Dreaming in Colors of Blood

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Summary

Akutagawa is hurt after the Port Mafia is attacked and he goes to the one place where he may be able to find help, the Armed Detective Agency. Atsushi is as confused as ever, Dazai is keeping dozens of secrets from the ADA, as always, and Chuuya gets to have fun being tortured for information! :)

Notes

Zello my friendos! This is my first Bungou Stray Dogs fanfic, YAY! Confetti for everyone! (coming from the future: When I first started writing this I had not read the manga but as of now I’m fully caught up and I’ve read some of the light novels too)
Now that that is out of the way without further ado I present, Dreaming in Colors of Blood:
This entire fic is inspired by this song but I will mention it again in the chapter it really influences.
(This chapter is inspired by this Song)
The Beginning of the End

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The street was completely dark except for a few lights that lined the sidewalk. He hoped more than he had dared hope before, he wasn’t being followed. Pain seared through his left side as he clutched his wound, his shirt and hand were drenched in blood, and he was beginning to lose any sense of feeling in his left leg. His vision was swimming, his sense of smell was gone, and he was finding it hard to breathe. He risked a glance at his wound and, unfortunately, his hand wasn’t doing much to stop the bleeding. There wasn’t a single doubt in his mind that he hadn’t left a trail of blood and he prayed to the stars no one would find it until morning.

He stumbled into the nearest alleyway and began to use the wall as a crutch. Why had he left them? He should have stayed to help, to at least try and get someone else away. They had seemed so hung up on getting him out of there if anyone, but he hadn’t cared he didn’t want to leave them behind like a coward. It had taken the one person he cared about more than anything to yell at him to make him leave. He had let the one friend he had to drag him to the exit. Something had happened when they were near the door to injure his side and leg, but he couldn’t remember what no matter how hard he tried.

He stumbled and tried to steady himself with his injured leg, but collapsed onto the cobblestone. He had to use both hands to catch himself so his head wouldn’t hit the ground. However, that allowed the blood from his side to flow freely. As he laid on the ground he could feel his blood run down his side and begin to form a small pool. He felt his body go completely numb and watched as his vision slowly began to fade. His friend had told him to find someone he could trust. Who could that possibly be now? Everyone he had trusted was gone.

Was that even a question? He knew exactly who he could trust but there was no way in hell he was going to go to them. No one could force him to go. He’d rather die a thousand painful deaths than ask for their help. Which would probably happen if he kept being so stubborn. His eyes fluttered shut and his consciousness slipped through his fingers.

He was back in the slums. He was weak, helpless, and hungry. They had decided to steal, to take what they needed, and kill, but only if they had to. We do what it takes to survive. No one could force him to go to them. However, the thought of giving into death when he had fought so damn hard to survive his entire life, sure could.

He willed his eyes open and slowly climbed onto his hands and knees. He used the wall to steadily rise to his feet and begin clutching his side. It didn’t matter who he had to ask for help he had to help them. He had to help the three people in the entire world he didn’t want to lose.

He limped down the alleyway, taking one step at a time. He was going to survive no matter what, and no one could tell him otherwise.

Everything was a blur for him after that. He could briefly remember stumbling up their doorstep knowing it was around 3 A.M, hoping someone would be in the building despite the early hour. He remembered a blur of the pain as he climbed the steps towards their office. The only thing Akutagawa could vividly remember was turning the handle to the Armed Detective Agency and the one word he was able to croak out before collapsing. “Help.”
What? Is all Atsushi could think when Akutagawa collapsed in the doorway. The carpet instantly began to be soaked with blood. Not a single member of the Agency moved. Atsushi felt Kyouka grab his arm and pull him close. She was shaking violently but he was too confused to comfort her. What was Akutagawa doing here of all places? Why was he bleeding? What did Dazai’s bad feeling have to do with him? Overall, what was going on?

Dazai was the first to make a move. He strode over to Akutagawa, knelt next to him, and lifted him in his arms. Dazai pressed the back of his hand to Akutagawa's mouth to check his breathing. Seconds later moved his hand to Akutagawa's wrist to check his pulse. He paused. After he laid Akutagawa back on the ground Dazai pressed his ear to his chest. There was complete silence.

“Yosano~,” Dazai said. He turned to look at her. She didn't move. “Yosano,” he said again. She looked away from him. “If we don't do something he’s going to die.” How was he able to keep his voice so calm?

Yosano made eye contact with him. “He's a mafia member Dazai,” She said, “with everything he's done to all of us, Atsushi mainly, I won't heal him without a reason.”

“I'll give you a reason,” Dazai said, “he seems to despise us, so why is he here? Why is he bleeding? If he got hurt on a mission he would have gone back to the mafia’s headquarters not here. He would not have come here unless he had no other option. Something happened to the mafia. We may never know what unless he tells us. So Yosano, heal him.”

Yosano glanced over to Ranpo. He nodded. She walked over to Dazai and Akutagawa, knelt next to Akutagawa, and placed a hand on his chest.

“Thou shall not die,” Yosano said. A blue light formed around Akutagawa. When the light faded Akutagawa's chest was rising up and down slowly and the blood stopped gushing out of his wound. “Wow,” is the first thing Yosano said. She shook her head. “It's a complete miracle he made it this far. All odds pointed towards him fainting far before he even reached our doorstep. He lost around thirty percent of his blood. On top of that one of the bones in his left leg was shattered. How on earth did he make it this far?” Yosano made eye contact with Dazai.

“Akutagawa has a habit of defying the odds,” Dazai suggested with a shrug. He stood up and Yosano grabbed his coat.

“You ask me to heal him and now you're going to make me bring him to the infirmary?” Yosano asked.

“Well~” Dazai said as he began to scan the room for an excuse.

“Pick up the person you vouched for Dazai Osamu!” Yosano said sternly. Dazai’s bottom lip jutted out and he began to pout. Dazai lifted Akutagawa off of the ground and moved towards the door.

“Stay here,” Atsushi whispered to Kyouka. He rushed next to Dazai as he left the room.

“Yes?” Dazai asked. He quirked an eyebrow.

“Why do you think he's here?” Atsushi asked in a hushed voice as he followed Dazai down the hallway. He scanned Akutagawa and watched as he steadily breathed.
Atsushi wasn’t sure what he should be feeling about what had just unfolded in front of him. He despised Akutagawa. There was no doubt about it. But when Dazai said he was going to die if Yosano didn’t do something, there had been some other emotion and he didn’t like the only word he could use to describe it. Terror, he had felt sheer terror for Akutagawa. What he disliked, even more, was the feeling of calmness that washed over him when he knew Akutagawa was going to be okay. This guy was supposed to be his enemy, but for some reason, he was still worried.

“Something happened to the mafia,” Dazai said simply. There was silence.

“And?”

“Why are you so interested?”

“I’m worried,” Atsushi muttered.

Dazai paused and stared at him in disbelief. “You do realize the port mafia tried to sell your head right?”

“Yeah, but I’m still worried!”

“Alright, the one and only true Cinnamon Roll,” Dazai said with a goofy smile. They reached the infirmary. Dazai laid Akutagawa on a bed, removed Akutagawa’s coat, and pulled up the blankets. “So basically the mafia is most likely destroyed in some way and it’s serious enough to scatter the members that are still alive.”

“You think there were deaths?” Atsushi asked shakily.

“It was obviously a serious fight,” Dazai said.

“How do you know?”

“Atsushi, Akutagawa was bleeding,” Dazai looked so disappointed. “You’ve been with us for quite some time Atsushi, I would have assumed you could have figured out that much.”

“I could,” Atsushi said, “I was hoping I was the only one who came up with that answer.”

Dazai chuckled and patted the top of his head. “You’re so innocent Atsushi~,” He said.

They left the infirmary and headed back down the halls.

Dazai began to hum and Atsushi looked over in his direction. Either Dazai wasn’t worried in the slightest or he was really good at hiding it. Atsushi could never tell the difference. Dazai always seemed full of emotion but when it came to matters like this it was impossible to tell. Unlike Atsushi himself, Dazai was really good, almost too good, at hiding his emotions. Atsushi always worried that if Dazai needed help he wouldn’t ask for it. Atsushi wasn’t ready to lose anyone in the life he somehow managed to build.

Atsushi had always felt like he was worthless, and no one would ever want or need him. However, since he joined the Agency, he’s noticed that all of those voices in his head were slowly fading into background noise, one at a time. He loved everyone in the agency and the thought of Akutagawa or anyone else hurting them made Atsushi’s chest burn with rage.

They reached the office and when Atsushi opened the door it was peaceful...for about three seconds before Dazai yelled something and tried to tackle Kunikida. Kunikida stepped out of the way and Dazai landed face first on the ground. Kunikida lifted Dazai up and kned him in the stomach several
times before dropping him back on the ground.

“Are you alright?” Atsushi asked as he sat down next to Kyouka. She was curled up on the couch, trembling. Kyouka nodded slightly and Atsushi pulled her into his arms.

He knew she wasn’t comfortable with Akutagawa anywhere near her, and he extremely disliked not being able to do anything for her.

“So,” Ranpo said. Everyone turned their attention to him. “Who’s going to call the President and inform him of what just happened?” They exchanged glances but no one volunteered. There was a long a silence and one at a time each of them turned to Dazai.

“I’ll do it,” Kunikida said with a sigh. Atsushi quirked an eyebrow and they made eye contact. “I do not want Dazai and his obnoxious sense of humor calling the President this early in the morning.”

An image of the President flashed through Atsushi’s head. He was always so straight-faced he wasn’t sure what the President’s actual mood would be. Especially since they might be waking him up. That left Atsushi to wonder, was the President a morning person?

Kunikida pulled out his phone, dialed a number, and stepped into the hallway closing the door behind him. It went dead quiet and even Dazai stopped making noise. The silence was only ever broken by Kunikida saying something from the other side of the door. The majority of what Atsushi was “okay,” “yes sir,” and “I’ll do that”.

Kunikida opened the door and the members of the ADA stared at him expectantly. He took a deep breath and Atsushi braced himself for a lecture. Instead Kunikida breathed out and began to talk.

“The President started by saying we handled the situation well and he wouldn’t have made a different decision,” Kunikida said. “He wants someone, specifically Dazai, to be watching Akutagawa Ryunosuke constantly. If by any chance he wakes up before the President arrives this morning he wants us to make sure Akutagawa knows who he is and that he doesn’t have memory loss before we start interrogating him.”

Interrogating him?

“I seriously doubt he’ll waking up anytime soon,” Yosano said.

“These are only precautionary measures,” Kunikida said.

“Why do I have to watch him?” Dazai whined. Atsushi couldn’t help but smile. In these serious situations, you could always count on Dazai to act like a child and lighten the mood.

Kunikida glared at him, “I’m curious as well but the President said you would understand why it has to be you and I didn’t need to be informed.” There was an edge to his voice and Atsushi could tell he was annoyed with that explanation.

Dazai’s bottom lip jutted out and he started pouting again. Reluctantly, he climbed to his feet and left the room with only a protesting pout.

Each of them separated to do several different things. Kyouka headed back to their apartment, Ranpo and Kenji went to take a nap, and Yosano went to the infirmary to make sure Dazai wasn’t going to fall asleep. Kunikida and Atsushi started their work for the day early.

Atsushi opened a computer and began to edit the report he had written the day before for Kyouka and his mission they had completed successfully. It always felt good when missions went without a
hitch. Atsushi loved to watch as Kyoka learned and grew the way he had most likely done so when he first began to work at the agency.

Atsushi’s thoughts began to wander, and one question arose again. What was happening?

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God, Chuuya hurt all over. His muscles throbbed, his head was pounding, his arms and legs ached, and he found it hard to breathe. His eyes wouldn’t open, and his stomach was constantly turning. Great way to start a morning! Or was it still night? He couldn’t be certain.

Chuuya pulled forward but restraints held him firmly in place. He scrunched his eyes a few times and forced them open.

The room he was in had a ceiling, a floor, and a wall made of stone. It was a circular room with no windows, a metal door was in the wall farthest away from him, and the only source of light was a small lamp in the center of the room.

As for Chuuya, he had been in worse situations but he still didn’t like his setup. The column he was attached to was like the ones the mafia used for torture. His clothes had multiple tears, he could feel a bunch of dry blood on multiple parts of his body, and fresh blood was constantly trickling down the side of his face.

What he disliked the most was the table next to him. There was a wide range of tools lying on the surface, from scalpels to knives to wrenches. So this was a torture room, lovely.

Chuuya’s vision began to swim and his body started powering down. The door screeched open making his ears ring. His eyes closed but he somehow managed to stay awake. Someone pushed a cloth against his head to stop the bleeding. One of their hands pressed against his stomach and a sharp pain shot through his side. He bit his tongue to stop himself from reacting.

They removed their hands. Metal clanged together as they most likely began to fiddle with the equipment next to him. He felt a cold sensation of metal touch his skin but there was no pain.

Are you awake? They traced on his arm. It’s all right, I’m a friend.

Chuuya wanted to laugh. This person thought he could trust them? He didn’t even know what they looked like and who the hell would willingly call themselves his friend? No one, that’s who. He was an executive of the Port Mafia, no one would willingly become friends with him. Even in the Mafia, there were only a few people besides his subordinates who he considered to be his friend. Yet this random person, who he couldn’t even see, was asking him to tell them whether he was awake or not? For all, he knew this person could be his torturer and they were just waiting for him to wake up.

The person set down whatever they were using and shuffled back to the door. They probably thought he was unconscious which was going to be the case soon. There was complete silence for a few seconds before the door screeched shut.

He begged silently for some sign that Akutagawa was all right. Chuuya took a deep breath, allowing his consciousness slip away.
Dazai watched as Akutagawa's chest moved up and down, steadily, as he fiddled with a button on his sleeve. He had run every possibility on why Akutagawa was here through his head, multiple times. But no matter what he came up with, either a part of the calculation was obviously wrong, or the answer he ended up with was something he didn’t like.

Yosano had entered and left the room several times to check to make sure Akutagawa hadn’t stopped breathing for some reason. She had asked Dazai at one point if he needed a break but he shook his head. The President was right, Dazai did know why he had to be there when Akutagawa woke up. That didn't mean he couldn't dread the moment. If Akutagawa woke up in a random place and didn’t remember what had happened he would freak out and attack whoever was around. Unless, someone Akutagawa knew and didn't hate with every fiber of his being such as Atsushi, was around to calm him down.

Dazai had no doubt that Akutagawa hated him, but Dazai also knew that Akutagawa hated Atsushi about a hundred times more and he was still looking to Dazai for acceptance. So Dazai was, sadly, the best option.

A few hours past and Dazai was ready to rip his eyes out of his sockets from boredom. He had nothing to do, he could work on the paperwork he was supposed to take care of the week before, but it seemed like so much work. Dazai scanned the room for a rope or something he could try to kill himself with when the door opened.

The President and Kunikida stepped into the room.

“Save me!” Dazai groaned as he leaned back in his chair. “I'm dying!”

“Congratulations,” Kunikida deadpanned.

“Kunikida!” Dazai whined. He started pouting. He turned to the President as if searching for a savior to take him from the wretched world he lived in. “If you gave me a rope I'd be entertained for the next few hours.”

“And then scare Akutagawa more than he'll already be scared?” Kunikida asked.

“If anything he'll roll his eyes and go back to sleep,” Dazai argued.

“What's your guess on our situation Dazai?” The President asked.

“It's more of a calculation than a guess,” Dazai said. “It doesn't really matter, though.” He took a deep breath. “In short, the Port Mafia has been wiped out.”

“What!” Kunikida yelled. “We couldn't wipe them out if we tried. No one has the kind of power to wipe out an entire organization.”

“First of all,” Dazai said. He pointed at Akutagawa. “The person lying on that bed shows you that not the entire Port Mafia has been wiped out. Secondly, whoever did so would have taken the executive members and anyone with valuable information to torture. And thirdly, I know you don't think anyone would be capable of such a large scale massacre but…” Dazai’s voice trailed off into a hum.

“You know someone who's capable of doing so,” the President finished Dazai’s sentence.
Kunikida opened his mouth to say something else when Atsushi burst through the door. He rushed over to the tv remote and turned on the small tv.

“You need to see this,” Atsushi said. He turned the channel to the news. Kunikida’s eyes widened, Dazai’s heart twisted, and his stomach formed a big knot. He would recognize the building behind the reporter anywhere.

The camera was focused on a blond female reporter with blue eyes and pale skin. The headline underneath her read, *Large Scale Massacre In A Central Building?* Dazai couldn't help but wonder if the reporter would commit a double suicide with him.

“The police found this building full of dead victims only a few hours ago,” the reporter said. “They found it by following a trail of blood that was discovered in the early mornings light. The Police are now searching for signs and evidence on what happened. From what we’ve heard they have no basic leads yet, is that true officer?”

The camera zoomed out and focused on an additional person. It was a police officer with short, brown, frizzy hair, dark skin, and brown eyes that seemed dull as if something had phased him. There were bags under his eyes, his lips were chapped, and his brow was sweating while his hands were trembling. It had obviously been a long day so far, and the officer wasn't prepared for the interview.

“That is not entirely true,” he said. “We are aware that no normal methods were used. The Gifted Special Operations Division are already investigating to see if the cause of their death was due to an ability user.”

“Do you know who these people in this building are?”

“We cannot be certain, but from the small amount of evidence we have they are most likely members of the Yokohama port mafia.”

“Is there anything else you can tell us about this?”

“There is no other information we have at the moment.”

“Thank you, sir.” The police officer left their view and the reporter turned back to the camera and smiled. The screen went dark as Kunikida turned off the television.

The room went completely silent. Dots that were scattered around Dazai’s brain began to connect like connect the dots, and formed a vague image of what happened.

There was a knock on the door and Yosano came in. “There’s a member of the Gifted Special Operations Division here to see you, President. He has also requested to see Dazai in particular.”

“What’s his name?” The president asked.

“Ango,” Dazai said. He stood up and leaned over to stretch. “Sakaguchi Ango, correct?”

Yosano nodded. Dazai sighed loudly. “I suppose I have to go see him.” Dazai glanced over to The President. This may be the one-time Dazai had Ango to thank for his life being saved from complete and utter boredom. The President nodded, and Dazai bolted for the door tripping over a stool in the process, but he didn’t care. He threw the door open and took a deep breath of the sweet, sweet freedom.
Dazai reached the entrance to the ADA’s office and paused. He knew as soon as he saw Ango his anger would erupt like a volcano inside of him. The emotions he had tried so hard to put a lid on would escape from his jar and show their full colors. Part of his mind would go on autopilot and he’d have to fight for control over it again. He made a deal with himself if Ango had bodyguards he wouldn’t harm him, just threaten him like always. If Ango didn’t have bodyguards, on the other hand, he would punch Ango in the face.

Dazai took a long calming breath. Stay in control. He threw the door open with a loud bang and spread out his arms.

“Ango~” Dazai sang with the biggest smile he could muster while his rage and reasoning began to wage war inside of him.

Ango jumped and clutched the arms of the chair he was sitting in. “You don’t have to scare me half to death.” No bodyguards. Was Ango an idiot? Dazai moved towards him and Ango stiffened.

“So~?” Dazai changed his smile just slightly in order for Ango to be able to know he was holding back a storm but so no one else would notice. The President, Kunikida, Atsushi, and Yosano all entered the room. He would probably regret doing this in front of them but at the moment, he didn’t particularly care. Ango opened his mouth but was interrupted by Dazai’s fist hitting his face and making him fall backwards out of his chair. Ango rolled and got back on his feet instantly. Dazai’s smile turned into a cruel sneer. He squared his shoulders and looked down his nose at Ango.

“Are you insane?!?” Yosano practically screamed. She moved over to Ango but he waved her off.

“So are you good?” Ango asked.

“I don’t know, am I?” Dazai said. His voice was lined with anger. You’re losing control. The room went silent. He took a deep steadying breath. Regain control, regain control, don’t let your emotions run wild.

Ango moved towards him, picked up the fallen chair, and straightened it out. Dazai moved towards him. Don’t lose control, you have control. Dazai passed Ango. Don’t do it, don’t do it. He reached towards Ango, grabbed his hidden gun, and pointed it at the back of his head. Damn it.

Ango’s hands went up. “Dazai!” Nearly every single ADA member yelled in unison.

Atsushi’s expression was full of surprise and…was he scared? Dazai couldn’t blame Atsushi, even Dazai didn’t know the extent of the blood lust that was shining through on his face. There was silence.

Mental Note: Think of a believable excuse to tell the ADA for your actions.

“If you’re done with your childish fit I’d like to talk about why I’m here,” Ango said. Childish fit? To Ango, Oda was a childish fit? Someone who they both had considered a friend Ango know
considered a *childish fit*?! His finger began to pull the trigger…Dazai’s mind pulled itself out of his suspended state and snapped back to reality.

“Fine,” Dazai sighed dramatically. He lowered the gun, gave it to Ango as he passed, and sat in the nearest chair.

“Why did you give it back?” Ango said, “You must have known I have another gun on me.”

“I did,” Dazai said, “but I’m also aware that that gun is considered evidence and is not a toy. It’s also an old gun, I believe it’s called a Graugeist, a European pistol? It has a low firing rate and accuracy if I’m not mistaken. Which also leaves me to wonder why the hell is one of the guns Mimic used considered evidence *now* when the entire incident happened four years ago?”

“Well, I guess I don’t need to jog your memory on what this has to do with both of us.” Ango pulled the gun out of his coat and set on the table. He pushed up his glasses and Dazai knew he was waiting for a reaction from Dazai. Well, he was going to get one. Dazai kept his face neutral and waited for an explanation.

“The Gifted Special Operations Division is speculating that Mimic had several factions unlike previously theorized,” Ango explained. "They now believe that one of those other factions was lying in wait for the past *four* years, and is finally making their move.”

“They?” Dazai questioned. “So that means you disagree?”

“Neither you nor Oda Sakunosuke were big enough idiots that you wouldn’t have realized there was more than one group,” Ango said.

“What if we did notice and you *left* to early for us to tell you?” Dazai said with a bite.

Ango snickered back. “You just *love* blaming me for his death, don’t you?”

“Hmm, I wonder why. It’s not like someone wasn’t there when he needed them,” Dazai merely said. Both of their eyes narrowed and they locked. There was a long silence. “Is it safe for me to assume that neither Chief Taneda nor any of your other superiors have any idea you're here?” Dazai said without dropping eye contact.

“I may not agree with them, but I would *never* go behind someone's back like that,” Ango said.

Dazai snorted. “So you didn’t go behind Odasaku’s back?”

“That was different.”

“How so?”

“For starters, if you had never dragged me along with you that day, I would have been able to infiltrate the Port Mafia and leave with no strings attached.”

“So it’s my fault you’re a complete and utter prick?”

“If it gives you some sort of closure, then yes.” Anger flowed through every vein instantly. He wanted to sock Ango in the face again only not hold back so his face would cave in. Dazai gritted his teeth so hard they began to hurt.

“It sounds to me like you're asking me to kill you,” Dazai hissed quietly so no one else could hear. He let every scrap of rage show. He didn’t care what the members of the ADA thought. His only
focus was terrifying Ango which he did successfully. Ango’s face went completely pale and he seemed to be fumbling to form some sort of sentence. Eventually, he stopped as he realized he had pushed Dazai far past the point of recovering any sort of control over the situation.

Dazai caught a glimpse of Atsushi and Kyouka’s faces. In the process of scaring Ango, he may have just traumatized the two of them. Atsushi looked more concerned than anything, but Kyouka was trembling. She whispered something into Atsushi’s ear, he whispered something back, and she nodded.

**Mental Note:** Ask Kyouka if she is okay after this and fish for information.

Dazai took a deep breath and made his face neutral. “You’re right. It’s not Mimic, it can’t be Mimic and I could give you every reason in the world on why it’s not.” He said. He stared at the gun for several minutes. Why would someone put this gun on the scene in particular? It had to be someone who knew about the Mimic Incident and were trying to throw anyone who was looking into the crime scene off their scent. That was obvious. So why did Dazai have a feeling that that wasn’t all there was to it?

“Are you positive this was part of the crime scene?” Dazai asked.

“Someone placed it there on purpose. I am one hundred percent positive it wasn’t anyone who was inspecting the scene, though,” Ango said. “We didn’t let any of the police inside and I was monitoring the whole inspection.” Something was missing, but what? “I’m here to ask for the Armed Detective Agency’s help in this investigation, you in particular.”

“I could figure this out in under ten seconds,” Ranpo interjected, “what do you need him for?”

“I don’t mean any offense by this Ranpo,” Dazai said, “but I have a feeling that that wasn’t all there was to it.”

Ranpo quirked an eyebrow. “Does everyone trust my ability or Dazai’s feeling more?” Ranpo asked the room. Everyone went silent. Dazai knew there was no way for them to choose. Both he and Ranpo had a reputation. Dazai, that his feelings were never wrong and Ranpo, that there was no case he couldn’t solve.

“As I was saying,” Ango said breaking the silence. “I have already cleared your help on this case with the higher ups. Meaning you and any other members of the agency who will accompany you on this case, are permitted into the crime scene.”

Dazai glanced over at the President. They made eye contact. So the decision was up to him? Great. Dazai sighed, “Fine, we accept.” Ango stood up.

“I’ll be taking my leave then unless there are any questions?” Ango asked.

“I have to go into the mafia’s base right?” Dazai said with a disgusted tone.

“Yes,” Ango said flatly.

Dazai scrunched his nose and mouth and groaned. “I never wanted to see that disgusting trench.” He whined.

Ango rolled his eyes, he set a folder of what Dazai assumed was information on the case and bowed to the president, then he left.
The door closed. Instantly Dazai groaned, flopped on the couch, and began to mope. He didn’t really have anything against going back to the base, since everyone he didn’t want to see was either dead or captured, except for the person in the ADA’s infirmary. Dazai just wanted to reassure to the members of the ADA he wasn’t on the verge of killing something or someone anymore so he played up the whole situation.

“Who do you want to accompany you Dazai?” The President asked.

“Preferably someone who’s not going to puke when they see a whole bunch of dead bodies,” Dazai said. “Beyond that, I don’t care.”

“Who would puke?” Kunikida asked.

Dazai turned and looked at him with a look that said, ‘Really?’ He tilted his head to the side and everyone focused on Atsushi.

“I wouldn’t puke,” Atsushi said defensively. “I would feel like puking, but I wouldn’t actually puke!”

“Are you sure?” Dazai asked.

Atsushi paused. “I think I wouldn’t actually puke,” He corrected.

“There you go, Atsushi~”

“I think I know who needs to go,” The President said. “Kunikida, you will go because you’re Dazai’s partner, but I would also like Kyouka to accompany you.” The room went silent. Kyouka shifted between her feet nervously.

“I’m sorry, but did I hear you, right sir?” Kunikida asked.

“If you heard me say Kyouka will be accompanying, yes you did hear me correctly.” The President said. “I’m guessing you know the basic structure of the Mafia’s headquarters?” She nodded.

“But Dazai knows the structure as well,” Kunikida protested.

“Not if they updated it in any way just to keep me from knowing how to get around,” Dazai said.

“You were literally there not that long ago, and you were able to get out.”

“You’re right, the basic path was the same. However, there were several places I didn’t recognize, and there was few extra walls here and there, that made it difficult to get an accurate sense of where I was. Some staircases even went up when they used to go down. Having her along will give us a correct orientation of the building.”

“You were still able to find your way around that’s good enough.”

“That’s not the only reason, Kunikida,” The President said. “She has a terrifying skill set for a thirteen-year-old girl. She’s very good at observing and figuring out how different people were killed. Based on what I’ve read in Atsushi’s reports, having her along will help you in some way I can guarantee, and if it makes you feel better I can send Atsushi with you as well.”

Kunikida sighed. “Is that all right with you, kid?”

“That’s perfectly fine with him,” Kyouka said quickly as she grabbed his arm. “Please tell me it’s fine with you?”
Atsushi smiled. “I’m fine, I can’t promise I’m not going to puke though.”

“If it would make Kyouka more comfortable to have you along it doesn’t matter,” Dazai said with a wave of his hand. Kyouka smiled and muttered thanks.

“We’re going to leave in thirty minutes, don’t be late,” Kunikida said. He turned towards Dazai. “You have somewhere to be for the next thirty minutes correct?”

“No,” Dazai said hopefully.

“Go back to the infirmary, Dazai,” Yosano said. Dazai jutted out his bottom lip and dragged his feet out the door. He shut the door behind him and instantly went back to a neutral expression as he moved to the infirmary. On the way there he grabbed the book he had bought on suicide quickly and when he sat down in the infirmary he started pondering how he was going to answer anyone who asked about Odasaku. However, after his anger had run wild like that they would probably be too worried about him losing his temper so they weren’t going to ask. The empty hole in his chest carved itself a more defined edge as the memories of Odasaku flooded back to him.

*Be on the side that saves people, that will make it at least a little better.* He was right it did make it better but the hole had never gone away. *Because I am your friend.* The words slice like a dagger in Dazai reminding him of just how much he missed Odasaku. Somedays he wished he could just forget him and maybe the pain would disappear, but then there were the days that he merely wished he could have been a better friend.

He’s thought of every way he could have done it differently. How he could have saved him. Maybe if he hadn’t waited to go to him and left without permission. Maybe if he hadn’t played along with Mori’s game and left sooner. Maybe if he had just all together stopped Odasaku from leaving he could have been saved.

But what did it matter now? Odasaku was dead and no matter how much Dazai wished it he wasn’t coming back. Death couldn’t be undone.

And maybe that was for the better. After all, if Odasaku hadn’t died he would probably still be in the mafia, he wouldn’t have met Kunikida, the President, or any of the others. He wouldn’t have been able to save Atsushi, who in turn saved Kyouka. So many great things happened after Odasaku’s sacrifice, so why did it still hurt so badly?

Dazai’s thoughts moved from topic to topic never lingering on one for too long. Eventually, he checked his phone. 9:45 exactly thirty minutes after Ango’s appearance. Dazai sighed and put his phone back in his pocket. He would wait about five to ten minutes and then meet the others at the door. After all who didn’t expect him to be fashionably late?

~

Kunikida was getting impatient, as he always did. The longer Dazai took to show up, the more Kunikida began to affect everyone’s moods around him. There was a lingering sense of agitated urgency in the air that made Atsushi shift back and forth between feet nervously. Kunikida muttered a curse under his breath as he checked his watched. Atsushi glanced at the clock. 9:58.

The doors flew open and Dazai strode into the room like he was the king of the world. That was Dazai, goofy fun that drove Kunikida crazy but was enjoyable to everyone else.
“You’re thirteen minutes and twenty-two seconds late.” Kunikida said. “What’s your excuse this time?”

“I thought it would be fun to make you agitated,” Dazai said with a smiled. And that was Dazai’s blunt honesty.

Kunikida grabbed the front of his coat and growled. “Do you know how important it is to be on time?” Kunikida began his lecture. “It’s important to keep a well-balanced schedule so-

“It's best you be on your way,” Yosano said quickly and pushed the four of them towards the door. “You don’t want to keep the taxi downstairs waiting any longer than you already have!” Atsushi chuckled.

They descended the steps, went outside, and climbed into the taxi waiting for them. Kunikida told the taxi driver a destination near the Mafia’s hideout. He had told them that he didn’t want to scare the driver and that they could walk the rest of the way.

Atsushi was bursting at the seams with curiosity. He couldn't help but wonder what the inside of the Port Mafia’s base was like. He’d only heard a bit about it from Dazai but even a few small explanations were enough to spark a flame of curiosity that kept growing.

The taxi pulled over next to a café, they climbed out and Kunikida paid the driver. Dazai and Kyouka walked in front of the other two, talking to each other about some technical thing Atsushi couldn't get his head around. They turned the corner and Atsushi saw the blockade in front of the entrance to one of the tall black buildings in the center of Yokohama. This was the mafia’s main base? Kunikida held out his Armed Detective Agency badge and the police let him through.

They entered the building and Atsushi’s stomach clenched. The entire room reeked with the smell of blood, dirt, and vomit. There were piles upon piles of body bags and the officers were still dragging more people into them. There were pools of blood all around the floor, along with different limbs that had been cut clean off of these people.

The world around Atsushi began to spin, his head felt light, and his stomach kept turning violently. *Don’t puke, don’t puke, you’ve got this, just don’t puke.*

Dazai strode over to a dead mafia member who was lying on their stomach and turned them over.

“My god,” Kunikida muttered.

Atsushi couldn’t hold it back. He ran over to the nearest corner and puked. No matter how hard he wished, he couldn’t erase the image. The person's face was so mangled and disoriented you couldn’t even tell what they used to look like. A few of their ribs were poking out from under their skin and there was a hole carved so deep in their stomach you could see part of their spine as if they had been gutted.

Atsushi puked again.

Who would do that to somebody? They were human like anyone else, who would be so inhumane to practically gut the person? The thought of the person lying there so mangled and thinking someone did that to them made Atsushi burn with rage. It didn’t matter that they were a member of the mafia, they were still a living person. They had just as much of a right to live as anyone else and to have… that, happen to them was inhumane at the very least.

Atsushi wiped his mouth and stepped back. *Hold it together.* Atsushi moved back to his colleagues but made an effort not to look at the body Dazai was inspecting.
“This was caused by an ability,” Dazai said finally.

“Who’s ability could do something like this?” Kunikida asked.

Dazai shrugged. Atsushi looked straight at Dazai. He wasn’t telling them something but that wasn’t exactly new. Dazai had kept plenty of things from Atsushi, and the rest of the ADA, and it always ended up working out for the better. So what was the problem with him keeping something from them now?

“Good to see you came,” Mr. Sakaguchi said from the side. Atsushi turned to him. This time he was flanked by two bodyguards. A woman with beautiful brown hair, pale skin, and brown eyes, and a man with short brown hair, pale skin, and blue eyes.

Mr. Sakaguchi pushed his glasses up and sized the four of them up. Atsushi also inspected him and noticed there was a new dark purple bruise under his eye. Most likely from Dazai’s fist. “I assume you didn’t read the contents of the packet I left you?”

Atsushi knew Dazai hadn’t, but Kyouka, Kunikida, and he had. It had contained basic knowledge about the investigation, and a list of items that may be relevant to the culprit.

“I don’t need to,” Dazai said with a shrug. A smile appeared on Dazai’s face but Atsushi could tell it was forced.

“Good to know you already have a handle on things.” Mr. Sakaguchi said. Their eyes locked and tension filled the air.

Kunikida coughed breaking the short silence. “So, what leads do you have so far?” He asked as he glanced between the two men questioningly.

“Unfortunately, we have nothing at the moment,” Mr. Ango dropped eye contact with Dazai and glanced around the room. “It’s still hard to believe anyone would be capable of this.”

“Whos bodies have you not found?” Dazai asked.

“The people you would be most familiar with are, Akutagawa Ryuunosuke-“ Which they already knew, but Atsushi wasn’t sure if it was a good idea to tell Mr. Sakaguchi that. “Gin, Tachihara Michizou, and Ryurou Hirotsu of the Black Lizards, Chuuya Nakahara, Kouyou Ozaki, Ichiyou Higuchi, Elise, and Ougai Mori.”

“Those were all the people I had guessed,” Dazai said, “Mori is in hiding somewhere with Elise, or he was captured, which is highly unlikely. Everyone else was probably captured.”

“Even Chuuya?”

“He wouldn’t have gone down without a fight, but it is possible if they were in a situation where he was more focused on someone else’s safety…” Dazai glanced at Atsushi and the others. An understanding passed between all of them. Whoever “Chuuya” was, had deliberately focused on helping Akutagawa, and in the process, he had been captured.

Mr. Sakaguchi sighed, “Whatever the case maybe I would like you to dig up whatever you can and then call it good for the day,” He handed Dazai a piece of paper and continued. “This will allow you to pass any of the guards so you can access any portion of the building. If you need any help just call for one of the officers and they will assist you, good luck.”

“I don’t need it,” Dazai said. He turned on his heel and the other three ADA members followed him
up some steps, through a few halls, and they stopped at a dead end. He cursed under his breath.
“How do we get to the main meeting hall, Kyouka?”

She pointed back the way they had come and took the lead. When they arrived they entered a large room with a few lights here and there. There was a small platform on one side of the room, rows upon rows of chairs, and there were dead bodies littered around the floor.

Kunikida took over. “Spread out and search for anything that may give us even the smallest of leads.” He said.

They nodded and began their search instantly. They looked around the room for what felt like hours but was probably only one or two. Atsushi pushed on multiple parts of the wall for any secret rooms, he looked in corners, and along the floor around the bodies, and underneath the chairs. The only thing he would not do was touch the bodies or look at them for too long.

“Let’s move to the next room,” Kunikida said after a while.

“Good idea,” Dazai said with a smile.

Kunikida, Dazai, and Atsushi moved towards the next set of steps. “Are you coming to Kyouka?” Atsushi asked.

She touched the wall and it rippled. Fabric? She balled a bunch of it in her fist and raised her arms.

“Kyouka, no!” Dazai…yelled? He moved towards her but Kyouka pulled.

The fabric tumbled down from the wall. Kyouka’s eyes widened in horror. Dazai’s feet rooted themselves in place and Kunikida and Atsushi’s eyes widened. There was a message scrawled in blood on the wall.

Atsushi looked at the message and then to Dazai. All of their eyes trained on him but he didn’t move. He didn’t make eye contact. He merely looked straight ahead. What on earth was going on?

“Well, Dazai,” Kunikida said breaking the silence, “we’re waiting.”

I’m Back

Dazai :)

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked my first chapter! This fic is not going to have a regular update schedule but I am going to try to get a chapter out at least once a month. I'm planning that each chapter will have a song it's based around (except for chapter 4 I believe). I do have an editor for this so shout out to her. However, she doesn't have an Archive account that is why she is not a co-author. The posting schedule is going to be base around when I can get a chapter to her and when she can give it back to me. Thank you for reading my first chapter and I hope you'll stay with me for my future chapters! (づ ̄³ ̄)づ
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Akutagawa wakes up and some questions are answered.

Chapter Notes

SOOOOOO I forgot that this fic is ALSO inspired by this song but I caught my mistake and that's all that matters. I hope you enjoy this chapter! (ᵔᴥᵔ)

This chapter is inspired by:
The first half of Song 1 (The second half is a future chapter)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Everything inside of Akutagawa felt awful. His limbs ached, his stomach hurt, his left leg felt numb, and he had a pounding headache. The worst part was he had no idea why he felt this way. He should know what happened. He should know where he was. But everything was a big mix of random thoughts and memories that made no sense when he tried to straighten them out then lace them together.

Akutagawa had an image of Gin, then blood, some sort of image of Chuuya dragging him somewhere, and some weird people in different uniforms than the Port Mafia’s. Every time he tried to string those images together it all ended up in a big mess of words and unfinished calculations. No matter how hard he tried he couldn’t think of anything.

Akutagawa’s eyes fluttered open, but everything was just a big blur. It was hard to make out any shapes or separate colors. After a bit of effort, he was able to pick out a person’s shape among the countless other things. He couldn’t tell what color their hair or eyes were, or what they looked liked in any manner but it was a start.

He thought they turned towards him, and he heard some sort of sound but he couldn’t make out any words. The blurred image came closer and the noise got louder but he still couldn’t make out what they were saying. He squinted to try and make out their image better but nothing worked.

“What?” He finally managed to croak out. He could tell his voice had cracked badly but he didn’t care in that moment. Whoever it was dabbed his ear with a cloth and when they pulled away he swore there was something red on it.

*If my ear is bleeding that would explain why it’s hard to hear.* Akutagawa strained to hear something and slowly words started to make it from his ear to his brain.

“Can yo- hear m-,” the voice sounded feminine. *Can you hear me*, he pieced together.

“Sort of,” He replied. Why did that simple phrase make him feel so out of breath? His eyes started to close slowly as his consciousness faded.
“Slee- for no-,” the image said, “regai- your streng- and we’ll t- late-”

Akutagawa wanted to protest. He wanted to ask what happened, he wanted to ask where he was, how long he had been asleep for. Was this the Port Mafia or somewhere else? What was with all of the different and strange images in his head? But everything inside of him protested and begged him to go to sleep. He allowed his eyes to flutter shut and sleep overwhelmed him.

~

Dazai felt their gazes on him waiting for an answer but he didn’t move, he didn’t speak. He had had a feeling that they were up to this but he hadn’t wanted to face the possibility. He had also had a feeling that the message would be there. That’s why he purposefully stayed close to it in order to keep the other three away. He had been planning to come back and look at it once he told them he was going to do one last check, but the waves of a rushing stream had swept that idea away. That stream was named Kyouka.

So he had a vague idea about what was going. Maybe he should have given the ADA a half explanation before it came to them discovering he was hiding something on their own. However, this wasn’t exactly a topic he was going to jump at the idea of talking about. On top of that, he wanted to keep the ADA members from being pieces in that bastards twisted game for as long as he could.

What was wrong with that?

Apparently, the stars saw everything wrong with that by making Kyouka so smart that she realized Dazai was trying to purposefully keep them away from the wall. Why did Atsushi have to save such a smart little girl?

“Well, Dazai?” Kunikida said. “We’re waiting.” Why did he sound so expectant? Did Kunikida really think Dazai was going to give them a straight, honest answer?

“I don’t know,” Dazai said, “the only explanation is it’s someone I’ve met before but I don’t remember.”

Kyouka raised her eyebrows. “I think you’d remember someone who would go through the trouble of killing the entire Port Mafia just to get your attention,” She said. And there she went being all smart again. “This message was written particularly for you, not the Armed Detective Agency which I would have guessed if it didn’t have your name in it. Meaning whoever did this knew you would remember.”

Dazai clicked his tongue. “That’s where you’re wrong, Kyouka, I have no clue.”

“You’ve known who was behind this since Akutagawa came to the ADA haven’t you?” Atsushi asked.

“Why do you fancy that, Atsushi~?” Dazai said as upbeat as he could.

Atsushi lowered his gaze to the ground.

“Just a guess,” he replied quietly. The room went silent and none of Dazai’s colleagues would look at him.
He wasn’t sure what was worse, all of them looking at him or none of them looking at him. Either way, it felt like they were trying to make him uncomfortable. It didn’t matter what they were trying to do, they couldn’t make him break, no one could, he had learned in the mafia the people with the loosest lips die first.

Dazai repositioned his thoughts. If Chuuya was the reason Akutagawa escaped why had he decided to focus on getting him out? Why hadn’t he focused on a larger group of people? Or defeating the enemy?

Something tugged on Dazai’s gut and an image of Hirotsu pulling Chuuya to the side and whispering something in his ear appeared in Dazai’s head. All the pieces fell into place. It was as if he was finding the last piece of a puzzle that had been lost for a long time.

Dazai let out a long, exasperated sigh. “No, Atsushi, I did not have an idea of who might be behind this until I saw the Port Mafia member you puked at.” He said finally. Not the truth in any way, shape, or form, but it made him seem like less of a scumbag.

“Well, who is it?” Kunikida asked.

Dazai began to hum and pretended to be contemplating Kunikida’s question. The least he could do was humor them. “I don’t think you want to know,” Dazai said.

“And why is that,” Kunikida said through gritted teeth.

“Because,” Dazai answered. “Anyway-” he extended his hand and Kyouka handed him the sheet that had been covering the message. He put it back up so no one else would see what was written. “-We should find something else to show Ango so it looks like we have some sort of lead we’re going off of.”

Kunikida growled, but reluctantly agreed. They moved to the next room and began to search for any other source of evidence.

After a long time of searching fruitlessly Kunikida told them he had found something. Dazai wandered over after a little bit and Kunikida handed what he had found to him. It was a hat, more particularly, one of Chuuya’s many hats.

Dazai’s chest tightened and a piece of him suddenly felt missing. They agreed the hat was good enough and they headed back down to where Ango was waiting.

Now all Dazai needed to do was fill in a few gaps by talking to Akutagawa and he would know exactly what he was planning on doing next. As much as Atsushi and Akutagawa were going to hate him, Dazai couldn’t stall for any more time. They needed to learn how to be an actual team before it was too late.

~

Blood, blood, and more blood. At first, it had started as a small puddle, then slowly it began to rise higher and higher until Akutagawa was waste deep in it. He scanned his surrounding for someway to get out of it but all he saw was darkness for miles. No light, no hope, nothing that could save him from this god forsaken place.
Something grabbed his ankle and he desperately began to pull away from the source. The more he tried to struggle, however, the farther up his leg this thing began to climb. The blood kept rising.

The thing pulling on Akutagawa was nearly to the surface. He stumbled back shook his leg but no matter how hard he tried to free himself it clung to him.

Its head surfaced and Akutagawa’s face drained of color. It was a middle-aged man with short, messy hair, a nice build, skin that was as white as paper, and pale eyes. He was wearing a police officer’s uniform and when he spoke it sent chills down Akutagawa’s spine.

_You did this to me! You’re the one who hurt them and me._ Akutagawa wanted to yell, he wanted to scream. He hadn’t- he didn’t kill him. It was just an order, a job, this wasn’t his fault, but he couldn’t form the words, let alone get his voice to work.

Something grabbed the back of his shirt that tugged him down towards the blood. _You killed us._ Whoever it was said behind him. By their weight, he guessed it was a middle aged woman. A small force tugged on Akutagawa’s sleeve and he glanced to the side. There was a small boy standing there. His clothing was nice with a well kept button-down shirt and overalls. His hair was slicked back, his skin was as white as the police officer’s, and his eyes...his eyes were completely white.

Akutagawa knew who these people were, he remembered every detail. A family of three, a mother, a father, and a son, the mother was staying at home to raise their son and her husband worked as a police officer. She was thirty-two her name was Rachel, she hated spicy food, dogs, and coffee. She liked her family, cats, and sweet things. The boy was seven and his name was Benjamin, he went to school at an academy in Yokohama, he enjoyed sports, donuts, and his mother’s hugs. He hated people who picked on others and anything that was sour. The father was thirty-four and his name was Nathaniel, he liked his family, their cat, and his job. He disliked criminals, those who would hurt others for their own gain, and spicy food.

They had died four years ago by Akutagawa’s hands. Their case was deemed a murder but was never solved.

Another person grabbed him, Akutagawa instantly knew who they were as well. Henrietta, short hair cut like a bob, also pale eyes but they were normally green, white skin like the others, twenty-seven, and ability user who got on the Port Mafia’s bad side. She died six years ago, killed by himself.

_You killed all of us_, Nathaniel said. Three more people grabbed onto to Akutagawa and started to drag him underneath the blood. _It’s your fault we’re dead, you killed us without hesitation, you’re a murderer down to the bone and you can never change._

The blood was at his chest now and it was too thick to move through. Several more people grabbed onto him. He stumbled backward, desperately trying to keep his balance. He wanted to scream, to yell for help, to find someway out of this dark place, but there was no light, no exit, _nothing_. What had he been expecting? There was never anything to give him even the smallest drop of hope. The police officer pushed him. He fell into the blood and started thrashing to reach the surface.

More people he had killed grabbed onto him and helped drag him deeper. He tried to get away, tried to get them off of him but nothing worked.

His lungs began to burn and his muscles started to weaken. Air, he needed air. Somewhere inside he knew there was no way to escape, but he tried anyway. He vision went blurry and the last thing he remembered was the defined red color of blood.
Darkness was all Akutagawa could see at first. He couldn’t feel anything and everything in him ached. His thoughts slipped in and out of his mind but he couldn’t tell what was what.

He was suspended in the fog of his mind and he wasn’t sure how to get out. Was he actually dead? Wait, why would he be dead? What happened exactly?

He tugged at the edges of his memory but every time he seemed to be at the edge of grasping the memory it slipped through his fingers.

His stomach still hurt, but not as bad as he thought it had previously. Then it was dark again. Dark and unsettlingly quiet. He heard a whimper from somewhere in the room, and then another. There was a pause but then humming started and there were a few more whimpers.

The memories hit him like a truck full of bricks. Chuuya, Gin, Higuchi, The Mafia, his wounds were gone, he had stumbled into the Armed Detective Agency, that’s where he probably was now, and the humming and whimpering were coming from…For the love of-

Akutagawa’s eyelids flew open and the light made him squint for a few moments before his eyes cleared. He stared at where a white ceiling met a beige wall.

He took a deep breath, glanced to the side, and…yep, it was Dazai being, a complete and utter idiot as alway. He was sitting in…

“Is this another one of your stupid ways to commit suicide?” Akutagawa deadpanned. His voice cracked and he wondered if he looked as awful as he felt.

“Oh good you’re awake, finally,” Dazai smiled as he slid farther down a…was that an oil tube?

“Can you help me? I thought this was a brilliant way to commit suicide by getting stuck, but it’s not suicide its torture.”

“What the hell are you doing?” A woman screamed from the door. She had a nice figure, bobbed, black hair with bangs, pale skin, pink eyes, a black skirt and tights, red shoes, black gloves, a white buttoned down shirt, a black tie, and a golden butterfly clipped in her hair. She had to be older than Dazai, probably in her mid-twenties, and her voice seemed familiar.

“Oh, Yosano!” Dazai practically yelled. “Once Akutagawa gets me out can you bring me back to my flat?”

“I can do that for you.” He grabbed the closest garbage can, climbed out of the bed he was in and slammed it on Dazai’s head. “Welcome home,” Akutagawa said flatly. He kicked the oil drum and Dazai tumbled out of it.

The woman who Dazai had called Yosano, snorted and a smile tugged on the corner of her lips. Akutagawa sighed and fell back into the bed. His limbs ached, the wound on his stomach felt like it may reopen if he moved around too much, his left foot still felt numb, and the devil’s hammers in his head didn’t help.

After a small moment, he scanned the room and noted any important details in his mind. White curtains that could be drawn around his bed, a tv, another bed or two that seemed empty, an idiot now lying on the ground, Yosano the Armed Detective Agency’s doctor and all of this was in the Armed Detective Agency, just great.
“Rude,” Dazai muttered as he removed the garbage can from his head. He climbed to his feet and spun around with a wide grin. “So-” that was never a good way to start a conversation with Dazai. “How do you feel?”

“Does, shit, sum it up enough?” Akutagawa asked.

“Not what I was expecting,” Dazai said with a frown, “but I suppose it does…” His voice trailed off. He glanced back at Yosano and she shrugged.

“My ability allows me to heal him, but I can’t give him all the blood he lost without an actual blood transfusion,” She explained, “his body has been trying to catch up with itself, so its focus hasn’t been on getting rid some minor pains here and there.” They were more than minor pains by the way they made him want to die.

Dazai nodded and turned his focus back to Akutagawa. “So~” Again, not the best way to start a conversation. “What do you remember?”

“Too much,” Akutagawa said briefly. He didn’t look Dazai in the eyes, he wasn’t sure he even could. Instead, he looked up at the lights and waited for Dazai’s next question.

“So…everything that happened?” Dazai asked. He phrased that sentence too precisely.

“Yes, but I’m guessing you already have a pretty good idea of what happened.”

“Not particularly,” Yeah right.

“Have any guesses?”

“They’re probably wrong.”

“I seriously doubt that.”

Akutagawa turned his head and their eyes locked. Akutagawa searched for any slip in Dazai’s mask and he knew Dazai was doing the same thing. As always Dazai was as unreadable as a book that lost all of its pages. Akutagawa kept his face stern and neutral. He wouldn’t let Dazai read him, not yet.

Dazai sighed and gave in finally. “You’re the only one who got out.” He said simply.

“I know,” Akutagawa said. Dazai quirked an eyebrow quizzically.

“How?” As if I’d tell you.

“Because I do.” Dazai’s eye twitched and Akutagawa could tell Dazai was slowly starting to get more and more impatient.

“Do you know what happened to Chuuya and the others.”

“Maybe, but I’m pretty sure you know more than I do.” Dazai’s eyes widened and he bit the inside of his lip. He glanced over at Yosano. He, apparently, didn’t want to lose his temper in front of one of the other members and let every remaining mafia personality trait in him show. How long can he hold himself together though? Akutagawa couldn’t wait to find out.

“How did you escape.”

“With help obviously.”
“Could you be more specific?”

“No.” Akutagawa saw Dazai’s jaw clench.

“Can you stop dancing around my questions?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Because I remember you very specifically saying, ‘those with the loosest tongues die first’.”

“Then I must have been wrong since you’re in front of me now.”

“Oh, you’re actually admitting you’re wrong about something for a change? That’s quite a development.”

“Are you trying to piss me off?”

“That’s debatable,”

Dazai blinked several times and took a deep breath. “Yosano would you please leave?” Play times over.

She blinked. She glanced back and forth between the two of them and seemed to be considering whether that was a good idea or not. After a long moment, she set down whatever she had been working on and headed out of the room.


“Chuuya, for some reason was very determined to get me out.” Dazai nodded. “But you already knew that didn’t you?” This was irritating. It was obvious Dazai had figured this out already so what did he need him for?

“I want to double check the feeling I had.” Of course, he had a feeling, why am I not surprised?

“Where do you want me to start?”

“The beginning of the attack.”

Akutagawa took a deep breath and straightened out his thoughts. “Whoever it was, attacked suddenly and without warning,” He started. “Chuuya was briefing The Black Lizards Leaders, Higuchi, and I on a mission we were going to set off on the next day. It had come in as a request for us in particular but the problem was there was no indication of who sent the request, but we deliver no matter what, so we were going to just jump into it.

“They hit the bottom level first and the alarms went off. Everyone thought this was just another stupid smaller organization trying to pull some sort of stunt. So at first, no one paid much attention to them, and we left the fight up to the lower level members. We didn’t realize it was different until the alarm that they were on the second level went off.

“We were planning to join the fray when a bomb on the sixth level, where we were, went off. Whoever these people were rushed in and the battle commenced.” Akutagawa paused trying to remember as many details as he could. “The fight lasted about…ten minutes before it was down to Chuuya, the Black Lizards, around thirty-five lower ranked members, Higuchi, and I. Several of
their members had already slipped past us to the seventh floor and Chuuya made the call for us to focus on escaping. We made it to the fourth floor before they surrounded us.

“Hirotsu grabbed Chuuya and whispered something to him. Chuuya’s eyes widened and for a split second, I swear I saw sheer terror pass across his face. That’s where everything got confusing.

“Chuuya grabbed me and said we needed to go. Hirotsu said they’d cover our exit and I asked why it was just the two of us leaving. He said he didn’t have time to explain-”

“Let me guess you said you weren’t going to go anywhere until he explained what was going on?” Dazai interrupted.

Akutagawa dropped eye contact with Dazai. “Yeah,” he continued, “Chuuya said he’d explain once we were out but I said those were my terms. I pushed back for around three minutes before he whispered something to Gin and she told me to go as well and I left with Chuuya after that-”

“You mean after she slapped you and yelled at you to go?”

“If you know all of this why am I explaining it to you?”

“I already told you why,”

Akutagawa took a deep breath and tried to cage is anger. “Chuuya and I made it to the entry way, but then we ran into three people. I can’t remember what they looked like but they beat Chuuya and me to a pulp. We somehow managed to push passed them. We were nearly to the exit and Chuuya was supporting me because my leg was already hurt.

“One of them came after us again and I pushed Chuuya to the side. That’s when I received the joy of being stabbed in the stomach.” He deadpanned. “Chuuya punched them and helped me the rest of the way to the entrance. Whoever they were got back up and attacked us. Chuuya told me to go and I tried to protest but before I could say much he just screamed at me to go. That’s about it.”

The room went silent. Akutagawa shifted uncomfortably in the bed. He felt Dazai’s gaze on him but he didn’t meet his eyes. Akutagawa was afraid there were too many cracks in his mask that Dazai would be able to easily see through.

“What did Chuuya tell you exactly?” Dazai asked, but of course, it was the one question Akutagawa didn’t want to answer.

“It doesn’t really matter,” Akutagawa replied.

Dazai hummed as if considering what he said. “I have a feeling it does. If nothing else it will explain why you came here instead of any other place the mafia controls.”

A lie formed in Akutagawa’s mind. It was simple and easy to stick to, the type of lie that you’re lucky to be able to come up with and most people would never double guess. The question was if Dazai would see through it?

“I couldn’t be sure that they hadn’t attacked one of our other resources I could have used. The Armed Detective Agency seemed like the only place I could be certain was at least safe from them.”

“Hm,” that was the sound Dazai made when he had already had a different idea and what you said went against that feeling. “He told you to go somewhere you could trust didn’t he?”

Akutagawa cursed under his breath and made sure he wasn’t looking anywhere near Dazai. Dazai
chuckled. “If it was anyone else you were talking to you definitely would have gotten away with that lie, but sadly you didn’t think through who you were talking to.”

“Just because I said it anyway doesn’t mean I didn’t add you into the equation. I merely thought it would be worth a try anyway.”

Dazai sighed. He glanced up at the ceiling. “I don’t know what we’re supposed to do or what you think we can do. What do you even want the Armed Detective Agency to do?”

What indeed? He hadn’t expected a warm welcome, he hadn’t even expected them to save his life. Sure, this definitely wasn’t the warmest welcome ever, but it was more than he had been expecting. So he hadn’t planned ahead what he wanted. Akutagawa took a deep breath.

Why did he keep lying to himself? He knew exactly what he wanted them to do, but he wasn’t sure he had it in him to throw his pride to the side.

An image of Gin and Chuuya flashed through his head. What was happening to them right now? Chuuya was most likely being tortured for any form of information, but what about Gin? Were they doing the same thing to her? Could he help her? Could he help both of them? All he wanted was to make sure they were both safe, but what was he supposed to do against whoever had attacked them by himself?

Just ask! It doesn’t matter at this point what Dazai thinks of you, if you want to help any of them you have to get Dazai’s help and if you’re lucky the entire Armed Detective Agency’s help as well. Suck up your pride and talk.

Akutagawa took a deep breath and looked into Dazai’s eyes. In that moment he knew there were dozens of cracks, holes even, in his mask. He knew Dazai could see every confusion, every pain, every obvious emotion playing inside of him, but there was no turning back. He needed Dazai, as much as he hated to admit it, he couldn’t do this alone.

“I need your help,” He finally choked out. “I need your help in order to get Gin, Chuuya, and Higuchi out of whatever hell they’re in, along with anyone else we might run into in the process. Please, Dazai, I can’t do this on my own.” Every word that traveled from his brain to his mouth pained him. Every emotion he couldn’t remove from his words made them even harder to say. Every stupid thought of getting on his knees and begging Dazai if he needed to, plagued his mind, but he would do anything if it meant saving Chuuya, Higuchi, and his little sister.

Dazai took a deep breath and sighed. “How can I trust you? How can I be one hundred percent sure you weren’t actually captured and they sent you here with the promise that they wouldn’t hurt Gin if you sent them back information about us?”

Akutagawa took a deep breath. God, he hated these idiotic thoughts and impulsive words. “If you want me to get on my hands and knees and beg you, I will. If there’s something you want me to do that may kill me in order to earn your trust, I’ll do it. Just name what it is.”

Dazai scanned over Akutagawa as if he was looking for a sign of a lie. A smile tugged on Dazai’s mouth and his eyes lit up as if he just realized something and Akutagawa hated the look of victory that dance across his face.

“You’ll do anything while you’re here without complaint?” Dazai asked to clarify. “You won’t argue one word if I tell to do something you absolutely despise?”

“Why do I have the feeling I just dug my own grave? And, no, I’m not guaranteeing I won’t push
back depending on what you’re thinking.”

“You said-”

“I said one task to prove you can trust me.”

“Okay,” Dazai said as he grinned from ear to ear. “I want you to learn to be a real team with Atsushi to take down the bastard who just took out the entire Port Mafia.”

Akutagawa’s face drained of color. “By Atsushi, you don’t mean the-”

“Jinko? That is exactly who I meant.”

This is bad. He had been expecting something that would completely tear his pride and ego to pieces because that’s the type of person Dazai was. But teaming up for a long period of time with the Jinko? That was a new kind of torture. The Jinko was a wimp, a good for nothing idiot, an impulsive dork who couldn’t think of a good strategy for the life of him. And Dazai wanted Akutagawa to team up with him and by some miracle work together like an actual team? Their abilities had nothing in common, hell, they had nothing in common. The Jinko was everything Akutagawa despised and vice versa. What the was Dazai thinking?

“You have no idea what brought me to that thought, do you?” Dazai asked.

“I’m contemplating whether you still have an ounce of sanity left, so yes, I am confused,” Akutagawa replied.

Dazai reached into a bag that was leaning against Akutagawa’s bed he hadn’t noticed before. Dazai offered Akutagawa two sheets of paper and he took them. One of them was on his Rashomon and the other was on the Jinko.

“Those are the stats for both of your abilities, pay particular attention to how the compatibility numbers line up.”

Akutagawa quickly scanned the rest of the numbers and facts before getting to what Dazai had told him to look at and…holy shit! Akutagawa’s eyes must have been deceiving him. He looked through each column and compared each number, again and again, taking them in slower every time. So he wasn’t seeing things. Each number lined up perfectly. Their stats complimented each other better than Dazai and Chuuya’s did! But a different question wormed its way into Akutagawa’s head. He checked the date his stats had come out. This year. He turned to Dazai and looked him dead in the eyes.

“How did you get your filthy hands on this year’s stats?” Akutagawa asked.

Dazai smiled. “Hirotsu gave them to me because I asked nicely.”

Akutagawa’s eyes widened. He had been planning to have me and the Jinko team up from the beginning! “How long?” Akutagawa asked as his eyes narrowed.

Dazai understood what he meant perfectly. “I knew something like this was going to happen since before I met Atsushi. When I met him I noticed a few things that may compliment your ability perfectly. My suspicions were confirmed when you teamed up during the Fitzgerald incident. I knew if you two teamed up you may be able to actual defeat the one enemy Chuuya and I couldn’t.” Akutagawa blinked a few times. Double black wasn’t been able to defeat them? Dazai slipped. Akutagawa smirked and Dazai narrowed his eyes quizzically.
“So this enemy were facing you’ve faced before and that’s why Chuuya looked so terrified for a split second? Because even double black couldn’t beat them?”

Dazai’s eyes widened as he instantly realized the first mistake he had made in a very long time. He sighed as he realized answering Akutagawa’s question was unavoidable. “Correct, if you went back in the records to a year before you joined the Port Mafia you could find the records of the job.”

You mean before you only gave Gin and I the option to join the Port Mafia. Akutagawa wanted to say but he held his tongue. He didn’t want Dazai to know what was really happening in his head. He didn’t want him to know what he really felt towards the Port Mafia. He would hold up his mask until the end up his days, that way, no one would ask any questions.

“Well, if you’re asking for not just my help but the entire Armed Detective Agency’s I was your first hurdle,” Dazai said. “You have to persuade the President to help you.”

I was afraid of that. “Can I not?” Akutagawa tried. Dazai looked at him as if he was asking if that was even a question. Akutagawa sighed. “Fine, it’s better to just get it over with right?”

“Oh, you really are willing to go to any lengths.” Dazai said. That was a test? “She is your sister I guess.” Dazai muttered. He waved his hand to the side. “Don’t worry about it, I can ask the President for you. I can at least do that much. The President is a lot more terrifying in person especially when you’re asking for something.” Akutagawa wasn’t sure if he should be worried that Dazai, out of all people, thought this person could be terrifying. “For now-” Dazai stood up and began to stretch. “-you should rest to recuperate the rest of the way.” Dazai wandered over to the door and glanced behind him before leaving to say one thing. “I assume you know this, but don’t go exploring unless you want any chance of getting us to help you slip away.” Dazai closed the door and disappeared.

Akutagawa was aware that it was stupid to go around the Armed Detective Agency without permission. It was stupid to do that anywhere you didn’t know at least a basic outline of and where most of the people stayed during which hours.

He laid back in his bed and let out a long sigh. Teaming up with the Jinko seemed like a nightmare to say the least. If Dazai thought they would be able to team up without arguing every thirty-seconds then he was asking for too much. The Jinko was more annoying than Gin was when she was going through her, “I’m a bratty teenager who won’t listen to what you say because I’m the boss of my own life,” phase when she was ten. Hell, remnants of that phase still came through every once in awhile. If he had to deal with the Jinko everyday he wasn’t sure how long he would be able to hold back his anger for.

He sighed again and rolled onto his side. He pushed his thoughts and worries to the side and focused on the one thing that would grant him some sort of sanity, sleep. Slowly but surely Akutagawa’s thoughts slipped away from the world one at a time and he got lost in the abyss of his mind.

“I understand where you’re coming from, Dazai, his ability could really help us if we’re attacked, but how do we know we can trust him?” Ranpo asked from across the way. Ranpo and Dazai were standing in the President’s office. Akutagawa had been right, it was better to get the conversation over with then to fret about it all night.
After talking to Akutagawa Dazai had gone straight to Ranpo and said he wanted to discuss something about Akutagawa with him and the President. Ranpo was respected by everyone in the Agency and if Dazai was able to convince him to help Akutagawa the rest of the ADA would most likely jump aboard the idea. Of course he had to run the idea through with the President as well.

The truth was he only told Akutagawa he would talk to the president because he needed Akutagawa to be at the ADA if he wanted to have a chance getting him and Atsushi to team up. Dazai had planned on taking the idea of borrowing Akutagawa up with Mori in a couple of weeks, and he had not been looking forward to it. However, as if a beam of sunlight rained down from heaven to bless him, Akutagawa had trusted him enough to come to the ADA of his own accord and give him the opportunity to have him willing team up with Atsushi. Somehow all of the pieces had fallen into place perfectly. Now he simply had to make it over the last hurdle, Ranpo and the President.

Dazai wasn’t planning to pull out the Atsushi and Akutagawa teaming up card if he didn’t have to. That would include explaining what was going on which would be a big waste of time if the entire ADA wasn’t there. That would also including admitting he had been hiding important information from the ADA members for a good amount of time.

Sure Atsushi, Kunikida, and Kyouka, already knew he was hiding something, but he still didn’t like the idea of the President knowing he the information could be a matter of life and death for the Agency quite yet.

“He’s done countless things to Atsushi and the rest of the ADA, every single sign is telling us to turn him out. He’s healed, he’s fine now, that’s all we signed up for. If you want to help him, go for it, we can’t stop you from doing what you want anyway. Besides if we had a good reason to help him, where would he stay? Because I would be extremely uncomfortable letting him stay here unsupervised during the night. What would he do while we’re trying to balance requests on top of helping the, two mafia members he specifically stated? Where would we even start looking? There are too many uncertainties.”

“You’re right but you could figure out where in an instant and then he’d be out of the way for the most part,” Dazai said.

“For the most part?” Ranpo questioned.

Dazai shrugged.

**Mental note:** Plan a time to explain the details of what’s happening.

“Why are you so bent on helping him anyway?” Ranpo asked. “You’re never like this.”

Because Dazai saw how hopeless Akutagawa really felt. He saw as Akutagawa let his mask crumble. He had heard how desperately Akutagawa needed them and how much he truly wanted to help someone. Sure it had been to people he cared about deeply, but Dazai had still never seen him like that before. It made him curious to figure out what other emotions are beyond the mask he had made Akutagawa build up.

Dazai shrugged. “Because even though they’re members of the port mafia they are human to aren’t they?”

Ranpo quirked an eyebrow. “That’s an odd reason for you, I would totally buy that if it was Atsushi
or Kenji, but not you.”

Fair point. “Dazai this would be a lot easier for you if you just told us what you’re planning instead of trying to dodge around it.” The President finally intervened.

“But it’s so much work to have to explain it twice!” Dazai whined. “In the time it would take to explain a second time I could have tried to successfully hang myself and jump off a bridge!”

Ranpo nodded to show he understood Dazai’s concern. The President on the other hand kept a stern face and didn’t seem to care at all until…

“I understand,” The President said. “Would it make it easier if I called the rest of the Armed Detective Agency here so you won’t have to explain twice?”

“But then I have to explain how this came up!” Dazai whined.

“You could just say Akutagawa wants our help because of this and it benefits us because of this,” Ranpo said, “it’s quite easy to get around all of your concerns.”

What about the concern of not wanting to bring all this up in the first place? The more Ranpo stared at him expectantly the more Dazai agreed with himself. Whether he liked it or not the moment the ADA met Dazai they were pieces in his game.

“Fine,” Dazai sighed dramatically. The President nodded and Ranpo left the room to gather the others. Dazai sat down backwards in a chair and pouted as the ADA members entered the room one at a time.

When all of them had arrived Dazai didn’t say anything at first. He stared at the ceiling pouting until Kunikida coughed. He focused his attention on all of his colleagues and slowly slid off the chair and onto the floor to mope.

Kunikida walked over to Dazai, picked him off the floor, and began to shake him violently as he yelled something about how they came here so start talking, or something like that. Half the time when Kunikida was talking Dazai just drowned him out.

Dazai held out from talking until The President told him to start. Dazai pouted but explained as quickly as he could in as little detail as possible. He left out the part about Chuuya and he already dealing with him and he left out details about who they were facing. He also left out any connection he may have had with him in the past. Kunikida realized that half way through and glared at Dazai but didn’t bring anything up. In the end he said it was just a feeling that kept getting worse and worse.

And then he went into his plan with Atsushi and Akutagawa teaming and immediately he was met with distress, only from Atsushi, and, thankfully, Dazai had been expecting that.

“You’re joking right?” Atsushi asked. His eyes were focused on the ground and he was playing nervously with his glove.

“Nope,” Dazai said. Atsushi bit his lip and his leg started bouncing slightly. “Atsushi how well do you remember the Fitzgerald incident?”

Atsushi looked up at Dazai. “I remember everything that happened. How would I not? It was only a month ago.”

“Then you remember how well you and Akutagawa worked together during it?” Dazai asked.
Atsushi opened his mouth but then closed it. He nodded. “See? Besides I have a good feeling about you two teaming up.”

All of the ADA members exchanged looks.

**Mental Note:** Mentioning you have a good feeling about anything makes the ADA consider more deeply what you’re talking about.

Atsushi stared at him uncomfortably before he finally gave in and looked at the ground. “I’m fine with teaming up with him and helping him if he truly needs us, and as long as you’re positive he’s not going to betray us.” Atsushi muttered.

Dazai grinned ear to ear and looked between each of the other ADA members. One by one they sighed and gave in saying something similar to what Atsushi had said, everyone except for Kyouka.

Dazai had been expecting resistance from her but for some reason some part of him had hoped she would just go along with everyone else. Everyone looked at her but she didn’t say anything.

“If you’re uncomfortable with this Kyouka you want to speak up now.” Dazai said finally. She didn’t reply. “We don’t have to do it if you tell us you’re uncomfortable.”

Kyouka took a deep breath and looked at him. “I’m uncomfortable with the idea yes,” she said. She went back to staring at the ground. “But you said you had a good feeling and if I don’t have to interact with him at all, and he’s just going to be here…” She paused and took a deep breath. “I’m okay with him staying for a little bit.”

“Well I guess that settles most of our hoops to jump through,” Ranpo said. Ranpo took a deep breath and yelled. “Everyone who votes Akutagawa gets to stay with Dazai raised your hand!”


“This was your idea to begin with Dazai, he’s your responsibility now,” Kunikida said, as he pushed up his glasses.

Suddenly Dazai regretted everything. Akutagawa had been his responsibility once before and it hadn’t been as bad as he imagined it could be now. For one thing he was having a harder time being able to tell what Akutagawa was thinking. It bugged him. Whenever it looked like something in Akutagawa’s mind clicked together Dazai couldn’t tell what it was. Dazai knew the cause of this new inability wasn’t because he had left the mafia, Dazai still knew everything that went through Chuuya’s head. For the most part he still could tell what went through Akutagawa’s head but it seriously bothered him whenever he couldn’t.

Secondly, Akutagawa was very moody, and compared to four years ago Dazai dared to say he was moodier which seemed unlikely, but was true if you looked hard enough.

Dazai began to pout and Kunikida told him to suck it up. Dazai whined for a bit to play up the act and finally everyone just left the room including Ranpo. It was just Dazai and the President. Dazai’s face went neutral and he turned a chair to face the President.

“Am I going to hear what you wouldn’t tell everyone else?” He asked.
Dazai took a seat and looked at the president. “The man we're dealing with is a morbid bastard who deserves to burn in hell.” The President’s face stayed emotionless. “He plays with people's minds and emotions like their some sort of toy. He manipulates people with their worst fears and makes them do inhumane things. And he finds amusement from watching people fall apart slowly. What he enjoys the most is when people tear their own lives apart, both him and one other person who was in the Mafia’s custody enjoy it. I’m not sure if she’s still in the Mafia’s special containment center but she may be. After all she betrayed him before we captured her.”

“What are their names?” The President asked.

Dazai took a deep breath and let a small portion of the memories he had pushed to the very edges of his mind seven years ago come back, “Stephen King and Patricia Highsmith.”

Chapter End Notes

And that was the second chapter my fellow BSD fans! Hope you enjoyed. Thank you for all of the kudos and hits after the first chapter. I was a little overwhelmed at first. I hope you'll enjoy my chapters in the future. If you have any feedback, advice, or anything else you’d like to share go ahead and post it in the comments ☽ DISCLAIMER ☽ !

Also: IMPORTANT NOTICE: My wonderful editor is going to camp, All. Freaking. Summer. She said she may be able to mail edited chapters to me but there is no guarantee :( If she does I'll post them as soon as I can but posting may be slower. Also also, for July (I almost wrote January?) I participating in Camp Nano and this is not my project. So that will also interfere with posting. Sorry in advance.

Until next time byeeeeeeeee!!!! (งords 3alborg)づ

P.S. If you notice any tags I should add/change or if the ratings should change in any way PLEEEEEEASE let me know I am horrible with tags. Thanks and bye! ▇▉
Pain, almost unbearable pain. Every few minutes the torturer would pause and repeat one of two questions, *Where is the hard drive*, and, *Where is Akutagawa Ryuunosuke*. Chuuya was proud to say they hadn’t broken him yet and it would take them a hell of a lot more effort to do so. He would only regret a few things later on, his aching limbs, his sore ribcage, and the master of a headache that had accumulated around his left temple.

Whoever was torturing Chuuya was very creative in his opinion. This person used a variety of methods and never pushed Chuuya so far as to kill him on accident, which many people would have done at this point. They stayed calm and collected. Whenever their deep voice rang out it was emotionless but strong. Every time they asked him a question Chuuya would say he didn’t know. He was the very person who hid the hard drive, but he wasn’t about to give up the one thing that had all of the port mafia’s backup files in case they had to wipe their system clean as he assumes Mori had done. As for Ryuunosuke, Chuuya also had a pretty good idea of where he was at that moment and if who Chuuya thought was behind this was it made his location more paramount.

Yes, Chuuya did feel horrible for manipulating Ryuunosuke so he would go to the Armed Detective Agency when Dazai had done enough to him already. However, Chuuya had faith that Ryuunosuke could put up with Dazai for a long time, and if Dazai did hurt Ryuunosuke he would have to answer to Chuuya if he survived this.

The torturer stopped momentarily and he growled. Whoever they were, were keeping Chuuya blindfolded, but even if they hadn’t Chuuya’s eyesight had already left him.

Hot metal pressed against the exposed flesh of his stomach and Chuuya bit his tongue to keep from screaming. Pain laced up his side as the torturer moved the metal upwards. His stomach burned and tears formed in his eyes. His sense of pain disappeared and all he could feel was the pressure, but even that slowly began to fade.

Chuuya hoped the Black Lizard Leaders and Higuchi were faring better than he was, but he couldn’t be sure...Crap, Gin! He had been so worked up about Ryuunosuke he had forgotten about mini-Akutagawa, as Dazai used to call her when it was just the four of them. Somewhere in the back of Chuuya’s mind, he wondered if Dazai would still call her that.

What kind of question was that? They could never go back to the way things were and it was about damn time Chuuya accepted that.
As for Gin, what was happening to her? What might happen to her? Did their captor know she was Ryuunosuke's sister? And if they did what were they doing to her to get information on Ryuunosuke?

If their captor knew about her they would have used her against Chuuya by now, right? Their captor must know he wouldn’t break easily, especially when it came to physical torture. What terrified Chuuya, was he didn’t know how skilled they were when it came to mental torture. If he knew Gin was someone Chuuya cared about they would have started trying to manipulate him by now.

Chuuya’s torturer stopped and repeated, “Where did you hide the hard drive?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Chuuya croaked. The back of his throat felt cracked and dry.

The pain returned and Chuuya had to use every fiber in his body to keep from screaming. It stopped and he gasped for air. Breathe in and out, in and out. The question bounced off Chuuya and he didn’t even realize it had been asked. The torturer must have realized this. There was a clank as they set something down and the door screeched open.

Chuuya sighed in relief until he heard familiar, small footsteps. He stiffened and he heard a small metal tool be picked up. *I’m a friend*. They wrote first.

“You said that before, I didn’t believe you then and I don’t believe you now,” Chuuya said through loud gasps.

*That is understandable, but I promise I am. If you need anything, anything at all just say and I will go and get it for you.*

Chuuya said the first thing that came to mind. “Water.” Their footsteps echoed as they moved to the...left of the room, and came back over to him. They tilted his head back and began to slowly pour water into his mouth.

“Who are you?”

*Rest for now Nakahara Chuuya. You will need your strength. I will come back tomorrow.*

“At least tell me how long it's been.”

*It has only been a day since you were brought here, beyond that I do not know anything else about where you came from. I only was told who you are.*

A day. It had only been a day? If it had been a week he would be worried what had happened in that time, but how had only a day passed?

His muscles relaxed as his “friend” left the room. Everything went dark.

~

Blood was all Akutagawa could see at first. Only, it wasn’t the blood of the people he had killed that had left a permanent imprint on his hands, it was his blood. More accurately the warm, fresh blood that had poured out his side not that long ago. What had just happened? His foot caught on a body as
someone dragged him across the Port Mafia’s floor. His vision blurred as his stomach throbbed. Why couldn’t he make out who was helping him?

“What’s happening?” Akutagawa managed to croak out.

There was a small laugh. “You must really be out of it if you can’t remember.” Chuuya chuckled as if trying to lift the mood. “But it doesn’t matter right now, you’ll remember in time.”

“Chu-” there was a loud bang and Chuuya pushed Akutagawa onto the floor. More blood oozed out of his side as he collided with the floor. He heard Chuuya puke.

“You better not die on me,” Chuuya whispered from above him.

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” Akutagawa pressed his hand to his side as Chuuya hauled him to his feet and towards the exit.

Akutagawa felt a surge first, then Chuuya pushing him. Akutagawa stumbled and fell to the ground, his head spinning. There was another surge. He was pushed further away. Three blurred figures crawled onto Chuuya and seemed to be trying to hold him down.

“Go!” Chuuya yelled. “Go and find someone you can trust!” Akutagawa didn’t move. “GO!”

…

Akutagawa sat straight up. His shirt was damp and his heart was racing. He had wanted to help, he hadn’t wanted to leave, but every emotion etched in Chuuya’s face had begged him to run. So he did, he ran like the damn coward he was. He pulled his legs into his chest and took a deep breath. The handle of his door creaked as it turned and Akutagawa instantly laid back down.

“Good to see you’re awake,” A tall man with glasses said as he entered the room. Akutagawa scanned him memorizing any important details. The man’s name clicked instantly. Kunikida Doppo, one of the Armed detective Agency’s most valuable members.

“Kunikida Doppo,” Akutagawa said with a stiff nod.

His eyebrow quirked. “Kunikida is fine, but how did you know who I am?”

“I make a habit of looking into the file of anyone I’ve exchanged blows with no matter how briefly.” Kunikida nodded. “Smart.” Akutagawa briefly contemplated if he should tell Kunikida he had just complimented Dazai. After all, Dazai was the one who drilled that habit into Akutagawa.

Kunikida pulled up a chair and cleared his throat. “I’m going to be blunt, I see you as an enemy-”

“You should,” Akutagawa said.

“I also believe Dazai was an idiot for trusting you so quickly,”

“When is he not an idiot?”

“I want you to tell me everything that happened and what Dazai is planning.”
Akutagawa’s eyes narrowed. His request didn’t make very much sense. “Didn’t he tell you already?” The file he had read said this was Dazai’s partner he would think Dazai would have told him.

“He may have, but I want to hear it in your own words.”

Akutagawa narrowed his eyes. “You think he withheld information from you.” It wasn’t something Akutagawa would put it passed Dazai he was constantly doing it.

“I believe it’s very likely,” Kunikida said. “Besides, Dazai was only telling us what you told him you were at the Port Mafia first hand. I would like to hear what happened from the source of our information.”

Kunikida’s reasons were solid and he didn’t seem to be lying or telling half-truths, so telling him what happened didn’t seem like a problem. However, he also wanted Akutagawa to tell him what Dazai had said he was planning. Akutagawa knew Dazai would not have slipped a second time and the older man had most likely withheld any information about Chuuya. Dazai probably had also ignored the whole part about fighting whoever they were up against before. Logically, Akutagawa would tell Kunikida what was going on in order to earn his trust, however...

“Dazai never keeps something from the people he trusts and who need to know without a good reason,” Akutagawa said. “If he told me something that he didn’t tell you, which is very unlikely since you’re his partner, he has a good reason for doing so. Quite frankly, I hate it, but in my current situation I trust Dazai more than anyone in the Mafia.” Even though Akutagawa wasn’t sure if Dazai was going to be another enemy or a friend he still had to trust him.

Kunikida’s expression remained stern, but despite his small internal plea, Akutagawa didn’t drop eye contact. He wasn’t willing to look weaker than any of the Armed Detective Agency members. Kunikida sighed and handed Akutagawa a pile of clothes.

“It’s an hour before anyone else arrives,” Kunikida said. “You should probably take a shower. You look awful.” Well, that proved that Akutagawa did, in fact, look as horrible as he felt. “There are showers at the end of the hall come back here once you’re done.”

Akutagawa thanked him and headed down the hallway. Gin. Of course, she was the first person he thought to worry about, when was she not? After all, she always seemed to have a habit of finding the one way to make a situation worse. Akutagawa closed his eyes and tried to imagine her. All he could see was the image of her as she said the last words he may ever hear from her again. Reopening his eyes, he reached a door that most likely lead to the showers. At that moment he could only hope his little sister was alright.

~

Thump. Atsushi looked up from his laptop as Akutagawa dropped a pile of paperwork on Dazai’s desk. Atsushi glared at him. Dazai stared at Akutagawa, then at the pile, then back at Akutagawa multiple times. The door swung open and Kunikida entered with another pile of papers.

“Why am I helping you grab this idiot's overdue work?” Akutagawa asked.

Kunikida set the pile next to the other one and Dazai whimpered. “Because you have nothing better to do and it’s about time Dazai gets some of this done. Besides, there are a few more piles this size and it would take me to long to get all of them myself.”
They headed back towards the door. Dazai grabbed the back of Akutagawa’s shirt, spun him around, and handed him a book. “Your time is much better spent reading than getting all of those dumb, unnecessary papers.”

There was a pause. “Who let the toddler buy this book?” Akutagawa asked. *Complete Guide to Suicide.*

“Toddler?” Dazai asked. “I’m an adult.”

“More like a-dolt,” Yosano interjected.

Dazai placed a hand on his chest and gasped.

Kunikida and Akutagawa left the room and came back with more stacks of paper multiple times. Atsushi did his best to ignore Akutagawa when he entered, but it was difficult not to awkwardly make eye contact with him. Akutagawa only acknowledged their eyes meeting once, but Atsushi had quickly looked away to avoid any tension.

“So,” Dazai said after Akutagawa and Kunikida had brought in the last piles of paper and Akutagawa had sat down next to him. Atsushi didn’t look up from his laptop even though he knew what Dazai was going to say next was directed at him. “What do you two think about trying a few techniques?”

Atsushi bit his lip and shrugged. “I don’t really care, ask Akutagawa.”

Akutagawa looked up from Dazai’s suicide book. “Why ask me? I obviously don’t have a choice in the matter.” Akutagawa said irritably.

“Oh, I’m sorry I wanted to have some decency and think of your opinion as well,” Atsushi said. Akutagawa rolled his eyes.

“If it doesn’t matter to you then I assume you already have a perfect idea of how to work with another person,” Akutagawa said.

“No, I don’t,” Atsushi said through gritted teeth. “I was asking your opinion because you nearly died yesterday. The thought crossed my mind that maybe you wouldn’t feel up to it today. I’m sorry you feel that your pride is being attacked, how about next time I won’t consider the limits of the human body and how about I won’t give you a chance to say you’re not completely healed and you’d rather wait until you’re fully healed to do whatever Dazai is planning.”

“Pride? Jinko, my pride was put through a shredder the moment I decided to ask your ugly mug for help.”

A burning heat laced through Atsushi’s chest. “Jerk!”

“Idiot,” Akutagawa responded flatly.

“Good-for-nothing imbecile!”

“Useless trash bag,”

Atsushi’s brain stopped…Why couldn’t he think of anything? Akutagawa quirked an eyebrow and Atsushi’s face scrunched together as he strained to think of an insult. “You Douche canoe!”

Akutagawa’s eyes narrowed. “Douche…canoe?”
"I couldn’t think of anything, okay? And I’m not willing to swear."

"But, Jinko, why a canoe?"

"Why a useless trash bag?"

"Because trash bags can be useless in many ways. They can have a hole, they can rip, or, Jinko, they can be you."

"If you’re going to insult me at least call me Atsushi."

"Fine, or they can be you Atsushi."

"Thank you." Akutagawa rolled his eyes, again.

"Can we get back to my original question, please?" Dazai asked.

Akutagawa shrugged. "I’m healed so it doesn’t matter."

"You can follow through with whatever schemes you’re planning once you’re done with at least one of those piles, Dazai," Kunikida said. His proposal made sense. The more Dazai slacked off the more his pile grew, and the more Atsushi and the rest of the Agency Members would have to put up with his whining later.

"How about I do all of them afterward?" Dazai asked.

Kunikida’s eyes narrowed and shifted to Akutagawa. "What?" Akutagawa asked.

"You told me a few things about his old partner and I was simply curious as to what he would have done."

"He wouldn’t have dealt with Dazai’s shit for this long," Akutagawa said pointing to the stacks of papers.

"There’s your answer Dazai." Kunikida said.

Dazai’s eyebrows narrowed quizzically. "You told him about Chuuya?" He asked Akutagawa.

"He was curious," Akutagawa shrugged.

"But he asked you a question and you just told him?" Dazai asked.

"Kunikida’s one of the people who saved me, and the questions were harmless."

"But you just told him?"

Akutagawa rolled his eyes. "Get to the point already."

"The point is you just told him, like that," Dazai snapped his fingers. "It took you nearly ten minutes of dodging my questions before you told me anything!"

"That’s because you’re an idiot who can put up with people dodging your questions for a while. Besides half of the questions, you asked me you already knew the answer to so there was no point in me telling you."

"I already told you that I wanted to-"
“Make sure you were right? No, you wanted to make sure I would tell the truth when it came to something you didn’t know.” Dazai blinked a few times as if he was slightly impressed. Akutagawa seemed to realize he was impressed too. “Did you honestly think I wouldn’t notice? A toddler could have realized that much.”

Atsushi would have never said it out loud, but he was impressed too. He knew that Dazai had to be a very convincing liar, since he had been part of the mafia, and he knew he would have never noticed Dazai’s real motives especially while he was hurt. Somehow Akutagawa had also managed to keep his insult going from several minutes ago.

“Atsushi, work, now,” Kunikida said sternly. Dazai pouted, grabbed the top paper, and started to look at it. Atsushi turned his focus back to his report.

Atsushi hoped Kyouka was doing okay. She had decided to take the day off when she was told that the president was planning to have Akutagawa join the ADA members if he was well enough today. After things were less awkward she said she’d come back. She had guessed it would be better the next day, but Atsushi had told her he’d tell her if things went awfully wrong and the tension was still as thick as concrete. Then she would probably wait another day to return.

What if the tension only got worse? Would she come back eventually anyway? What if she didn’t come back even if things were fine? What if-

Atsushi shook his head and refocused on his report. Nearly an hour passed and Atsushi switched to filling out health forms.

“I’m done!” Dazai yelled. Atsushi jumped. His eyes shot up from his computer to Dazai and his dorky smile. Dazai’s eyes darted to Kunikida. He sighed and waved Dazai off. He turned to them and smiled. Atsushi and Akutagawa sighed simultaneously and instantly glared at each other. “Let’s go!”

Atsushi shut his laptop and unhappily followed Dazai and Akutagawa out of the Armed Detective Agencies office and to the stairs. Dazai lead them up the steps. Why were they going up? He glanced at Akutagawa who was as emotionless as ever. At least he guessed that was the case.

Atsushi looked away almost as soon as he looked at him. His stomach began to turn as the image of Akutagawa remain in the forefront of his mind. He had instantly seen some other emotion laced through Akutagawa’s features, besides boredom. But what was it?

He couldn’t help but let his eyes drift back over to Akutagawa as he moved behind Dazai so the older man wouldn’t see him. There was something… something in Akutagawa eyes and through the rest of his face. Something that Atsushi couldn’t identify, something.

Who was he kidding? He knew what it was only he couldn’t admit it to himself. It was pain, solid pain and heartache that made Dazai’s heart clench.

It was subtle and if you weren’t looking for it the slight expression would easily go unnoticed, but sure enough, it was there. What had Atsushi expected? Akutagawa had just lost everything that gave Atsushi the right to think he wasn’t pained by that? What told Atsushi he wasn’t human and he didn’t have emotions?

The fact that he didn’t seem to care about anyone in the Port Mafia but two, three members? All of those people and he only care about helping two or three of them? What kind of person only cared about a few people?
Then again, he may have been worried the ADA wouldn’t help if he was concerned about too many people. But what did that matter? He should have at least asked. Although Akutagawa seemed so closed off, he may not have anyone else he could possibly think of, maybe he didn’t rely on anyone else. Atsushi didn’t know what his life was like in the Port Mafia. He needed to remember to try and give Akutagawa the benefit of the doubt even if it was hard. He had as much of a right to have Atsushi’s positive outlook as much as anyone else did until he completely dragged it through the mud. Which he had done on countless occasions already.

Atsushi’s face frowned deepened. Another chance, he was going to give Akutagawa one more chance before completely shutting him out and putting him under harsh lighting.

At least it seemed like Akutagawa was trying to help instead of turning away and acting like it didn’t concern him. But Atsushi still felt doubtful that Akutagawa would follow through and push to get the people he trusted back once it became too difficult. The benefit of the doubt! He was trying and right now that’s all that mattered! But it would still be nice to be sure he was serious.

He was putting up with Dazai and his crazy antics wasn’t he? If he was putting in the effort so far that was good enough! But still…

Atsushi groaned internally. It would be so much easier if he could just read everybody's minds. Why couldn’t that have been his ability instead of a tiger who half of the time wouldn’t even cooperate, especially when he needed it the most?

Atsushi’s eyes lingered over to Dazai. Speaking of reading minds, where on earth were they going and what was he going to have them do? Dazai was the biggest mystery out of everyone in the Agency, he may even be more of a mystery to Atsushi than Akutagawa was. When you got down to the facts he knew nothing about Dazai. He didn’t know who he was in the mafia or what made him quit. He didn’t know why he joined the mafia in the first place, or how long he had been a member. Atsushi was aware Dazai knew Akutagawa to an extent. He also seemed to know this person named Chuuya who had been his old partner? Atsushi wasn’t even sure about that much!

Both of these mysterious people in Atsushi’s life he wanted to know about. Even if they didn’t want him to. He wanted to know as much as they would share. Dazai more than Akutagawa if he was being honest, but Akutagawa still intrigued him. He wanted to know why Dazai’s approval was so important to him, and how much he knew about Dazai. If Akutagawa told him that then he would be one step closer to knowing Dazai as well.

At the moment Atsushi was more concerned about what Dazai was planning. Not even Ranpo knew that much and that worried Atsushi. Every time Ranpo tried to figure out what Dazai was thinking he couldn’t. It never seemed to phase Ranpo or any of the other ADA members but it affected Atsushi.

Whenever anyone asked Atsushi’s opinion on where he wanted to go together with his colleagues he always said he didn’t have an opinion. Ranpo always said otherwise and stated that preference.

They reached the door to the roof and Dazai pushed it open. There was a slight breeze that sent a shiver down Atsushi’s spine. Dazai spun around and looked at the two men with a wide smile.

“Now, this may seem childish to you Atsushi, but guess what we’re going to do?” He didn’t wait for a response. “We’re going to play an extreme game of tag!”

Tag? That seemed a little dull and was not at all what Atsushi thought.

“It’s worse than it seems,” Akutagawa muttered. “I’ve never been able to catch him.”
“But now you have a partner,” Dazai said motioning to Atsushi.

Atsushi wasn’t sure if that would help or make things harder. If they started arguing they could be derailed quickly.

“You can use abilities of course,” Dazai said, he reached into his jacket and threw Akutagawa his coat. “and it's noon so you have until the sun completely sets to catch me.”

Wasn’t that so too much time? They might be able to catch him in less. Dazai was probably good at staying hidden, but there were two of them and only one of him. They should be able to do it.

“So you sure that’s enough time?” Akutagawa asked. Atsushi blinked. How was it not? It may be a bit difficult but it almost seemed like too much time. Dazai raised his eyebrows as if daring him to protest. Akutagawa shifted back and forth between feet. “I’m merely saying that you gave me three consecutive days at on point and I never came close.”

Atsushi’s eyes widened. So this was going to be a lot harder than he had originally thought.

Dazai’s smile grew. “Good luck!” He leaned back and fell off the edge of the roof. Atsushi blinked. He felt a hand firmly wrap around his wrist and pull him forward. Akutagawa ran off the edge after dazai, dragging Atsushi off with him.

Chapter End Notes

Eyyo everybody! It's been a long time since I posted the last chapter and I apologize but the next two chapters should be posted by the end of October/the beginning of November. After those two chapters, I am unaware as to when the next one will be ready, but I will try to move as fast as possible. I realized recently that is basically an AU or you could say an Alternate Timeline (since this will never actually happen but it's still in the BSD universe). So yeah, I'm writing this AU. If you have any suggestion please let me know in the comments most of these characters are hard to portray accurately.

Self-promotion: If you want to read a light-hearted BSD fanfiction please check out my other work, Diversity. Please...I want kudos, they make me feel warm and fuzzy on the inside.

As per the usual song, this chapter is inspired by this song.

Thank you for reading this fanfic and I hope you have a wonderful day, week, month, year, and life. (ᵔᴥᵔ)
Teamwork

Chapter Summary

The most light-hearted, slightly funny chapter that will most likely be in this fanfic.

Chapter Notes

This is literally just Akutagawa and Atsushi being dorks because I didn’t know how else to give you a chapter like sooooo AKA the one slightly fluffy chapter that won’t have some sort of life and death tension between these two for a while.

*Cough, cough*Iforgotletedthischapterawhilebackandstillneededtopostit*Cough cough*

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Atsushi screamed. He closed his eyes. His feet lightly touched the ground and they were running.

Atsushi wasn’t sure what he disliked more, the fact that he was letting Akutagawa drag him around randomly even though they had already lost sight of Dazai or the fireworks that were shooting up his arm from where Akutagawa was gripping his wrist. His hands were just so smooth and warm, and his hand fit around Atsushi’s wrist so perfectly like he was-

What was he thinking? Atsushi needed to clear his thoughts. Focus, Dazai is who you need to think of, so where would he be. They began to slow down before coming to a stop.

Akutagawa cursed. He let go of Atsushi’s wrist and Atsushi immediately missed Akutagawa’s warmth. What was happening to him? Atsushi didn’t like when people swore but he understood for most people it was a regular reaction.

Akutagawa turned to Atsushi. “Has Dazai really told you nothing about working as a team?” He asked.

Atsushi shook his head. What was Akutagawa even talking about? “You could always tell me what you believe he should have told me.”

“I suck at explaining things,” Akutagawa muttered and turned away. So that was that? “Anyway, we need to focus on tracking down Dazai. For him this just a test to see what he needs to focus on more. Whether he likes or not we have a deadline we have to learn to work together by and the worst part is he doesn’t know when that is.”
A deadline? What was he even talking about? Why would they have a deadline? Was it about the person Dazai had referenced? Had Dazai told Akutagawa more than everyone in the ADA?

“You know something I don’t, don’t you?” He asked.

Akutagawa shrugged. “Who knows, it depends on what you already knew about our situation and what Dazai told you.”

That was really helpful. Atsushi had to resist the urge to roll his eyes. “Won’t it be impossible to track him down?” Atsushi asked shifting back to the task at hand. “He’s constantly moving isn’t he?”

“If that was the case this would be easy,” Akutagawa dead-panned. “He hides until we get five hundred yards away and then moves. So there’s no way to pin him down in time.”

“How do you know this?”

“I spent a lot of useless energy at one point trying to figure out a pattern in his movements. All I was able to come up with was that number.”

“Why don’t we find out where he is and then approach him from two different ways?”

“Great idea,” Akutagawa said flatly. “So where is he?”

“I don’t know right now, but we could track him and eventually find out.”

Akutagawa stared at him and Atsushi wished he could read his mind. Had Akutagawa never thought of this plan or did he already know a flaw in the idea?

“You have no clue how far five hundred yards is, do you?” Yeah, definitely something with his idea. “Have you ever tracked someone down before?”

Atsushi couldn’t say he really had. He tracked people through evidence and leads, that was his job, but he had never tried to find someone without either of those. Atsushi shook his head.

“Great,” Akutagawa said blandly. “Just follow my lead.” He started to walk and Atsushi quickly followed.

Atsushi was lead through the winding streets of Yokohama. He kept glancing side to side to try to spot Dazai. Either Atsushi was as blind as a bat or Dazai was a lot better at hiding than he had first thought. He turned his focus to Akutagawa who didn’t seem to be looking for Dazai at all. His chest clenched and doubt seeped into him.

He had to believe that Akutagawa knew what he was doing. After all, Akutagawa had done this several times before, hadn’t he? He knows what the game was like, Atsushi should trust him. At the same time he had never been able to catch Dazai so did he really know what he was doing? The truth was, he knew more than Atsushi did. For now, Atsushi was going to rely on him.

Akutagawa stopped and glanced down an alleyway. He definitely seemed determined to find Dazai, it was almost…Intriguing! He was intriguing, a mystery Atsushi wanted to unravel and find the answer to, he was no way that other thing and he wasn’t going to say or think that Akutagawa looked sort of cute when his eyes filled with determination. Dang., it!

Atsushi slapped his forehead and Akutagawa turned to him quizzically.

“Sorry,” Atsushi whispered. “I just had a stupid idea.”
Akutagawa rolled his eyes and turned back to the direction they had been heading in. Okay so maybe, just maybe, he was a little cute but he was so rude and annoying, and cruel that his looks amounted to nothing! He didn’t care about life. Atsushi knew because Akutagawa was able to kill so easily. If Akutagawa truly didn’t care though, why did Atsushi feel like there was more to Akutagawa then what he was seeing?

Was it because Akutagawa had stopped trying to kill Atsushi once he realized he wouldn’t gain any respect from Dazai if he did? What if…no, he was wrong, he was definitely wrong, but Atsushi still couldn’t hold back from considering the thought. What if he didn’t like killing but he kept doing it because that’s the only way he believed Dazai would acknowledge him? Atsushi believed, no, he knew it was a stupid thought, and yet, something about that innocent thought gave Akutagawa a reason for what he did. It felt as if a reason, even though he still wasn’t right, made Akutagawa seem more human. Maybe Atsushi’s thought wasn’t one hundred percent accurate, but it seemed to be at least be fifty percent right. Something inside Atsushi knew that the fifty percent was true.

Atsushi slapped his forehead again. He felt like an idiot for randomly slapping himself. Akutagawa probably thought he was. How was worthless he?

“I found something,” Akutagawa called. Atsushi snapped out of his train of thought and wandered over to his partner. He was holding a piece of clothing, no, a piece of a bandage.

“So he’s that way,” Atsushi said pointing down the alley way. He began to head in that direction when he felt his suspenders pull and he stumbled back. “What?”

Akutagawa didn’t say anything. The tail of his coat turned into his Rashomon and propelled him onto the roof of the building next to them. He motioned Atsushi up.

“Um, I can’t get up there!” Atsushi called.

“You can use your ability, Jinko,” Akutagawa said.

Blood thrummed violently through Atsushi’s veins. “First of all,” his legs transformed and he jumped onto the roof. “I prefer not to use my ability if I don’t have to, and secondly,” Atsushi took a deep breath and yelled, “don’t. Call. Me. JINKO!”

Akutagawa blinked. “You were serious about me calling you Atsushi?”

“Yes!” He glared at Akutagawa. Akutagawa rolled his eyes but complied. “Why are we up here?” Atsushi asked.

“It was too easy,”

“What?”

“The bandage, do you really think Dazai would let himself be tracked so easily?”

No. “So why do you think it was there?”

“To drag us into that,” Akutagawa pointed towards a narrow alley way with a net over top. Atsushi smiled. It was such an obvious trick and Akutagawa had seen right through it as if it was nothing. If he hadn’t been there Atsushi probably would have walked right into it. He slightly understood why Dazai wanted them to be a team. Sure there abilities worked well together, but Atsushi often ran in without thinking, Akutagawa was impulsive but he still managed to think through both of their actions. It almost made Atsushi feel like he could rely on Akutagawa, almost.
“If he’s not over there then that means,” Akutagawa turned around and dragged Atsushi off the edge of the building. A red-black platform formed under them before they hit the ground.

As soon as their feet were planted Akutagawa let go of Atsushi’s wrist and they ran.

The two men rounded multiple corners, weaved through streets, and were nearly hit by three cars. They rushed across a street, into an alleyway, and stopped. Akutagawa pushed a big dumpster off of the wall and crouched.

“He was here,” Akutagawa said. “He left around a minute and a half ago.”

“Which way did he go?” Atsushi asked.

“Either east or west,” Akutagawa rose and looked down both directions of the street they had just run through. He turned back to Atsushi and stretched out his hand. “Give me your phone.”

Atsushi’s mouth parted slightly. What? Why would he give Akutagawa, a member of the Port Mafia, access to a phone with every ADA members phone numbers in its contacts?

“Okay,” Atsushi handed his phone to Akutagawa cautiously. Akutagawa typed something in and handed it back. “What is this?” Atsushi asked as he looked at the numbers on the screen.

“My number, what else?”

“Why do I need it?”

“There are many reasons. We’re supposedly partners now so it only seems reasonable, but the main reason is there are two of us.”

“And?”

“You’re supposed to be a detective, Atsushi, you can figure out that much.”

Two? Why two? Why did it matter? Oh. “Why are we going to split up?” Atsushi asked.

“It’s easier that way.”

“But I can’t track down Dazai!”

“You’ll be fine,” Akutagawa said. “If you’re completely stuck and you think he’s in that direction call me. Otherwise, we’ll meet back up here in twenty minutes okay?”

“What do I do if I think I’ve found where he used to be?”

“Call me,” Akutagawa said simply.

“Okay,” Atsushi mumbled. Atsushi started to walk away.

“Oh, and one more thing,” Akutagawa called. “Be on the lookout for traps and don’t go down any alleyways with a dead end. It’s easier to get trapped that way.” Atsushi nodded.

They parted ways and Atsushi headed down the sidewalk. What was Akutagawa thinking? Atsushi didn’t know what he was doing, for the past few minutes he had just been aimlessly following Akutagawa how was he supposed to suddenly try to do what Akutagawa had done for years?

Atsushi weaved through the streets and alleyways of Yokohama trying to find any clear sign of
Dazai. He scanned every inch of the ground for any clues but found nothing. He walked aimlessly for what felt like hours until he finally stopped to head back.

How had Akutagawa tracked Dazai before? Atsushi hadn’t seen any clues then either, besides the bandage and that had been a trap.

There was shuffling behind him. Atsushi spun around. The tail of tan coat disappeared behind the corner. An alarm blared through his head. Don’t go down any alleyways with a dead end. It’s easier to get trapped that way. Atsushi crept towards the turn and peered around the corner. Sure enough, it was closed off and Akutagawa’s warning began to grow louder in his head.

Thwack! Hard, something hard hit the back of his head. Atsushi collapsed. He could feel his blood as it roared through his head. Everything went dark.

~

It was an hour past their meeting time. Akutagawa groaned. That idiot got caught in a trap, didn’t he? Akutagawa sighed, slipped his phone back into his pocket, and headed in the direction his partner had gone.

There was no doubt in Akutagawa’s mind that Dazai would blame him for this. The least he could do was retrieve the Jink- Atsushi, he could retrieve Atsushi from whatever he stumbled into.

Akutagawa had run into a few traps but easily avoided them. Every single one of them had been too easy to avoid, and that raised a red flag. Dazai could be cruel, but he wasn’t cruel enough to not leave little clues here and there. Since, Akutagawa found nothing in the direction he had gone he could only conclude Dazai was in the direction Atsushi had gone.

Akutagawa weaved through alley ways and streets following any trace of Atsushi he could find. Eventually, his body went into autopilot and his intuition took hold. His senses heightened and his mind pulled away from his actions until his limbs moved on their own.

Akutagawa turned into an alley. The end of a tan coat disappeared behind the next turn. He kept his expression neutral as he approached the end of the alleyway. Someone was watching him and whoever it was, was terrible at concealing their presence. He came to an abrupt halt as he arrived at the turn and made sure not to turn or look behind him.

The wind blew through the alleyway and the end of the coat reappeared. Akutagawa snickered and rounded the corner. There was a coat hooked on the side of the wall, but it was too small to be Dazai’s.

There was a quiet step and a small brush of air hit Akutagawa’s neck. He whipped around, grabbed a man’s raised arm, and threw him onto the ground. Akutagawa sat on top of the man and raised the man’s arm to the point where it was about to pop out of its socket or snap. The man cried out. He had short red hair, tanned skin, hazel eyes, and he was shorter than Akutagawa.

“Atsushi Nakajima, what did you do with him?” Akutagawa questioned.

“What?” The man asked through deep breaths. Akutagawa twisted his wrist. The man gasped. “I don’t know who you’re talking about!”
“A male, grey hair, pale skin, his eyes are double-colored, yellow and purple,” Akutagawa listed as he slowly pressed the man’s wrist farther down.

The man yelped. “The ability user,” The man said quickly, “That’s who you’re talking about right?”

“Why did you kidnap him?”

“Some guy told us there was seven billion yen bounty on his head, that’s all I know I swear!”

“Who told you this?”

“He didn’t give us his name.”

“Describe him.”

The man didn’t say anything. Akutagawa rested his knee on his shoulder and began to pull his arm up.

“Okay, okay! He seemed old, I think he had grey hair, but that’s all I remember.”

Akutagawa sighed. That was unsettling, someone had tried to get Atsushi kidnapped and this game speed up the process. Why had that man told a gang about the bounty? And why had Atsushi even fallen victim to amateurs? Was it possible that his “partner” had just proven that he was more of an idiot than Akutagawa had initially thought?

Akutagawa released the man’s arm and rose to his feet. The man scrambled to the side and slowly stood up.

“What’s your name?” Akutagawa asked.

“R-Riku,” He stuttered

“Well, Riku, the bounty was revoked several weeks ago. In other words, there is no bounty.”

Riku blinked. “The man told us about it yesterday.”

“The man you’re referring to, is, for reasons unknown to me, using your gang to track down Nakajima Atsushi. So if you wouldn’t mind bringing me to him that would be delightful.”

Riku said nothing. Akutagawa summoned Rashomon. Riku squeaked and motioned Akutagawa forward. A drop of rain hit him and the sky slowly began to pour. Just great. They emerged near a cluster of warehouses after walking for had felt like ages after, and Akutagawa assumed one of them was Riku’s gangs base. Hopefully, Atsushi had been able to buy himself enough time for Akutagawa to get there. If he hadn’t and was now hurt, Dazai would probably kill Akutagawa. He took a deep breath. *Come on idiot, you better be all right.*

~

Atsushi’s temple was pounding and there was a small, throbbing pain on the back of his head. His eyes fluttered open. Everything was blurry and black spots were dancing through his vision. He scrunched his eyes closed a few times. The dots slowly began to fade until his vision started to clear.
Stacks and stacks of boxes surrounded Atsushi. There were only a few openings between boxes. The roof must have been made of metal by the way the rain echoed through the room. Wait, rain? When had it started raining? How long had he been out for?

Atsushi tried to move but was met with restraint. His arms and legs were tied to the chair he was sitting on. He could easily transform and break the bonds, but he didn’t know why he was here and it could just be a simple misunderstanding. If that was the case Atsushi didn’t want these people chasing him down for a reason that could have been dealt with by having a simple conversation.

There was a loud bang and several boxes tumbled over revealing two men. One was short and plump, the other one was about Atsushi’s height.

The short man walked towards Atsushi and began to circle around him.

“The man told us the bounty was on the head of “the Jinko” but there’s nothing tiger-like about him!” The shorter man shouted.

“I’m sorry Sai,” The taller man said. “We just grabbed him because he fit the description the man told us.”

“Was he accompanied by the Rashomon user?” The taller man shook his head. “Then why did you grab this boy?”

“Um, excuse me Mr. Sai,” Atsushi interrupted cautiously, “I hope I’m pronouncing your name right, but is there something I can help you with?”

Mr. Sai moved a stool in front of Atsushi, sat down, and cleared his throat. “I believe there has been a misunderstanding, young man,” He said. “We meant to…accumulate someone with a rare ability called Atsushi Nakajima. There is a large reward for anyone who can find him. We seemed to have mistaken you for him-“

“You weren’t mistaken. My name is Atsushi,” Atsushi said. “I’m also the “Jinko” but I would prefer if you just called me Atsushi.” He smiled. “But the bounty isn’t in place anymore. The person who originally placed it on my head is either missing or dead so there would be no way to get me to him anyway.”

Mr. Sai’s eyes narrowed. “Why would you tell us who you are? You could have lied and we would have let you go on your way.”

“It’s not nice to lie,” Atsushi said. “And the more you lie to people the harder it is to earn trust with others. You seemed so nice too I figured you’d understand my situation if I told you, and this has happened to me quite frequently. So this scenario doesn’t really worry me, anymore.”

Mr. Sai stared at Atsushi in disbelief.

“So we abducted an angel from heaven?” The taller man asked his boss.

“It seems so,” Sai said. The two men untied Atsushi’s bonds and they went into a long conversation. Atsushi was glad that Kenji’s approach worked sometimes. They told Atsushi how they had heard of him. It unsettled him that there was someone out there trying to get these people to go after him. Atsushi told them a little bit about the ADA but made sure not to mention too much. He also made sure not to mention too much about Akutagawa since his partner wouldn’t like that.

Atsushi learned the taller man's name was Yuki and their gang called The Black Eagles. Sai was the leader of the gang and Yuki was his second in command. Their conversation lasted a long time.
before a shout for Sai rang through the room.

A man stumbled passed the boxes and Atsushi’s partner appeared. Akutagawa’s eyes drifted to Atsushi and he sighed.

“Hello Akutagawa,” Atsushi said.

“I see you’re getting along chummily,” Akutagawa glared at him.

“Unlike you, I try to make friends wherever I go,” Atsushi said. “An example would be my two newest friends Mr. Sai and Mr. Yuki, who are a hundred times nicer than you.”

Akutagawa rolled his eyes. “You’re an idiot, the time you spent here “making friend” could have been spent looking for Dazai.”

“We still have plenty of time!” Atsushi argued.

“We have five minutes Nakajima!”

Atsushi blinked. The time couldn’t have gone by that quickly, could it? How was there only five minutes left? “How long ago did we split up?”

“About three hours ago,” Akutagawa said.

“Well, I learned if you’re lost you should wait in one place for someone else to find you,” Atsushi said quickly. Mr. Yuki and Mr. Sai nodded in agreement.

Akutagawa paused. “I don’t have the vocabulary capacity to describe how much of an absolute fool you are.”

Atsushi glared at Akutagawa. “Sorry I didn’t know where you were while I was here! Let me guess you went after Dazai on your own because you don’t feel like you need me?”

“I was looking for you thus why he’s here,” Akutagawa said flatly as he pointed at the man Akutagawa had shoved towards them.

Heat laced through Atsushi’s chest and rose to his cheeks, “Oh. Sorry.”

Akutagawa rolled his eyes. “Seriously, did you think I wouldn’t suspect someone kidnapped you?”

“I don’t even know where you would start looking for me.”

“How many times have I tried to kidnap or kill you?” Atsushi shrugged. How could he be sure? “Exactly, I know a few of your behavioral patterns. Not all of them but the few I needed, especially how you act under pressure. You panic and let your body carry you anywhere it wants. You normally end up exactly on top of what you’re looking for because your senses are sharper than you realize.”

“Was that…A compliment?”

“Don’t let go to already inflated head.”

“Well, aren’t you two getting along nicely,” Dazai said as he jumped off of one of the surrounding boxes. He was grinning ear to ear. “I’m glad to see you’re alright Atsushi, especially since this was not part of the plan.”
“I’m fine thanks.” Wait. Atsushi glanced around a cluster of boxes and out the window hidden behind them. There was a small sliver of light peeking over the horizon. Atsushi’s gut tightened with anticipation. He mustered the biggest smile and leaped towards Dazai.

“Dazai!” Atsushi wrapped his arms around Dazai, who was standing there stunned and looked up at him beaming. “We win!”

“What?” Dazai said.

“The sun’s not down,” Atsushi said pointing towards the window. He watched as the last bit of light slipped below the horizon. “You said and I quote, ‘you have until the sun completely sets to catch me.’”

There was silence. “Do I really have to admit defeat?” Dazai asked. Atsushi’s smile grew. Atsushi glowed with excitement as he turned to Akutagawa.

Dazai also looked at him. “Well?”

“This win is completely his,” Akutagawa said. “It didn’t even cross my mind to check the time.”

Why was Akutagawa so dense? “You’re the one who found the trails to lead us to here where I caught him. I would have been completely lost without you. So why are you saying this is my win?”

“As I said before, you’re a lot more perceptive than you think. You would have been fine without me.”

“Can you just take the stupid compliment?”

“Fine,” Akutagawa said as he rolled his eyes.

“You did well,” Dazai said with a warming smile. Atsushi smiled back while he shook with adrenaline. Dazai wandered over to Mr. Sai and Mr. Yuki and started talking to them about the man who had told them about the bounty. Atsushi watched as Akutagawa wandered over to the window and stared outside. His body seemed relaxed, and his posture was normal, only his dark eyes betrayed him. Atsushi could see a hint of the sadness he had seen before this game had started. It made him want to ask Akutagawa what was wrong but Atsushi wasn’t sure if he should. Akutagawa was so distant it seemed impossible to be able to reach out in any way.

So Atsushi stood there waiting for Dazai and watching Akutagawa. If Atsushi could have one wish, it would be to remove all the pain and weight the people he knew, were bearing. He wanted to help everyone but how was he supposed to do that when the one person in front of him at the moment, the one person who might actually need him, was too far for him to reach. No, it wasn’t that he was too far, it was that Atsushi was to scared about how he’d react, he was too scared that Akutagawa would hurt him. Knowing that his fear was what was keeping him away from Akutagawa made Atsushi’s hate himself.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is sort of relevant to the plot? I wanted to give you a small side story that wasn’t just "oh by the way this person is suffering internally" because that’s kind of coming up (if it hasn’t already happened. I can’t remember anymore).
Also, sorry that this is a little *cough* two weeks *cough* late. I edited it and then did nothing with it. I then realized a couple days ago when I got an alert that someone left a kudo, that I HAD NOT YET POSTED IT. I panicked and realized I DIDN"T HAVE TIME FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS WHERE I COULD!
But we're here after several panic attacks and posted. The next chapter is will be next month, (the writer says even though they didn't post all summer when they were planning to at the end, and that didn't even happen).
Anyway, have a great day-week-life. Fair well all.

*Cries because uses the word "oh," "really," and "quickly" too much.

Also, this is shorter than most of my other chapters, my apologies.
“I don’t understand what the problem is,” Dazai said.

“The problem is your refrigerator is a literal hellhole,” Akutagawa said flatly.

After the first day of, “Dazai’s Weird Plans” as Atsushi had heard Kenji call it cheerily, the next day flew by. Dazai had them work on basic fighting styles together. At first, it seemed as if they would be simple because Atsushi and Akutagawa had taken care of Fitzgerald so easily. Turns out, winning against Fitzgerald had been complete luck. The two men kept tripping over one another and getting in the others way. Atsushi had a suspicion that it was mainly his fault but when he tried to bring it to Dazai’s attention he would quickly turn Atsushi down and said he was doing fine. Towards the end of the day, Atsushi told Dazai that Akutagawa had mentioned something about teamwork fundamentals. Once again Dazai said he was doing fine and Akutagawa needed to make up for slacking off.

By the time they had ended their last exercise Dazai seemed to be thoroughly annoyed with Akutagawa, Akutagawa seemed to be furious with Atsushi, and Atsushi was angry at himself. He wanted to try to get Akutagawa to tell him what he was talking about the previous day, but, if Atsushi was being honest, he was slightly terrified of asking Akutagawa while he wore that intimidating scowl.

When they parted ways that day Atsushi was worried the other two men might ring each other's necks when they got to Dazai’s flat. However, Atsushi was too exhausted to think about it too much.

Then the morning came and with it another day. If Atsushi had learned one thing over the past few days, it was that making up two consecutive days of paperwork was very difficult, especially when it was the ADA’s worker assessment week.

Kunikida had promised that he would put a stop to, Dazai’s plans for the day so Atsushi could try to finish most of it. As long as no requests came in that he was needed for, he was free to work on his paperwork all day.

When Atsushi walked in with Kyouka, since it was her first day back, he was relieved to see not only had Dazai and Akutagawa not arrived yet, but Tanizaki was back from his several day mission.
on the other side of Yokohama. Naomi was no doubt thrilled. With everything that had happened in the past three days Atsushi was also relieved to see someone around his age he could trust.

As soon as Atsushi entered the room Tanizaki rushed over to him and started to bombard him with questions. He answered them as best as he could and told him when he didn’t know.

After their small conversation, Atsushi went to the nearest computer and began his long day of work. Kyouka sat next to him and also began to type furiously. Luckily Tanizaki, Atsushi, and Kyouka were all behind in paperwork. It was nice to know that he wasn’t alone.

The door swung open and Dazai waltzed into the room with Akutagawa trailing behind. They were arguing about something. Kyouka jumped. She clutched the sleeve of Atsushi’s shirt.

“I don’t understand what the problem is,” Dazai said.

“The problem is your refrigerator is a literal hellhole,” Akutagawa said flatly. “You have nothing besides, snow crab and sake. It’s a miracle you’re still breathing.” Atsushi reached over and squeezed Kyouka’s hand to reassure her it was okay.

“I eat at restaurants most of the time,” Dazai defended.

“I’d hope so,” Akutagawa said.

They argued with each other as they sat down. Atsushi saw as Akutagawa’s eyes briefly passed by him but ignored Kyouka. He let out a small sigh of relief and let go of Kyouka’s hand as they went back to typing. It was reassuring that Akutagawa could hold a promise. During one of their breaks the previous day, Atsushi had told Akutagawa that Kyouka was planning to come back and requested that he did his best to not interact with her. Akutagawa had said that wouldn’t be a problem, but Atsushi still had his doubts and anxiety to deal with before they left their flat that morning. A long silence weaved through the room. Nothing felt out of place once Akutagawa and Dazai had settled. All of them were at peace.

Bam! The door to the ADA swung open. A small girl rushed through. Her skin was pale, she had short, blonde hair, and her eyes were blue. She began to rapidly speak, her tongue forming words Atsushi did not know. Kunikida glanced around the room as tears spilled out of this girl’s eyes.

“Does anyone know what she’s saying?” Kunikida asked in a low voice.

“Something traumatizing happened to her,” Dazai replied.

“Pure genius, Dazai,” Yosano said with a huff. Atsushi’s heart clenched as this girl collapsed to the ground, tears pouring from her eyes as choked sobs came from her throat. Kenji ran over to her.

Atsushi looked over to Tanizaki and they made eye contact. It’s okay we’ll figure this out. He mouthed. The other boy always knew what Atsushi was feeling in these type of situations. More than Atsushi himself seemed to know in his moments of panic.

He scanned the room as Kunikida asked once more if anyone knew what she was saying. Everyone shook their head, even Dazai.

“Liar,” Akutagawa coughed as the ADA members tried to help the small girl. No one had seemed to notice but Atsushi. They made eye contact and Akutagawa motioned towards Dazai before quickly looking away.

Atsushi blinked. Did he just try to help? In this situation? This had nothing to do with him and was
purely the ADA’s problem. He shook his head. It didn’t matter, for now, he would accept the help and continue forward.

Atsushi moved next to Kunikida and whispered what Akutagawa had said. He snuck back over to his chair as Kenji escorted this girl to a chair a box of tissues in hand.

“Dazai,” Kunikida started. Dazai looked at him with a smile. “What was your position in the mafia exactly?”

His smiled faded and was replaced with a small frown. “Where did this come from?”

“Answer the question.”

Dazai began to hum as if considering what his response was going to be. “I did several jobs here and there. My position varied depending on where I was needed.”

“Is that true Akutagawa?” Kunikida asked.

“That’s definitely one way of putting it,” He said without looking up from his book.

Kunikida had asked Akutagawa so many questions about the mafia throughout the days he had been here Atsushi felt bad for him and Dazai. Whenever Dazai had tried to deceive the ADA about the mafia Kunikida would clarify with Akutagawa and as a result, show the entire organization that Dazai was lying. Kunikida seemed to enjoy it, Dazai most likely hated it, and Akutagawa’s emotions were as obvious as a closed door’s.

“He was in a higher position than I am in now,” Akutagawa continued.

“Did you ever deal in foreign affairs?” Kunikida asked.

Dazai’s frown deepened and his brow scrunched together. “That was not my area of expertise, but occasionally.”

“Then you would know several languages.”

Dazai’s eyes narrowed. “I don’t know what this girl is saying if that’s what you’re getting at.”

“I’m not convinced,” Kunikida said.

“I really don’t know,” Dazai said.

The two men began to bicker. Atsushi looked over to Tanizaki who was... glaring intensely at Akutagawa? Was it just Atsushi or had Akutagawa not heard the sound of a turning page recently? Atsushi followed Tanizaki’s glare down to Akutagawa’s hand as it swiftly moved over a large notepad. After several seconds, for only a small moment Akutagawa stopped and then continue writing.

Atsushi heard the little girls fast pace talking stop and Akutagawa slowly stopped writing as well. Atsushi’s eyes narrowed. What was he doing? With a deep breath, Atsushi called on his tiger’s eyes and attempted to read the writing on the notepad. Akutagawa had strategically placed several books and few other notepads in front of his own so Atsushi couldn’t get a good view.

Akutagawa grabbed a sticky note, slapped it onto the notepad, and wrote something quick. He placed the notepad on the ground and used his ability to slide it to Atsushi. Atsushi quickly picked it up and looked at Akutagawa. He pressed his finger to his lips and went back to reading. Atsushi read...
the note attached to the front of the notepad.

*Take full credit and actually make up a good excuse, okay? Also, Dazai does know what the little girl is saying. I don’t know why he’s being a pain in the neck but when does anyone ever know? Show this to one of your higher-ups and take the best course of action.*

Atsushi shoved the note into his pocket and scanned over the words on the pages in front of him. Tanizaki moved over to Atsushi and peered over his shoulder. Atsushi’s eyes widened. This was… Atsushi and Tanizaki looked at each other and then back at the notepad. Didn’t Dazai say-? They looked at each other again and then back to the notepad. The two men stood in silence gazing at the words in front of them.

“Is this really what she’s saying?” Tanizaki asked.

“Dazai did say something traumatizing,” Atsushi replied.

The two men glanced at Akutagawa who seemed to be lost in the book in front of him. How? How had Akutagawa done this while the girl was rambling? How had he translated what she was saying and why had he done so for the ADA? This wasn’t his job, yet he had still helped.

Atsushi rose from his seat and looked at Tanizaki. An understanding passed between the two of them and they walked over to where Kunikida was standing by the girl. They dragged him away and handed him the notepad.

“What is this?” Kunikida asked.

“A translation of what the girl is saying,” Atsushi said. His gut rose as Kunikida seemed to inspect him thoroughly. This. Was. Terrifying. Atsushi had no way of knowing what Kunikida would think. He wasn’t an idiot, so Atsushi didn’t believe there was any way he could convince him that he had written the translation, at least not on his own. At the same time, however, Akutagawa did not seem eager to be put in the spotlight and Atsushi wanted to respect that. After all, he did just help the ADA without any of them asking him to.

“How did you manage this,” Kunikida asked in the tone he always used when he knew someone was about to lie but he still wanted to give them a chance.

“Great question, how did we manage this Atsushi?” Tanizaki asked as he bumped Atsushi’s.

Panic flooded through Atsushi. His stomach began to turn and twist into knots. “I don’t know how did we Tanizaki?” Atsushi asked as he bumped the other boy back. So far keeping Akutagawa out of the topic didn’t seem like a viable option.

They exchanged eye contact and Tanizaki must have realized how panicked Atsushi felt because he took the lead. “Well the girl first came in we figured it would be a good idea to try and figure out what she was saying. At first, we just wrote down whatever syllables we could hear. And then, we umm…”

“We pulled out a translating dictionary,” Atsushi said quickly.

“Yes!” Tanizaki said jumping on board with wherever the quick idea was taking them. “We then slowly went through and paired the syllables with words and found the answer.”
Kunikida quirked an eyebrow. There was no way he was buying this. He glanced down at the notepad and then back at them. “So you made a flawless translation and made each sentence only include the primary details because you could tell this girl was rambling? And you did all of this in fifteen minutes?”

Atsushi and Tanizaki nodded in unison. They stared into Kunikida’s eyes and awaited his next words.

“Are you going to tell me how you actually got this translation and why you’re lying or are you going to leave it up to speculation?” Kunikida asked sternly.

The two ADA members bowed their heads and spoke in unison. “It was Akutagawa.”

Kunikida’s eyes narrowed. Atsushi pulled out the note and handed it over. “I knew that suicidal idiot was lying.” Kunikida hissed. Kunikida sighed and pocketed the note. “So Akutagawa gave this to you?” Atsushi nodded. “Do you know why he told you to take full credit for his contribution to the Armed Detective Agency? It would certainly be a good way to gain our trust.”

“I believe there are a few reasons,” Atsushi began. “One is that I don’t believe Akutagawa is trying to prove we can trust him. The way he seems to be going about having our trust is if we don’t trust him, we don’t, and if we do, we do. He also doesn’t seem to want to be the center of attention. Another reason could be the satisfaction of uprooting Dazai’s lie at the seams.”

They fell silent. Kunikida paged through the notepad and looked back at where the girl was sitting.

“I’ll try to make this as little of a deal as I can but that may not be possible,” he said at last. “Thank you, both of you, delivering this to me is a big help.” He turned and walked back to the girl. The two men stood there for several seconds after they were alone.

Pretending that Atsushi and Tanizaki had created the translations written on the notepad had gone horribly wrong. Even though Atsushi had expected that would happen he couldn’t help but feel bad. If Akutagawa knew Atsushi at all, he would have known asking them to pretend he knew nothing was an impossible request, to begin with, but Atsushi still felt like he could have put in a better effort. Pretending that Atsushi and Tanizaki had created the translations written on the notepad had gone horribly wrong. Even though Atsushi had expected that would happen he couldn’t help but feel bad. If Akutagawa knew Atsushi at all, he would have known asking them to pretend he knew nothing was an impossible request, to begin with, but Atsushi still felt like he could have put in a better effort. If Akutagawa knew Atsushi at all, he would have known asking them to pretend he knew nothing was an impossible request, to begin with, but Atsushi still felt like he could have put in a better effort. Wait, why did he even care? Akutagawa was brutal, sinister, deceptive, and controlling, why should he try to do something nice? So Akutagawa helped out, big deal! That was one right in thousands of wrongs. Then again he had completely put impressing Dazai on the back burners when he went to help Atsushi during their game. He actually seemed to have been a little worried when they had their argument. But that was it! However, he also did follow through with his promise concerning Kyouka, and during practice the previous day had he…?

Atsushi needed to stop thinking about this. Akutagawa was preposterous, that was all. Atsushi needed to stop thinking deeply about what Akutagawa may have done. If he didn’t, he was afraid there might be more than he wanted to know about over the past few days, even though it was highly unlikely.

Atsushi and Tanizaki went back to their computers and continued their work. Every once in a while Atsushi would look up to make sure a): The little girl seemed to be alright and b): Akutagawa wasn’t doing anything questionable.

The rest of the day flew by before Atsushi knew it Kyouka nudged him and asked if he was ready to go back to their apartment. He finished the last of his paperwork, Atsushi was proud to say. He had somehow managed to fill out all of the assessments for himself and the brief ones on his colleagues as well as doing all of the other work he had to do.
The two ADA Agents headed back to their apartment. Atsushi was glad that Kyouka seemed fine with Akutagawa being around so far. He was only concerned that eventually, they would have to have a conversation.

~

Everything went dark. Akutagawa couldn’t see. He couldn’t see, he couldn’t feel, he couldn’t move. Everything was completely still. Not even his breathing seemed to make noise. A sharp whistle rang through Akutagawa’s head and his forehead began to throb. Feeling slowly came back to his fingers and then to the rest of his hands. His arm trembled as it remained extended outwards. Something wet washed over his hand and drizzled down his wrist.

Akutagawa opened his eyes. Blood dripped down his hand onto a cement floor. His head began to spin and he could feel his legs trembled. He looked up into wide eyes. It couldn’t be...that wasn’t… Akutagawa knife slid out of Hirotsu’s chest as the Black Lizard leader fell backward.

The knife clattered to the ground and Akutagawa stared at where Hirotsu had just been, stunned. Slowly he turned his head to examine his surroundings. The other leaders were lying on the ground along with Higuchi, Chuuya, and Kouyou. Akutagawa walked over to Chuuya and inspected his wound. His wound wasn’t caused by a knife, it had been caused by…

Akutagawa stumbled backward, rushed to the nearest wall, bile rising in his throat, and puked.

After his gut settled he rested his back against the wall and took in the rest of the room. The walls and ceiling were made of stone. There was a door to one side of the room that was most likely locked and an embroidered tapestry of a black, mangled tree with a caged raven at its base and a noose draped from a branch, hanging on the other wall. The last remaining item was a small, round end table, in the center of the room, with a chessboard on the top.

As per his allies bodies; Kouyou was lying on the ground with her hair across her face and a gaping wound in her stomach. It was caused in the same way as Chuuya’s. Higuchi and Michizou were lying in a similar way with the same wound. Then there was Gin.

Akutagawa’s chest tightened at the sight of her. Her eyes were open and her mouth was parted slightly. There were red streaks on her cheeks and her arm was lying straight out as if she had been reaching for something or someone.

It felt as if Akutagawa’s entire world was collapsing in on itself. He didn’t want to inspect her wound, he couldn’t, but something inside of him made him look at what he’d done.

This is what will happen if you follow the path you’re on. A cold, raspy voice rang through the room. Approach the table. He shouldn’t obey whoever was deciding to mess with his head but he didn’t know what else to do. What do you see?

Akutagawa tried to swallow the lump that had formed in his throat. “A chessboard,” he replied.

A small laugh echoed. You can do better than that.

Akutagawa’s eyes narrowed. “I see light and dark pieces. Representing the Armed Detective Agency with the light, and the Port Mafia with the dark. That’s at least how the boss always described his chess board.”
How about this situation? How would you classify the sides of the board now?

“The light is the Armed Detective Agency and any remaining mafia members, the dark side is the bastard who started all of this,” Akutagawa replied.

The voice laughed. Very good, I can’t wait to see what piece you’ll become. Also which side you’ll choose.

“What do you mean?” Akutagawa asked hastily.

*Look around you.* Akutagawa clenched his fist but didn’t look. See? You can’t even look at them. You can’t look because you’re aware that this is possible. You may kill everyone you hold dear in the future. There has always been and there will always be that possibility. There is always a chance you will lose control of Rashomon as you once did and it will kill everyone. That is what happened here after all. Why is this a possible reality I wonder?

Akutagawa bit his tongue. He knew the answer, he didn’t even need to think about it. “Because I didn’t learn to control Rashomon through understanding the fundamentals of the ability, I learned to control it through my own fear.”

Indeed. You’re terrified of this happening and you killing the people you’ve grown to trust. I can assure you this will happen. It will unless you come over to the opposite side of the board.

Akutagawa paused. Was this voice referring to the black side? If that was the case then they’d be…

“There’s no way you’re really talking to me,” Akutagawa said. “This is just a dream, I know it is. All of this is only in my head.”

*It’s much more than just “in your head”.* Akutagawa Ryunosuke, the Rabid Dog of the Yokohama Port Mafia. My conversation and voice are real, I’m speaking through your subconscious. This room also exists, the only thing that is in your head is you and your allies. However this room, this situation, this conversation will happen, I’ll only be telling you that you could have prevented it if you had joined me.

Akutagawa Ryunosuke I can teach you how to truly control your gift. All you have to do is pick of one of the black knights. I’ll show you how to protect your allies. I will support you, lead you, help you when you stumble, and guide you gently. I will be everything Dazai Osamu was not to you.

Akutagawa’s eyes widened. Whoever this was, knew a lot about him and most likely all the other important members of the Port Mafia and the Armed Detective Agency. They knew more about Akutagawa than he probably knew about himself. This person could stop this, stop this massacre from happening if Akutagawa just…

He reached out for the piece but stopped. What would Gin think? What would she do if she figured out Akutagawa was no longer on her side? Would she keep going or give up?

He lowered his arm. A dark shadow stretched over him. Akutagawa jumped forward and whipped around. A stone hand reached out, grabbed his neck, and pinned him against the wall.

The figure holding him had been carved into a giant knight chess piece. Akutagawa attempted to use Rashomon but for some reason, it wouldn’t respond to his commands. He couldn’t breathe. As he struggled he felt his lungs begin to throb as they begged for air.

“I didn’t turn down your offer!” Akutagawa managed to croak out. The giant chess piece dropped Akutagawa and he began to cough. “Give me time, I just need to think it over.”
Will you discuss this with Dazai or any other Armed Detective Agency member?

Akutagawa rolled his eyes and shoved his hands into his pockets. “As if,” he grumbled. “Dazai wouldn’t understand where I’m coming from, and there’s no one I’m even slightly willing to reside in who’s part of the Agency.”

Very well. The door swung open to reveal a plain grayish haze. It looked like a wall but Akutagawa guessed it was actually the exit. You’re free to go.

Akutagawa approached the doorway. When he had almost crossed the threshold he paused. “Can I at least have your name before I go?” Akutagawa asked.

He could hear the voice snickered. *If something as simple as a name will convince you that this actually happened, then I don’t mind at all. My name is King, Stephen King.*

…

Akutagawa’s eyes flew open. The front of his shirt was drenched in sweat, his heart was pounding rapidly, and...he was trembling. He could feel as water filled his eyes. He took a deep, shuddering breath. He pulled his pillow into his chest and pressed his face into it. A tear trickled down his face. No, he couldn’t cry, Dazai was sleeping on a futon next to him. If Dazai was awake Akutagawa couldn’t let him see how big of a mess he really was. He couldn’t let Dazai think of him as weak. Another tear slipped out and fell down his cheek.

*Pansy! Pull it together you good for nothing idiot. You’re fine. This has happened plenty of times before you’re fine!* Akutagawa dug his nails into his arms. He needed to restrain his tears.

Akutagawa had endured plenty of dreams where he had killed everyone he knew. So why was this one so much harder to deal with? Why were all of his dreams affecting him now when before they had rarely shaken him up?

He needed to start at the beginning and think through his dream. It started with, with… multiple tears slid down his cheeks. He was so worthless. He deserved this pain.

No matter how many times he tried to stop the tears, no matter how much he told himself he was weak for crying, no matter how many times he tormented himself he couldn’t stop crying. So he cried, silently, to keep Dazai from knowing. It felt like he was heaving through corrupted lungs. What was the point in living anymore when life brought him nothing but pain? Why was he still trying?

He took a deep breath and the tears stopped rolling. The answer was easy, Gin. He was still alive for her sake. Once she became an adult Akutagawa wouldn’t have to worry as much. He could kill himself because she wouldn’t need him anymore. He hadn’t done it yet because he had promised himself he wouldn’t die until Gin could take care of herself. Once she could he would gladly accept death.

Akutagawa rolled onto his back and stared at the ceiling. He wouldn’t fall back asleep, he couldn’t. The thought of having another dream terrified him. *Focus on King.* Akutagawa closed his eyes and shifted his thoughts.

How had King known so much about Akutagawa? He had known exactly how to apply just the
right amount pressure on Akutagawa to make him want to quickly pick up the sides chess piece. That left him to wonder, who was King? Why had he wanted Akutagawa to exchange sides? It was probably because he was on the other side but what chess piece was he? On top of that, how had he talked to Akutagawa? Was it his ability? There were too many questions Akutagawa didn’t have the answer to even begin trusting King. So why did he still want to run to him for help?

Something in the back of Akutagawa’s head whispered an unimaginable thought. Tell Dazai. Tell him what? Tell him that he heard a weird voice in a dream? Tell him about the chess pieces? Tell him that he had cried? Dazai would scoff at him and tell him he was doing something wrong. He wouldn’t care. So Akutagawa would have to keep it inside of himself. He wouldn’t say anything and if Dazai asked, nothing happened.

~

Chuuya’s head felt like it was ready to explode, but lately, that feeling was normal. Everything inside of him screamed for the pain to stop daily and Chuuya was bored of it more than anything. The person who had been tracing words on his arm showed up after each of his torture sessions to give him water and help in any way other way they could and Chuuya was getting bored of not knowing who they were. So instead of worrying about his interrogator, he focused on any clue they had left so he could figure out their sex and if he might know them. He had concluded they’re female, by the way, they seemed to run across the ground with lighter footsteps than most men. Also, the movements on his arm were too elegant and traced delicately. There was still a chance it was a man but Chuuya believed they were female.

Next, he looked for anything that he found familiar. There wasn’t much to go on so the little bit he was able to scrape by with he had to make work. He focused on her handwriting mostly, but he also looked for clues in the sound of their footsteps. He had come up with one person.

The door screeched open and her footsteps moved across the floor normally. She picked up one of the tools she used to trace letters and began.

_I don’t have a lot of time to explain so I’m going to get straight to the point. You’re being transferred to a different building. I don’t know where and I don’t know why but I did threaten to murder the warden of this building if they didn’t take care of you after every time they torture you. I’m sorry I couldn’t do more for you but this is all for now. You’ll be moved in a few hours. Until then I brought water. She helped him drink and then continued writing. I hope you have a safe trip I have to go soon-

“Thank you,” Chuuya said, he smirked. “Thank you for everything, Gin.” A rich laughter exploded into the air.

“It only took you four days to see through my disguise?” She said through gasps of air. “Seriously Chuuya, if you were going to stay here I couldn’t tend to you anymore. The deal was I could help as long as you didn’t know who I was and I didn’t talk to you.”

“But you still did talk to me,” Chuuya said.

“I’m good at finding ways to bend the rules.” Gin said. He swore he could hear her wink. She was definitely as smart and as cunning as a snake. You never knew when or if she would strike. And if she didn’t you could always count on her working sneakily in the background.
“Is there anyone else here with you?”

“Higuchi,” Gin said, “Hirotsu and Tachihara used to be but they were moved two days ago. They seemed to be keeping us in pairs which leads me to believe they don’t have many bases. At least the lower ranked people in pairs I should say. Do you know anything about Akutagawa Ryuunosuke?” She asked. Information on her brother seemed to be paramount in her mind but she was doing a wonderful job of not showing it.

“I believe he isn’t in one of the buildings,” Chuuya said. “If I’m correct then he would be with Dazai.” He mumbled the second part. There was no way for him to know who was listening in.

“Okay,” she said. “Goodbye Chuuya, hopefully, we’ll see each other again.”

“Goodbye Gin,” Chuuya said. “Do you know where we are?” No. she wrote on his arm. She left without another word.

So they were moving him to a different base. They probably did so in order to keep anyone he called an ally from finding him easily. Chuuya closed his eyes and prayed to the stars that no one would be foolish enough to go looking for him. If an executive didn’t know what they were up against it was unlikely anyone else did. Except for maybe him. The thought of Dazai’s disgusting face made Chuuya want to hurl. But he had puked enough for one day and he wasn’t sure his stomach could bear it.

He needed to rest until he was moved to another building. The buzzing thoughts in his head calmed to a low hum and he drifted off to sleep.

~

Dazai could feel the light of the sun against his eyelids. Why did he have to get up now when he was having a pleasant dream about a double suicide? He groaned and sat up with a yawn. He could feel Akutagawa’s eyes on him.

“How long have you been awake for?” Dazai asked without turning to look at the younger boy.

“A few minutes.” He answered. Akutagawa was lying, but Dazai didn’t really care. As long as he didn’t lie about anything important it didn’t matter.

The two men got dressed, had a quick breakfast, and left the flat without saying another word to each other. Dazai opened the door to the ADA to find the members running about frantically. Kunikida ran from one computer to the next, Kyouka and Atsushi were trailing him with paperwork in hand, Tanizaki and Naomi were looking at something on the same computer, and the other members were rummaging through files cabinets.

“What’s happening here?” Dazai asked.

Kunikida quickly glanced over his shoulder before going back to what he was doing. “I’m glad both of you are here.” Dazai quirked an eyebrow. He knew that girl’s brother had been abducted but he didn’t think it would turn into this big of a deal. “There have been multiple kidnappings in the same area as Leena’s brother.”

So they had been able to translate what the girl said, Dazai was impressed. He thought it would take
them at least two days and it seemed like they had been working on this case all morning. Which means they were able to translate it yesterday.

His gut turned and a thought washed over him. Dazai sighed.

**Mental note:** Ask Atsushi if Akutagawa had given him a translation and that’s why he and Tanizaki pulled Kunikida to the side yesterday.

Kunikida finished typing something on the keyboard and directed Kyouka and Atsushi to set the papers down on the table. He came over to Dazai while holding a notepad which Dazai assumed was what the translation of what the girl had said was on.

“I realized last night that this abduction was similar to a chain of other abductions but until now we haven’t been able to find a solid lead.” Kunikida began. “This girl may be our way to finally crack into this case.” He flipped through the notes again then looked at Dazai. Kunikida motioned Atsushi over and he came to them. “I want you to go look at the scene along with Atsushi and Akutagawa. Take Leena as well.”

Dazai nearly choked on his own spit. “What!” Akutagawa and Atsushi yelled in unison before they turned to glare at one another. Dazai blinked. Kunikida, an idealist above anything else wanted to allow a criminal, Akutagawa, to go on a case?

Kunikida pushed up his glasses and straightened his back. “I don’t like going against protocol, but at the moment Akutagawa is the only one we have who has any idea of what Leena is saying and I need her to go on the case with you.” Kunikida glared at Dazai as if to emphasize his point in their argument the previous day.

Wait. Dazai eyes drifted to Akutagawa who had a murderous look pointed at Atsushi. He seemed to be stumbling to find his words. After a few seconds, Atsushi stopped and said, “I’ve got nothing besides I’m a horrible liar.”

Dazai stared at Akutagawa and noticed he was deliberately avoiding looking at him. Why did he have to ruin Dazai’s fun? It was entertaining to watch the other ADA members struggle. He would have helped them eventually, just after they had struggled a bit longer. He wasn’t angry he was simply puzzled. From Akutagawa’s look and from what Atsushi said Dazai could conclude that Akutagawa hadn’t wanted the ADA to know that he had translated what Leena had said. But why? He would have earned their trust easily, they may not have believed him at first, but they would eventually. So why would he have Atsushi tell them instead?

“Are you sure that’s smart,” Ranpo said piping in from the side.

“I’m sure it isn’t,” said Akutagawa who seemed as confused as everyone else.

“Do you have another idea Ranpo?” Kunikida asked.

“Strangle Dazai until he starts working,” Ranpo said.

“Please do,” Dazai chimed in. “I won’t start cooperating.”

Kunikida sighed. “Until Dazai stops being difficult we’re going to have to use Akutagawa.” Kunikida turned to him and Akutagawa shrugged. However, the masked scowl on Akutagawa’s
face told Dazai he was a bit annoyed.

Annoyance and confusion flowed through Atsushi. Why was Akutagawa coming with them? Even if he could translate why did it have to be him? The group split up to get ready and Atsushi grumbled as he walked over to Kyouka. Her eyes were full of concern. Atsushi smiled to tell her he was okay.

He met Dazai and Akutagawa at the door and Kunikida wandered back over.

Kunikida cleared his throat, “I have a few rules for you Akutagawa.”

“Don’t kill people I’m guessing is one of them,” Akutagawa said with a flat voice. He could at least try to have some emotion behind his words.

“Yes but I don’t believe I need to tell you that,” Kunikida said, “These are obvious but I want to specify them, Dazai is in charge. If he starts acting like an absolute idiot Atsushi is in charge.” Kunikida glanced at Dazai. “Scratch that, Atsushi is in charge period. Leena is your first priority protect her no matter what. If you notice anything that could be important you’re obligated to tell either Dazai or Atushi, I would recommend not the suicidal maniac.” Dazai pressed a hand to his chest and took a quick intake of air dramatically. “For the most part do whatever you believe an Armed Detective Agency member would do. Are there going to be any problems?”

“No, as long as the Jinko doesn’t act u-” Akutagawa stopped and took a deep breath as he realized his mistake. Atsushi glared at him. “As long as Atsushi doesn’t act up, better?” If he could say Atsushi’s name with less disdain it would be perfect. Akutagawa’s eyes widened and he turned to Atsushi. What was he thinking? “Do you happen to like sushi?” Atsushi narrowed his eyes. What? Why was this important?

Dazai snorted and started chuckling. “Yeah, I guess, why?” Atsushi asked as he glanced from Dazai to Akutagawa.

“Merely curious as to if you like sushi.” What was he hinting at? Dazai bursted out laughing Kunikida seemed to be resisting a smile. Even Akutagawa seemed amused. Dazai caught the attention of the other members of the agency and they focused on them.

“What’s so funny?” Atsushi asked exasperatedly.

“Nothing, Atsushi, I was just wondering if you like sushi.” The other members of the ADA started giggling. Atsushi shook his head to show he still didn’t understand.

Dazai grabbed Kunikida’s shoulder. He was laughing so hard tears gathered at the corners of his eyes. “How have I not noticed that?” Dazai was barely able to say as he tried to calm down. “Atsushi likes sushi ~” Dazai collapsed to the ground in a fit of laughter. This time the rest of the ADA joined him in laughter.

“I don’t understand,” Atsushi said glancing around the room for help. “Tanizaki?” Tanizaki was laughing too hard he just shook his head.

“Sushi,” Akutagawa said.
“Yes-” Atsushi said. He paused had Akutagawa just called him sushi? And he responded? Why? Atsushi shook his head. Now he was even more confused.

“Atsushi,” Akutagawa said. Atsushi shook his head yet again. “At sushi.” Oh. Atsushi slapped his forehead. He was an idiot. The ADA kept laughing and Atsushi pressed his lips into a tight line. Why hadn’t he caught that sooner? He really was as oblivious as a dead duck.

The ADA slowly stopped laughing, leaving Dazai to laugh as he lied on the floor trying to regain his composure. Kunikida went back to looking through files to find any trends in the abductions. Atsushi and Akutagawa waited until Dazai recovered. He led them to where the little girl, Leena, was sitting. She looked up with wide, dull eyes. Her hands were trembling and her legs were bouncing. Akutagawa said something quick in a different language and her eyes lit up.

She started talking back to him. They had a small conversation and Dazai lead the three of them out of the ADA. When they had reached the street Dazai signaled a taxi and told the driver their destination. As the taxi pulled away from the curb Leena started frantically talking to Akutagawa. She rambled on for several minutes before he stopped her and said something in the other language. The taxi went silent.

“So what are we trying to do exactly?” Atsushi asked. He knew they were going to where Leena’s brother had been kidnapped but he hadn’t been told what they were doing there.

“We’re going to search for any clues, and Leena is going to walk us through what happened so we have a better visual picture. We’ll also do some basic reconnaissance around the area, but we’ll figure all of that out while we’re there,” Dazai said with a shrug. “Anyway,” He turned to Akutagawa. Atsushi’s partner kept his gaze firmly in front of him. “What is all of this I’ve been hearing about you contributing to the Armed Detective Agency, Ryuunosuke~”

“Don’t call me that,” Akutagawa said.

Dazai gasped and placed a hand on his chest. “Chuuuya and Gin call you by your first name all the time.”

“That’s because they’ve earned the privilege of doing so. I trust them to use my first name in the situations where I don’t mind as much. You, however, have earned no right to call me Ryuunosuke.” Akutagawa said.

Atsushi blinked. Wow. Each word came out so fluently it sounded like he had said this miniature speech a million times. Then again, Atsushi had no way of knowing if he had or not.

“Well, Ryuunosuke, I’ll call you whatever I want to call you,” Dazai said with a massive pout. “And I’m very hurt that you don’t trust me enough to let me call you by your first name.”

Akutagawa growled. “Paskapää1.”

Dazai gasped and Leena’s eyes widened. “Don’t talk like that in front of a child Akutagawa!”

The taxi driver pulled up to their stop. Dazai paid and they exited by the red brick warehouse Atsushi had taken Kyouka to and where he had bought her a crêpe.

Couples were everywhere; in the grass with a picnic basket, getting ready to tour the building, going for a stroll, or just observing the warehouse. There were a number of different things.

Leena lead them through the crowd and to a snug corner by the entrance of the warehouse. No one seemed to give Atsushi and them a second thought. Leena spoke.
“This is where the man took her and her brother,” Akutagawa translated, probably for Atsushi’s sake. Leena pointed to a spot against the wall and then to where they were standing. “Her brother stood there and the man was standing where we are. He knocked out her brother and that’s when she ran.” Akutagawa asked her something and Leena responded. “The man who told them he knew where their parents were seemed older than us, she thinks he had grey hair, but besides that, she doesn’t remember.”

“I have a question,” Dazai said. “What do you mean about their parents? I haven’t been able to fully read your translation.”

Akutagawa rolled his eyes. “I’ll try to keep this brief. Leena and her brother, Elias, were touring Japan with their parents when they got separated. Their parents had planned to go to the Red Brick Warehouse the next day so that’s where they headed to hopefully find their parents. Since they couldn’t understand anyone they decided this was their best guess. While they were here they ran into someone who spoke their language and said he had seen their parents a little bit ago. They believed him and this is where he kidnapped her older brother. Thus how we are now in this situation.”

Atsushi ran the story through his head again and again. Something felt off. The story made sense, but if they couldn’t speak Japanese how had they found their way to the warehouse? There was something, just a little piece of the puzzle, that wasn’t fitting into the picture right.

“How did she learn about the ADA?” Atsushi asked. Who would have told her? If she was a tourist she wouldn’t have known. Heck, even if she was Japanese at her age Atsushi wouldn’t have been able to pick up information like that.

“Her parents learned about all of you and told her and her brother,” Akutagawa said.

Atsushi blinked. Wait, what? That made the whole situation make less sense. He glanced over to Dazai who pressed a finger to his lips then quickly removed it. Atsushi nodded to Akutagawa to show he understood. He didn’t understand, he really didn’t. But Dazai wanted him to stay quiet so he did.

Atsushi did his best to go about the rest of the day acting as if he knew what was happening. However, if there is one thing he has proven to himself and everyone around him this week it was that he was a horrible liar. He was so scared he would mess up whenever he would try to bring up even a simple question like, “how was your day?” He would stutter and stumble over the sentence so much it was unrecognizable.

It was noon when they started heading back to the agency. Atsushi felt as though they were empty-handed. All the people Atsushi had talked to in the area had known nothing. When he brought it up with Dazai he said they had found plenty.

They dropped Leena back at the ADA and Dazai said he and Akutagawa were going to a restaurant and invited Atsushi. Normally the members of the ADA went to the café on the first floor so it sounded nice to go somewhere else for a change. On the way there they were completely silent. It was strange. Kunikida could do absolutely nothing to get Dazai to be quiet and yet here he was, as silent as a rock. The silence almost felt...awkward? Atsushi was fairly certain he didn’t feel awkward so that only left Akutagawa and Dazai. And yet again Atsushi was confused.

Sure, Atsushi didn’t know the extent of the relationship between Akutagawa and Dazai, he didn’t even know how they knew each other besides they were both in the mafia. He didn’t know why Akutagawa wanted Dazai’s acceptance so badly, and he didn’t know why Dazai supposedly hadn’t given it to him yet.
Atsushi didn’t know a lot of things and it was starting to get annoying. Whenever people passed knowing looks, whenever there was inside joke, whenever someone knew something they weren’t letting on (*cough cough*Dazai*cough cough*). Atsushi always seemed to be the one who didn’t have the slightest clue.

Lunch passed with Atsushi initiating every conversation. He was thankful that Dazai immediately took every opportunity Atsushi presented him to talk and together they chatted up a storm. Akutagawa remained quiet and emotionless. Atsushi tried to ask him questions but Akutagawa would shrug and immediately return to staring out the dim window.

Towards the end of the meal Akutagawa’s leg was bouncing and he seemed to be fidgeting more. Even Dazai started acting differently. He would randomly glance out the window during their conversations and then look back to Atsushi as if nothing was wrong. And there Atsushi was being the one person out of the loop, again.

“We should leave,” Akutagawa said. The first thing he says and it’s because he’s being paranoid.

Dazai shrugged. “Don’t worry, we’ll leave as soon as the bill comes. After all, the edge of the storm has only started its approach.”

Atsushi narrowed his brow. The waiter brought the check. Atsushi tried to split the check with Dazai but he turned Atsushi down. They left the restaurant and Akutagawa suddenly seemed more alert. What did the both of them know that Atsushi didn’t? Atsushi looked out into the street. There were so many cars passing it was impossible for his eyes to track a single car without his ability. Dazai and Akutagawa snapped to attention and Atsushi jumped.

“That was-” Akutagawa darted down the sidewalk.

“Wait! Akutagawa-Ugh!” Dazai ran after him and Atsushi quickly followed.

The Jinko’s eyes darted as they followed Akutagawa’s movements through the crowd. Dazai grabbed Atsushi’s sleeve and pulled him to the side. They weaved through alleyways and reemerged on the sidewalk. Dazai reached out and pulled Akutagawa into the alleyway.

“Let go!” Akutagawa tore his arm from Dazai’s grasp. Dazai pushed Akutagawa into the wall and put both arms on the wall around him. Atsushi would be terrified if he was in Akutagawa’s position, but instead, his partner stood firm and glared directly at Dazai.

“Move,” He ordered.

Dazai didn’t react. “You’re not thinking this through-”

“Does it really seem like I give a damn anymore?” Akutagawa’s voice started to rise. “That was him Dazai, that was-”

“I know who it was Akutagawa.”

“Then why are you still standing there? It would be easy for you to save him or at least track him to wherever they’re taking him.” Was Akutagawa frustrated? Or at least clearly showing his frustration?

“I understand that it makes you feel worthless to stand around, I feel the same, but what were you planning to do once you caught up with him? I doubt Chuuya is in any condition to run, and then you would be taken too. Start thinking things through for once.” Dazai exclaimed.

Akutagawa’s face drained of emotion and Atsushi watched a little light slip out of his eyes. He
crossed his arms and leaned against the wall without another word. Dazai backed away from him.

“Now because I’m not going to take off randomly like an idiot, I’m going to go track Chuuya and find out where they’re taking him,” Dazai said. “You can go back to the agency, my flat, or wherever else you want to go, Akutagawa. I don’t care as long as you don’t act like a reckless fool again.”

Dazai strode out of the alleyway and down the sidewalk. He left Atsushi’s field of vision and Akutagawa cursed. He swung around and punched the brick wall next to them. He repeatedly swore, punching the wall each time. Blood rolled down his fist but he didn’t stop.

“Damn it!” Akutagawa yelled. Rashomon lashed out and crashed into the wall leaving a huge dent full of brick dust. He breathed in and out heavily.

Atsushi wanted to step away but he was afraid Akutagawa would remember he was there and turn his anger him.

Akutagawa placed both of his hands on the wall and chuckled softly. “I really am pathetic, huh?”

Atsushi jumped. “U-um,” He stammered. “I wouldn’t say you are pathetic in any way.” Atsushi quickly started thinking of something encouraging to say. “You’re very smart and despite what Dazai said you wouldn’t have rushed in without a plan.” Akutagawa glanced over his shoulder with a raised eyebrow as if to challenge his statement. “You’re really talented and very strong. You know what to do in tight situations and anyone can rely on you even if they don’t think they can.”

Akutagawa shook his head in what Atsushi hoped was disbelief and not; ‘you’re an absolute idiot. “Are you used to trying to cheer up people who have attempted to kill you multiple times? Because you’re good at it.’”

Atsushi felt heat rise to his cheeks and he hoped his blush wasn’t visible. If it was Akutagawa didn’t make any comments. Akutagawa sat on the ground and Atsushi followed his movement.

“What should we do now?” Atsushi asked. He didn’t really want to go back to the agency without Dazai, but he didn’t want to wait for him either.


“One thing you should know is to never ask me to make a decision,” Atsushi said. The Port Mafia member raised an eyebrow. “If you do, the decision will never be made.”

“So you’re indecisive?”

“Very indecisive. Like…” Atsushi trailed off into multiple stories. The entire time Akutagawa listened and didn’t breathe a word. He only gave Atsushi a few eye rolls. From there the conversations branched outwards and they talked.

Atsushi’s heart pounded rapidly but he didn’t notice. For once he and Akutagawa were having a civilized conversation. Akutagawa wouldn’t look Atsushi in the eyes for some reason, but Atsushi was, surprisingly, enjoying himself. Every word that came from his partner’s mouth was articulate and connected to the last beautifully. It was as if he was watching a poet create the most beautiful line of poetry the world had ever had the pleasure of witnessing.

Atsushi started talking again and Akutagawa’s gaze met his own. Atsushi’s stomach twisted dramatically. How had he not noticed how beautiful Akutagawa’s eyes were before? Most people would call his gray eyes dull and boring but they were wrong in so many ways. His eyes seemed to
reflect the light and gleam. The tiger's eyes initiated briefly, and Atsushi swore he saw small brown flecks in Akutagawa's eyes. He took a deep breath and refocused on what Akutagawa was saying.

As they talked Atsushi knew it was starting to get late in the work day, but he didn’t care. He didn’t want this moment to end. He didn’t have the heart to make it end. Besides this was so...nice, and Akutagawa didn’t seem eager to move or think about needing to be somewhere else so Atsushi didn’t push anything on him. He was perfectly content and he didn’t want to move either. Atsushi couldn’t help but think if only this moment could never end.

~

He descended the long staircase slowly, letting his footsteps echo off the walls. It had been a pain to break into the old port mafia's jail cells, but he had never doubted he could. He was certain she had not doubted him either. He reached the end of the stairwell and opened a heavy wooden door. It screeched as it was shoved open and he emerged into a small room.

There were two chairs placed immediately in front of him. Little ways past the chairs was a glass wall and short proud women sitting on the other side with her legs crossed. She wore a long white Kimoto and was barefoot, the clothes of a quarantined ability user. Her long dark brown hair hung past her shoulders and the lack of sun over the years made her skin paler than it used to be.

It had probably been years since she was allowed to have a conversation with anyone, and yet even from behind her, he could still tell she was as lively and as young as ever.

Her visitor sat down in one of the seats outside of her glass and watched as she sat meditating. He knew she would only speak when she wanted to. A long silence hung in the air but neither party spoke.

“You’re the second person to visit me this week,” She said without turning to face him, her voice soft and full of patience. “You might have just made a new record, Dazai Osamu.”

“I try my best, Patricia Highsmith,” Dazai said with a smirk. Another long silence passed between the two and Dazai listened to her calm breathing. The silence stayed suspended until he couldn’t take it.

“I assume you know why I’m here-” Dazai said.

“Do you know why I haven’t tried to break out of this awful prison, Osamu,” Highsmith asked.

Dazai bit the inside of his lip. He really hated that name. “Because you like observing humans and you can do it from here?” He asked.

“Not exactly,” She said, “Because your actions intrigue me and I’d rather wait for you to come to me than the other way around.”

“You like being the center of attention.”

“Call me needy if you wish but whatever I do it for all of you.”

“And when you helped King tear many of the mafia’s members lives to shreds you were doing it for us?”
“That’s different Osamu-”
“How so?”

Highsmith took in a deep breath. “Because I thought I was helping someone destroy the people who were monsters when in reality I was helping to build the real monster.”

“King isn’t a monster,” Dazai said. Highsmith glanced over her shoulder and quirked an eyebrow. Her eyes were still full of light and hadn’t lost any of their shine even after being in a cell for years. “He’s a demon.”

“Ah, yes I forgot,” she sighed, “you’re not exactly human either. You’re the monster he’s the demon. At least that’s how you seem to explain it,” She chuckled. “I’ve watched you grow over the past four years Dazai. You’re far more human than you’d care to admit. Everyone else in your life may be more human than you, but you’ve learned a lot from them. You’re not the monster you once were, at least most of the time.”

“I could be a monster if I wanted to,” Dazai said.

“You could be a demon if you wanted to, and you could become an angel if you wanted to. You can become anything you wish as long as you put forth the effort.” There was silence. “Of course you didn’t come here to have a pleasant discussion did you?”

“King’s already been here hasn’t he?”

“And if he has so what? He would have died by my hand if he had left recording devices of any kind here.”

“Good to know you’re still up to kill someone.” Dazai took a deep breath and looked her in the eyes. “What is it going to cost me to keep everyone I care for alive, and what will happen if I don’t follow through?”

“You want your calculation?” Dazai nodded. She took a deep breath. “Osamu, last time I told my calculation, or prophecy as some would call it, on the same topic it didn’t end well for your partnership. You followed my instructions to a T and as a result, both you and Nakahara Chuuya suffered greatly.”

“We survived”

“No, you did not, not truly. You tore your partner’s heart to shreds, it would have been merciful to let him die instead of doing what you did.”

“This time will be different.”

“How?”

“Because now I have the motivation to follow through,”

“We’ll see.”

Dazai sighed. “Well, anyway, I didn’t come here for your criticism about the past I came here for help about the future, now am I going to get it or am I going to have to force it out of you,” Dazai said coldly.

“No one can force anything out of me Osamu, you know that.” Highsmith closed her eyes, looked away from him, and both of them went silent. She opened her eyes and looked at him. A tear slipped
down her cheek. “You won’t succeed.”

“Tell me what I have to do.”

“You may have already failed unless you miraculously turn things around.”
“I won’t be able to until you tell me what I need to do!” Dazai said through gritted teeth.

She closed her eyes. “Four,” she started. “You’re team, in the end, will be composed of four. Two knights, a king, and a queen. One piece will be crushed by black unless all four can learn to give love.”

Dazai rolled his eyes. “Why is everything always about love with you, whether it be friends, family, or significant others?”

“Because everything in this world comes back to love. It is the fundamental emotion of every human, the only reason you believe you’re not human is that you have never allowed yourself to feel love, even though someone was ready to love you back. You pushed them away and hurt them so badly that they would never think a single kind thought about you.”

“If I recall correctly, you’re the one who told me to hurt them.”

“I gave you two options Osamu,” she kept her voice quiet but it was lined with anger. “You’re the one who chose the path of pain. I told you, you could either push them as far away as possible and hurt them, or you could let them in and acknowledge your flaws. Your options were to hurt another or to be vulnerable and maybe be hurt. I deemed you a monster because of the path you chose.”

There was silence and Dazai hated every lasting moment of it. Highsmith never talked unless she wanted to and right now Dazai knew she wanted to watch him squirm in his seat. Well, he wouldn’t let her have the satisfaction. He kept his emotions hidden and his shoulders squared. He only came here for information there was no need to let her get him riled up.

Highsmith sighed. “What you have to do is learn to care for and love the other three, in your soon to be team. Instruct them with a kind, guiding hand and not like the jerk you tend to be.”

“You mean I tend to be towards Akutagawa,” Dazai said.

“I never specify names Osamu, you should be aware that is one of my policies by now.” She took a deep breath. “If you do not heed my words one of them will die. Every action you made from when Ryuunosuke appeared at the Armed Detective Agency, to now and onwards all matter and mattered. Each action will determine which one will die. And you are one of the candidates so don’t believe you’ll slip past death this time.”

“Any chance you’ll tell me what variable will determine who dies?” He smiled. There was silence. Dazai stood up and sighed dramatically. “I suppose I’ll have to determine it on my own.” He moved over to the doorway.

“Some free advice,” Patricia Highsmith called from behind him, “The sooner you tell Ryuunosuke and Atsushi about Stephen and how he can manipulate the minds of humans the better.”

“Since when do you like helping me for free?” Dazai asked, turning back to her.

“I told you how to survive for free didn’t I?” Dazai nodded thoughtfully. “Anyway, my warning may be too late.”

Her eyes glaze over. Panic swelled in Dazai’s chest. When would King have been able to talk to
either of his subordinates? King never needed a place, he never needed a time, he only needed to say hello.

Dazai bowed to Highsmith before rushing out of the room and out of the building. He was met with a dark sky and twinkling stars. First thing tomorrow, before they cleared up this mission, Dazai would halfway come clean to his subordinates. He’d leave out as much as he could and just give them the bare minimum of what they needed to know about how tempting King could be. And if it seemed like either of them were already caught in his web Dazai would free them.

Chapter End Notes

1: Paskpää, means bastard.

EAT UP THIS LITTLE FLUFF WHILE YOU HAVE IT!!!! CAUSE THE WORD "FLUFF" DISAPPEARS REAL QUICKLY!!!!

NOW THAT THAT'S OUT OF THE WAY!!! SUP ALL Y'ALL!!! Where have you been? You might be asking. WELL LET ME TELL YOU!!! November rolled around and with that came a whole bunch of nonfanfic writing and the realization I AM THE WORST AUTHOR EVER!!!

HOW MANY TIMES DO I NORMALLY UPDATE!?!?!!? Uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu- I'm gonna stop myself there.

my point exactly. I was SUPPOSED to keep myself to a schedule. Well shit, that didn’t work out. So I'm now here thinking, why, in the name of everloving candy canes did I think I could stick to an every month schedule on my own accord?

SO HERE WE GET TO THE ACTUAL ANNOUNCEMENT.

I, um, uh, kind of have a tumblr. I made it for no reason but to repost whole bunch of BSD and Voltron fanart. I'm still gonna use it for that, BUUUUUUUUUUUUT, I'm also going to use it to promote my writing aaaaaaand give people updates to where I am in the chapter writing process when I'm working on stuff.

Don't go no tumblr? No sweat, I created a twitter account I'll also be giving updates on while watching Boku No Hero Academia. So wish to scream at me when the actual torturing of all of my children in this fandom begins? Wish to say hi? Wish to tell me to HURRY THE UP WITH THE NEXT CHAPTER?!?!?!

You can do all of that on tumblr and/or twitter @Venn_KaiAgram. You don't have to follow me or anything. I expect nothing from all of you, I just want you to have an easier way to know when things are being worked on.

*Deep breath* anyway so hope you enjoyed this.

Also: IT"S BASICALLY CHRISTMAS!!!! (I apologize if you do not celebrate Christmas but..like...I'm excited about presents.
Gin woke up with a start as long, thin legs extended across hers and scurried towards her hip. She frantically waved her leg and she slammed it into the wall repeatedly. She slipped off of her mattress and landed on the floor, a loud groan escaped her lips.

“Are you alright?” Higuchi asked from the other small cot if anyone could even call it that.

“Been better,” She grumbled as she rose to her feet. Her eyes scanned over her leg. The sensation was gone. She climbed back under the small, thin blanket as best as she could with her hands bound behind her back. Gin glanced up at the small barred window into the perfect night sky. “I’ll take over watch, why don’t you try and get some sleep,” She said with a sigh.

Higuchi quirked an eyebrow worriedly. “Are you sure? You still have about an hour before it’s your turn.”

Gin nodded. The other girl didn’t protest. She wiggled under the covers. Their first night in this prison it had been Gin, Tachihara, Higuchi, and Hirotsu. After Tachihara’s initial shock of Gin being a girl, the four of them had collectively decided to take shifts throughout the night to ensure that whoever had kidnapped them wouldn’t try to harm them while they slept.

For nearly all of the next day, nothing had happened. The extent of their day had consisted of eating two meals and discussing only little things that never kept a conversation going for long. Then a third meal showed up and with a man with a bushy mustache. He threatened the four of them with torture if they didn’t tell him where Akutagawa Ryunosuke was. It had been reassuring to know Ryuu had escaped. Even though Gin had no idea where he would go. She just hoped he wouldn’t come looking for her anytime soon.

When they said they didn’t know that was when their kidnapper told them about Chuuya’s predicament. They said they would continue to torture him if they didn’t tell him. Gin had tried to threaten him in return but he had merely laughed. She then took on a new tactic that had often
worked with her older brother. She began to whine.

A second gruff voice yelled at her but she only grew louder. The two agreed to let her take care of Chuuya after each torture session as long as he was not made aware of who she was, and as long as she didn’t talk to him. And she didn’t, at least not verbally. Eventually, they had moved Tachihara, Hirotsu, and finally Chuuya, to a different prison. The other Black Lizard Leaders could have still been in the same building, but Gin seriously doubted that. They seemed to want the major mafia members to be as far away from each other as possible. It was a smart strategy since one of them would eventually attempt to break out, and if the rest of them were in the same location it would only make things easier.

Gin stared out of the small window, as she tried to plan her own escape. One thought overwhelmed her attempts to formulate a plan. Ryuu. Everything inside of her prayed that he was alright. She had lost count of how many days she had been inside of her cell for, but she knew it had been at least a week if not more. She didn’t know where he was but she hoped he was with someone he could trust, and someone who may be supporting him.

Why couldn’t she say she wished he was with Dazai? Was it because some part of her knew, in the end, Dazai would only hurt Akutagawa? She hoped that part was wrong, even though she knew eventually things between them would get bad and Akutagawa may even break. She still hoped otherwise. After all, hope was all she could rely on in her cell.

Gin let out a small sigh. “Ryu,” She murmured, “right now there’s a war between the vanities but all I see is you and me. To fight for you is all I’ve ever known, so come home.” She continued to sing to herself in a low voice. If only she could sing loud enough for her brother to hear.

~

Atsushi’s gut rose. He typed faster on the computer in front of him. He hadn’t looked but he could feel Dazai staring at him. The one worry Atsushi had had after he and Akutagawa talked the day before was that Dazai would get whim of their discussion and be angry. If Atsushi had to guess he would say that Dazai wasn’t here because of the discussion, but that didn’t keep Atsushi from worrying.

Dazai’s gaze remained on him for several long minutes before Atsushi had finished his report on what they had discovered the day before. His hands slowly began to stop moving and when he wrote the final words he swallowed before meeting Dazai’s eyes.

“Y-yes?” Atsushi stuttered. Very smooth, that didn’t indicate that he was trying to hide something at all.

Dazai leaned forward and whispered, “I need to tell you and Akutagawa something shortly. If you don’t mind could you come to the café downstairs when you go on break?” Atsushi nodded and Dazai smiled back. He turned his focus back to annoying Kunikida and Atsushi’s gut clenched.

Did Dazai find out that they talked? Probably not, but what if he did? Why was Atsushi getting so stressed out about Dazai? He probably wouldn’t care. But what if he ended up thinking that Atsushi was annoying and decided to start treating him the way he treats Akutagawa? Atsushi knew that Dazai always gave Akutagawa more crap than he deserved. He didn’t want to admit he was scared that Dazai would turn on him one day even though Atsushi knew he wouldn’t. However, the
thought had still plagued his mind since Akutagawa appeared.

As he returned his focus to editing his report, his arms trembled and his fingers stiffened whenever he tried to type a word. Thoughts of doubt and stress flooded through his brain making every minute painfully slow as the clock ticked loudly in his ears.

Finally, Atsushi couldn’t take another moment of the anxiety and told Kunikida he was taking a break. If he found out what Dazai wanted from them hopefully his panic would dissipate. However, there was always the chance it would increase.

Atsushi descended the steps to the café, opened the door, and a bell chimed as he entered. He glanced around the coffee shop before his eyes rested on Dazai’s tall form as the older man waved him over. He moved over to their booth and slid into the seat across from Akutagawa and Dazai. Akutagawa turned his attention to Atsushi and gave a curt nod before leaning back into the booth and crossing his arms.

Dazai glanced between the two of them and took a deep breath. “Alright, so, there is some information I have been withholding from the two of you that I need to inform you of, however, I am also asking you to refrain from telling the ADA members. If you accidentally slip, that’s fine, but I would prefer if they didn’t know. Also, if they find out you know something they don’t and they start extensively questioning you tell them to come talk to me, are we clear?”

Both of them nodded but Atsushi had a feeling what Dazai was saying, was directed more towards him than Akutagawa.

“The man who took out the mafia and who has been a threat to them in the past is named Stephen King. He’s an American ability user who appeared in Yokohama several years ago. He used to have an assistant named Patricia Highsmith.”

“Used to?” Akutagawa interrupted.

“In our last exchange, Highsmith betrayed King, and at the same time was taken into the Port Mafia’s custody. The prison was only known to a select few so it is likely she is still there. However, she has the capability to break out on her own at any time. I don’t believe she will pose a threat to us, but she will be a neutral party, which is worse. If we’re lucky she’ll aid us, but I am certain she will not return to King’s side.”

“Why is it worse?” Atsushi asked.

“There’s a greater risk of variables inside of a plan going wrong if a neutral party suddenly does something to aid the other side,” Akutagawa explained. “Why are you telling us this now of all times?” Dazai and he locked eyes and Atsushi couldn’t tell what was going through either man’s head.

“Because you need to know what King is like,” Dazai said. “He’s more manipulative than anyone you’ve met.” Atsushi swallowed. “He preys on your biggest fear and uses those around you to change your distortion of the world until you’re completely in his grasp. Before you can fully realize what’s happening you’ve already hurt everyone you care for. He knows exactly which string to pull and which triggers to use when. No one plays the manipulation game better than he does. Including myself. I can come close but I’m not as deplorable as him.”

“How do you know this?” Akutagawa quickly questioned.

Dazai met Akutagawa’s eyes. “Because I watched someone I used to trust fall victim to King and
destroy everything they held dear. I’m not eager to watch one of you do the same thing.” Akutagawa
turned to face the window and Dazai’s brows narrowed.

Dazai glanced over to Atsushi and he instantly started to think of all the things Dazai may want him
to say. Did he want Atsushi to ask a question? To say something about Akutagawa? A thank you
maybe?

Dazai turned back to Atsushi’s partner. “Akutagawa, did King happen to talk to you already?”

“No,” Akutagawa said gruffly.

“Are you sure?” Dazai asked.

“Yes,” Akutagawa said.

“Stop lying to me,” Dazai ordered.

“I’m not lying.”

“Akutagawa-”

“I haven’t talked to him, Dazai. Besides, I hadn’t even heard of him before now,” Akutagawa said
firmly. Their eyes stayed trained on each other for several long seconds.

Dazai took a deep breath. “Fine, whatever you say. Both of you are dismissed. Akutagawa, you can
either head back upstairs with me or head back to my flat.”

“Aren’t the other Armed Detective Agency members going to be sort of suspicious of what I might
do if I go back by myself?” Akutagawa asked.

“It’s your call,” Dazai said. Akutagawa nodded but Atsushi could tell Akutagawa wanted Dazai to
tell him what to do. Akutagawa probably felt like he was going to do something wrong in Dazai’s
eyes, the same way Atsushi was several minutes earlier.

The three men climbed the stairs back to the ADA and resumed their work. The rest of the day
passed quickly and before Atsushi knew it, he had submitted his report, helped Tanizaki and
Kunikida with several things in the case the little girl had presented them. By the end of the day they
had made a little progress but not as much as they would have liked. Atsushi wrapped up a few last
minute things and he and Kyouka headed out.

~

Dazai knew Akutagawa was lying, but if he had tried to push the matter Akutagawa would have
lashed out and he hadn’t wanted the idiot hurting Atsushi. So Dazai had kept quiet and let
Akutagawa get away with his fibs, despite the warning he had already given. People never made
sense. Dazai had specifically told them what King could do and indicated what happened to him in
the past so Akutagawa and Atsushi could tell him if they needed help. Of course, the person who
had made contact with King had to be Akutagawa, the one person, who no matter what Dazai said,
would never ask for help.

Dazai knew how Akutagawa acted towards him and how Akutagawa didn’t trust him was because
of how he had taught the younger man. However, he was trying to show Akutagawa more of the side of himself he normally showed Atsushi and the others, but his apprentice wasn’t making it easy.

While resisting the urge to grumble Dazai finished up some of the work he had neglected to do during the time he had been in the office and flipped open his phone. It was already one in the morning. He should go to bed.

Memories of two days ago came flooding back to Dazai as he thought through every detail. Akutagawa had sensed Chuuya’s oncoming presence far before Dazai had, even though Dazai had had a feeling that Chuuya was going to show up in some way. It bugged him. Dazai was the one who normally felt a new presence first. However, he figured it was because Akutagawa was so desperate to hear something about Gin and Chuuya that he had fine-tuned his senses to pick out the slightest hint of them. After all, Gin was his little sister and after Dazai left he had guessed that Chuuya and Akutagawa would confide in each other more than they already had. But something had still felt off, almost as if King had purposefully allowed Akutagawa to feel him. If someone’s trying to kill a mouse, they have to put something the mice are looking for in the trap.

King was known to try to tear teams apart, that was one of his many specialties, and he had decided to start with the most emotionally distraught team member of them all. Akutagawa was a great actor when it came to covering up his emotions, but Dazai knew all too well how badly it hurts as your own emotions begin to eat away at everything inside of you. If pushed to the brink every part of who he thought he was and any sense of who he will disappear leaving behind an empty sack of a body. Panic welled in Dazai’s chest at the thought of that happening to Akutagawa. It had been about two years after Oda’s death before he couldn’t stand the pain anymore and went to the president. Every word had spilled out, one after another. The mafia, Oda, what he left behind, all of it had spilled from his lips. That had not been his best day.

He reached out to turn off the lights. The blankets behind him rustled. Dazai’s eyes darted behind him to Akutagawa. He took a deep breath as his pupil tossed and turned his sleep.

Dazai turned off the lamp, letting the moon be his only source of light as he slipped under his blankets. He should have slept, he should have let himself slip away, instead, he listened to Akutagawa’s rapid breathing.

Dazai laid in bed for around half an hour before he heard a sharp intake of air. Dazai had a guest room Akutagawa could have taken up residence in, but the first night he had been worried Akutagawa wasn’t fully healed and wanted him nearby. After that, he had planned to let him move to the other room, but Akutagawa never asked about it, so Dazai had never said anything.

Akutagawa began to breathe deeper as he recovered control of his body and emotions. Dazai waited a few moments before speaking. “Are you okay?”

Akutagawa jumped and spun to face him. “I’m fine.”

“Are you sure?”

“I said I’m fine.”

“I know, but I was double checking.” Dazai began to hum. Akutagawa remained silent. He stopped humming and the room stilled. “What were you dreaming about?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Akutagawa said flatly.

“Yes, it does,” Dazai said.
Akutagawa took a deep breath, “Blood.”

“Is that all?”

“Basically.”

Why was he impossible to talk to? “Be more specific,” Dazai paused, “please?”

“It was a simple nightmare, I’ve had plenty before, I’m fine.”

“I’m trying to help, Akutagawa.”

“I don’t need your help.”

Dazai had to use everything in his power not to sigh. Fine, he had tried to be Mr. Nice Guy and if Akutagawa wanted Dazai to do this the hard way then that was his choice. “Is that what you said about me when you talked to King?”

“Stop accusing me. I have never seen him before.”

“Well one of you have at least had a conversation with him, I know you have.”

“One of- you mean either Atsushi or me? It was Atsushi then.”

“I also know it wasn’t him.”

“How?”

“Because Atsushi seemed thankful for the warning and he also can’t hold a lie for the life of him.”

“Based on what I’ve seen him do, he could, and would, if someone else’s life was on the line.”

Dazai went silent. While that was true, Dazai knew King had somehow talked to Akutagawa. There was the possibility of Atsushi being the one, but it was unlikely. There was also the possibility that neither of them had known who King was when he had told them. There was a possibility that Highsmith had said, “It may already be too late,” in order to scare Dazai into telling his apprentices about Stephen King. But she normally wouldn’t do that, she always gave the people she talked to the option to say something or keep silent. If she scared people into doing things she wouldn’t have as much fun observing them.

“If that was the case he would have told me about his situation secretly,” Dazai said. That was not entirely true. Atsushi would not tell him if the situation was dire enough, but Akutagawa didn’t need to know that. “On top of that since the mafia was just taken down and you’re the only one left, whatever mental state you’re in makes you a perfect target.”

He rolled his eyes. “Why do you even think he’s tried to talk to us? You have no evidence unless someone implanted that idea in your head.”

“It’s a feeling.”

“Well, maybe your feelings can be wrong sometimes.”

“Perhaps, but I seriously doubt you’d be so bent on arguing with me if you didn’t have something to hide.”

“I am not hiding anything.”
“No matter what you say I will never trust you. No one in your life ever will because you’re a bastard who lies in order to avoid the things you don’t like.”

Akutagawa physically recoiled. Shit. He had slipped, he had slipped up badly. Akutagawa’s breath shuddered and his lips quivered. All possible gateways beyond Akutagawa’s walls closed, and Dazai watched it happen. “You’re right, I am a bastard, but who made me this way? It sure wasn’t Chuuya, Gin, or myself, so who was it?”

Me rang through Dazai’s head. No, it wasn’t Dazai’s fault, Akutagawa was the one who took everything he said to heart. His apprentice should have listened and made up his own mind based on who he was, not who Dazai said he should be. But weren’t you the one who demanded his complete cooperation, Odasaku’s voice reverberated through his head. Besides the Agency still trusts you despite all of your lies.

Stop. He didn’t need his dead friend to start chastising him, again. That had already happened enough times when he had first joined the agency. Oda had been the voice of reason in order to prevent him from doing something that was technically illegal. He didn’t need that to happen when it came to how he talked to Akutagawa.

He was just a kid when you found him, he’s trying to be like- Nope! Nope, no, not another word. Dazai didn’t care, he had left the mafia four years ago Akutagawa should be over trying to impress him by now. But that, sadly, did not seem to be the case even though Dazai hadn’t talked or contacted him within those four years.

Dazai began to hum, “The Port Mafia as a whole is my guess.” Not a lie even if Dazai had played a more significant role in Akutagawa’s personality than the others.

“I meant a singular person-” Akutagawa began.

“Well, obviously you were wrong then,” Dazai interrupted. Akutagawa fell silent with only the remainder of a glare directed at the wall. “So I will repeat my question, are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Akutagawa muttered.

“Would you like us to repeat our conversation?”

“Shut up.”

Dazai opened his mouth to reply.

Old Mental Note: When Akutagawa falls silent and his sentences become quick and short, do not push matters further. Stand down.

Dazai took a deep breath. “Alright,” he laid back down on his bed and rolled onto his side. Similar experiences had happened like this, but when Dazai tried to push Akutagawa eventually his apprentice just left the room, and with King and everything that was going on he didn’t need that to happen.

~
Atsushi and Kyouka arrived at the Agency bright and early to find Kunikida and Ranpo in a deep conversation with each other. Kunikida glanced up and nodded to acknowledge their appearance.

Atsushi quickly logged onto one of the laptops and typed up a quick schedule of what needed to be done that day per Kunikida’s advice. Even though it wasn’t as rigorously planned out as Kunikida’s, Atsushi still found it helpful to make a quick list so he had his tasks sorted out in his head. Atsushi logged out and moved over to where the two agency members were talking.

“Atsushi,” Ranpo started, “in your report, you mention that there was a strong scent around the place Elias had been kidnapped, do you know exactly what it smelled like?”

Atsushi thought back. He hadn’t exactly paid attention to the smell, but now that he thought about it the first time he had been there it had smelled different. “Well it smelled sort of like a very strong type of wine I know Yosano brought to the office recently, but I don’t remember what type it was. Also, there was a faint trace of some sort of powder. I sneezed multiple times. My guess is it was baby powder but I’m not a hundred percent sure.”

Kunikida nodded thoughtfully. “I guess we have to wait for our medic to arrive to keep moving forward on this.” Ranpo leaned back in his chair and yawned. “Go grab Leena from the infirmary, alright?”

Atsushi nodded. He headed out of the room and down the hall to where Leena had been staying. He ran through a few of the sentences Akutagawa had taught him a few days ago and opened the door.

Leena’s big eyes looked up at him as he entered. Atsushi shifted back and forth between feet uncomfortably. “Um, hei (hello),” Atsushi said, “Kuinka voit (How are you)?” Leena smiled as if she was trying to hold back a laugh and Atsushi felt heat rise to his cheeks.

“Olen kunnossa, sinä? (I am okay, you)?” She asked.

“"Olen, (good),” Atsushi said. He waved her over and Leena followed him back down the hallway. Atsushi turned to open the door when there were footsteps coming towards them. Dazai and Akutagawa appeared, only something was different. Even from the slight distance between them, Atsushi could feel a tension that hadn’t been there the day before, even Leena tensed when they approached them.

“Hey,” Dazai said with a smile.

“Is something wrong?” Atsushi asked as he looked between him and Akutagawa. Dazai quirked an eyebrow and shook his head.

“Niin? (Yes?)” Akutagawa asked Leena. The small girl started talking at a rapid pace as Atsushi opened the ADA’s door and lightly guided her inside.

She whipped her head around to face Atsushi’s partner and asked, “Oletko introvertti? (Are you an introvert?)”

“Olen,” Akutagawa replied.

The girl kept talking at an even faster pace, Atsushi heard Akutagawa take a deep breath, and Dazai started chuckling. Atsushi looked between the two men puzzledly.

Atsushi heard Ranpo’s voice and turned around to see Kunikida waving him over. He turned back to
Akutagawa, as his partner realized his chance to rid of Leena and seized it. Akutagawa said something to Leena and she glanced up at Atsushi and pointed at him. Akutagawa nodded and he waved Atsushi and her off.

Akutagawa muttered something along the lines of, “what was the point in asking the question?” as Atsushi lead Leena towards his mentors. Kunikida started to talk about Leena and Ranpo chimed in here and there. As for the small girl, she seemed terrified. Her lips were trembling, her foot was bouncing, and she was visibly sweating. She glanced up at Atsushi and he tried to give her a reassuring smile but he didn’t have any idea how to make her feel safe around them. None of the ADA members knew how to communicate with her and yet they were trying to get all of the information they could from her when she may or may not be interpreting their questions correctly. Besides if they were going to take this approach Ranpo should use his “ability” to help.

Previously when Atsushi had asked Kunikida why they weren’t asking Akutagawa to interpret what she was saying, he had replied that Akutagawa may lie and translate it wrong. When Atsushi said Dazai also knew what she was saying and could call Akutagawa out Kunikida had said, “can we really trust him to do so?”

While Kunikida was justified, Atsushi was afraid not using his partner as their translator was putting too much stress on Leena. She already seemed super stressed and afraid from what she had recently experienced, he was worried putting on extra stress was going to make her break.

The day progressed and Atsushi ran around doing many things. Writing reports, helping ask Leena questions, making a coffee run to the café below, and the like. Atsushi hurried up the steps after delivering some papers to Yosano and entered the room when he first heard a quiet bickering between Dazai and Akutagawa. He rushed the papers over to the doctor and then over to Leena and the other two men to see if he could help. They still seemed to be struggling with communicating with Leena.

“What are you trying to ask her now?” Atsushi asked.

“We want to ask exactly where their hotel was,” Kunikida told Atsushi as he narrowed his eyes thoughtfully.

Atsushi looked at Ranpo and Kunikida. “Are you sure we don't want to just ask Akutagawa to translate?”

“Why ask him?” Dazai interjected, “It’s not like he’ll tell you the truth.” His eyes darted to Akutagawa as if to challenge him. The memories of the previous day in the coffee shop came popped into Atsushi’s head. We’re they still fighting about King?

“Oh?” Kunikida asked.

“At least I don't act like an untrustworthy child,” Akutagawa said barely looking up from his book. Their eyes locked.

“When did this happen?” Kunikida asked Atsushi in a low voice.

Atsushi frowned. “I-I’m not sure,” Atsushi stuttered as he tried to mask the truth. Kunikida stared at him. He sighed. “Okay, you win, they had a small argument yesterday. Dazai accused Akutagawa of lying but to me, Akutagawa just seemed tired and unwilling to put up with Dazai. And if he was lying I couldn’t tell.”

“Was it about Leena?” He asked.
Atsushi shook his head. “It just about some dream Dazai thought he had which doesn't make any sense because I don't understand how he would see into Akutagawa’s dreams. Also, he didn't say it was a feeling he just acted like he knew somehow.”

Kunikida shook his head. “Who knows how or why he said that. It's impossible to know what's going through that man’s head.”

“As if you can even begin to talk, you chase after me like a petty child unable to earn anyone's trust,” Dazai said.

“At least I'm not a narcissistic bully,” Akutagawa said back to him.

“With the size of your intellect, I doubt you even know what narcissistic means.”

“Narcissistic: a disorder in which a person has an inflated sense of self-importance.”

“Are you really going to be a dictionary?”

“That's about all I'm good for. So tell me what you’re good for because I’m having difficulty seeing it on my own.”

“You have difficulty seeing anything on your own.”

“At least I haven’t built up so many lies around myself that it would only take myself or any other mafia member to unravel all of them.”

“Is that a threat, Akutagawa Ryuunosuke?”

“Depends on how you look at it.”

Silence filled the room. Atsushi’s gut knotted as he glanced between the two men. At first, they had seemed to be throwing cheap shots at each other. The fight had seemed to be leaning in Dazai’s favor, but with the previous comment Akutagawa had balanced it out. Anticipation rose through his chest. Something bad was about to happen, he could feel it, but he was unsure how to stop it.

Dazai snorted, “At least I don't have to watch out for a girl who can't even take care of herself.” Atsushi felt a shiver roll down his spine as Akutagawa’s glare turned to something darker.

Dazai snickered and his eyes gleamed. Another shiver traveled through Atsushi and his muscles tensed. The knot in his stomach tightened.

“Dazai,” Kunikida said in a low voice.

“It’s only natural she didn’t make it out of the mafia’s building. After all, the only things she seems to be capable of doing is leeching off of others-” Akutagawa crashed into Dazai and pulled the older man out of his chair, driving him into the nearest wall. The agency members were instantly on their feet. Akutagawa pinned Dazai to the wall by his collar.

Atsushi felt tears sting his eyes as he watched Dazai’s cool and collected smirk turned devilish, and as the eyes that had been the first to look kindly at Atsushi turned cold. He was a completely different person.

“Bring Gin into this one more time I dare you!” Akutagawa growled loudly.

“You were the one person she could always count on and when it mattered most you ran,” Dazai said coldly. “It’s the same damn thing with you. You can never protect anyone you have an ounce of
a feeling for. You’re a pathetic and useless being, you would do the world a favor by killing yourself. But then again, you don’t have the guts. You could set up the perfect suicide, but when the time came you’d just run away from that too. Because all your competent at is running. Even when the lives of the few friends you have are in your hands you decide to save your own worthless hide. You’re pathetic.”

Silence filled every corner of the room. Akutagawa let go of Dazai, turned on his heel, and walked towards the door. “So you’re running away from me like the coward you are?” Dazai asked.

Akutagawa stopped and stood by the door in the silence. Atsushi watched Akutagawa’s shaking form take another step and disappear through the door.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry Akutagawa.

More Gin to come. ■‿︵

Also, I can't listen to "Come Home" without crying anymore.

Also, also, everything that was in another language was probably wrong, I use google translate.

Also, also, also, cry with me or scream at me on tumblr or twitter @Venn_KaiAgram
Chapter Summary

Everything goes to shit

Chapter Notes

Well, those who commented wished for a quick update, and my school canceled because of snow so... YEET!

Also... Sorry, (not sorry) Akutagawa.

This song is for the first section and Akutagawa collectively over the story so far. But mainly the first section.

This song is for this chapter but also kind of a mixture of the last chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Where was he going? Akutagawa’s legs instinctively carried him through the streets of Yokohama and he couldn’t grasp where they were taking him or where he was at that moment. He didn’t care, he just needed to get as far away from Dazai as possible before, before... Akutagawa couldn’t keep the tears from flowing. Everything inside of him hurt so damn much. He swallowed hard and it felt like he was swallowing down water as he drowned. This was the depression he knew all too well. He was drowning and nobody seemed to notice. But the few who did didn’t care enough to try to save him. Instead, they sat back and enjoyed the fucking show. Like Dazai, he watched from a safe distance and fed Akutagawa’s self-hatred by confirming the messages the demons in Akutagawa’s head screamed every day.

You’re a pathetic and useless being, you would do the world a favor by killing yourself.

Did his mentor really think he didn’t know that already? He already knew he was an idiot, he knew no one cared, he knew he was worthless, he was reminded of these things every day. He could kill himself and no one would notice his absence, no one would care that he was suddenly gone, no one would cry, no one except for Gin. And he couldn’t do that to her, yet. Soon she would be an adult and be able to completely fend for herself. At that point, he could kill himself and she would be safe. He only had to pull through that small time than he’d be freed from having to live his wretched life.

What was he thinking? All he could be freed from now was his existence he had stopped living a long time ago.

Small drops of water hit Akutagawa as the clouds opened up and the skies. Perfectly terrible weather, for another perfectly terrible day. Akutagawa felt the darkness close in around him and he slowly came to a halt by the red brick warehouse. What was he even doing anymore? The Port Mafia was gone, what was he even trying to do? Save his sister? Save Chuuya and the others? What a load of shit. Dazai was right, he was running, he was running from life, from his sister, and from
himself. He truly was pathetic.

“I swear they’re all there,” a small, meek voice said. Their voice had a thick accent and they sounded fairly familiar. “The one who’s been talking to me left, but apparently he’s not even a member of the Agency so everything should work out the same.”

Akutagawa slowly moved towards their voice and pressed his back against the wall of the warehouse. He could sense them right around the corner.

“I said they all needed to be in the same place, you’re one job was to keep them together, all of them.” A deep voice hissed angrily.

“I’m sorry,” the other squeaked.

Akutagawa peered around the corner. There was a man dressed in all black, by the shape of the holster attached to his hip, he was probably carrying a light pistol. He had black sunglasses and pale skin, his hair was brown and he had a bushy mustache.

Facing him was a small girl, a girl who shouldn’t have been there. It was Leena. How had the agency members not noticed her absence? Unless... Akutagawa wanted to punch himself, something had been up with her energy that morning. The few days he had known her for she had never been as energetic as she had been. Today she was trying to make it seem as if she needed him more, because whoever she was working for wanted all of the Armed Detective Agents to be in the office.

“We’ll give you this one pass,” The man said to her, “as long as you’re a hundred percent sure the man who left was named Akutagawa.”

“I’m a hun-hun-hun’red percent sure,” Leena stuttered. There was no doubt the story about her older brother was real. Akutagawa assumed she had been captured as well and her captor had promised to not harm her or her brother if she did as they instructed. The entire story about her escape and finding the agency had been a little off. The Jinko had been right to try to question it. Thankfully Dazai had shut him down, otherwise, Leena may have told her captors they were onto her.

The man tapped his ear. “We can make that work, your brother will be spared this time but don’t mess up again-” The man stopped and looked around. “Were being watched.”

How did they know? Of course, they would have put up cameras beforehand, how had he not thought at least that much through? How much more idiotic could he get? Summoning Rashomon would put the man on high alert. All Akutagawa could do was a take a bet and hope this man knew what he was talking about. He rounded the corner and the man instantly drew a gun.

“Get down on your hand and knees and put your hands above your head!” The man shouted. Akutagawa did as he was told. “What’s your name?”

“Akutagawa Ryunosuke, and according to King, there’s an opening to be his knight instead of Dazai Osamu’s,” Akutagawa replied.

The man slowly lowered the gun but Akutagawa could tell he was still on high alert. “How can I trust you?”

“I’ve been staying at the Armed Detective Agency until now if you need any form of help invading them I’d be glad to assist,” Akutagawa replied. Every word made Akutagawa’s stomach sink, but he couldn’t go back to Dazai, so what else could he do?

The man touched a finger to his ear again and there was a moment of silence. Leena stared at
Akutagawa in shock, but he didn’t meet her eyes.

“You’re sure you want to accept Stephen King’s invitation and to fight alongside him?” Akutagawa nodded. “Very well, now girl, go back to the agency and don’t you know what will happen if you breathe a word. We have hacked into their security system. Continue to report any new developments, after all, no one can understand you now that he’s with us.”

“Wrong,” Akutagawa interrupted, “Dazai Osamu can as well, he was just being a pain to keep you from knowing.”

“Alright, be as cautious as you have been, around this Dazai.” Leena nodded and quickly rushed towards Akutagawa. At the last moment, Rashomon flared to life and ripped the man’s arm off as it passed. He collapsed to the ground and began to scream. Leena stared in horror and Akutagawa picked her up, and bolted from the sight. Undoubtedly they’d send back up soon, he needed to get Leena back to the Agency and- Why was he doing this? There was no point to this, Dazai didn’t care, why should he? His life wasn’t worth anything he might as well tell Leena to run to the Agency and come clean. Then let King capture him and do whatever the hell he wanted to do with him. His life had no purpose, no meaning, no reason for existence. Frankly, he was tired of existing and attempting to be something more when the world kept proving to him over and over again that that was impossible. He was worthless and from the number of times he had been knocked down, he should have learned to stay down. It was about damn time he did.

But then there was Gin. She had tried to help him hold on. She’d been there every time he had broken down when he had allowed her to be there. And no matter how many times he knew he was just a nuisance to her, whenever he had asked for her to be there, she had been. For once in his God-forsaken life, he needed to be there for her. Then he would disappear and no one would realize a difference, the exact way he had come into this wretched world.

His legs carried him through the streets of Yokohama with Leena clutching him. He could hear voices shouting behind him, but he didn’t stop, he just kept doing the only thing he could. Run.

Akutagawa crashed into another body. Instantly Rashomon formed into a shield and Akutagawa pushed Leena behind him.

~

The room was dead quiet. Atsushi’s mind was having a difficult time formulating a complete thought. What had just happened? He wasn’t completely sure. Did Akutagawa just snap? Did Dazai push him to his snapping point? Did Dazai snap? How had Dazai even though saying those awful things was a good idea? And why had Akutagawa been so bothered by them? Normally he would have just rolled his eyes and let it bounce off of him. Or would he?

The epiphany hit Atsushi like a massive tidal wave, the insults never bounced off of Akutagawa instead they probably dug into his mind and ate away at his heart. But because he felt like he had to keep up the tough, emotionless persona no one had known, no one had noticed, and how incredibly lonely he must have felt. Not only did he lose everyone he cared about but he had to put up with the constant antagonistic behavior Dazai showed him while he was most likely battling self-deprecating thoughts that had infiltrated his mind from that night.

And Dazai...oh gosh Dazai, he had told Akutagawa to kill himself and provoked him by saying he
didn't have the guts. Sheer panic bubbled in his chest and Atsushi began to tremble. What if Akutagawa did follow through? Whatever Dazai said seemed to affect him immensely, Atsushi suddenly had an urge to rush out of the agencies building and find his partner.

Dazai marched back to his seat and began to vigorously type on his computer. The other Agency members looked at one another to see if the others were going to say anything. Their gazes drifted to Kunikida who was now sitting and working as if nothing had happened. One by one the agency member began to sit down, all except for Atsushi.

“How can all of you just wave what Dazai said to the side and not care?” Atsushi questioned.

“Get back to work Atsushi,” Kunikida said. “You’re going to ruin the schedule of the agency, and there’s nothing we can do until the president gets back from his errand. So sit down.” These were not the people Atsushi cared for. He refused to believe this is what their approach was. He knew they were kinder than this.

“No!” Atsushi nearly screamed. “What Dazai said to him was cruel and demented. Kunikida you always told me that every action I do needs to be done with the Agency in mind. From what I’ve learned, Dazai’s actions were not how an Agency member would react.”

“And?” Dazai said while half-laughing. “You know I don’t care about Kunikida’s ideals.”

Dazai laid across the table with a huge pout. Kunikida quickly stood up seeming to have lecture ready when he knocked a drink next to him off the table, only to find an unhappy Yosano looming over him moments later. An all-out war broke out once Yosano reached for Kunikida and ended up knocking a bag of Ranpo’s sweets onto the ground and they spilled across the floor.

Dazai rushed over and closed Kunikida computer while the other man was trying to calm Ranpo down. Yosano grabbed the back of Dazai’s coat and threw him into the two other men. The brawl commenced and eventually dragged in Kenji and several of the other office members.

Atsushi looked around at the newfound chaos and he felt a lump form in his throat. “Really? None of you care?”

“I know you’re really nice and all Atsushi,” Tanizaki said, from where he was hiding behind his chair, “But he’s not an agency member and he's tried to kill you multiple times. Just let it be, it’s not our place to question Dazai. After all, he was the one who vouched for Akutagawa. If he doesn’t feel like he can vouch for him any longer we have to respect that.”

“It’s not our-” Atsushi paused as his heart twisted. Akutagawa had helped them, sure it wasn’t a lot but it was something, and that something mattered to Atsushi. “Fine,” He rose to his feet and walked towards the door.

“What are you doing, Atsushi?” Dazai called from where Yosano had him in a headlock.

“The one thing that none of you seem to be able to do,” He replied.

“And what’s that?” The room went quiet and Atsushi could feel all of his friend's eyes on him. The tears rose inside of him and began to spill down his cheeks.

Atsushi turned around and yelled, “Care!” He burst through the door slamming it behind him. He rushed down the steps and out onto the streets of Yokohama with tears still stinging his eyes.

Did no one else notice how much pain Akutagawa was in? Or did they notice and just not care? The second seemed more likely with how they acted in the building. He didn’t care what they thought
about him running, right now he just wanted to try and find his partner. If they thought he was overreacting, fine. If they thought he was being weird, fine. If they started thinking poorly of him, fine! No matter what he wasn’t going to abandon someone who might need help when no one seemed to be there for them.

Atsushi was sprinting through Yokohama, he didn’t know where his legs were taking him or where he was in that moment. However, it was like Akutagawa had told him, in a panic he normally ends up directly on top of what he’s looking for.

He was jogged out of his thoughts as soon as he ran into a pedestrian. Atsushi quickly scrambled to his feet to apologize when he realized Rashomon was directly in front of him.

“A-Akutagawa?” Atsushi asked.

Rashomon was lowered and Akutagawa let out a sigh of what Atsushi hoped was relief.

“Oh my word I’m so glad to see you,” Atsushi said. “After what Dazai said I was really worried and-” Atsushi’s eyes drifted to behind Akutagawa and he paused. “What is Leena doing here?”

“Mitä hän sanoo? (What is he saying?)” Leena said.

Akutagawa took a deep breath and said, “Cut the other language crap, I don’t have banned for it.”

“Sorry,” Leena squeaked.

“You don’t just speak one language,” Atsushi said dumbfoundedly. Akutagawa raised an eyebrow and once again Atsushi felt like an idiot. She was talking and he understood her, she obviously didn’t only speak her own language.

“What are you doing here, Atsushi?” Akutagawa asked.

Atsushi looked up at him and he could feel Akutagawa’s glare dig into the back of his head. Atsushi’s chest twisted. Why did his stare suddenly feel sad? “I went looking for you because I was worried. After all, Dazai said…” his eyes drifted to the ground and Akutagawa let out a prolonged sigh.

“To go kill myself?” Akutagawa finished. Atsushi nodded. “It’s not like he’s the first person to tell me that.”

Atsushi’s eyes flew up to Akutagawa’s. “Who else told you that?” He asked. Was it another agency member? Akutagawa had probably felt out of place as it was, had multiple people been as mean as Dazai on top of that?

“Myself,” Akutagawa said dismissively. His eyes widened and filled with panic. He probably didn't mean to say that out loud.

An uncomfortable silence fell between them and Leena glanced at them seemingly confused. Were they perhaps talking too fast?

“Are you okay?” Leena asked breaking the silence.

“I’m fine,” Akutagawa snapped. Atsushi’s and his eyes met for a brief moment before Akutagawa quickly looked away.

It was times like this when Atsushi wished he could read others minds. That way he not only knew
what they thought of him, but what they thought about themselves. Without that information, Atsushi wasn’t sure what to say to comfort his partner or if the other man wanted him to say anything. Silence was sometimes what people wanted to feel cared for.

Boom! A strong breeze of smoke blew passed them. Fear pulled on Atsushi’s gut. The explosion had been in the same direction as the Agency.

“Does anyone know where he might have just gone?” Tanizaki asked, his voice quivered. To find Akutagawa was the simplest answer. Dazai couldn’t piece together why Atsushi was suddenly so determined to help Akutagawa when he had been the person to hate helping him the most when he first arrived.

He couldn’t blame the boy, even Dazai had let his emotions show far to much in the past twenty-four hours, and he could only hope no one had paid to close attention. After what Highsmith said, he had been far to on edge, neither Atsushi nor Akutagawa may have been in communication with King. While Akutagawa seemed the most likely to have had some sort of interaction with him, Dazai had been a fool for jumping straight to the point and alienating his subordinate.

Had Atsushi noticed that? Is that why he had felt so strongly? No, he could have felt strongly for any reason. Besides, since Dazai couldn’t push away the nagging sensation that the way the boy had acted was more than him merely being upset because someone else was ill-treated. If his hunch was correct Atsushi was going to be in for one hell of an emotional roller coaster.

“He probably ran in whatever direction he felt like,” Kunikida said, “that kid is a fool.”

“While I don’t agree with needing to run after the mafia member I do believe Dazai’s actions were out of character, to say the least,” Yosano said. “And I want some answers.”

“We all do,” Ranpo joined in. Well, Dazai was screwed. If Ranpo agreed to force answers from him there’s not much he could besides commence operation Dodge All Their Questions.

“To be more precise, we all want to know what your hiding about our enemy,” Kunikida said. He pushed up his glasses and planted on of his so-called menacing gazes at Dazai. In his day, Dazai had given and seen glares far worse. It was funny to watch Kunikida try so hard to make Dazai uncomfortable when there was no way a simple stare could get to him. “It hasn’t gone unnoticed by any of us that your hiding far more than you let on. While that isn’t new, it’s certainly more annoying with the severity of our current situation. We were planning to ask you more once the president returned, but I suppose we should ask now since Atsushi’s just left and he’ll want an explanation about that. So, Dazai, care to explain?”

“Do you want to know what’s been interesting lately?” Dazai asked. “I heard that-”

“Um, hell no,” Yosano interrupted. “We’re not playing your little game where we chase you around to try to find out answers while you change the topic. Either you tell us or you get to have an appointment with me.”

Dazai snorted. Laughter erupted from his chest. He didn’t know what he found funny. Perhaps it was the gathered stress of the entire week. Perhaps it was caused by the nervous tension throughout the room. Then again it was probably his laugh that caused the tension. Maybe he laughed because
they had seemed so determined. Determined that they could make him break. That they could make him fess up and reveal all of the information he had packed in his head. Most people wouldn’t remember everything he knew, but if it was relevant information, even from years ago, he remembered. He even remembered the things he wished he could forget. That must have been what caused it.

“I’m sorry,” Dazai said once he had regained himself, “please continue whatever you were going to say.”

“We just want to know everything you’re hiding about whoever we’re up against and why you thought it was a good idea to keep Akutagawa around.” Kunikida said.

“Well Akutagawa is simple enough,” Dazai said. “I assumed you would be able to at least piece that much together, I hope.” He scanned the room. No one replied. “Okay, detectives, Akutagawa is a skilled fighter when he doesn’t act out of pure impulse. He came to us for help and it was a good idea to make sure he had our backs.”

“But you just made him leave maybe never to return,” Yosano said. She pressed her lips into a thin line and quirked an eyebrow. “Doesn’t that seem to have backfired. Which is rare for you so I would assume that it was part of your plan all along.”

She definitely got him there. She had managed to back him into a corner, the one thing Dazai needed to avoid the whole time. Changing the subject wouldn’t go over easily, it would be too abrupt, too noticeable. He had to find a way to answer their questions as abstractly as possible.

“Of course it was part of my plan now,” Dazai said.

“It wasn’t originally?” Kunikida asked.

Dazai shrugged. “So what if it wasn’t. Different situations call for different measures.”

“And what measures does this situation call for?” Kunikida asked.

“Certain measures,” Dazai said.

“Who are we up against Dazai?” Kunikida asked sternly.

Silence filled the room once more. Why did they keep wanting answers? Hadn’t Dazai proven to them time and time again that he knew what he was doing? Why couldn’t these human creatures just trust him? They had full right not to, they were emotional people despite their impassiveness at times.

“When do you suppose a massive enemy would strike? And where would their first target be?” Dazai asked.

“Stop trying to distract us, moron,” Yosano said.

“When defenses are down and strike where revenge is most likely to be taken,” Ranpo said. “At least that’s one strategy. Either for revenge or they meant to hit the place where it would hurt the most as a declaration.”

“Probably a mixture of both,” Dazai said.

“You would know why,” Kunikida said.

“If it’s for revenge they believed whoever they want revenge on were members of the mafia,” Dazai
“Is that supposed to mean they want revenge on you?” Kunikida asked.

“Seeing as they haven’t turned away yet and gone back to where they came from, that’s possible,” Dazai said, “or they want revenge on Akutagawa, or they don’t want revenge. They just want to watch both organizations fall.”

“What makes you think they haven’t left?” Yosano asked.

“Obviously—” Dazai paused. He looked around the room. His gut turned violently and his eyes widened. King has slipped passed him. How? “Where’s Leena?”

All of them began to look around the room. The entire agency fell into an uproar. They began to tear apart the office looking for her. Dazai quickly slipped away while the search began. She wasn’t in the office, King had managed to slip her out without him noticing. Either he knew Dazai was on to him or it was damn lucky she wasn’t there at that moment. It probably happened while he had been distracted by Akutagawa. Dazai closed his eyes. Everything inside of him pulled him in one direction. Towards the outskirts of town. He needed to be there. He didn’t know why. But he had a feeling that’s where he was going to be needed.

~

Atsushi sprinted towards the Agency. In that moment he didn’t think about Akutagawa, he didn’t think about Leena, he didn’t think about the danger, he didn’t think, he only wanted to know if his colleagues were alright.

When he arrived in front of the Agency’s building there was a huge crowd swarming the base. The building was on fire. Atsushi desperately looked through the crowd until his eyes rested on Kunikida and some of the other ability users. As he tried to weave his way through the crowd to them that was when he heard Tanizaki scream at Kunikida from some argument they were having.

“Naomi is still in there!” Tanizaki yelled, “she went to the archives to look up some files and she didn’t return before the explosives went off.”

“What?” Kunikida said.

Atsushi looked at the building that seemed to be falling apart at the seams. Naomi was in there somewhere, why hadn’t she left already? Was she trapped? Did she get hurt trying to escape? His legs instantly began to carry him towards the building as he darted for the door.

Before he had made it past the edge of the crowd a police officer was in front of him with his hand on Atsushi’s chest.

“Please take a step back, sir,” The police officer said. “It’s not safe.”

“But someone's still in there,” Atsushi said frantically.

“Please take a step back,” The officer repeated more sternly this time. Atsushi took a step back but looked up to the Agency’s floor. Atsushi heard sirens in the distance but his gut began to turn. They weren’t going to make it in time. Sadly the police officer didn’t seem like he was moving anytime
soon, but Atsushi couldn’t blame him, this was the police’s job after all they had a duty to keep everyone around safe. He still felt so helpless, so aggravated that he couldn’t do anything for Naomi.

Atsushi began to look around the police officer to try and find another entrance that he would be able to sneak through. A force tugged at his waist.

“Hang on,” a voice whispered from behind him.

A moment later Atsushi was crashing through one of the top windows and he was in a small room in the building. He blinked and tried to pull his thoughts together to find out what had just happened. Glancing down at his waist, he realized Rashomon was wrapped around him. There was a cough to his side and Atsushi’s eyes darted up to see Akutagawa as he waved away some of the smoke that was starting to seep into the room.

“We need to start planning,” Akutagawa said, “where is this girl supposed to be?”

Atsushi’s brain was still trying to comprehend what had just happened, several long seconds passed before he realized Akutagawa had just talked to him. Akutagawa snapped in front of his eyes and he jumped.

“We need to get to her if you want her to stand a chance.”

“Right,” Atsushi said. He scrambled to his feet, rushed in front of Akutagawa, and started leading the other boy through the halls and up the steps. Akutagawa used his ability to protect them from the flames around their feet.

They moved as quickly as they could. When they entered the room where Tanizaki had said his sister was, Naomi’s face lit up in what Atsushi believed was relief and maybe terror now that flames were starting to enter at a quicker pace. Atsushi rushed over to her side.

“My leg,” she managed. Atsushi glanced down to where Naomi’s leg was stuck under a metal shelf. His arms transformed into his ability and he began to try to lift the shelf off of her. He pulled and pulled but it would not budge. The heat of the fire began to press harder against Atsushi, he glanced over his shoulder at Akutagawa and it seemed like the other boy was struggling to keep the fire at bay.

Atsushi tried to pull harder until Naomi cried out in pain and quickly glanced down at her. The shelf didn’t seem to be going anywhere except for pushing deeper into her leg.

“You’re going to need to do two hard things at once, can you manage?” Akutagawa said out of nowhere. Atsushi jumped and turned around to the fire. Rashomon was spread out and blocking it from them but he could see the shield straining in the middle, no doubt it would shatter in the next few minutes.

“Are you listening to me?” Akutagawa asked. Atsushi quickly nodded. “I’m going to use as much of Rashomon as I can without dropping the shield to cut up the bins holding this down. As soon as that happens you need to lift the shelf off of her and simultaneously pull her out because once I destroy the bins the other shelves are going to topple over and if you don’t get her out she’ll be crushed. Are you ready?”

Atsushi took a deep breath, braced himself, and nodded. “On three?” Atsushi asked. Akutagawa nodded. “One,” Atsushi looked at Naomi, “two,” she nodded like she was ready and Atsushi grabbed her hand, “three!” All at once, Akutagawa used Rashomon, Atsushi pulled the shelf up, and Naomi out. Naomi’s weight threw Atsushi off balance, he stumbled backward into the shield, and it
shattered behind him. The fire instantly began to consume the room. Atsushi regained his balance as
the wood floor cracked and collapsed beneath the three of them.

Naomi began to scream as they plummeted to the floor below, Atsushi clutched her close to him and
closed his eyes. Before he knew it a familiar pressure hit his knees and the two of them were safely
set on the ground. Atsushi opened his eyes and looked at a standing Akutagawa who merely rolled
his eyes once he had met the other boy’s gaze.

“Idiot,” Akutagawa said.

“It’s not my fault!” Atsushi protested. Akutagawa quirked an eyebrow. “I lost my balance, mistakes
happen!”

“And you nearly killed us,” Akutagawa said.

“Well, I didn’t in the end!” Atsushi followed.

“Because I threw us out of the building and to some alleyway nearby,” Akutagawa said.

He did what? Atsushi looked around himself. They were indeed in an alleyway. Naomi was sitting
against the wall next to him and inspecting her leg. Sirens blared past them as two fire trucks zoomed
past the alleyway and down the street. Atsushi heard them pull over somewhere nearby. He offered
Naomi his hand and helped her to her feet. She put her arm around Atsushi’s shoulder and stumbled
forward until she seemed to be falling over again. Suddenly, Rashomon wrapped around her waist
and pulled her to an upright position. She turned to look at Akutagawa but he was already moving to
look around the corner of the alleyway.

“Why did you save me?” Naomi voiced.

“Why would I not?” Atsushi said.

“I’m not talking to you,” Naomi said. Oh. “Why did you help Atsushi save me, you’re a mafia
member, why would you save an agency member?”

Akutagawa took a deep breath and faced her. “You’re the little sister of that guy, Tanizaki, right?”
She nodded. Something flashed through Akutagawa’s eyes and he seemed almost sad. ”No one
deserves the pain of losing someone they love with everything they have.” Atsushi stared at him
blankly.

“The two of you should get going, We’re right by the Agency if you want to bring her to her
brother,” Akutagawa said, motioning around the corner.

“Aren’t you coming?” Atsushi asked as he helped Naomi limp over to the corner.

Akutagawa shook his head. “I will be staying right here unless something becomes worse.”

“They already did permanent damage to us by burning down our building, why would King make
what he did worse?” Atsushi said exasperatedly.

“King?” Naomi interjected.

“King did permanent damage by getting rid of most of the mafia’s lower ranked members, but he
didn’t stop there did he?” Akutagawa said. A pit formed in Atsushi’s stomach and the fear began to
rise in him. “Take her to your fellow agency members and her brother. Since the firefighters haven’t
been able to locate her yet he’s probably ready to run into the building himself.”
Atsushi nodded and helped Naomi limp around the corner down the sidewalk. He wanted to glance back at his partner but something inside of him told him he shouldn’t, so he focused on getting Naomi to Tanizaki.

The Agency members weren’t that far away, just about a block down the sidewalk. Atsushi saw one of the firefighters talking to Kunikida and the others and Tanizaki seemed to be arguing with them. Atsushi was about to call out when Naomi did for him.

“Tanizaki get over here and carry me!” She shouted down the sidewalk.

The other ADA members turned around to face them. Tanizaki was the first one sprinting towards them. He ran straight to Naomi and embraced her muttering a hundred random words a second. The other members hurried over while Tanizaki was still rambling.

Naomi began to explain what had happened to her and Atsushi glanced around only to notice Dazai wasn’t there. Where was he? Atsushi was already lost on what went through Dazai’s head, but it had been even more confusing lately. He had been acting a little off and then he had been so cruel it was unnerving to think about.

There was a sudden gust of wind and Atsushi flew backward. He hit something hard, tumbled to the ground, and rolled across the dirt. He groaned as his head began to pound against his skull. He slowly opened his eyes and fear rushed through him.

Atsushi pulled himself to his feet and desperately began to search the area around him for some sign of the other Agency members. *King did permanent damage by getting rid of most of the mafia’s lower leveled members, but he didn’t stop there.*

Atsushi glanced through the surrounding forest again as doubt, fear, and hopelessness began to consume him.

~

Akutagawa watched as an ability swept up the Armed Detective Agency members and they disappeared. Rashomon flared to life and Akutagawa backed up to the nearest wall. If someone was going to randomly appear he didn’t want it to be behind him. Then the wind came. Akutagawa used his ability to launch himself into the air to dodge the blast, and he landed on the roof of the nearest building. He quickly spun around to face a sheepish figure with a hood pulled over their head. The figure quickly thrust his hand forward and another gust of wind blew at Akutagawa. He easily dodged the blast and rushed the enemy.

There was another blast of wind. Akutagawa slid underneath, grabbed the enemies jacket, and pushed them so they were teetering off the roof of the building.

Their hood slipped off to reveal a pale, slimmed faced man. Akutagawa quickly made note of the man’s black hair and dark brown eyes. The man firmly grabbed Akutagawa’s arm to make sure he wouldn’t let go.

“What did you send them?” Akutagawa asked as he held the man further off of the edge. There was silence and he let go of the man’s jacket so it was only his enemies strength keeping himself from falling. Akutagawa repeated his question and once again the stranger remained silent. His patience started to slip away and anger boiled inside of him.
Akutagawa grabbed the man once again and threw him back onto the roof. His enemy hit the ground with a thud and Rashomon lingered over him.

“Where did you send the members of the Armed Detective Agency?” Akutagawa asked again. The man did not reply. His hand moved upwards and Akutagawa lowered Rashomon closer to the man’s neck as a warning. A sudden blast of wind came from behind Akutagawa and he cursed as he tried to dodge it. Everything went black.

Akutagawa stumbled through the darkness and there was another gust of wind before he found gravity pulling him towards the ground. The darkness clouding his vision disappeared as a branch slapped his face and he hit the ground hard. A thick strand of pain blared through his head and to his temple where it decided to reside. He slowly rose to his feet despite the desperate pleas from his now sore body. He took a step forward. Both of his legs gave out under him, and he collapsed to the ground in pain. How high had he fallen from? And why hadn’t Rashomon done anything? Had the sudden use of that man’s ability confused him too much to protect himself or had it been because he couldn’t see? His sight shouldn’t have had anything to do with Rashomon. The first seemed more likely even though how fast anyone used their ability had never affected Rashomon’s reaction before, but it had to be the solution unless.

Akutagawa tried to summon Rashomon and nothing happened. He took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and tried to summon his ability once again. When he opened his eyes Rashomon was in front of him but it was moving far more sluggish than normal.

Just great, whatever sort of teleportation that ability caused didn’t just change his location but also messed with his ability. Akutagawa climbed back to his feet and tried to walk again despite his wobbly legs and sore muscles. While he walked he tried to use his ability and it slowly picked up speed.

He was either in some clutter of trees or a forest. Whichever it was he just hoped he either was still in or wasn’t very far away from Yokohama. Where had that man even intended to send him? There was no doubt in Akutagawa’s mind that he was affiliated to King, but if that was the case why was Akutagawa now in the middle of who knows where? It would make more sense to send him straight into the enemy’s territory where they would be lying in wait to attack him.

Akutagawa looked at his surroundings again, only to find himself pacing in circles. A very effective way to start moving somewhere else. He sighed, stopped moving, and tried to decide which way to go, even though it didn’t seem to matter since each way looked exactly the same. The loud bird chirping directly in his ear didn’t help either. At least he didn’t have another human around trying to talk to him while he was trying to think. It was the first time in a while he had been able to embrace being alone, and it was actually quite peaceful.

There was a large noise behind him almost like a wrecking ball crashing to the ground and a cloud of dust rushed towards Akutagawa. At least the peace and quiet was nice while it lasted. Before Akutagawa could even begin to consider what might have caused the noise he was running towards it. He didn’t know if he was running straight into his death but he didn’t exactly care. Whatever was over there was probably related to King.

Akutagawa came to halt and attempted to quickly assess the battle that had appeared in front of him. There seemed to be two enemies, one who was very buff and who would easily overpower Akutagawa in physical strength, and another who was far less big but still seemed able to rip the head off of a full grown bull. Great.

He scanned through the people fighting the two monsters. Half of the agency was still fighting and half of them were in the background trying to help in any way they could, all except for Dazai. Only
the stars knew where he was. Akutagawa scanned the members to try and understand each of their injuries and how much longer they could fight in order to know who to help once he joined the fray.

Akutagawa paused and quickly scanned through the members once again. Where was Atsushi? He scanned through the crowd once more, and there was, yet again, no Atsushi. As if on queue the Jinko leaped out of the trees behind the men, transformed his legs, and kicked one of the enemies in the back of the neck before rushing over to his fellow Armed Detective Agency members. That answered that.

The enemy Atsushi had kicked stumbled forward but quickly regained his balance. He snarled and began to advance the agency.

Akutagawa watched the agency members get ready for the incoming attack before he sensed a new presence behind him. He summoned Rashomon as he spun around and the person behind him hands flew into the air. Short orange hair, pale skin, hazel eyes. As silently as he could, he settled Rashomon and glared at the young Agency member.

“Don’t sneak up on me like that,” Akutagawa quietly said.

“Sorry,” the other muttered. Tanizaki, that had to be right.

“What are you doing over here? Aren’t you supposed to be helping them?” Akutagawa quietly asked.

“Yeah, but I’ve been using light snow-my ability, it allows me to project illusions. So I noticed you and I thought I’d use my ability to hide you. You can help the agency whenever any of us are in trouble and then I can quickly make you disappear again.”

“That’s,” Akutagawa paused, “actually a good plan.”

“I know, right?” he said.

“I still need to know a few things.”

Tanizaki and Akutagawa talked over the plan for a few more minutes before the snow began to fall and Akutagawa moved out of where he had been hiding. He began to get closer to the enemies and he started to watch their movements. As normal, the bigger the target, the slower they move.

Atsushi darted towards one of the enemies but they seemed prepared. As soon as he reached the man, he transformed his arm and swung but the enemy grabbed his fist and brought his knee to Atsushi’s stomach. The enemy pulled back his fist to attack. Right as he was going to punch Atsushi Akutagawa made Rashomon block the punch. The enemy pulled back his arm in surprise. Atsushi slipped out of his grip and right as he was about to lay another kick on him Akutagawa slipped behind the enemy and watched as the snow encased him.

No one could see him again. Several more similar encounters happened with Atsushi and the other Agency members. After what felt like ages they had managed to knock out both of King’s men.

Akutagawa was breathing heavily and was standing by the agency members when Tanizaki stopped using his ability. A few of the Agency members jumped when he suddenly appeared next to them, the others seemed like they were too tired to care.

Everything was over. Rain poured from the sky. At first, there was a light drizzle nothing seemed out of sorts until a lightning bolt hit the ground by Akutagawa and the others. Akutagawa was pushed off of his feet by the blast and into nearby bushes. A new physical pain began to move through his
body and he groaned.

His head began to pound viscously and when he opened his eyes everything was slightly blurry and distorted. He slapped his cheek and blinked multiple times. As a result, his vision began to clear but his headache worsened.

Akutagawa pulled himself onto his knees and there was a groan next to him. He glanced to the side to see Atsushi beginning to rise to his feet. Akutagawa used a nearby tree to stand and he pulled Atsushi behind a small cluster of trees and out of the line of sight of whoever may be out there.

“What just happened?” Atsushi asked.

“The two men we just fought were only pawns,” Akutagawa said, “whoever just attacked was waiting until we were completely worn out. On top of that they now know most of our abilities.” Akutagawa would have punched himself if it hadn’t been for his already growing headache. He should have been watching for any sign of another enemy. This had happened to him in mission in the past, he should have learned from those. He was such an idiot.

Akutagawa glanced around the corner and the Agency’s situation didn’t look good. There was a small group of other enemies and he guessed at least half of them were ability users if not more. Most of the agency had already been knocked out and handcuffed. There were only a few left fighting now.

“We have to help them,” Atsushi whispered.

“We go out there, and we get captured too,” Akutagawa said.

“We’ll either get captured or save the agency.”

“There are,” Akutagawa looked back at the fight. All of the ADA members were down and only King’s affiliates remained. “Thirty of them, give or take, and two of us.”

“Are you coming with me or not.”

“Atsushi-” Akutagawa began. His partner started to bolt out of their hiding spot. Akutagawa reached out but the fabric of Atsushi’s shirt slipped through his fingers. Another arm reached out, grabbed Atsushi, and pulled him back into the hiding place.

Atsushi opened his mouth to say something but he was quickly hushed by Dazai. Atsushi went silent and Dazai leaned to look around the trees. Akutagawa instinctively straightened his spine, crossed his arms, and removed any hint of exhaustion, pain, or emotion from his posture and expressions.

“What were you about to do?” Dazai asked in a strict tone. Akutagawa tried to form a reply but realized he was talking to Atsushi.

“I was going to go help-”

“And get caught as well?”

“Akutagawa already tried to talk me out of it. I’m going to try and help them no matter what you say.”

Dazai sighed. “And suddenly I’m starting to think King talked to you, because I know your reckless but this a whole new level.”
“So what? I want to help.”

“No, that’s reckless and dumb.”

“I still want to help.”

“Do you understand anything of what I’ve told you? I know you want to help, but if you get captured a guarantee if King hasn’t already talked to you, he will, and he’ll make your life a living hell.”

“Stop going after him, you already know it was me,” Akutagawa said angrily. Dazai looked at him. “King said hello to me, okay? I lied to you, are you happy now? It was one damn dream what does it matter?”

“One damn dream can be enough.”

“And how would you know?” Akutagawa said. “Because of your “friend”? It seems to me like you had a lot more friends in the mafia than the one we knew about. And even having that one friend, Oda, or whatever his name was, a lot of people would have said was dangerous. You would have said it was dangerous as well. I know this because you told me it was dangerous to have friends. Let alone, Gin.”

“We don’t have time to argue about this,” Dazai said.

Rage burned in Akutagawa’s chest. “Really? I didn’t notice our time limit, because of course there was no point to me talking rapidly in order shut you up about the whole King topic.”

“You two need to leave,” Dazai said abruptly. “You need to get as far away from here as possible.”

Akutagawa narrowed his eyes. What? He understood why they needed to leave, but wouldn’t Dazai want Akutagawa to cover Atsushi and his escape?

“I’m not leaving,” Atsushi said sternly.

Dazai took a deep breath and looked at the two of them. “You two are the new incarnation of Chuuya and my partnership, which was known in the mafia as Double Black,” Akutagawa blinked. There was no way, he could possibly be part of one Dazai’s big elaborate schemes like that. After all, Chuuya and Dazai’s partnership was legendary. Akutagawa wasn’t skilled enough to be part of anything of the sort. “If anybody needs to get out of here it’s you two. I trust both of you to come up with a plan and get us out of King’s hands. Now go.”

“I’m not leaving all of you,” Atsushi said a little too loudly.

“There’s somebody over there,” One of the enemies yelled.

Dazai glanced around the trees and then back to them. “Someone’s coming. I’ll cover your escape, you need to go.”

“We can’t go-” Atsushi began. Akutagawa impulsively hit the back of his neck and Atsushi collapsed into his arms. The first unsuspecting victim ran behind the cluster of trees and Dazai instantly knocked them out.

Akutagawa lifted Atsushi onto his back and got ready to run. “None of what you just said made any sense by the way,” he said.
“Don’t stay in one place for too long,” Dazai instructed. “Until you have a plan constantly be moving.”

Akutagawa took a deep breath as Dazai knocked out the enemy’s second scout. “You’re very intelligent Akutagawa,” Dazai said, “When you don’t let your mind get clouded with hatred that is. If anyone can figure out why I was thinking the two of you will make a great team it’s you.”

“And now you're complimenting me?” Akutagawa said. “Please stop trying to help me. I’m running away from an enemy for a second time and being a worthless ass. I get it, stop lying by trying to say I’m smart. You know I’m an idiot.”

Several long seconds passed in silence and Akutagawa could hear the thumping of the enemies feet. “Take care of him,” Dazai said, nodding towards Atsushi.

Akutagawa remained silent.

“Go,” Dazai commanded.

Akutagawa took a deep breath and ran. All you can ever do is run. He broke into a sprint and didn’t look back.

Everything inside of Akutagawa despised himself for being such a coward. All he could do is run, he could never help anyone. No matter how hard he wanted to believe he was more than a pathetic human being, the world always proved him wrong. You're a pathetic and useless being, you would do the world a favor by killing yourself. He knew that, he always had. The world didn’t want him to live, no one did, and yet he was thrust into situations where he had to survive for someone. However, this time he wasn’t surviving solely for his sister, this time he was surviving for someone else as well. This time he was surviving for Atsushi.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I'm actually very sorry Akutagawa.
And I'm quite proud of my writing in the first section of this.

Because of the fast update, I may not update in February. I try to update once a month but I just gave my editor/beta reader the next two chapters and they have a very busy life. Unlike myself.
I hate to leave you hanging off a cliff but ＼_-(∀)/ ＾

If all of you would like to scream at me you can do so in the comments, on tumblr, or twitter
If you'd like to kill me please do it quickly while I'm asleep,

Hope you enjoyed. I'm going to go make myself a hot chocolate and cry for my precious sons and the editing of this chapter. It took me three hours. ▇▇▇ Bye!
~Ey! I am so so so sorry, for being so late but here you go. Also it's been so long I couldn't even remember what the last chapter was about and had to read the ending. Oooooooof. That hit hard.

The tone of chapter = Music: Link 😊

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

A couple weeks ago Akutagawa would have stood his ground and fought whatever got in his way in order to try to impress Dazai. But during his stay at the Agency again, and again, no matter what he had chosen, he had always done something wrong. Whether he had fought or ran he had done something wrong in the older man’s eyes. Every remark had turned into another chain that enclosed tightly around Akutagawa’s neck. Every voice had turned into a new thought that kept reminding him of his mistakes, of his worthlessness.

The weight of Atsushi on his back only emphasized the growing cloud of depression that hung over him and clung to his skin, never to leave him in peace. It seemed to weigh down on Akutagawa with a relentless assault of disgust towards himself. Everything inside of him wanted to stop trying, to stop fighting, he wanted to be done with the constant weight of his pain.

But he couldn’t give up now, Atsushi was unconscious and weak, if he didn’t somehow get him to safety he would die. You’ll never be good enough, you’ll never protect those you care for, you’re better off alone in a world that wants you dead. Akutagawa needed a distraction. He settled on focusing on his own labored breathing.

The rock in his chest seemed to grow heavier with every passing second, and the headache he had attained meddled with his efforts to think of what to do. As the sky let loose a shower of rain he could only think that he needed to find a safe place to reside through the approaching night. He began to run through every possibility he knew of, however since he had no idea where he was there were no immediate options.

Akutagawa kept an even pace as he ran through the trees. The first thing he needed to accomplish was finding out how far he was from Yokohama. If he found something he recognized as well his day would be made.

Atsushi shivered and Akutagawa hoped he wasn’t about to wake. If he did, the Jinko would be determined to go back to Dazai and the other Armed Detective Agency members. He would then run off in a random direction. Because Akutagawa no longer had a clue where he was, and the rain would make it impossible to find any tracks Atsushi would leave behind, any chance of finding safety would disappear. The younger boy stilled.

Relief blew out of Akutagawa’s lungs and he scanned their surroundings again. He could only find trees in the masked haze. Akutagawa came to a halt as he tried to make something out in the distance. It seemed shaped like a house but it was impossible to be sure. Besides what was it doing in the middle of nowhere? Akutagawa didn’t have time to consider his actions. It was dark and raining, he had no other options.
As he made his way towards the house he slowly began to notice more. Many of the windows were broken and ivy along with other plants were growing up the side of the building. The “house” seemed more like an old hotel and appeared to be falling apart, but he supposed this was as good a place as any.

Akutagawa dragged himself inside the building and hurried up the nearest staircase to get as deep inside of the building as possible. The rain was pouring down hard enough to erase any tracks he had left behind. They were safe, for now.

He found his way to a small room with only one window and one door so it was the best option if anyone attacked them. Akutagawa moved over to one of the corners and used Rashomon to lower Atsushi to the ground. Both of the boys were soaked, but the younger one was now shuddering. Akutagawa sighed. He took off his coat, despite the risks of not having Rashomon on him, and laid it on the other boy. It wasn’t much and his coat was also soaked but it was better than nothing.

Pain shot through Akutagawa’s temple. He stumbled backward as his vision began to blur. His arm quickly shot to the nearest support system in order to steady himself. Slowly his vision cleared and he attempted to take a few steps. All at once, the world spun, his legs gave out, and he vomited.

Akutagawa collapsed to his side. Everything inside of him was in pain, and his limbs barely moved. There was a loud noise outside the room. He swore and forced himself to his feet. Everything around him began to spin again.

Akutagawa shut the door as he heard the shuffling feet move closer. The noise stopped and a low murmur began outside of the door. Akutagawa removed Rashomon from the tiger’s shoulder, and picked him up, despite the pleas of his body. He moved towards the broken window.

The door was thrown open and Akutagawa jumped through the window. Before he knew it he was on the ground running, yet again. The entire sprint was a blur. He couldn’t allow the Jinko to get hurt, he wouldn’t allow it. His feet hit a harder surface than the soft mud he had been trekking across, but he didn’t understand why. He could barely see two feet in front of him let alone figure out what he was running on.

A loud horn sounded and Akutagawa stumbled into a cold street. Akutagawa used his ability and lowered the Jinko to the ground. As soon as Akutagawa felt Atsushi securely lying down, he collapsed. Bile rose in his throat and spilled onto the ground.

His vision left him. Everything was dark. The air frigid and damp. Sweat trickled down his neck and back. He vomited again. Pain laced throughout his head and the world around him spun. Any sense of direction he once had disappeared. He felt as if he was suspended in a dark world with no gravity. No direction. No feeling. No life. Only death consumed his thoughts. The patter of the rain slowly disappeared until only silence remained.

His arms scampered across the wet pavement in the dark, feeling the ground until he made his way to a wall. With a groan, he leaned back and resisted the urge to vomit again. Hopefully, no one would find them, at least until he could see again.

A head pounding mercilessly and no sense of direction, he was the easiest target anyone in search of money or blood could find. Second to Atsushi who was completely oblivious to their situation. How the boy had been able to remain unconscious for so long Akutagawa would never understand. It had been himself who had knocked Atsushi out, he may have accidentally hit the boy too hard.

A small laugh that was more of a huff of air left Akutagawa’s lips. Of course, that’s what happened. He couldn’t control his own power, he was worthless. He could do nothing but kill and harm others.
Before the Jinko woke Akutagawa needed to start moving again.

Sleep. The concept tugged at the corners of his mind and traveled through his body. Every muscle relaxed and refused to take his commands to move once more. Exhaustion rushed through him and his body melted into the wall behind him. He sat for what felt like hours, his mind refusing to sleep, his body refusing to move. All he could do was listen, listen to the cars pass by, listen to the distant thumping of feet, listen as the patter of rain slowly disappeared, and listen to his own breath along with each huff of air that came from Atsushi.

Finally, a funnel of light filtered through his eyes. He still couldn’t see all too well, but it was enough. Against every protest his head and muscles cried, Akutagawa pushed himself to his feet. He used his ability to lift Atsushi and he began to navigate through the alleys of Yokohama. He knew every route, he knew every twist and turn, he knew where he was and where he was going in seconds. This was his territory. If he stood any chance, being in this town was how he was going to make sure they survived.

He was still barely able to see but with the aid of the walls around him, he managed to move forward, one step at a time. At least he hoped he was moving forward. It still felt like he was walking vertically. Leaving a trail was the worst thing he could do in their predicament. But he didn’t know any other way to be remotely safe through the night without leaving a slight trail behind.

Akutagawa stumbled forward and paused to regain his lost breath. His lungs were burning and every time he breathed pain traveled through his chest. After a few moments, he recollected himself and continued his journey. His hand trailed along the wall and every time it disappeared he quickly searched for the next one.

Slowly his vision came back to him and the world balance. His surroundings were only a dark blur. He reached the end of the twisted alleyways and his eyes scanned the sidewalk in front of him. At the end of his sight, a large building loomed over the rest. Akutagawa leaned Atsushi against the wall behind a large garbage can and moved down the sidewalk. It would be only a few moments before he could return to his partner.

The doors slid open and he walked into the building. His shoulders squared, he hoped his less than sightly dirt and maybe blood stained face wouldn’t attract too much attention. The attendant behind a long desk didn’t take a second glance at him. No doubt she was used to all kinds of people.

“Single room?” The attendant asked, her voice monotone and bored. Akutagawa nodded. She rang the room into the register and extended her hand. “Card.” Akutagawa pulled out a small wallet and slipped out a card. She swiped it and handed it back. After a few moments, she handed him a receipt and a pen. “Sign.” Akutagawa signed a counterfeit name and handed it back. She handed him a key. “Have a nice day.” Without another word she pulled a magazine out from under her chair and flipped to her last page.

Akutagawa turned away from her and left. He grabbed Atsushi from the alley and snuck around to the back of the hotel. Using the key Rashomon had swiped off the attendant, he unlocked the back door and entered the hotel. They entered a boiler room. He didn’t give the room a second look before heading up the steps and following the signs to the keys room number. Once he had reached the sixth floor he moved down the hallway until he reached the room. 634. With a sigh, he unlocked the room and carried Atsushi inside.

The interior was basic, containing a bed, a nightstand, a desk, and a small tv along with an attached bathroom. Rashomon laid his partner on the bed and pulled up the covers. Akutagawa slid down the wall, rested his head back, and made his ability lock the door. They were safe, for now. Any moment that safety could be destroyed, but for now Akutagawa would accept the peace and quiet.
Even though he tried, his body now wouldn’t let him rest. It had wanted him to so badly before, but every time he focused on sleep, his stomach would turn and his eyes would open. Something always felt off even after he checked the door was locked. After the sun began to stretch its fingertips over the horizon and what had to be hours of restlessness, the bed stirred.

His partner groaned and tried to push himself to sit. Akutagawa rose to his feet and watched Atsushi struggle with his recovering body. After a large intake of air Atsushi collapsed backward with another groan. His hand drifted to the back of his neck and began to massage it. He stood silently against the wall, waiting for Atsushi to either notice him or voice a question. The Jinko forced himself upright and glanced around the room. He bit his lower lip and began to curl in on himself.

“Dazai?” He called. Silence filled the room. “A-Akutagawa?”

“Right here,” Akutagawa replied.

Atsushi jumped and snapped his head to him, hand clutching his shirt. “Oh, hi.” He looked away and went silent. “Where’s Dazai? And where are we?” He pursed his lips and refused to make eye contact with Akutagawa.

“As far as I know of he was captured, covering our escape,” Akutagawa said. It should have been him. Akutagawa should have been the one to cover Dazai. He didn’t deserve to be protected. He was worthless. “He may have been able to escape and maybe rescue the Armed Detective Agency, but I don’t know.”

Atsushi balled the blankets in his fists and a shaky breath left him. “Why?”

The room fell silent. “I don’t understand the question,” Akutagawa said.

“Why did you let them go?” Atsushi yelled. “You could have done something couldn’t you? You could have stayed and helped recover the agency. We’ve helped you in so many ways and yet you did nothing.” Akutagawa opened his mouth to respond but the words wouldn’t push passed the lump in his throat. “You did absolutely nothing. And now we’re stuck, on our own, without anyone. No wonder Dazai has never accepted you. You never do as much as you should. And you know what? He will never accept you because you don’t have what it takes to make him.” Tears poured out of Atsushi’s eyes and Akutagawa remained quiet. His chest burned, but not with the rage he normally felt, but something else. Something foreign.

His partner threw off the blankets and stormed towards the door. Akutagawa reached out and grabbed his arm. Everything inside of him was in pain, but Dazai had wanted Akutagawa to protect this boy. Even if he would never accept him, Akutagawa would do as he was told.

“Let go of me,” Atsushi said. He tugged on Akutagawa’s grip.

“It’s not safe out there on your own,” Akutagawa said, his voice threatening to break.

“I said, let. Me. Go.” Atsushi said through gritted teeth. Akutagawa didn’t move.

A fist buried into his stomach. Akutagawa collapsed to the ground in a sputtering fit of coughs. Tears stung the corners of his eyes and vomit threatened to tumble out of his mouth. He briefly heard the slamming of the door and the thumping of the Jinko’s feet as he collapsed.

Akutagawa remained on the ground until his coughs had ceased. He used the wall to rise to his feet, but his legs wouldn’t move. If anything happened to Atsushi it would be his fault and he wasn’t willing to lose anyone else. Slowly, Akutagawa made his way to the door and followed Atsushi. His movements were sluggish at first, but as the physical pain dispersed his speed grew.
His feet carried him through the streets of Yokohama, following every piece of the trail the Jinko left behind. While Atsushi may think no one could find him, he wasn’t great at making sure that was the case. Once the trail brought Akutagawa to a park he came to a screeching halt.

He quickly ducked behind a bench and peered over the top. Atsushi laid on the ground next to the feet of a man in all black. The man talked into his phone, not at all quietly. If he wished to make Atsushi’s abduction sneaky he wasn’t doing a great job of it.

“It took some work, but I have the missing agency member. If the missing mafia member is in the area I’ll find him.” A pause. “Alright. Then I’ll just bring the cargo back.” The man ended the call and moved towards a car dragging the Jinko with him. Akutagawa watched the man tie up Atsushi and throw him into the trunk of the car. Once the engine was started Akutagawa moved towards the car.

It pulled away and Akutagawa pulled a small grey machine from his pocket. Rashomon quickly stuck it under the car. It drove around the corner and Akutagawa immediately pulled out his phone. He quickly ran after the car following it with the map the tracking device created on his phone.

~

Every breath of air that entered his lips tasted stale and the small scent that came with it was filled with must and mold. The thick blood that gathered in his mouth was the only thing that kept him from believing he hadn’t left the world of pain and regret. That, and the warm presence of another body holding him.

“Don’t touch him,” Chuuya heard his ex-partner growl above him. Chuuya’s heart froze. That voice couldn’t have been him. The warmth next to him felt so real and close, and the arms around him made him want to melt into them. The presence of his past partner was so close, but impossible to be there.

“You come another step towards him and I’ll make sure you never take a step again.” Dazai threatened. His grip on Chuuya tightened and the man’s finger brushed against his wrist. A strand of electrical currents shot up his arm and through his neck. It was him alright. Chuuya forced his eyes to open. The mackerel's all too familiar face hovered above him sending a strand of nausea through his stomach. Chuuya would have made an insulting remark but one look into Dazai’s eyes made him immediately reconsider. His eyes were dark, as dark as they had been back at the mafia. Only now something was different, his eyes didn’t seem to radiate the same longing for blood shed, but instead murderous rage towards anyone who threatened something. But what?

“We’ll return later for him, we’ll see how you like going without any food,” a harsh voice rang through the cell. Oh, he was protecting Chuuya.

“I’d like to see you try to break me.” There was a loud bang, and Chuuya heard his partner let out a long sigh.

“Dazai?” Chuuya choked out the question and every sense of strength he seemed to have faded away.

“Chuuya!” Dazai said in a cheery voice as his eyes filled with a new light. His heart skipped a beat as he gazed up at the man he hated. He had never seen Dazai’s eyes light up like that. “How are you
feeling?"

He tried to shift in Dazai’s arms but pain shot through his spine and into his skull. A soft groan left his lips. “Not great,” Chuuya said breathily. Of course, after he shifted his ribs created a greater pressure against his lungs and breathing became far more of a task. Dazai lifted him to a sitting position and his lungs filled with air. Chuuya struggled to find comfort in his partner’s arms, but he wanted the warmth and promised protection to stay by his side. So he tried to not show his discomfort to Dazai, which did not end the way he wished.

“Is there anyway I can make you comfortable?” Dazai asked. His lips pressed into a tight line and his brow narrowed in concern.

Chuuya slowly shook his head and leaned into Dazai. His partner shifted his hold so he was supporting Chuuya’s head better and he pulled his hip closer to him. The looming presence gave him nothing but comfort from the pain threaded through his body. Breathing even seemed like too much of an effort, but as Dazai brushed his thumb over his cheek all Chuuya wanted to do was breathe him in. And he hated every new breath that entered his lungs at the same time.

Dazai had a comforting scent he hadn’t smelled in a long time. A mixture of what Chuuya could only distinguish as chestnut and twine? He wasn’t sure, but nonetheless, it was comforting, it was familiar, it was all he needed to hang on a little longer. As long as he was here, Chuuya would be safe. He wouldn’t let Chuuya be hurt. No matter how many times he talked about hating Dazai, and Dazai did the same about him, Chuuya trusted Dazai. He only hoped the other man felt the same.

Chuuya mumbled words that were even incoherent to his own ears, but he thought he said something about how warm Dazai was. A small chuckle sounded and Dazai’s grip tightened. A small smile tugged on the corner of Chuuya’s lips as he pressed his face further into his partner’s chest. Why did he feel the need to be closer to someone of his past? He couldn’t conjure a definite answer and something inside of him didn’t want to know. All he wanted was for Dazai to hold him and not let go.

“You should sleep,” Dazai whispered.

He was right, Chuuya should, but if he closed his eyes for the night would Dazai disappear? Would the small comfort he had in that dark prison disappear? This man was all the light Chuuya could find in his mind to stay alive. Would his only hope leave him? Would he turn out to be some part of a devilish dream?

“I can’t,” Chuuya choked.

“Try,” Dazai said.

Chuuya swallowed hard and took a deep, shaky breath. A light hum echoed from above him. His partner slowly swayed back and forth, lulling him to a dull, light sleep. He only slightly realized the long narrow fingers that intertwined with his own and the soft lips that touched his temple before his exhaustion took hold and he drifted off to sleep.

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By the time Akutagawa had tracked the car to one of King’s hideouts, the sun had risen to its peak. He knew using his ability would be a massive chore since he was already exhausted, but he had to
save Atsushi before the boy was taken somewhere else while Akutagawa wasn’t paying attention.

He snuck towards the tall office building the car had stopped at and walked towards the doors. He peeked through one of the windows, only two guards stationed by a back door, and a receptionist at the entrance. The guards weren’t holding any guns but there was no doubt in Akutagawa’s head that they had some on them.

He had two options, force his way in and raise alarm, or sneak inside and hope no one caught him. The easier option was to raise hell, but then they would move Atsushi before he had a chance of finding him. Sneaking inside the building had to do.

*I can guide you.* Why did Akutagawa even care? Dazai could run for only so long, and there was no doubt in his mind that his mentor had been captured. He didn’t know where his assurance came from, but he listened to it. His mentor wouldn’t be able to criticize Akutagawa for leaving the Jinko behind if he never knew they had gotten away from the previous fight. He could leave Atsushi and then-

His train of the thought stopped abruptly. And then what? He didn’t have the strength to do so. Despite that, his mind screamed at him. Then he could join King. Join him and save Gin, join him and never have to worry about Dazai again, join him and never see Atsushi again. Akutagawa’s stomach clenched. Why did it feel like a something was scraping away the inside of his chest? Was it anticipation or guilt? Excitement or shame?

“Who are you?” A deep, gruff voice asked.

Akutagawa’s head snapped up and backed away from the window. He opened his mouth to respond but the words hitched in his throat. If he just said his name King may or may not realize what he wants and tell this man. No matter how hard he wanted them to, the words did not come.

The man raised a gun and repeated his question. In a second he was flat in his back with Rashomon hovering above him. The man’s chest barely rose with each breath he took. With each slight movement, the man attempted to make Akutagawa lowered his ability closer to him. They remained in this state of suspension for long moments.

Then the man was moving. He rolled out from under Rashomon and dodged the thrust of the ability Akutagawa sent towards him. The man charged Akutagawa. Once he was in range Akutagawa used Rashomon to shove him to the ground. He clenched his fist and Rashomon turned into a spike that traveled into the man and up through his back.

Blood drizzled down the tip. He quickly removed his ability and turned away from the man returning to observe the interior of the building. Nothing had changed on the inside. No one had noticed.

Sneaking in wouldn’t be the problem. While he was inside he would have to remain out of sight, and without a layout of the building or any previous knowledge of where he was headed, not being noticed would be a struggle. If he could somehow find a quick way to blend in or find the security room, assuming the building had one, he could plan an actual course of action. Akutagawa moved away from the window and scanned up and down the building once more. There were many windows, but most of them were probably locked, maybe even bared. Also considering his head still wanted to kill him, especially after his encounter with whoever that man was, climbing through a window was not a favorable option. Every other entrance he could find was no doubt guarded as well.

With a sigh Akutagawa moved towards the door, hoping a blunt approach would work. The doors slid open in front of him and the three people present looked towards him.
“May I help you?” The woman behind the desk asked.

“I’m here to free a tiger,” Akutagawa said. One of the guards pulled out a gun. Before anything happened Rashomon tore through the people surrounding him, blood pouring from their wounds. He placed all three behind the desk and grabbed a badge off of one of the guards along with his hat.

He walked over and scanned the badge on the elevator pad. He put on the hat and stepped into the elevator without hesitation. Making sure not to look at the cameras Akutagawa stood in the elevator until it had moved up to the next level. It didn’t go anywhere but the entrance, the garage, and the second level, smart to make intruders take unnecessary detours.

He stepped out of the elevator casually onto the next floor and headed down the hall. There were a few doors here and there, but nothing struck him as important. Finally, towards the next elevator, a door like the rest appeared. There was no evidence to support that anything of what was beyond the door was better than the others. Despite that Akutagawa opened the door.

The room was dark. No one was present. The only light in the room was what filtered in from the hallway and the brightness of the screens. He shut the door behind him and glanced about the room. Nearly every floor had to be monitored from the room.

Akutagawa quickly scanned through all of the screens and repositioned to different cameras. There were no hints of where the Jinko could be. Yet he continued to search nonetheless. He went through each camera multiple times before conceding that he would have to travel deeper in the building to find the level. At least from here, he could map out a path to the other floors. He fidgeted with one of the control boards relentlessly. His hands stopped moving.

Wasn’t he going to leave the Jinko here? Wasn’t he going to go find Stephen King instead of saving Atsushi? Instead of saving the partner that had been thrust upon him? It hadn’t been his choice to associate more than he had to with Atsushi, yet Dazai had tried to force him to be the boy’s partner. He had a right to not want to save him.

Why was he going through all this trouble when the Jinko didn’t even matter to him? Was it because he wanted Dazai’s approval? If that was the case he wouldn’t have to worry about that after joining King.

No matter how many times he told himself he would be better off leaving Atsushi behind, his hands began to work the cameras, searching for some way to find the boy. A spark lit up his head. There was a door in the shadow of the deepest hallway on the sixth floor. The only difference between the other doors, was it’s handle seemed to have a firmer locking system. There, through that door is where he would most likely find Atsushi.

Akutagawa straightened up. He knew where Atsushi was and that was enough. He should turn around and walk back out of the building. He could forget he ever set a foot near the Jinko. You’re very smart and despite what Dazai said you wouldn’t have rushed in without a plan. His breath caught in his throat and his chest twisted violently. You’re really talented and very strong. You know what to do in tight situations and anyone can rely on you even if they don’t think they can. He blinked hard. Atsushi had seemed to rely on him back then. For now, Akutagawa would do what Dazai wanted.

He moved out of the room and continued down the hallway. He made decisive turns based off of what the video cameras had pathed out for him. He took a few more elevators before arriving on the sixth floor. He traveled through the halls, keeping his head low and continuing as fast paced as possible without seeming like he was rushing.
Once he had made it to the door he had seen on the cameras he slowly glanced around to see if the cameras were as he had positioned them while in the control room. It wasn’t natural, they were where he had left them. As he had moved through the building he had seen no one. There was no one here.

Akutagawa knelt to the ground. As his ability entered the keyhole it shaped itself into the appropriate key and clicked the door open. He slipped inside. It was a small room with nothing but wood walls. No furniture, no papers, nothing. He had been afraid of this. Since no one had been in the building he was aware they may have moved Atsushi already. With a sigh, he turned towards the door.

“Are you sure?” A muffled voice asked. Akutagawa stopped and turned towards the farthest wall.

“Positive, we should be able to move him as soon as we get clearance,” Another voice said. Akutagawa walked towards the voices.

“Finally, we’ll get some sort of promotion, it took long enough.”

Small feet stepped towards him. The wall swung open and Akutagawa pivoted behind it. Two men stepped out from behind the wall and stepped towards the door. The door swung shut. Akutagawa slipped his fingers between the secret door and wall. He bit his tongue to hold back the pain as the door crushed his fingers. The men disappeared through the door and Akutagawa slipped behind the wall, unsure as to where he was going.

The room he had entered was dark but the air that entered his lungs was automatically stuffier. His hands drifted along the wall until landing on a switch. Click. A dim light lit from the ceiling, barely providing enough light to reach the corners of the room. He had entered a large hall. The longest wall was lined with cells.

He began to walk down the hall, eyes jumping from each cell, waiting to find some trace of the tiger. There was nothing.

He began to walk down the other way, his gut rising with every empty cell he passed. At the end of the room, he turned to head back to the door his breath shaking. His eyes drifted to a dark figure that shifted on the floor. The figure didn’t move again. He struggled to make out who it was with the limited source of light. His ability formed a key and unlocked the jail cell without him thinking. He pulled open the door and placed a hand on the boy on the ground. Slowly, his hand trailed over the boy’s arm as his eyes adjusted to the new lighting. Once his hand made it to his hair a thankful breath escaped his lips. It was him, it was Atsushi.

Alarms blared through his ears. Loud bells crashing together along with horns and other noises Akutagawa couldn’t distinguish. He began to shake Atsushi to try to wake him but he didn’t stir.

“For fucks sake get up,” Akutagawa said, a little too panicked for his liking. His heart pounded rapidly. They couldn’t get stuck here. “I am not dragging you around again, if you don’t get up I’m leaving you behind.” He would drag Atsushi around again, but he would prefer if he walked on his own.

“Akutagawa?” Atsushi said drowsily. He blinked his eyes dreamily as he rose. Some form of gratitude escaped Akutagawa’s lips. Once he had pulled the Jinko to his feet, Atsushi looked at him and frowned. “Are you okay?” He asked, “you’re shaking.” Akutagawa blinked. He hadn’t noticed. The wall crashed open and a large group of people rushed into the room, guns aimed at the two men.

Chapter End Notes
Again, I am so so so so so so so sorry for this being soooooo late. On my twitter and
tumblr I explained that there were a few issues with my editor returning chapters and
such, but I finally got 3 back! 3! So you can count on myself posting May and June.
July should also have a post but anything beyond that is unknown.
You may be wondering, "Is there really that much of the story left?"
LET ME TELL YOU! sometimes I wish there wasn't... BUT THEN I GET HYPED
AND WRITE A BUNCH AND THEN...I get into a mood where I wonder if it will
ever end because I keep thinking of more things so the plot continues to expand the end
gets furth and further out of sight. BUT THEN I"M JUST HYPED AND WRITE!
*Rinse and repeat*
but that is A-OKAY. We're gonna write and write and write some more.
Anyway how yah doin? I'M DOIN!!!...!!!!....okay. I've been fine...lower than normal
but fiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiine.

ANNOUNCEMENT: *This has nothing to do with fanfic* YAH BOI IS GOING TO
SEE DEAD APPLE!!!! I AM SO FLIPPPPPPPINNNNNN" EXCITED!!!!!!!!
Thank you, Crunchyroll for bringing this movie to us nerds. If you want to go (they are
only providing it to the US and a few places in Canada, sadly ╭╮
But other
countries may have a different provider so I would check (｡◕‿◕｡) go to Crunchyroll
movie night. BUT THIS BOI IS GOINGGGGGGGGGGGG!!!!!!!!!! I AM SO
EXCITED!!!!! I have been looking up everything I can on tumblr and
AAAAAAHHHHH! THE FAN THEORIES, THE POSSIBLE CANNON THAT
YOU CAN"T TRUST BECAUSE PEOPLE DON"T HAVE PROOF THAT IS
CANNON, THE SHIPS, THE TRAILERS!!!!!
MMMMMMMMMMMAHAHAHAHAHHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHHAHAHAHAHAHAHAH
I AM SO HYPED!!!
（╯°□°）╯︵( .o.)
Also at the beginning of this story, you may remember I said I wasn't planning on
reading the manga...THAT WENT OUT THE WINDOW! I was tired of waiting so I
started at the beginning of the story and binge read all the way up to where every sight
has the chapters translated...I also have all of the volumes that are released in the US
soooooooooo...that did not hold true in the slightest.
Also also, CAN ANYONE TELL ME IF THE SEASON 3 RELEASE DATES ARE
LEGIT??? ANYONE??? I found them on a sight, and I think it was for Japan and not
across an ocean, but they could have also been fake and I'm confused and I want help.
So....does anyone possibly know? Please hit me up if you do. I need to watch these
precious people again.
Also also also, I had an actual announcement and then it slipped out of my head...so if I
remember-OH! (half way through writing I remembered (；一_一)). Thank you so
much for being nice through my strange posting schedule (if you can even call it a
schedule) all of you are so amazing and thank you for all the support. Every comment
really heightens my day and I appreciate every single one of you with all of my mushy,
bleeding, red heart (▰˘◡˘▰)(✿´‿`)(ღ˘⌣˘ღ).
If you'd like to be a fan and not have a life with me you can hit me up on tumblr twitter
and/or the comments


Master of Lies Part I

Chapter Summary

Atsushi and Akutagawa run like a bat out of hell
&
Dazai has a visitor

Chapter Notes

As of 13 days ago, I have been writing this fic for a year!!! I'm excited.

Anyway, here's the music for this chapter
Song 1

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A large noise blared through Atsushi’s head. The noise grew with every second. He groaned. His head flopped with every jerk his body took from someone applying force to him. There were grumbles somewhere in front of him. His mind felt groggy and he didn’t know when he had fallen asleep. Briefly, he was back at the agency, where he sat typing out a report in a chair directly in the sun. He was home. He was at peace.

“For fuck’s sake get up!” A deep voice growled.

Whoever it was was quite annoying along with the beeping noise. His train of thought halted. Wait. That wasn’t a beeping, well it was but the purpose was for something else. It was an alarm. But what for?

“I am not dragging you around again, if you don’t get up I’m leaving you behind.” And that wasn’t an annoying person. Well, yes, he could be annoying, but it was actually Akutagawa. Atsushi’s eyelids fluttered open and he blinked multiple times to clear the blurriness from his eyes. “Thank the stars.” The man’s voice sounded relieved? How could he be relieved that Atsushi was alright? He must have judged Akutagawa’s tone wrong.

“Akutagawa?” It was a silly question, Atsushi already knew it was him but he wanted to hear his partner’s voice again. He laid a hand on Akutagawa’s arm to stop himself from shaking. Only, he wasn’t the one who was shaking. “Are you okay?” Atsushi asked. His frown deepened as he clutched the older man’s arm to double check he was right. “You’re shaking.”

Akutagawa blinked and stared at Atsushi in what he thought was awe, but his face was almost as impassive as normal so he couldn’t quite tell. Had he not noticed his own shaking body?

Something big thudded to the ground and Atsushi’s ears rang from the impact. He still didn’t feel fully awake. Before he saw who had broken down part of the wall Rashomon was up and bullets
were encased in its mass.

A hand tightened around his wrist. He felt like his wrist would break. Then he was running. Rashomon carved a path to the exit and tore in half anyone who was foolish enough to get in their way. Blood splatter across the ground and walls. It was Atsushi’s turn to tremble.

His lungs began to constrict. His head was rushing and he could feel his mind disconnected from his body. The blood that splattered across his face felt like fire against his skin. The blur of halls passed as they ran. Stairs, more halls, stairs again, halls. His lungs couldn’t take much more. They burned with the want to breathe, but he was too afraid of tasting the pools of blood he had allowed his partner to leave behind.

Blood drizzled down his face and ran into his eye leaving the painful sting of death. What had happened? Why were they running through some strange building? All he could remember was blowing up at Akutagawa and then a sharp pain in his neck-

They had got him. King must have kidnapped him, and Akutagawa...Akutagawa was rescuing him. He went out of his way to save Atsushi. Why? He would have been better off surviving without someone who was idiotic enough to get caught only a few hours after escaping. No, he hadn’t escaped. Akutagawa had been the one who escaped. He had been unconscious, useless, the whole time. Akutagawa had saved both of them. He had hurt so many and had no right to redemption. Still, Atsushi had never tried to ask, why. Why had he done what he did? Why was he a murderer? Why had he joined the Port Mafia? He had talked with Akutagawa for several hours before yet he had been too afraid to ask. Atsushi was weak.

Weight jerked him forward. A staircase appeared at his feet.

“Akutagawa~” they were falling. Atsushi ran into his partner while he seemed to be trying to regain his balance and they tumbled down the steps.

Atsushi’s skull collided with the floor. Blood roared through his head as the noise dispersed and became a distant thrum that passed through his ears. The world around him spun and extended away from him as a dark haze funneled his sight.

No. He wouldn't let this happen again. He wouldn’t succumb to the darkness and leave Akutagawa to haul them out again. Shouts grew closer as Atsushi tried to push himself to his feet. He managed to sit up. Pain rushed through his head. Atsushi lifted his hands and firmly slapped both his cheeks. Nothing improved. His headache continued. As the voices grew closer he forced himself to move faster. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes. Please. Please, help me. His eyes flew open and he could see. Everything was far clearer than normal. Feet thudded against the steps above them.

Atsushi quickly looked for Akutagawa. He was trying to stand, but even with the help of the wall once he was almost to his feet he collapsed to his knees again followed by a flurry of curses. Atsushi grabbed Akutagawa who grunted in surprise. Atsushi supported his partner's weight as both of them tumbled down the next flight of steps, barely keeping their feet under them. Atsushi couldn't tell where they were going. He let his feet take them through the building, wishing Akutagawa would give him some sort of instructions. But the man remained quiet. So quiet Atsushi feared he was unconscious, but he was still running so he must have been awake.

Atsushi arrived at an elevator and scanned the hall. He hadn’t passed any other stairwells. Worst idea was to leave a building through an elevator during an emergency. He pressed the down button. He was going to have to ignore that rule just once. The doors opened and they stumbled inside. Shouts echoed behind them. Atsushi selected the bottom button. It wasn’t the first floor but hopefully, it would have an escape.
“What happened and are you okay?” Atsushi asked as he thoroughly checked his partner for any signs of wounds.

Akutagawa’s eyes closed. He pushed Atsushi away leaned against the elevator wall, and slowly nodded. “I’m fine,” he opened his eyes and glanced at Atsushi before looking at the ceiling.

His eyes had been unfocused. Atsushi bit his lip. Could he even see Atsushi? Could he just sense where Atsushi was and played it up so he seemed okay? Why did he always lie? He could tell the truth and be more open with Atsushi. What made him believe he wasn’t safe? No wonder Dazai has never accepted you. You never do as much as you should. And you know what? He will never accept you because you don’t have what it takes to make him. Because he wasn’t safe. Atsushi had punched him in the gut metaphorically and literally. He no longer had a right to believe he deserved Akutagawa’s trust. He would need to earn that back. For every wrong done to someone, it takes five times as many rights to fix the damage. Even then, things may never be the same. That person may still be on their guard, and there’s nothing anyone can do about it.

The silence continued. They were almost to the garage level, at least that’s what Atsushi believe this level would be. He wanted to- no, he needed to say something.

“Akutagawa-” He started.

“Get ready,” his partner interrupted. “You never know what or who will show up.”

“I’m sorry,” Atsushi said before he could think twice.

Akutagawa sighed. “You don’t need to apologize.”

“But-”

“Just survive,” Akutagawa said, “that will be enough of an apology.”

Of course, it will. Atsushi should have seen it coming. Akutagawa wanted to make sure Dazai knew he was capable of protecting himself and Atsushi. He needed him to survive in order to prove to Dazai he was worthwhile. Atsushi’s actual life probably didn’t matter to him. At least if he survived and Dazai did accept Akutagawa, it would clear some of his conscious about how useless he was. It was still apparent that he wasn’t worth much.

“Okay,” Atsushi mumbled.

Ding! The elevator stopped and the door slid open. Rashomon appeared in front of them and Akutagawa pushed Atsushi behind him. Nothing happened. Akutagawa took a cautious step out of the elevator and the bullets began to fly.

Akutagawa’s hand tightened around Atsushi’s wrist again and they ran. Bullets flew passed them as they weaved through cars. Cars Atsushi hadn’t noticed were there until Akutagawa decided to use them as cover. They were in a box of concrete with an opening at the far end. However between that opening and there were at least fifty to a hundred armed men.

“Here’s the plan,” Akutagawa said. “I’ll-”

“I hate it,” Atsushi said.

Akutagawa stared at him. “I didn’t even finish.”

“You’ll distract them while I make a break for the exit?” Atsushi asked. Akutagawa nodded
confirming his theory. “Not happening.”

Akutagawa rolled his eyes. “Fine, then.”

“We’re not killing all of them either,” Atsushi said.

“I wasn’t going to say that,” Akutagawa said. Atsushi raised an eyebrow.

The bullets stopped. Something clanked across the ground and Akutagawa jumped on top of Atsushi. A grenade went off. The force collided with the two of them and threw Atsushi backward. His body collided with the ground. Skin ripped off his arm as he skidded across the concrete. Atsushi bit his tongue to keep from crying out. A loud cough came from beside him. Atsushi’s breath hitched in his throat. Vomit was spread across the floor accompanied by a little blood. Akutagawa coughed again his hand gripping his stomach even tighter.

“Akutagawa?” Atsushi asked. He didn’t reply. Akutagawa swayed before collapsing. Panic swelled inside of him as he stared at his unconscious partner. He knew something was wrong, why couldn’t he do anything?

Bullets ricocheted off of the cars and Atsushi bolted towards Akutagawa. He scooped up his partner and dragged him behind the nearest vehicle. The first step was to breathe. Next step was to-was to-was to. The noise of every bullet echoed through his head as a symphony of bangs and clangs. His ears rang and he felt like his head was going to explode. He had to protect Akutagawa. If he couldn’t do that what was he worth? Blood thrummed in his veins. He was shaking again. He had to protect his partner. He had to protect Akutagawa. That man was all he had left. He had to protect him.

A small pain hit the side of his stomach. Atsushi blinked. The pain shot through his chest and through the rest of his body. A hand drifted towards his side where the pain originated. Warm liquid coated his hand. He peered down at his side. Crimson blood oozed from the wound. His head spun. Everything went dark.

~

Chuuya’s chest rose and sank steadily with every breath. His jaw was slack and his weight was fully pressed into Dazai. The man’s actions had surprised Dazai. He hadn’t imagined how heavily his presence would impact Chuuya. His old partner had almost seemed relaxed now that Dazai was there. For all of Chuuya’s talk about hating him, his presence had definitely comforted the other man. Dazai could blame Chuuya’s comfort due to not being alone anymore, but Dazai hoped it was different. He hoped it was more than that.

He shook his head. Nothing would ever come of that hope, it was better to stuff it down before it ended up hurting him. Or worse, hurting Chuuya. He shouldn’t have even shown need in defending Chuuya. He should have let the guards take his old partner, but every time he imagined Chuuya being taken away nothing, but rage twisted his stomach. He had protected Chuuya, but at what cost?

Despite not receiving food for what Dazai estimated to be twelve hours, he felt fine, it was the man in his arms he was worried about. Chuuya hadn’t woken up again yet. If he didn’t wake up soon, Dazai was going to have several more challenges ahead. If he did wake up, however, Chuuya would probably be hungry, and even if he wasn’t he would need to eat something. Their future did not look good. Dazai was going to have to start coming up with a way to get out on his own in case his
partner did not wake.

While his feeling about needing to go to the outskirts of Yokohama had been right, he wished his feeling hadn’t said where he needed to be was captured.

“They seriously made it out?” A guard’s voice echoed through the cell.

“Yeah, but apparently the mafia boy was injured and the tiger had to get both of them out,” A second voice answered.

His heart stopped. What? When had they been captured?

“To think it had only taken a day and we almost had them.” The first man grunted. “How did they manage to slip through our fingers?”

“I’m not sure but there’s a rumor the mafia member snuck in and nearly got out before collapsing. Then the tiger had to escape on his own.”

“If you must know the tiger boy suddenly fully transformed on us,” a third, elegant voice came in.

The others seemed to become flustered and quickly started apologizing. Calling the new appearance “sir” and other related titles.

“Don’t be worried, I simply ask you to watch where you’re talking.” The man said.

Dazai felt as their eyes turned towards his and Chuuya’s cell.

Dazai lightly set Chuuya onto the ground, took off his vest to prop up Chuuya’s head since his coat had been taken from him. The color of the coat surrounding his body had been a constant reminder of his old friend and the promise he had made. The promise to be better. Now that reminder had been taken from him. If he had the impulse to lean across the line of light back to the darkness he would have to resist it on his own. He had already nearly fallen across the line once while protecting Chuuya. He would have easily been able to escape his cell and wring the life out of the bodies of those who had dared to hurt his partner. That would have gone against everything he had tried to change in himself, and completely ruined his and Chuuya’s chances of escape.

Dazai took a deep breath and threaded his arms through the bars.

“I thought I sensed eyes this way,” Dazai said, his smile grew until he grinned ear to ear. He made sure to filter some of the rage for his partner into his eyes to make sure the people outside of the cell weren’t too comfortable with his appearance.

Each of them were dressed in all black, but only two of them had shotguns strapped to their backs. Those two were shorter and seemed concerned with his sudden appearance. However, a tall, pale, and slim man smiled at him without a sense of worry.

“Hello, Dazai Osamu,” the man said. He ran his fingers through the ends of his dark brown hair pulling it behind his ear. His hand ran over his mustache as he spoke. “I am Robert Lewis Stevenson, I have the official position of watching you and your comrade.”

“Comrade?” Dazai asked. “We’re not comrades.”

Stevenson frowned. “Merely friends than?”

“Not exactly,” Dazai said.
“Lovers?”

“Definitely not.”

“You are odd indeed,” he said. “You were so determined to protect him earlier. Why go through so much? Your lot seems like the kind who wouldn’t do anything for an acquaintance.”

“My lot?”

“The Port Mafia.” Silence filtered through the room. “You are a member, no? Stephen said you are one of the top ranks. You’ve just been undercover working at the Armed Detective Agency for the Port Mafia.”

Dazai couldn’t think. How did King not know? His processing abilities weren’t working very well. His thoughts wouldn’t come, so he did the only thing he could, he talked.

“How did you know?” Dazai asked. His voice wavered slightly as if worry began to seep into him. He didn’t register himself instinctively playing along.

Stevenson snickered. “So it is true. The ultimate infiltration. I assume only yourself and your boss were aware of this. You hurt everyone you knew in order to take down your enemies. You’ll end up betraying even more people.”

“And?” The corner up Dazai’s lip lifted into a small smile.

“And you’ll be a monster,” Stevenson said. His eyes slimmed and he looked almost sad.

“Monster? Do you know what King has done? Don’t’ pity me for being a monster when the man you follow is a demon.”

His eyes widened and hatred filtered into his enemies eyes. It may not have been intentional to play along with him, but that was okay, Dazai could play the villain easily enough.

“You know nothing of Stephen King,” the man hissed.

“You say that while looking passed the pain he’s brought upon so many?” Dazai asked.

“And what of the pains you’ve brought upon your comrades?” His voice began to rise.

“I have brought them pain,” Dazai said. “However every day some part of me regrets bringing that pain. Even though I know it was necessary for me to ever feel okay.”

“And destroying an entire organization is going to bring that false peace?”

Dazai chuckled. “Look at me, what am I going to do here? My pupils have nearly been taken into custody while I’m uselessly stuck here. What false peace can I have?”

“No man is useless while he has a friend (1),” Stevenson said. “That’s why I’m guarding you. Your attitude is far too at peace for someone locked up.”

Dazai shrugged. Stevenson’s eyes narrowed and scanned him up and down. “Are you trying to use an ability?” Dazai asked with a breathy laugh.

“possibly,” he said through gritted teeth.

“That won’t work.”
“Actually it will,” Dazai raises an eyebrow in question. “I had been using it. Besides you can only cancel abilities you have direct contact with or by touching the ability user. This ability you can’t touch.”

“So you’ve been reading my mind,” Dazai said. The man’s eyes widened.

“How-“

“And if I had to take a guess, you can only use your ability while you’re calm.”

A smile rested on Stevenson’s lips. “You were so close, but-“

“So then you can enter others minds while calm.” Once again Stevenson’s eyes widened. He took a step back. “I assume that ranges over a certain distance or as long as you know your target in some way. My guess is either knowing where they are or having an image of them. Perhaps both. You can also connect two people’s minds.” (2)

The man stared at him. “Who the hell are you?”

“Dazai Osamu,” he answered, “the one who can see through your tricks, and the man who’s going to bring your destruction.”

The man’s breathing increased speed. “Your threats are meaningless, you have nothing you can use against me.”

“You said it yourself as long as I have friends, I’m not useless,” Dazai said.

“If you think about it, you don’t have friends,” Stevenson said. “You have people you have betrayed, and those who you will betray. No one else.”

“Whatever you say I suppose,” Dazai said with a sigh he pulled himself away from the door and wandered towards Chuuya. “If I were you I’d start watching my own back and stop relying on others.”

“Is that a threat.”

“A warning.” Stevenson didn’t respond. The air remained still until feet echoed through the cells.

Dazai took in a deep gulp of air. Thanks to his confusion mixed with panic blanked. Hopefully, that kept Stevenson from being able to see the lie. Whether that was truly a good thing or not, he would find out in time. Until then, he could rest assured King wouldn’t try to use the agency as leverage.

As carefully as he could Dazai lifted Chuuya into his arms and leaned against the wall. He hadn’t slept for fear of King taking away his old partner, even though Dazai would wake up from any such movement. He took in a deep steady breath and closed his eyes.

“What you said,” a small cracked voice came from his arms. Dazai opened his eyes. Chuuya’s soft blue eyes stared up at him. He looked so tired, so pitiful, so much smaller than normal, and Dazai hated seeing him like this. Seeing him like he wasn’t the strong, brave man Dazai knew he was.

“What you said about still being, being part of the mafia,” Chuuya took a breath, “You were lying to him right?”

Dazai stared down at Chuuya. His eyes were wider than normal, they seemed brighter too. Hope, they were brimming with hope.
At that moment he only knew what he didn’t want to say, and what he did say wasn’t what he wanted. But the lie slipped from His lips before he could fully form how he wanted to answer.

“No, Chuuya,” His old partner had hope, and he couldn’t bear to watch that light extinguish. His chest twisted and his gut pulled away as he finished the sentence. “No, it wasn’t a lie.”

“Oh,” Chuuya’s voice was quieter. He smiled. “I missed you, Da-zai.” His eyes closed as sleep overtook him.

“I missed you too Chuuya,” his voice cracked. “I miss you.” Tears rose inside of him. His throat felt clogged. He forced the tears down and swallowed hard. He had to say this even if Chuuya couldn’t hear him. “I’m sorry.”

Chapter End Notes

1: Actual quote by Stevenson

2: Treasure Island: An ability that allows Stevenson to enter another person’s mind (mind-reading, dreams, etc.). Can also allow someone else he is touching to enter another’s mind. Only works when he is calm and when he knows what his target looks like.

I'm sorry.

But y'all now that's a half-felt apology, right?

Anyway, I'm so hyped that I've been writing this for a year already. It doesn't feel like it's been that long.

For some exciting news, I will be posting through July. I am confirming that. I have no clue about August (it's kind of out of my hands currently) but hopefully, I will. In July I will not be posting until the second half of the month just so all of you sort of now. Not that you need to but eh く(∩utilus)ふ

You can feel free to hit me up in the comments, tumblr and twitter

Also, have a great day, week, month, year, and lifetime.

Also also, I'm going to end this chapter by leaving you with this song
Chapter Notes

There are going to be “day: ?/1” within the text. FYI Day 1 is going to be starting from what happens in the last POV and going forward. For additional details see the endnotes.

This is the song that goes with the mood of the chapter :) SONG! :)))

Also, this is just the plain link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Kf-FIECN7M

HAVE FUN :)

Day: ?

Liquid oozed into Akutagawa's shirt and spread across his skin as strong fingers coiled around his shirt. His feet pushed against the ground and he tumbled forward. A liquid encased him immediately after he hit the ground. He pushed himself upright and stared down at the sea of blood that surrounded his waist. A hand yanked at the front of his bloodied shirt. He tried to pull away. He couldn’t breathe. The crimson surrounded him. He ripped the hand off his shirt and tried to find his way to the surface. Which way had he come from? His lungs burned. Hands grabbed him and dragged him further down. He needed air, oxygen. He needed to get to the surface. His vision went dark.

His eyes opened and he was standing in a dark haze. He could see nothing, but something could see him. He felt it’s gaze. Why? The voice was hoarse, and shivers rippled through his spine. Why big brother? Gin was in front of him. She stared at him with dark, hollow eyes, blood pouring down her face. Her skin was even paler than his and a hint of a smile rested on her lips. Why did you leave me behind, big brother? His gut turned. He hadn’t wanted to. He had wanted to save her. He wanted to save her. He tried to talk, to cry out to her, but the words died on his lips.

She took a step towards him, blood dripping down her arm. Her eyes reflected a hollow, black abyss as blood poured out and down her cheeks.

You shouldn’t have gone to him. Now I’m hurting because of you big brother. She took another step towards him. Akutagawa wanted to run, he wanted to dash to wherever Dazai was, he didn’t care if the older man hurt him, he just wanted to get away.

Where are you trying to go, big brother? Are you going to leave me behind again? Akutagawa tried to move his legs, but they were fast in place. Gin crept closer towards him. He looked down. Running did not seem like an option, his legs were melting.

A hand grabbed his throat. He gasped for air as he stumbled back and collapsed to the ground. His eyes quickly flickered to Gin's hollow ones. A bright red pool surrounded him. The liquid stung his eyes. Where was his sister? The sensation of her hand had left his throat. He still couldn’t breathe. He fought to rise to the surface of the thick blood. He flung his arms through the liquid but no matter how much higher he rose there was still no surface. Fire erupted in his lungs. He pulled harder and
faster hoping he would break to the surface. Darkness consumed him.

...  

Day: 1

Akutagawa gasped for air. His body flew forward and his chest slammed into some sort of restriction. Coughs sputtered from his mouth followed by a flurry of gasps.

"What the heck?" A high pitched voice squeaked. "Are you okay?"

Akutagawa’s eyes rested on Atsushi’s form clutching a wheel, a steering wheel. He met the other boy’s eyes before they darted back forward. Akutagawa was thrust back into his seat as the car lurched forward. Why was he in a car? And why did his leg hurt like hell? He looked down at his thigh. A cloth was wrapped firmly around his leg with a small towel underneath. A small red dot was steadily growing larger. That's why.

His eyes drifted to the front window. They were driving through the streets of Yokohama with no apparent destination. The car’s clock read 6:12. Just how long had he been out?

“What happened? Where are we?” Akutagawa asked.

Atsushi jumped and his head spun to look at Akutagawa. “I, um,” He began. A car honked and Atsushi jumped again. “Sorry.” His eyes focused on the road. His arms shook and he seemed double guess every move he tried to make. It was painful to watch.

“Pull over,” Akutagawa said.


Akutagawa looked straight at the side of his skull. “You don’t know how to drive a car,” he said through gritted teeth.

“No, I do!” Atsushi protested. “Well, I sort of do.” How had they not died? “I take taxis most of the time. Kunikida started teaching me but it’s difficult.”

Akutagawa took a deep breath and scanned their surrounding. Most of the curbs didn’t seem to be a good place to park their...truck? It was definitely a truck. As for where they were Akutagawa figured out on his own. They were in a part of the city that drew locals who were looking for a drink, which meant it wasn’t safe, but it was also the safest place for them to be.

“Take a left,” Akutagawa ordered.

“Wha-okay.” Atsushi started to turn.

“Signal.”

“Right.” The low sound clicked in rhythm and he slowed the car down. To slow but at least he wasn’t too fast.

“There,” Akutagawa pointed behind a small car parked by the curb. There was a lot of space between the car and the next so hopefully, Atsushi would be able to make it. “Slow down.” Atsushi
followed his instructions. He led him through the parking job as slowly as his sanity would allow. Atsushi completed the job after repositioning several times but succeeded nonetheless.

He took a deep breath and rested into the seat. Akutagawa wasn’t sure what he should ask the boy. He still hadn’t told him what had happened but was that a good idea to ask again? Maybe he should let Atsushi regain himself before asking.

“To be honest, I’m not completely sure,” Atsushi said. Akutagawa hated when he read his mind. The Jinko always seemed like he was completely unaware of it too. “About what happened I mean. I remember being shot in the stomach and then darkness. I’m assuming the tiger took over. When I woke up it was around five. I was lying on a sidewalk with you beside me. I’m not sure why the tiger saved both of us. But I think it did so, yeah.”

Akutagawa nodded slowly. All he could remember was his headaches returning. Collapsing down steps. Atsushi’s voice wondering if he was okay and a searing pain in his leg before he collapsed. But that still raised one question.

“Where did you get this car?” Akutagawa asked. Atsushi didn’t respond. The boy wouldn’t look at him either.

“I-I borrowed it,” he said.

“You mean you stole it,” Akutagawa said. He felt slightly impressed.

“No!” Atsushi replied. “I’m going to give it back, but I need it for a bit.”

Akutagawa chuckled and a smile tugged on the corner of his lip. Of course, he was, Akutagawa supposed eventually he could help him with that endeavor.

“Are you okay?” Atsushi asked.

Akutagawa snorted. “I can smile too.”

“I didn’t mean you couldn’t,” Atsushi explained, “I just, never thought you would...I guess.”

“Ah,” Akutagawa said. Atsushi’s cheeks grew vibrantly pink.

“Sorry,” he muttered.

“You don’t have to apologize,” Akutagawa said. He slowly chewed on his next words evaluating them several times. Why was he going to go through with them? “It was cute.” He felt Atsushi’s gaze latch onto him. Heat seeped into his face and he quickly looked out the window.

“W-what?” Atsushi squeaked.

“Nothing,” the vehicle fell silent. Why would he say that? He had thoroughly thought about his words, yet somehow he had thought they were a good idea. The Jinko hadn’t even been that cute, he wasn’t that cute. Adorable? Hell ye-no! No no no no! He needed to drown the feelings. It’s what he was known for. Turning emotions into nothing.

“We should find a place to stay,” Akutagawa said forcing his lips to stay in a thin line. “Do you have any idea where-why is your face so red?”

Atsushi stared out the front window. His cheeks were newly painted with bright red painted. “It’s fine, continue please;”
Shut them out. “Okay, do you know where the nearest hotel is?”

“I think I saw one a few blocks back,” Atsushi said.

“What was the street number?” Akutagawa asked slowly.

“I don’t know, why do you need to know?” Atsushi asked.

“It’s hard to explain,” Akutagawa said. It would only take about thirty seconds to explain it to the Jinko, in actuality, but he would rather have that time to find the right number. “Can I drive?”

Atsushi blinked. “Oh, sure.”

They switched seats and Akutagawa looked at the ignition. “Where did you learn to hotwire a car?”

“Dazai,” Atsushi said, “He said it was a skill that would come in handy. Little did I know he was having me practice on Kunikida’s car.”

Akutagawa held back a laugh and instead shook his head. “Your work is very interesting.”

“I have nearly died by my coworkers’ hands on many occasions,” Atsushi said.

The corner of Akutagawa’s lips lifted. “If they ever try to kill you again tell them I haven’t given them the right to. I’ll be the one to kill you.”

Atsushi’s eyes widened. “You’re still going to go on about that?”

“It’s my right,” Akutagawa said matter-of-factly.

Laughter erupted from Atsushi. Tears trickled down the other man’s cheeks and his hands clutched at his gut. Akutagawa began to pull out of their parking place while the Jinko was still laughing up his stomach. He transitioned his foot to the gas and a sharp pain shot through his leg and up to his hip. The laughter became little giggles and then pants.

“You okay?” Akutagawa asked.

“Yeah,” Atsushi rubbed his eyes. “I feel less stressed now thanks. That was really funny.”

“I could tell.”

“Akutagawa your leg,” Atsushi whispered suddenly.

Akutagawa quickly glanced at his wound before returning to the road. The blood had almost spread to the edges of the bandage. “Don’t worry.”

“Don’t worry?” Atsushi said, “Akutagawa you’re bleeding.”

“I’m not losing blood very fast,” Akutagawa said, “my heart should be able to compensate for dying blood cells as well as the blood loss until we reach some place where we can take care of it effectively.”

“If you say so,” Atsushi said quietly. “Oh, it was down that road, to the left.”

Akutagawa glanced at the sign. 632. That wouldn’t work. “I hope your fine with a bar or something,” Akutagawa muttered. They passed another street before 634 came into view. He thrust the wheel to the side and the car turned. The back end skidded against the concrete loosely behind them. Atsushi...
squeaked and grabbed Akutagawa’s arm.

He slid the car into the nearest parking place and stopped the engine. Akutagawa glanced out the window. The bar seemed to have two levels, the bricks on the outside of the building were chipped away, and a small sign in the window read: **Rooms for Rent**. A small group of men stumbled out of the building shoving each other violently, yet there were smiles on their lips and bottles in their hands.

“Wait until I get to your side of the car to climb out,” Akutagawa said.

“Why?” Atsushi asked.

“Trust me,” he opened the door without a response and walked to Atsushi’s door. He opened it and the younger man stepped out.

“I still don’t feel like that was necessary,” Atsushi said. He was an easy target. It was as simple as that. Akutagawa needed to establish right away that if anyone dared to move towards the to-kind-for-his-own-good man, there would be issues, that included a knife in whoever’s chest.

They entered the building, Atsushi trailing behind Akutagawa. Akutagawa signed for the room and they headed up to hopefully get some sleep. They entered the room and Atsushi collapsed on the bed.

“When you wake up don’t take off again,” Akutagawa said half-joking half-concerned Atsushi may try to sneak off.

“Sorry,” Atsushi muttered, “about that.” Akutagawa shrugged and locked the door. “And about what I said. I didn’t mean it.”

“It’s fine,” Akutagawa said.

“No, it's not.”

“Yes, it is.”

Atsushi sat straight up. “I told you that Dazai would never accept you and that you don’t have what it takes to make him. Also that you don’t do enough.”

“It’s fine.” He paused. “Besides, it was true.”

“No, it wasn’t!” Akutagawa checked outside the curtains and he made sure not to look at the other boy. “Okay, who is it who has saved me multiple time despite their own injury? And who was it who helped me run into a burning building to save someone they didn’t even know all that well? You push yourself harder than you should, and you always try help any way that you can. no matter how many times other people have knocked you down. Besides I’ve told you before. I think Dazai accepted you a long time ago.”

There his chest went again, twisting in weird ways, making his eyes water, and making his hands and lips tremble. A long silence spanned the room and went uninterrupted except for the ticking of a small clock. His mind grasped at any thoughts to distract himself. Their timing had luckily been perfect. That was a good thought to distract himself with. Hopefully, Dazai would catch on and find them. He just had to keep leaving the trail, but he had to start making the pieces more like crumbs rather than whole loaves of bread. It had been an okay start but now the smaller he could make the crumbs, the safer they would be. He would stick with the number 634 for now, but soon he would have to move onto smaller things. That way he and Atsushi would be safe, for a little while at least.
Three or four days had passed since news of Akutagawa and Atsushi had reached Dazai and Chuuya. It was near impossible for him to tell how long it had been but based on meals, three or four days seemed likely, but there was the possibility of a few more. Some relief had been given to him upon hearing that the young mafia member was alright but the thought of how quickly things could turn gnawed at Chuuya’s gut. What was more aggravating was how loud Dazai’s words were in Chuuya’s head. No Chuuya, I wasn’t lying. He said it, he said it himself, the whole thing had been set up by Mori. Dazai was still an executive and he had only “left” to infiltrate the Armed Detective Agency.

At least, that’s what one voice said. The other wouldn’t stop screaming about all the times Dazai had lied and how easy it would have been for him to let that little lie roll off his tongue. It was obvious Chuuya had needed some piece of mind, but the slice of the pie he had received had only grown into an even bigger controversy. His head and his heart were at it again.

His heart cried that Dazai was still one of them, while his head yelled that there was no way. His heart swelled at the thought of Dazai coming back and a sense of belonging returned. While his head produced a less than nice feeling and made him think he wasn’t deserving of even knowing Dazai. Which voice would anybody else he knew want to be the truth? Definitely not the one that made them feel worthless. Even if the most likely answer stared him in the face, he didn’t want to believe it. If people would call him naive for that, then hell he was. So what if he still hoped? It was his own damn fault if it ended up hurting him.

Chuuya knew what Kouyou would say. You shouldn't give yourself false hope. The pain you cause yourself will be worse than accepting the inevitable. Well, screw the inevitable. He still had some faith in his partner.

But he knew it was misled trust. That man had a reason to lie, but no reason to not lie. Chuuya had been anxious and in need of comfort. Wouldn’t he lie to Dazai if the man needed him to? Not that he would ever need Chuuya to do anything for him.

But at the same time, Dazai had already threatened people on his behalf. The man seemed desperate to protect him, and every second he held Chuuya in his arms never letting go. When meals came he simply propped the other boy against his chest and made sure Chuuya was eating.

He needed Chuuya for some plan of his, any form of affection he had shown Chuuya in the past was for that reason. Why would it be different now? He was just trying to win him over with pretty little lies. That way he could ensure Chuuya’s aid for when he needed him.

Why couldn’t he just make up his mind?

“What are you thinking about?” Dazai asked.

“Nothing,” Chuuya replied quickly. The other man quirked his brow. “Nothing of importance.”

“Anything you think about is of importance,” Dazai said.

There he went being such a smooth talker! Bull shit, absolute bull shit. He did sound very sweet and
sincere though... Absolute bull shit!

“Did I say something wrong?” Dazai asked.

“What makes you say that?”

“You glaring at me as if you’re trying to burn a hole through my skull.”

“It’s very possible I am trying to.”

“What did I do?”

It was what he didn’t do. No, it’s what he did, sort of. How could he explain that he was glaring at him because he thought he was a liar, but at the same time he thought he was telling the truth? Something’s are better left unsaid because attempting to explain things would be too difficult.

Clang! A metal tray slid under the door.

“Do you want to eat?” Dazai asked.

Chuuya hummed. “No, I don’t feel like it.”

“Chuuya,” Dazai’s voice lowered slightly, “you need to eat something. You’re not going to be able to regain your strength unless you eat.”

“Like hell, a chunk of bread and some form of a soup broth is going to help me regain my strength.”

“Well, it’s definitely doing something because you’re far peppier than when I first arrived.”

“That’s probably from the sleep and lack of torture, not the food.”

“It’s from all of them.”

“That doesn’t matter I’m not hungry.”

Dazai rolled his eyes and leaned over Chuuya. He dragged the tray back to them and shoved the piece of bread in Chuuya’s face.

“Eat.”

He pushed it away, “no.”

He set down the chunk of bread and glared at Chuuya. He raised the soup bowl to Chuuya’s face. “Eat,” he said again.

“No, I’m not hungry Dazai,” Chuuya insisted. The other man’s eyes narrowed.

“I’m not giving up,” he said firmly.

“Well shit, nor am I.”

“Chuuya~” Dazai whined. Dazai’s bottom lip jutted out and formed into a massive pout.

“Oh fine, damn it, just give the stupid soup thing.”

Dazai’s bottom lip retreated and the corners of his lips lifted. He handed Chuuya the bowl, and the redhead took several sips. The broth was room temp at best and it stuck to the sides of his throat as he forced down sip after sip. Chuuya slammed the bowl back onto the tray.
“Okay, I’m done, I drank half of it, are you happy?”

Dazai sighed, “I suppose.”

“Good, then I’m going back to sleep.” Dazai moved the tray and Chuuya rested his head on his shoulder. He laid there for barely more than a minute before the darkness enveloped him.

…

Day: 1

His seat vibrated and his head bumped up and down. Chuuya felt as if bags upon bags of sand had been poured into his limbs and he was being pulled down to the center of the earth. On top of that, his eyelids felt glued together. The more he tried to move, the more tired he felt. What didn’t make sense were the constant vibrations around him. He could feel that he was sitting upright and in some type of chair, but he couldn’t figure out why or where he might be. If someone had taken him out of his cell they would have had to get passed Dazai, which would have been impossible. Unless their food had been drugged. His body definitely felt like he had been asleep due to some sort of sleeping drug.

Chuuya’s body jarred violently and his head slammed back into a seat. He groaned and shakily lifted his hand to touch the back of his head.

“Backroads am I right?” Dazai sounded light and cheery as always. Wait, backroads? Chuuya rubbed his eyes and forced them open. Sure enough, he was on a road, in a car. “Seeing you randomly waking up in a car like this is giving me a strange sense of Deja Vous right now.”

“Really?” Chuuya asked his anger spread through his words. “Do you normally drug people in order to escape? And how the hell did you sneak it passed King?”

“I have my means,” Dazai said, “and in my defense-”

“No,” Chuuya said, “you don’t get a defense statement. You get to go straight to the execution, good for you.”

Dazai chuckled. “I’m glad you’re still up to poke at me.”

“I’m not poking, I’m slapping, I am bitch slapping,” Chuuya said. Dazai erupted. Laughter blew through the air and they swerved. “Road, road, road!” Dazai pulled them back into the correct lane. “Okay, I’m driving.”

“No you’re not, you’re injured.”

“Then stop trying to kill us!” Chuuya shouted, “I’m not committing a double suicide with you. Besides, if I’m driving I’ll actually know where we’re going.”

“Oh, I can tell you where we’re going,” Dazai said, “I mean it’s obvious, we’re going to find someplace to stay.”

Chuuya quirked an eyebrow. “If we’re finding a place to stay than why have we passed at least three hotels?”
“Because none of them have felt,” Dazai paused, “right.”

“Right?” Chuuya scoffed.

“If we pick the right hotel we might be able to find a lead on Akutagawa,” Dazai explained. “So I’m waiting for my gut to tell me, that’s the hotel!” Dazai turned the wheel suddenly. They narrowly escaped being hit by another car and a loud horn followed in their wake. Chuuya grabbed Dazai’s arm and the other man slid the car into a parking place behind a line of buildings.

“The hell?” Chuuya screamed.

“I had the feeling when the turn appeared,” Dazai said.

“I can see that, but we could have taken the time to make a U-turn, idiot.”

“Do you want to fall further behind?” Dazai asked.

Chuuya narrowed his brow. “Behind what?”

“King,” Dazai said, “there’s not a doubt in my mind there are people looking for Akutagawa and Atsushi right now. I don’t doubt Akutagawa is being careful, but I also don’t doubt that he’s leaving behind a trail. And you know as well as I, no matter how small the trail is, it’s still traceable.”

“I guess,” Chuuya said, “But it would have taken more time if we had hit the car.”

“If, Chuuya,” Dazai said, “but we didn’t hit it, meaning I had enough space.”

“You're insane.”

“Certifiably. I’m going to head inside, do you want to come with or remain in the car?” he asked.

“I’m going with you obviously, I’m not staying behind in case any of King’s underlings show up,” Chuuya said. He’d be a fool to stay behind, especially since he wasn’t sure if he could use his ability effectively.

Dazai opened his door and ran around the car to Chuuya’s. He opened the door and extended his hand. “Are you ready to go, beautiful?”

Chuuya’s heart thumped. “I’m going to punch you.”

“I don’t doubt that,” Dazai said. Chuuya sighed and accepted his hand. The other boy helped him out of the car. Chuuya tried to take a step and his legs immediately collapsed.

“I guess my muscles must have deteriorated more than I thought. Damn, this is going to be a pain,” Chuuya growled.

“It’s okay, I can help,” Dazai smiled.

Chuuya pushed as far away from him as he could. “I don’t like this side of you.”

“Why?” Dazai chuckled. “Am I too helpful?”

“Too nice,” Chuuya said.

Dazai frowned and slowly it turned into a pout. “I can be nice too.”

“You sure can,” Chuuya paused, “when you want something from someone.”
“What could I possibly get from you?” Dazai snickered. “You can barely move.”

“Now that’s the Dazai I’m more used to seeing,” Chuuya said. “No mercy.”

Dazai pouted and looked away from Chuuya. He refused to make eye contact. They wandered to the front of a tall hotel building and Dazai helped Chuuya inside. They reached the welcome desk and the woman sitting there looked up from her magazine. She rolled her eyes and set down the news.

“Why the role of the eyes? Long shift?” Chuuya asked.

“Nah,” she said, “there’s just always someone like you, every shift.”

“Someone like us?” Dazai asked.

“More accurately him,” she pointed at Chuuya, “either someone who looks like the shit was beaten out of them or someone who looks like they beat the shit out of someone. Like the girl who was here right before you, her boyfriend definitely isn’t a great person. Then there are just those weird guys like my last shift who look like secret agents or something who come in looking for information. So boys, single or double?”

“Doub-” Chuuya began.

“Seen anyone who looks like they beat the shit out of someone recently?” Dazai asked.

“Yeah, a few shifts ago there was a guy with bloodstains on his face and clothes, why do you want to know?”

“Did this guy have black hair and two long strands of hair on both sides of his face with white tips?”

“Why would I tell you?” Dazai slammed several ten thousand yen bills on the counter. The girl reached forward and grabbed the money.

“I seem to recall him looking like that, he was weird though, I gave him his key, he walked out the front door, and I didn’t see him for the rest of my shift.”

“What room was he in?”

“That could get me fired.”

Dazai handed her another stack of the bills. She quirked a brow and accepted them.

“I don’t know that answer off of the top of my head but I can look,” she sat forward and began to type into the computer sitting next to her. “Looks like room 634.”

“What time did he buy the room?”

“Approximately,” she leaned back in her chair and narrowed her brow, “6:34.”

Dazai tugged on Chuuya’s arm and lead him back towards the door. “Aren’t you at least going to rent a room!” The receptionist yelled after them.

They left the building and Chuuya tripped over his own feet. Dazai caught him. “I hate this,” he muttered.

Dazai snickered. “Don’t worry, there’s going to be more sitting because we’re going to be staying in the car at night. We need all the time we can get in order to catch up to King’s minions and to get ahead.”
“So the race begins?”

“Oh, Chuuya,” Dazai said in the way he always spoke when he was amused by something he knows but someone else doesn’t, “the race began before we escaped.”

Chapter End Notes

The new “Day” thing is because things are about to get jumbled with different POVs. The days will jump around and I'm labeling them so Y'all have some idea of how long it's been and where they're at and because where I am in writing this I realized I had no clue how long it had been so it was a good idea for every party involved. (•﹏•)

Anyway, I'm so happy you read my work.

Also, I'll be posting next month too, but not until a later in the month. I'm going to be away for the majority of the month so that's why I'll be posting later :P

Also, also, I'm recovering from a major cold so if something was a little off just let me know, and I'll see if I'm willing to fix it (◕‿◕✿)

Also, also, also, all of you are wonderful human being. I hope you have a great day, week, year, and life | (•◡•)| (❍ᴥ❍ʋ)

If you want to hit me up you can do so on my Twitter or tumblr or the comments below (づ。◕‿‿◕。)づ.
A Makeshift Team

Chapter Summary

You got some sskk, skk, and some Gin :)

Chapter Notes

What's up duck? I still have major jet lag woooooooooh!!!!! Don't know how well this is edited since I was falling asleep while trying to fix things but here goes nothing!

Parts are separated by: ~
Time gaps/dreams: ...

Music: For Part 3 and 1 if you want but mainly 3 For Part 2 and 4 For Part 2 and 4 yet again

Hope you enjoy :))))))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day: 2

Flames seethed through his stomach. He dug his fingers into his side, hoping the pressure would ease the pain. Curse his clumsiness. Never again would Akutagawa trust the corners of tables, or any other low pointy objects. When all of this was over, every table in his and Gin’s apartment were going to be round. He would make sure of it.

Normally he wouldn’t be as careless even in the middle of the night, so why was it harder to simply walk around now? His eyes took more time to adjust to the darkness than normal, and he couldn’t discern different noises as well. Why wasn’t his body working normally? At least Atsushi hadn’t woken up from his noise. His one fear had been that his profuse swearing would stir the other boy. Luckily, the tiger slept like a rock. Most nights, anyway. If the Jinko got up to go to the bathroom he wouldn’t fall back asleep for the rest of the night. Which was especially annoying because he wiggled and turned every few seconds and Akutagawa could barely get himself to sleep for even ten minutes on regular nights. He would like to have a room with two beds at least for one night, but it was too risky. If King was anywhere near finding them getting a two-bed room would raise attention. Besides, it would also extinguish the trail he had set up. If there was the slightest chance Dazai was trying to find them, he might need it.

The bed bounced and Akutagawa swore under his breath. The Jinko had awoken. Akutagawa grabbed a spare pillow and used it to block out any sound the boy made. He was so tired he had forgotten to immediately lock them in their room upon arriving. He had nearly killed three pedestrians while driving and didn’t care about staying vigilant enough to hear if someone was trying to break in. Nothing guaranteed they were safe, even though nothing had happened the previous night. Dazai would punch him if he found out about how carelessly he had been acting, but a switch in Akutagawa’s head had been flipped and he didn’t care. Dazai could go finally kill himself and
Akutagawa would be fine. He might actually be able to sleep at night without thinking of everything he might be doing wrong in that man’s eyes.

The sheets pulled and the blankets jostled. Damn Atsushi. A chill ran through Akutagawa’s spine as the makeshift pillow barrier that Atsushi had constructed was pulled away. Was he seriously going to do this again? The pillows were placed back into a wall only a few minutes later. If Atsushi couldn’t make up his mind he could just sleep on the floor. Or Akutagawa could sleep on the floor so the Jinko was more comfortable. Or he could kick the Jinko onto the floor and actually sleep for once. He had been through enough shit over the past...however long it had been! Didn’t he deserve at least one night? One night without a stupid cat. One night without nightmares. One night to sleep! Or was that too much to even ask?

The pillows were removed then replaced. Removed. Replaced. Removed. Replaced. Akutagawa’s gut tightened and flames seethed through his chest. Apparently, it was too much. The pain in his stomach was fading, but the anger boiling in his gut was only beginning. Removed. Replaced. Removed. Replaced. Removed. Replaced. Removed.

“Just make up your damn mind,” Akutagawa shouted. “Or just sleep on the floor.”

“S-sorry,” Atsushi stuttered. “I’ll just sleep on the floor.” He started to grab a pillow and move.

Akutagawa sighed, “You’re fine you can stay where you are.”

“A-are you sure?” Atsushi asked. “If I’m bothering you I can move.”

Akutagawa remained silent. Why had he even asked the man to move? If Atsushi said anything to Dazai the older man would be absolutely furious. Things were already bad enough and Akutagawa had had the stupidity to do something that would make it worse. Not that he was surprised. He was always the one to screw himself and everything else up.

“What’s wrong?” Atsushi asked.

Akutagawa flopped onto his back and looked at the boy. “Nothing, why?”

“You’re being very quiet,”

“I didn’t realize I should be loud while you’re trying to sleep.”

Atsushi’s eyes widened. “No! That’s not what I meant!”

“Settle down,” Akutagawa said. He rolled back over and shut his eyes. “I’m tired and I’m always a mess when I’m tired, so let’s just go to bed.” His sudden honesty shocked even himself. He was an utter mess because he was tired, but admitting that to Atsushi had not been an intent of his.

He was met with silence so deafening anyone would have thought the Jinko had suddenly died. However, Akutagawa could still feel energy buzzing around the tiger. Atsushi was wide awake. Akutagawa wasn’t going to get any sleep. Wait, it wasn’t just a bunch of energy, the tiger was actually buzzing, or shaking, shaking was the correct word.

“Hey, Akutagawa?” Atsushi whispered.

“Yeah,” Akutagawa said, forcing down his sigh.

“If everyone you know was about to die and you could only save one of them, who would you choose?”
His heart stopped. A large frog crouched in his throat. “What brought this up?”

“Curiosity,” Atsushi said quickly.

Akutagawa’s gut turned violently. He hated the thought of leaving the other two to die, but it was so obvious who he would choose. “Gin.”

“Oh,” Atsushi said, “I guess you have things planned out.”

“What’s wrong?” Akutagawa asked he rolled over to see Atsushi’s back to him.

“Nothing,” he said meekly, “really, it’s nothing.”

“Stop lying to me,” Akutagawa said.

“I’m not!” Atsushi flopped over to face him. “I mean, I guess I am, but I don’t like when you do that thing where you just feel free to read me like an open book.”

“I feel free to because you allow yourself to be an open book.”

“That’s not fair.”

“How so?”

“I never gave you permission to read me.”

Permission? Akutagawa snorted. How was he supposed to refrain from reading him when the Jinko made it far to easy? Having that expectation was what wasn’t fair. He could still try to help Atsushi, though. Even if the boy didn’t want him to read him, it was obvious he was torn on who he would choose if it came down to only one of his friends surviving.

“I have an easier choice,” Akutagawa said matter-of-factly. “If it comes down to that choice, which it won’t, you will have a far harder decision to make.”

“Okay,” Atsushi said. He didn’t seem to feel any better.

“I don’t know if this will make you feel any better, but I know Chuuya would be almost as indecisive as you if not more.”

“Really?” Atsushi asked, his voice perked up.

“Yeah, he cares far too much about everyone,” Akutagawa said. “You’re both too caring for your own good.”

“Okay, thanks, that does make me feel a little better.”

“What brought this up?” Akutagawa repeated.

“Why do you care?” Atsushi asked. Why was there almost pity in his voice?

“What?”

“I know you’re trying to help but are you just asking and pretending to care in order to impress Dazai in someway?”

Atsushi’s eyes were focused on the mattress. “I don’t know where the hell this is coming from.”
“You’ve only ever cared about impressing Dazai, if you’re trying to act like a good guy now, please stop.”

What? What? And what? Where the hell was this coming from? Did he seriously think he was trying to act good? He had literally yelled at him a few days ago for being reckless and running off to look at a stray cat. Yes, the stray had been cute, but that didn’t give him a right to disappear without warning. In no way had he mentally thought he should be nice to the Jinko.

“You want me to be the bad guy?” Akutagawa asked. He didn’t wait for a response before planting his foot firmly into Atsushi’s side. The tiger yelped as he tumbled off of the bed. He gripped his side and started to curl into himself.

Shit. Akutagawa hadn’t meant to kick him that hard. He hadn’t meant to kick him at all actually. Atsushi grabbed his pillow and pouted at Akutagawa before flopping onto the ground.

The pit of his stomach twisted and a large lump clogged his throat. What had happened? One minute Akutagawa was fed up and the next he was blinded by anger and Atsushi was on the ground. Water built up behind his eyes. He was fine. He rolled over so he wouldn’t have to look at the Jinko, and squeezed his eyes. His chest twisted and twisted until a thick knot sat on his lungs. Water bubbled up to the rim of his eyes but he forced his tears to not spill. He was fine. He wished the darkness would just envelop him, but it never did.

~

Day: 1

Waiting, the period of time in which someone must sit patiently until someone else shows up or something occurs. At least that’s how Gin would describe the pain of just sitting and eating all day. She was constantly more tired than usual and she could feel her strength fade with every passing day. So maybe it was the lack of strength or maybe it was the boredom, either way escaping had been the most fun she had had since before she was captured. Although she probably wouldn’t have succeeded without the uproar Dazai and Chuuya’s escape had caused.

Higuchi and she had been sitting around, doing nothing as normal when alarms blared through the building and alerts started raging. A large booming voice ordered everyone to rush to the third district prison to intercept the prisoners Osamu Dazai and Chuuya Nakahara.

Gin then waited about ten minutes before lockpicking the door open. Then she and Higuchi bolted out of that cell as fast as they possibly could. Thankfully, since they weren’t ability users everyone underestimated them, so Gin only had to knock out two people.

So there they were, running in a direction, hoping the exit would be at the end. Higuchi was already panting, and Gin couldn’t say her lungs and legs were faring any better. They passed several cells but no one looked familiar, in fact, only a few cells had anybody in them. Gin would have rescued all of them, but there was no way she could help all of them escape. She made a quiet promise to come back for them. They hurried down a flight of stairs and into the next hallway.

“Break?” Higuchi asked the word seemed to physically pain her. “Please?”

“Higuchi, if we stop now they’ll catch us,” Gin said. She glanced through a small window in a door. Wait, was that…? “Break time.”
Higuchi stopped immediately. She doubled over onto her knees as Gin rushed back several paces. She peeked through a small window carved out of a large metal door. Inside there were two people. One of them had looked like Tachihara, but now that she was looking closer it obviously wasn’t him. This guy’s hair was too orange and the brunette with him seemed quite clingy. No pretty girl would want to be clingy with Tachihara.

The boy hadn’t been Tachihara like she originally had thought, but why did he still seem so familiar? She knew for a fact she hadn’t met him, but where would she have seen him? A report maybe? But whose report would she have seen? Very few were threaded through to her unless they were from one of her underlings, and she was positive it hadn’t been one of them. So where?

“Hey Higuchi,” Gin called.

“Yeah,” she asked through deep breaths.

“Do you know this guy? Did you put him in a report or anything for Ryuu?”

Higuchi frowned and moved to look through the door’s window. “Yeah, he’s an agency member, Akutagawa and I faced him the first time we tried to capture the Jinko. His ability is to—well I’m not sure but he seems to be able to make solid projections and hide or maybe it’s illusions? I’m not certain. You probably saw him when you and the other Black Lizards attacked the agency.”

“Really?” Gin asked. Higuchi nodded. “So that means the agency has also been hit.” And if Ryuu was there he may have been kidnapped as well. Gin crouched and began work on the lock.

This is what she meant when she said people doubted her capability because she wasn’t an ability user. This lock was far more complicated than her and Higuchi’s had been. Click. Gin pulled as hard as she could and slowly managed to move the door. Why would anyone create a door that was heavier than a stack of ten sumo wrestlers?

“Who’s there?” The boy called out.

“Two very tired mafia members making an escape,” Gin replied through heavy breaths. “There was no point in hiding it after all. She finished opening the door and waved at the boy and girl. “Would you care to join us?”

He looked at the girl holding onto him. “Naomi?”

“Well, we aren’t staying here,” the girl said. “Come on big brother, you should at least have that much of a brain.” They were siblings, the girl was the younger sister with an older brother, and the sister was very clingy and seemed to force hugs and physical contact upon her brother. Gin felt some serious deja vu.

“The irony is so strong,” she muttered.

“What?” the boy asked.

“Nothing,” Gin said, “I’m Gin, this is Higuchi, I believe all of us encountered each other before.”

“I’m against them joining us,” Higuchi said.

“Your that girl who was with Akutagawa,” the boy hissed. His glare was filled with bloodlust.

A strong realization dawned on Gin. “Wait, you said they were the first attempt to get the Jinko?” Higuchi nodded. “Oh, so that girl is the agency member you shot in the back like twenty times, and
the boy tried to strangle you before Ryuu sort of impaled him?” She nodded again. “Splendid, shall we go?” The other three stared at her. “What?” Higuchi rolled her eyes and looked over at the boy and then back to Gin. “Look you three,” Gin continued, “all I want right now is to get out of this hell hole and eat a giant bowl of pasta. But until we push aside the bad blood and start moving our asses, that’s not gonna happen. And quite honestly I’m ninety percent certain there going to try to find us soon so we’re kind of on a time limit if you hadn’t noticed. For now, ignore the fact that we tried to kill each other at one point and let’s just get out of here, alright?”

Higuchi and the boy made eye contact, or glaring contact, Gin couldn’t really see.

“Sure thing,” Naomi said, “pasta sounds amazing right now.” She stood up and walked to the door her older brother quickly followed. “Shall we?”

“Thank you,” Gin said quickly before motioning them forward. Higuchi and Tanizaki only made one more attempt at glaring before all of them took off down the halls.

A new set of alarms went off a little afterwards, with a new announcement;

“The second district is now in lock down. Four prisoners have escaped, Agency members Junichiro Tanizaki and Naomi Tanizaki, along with Port Mafia Members Ichiyou Higuchi and Black Lizard Leader Gin. I repeat, the second district is now in lock down.”

Sure, mention the non ability users last, because they’re not a big threat. Gin was ready to strangle these people. Just because she didn’t have an ability didn’t mean she couldn’t kick there asses straight to the moon. If she tried hard enough she could kick there asses all the way to Mars. Sure their doubt gave her an element of surprise that was useful, but that didn’t make it piss her off any less.

Gin threw out her arms and brought the three others to a stop. Feet clattered against metal. There were a group of people coming up the flight of steps they probably needed to go down. Gin quickly looked around the hallway. If she could find an escape fast enough they’d make it.

“How well can each of you fit through a vent?” She asked.

“When would we have tried?” the boy asked.

“Well you’re about to,” She quickly moved to glance around the next corner. No one had emerged from the door yet. She could make this work. She quickly removed the vent's cover and motioned the others over.

“You do realize I can disguise us right?” the boy asked.

“Does your ability show any evidence that it’s being used?” Gin asked.

“Well, snow starts to fall, it’s called light snow.”

“Then they’ll know were here and search for us in this area. Instead of that happening and us eventually being found we’re going through the vents. Higuchi, you’re first.”

“What?” She squeaked. Gin waved her over. She slowly took a couple steps towards Gin and crouched. “I don’t think I’m going to fit.”

“You’ll be fine,” Gin said, it was a lot easier than it looked. Higuchi sighed and started to worm inside of the vent. Once she was inside Naomi followed. The pattering of feet came closer. “Alright, cover us.”
“But you said—” the boy began.

“I know what I said, but as long as we get in the vent fast enough we’ll be fine,” Gin said. Snow began to fall around them. The boy was next to enter the vents. The door swung open as he disappeared inside. Gin quickly followed as shouts came from the pack of enemies. Gin easily slipped into the vent and made sure to reattach the cover, before following the other three.

They managed to get out of the system with only one wrong turn. They ended up in a dead end so Gin was able to take over leading them through the system. The exit of the system sadly was still in the building, at least she thought it was, but they had managed to slip away from their pursuers.

Her feet collided with the ground. The walls were close to Gin, and once all of them were successfully inside the room her shoulders struggled to not run into the shelving and into the others. Brooms and mops hung along the walls and boxes of tissues and garbage bags filled the shelves along with other necessities, there was even a little food. Their storage closet wasn’t anything like what Gin would have imagined.

Creak! Why did the door have to be so loud? She peeked outside the door. She was shown a hallway. Doors dotted the wall every few paces with numbers screwed into them and an elevator was placed between two of them. An apartment building? Or a hotel? Both in one maybe? It’s either the same building or just connected to the one they had come from. Everything was very quiet, so Gin assumed it was a connected building, otherwise, there would be people running around.

Whatever it was it didn’t matter, at that moment they were safe. They decided to sit down for a bit and passed around some small bags of vending machine snack bags. The taste of snack food, her one joy in life had been given back to her.

“What’s your name?” Gin asked through a full mouth of food.

“Me?” The boy asked.

“You’re who I’m looking at, so I’d assume so,” she said.

“I’m Tanizaki Junichiro, what’s your name?”

“Gin,” she said simply. These two definitely didn’t need to know she was related the man who had nearly caused both of them to be killed.

“Tanizaki Naomi,” his little sister said, “just in case you didn’t catch it before.”

“I think you know mine, but I’m Ichiyou Higuchi,” Higuchi said.

They continued to talk as they ate as much as both of the Tanizaki’s would let them before their conscious got the better of them, and they forced all four of them to stop taking food. Gin would have gladly kept eating but they threatened to kick her out of the closet. So either she stopped, or she fought them for kingship over the closet and its inhabitants. She chose to still be accepted by their makeshift team.

After some time had passed, which included Tanizaki and Naomi taking a quick nap, they decided to send Gin and Tanizaki to the main floor to figure out where they were. Gin was very clear on the way down the elevator that Tanizaki should allow her to do the talking unless there’s need for him to speak. He didn’t reply so Gin hoped he agreed.

“Is there something wrong with your room ma’am?” A very bored woman asked. There was a computer to her right and she was holding a copy of the day’s magazine in her hands.
“Um, well you see, we would like to see a map of Yokohama, and it would be great if you could point out where we are on the map,” Gin said.

“Sure,” she pulled out a map from under her desk and used a red pen to circle an area on the map, “We’re about here.” She glanced at Tanizaki and leaned forward to whisper. “Is your boyfriend treating you alright? He didn’t give you any of those bruises on your face did he?”

“What?” Gin asked. Oh, she was under the impression Gin and Tanizaki we’re a couple. Gin could roll with this. “O-of course he’s treating me well.”

Gin shuddered. Someone else was coming. Gin grabbed the map off the welcome desk and pulled Tanizaki to the steps.

“You’re welcome,” the woman yelled after them.

The doors into the building slid open as Gin and Tanizaki slipped into the stairwell. They hurried up the steps. Neither of them spoke until they were at least a few floors up.

“What did that woman say to you?” Tanizaki asked.

“She asked if you were treating me right,” Tanizaki quirked his brow. “She probably thought we were a couple and you were maybe abusing me.”

“What?” Tanizaki screeched.

“Don’t freak out, she’s probably seen it enough times to where she feels obliged to at least ask,” Gin said. “Besides, you were standing next to me, and apparently I have some bruises on my face.”

He surveyed her and said. “Yeah, how did you get those?”

“ Probably from falling off the thing the people who kidnapped us dared to call a bed,” Gin said, “I fell a lot.”

They arrived in front of the closet and knocked. The door only cracked before it opened the rest of the way. They slipped inside and Gin immediately placed the map on the floor. The four of them crouched around it, and she pointed at the red circle.

“This is where we are,” Gin began, “the closest, and the best place to go is here.”

“What?” The three others said.

Higuchi looked at the map, and then back at Gin. “Um, Gin that’s a mall,” Higuchi said, “it’s completely open and close by, it will be the easiest place to find us.”

“And it will have the most witnesses,” Gin winked. “I doubt most people would stand by if three young women appeared to be getting kidnapped. Sorry Tanizaki, but you’ll be the least of other people’s concerns.”

He shrugged, “if Naomi’s fine, I’ll be fine.”

“I suppose that works,” Higuchi said hesitantly.

“Higuchi,” Gin said slowly, “you know my capability, and you know how my job works. I think I know how to hide.”

Higuchi bit her lip. Her eyelids closed and her chest raised before they fluttered back open and her
chest sank. “Alright, let’s go then.”

Naomi folded up the map for them and they wandered to the elevator. They made it to the bottom floor and hurried out the door before the lady, Gin and Tanizaki had talked to, could notice they were there. They slipped outside the building and ran across the street. They bolted down the sidewalk. Gin glanced behind them. Two people in black suits had spotted them and were following them. They had to make it to the mall before they caught up. Gin hoped there were a bunch of people there. Her gut told her it was the best place to go. Sometimes, however, her gut betrayed her. It had happened in the past it could be the case now. It had been more trustworthy than not, however, so she was willing to take the risk.

Gin lead them through the streets, making sure not to turn into any alleyways. If the people in suits caught them it would be better for them to be on a main street where there was the possibility of someone pulling over and helping them. A long, large building appeared around a corner and Gin sprinted towards it. The others groaned but picked up their speed as well.

Her legs burned and her lungs felt like they were collapsing on top of each other. Her breaths were quick and her head spun. They were almost there, then she could rest. They ran straight into the mall. Gin lead them to the center where they collapsed on the edge of a fountain. The people in black had disappeared. She thanked the stars they were fine for the time being.

Her lungs still burned, but at least she could breathe. She wanted to make a plan with the other three, but it felt as if a massive weight had been set in her throat and made talking nearly impossible. Luckily she didn’t have to.

“So I suppose our first order of business should be finding a source of income,” Higuchi said. Her voice sounded like it had been stretched into a thin streak of air. “Or at least a way to acquire food and water. Also some source of shelter. We’re kind of screwed until we can find shelter.”

All three of them looked at Gin. Why were they expecting her to know something? She shrugged, “I’ve got nothing. Why do I sound like a frog?”

“You sound like a cute frog,” Higuchi commented.

Gin’s eyes narrowed. She already knew everyone thought her voice was cute, but really? A cute frog? “Anyway our kidnappers took all of my extra cash.”

“I suppose we should find Dazai then,” Tanizaki sighed, “he’ll know what to do.”

“That would surely be easier,” Gin said, “but then we get rid of our chance of helping anyone.” All three of them narrowed their brows at once. “What advantage do we have over Dazai, Chuuya, and Akutagawa?”

“Akutagawa?” Tanizaki asked his voice raised.

“Apparently, he was never caught, so yeah, Akutagawa,” she would rather call him Ryuu, but that would seem a little too affectionate if they were just coworkers.

“What do you mean by advantage?” Higuchi said, “we have nothing on our side right now.”

“We’re underestimated,” Naomi said.

“Bingo,” Gin said. “Right now we’re the least of our kidnapper’s concerns. They’re probably going to focus on taking out the main players who have escaped, not the little pawns.”
“Okay, and?” Tanizaki said.

“Meaning we can do a whole bunch of things, and they won’t think it’s us. I’m sure they’ll assume it’s Dazai. We can start looking into them and freeing anyone who is unrightfully imprisoned. I noticed quite a few people who looked like civilians. Their staff may be comprised mainly of people who are being forced into submission. On top of that, if we come across any Armed Detective Agency ability users or Mafia members we can also help them out, under more cover than Dazai or Chuuya could acquire.”

“That’s great,” Higuchi said, “but where are we going to find money, actual clothing, food, water, and shelter?”

“Easy,” Gin said, “there’s a place I know by the back of my hand that’s free of any charge when it comes to shelter. First come first serve as they say.”

“Where is this?” Naomi asked.

Gin snickered, “the slums.”

~

Day: 3

Akutagawa read each text through again and again. He scrolled through all of the texts Gin and him had sent each other as far back as his phone remembered. There was never anything else for him to do while he stood keeping watch. The previous night had been an absolute disaster. The two men had ignored each other the entire day and when night came Atsushi collapsed on the bed. Akutagawa remained standing and was still standing. The only thing he had to calm himself, were all the small things Gin would randomly text.

Something about a cat or a stupid dog. Maybe something about a dumb move Tachihara pulled, or what she was craving for dinner. She often sent random jokes which seemed more funny, looking back through them. Whenever he had been working he often thought of them as annoying, but at that moment he was glad his sister had sent so many things even though he would rarely respond.

He reached the end and read the last text. I love you! It was the last thing she had sent him. He had seen it when he was heading to the main office building and hadn’t felt a need to respond. Then King attacked and now he couldn’t respond in case his phone was tracked. He shouldn’t even have a phone, but he couldn’t get rid of it. Even if Gin escaped she wouldn’t call him, it would be stupid too, yet he still couldn’t get rid of the phone.

“You should sleep,” Atsushi’s voice broke through his mind like a bullet through its target. The first words out of the Jinko’s mouth all day, and they were about Akutagawa’s well-being. He was truly unbelievable.

“I’m fine,” Akutagawa said, “If I need to sleep I can do it here.” Besides, he doubted he could sleep even if he tried.

Atsushi quirked a brow. “While standing?”

“Yes,” Akutagawa said. Hopefully, the Jinko would shut up, but maybe that was too much to hope.
“Look,” Atsushi began, “Last night I was a jerk and you were a jerk back. Let’s move on and sleep because you look like a zombie.”

Their eyes locked together. Akutagawa rolled his and moved towards the bed. He wasn’t going to deal with Atsushi arguing with him. He closed his eyes and the only thing he could remember was Gin telling him to leave her behind.

…

There was darkness. A pool of blood spread out in every direction as far as he could see. This time, the pool wasn’t rising, it was staying at the same level, and nothing seemed to be moving towards him. A sharp pain plunged into Akutagawa’s spine. He stumbled forward. Coughs sputtered out of his mouth, blood spilling out every few. His knees gave out from under him. Blood drizzled down his back and seeped into his shirt. He coughed and blood flowed out of his lips. He forced his body to turn around.

Gin stood behind him, a wide empty smile on her lips. Her eyes were black voids again with blood spilling down her face. Her entire body was covered in blood and her hair was covered in dried splotches.

*Why did you leave me to die, big brother?* His back stung as her words seemed to burn into the blade. *They hurt me. They tortured me. They touched me. If you had only been strong enough you would have saved me in time. If you had left the tiger behind, you would have saved me. It’s your fault.* Her skin began to droop like melting plastic, and slowly fell. Her voice lowered with every second that passed. *It’s your fault. It’s your fault. It’s your fault.* Her entire body began to melt condensing in on itself. A pool of what looked like skin colored gel, formed as she collapsed. Akutagawa’s stomach rose into his throat and he closed his eyes as he began to heave.

…

Akutagawa sat straight up and tumbled off of the side of the bed. His arms and legs were heavy as he fumbled his way into the bathroom and puked. His entire body trembled as he heaved again and again into the toilet. At that rate, he was going to wake up the tiger, and he did not want the Jinko to see him like this. He didn’t want to even feel like this, this weak and pathetic. It had been one stupid dream, yet every time he vomited tears fell from his eyes. They came either from the pain of his stomach or the pain of his knotting chest.

What if she was hurt? What if they had hurt her? What if it was because he had rescued Atsushi instead of joining King? What if she was dead and it was his damn fault?

An image of her flashed through his head. Bile rose through his throat and poured into the bowl. Damn, he was pathetic.

“Akutagawa?” A small voice asked from the doorway. The Jinko staying asleep had been too much to ask. Every power in the world really did hate Akutagawa.

He puked again. The Jinko crouching down next to him. He went to puke again but nothing came
up. He coughed violently and felt like his chest as it shredded to pieces. A hand lightly touched Akutagawa’s back and started to rub in small circles. He kept gagging, but nothing else would come. There was nothing left for his stomach to release.

“Akutagawa your trembling,” Atsushi said lightly. He hadn’t even noticed how hard he was shaking. He felt like a black hole was consuming him and his body would not stop shaking no matter how many attempts he made to control it. His head felt like there was no light for him to search for anymore, and his entire body felt like it was being sucked into the earth.

Atsushi wrapped an arm around him and brought him into a hug. He was so damn weak. Why did he even try to live anymore? He obviously didn’t have what it took without being bothersome to others. He was one big fucking burden.

“Are you sick?” Atsushi asked. His thumb rubbed smoothly against Akutagawa’s shoulder.

Akutagawa shook his head. “Bad dream?” He nodded. “What did you dream about?”

Akutagawa shook his head again. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“I can’t do anything to help you if you don’t try to tell me what’s happening,” Atsushi said.

“I don’t need your help,” Akutagawa snapped, “I’m fine. I don’t need help from someone who can’t cooperate with someone else who’s in the same damn situation for a few fucking days.”

Atsushi glared down at him. “I’m not cooperating? I promise you I will cooperate with you but you have to let me help you.”

“I said I don’t need your help.” Akutagawa pushed on his chest. Atsushi let go of him and Akutagawa immediately collapsed to the side. He tried to raise himself up but his arms wouldn’t work.

Atsushi sighed and helped him sit up. When it was obvious he couldn’t sit on his own Atsushi pulled him into a side hug. “This is the problem Akutagawa. I know I screw things up a lot, but you never let me help you, and I feel like you don’t trust me. Whether it’s driving a car, given that I am bad at it, or just tell me why we’re doing what we’re doing. I know there’s a risk of King overhearing and finding out, but as far as we’re aware of he has no clue where we are. That’s why I don’t know why you’re keeping one hundred percent of everything to yourself. You even tell me to stay in the truck when you go to buy food. Akutagawa, if anyone is not cooperating it’s you. Dazai put us on a team for reason. And that’s so we have each other’s backs not just so you can order me around and do everything for me. He’s not expecting you to do everything. He’s expecting you to work with me.”

Oh. That’s why he had been getting frustrated with Akutagawa lately. That also explained the hostile behavior from the previous night. So, yes, he had been keeping a lot from Atsushi. Did he have to tell the other boy every reason for what he was deciding to do though? Or could he just tell him some of it?

“You don’t have to tell me everything tonight, but I’d at least like to try to help you with whatever you dreamed of in anyway I can,” Atsushi said. Akutagawa hated when he said things as if he was reading his mind. Even though the boy wasn’t doing it consciously, there was still a possibility he was doing it without really thinking.

“Fine,” Akutagawa muttered. He closed his eyes and leaned further into Atsushi’s arm. The Jinko pulled him fully into his arms and Akutagawa opened his eyes. “My dream was about Gin, and what happened to her was gross. I don’t want to go into it, but what really got to me was,” he paused,
“what if King hurt her? What if he touched her in another way? What if he did something to her because I couldn’t get there? What if it’s my fault if something happened to her? I had a chance where I might have been able to help her, but my head seemed to go on autopilot and the chance slipped by. If she has been hurt since then it’s my fault and-”

“Does she love you?” Atsushi asked.

“What?” Akutagawa asked. “I don’t know, but what if she thinks that it’s my fault she was hurt and-”

“Akutagawa,” Atsushi said, “Does she love you? Does your sister love you?”

“How did you know she’s my sister?” Akutagawa asked.

“That doesn’t matter right now,” Atsushi said, “does she love you?”

“I don’t-” I love you. The last thing she had texted him. “Yes,” he said, “yes she does.”

“Then if something did happen, she won’t blame you,” Atsushi said, “it’s not your fault, and if she loves you she won’t think it is, it will never even cross her mind. Even if you tell her you had a chance, she won’t blame you. If she loves you, you fretting so much over her is all she’ll need to know you cared about her. She won’t care if you had a chance because she cares about you.”

The knot in his chest loosened and fresh tears poured down his cheeks. For once he wasn’t crying from pain. This time, he was crying from relief instead. Silence fell between them but Akutagawa was comfortable in it.

“We should go to bed,” Atsushi said his words cut through the silence, “You can tell me more tomorrow, alright.”

Akutagawa agreed and Atsushi helped him over to bed. He told Akutagawa not to worry about his vomit and that he would take care of it. Akutagawa didn’t think twice before falling asleep. This time his sleep was quiet and peaceful.

~

Day: 3

A large groan echoed through the tiny car. Chuuya had slept in that seat all night. Not only was it stiff, but extremely uncomfortable. He had awoken several times and it had taken forever for him to get comfortable enough to fall back asleep. They paid for a parking place all night, it was completely out in the open, but like Dazai had told him a thousand times, it’s easier to hide in plain sight than to actually hide. Except for Akutagawa, it seemed. That boy did one hell of a job hiding. Dazai was even having difficulty. The first hotel was easy to find. There was someone who had signed into a small lodging by all the bars at 6:34 on road 634. But then things became far more complicated. They had found a link to three other hotels where someone had gotten a room at 6:34. Two were at night and one was in the morning. They had eliminated the morning because it was unlikely they wouldn’t be on the move in the morning, and because it was at that hotel one night costed someone enough to sell their whole family into slavery and still have their limbs ripped off of their body in order to sell them to the black market.
Anyway, his point was that it was to damn early for Dazai to be waking him up when the sun wasn’t even up, and he had been tortured for probably weeks. He had no idea how long it had actually been, but it had definitely felt like weeks. Then again, he had felt like a week had passed when Gin had told him only a couple days had passed. He should probably find out how long he had been in there for. If the other man would even answer him with a straightforward, understandable answer.

“Chuuya~” Dazai whined.

Chuuya groaned again and forced his eyes opened. He felt like chains were binding him to the chair and refused to let him move. He was only twenty-two and still felt too old for this. How did Hirotsu manage?

“Finally,” Dazai said. “Do any of these names look familiar to you?”

“What?” Chuuya growled. “You woke me up to ask me the same damn question? I told you last night I don’t know~” Chuuya stopped. The names were different than the previous night. In fact, it was a long list of them. “What did you do?”

Dazai smiled. Fire flashed behind his eyes. He was having fun with this. Akutagawa was going to be ecstatic once Chuuya told him Dazai had a thrill from their search. “I’m glad you asked,” he said. “I figured there was no way I was going to really figure out which identity was false without doing extensive digging. It would have taken me days to do so since the Mafia is always so thorough about setting up fake identities. Also, I had a feeling that neither of those identities was false but if that was the case where had he gone? So I used this map to set up a radius of 643 meters in every direction.” Chuuya took the map from him. The circles around the building were drawn exactly at 643 meters. “Then I noticed there was a thin line between both locations where the radii almost touched. So I investigated the area further and found a small drive-in motel. There was no one signed in at 6:43, however, it was easy to figure out the time it would have taken them to reach the motel and I averaged out how long they’d wait. The list in front of you is the names after 3 PM. I figured they’d sign in anytime after that. So do any of the names look familiar?”

Wow. He did all of this from where they had ended the previous day in...four hours? Chuuya had only slept for around four hours since the last time he awoke. Not that he was surprised, Dazai always did things that would take normal people forever in more than half the amount of time. Half-forever? It didn’t matter. What mattered was he was supposed to search through a list of names over a long period of time and find one name that might be Akutagawa? Were they literally going to follow a might trail? Was he supposed to help with this “might” trail on six? Yeah, six hours of sleep total. Given that was better than any other times he had slept, but still. How was he supposed to look through this list?

Chuuya groaned and slowly started to scroll through. Wait, “why three?” He asked.

“You’re thinking six right?” Dazai asked. Chuuya nodded. “Well, actually the list is composed of people during all multiples of 3. Because the two lowest numbers times together to equal six is three and two I figured since three was already part of the other number I should do all multiples of three just in case.”

“Okay,” Chuuya muttered. He slowly read each name. He recognized a few names, but they didn’t ring any bells he needed to pay attention to. At least they weren’t related to Ryuunosuke. One of them reminded him of Gin but she was still trapped by King. Unless she had escaped, but it was unlikely. The motel was close to slums, so it would make sense if she was there but...No he needed to find Akutagawa, he doubted Gin had escaped on her own. His priority was Akutagawa. Besides these dates were from the night before. Chuuya looked over the computer. It definitely seemed new, which lead him to believe...
“Did you steal the computer?” Chuuya asked.

Dazai chuckled. “Because I’m going to use a stolen computer to hack into anything.” He paused. “Yes, yes I did.”

Chuuya snickered, “It’s not smart to hack into security systems with a stolen computer Dazai.”

“I had no idea Chuuya,” Dazai replied flatly. Silence filled the car for a couple more minutes as he started to look through the names again.

“What were the names we were following?” Chuuya asked.

“Well, the one I feel is the most reliable was something Haruka,” Dazai said, “if I trained him at all, the last name won’t matter.”

Chuuya pressed a couple buttons on the computer and typed in the name. “There are two Haruka’s who stayed the night.”

Dazai leaned over. “Can you hack into the hotel’s database and search for the same two Haruka’s until one disappears? Our times in the parking meter is almost up, so we need to move. I don’t want to spend any more money to stay here.”

Chuuya agreed. Dazai pulled out of their parking place as Chuuya started searching for the two Haruka’s. He set up multiple tabs with multiple different hotels and tracked each one separately. He only took a break for a quick breakfast, and before he knew it Dazai pulled into a small diner for lunch. Dazai didn’t say anything at first while Chuuya typed furiously into the computer to stay ahead of the firewalls. Once his typing died down, however, the other man spoke.

“Are you at a point where you can stop so both of us can go in, or do you just want me to bring something out to you?”

Chuuya grunted. “You’ll probably just bring me a garbage bag. So yes I am.”

Dazai ran over to the other side of the car to help Chuuya, but he shoved the older man away. He wanted to try to get up on his own. Chuuya used the door as support as he pushed out of his seat and managed to stand. When he took a step forward without support, however, he fell. Dazai caught him and helped him upright. The other man locked the car and helped Chuuya into the diner.

In order to not look like the walking dead, Chuuya threaded his arm through Dazai’s in order for it to look, half-way normal. Not that anyone was expecting a gay couple to openly waltz into a diner but hopefully no one would be an ass about it since it wasn’t even real.

They took two seats at the bar and Dazai ordered them sandwiches. Chuuya didn’t have to ask Dazai to know there money was stolen. Where he got it from didn’t matter, but hopefully, he hadn’t robbed a store. There are security cameras in shops, and they didn’t need the police after them as well. However, if Chuuya could choose who was after them he would much rather have the police than King.

When Chuuya had first found out King had been their captor, everything that happened suddenly made sense. From how they knew about the jump drive, to everything else. Except for why he seemed so hell-bent on finding Akutagawa. Given he was the only mafia member who had escaped King, but it still didn’t sit right with Chuuya. There was a voice in the back of his head that said it had something to do with stupid Dazai. So he wanted to ask the other man but wasn’t sure if he should. He had told him what King had asked him already, but he hadn’t told Dazai how the jump drive was barely mentioned and how Akutagawa seemed to be their main focus. Wait, what if they
knew? No, there was no way. No one in the mafia but Chuuya knew. Not even Mori or Akutagawa. So there was no possibility of King knowing.

“So,” Dazai said, “where exactly did you hide the jump drive? I’ve thought about it a million times but I’m trusting that you’re not stupid enough to hide it in your own apartment or Kouyou’s.”

“You don’t need to know,” Chuuya said. “If Kouyou doesn’t know, you don’t get to.”

“Harsh,” Dazai said. “I’m simply worried.”

“There is no reason to be,” Chuuya said, “I guarantee King won’t figure it out.”

“Are you sure?” Dazai asked.

“I’m positive.”

“If we need to go grab it for safety sake we can,” Dazai said, “that jump drive is the only chance the mafia has to be restarted. If you want to grab it we can.”

“It is perfectly safe where it is,” Chuuya said, “We need to find Akutagawa, he’s our top priority.”

“As an executive, I would think securing the jump drive would be your main focus, but I suppose I shouldn’t leave Atsushi to suffer much longer, but you don’t seem very convinced.”

“Atsushi?” Chuuya’s heart stopped. He hissed, “the Jinko is with Akutagawa?”

“Yeah, I thought I told you.”

“No, you didn’t,” Chuuya forced himself to breathe. “I hope the kid’s okay and that he’s in one piece by the time we find them.”

“He’ll be fine,” Dazai said, “More importantly, you don’t believe the jump drive is safe.”

“I just told you it is.”

“You’re lying.”

Chuuya hissed like a cat. He hated when Dazai read him. If he couldn’t get around Dazai knowing the jump drive wasn’t entirely safe that was fine, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t have fun with it. “It’s halfway safe.”

“So King might find it.”

“No, there is absolutely no chance King will find it.”

Dazai narrowed his brow. “Okay, now I’m confused because as far as I’m aware of you’re not lying.”

“I’m not.”

“The hell?” Dazai’s head was based around logic and facts, everything had a connection to something else and without knowing where the jump drive was it was practically impossible for him to piece it together. That’s what Chuuya was betting on. If Dazai was able to figure out where it was hidden, King could too. Knowing Dazai couldn’t figure out lifted a huge weight off of Chuuya’s chest.
The cook called out their order and set two large, meat loaded, sandwiches in front of them. Thick food, hopefully, Chuuya could make it through at least half. It would be even better if he could eat all of it, but with the way, his stomach already wanted to reject the contents it was about to be given that was unlikely.

A bell attached to the top of the door rang. Chuuya took a bite of the sandwich and forced it down his throat. Damn, it hurt.

“Two specials,” a familiar voice said.

Shit. Dazai leaned back slightly to look at the two people who had entered. Chuuya and he made eye contact. Yep, it was definitely Stevenson. Chuuya glanced over his shoulder. There was a shorter man with him. His mustache was greyed, and Chuuya could only see a little bit of grey hair peeking out from under his what kind of hat was that? A deerstalker? He wore a nice, well-fitted grey suit with a tight tie and slacks. He nodded at the cook with a nice smile. The man leaned over to Stevenson and whispered something to him. The younger man nodded and the other pulled out a pipe before leaving the building.

Once he was gone, Stevenson whipped his head in Dazai and Chuuya’s direction. They slouched down faster than a cheetah running for its life. There was a small clattering before Stevenson must have sat down at the bar and ordered a drink.

When Chuuya leaned back to look at Stevenson again, his eyes were closed and his breathing was so relaxed he seemed to be asleep.

“He must be using his ability,” Dazai mumbled.

His eyes opened, and Chuuya slouched down again before Stevenson could see him. Thank the stars a rowdy bunch of men had decided to hit up the diner with the cheapest beer imaginable to get drunk before returning to work. Otherwise, Stevenson would have seen them by now. The bell chimed again and the older man walked through the door. Stevenson motioned him over.

“They know we’re here,” Dazai whispered. “Do you think you can use your ability?”

Chuuya considered the question for only a moment. “If you’re fine with me fainting and the possibility of Tainted taking over, yes.”

“So no,” Dazai said, “only use your ability if you’re a hundred percent sure I need you to.”

Chuuya nodded. This wasn’t good. Dazai was supposed to support, while Chuuya was offense, having support play offense against two people with an offense who couldn’t even support was bad. They were royally screwed if Dazai couldn’t get the jump on them.

Nothing happened. They didn’t move, and neither did their opponents. At first, Chuuya felt like he had to be on guard, but with every minute that passed, he relaxed more and more. Finally, he didn’t care as much and continued to eat his food. Every bite hurt, but it was actual food instead of, who knows what. Most of the food he had been given was a complete mystery as to what was in it. He wouldn’t be surprised if half of what he had eaten wasn’t supposed to be eaten.

Chuuya only managed to eat about a quarter before his stomach refused to consume anything else and his throat throbbed. There was movement on the other end of the bar. Dazai shifted in his seat. He stood up so fast Chuuya could hardly catch the movement. He spun around on his stool so he could at least see what their enemies were doing. Both men were standing and facing the two of them. Stevenson had a gun trained on Dazai.
“Put that away Robert,” the older man said. “We don’t need to cause the people here to be more concerned than they already are.” Stevenson did as he was told. “Dazai Osamu, it’s a pleasure to finally see the man that can drive Stephen up the wall. You’ve really made a mark in King’s head.”

“What does King want with Akutagawa?” Dazai asked.

A murmur flew through the people in the shop. “Perhaps we should talk outside, your pupil’s name really does seem to unsettle these people.”

“I can see what King’s trying to do to him,” Dazai said completely ignoring the older man’s suggestion.

“You see, but you do not observe,” he said.

Dazai continued, “King is a deceitful demon, whatever he wants with Akutagawa is only going to hurt him, that’s a fact.” Why was Dazai getting so tense so quickly? Just talking about King seemed to be setting him on edge. Chuuya had been right beside Dazai last time they saw King and he hated him just as much as Dazai did, but this was a whole new level of Dazai acting weird. He normally wouldn’t get so tense. What was wrong with him?

“There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact,” the man said.

“Who are you?” Chuuya asked before Dazai could say anything.

“Arthur Conan Doyle,” he said, “may I suggest once more that we talk outside? I’m not looking for a fight.”

“We can’t trust these people not to attack Arthur,” Stevenson said.

“Stop being so high strung,” Doyle said, “you’re useless when you’re anxious.”

Chuuya snorted. If they weren’t on opposite sides of this fight Chuuya might like Doyle, but since he was one of the people who was alright torturing him there was more hate than friendship. It was obvious Doyle didn’t want to talk in here in case a fight broke out and it put the people here in the way. At least the foreigner had some dignity.

“Fine,” Chuuya said, “we’ll gladly talk outside.”

“Chuuya,” Dazai said in a deep condescending voice.

No, this man was not controlling his life. “Shut up Dazai and make a sign of agreement.”

Dazai let out an overdramatic sigh. “I suppose that’s better than being in here.”

Stevenson kept his eyes on them as the four men left the building. Chuuya kept Dazai’s shirt in a tight ball in his hand. He tried to hide the fact that he needed the man to walk, but he wouldn’t have been surprised if Doyle had noticed with the number of times he glanced at them. Once they were outside Chuuya leaned against a car and he placed a hand on his hip. He might as well act like he wasn’t about to fall over. The more he thought about having to stand up, the more his legs shook, and the more he felt like he was about to fall over.

“If you wanted to come out here to fight us get on with it,” he said. At least if they really wanted to fight he’d have places to hide.

“I didn’t ask to come out here to fight you,” Doyle replied calmly.
“Of course you didn’t, neither of you have fighting abilities,” Dazai said.

A smile pulled on the corner of Doyle’s lips. Of course, Dazai knew that. Why wouldn’t he know what kind of ability this guy had? He’s Dazai fucking Osamu and he knows everything because he’s a damn know it all.

“I would suspect nothing less from the demon prodigy,” Doyle said, “and you call Stephen, or King as you say, a demon.”

“Us demons don’t tend to get along,” Dazai said, “I assume your ability has something to do with healing or something close range?”

Doyle smiled, “my ability is A Study In Scarlet. I can remove poison from people or infect them with it with a touch of my hand. Hence why I tend to wear gloves as a safety precaution.” He waved a gloved hand in front of them.

Ding. Ding. Doyle reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone. He quirked his brow. “Excuse me,” he answered the phone and took a few steps away from them. None of them spoke as Doyle listened. Several minutes passed before he hung up the phone and turned back to them. “New orders, Stevenson,” He leaned into the younger boy and whispered something to him. “Alright Osamu,” he said once he pulled away. “You wished to know what we want with Akutagawa and I don’t believe you’ll let us leave until we tell you.” Dazai shrugged. “In short, we want to save him from you. It’s obvious he is hurting and you’re not doing anything about it you’re just making it worse. So we’re going to help him. The way I saved King we will save that lost boy. Good day.” He nodded in Chuuya’s direction and turned to leave.

Chuuya looked at Dazai. Why wasn’t he saying anything? What did Doyle mean about him not doing anything about Akutagawa’s hurt? And what was this about him making it worse? Even if what he said was true Dazai would normally try to learn more wouldn’t he? Why wasn’t he saying anything?

“Akutagawa is far stronger than you realize,” Dazai said firmly, “he doesn’t need anyone to save him. He may want someone to but he can save himself.”

Doyle turned back to him. “Why don’t you try telling him that and see if he feels the same way. That boy has pain far beyond what you can see. You say King’s tactics are devilish, but when you faced him before all he ever wanted to do was help you. So now we’re back trying to help someone else. Sure King has other motives, and so does everyone else. However, I am here to help that boy, no matter what form it’s in. Good day, Dazai Osamu.” He lead Stevenson away and didn’t glance back at them.

Dazai didn’t say anything as he walked passed Chuuya and to their car. “What was he saying about King trying to help you?” Chuuya asked.

“We need to find a different location, they may try to send people our way,” Dazai said.

Chuuya gritted his teeth. “Answer my question Dazai, I want to know what he meant.”

“If we don’t move there’s a chance they’ll send people to detain us.”

“Dazai Osamu I have a right to know!” Chuuya screamed.

Silence. “Chuuuya~ we need to leave, get in the car.”

In any other situation, Chuuya would refuse and tell Dazai he wasn’t moving without an answer.
However, this wasn’t the blissful years of when Dazai was part of the mafia and they were at the top of the food chain. At that moment they were at the bottom and they were the ones who needed to flee.

“Fine,” he seethed. He whipped the door open and slammed it shut as hard as he could with his half-ass strength. He crossed his arms and refused to look at Dazai as he climbed behind the wheel and pulled out of the parking lot.

They drove for an hour in complete silence. Chuuya refrained from opening the computer to look for Akutagawa. His stomach pulled him towards it. He didn’t want to give up the chance to find Akutagawa but when he wanted something from Dazai he had to stick with the act until the very end. Otherwise, Dazai would distract him until he forgot about the act and had to try to restart which never worked.

“Are we going to even attempt to find Akutagawa or do you not care anymore?” His words were laced with venom. Was this the side of Dazai Akutagawa had been seeing? His extremely stressed and mafia side combined? If so that boy definitely did need help. There were still limited emotions with this side but the air he gave off and every word that came out of his mouth always said to whoever he was talking to they were wrong. Also that they were a nuisance. Or that they were a waste of space. Chuuya felt the last one a lot.

The car pulled over and Dazai held out his hand. If Chuuya wasn’t going to do it Dazai would. It was at least a little reassuring to Chuuya that he cared enough about finding his old pupil that he would wrestle Chuuya too. Initially, Chuuya didn’t move, but once Dazai started leaning over him to grab the computer, he snatched it out of the taller boy’s grasp and held it tightly in his arms.

“Hand it over Chuuya,” Dazai said firmly.

“What was Doyle talking about Dazai?” Chuuya asked. His eyes made contact with Dazai’s. This man was going to give him some answers.

“Chuuya, King’s whole thing is to manipulate people, you know this,” Dazai said, “Doyle was probably saying those things to put us against each other to give them more time so we would fall behind. We need to find Ryuunosuke. Are you going to help or are you going to make me do it?”

“You keep saying that it’s King’s whole game,” Chuuya said, “but are you sure you’re not just using that to hide your own mistakes? Because there are some things you haven’t given me the whole story on and things you haven’t owned up to and I want to know some of it. All of it is far too much to ask from you but you are not getting this computer until you tell me.”

Dazai stared at Chuuya. He wasn’t going to back down, and they needed to find Akutagawa. The younger man came first. If Kouyou would say anything it was, ‘screw Dazai and focus on your friends.’ Chuuya opened the computer and started the search. He would just neglect to acknowledge Dazai. That would be aggravating enough. And with Dazai’s current stress levels it would either end in answers or Chuuya getting hurt. Either one Dazai would have to act and wasn’t that what Chuuya truly wanted to see? How far Dazai would go in either direction if he could make him snap. Wasn’t that what Chuuya wanted to know? It’s sounded mean, but that man had held Chuuya in the palm of his hand long enough for him to be interested in what he could do to Dazai.

The man pulled the car over into the road and continued their trip. Several hours must have passed in the silence with the amount of work Chuuya had done. That and the sun had started going down. Chuuya wasn’t hungry but Dazai had still held the rest of his sandwich up to his face until he had taken a few bites.
Chuuya looked through a list of hotel names over and over and swore repeatedly. When Dazai asked what the matter was Chuuya didn’t say anything. They had been parked in a restaurant back parking lot for most of the day after lunch feeding off of the building’s free wifi. However, now Chuuya was stuck and he wouldn’t be able to figure out the loose end of the trail without Dazai. And he wouldn’t be able to figure out whatever the hell Akutagawa’s head had come up with without an equally intelligent man.

“Chuuya just talk to me~” Dazai whined. He didn’t respond. There was a long period of silence. The seconds seem to pass like maple syrup pouring out of a bottle. Dazai finally spoke again. “King first talked to me the same way he talked to Akutagawa. Through a dream.”

Chuuya’s heart fluttered, but his stomach dropped. “He’s been in contact with Ryuunosuke?”

“Yeah,” Dazai said. “He said that he understood how I was feeling or something stupid like that, and offered to help me. I, of course, had no idea what he was talking about initially, but through the next day, it started making more and more sense to me. And long story short after I neglected his offer everything all those years ago started. Now can Chuuya tell me what’s wrong?”

Chuuya stared at him. He had actually told Chuuya something. He had assumed he would have to be the first one to break because Dazai would remain an iron wall. Apparently, his assumption was wrong.

“Oh, yeah,” Chuuya said, “the trail of Haru’s ended and suddenly at that. I can’t figure it out.” Dazai let his chair recline. “Do you want to see the computer?”

Dazai shook his head. “It will only complicate things.” Didn’t he need to see what was happening with their information to know how to find Akutagawa? “What does the root of Haru mean?”

Chuuya stared at him. How was he supposed to know? He didn’t just memorize the meaning of names for fun. “Well, the internet says, Distance.”

“Yuu,” Dazai said, “Yuu can also mean distance, search that.”

Chuuya did as he was told. Several minutes later he had a list four times as long as the others. “Dazai, it’s also pulling up names that just starts with Yuu, there has to be a way to narrow down the field.”

“Not unless he was really trying not to be found,” Dazai said, “but the trail shouldn’t be that small yet. It’s getting there but not quite.” The car fell silent as Chuuya waited for Dazai’s next words. “You want to get something easy to eat, like noodles?”

“Seriously?” Chuuya asked. “We’re about to find the key and you want to go buy pasta?”

“I’m in that kind of mood,” Dazai said. He wiggled his eyebrows. “Come on Chuuya~ you have to be loose like the cooked noodles.” He then began to imitate what newly cooked noodles would act like if Chuuya picked them up.

He bursted into laughter. When he finally stopped his stomach hurt but he just rolled his eyes. “Then let’s head out captain. Your noodle brethren await.”

Dazai departed from where they were parked and headed straight to the nearest noodle shop. The employees did not seem very excited about a couple of men walking in after dark. Chuuya didn’t feel too bad. Sure customer service sucked, but hey it’s their job, if they didn’t like it they should find a new one. Dazai ordered two bowls and moments later they were at a table stuffing noodles in there face.
“Ki!” Dazai exclaimed suddenly with at least twenty noodles dangling out of his mouth.

“Eat or talk, pick one,” Chuuya said.

Dazai inhaled half of his remaining noodles before continuing. “-Ki, Yuuki has got to be the name.”

“Care to explain?” Chuuya asked as he took another large slurp of noodles. These were at least easy to swallow and the more he ate the louder his stomach growled.

“We already determined that Haru means distance and so does Yuu,” Dazai said after finishing off his noodles. “I was thinking of something else that could be related to Haruka, but that was a bad call on my part.” Chuuya blinked. He actually admitted he did something wrong. “He would find a new meaning because if it’s too closely related to Haruka it would be far too obvious. So I started thinking of names that began with Yuu. The ending Ki depending on how it’s spelled can mean hope, brightness, or living. Now which spelling though? If Atsushi came up with the name it would be hope or brightness. However, since it’s Akutagawa he would use a simple and plain message, which turns out to be living. It’s a signal to anyone who looks for him that he is alive. Thus Yuuki must be the name.”

“Okay,” Chuuya said, with that tangent, he had actually managed to finish his food, only now his stomach wanted to explode. “That’s all well and good but Yuuki is a very common name, there are going to be at least a dozen. Is it going to be related to time again?”

Dazai shook his head. “I don’t think so, that would be too obvious. I think-” The door swung open and men in black suits walked in. There was no way fancy dressed men were walking into a cheap noodle joint. Good to know if King was ever looking for them they’d always find conflict wherever they went to eat.

The men didn’t even bother to stop at the counter to blend in. Not like they could blend in while they were in fancy suits.

“Dazai Osamu, we were sent by Sakaguchi Ango, were here to take you in for your safety,” one of the men said.

Instantly Dazai smirked. “What branch are you from?”

“Excuse me?”

“Who’s branch are you from?”

“Sakaguchi Ango’s.”

“Ango doesn’t have a branch idiot,” Dazai with a sigh, “I don’t even know what I meant by branch. Just get to the point where you’re pointing your gun at me in order to take me in to see King.”

All of the men drew their guns. Neither Chuuya nor Dazai moved, because neither of them cared. Chuuya was already bored of having to deal with King in one day. The only stressful event were when Doyle and Stevenson appeared because they were obviously much higher in rank than these idiots.

He pulled out the laptop and began to look for Yuuki’s as Dazai punched the first man. A brawl began and Dazai had three of the...seven men down within the first few minutes. One of the men shot a bullet but Dazai ducked and it hit his teammate. What utter amateurs. One of the men rushed Chuuya. The redhead didn’t do more than flick the man and use a very small fraction of his ability and his enemy went flying into a table.
Chuuya grabbed his head as his vision began to spin. He shouldn’t have used his ability, but it would have been boring without it. He tried to refocus on the words but they blended together and Chuuya couldn’t seem to separate them. Instead of trying he thought about what Dazai had said. Time would be to easy, so did that just mean they were going to have to narrow down the list as much as possible? Chuuya let his fingers fall over the keyboard naturally and he typed Yuuki into the search engine he had created. If he spelled it right there should be only a few Yuuki’s.

Chuuya opened his eyes and squinted to try and make out what it said but the harder he tried the more his forehead began to twist and it felt like a meat cleaver was pounding against his brain.

“Okay there are only a few Yuuki’s but if you set up a certain radius from the previous hotel you get.” He paused as he typed something in. “One search result.”

His breath caught in his throat. “What?” The blood in his head seemed to rush even faster and his chest tightened. He swayed a bit and Dazai firmly grabbed his shoulder to steady him.

“We’ve found Akutagawa,” Dazai said, “or where he was last night, I should say.” He typed a few more things into the keyboard. “If we use the patterns so far we can deduce where he is today and where he’ll decide to go tomorrow.” Chuuya was kind of surprised the employees hadn’t said anything to them yet. Then again almost everyone in Yokohama we’re probably somewhat used to fights breaking out. Either that, or they just hadn’t noticed.

“There,” Dazai said. A triumphant grin spread across his lips. “I know where we’re going to find Akutagawa.”

Chapter End Notes

I am very proud of this chapter, because do you know how long this chapter took to write??? TOO LONG! Immatakeanapnow.

Because this is so long I hope it makes up for stilling being unsure if I can post next month or not. I'm crossing my fingers for September but that I'm unsure of too. Let's all hope I can though.

If you've been reading the notes you'll know I have an editor/beta who has a full schedule, so I'm always writing ahead of where I'm posting. It's always weird to look back when I'm about four chapters ahead.

Anyways, I hope I can post next month but its kind of looking like I may not be able to : (, I still hope I can though!

Also, I have a question for y'all...any guesses on where the jump drive is? Just curious if I was waaaaaay to obvious or not...I'm bad at keeping things secret most of the time. I tried to hint at it but I don't know if the "hint" was more like an elaborate portrait or not. If you have any input please message me/comment

Also, also, in the beginning, notes I mentioned jet lag, I was across an ocean for a good chunk of the month, I know I mentioned I wasn't gonna post at the beginning of the month but I don't know if I mentioned that. ¯\_(ツ)_/¯.

Also, also, also, I hope all of you are going to have a good day, week, month, year and life!
Feel free to hit me up on tumblr twitter or in the comments c:
BYEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!!!!
Rich laughter echoed through a small truck parked on the side of the road. Cars zoomed by this truck and the drivers did not even spare them a glance even as the laughter erupted. Inside the vehicle, two men created a different world, one where they felt secure. “When did I lose you Jinko?” Akutagawa asked.

Atsushi pulled himself out of his thoughts. He had started thinking about Kyouka and Dazai... when? He sipped on the straw to his coffee drink, a Frapa- whatever it was called. Akutagawa had started talking about the intricacies of the trail he was leaving and then... Atsushi couldn’t remember anything passed the significance of the time they checked into their hotels. Well, besides the fact that he briefly remembered something about two similar names, but he didn’t remember what they were or their similarity. It had been too complicated so his mind had wandered.

“Somewhere after the whole time thing,” Atsushi answered.

“So at the beginning?” Atsushi nodded. “You’re an idiot.”

“That’s rude,” Atsushi muttered, “even if you’re not far off.”

“You’re just a bundle of self-deprecation aren’t you?”

“And you’re not?”

Akutagawa fell silent. That’s what Atsushi thought. “So just let me get this straight,” Atsushi said. “We’re using the same number in a variety of ways, to set up a trail that only Dazai will be able to follow?”

Akutagawa shrugged. “Anyone who finds the end of it can track it. Also, we were using a certain number, 634 to be exact. Now we’re using the meaning of names to make the trail. I’m planning on switching to the first letter of street names soon. Or something similar, I’m not sure, I’m kind of
making this up as we go."

“Well you’re doing a very good job of it,” Atsushi said, “because I don’t even understand how your connecting names.” Akutagawa opened his mouth but Atsushi quickly continued. “Trying to explain it to me would be a waste of time.”

“You would get it eventually,” Akutagawa said.

“I wouldn’t be so sure of that,” Atsushi chuckled.

They fell silent. It didn’t feel as awkward as normal though. Atsushi was perfectly content in the silence.

Akutagawa sighed. “We should probably move, any preferences for lunch?”

“Somewhere small, without a lot of people,” Atsushi said.

His partner smirked. He turned in his seat and restarted the car. “You’re starting to get the hang of this.”

They fell into another silence as Akutagawa drove through the town towards what looked like the slums. All of the buildings seemed to be falling apart and the streets were lined with filth. They didn’t enter the slums. At first, Atsushi wondered if they had but he spied the whole city shortly after. Akutagawa quickly paid the parking meter and they walked down a few streets before finding a small diner.

Atsushi looked up at the quick clouds as he stepped out of the alleyway, towards the door. A hand gently pulled him back. He stumbled but quickly twirled to see Akutagawa motioning him back. He slipped behind his partner and peeked over his shoulder.

“What’s happening,” he whispered.

He pointed at a shiny, black car that had just pulled into the parking lot. “That car is far too fancy to be this close to the slums.” The car doors swung open and two men stepped out.

“We should probably go somewhere else in case, right?” Atsushi asked. Akutagawa nodded. They took a few steps back and after deciding the men hadn’t noticed them, they sprinted back towards the car.

They found a small restaurant and quickly ate before heading out. Akutagawa tried his best to explain what they were doing and get input from Atsushi, but there were two major problems. Atsushi only tracked half of what he said and everything he could track made him feel as if his input wasn’t necessary and was unwanted. However, he was afraid Akutagawa would feel bad so he kept it to himself. He figured that if he hurt Akutagawa again, even if it was unintentional, he would sever any other chance he had to get through to his partner. If he was going to make up for what he said and earn Akutagawa’s trust back he needed to take small steps. That way the man would naturally let down his guard instead of it being forced. At least that’s what Atsushi hoped would happen.

A large possibility in the corner of his mind constantly screamed at him but he preferred not to think that Akutagawa may never open up to him. He preferred to think that he still had a shot even after all of his hurtful comments. But if he was Akutagawa, he wouldn’t let him near himself.

Somehow, the man seemed to be opening himself up more. Atsushi didn’t know what he said to seem trustworthy but whatever he had said, must have clicked inside Akutagawa’s brain. Even though Akutagawa was...a little cute, Atsushi only wanted to be friends with him. It would be a relief
to have the man as a friend instead of an enemy. Even if they were frenemies instead, Atsushi would be fine with that. Anything was better than when they first met.

Several hours past in the car before Akutagawa pulled into a hotel parking lot. Atsushi waited in the car for him to return from checking them into a room. Once he did, they reparked and hurried up to their room.

Atsushi flopped onto the single bed and glanced over at Akutagawa. He quickly locked the door and checked outside the window before shutting them.

"Why do you do this every night?" Atsushi asked.

Akutagawa faced him and pressed his lip into a line. "For safety, why else?"

Atsushi shrugged, "do you really think someone followed us?"

"I think there’s a possibility. What’s with all of these questions?"

"I’m curious," Atsushi said, "so-" Akutagawa rolled his eyes. "One more question. Why do you keep buying a single room? I’m fairly certain half of the city at this point thinks we have a romantic relationship."

"That is an overstatement, and because I don’t want to buy two plane tickets."

"What do you mean?" Atsushi asked.

"You said one more question," Akutagawa said.

"You didn’t give a clear answer!"

Akutagawa smirked. "Basically we’ve been using every name a few times and then I’ve bought a plane ticket under that name that goes somewhere in Japan or a neighboring country. It cuts off most of the ties of the name being us."

He said "we", he had included Atsushi twice. Atsushi’s heart rammed against his chest. His stomach filled with bubbles. They furiously popped and hitched in his throat. Why couldn’t he breathe?

"Are you okay?" Akutagawa asked.

"O-of course I am, why wouldn’t I be? Everything’s great."

"Your face is turning red."

So that’s why his face was burning. His chest clenched. He stared at the bed and tried to force the heat threading through his veins to stop. "So, um, what’s the name we’re under now?"

"The name is Yuuki," Akutagawa said, "This is the second night we’ve used it, and-" he sat on the bed and his hip bumped against Atsushi’s. Akutagawa immediately slid to the other end of the bed and fireworks erupted up Atsushi’s side and through his arm. His eyes didn’t know where to reside. At one point they were on the floor, once on the wall, once on Akutagawa’s lips, and then straight back to the floor. Akutagawa refused to look at him and stared very intently towards the curtains. Atsushi wasn’t sure why the boy found them so interesting, but apparently, it was better than having to look at him.

"Y-you were saying?" Atsushi said in a high pitched voice.
“Wha-oh yeah, I wa-was saying something wasn’t I?” He let out a breathy laugh and his cheeks were coated in a thick pink. Atsushi would have thought it was his imagination if Akutagawa hadn’t started to hide his face with a hand. Was he embarrassed? Atsushi was probably the only who was as affected as he was by the other boy, so why was he embarrassed? Probably, he was probably the only one. Why Atsushi was affected was because he thought Akutagawa was slightly attractive. Okay, far more than slightly, but it wasn’t any deeper than an attraction right? He didn’t need to wrestle with any more feelings than he already had. They were in the middle of running for their lives for goodness sake! “Um, I-uh, don’t really remember what I was going to say.”

Atsushi bit his lip. “You were saying something about the name Yuuki or something.”

“Oh, right,” Akutagawa said. “I was just going to say that I’m going to have to send him to the US, or maybe China, then I’ll switch patterns.”

“Okay,” Atsushi’s voice was barely more than a whisper. He swallowed hard and the room fell silent. This was stupid, his chest was stupid and the way he was acting was stupid. If he had feelings for him so what? Yes, fine, he liked Akutagawa as more than a friend, it was time to stop fighting himself. So could he stop acting like an idiot? If he liked Akutagawa than the first step was the same thing he was already trying to do. Get the other man to trust him more. Then he could see if anything more was possible after they were friends. And if they didn’t become friends his feelings were doomed.

He slapped both sides of his face and the noise echoed through the small room. Akutagawa jumped and his head snapped to him. “Alright, so you asked me about the pattern, and whether you should use street names.” Akutagawa nodded. “Great idea but do we want to go vaguer? Street names totally work as well but if we want to start closing the trail until it’s barely anything we might want to take bigger steps.”

“Are you okay with that?” Akutagawa asked. Atsushi quirked his brow. Why wouldn’t he be? “If we do that Dazai will be the only one who will definitely be able to find us.” Oh. He was thinking about the rest of the agency as well, not just Dazai. “I know all of you are detectives but I don’t think many of them will be able to find us. Even Dazai-” he shook his head. “Never mind, that’s a stupid notion.”

“No you’re right, Dazai will struggle too,” Atsushi said.

Akutagawa laughed. “Yeah right. If he’s following our trail it will take him less than an hour to find us. There’s no way I’m that good at making a vague trail.”

Atsushi smirked. “Something tells me you’re wrong about that.” And there was the look. The look that said Atsushi was saying something stupid again. “I’ll bet you ten hundred yen that Dazai will struggle a little to find us. Maybe not a lot, but at least a little.”

“Why are we betting?” Akutagawa asked.

“Because I’m trying to make a point,” Atsushi said. “That you need to give yourself more credit, and you need to be nicer to yourself. You’re worth the world to more people than you know.”

Akutagawa stared at him but didn’t say anything. Atsushi shifted uncomfortably. He wasn’t sure what else to say. “I doubt that,” he muttered and looked back at the floor.

“I’m one of them,” Atsushi said with a shy smile. “I know I was an ass hole to you a couple days ago and when I first woke up after the agency was taken, but I really don’t believe anything I said.”
“You weren’t an asshole,” Akutagawa said.

“Yes, I was,” Atsushi said as flatly as he could, trying to imitate the other boy. “And I know hurtful words are the only thing anyone actually listens to, but I’m going to try to prove what I said wrong. And I am determined to show you that you’re worth more than you know.”

“How would you even know I don’t think I’m worth anything?” Akutagawa said a small smile played on his lips. His voice had wavered.

“Because,” Atsushi paused, he didn’t want to sound like he was forcing stereotypes on him or anything similar. He needed to select his words carefully. “Because, based on what I’ve seen, this could be wrong, while we were at the agency, you were a lot more hurt than you wanted to let on. To me, you seemed scared of anyone figuring this out, so you lashed out to make it seem like you’re angry instead of hurt. Part of it I’m sure is out of your control because you’re not sure what you should do with your pain.” Atsushi smiled a bit. “And a few things you’ve said and done are exactly what I do when I’m trying to run away from my feelings. Also, after what Dazai said, to you and when I found you bringing Leena back, you seemed,” he paused, “I may have been reading into it more than I should have, but you seemed sort of, how do I say this sensitively.”

“Just say it,” Akutagawa interrupted.

“Okay,” Atsushi swallowed, “if I’m going to be blunt, you seemed suicidal, or at least like you had been thinking about it.”

Akutagawa stared at him. Completely. Emotionlessly. Atsushi’s gut turned violently, his teeth dug into the inside of his lip, and he started to pushed himself into the bed. If only the covers would swallow him. He opened his mouth to cover up what he said somehow.

“How the hell did you know?” Akutagawa’s voice strained.

Atsushi’s eyes widened. “I, um, I’m not sure I guess,” Atsushi said quietly, “intuition?”

“This is what I fucking hate about you,” Akutagawa scoffed. Atsushi’s chest tightened and tears brimmed his eyes. “Shit, I didn’t mean that to hurt, I just,” Akutagawa’s eyes darted around the room before he closed them. “I just need a minute.”

Atsushi didn’t say a single word. His heart felt like it was going to twist hard enough to snap. “I feel,” Akutagawa’s voice sounded as if a massive frog had taken over his vocal cords. “I feel like I’m drowning. And I have dreams, where I literally am. My lungs burn, and whenever I’m around Dazai it’s worse. The feeling creeps into the day, and I want to die.” He bit his lips and furiously began to blink. He wouldn’t make eye contact with Atsushi. “And I’m scared.” A small laugh left his lips. “I’m scared that Dazai will find us. I’m not sure I can handle him. And throughout the entire day, something has been gnawing on my gut saying we’re going to see him, and he’s going to find us soon.” Akutagawa brought his eyes to Atsushi’s. They glistened with tears. The younger boy didn’t know what to do. So he held out his hand. “What are you doing?”

“Hold my hand,” Atsushi said.

“What?” Akutagawa asked a little pink dusted his cheeks. Atsushi smiled at him. Slowly the other man put his hand in his.

“If Dazai does find us, I will do my absolute best to stick by your side. And if I start drifting to Dazai’s side, I want you to tell me and I want you to take me by the ear, metaphorically or literally, and drag me back to your side. Understood?”
“I don’t know if I have the strength to do that,” Akutagawa said. Atsushi squeezed his hand. “I can try though.”

“Thank you,” Atsushi said, “I really do want to stay at your side, but I’m going to mess up. And I just want a way for you to tell me you need me. Is this okay?”

Akutagawa nodded. “I just don’t know how good I’ll be at following through.”

“If it doesn’t work it doesn’t work Akutagawa,” Atsushi said, “and that’s fine. We’ll figure something else out.”

Akutagawa nodded. Atsushi squeezed his hand again. The warmth of the other’s hand coated Atsushi’s and he tried his best to smile through the heat that laced through his face.

A light knock hit the door. Akutagawa stood up immediately.

Atsushi stared at the door. “Do you think-”

“That’s not them,” he said with a low voice. Akutagawa trembled and Atsushi continued to hold his hand. Did he often tremble? He let go of Atsushi’s hand and the younger boy immediately missed the feeling of the other’s fingers wrapped in his. “Get behind me.”

“Let me help,” Atsushi whispered.

Akutagawa made eye contact with him. Another small tap sounded. “Open the window and get ready to jump.” Atsushi did as he was told as Rashomon moved towards the door and unlocked the bolt. Akutagawa stepped back towards the open window and grabbed Atsushi’s now transformed hand. They leaned out the window and Rashomon threw the door open.

A bullet zipped straight into Atsushi’s shoulder and he exclaimed in pain. Blood oozed into his shirt and his vision swam. Something pulled him backward, out of the window. His feet lightly hit the ground and Akutagawa pulled his other arm forward.

“Thank you,” Atsushi grimaced. He matched Akutagawa’s pace and they ran. They weaved through back streets and alleyways and took so many turns Atsushi no longer had any idea where they were.

They took another sharp turn and Rashomon shot forward. Atsushi hadn’t even seen who was there. Akutagawa took a few steps back and his fingers slipped out of Atsushi's. Rashomon stopped, and they watched as the ability unraveled.

“I had a feeling we’d find the two of you back here.”

~

Day: 4

Akutagawa collapsed. Chuuya pushed Dazai out of the way and still barely caught him before he hit the ground. The boy started apologizing profusely. “Calm down, and sit down,” Chuuya said.

The younger man pushed him away. “We don’t have time we have to-”

Dazai stepped forward and touched his shoulders. Chuuya’s ability vanished and Akutagawa nearly
collapsed again. He would have slapped Dazai if the man didn’t seem like he was trying to help.

“Calm down,” Dazai ordered.

Akutagawa’s limbs stiffened and his breathing increased rapidly. “You’re not helping dumb ass,” Chuuya muttered. He leaned into the wall and took a deep breath. Damn his body hurt.

“I can see that Chuuya~” Dazai singsonged.

“He’s right I need to calm down I-” Atsushi shoved Dazai away. Chuuya blinked. Was he trying to protect Akutagawa?

“Hey, it’s okay,” Atsushi said quietly. He tried to get Akutagawa to meet his eyes. He wouldn’t.

Akutagawa inhaled deeply and spoke. “How can we know it’s really the two of you? You could just be a trick from one of King’s ability users.”

“Dazai canceled out your ability,” Chuuya said.

“I don’t know the extent of this ability users ability,” Akutagawa said.

“Akutagawa,” Dazai said, “I mentored you since I picked you up from the slums and when I did you asked me one thing before you agreed to join the mafia. You asked if I could give you a reason to live and I said yes.”

“Anyone could figure out what I said,” Akutagawa said.

Chuuya sighed. He had a right to be suspicious, but Chuuya didn’t want to put up with this. “Look Ryuunosuke, I was just tortured for however long it was, I had to run all the way here from our car, and my entire body wants to die right now. I really just want to down a bottle of wine currently. Also, I have missed you like hell and I’d like to give you a damn hug if I could.”

Akutagawa motioned Chuuya over. “You’ll trust him right away but not me?” Dazai said with a pout.

“Dazai,” Chuuya began as he wrapped his arms around Akutagawa, “you’re easier to imitate because you show fewer emotions. I, however, have a large range of emotions and Akutagawa and I have hung out many, many times over the past four years. I think he can tell it’s me.”

“Well I don’t know what to say to make him believe me,” Dazai said.

“You’re smart you can figure it out,” Chuuya said. And he better hurry up because whatever they were running from caused Akutagawa to shift continuously between feet.

Dazai’s eyes snapped open. “I know something King doesn’t,” Dazai said. “G-i-n.”

As soon as Dazai spelled out her name Chuuya’s eyes also widened. “Of course, let’s move mackerel.”

He smiled widely and started leading them back the way Chuuya and he had come. He brought them to “their” car.

“Oh crap,” Atsushi said, “Akutagawa-”

“The police will find it and return it to the owner,” Akutagawa replied. What were they talking about?
“But we didn’t even leave any money for hotwiring it,” Atsushi groaned.

“Let’s hope they have good insurance.”

“Oh, so you stole a car?” Dazai asked Akutagawa.

“Nope,” Akutagawa said, “he did.” He pointed at Atsushi who groaned again.

“I didn’t steal it,” Atsushi protested.

“My mistake,” Akutagawa said, “he borrowed a truck.”

“You can’t borrow a car without asking,” Dazai said.

“I was going to give it back!” Atsushi yelled. He slapped a hand over his mouth. Chuuya burst into laughter and had to use the car for support. They had already run from the car and Chuuya had quickly grown exhausted. Dazai had offered to help but he had refused. He wanted to start to move on his own. So now with the walk back his legs were ready to collapse.

“We should probably go,” Dazai said. He unlocked the doors and Chuuya slumped into his seat. When Dazai entered he quirked his brow in concern. Chuuya didn’t pay any attention to him. The two others climbed in. He glanced in the rearview mirror. Akutagawa was still tense. What had Dazai done?

“Akutagawa you okay?” Chuuya asked.

“I’m fine,” he snapped.

“Calm down and don’t snap at him,” Dazai said in a low voice.

“Sorry,” Akutagawa said quickly.

“Shut up Dazai,” Atsushi said. The older man looked at Atsushi who tried to glare at Dazai but just pouted at him.

The car went silent and Chuuya glanced over his shoulder at Atsushi. The boy seemed very content after Dazai fell silent. The car made a sharp turn and Chuuya grabbed Dazai’s arm.

“What the hell are you doing?” Chuuya yelled.

Dazai glanced up at the rearview mirror and the car sped up. Chuuya turned in his seat. Several cars were on their tail. Shit.

“Ryuunosuke do you want to give them some Rashomon?”

Chuuya didn’t have to finish his sentence before Akutagawa rolled down the window and his ability flared into action. Rashomon rammed its head into one of the cars and it flew into a wall.

They made another sharp turn and Dazai gunned it down an alleyway. He spun into a side street and then into another alleyway.

“Everyone out!” He ordered.

He led them into a building and out a back door. They sprinted through an alleyway and he leaned around a corner. He motioned for them to stay there and snuck out. Chuuya sighed in relief and glanced over at the other two boys. Atsushi frantically shifted between feet and Akutagawa stared
intensely at the ground.

“Have you two run into them before?” Chuuya asked, “I mean after you somewhat got captured?”

Atsushi’s jaw dropped and Akutagawa’s eyes widened in horror. “You know about that?”

Akutagawa’s voice rippled with cracks.

“One of the guards briefly mentioned something about it,” Chuuya said, “but Akutagawa, do not, do not, worry about Dazai. If he’s an ass for some reason I will shut him down. But I’m fairly certain he won’t be. Especially if you tell him the truth of what happened. If you lie he will throw a fit because he’s very on edge. He may not look like it but he’s scared as all hell. So please speak the truth and I will gladly cover for you.”

Akutagawa swallowed. He didn’t seem to like Chuuya’s words but he nodded nonetheless. Not like that expectation was fair since Dazai wouldn’t speak the truth. After all, didn’t he lie to Chuuya twice now? He had said that he was part of the mafia. He was lying. However, did he really mean that? He may have been telling the truth. Chuuya slapped himself. He didn’t need to think about that.

“Are you okay?” Atsushi asked.

Chuuya nodded and tried to smile. This boy already seemed like he was going to over worry about Chuuya and he had barely known him for more than a few minutes. He knew exactly who Nakajima Atsushi, AKA the Jinko, was. He had read the reports and his profile, plus he had heard all of the stories, or rants, from Akutagawa. Now that he could see the boy he could tell why the boy got under his skin. Atsushi seemed innocent, very innocent.

“I’m Atsushi-” The boy started.

“I know,” Chuuya said, “I’m Nakahara Chuuya. You can call me Chuuya.”

The boy’s eyes widened. “Oh! I thought you were familiar. I think I’ve either seen you before or Dazai just showed me pictures.”

“It’s possible we’ve seen each other,” Chuuya said, “but I don’t recall that.”

“Probably just a picture then,” Atsushi said.

“I forgot you two haven’t actually met,” Akutagawa said. “I’ve been mentioning him and you’ve had no idea who I’ve been talking about.”

“I knew who you were talking about,” Atsushi said, “I just didn’t know him.”

“You talked about me?” Chuuya asked a smile working through his lips.

“Oh no,” Akutagawa muttered which only made Chuuya’s grin grow wider.

“I didn’t realize you cared about me so much,” he put his hand on Akutagawa’s shoulder.

“Don’t touch me,” Akutagawa said.

“I frickin’ love you,” Chuuya said and winked overdramatically.

Akutagawa smacked his hand off his shoulder. “I frickin’ hate you.”

“Look at the three of you getting along so well,” Dazai said.

“Shut the fuck up mackerel,” Chuuya hissed. Atsushi physically recoiled. Dazai fell silent and a
massive pout appeared. “Shit,” he muttered. He actually needed Dazai to talk. “So why did you leave?”

“I don’t know because I’m not supposed to talk,” Dazai said mockingly. Chuuya narrowed his eyes and set his jaw into the best bitch face he had. “I was just getting a new car, but since I’m supposed to shut up I’m not going to tell you which one it is.”

Chuuya weakly shoved Dazai. He swore under his breath. Why couldn’t he find any strength to do anything? He peered around the corner and there was a single bright yellow car.

“Is it the yellow car?”

Dazai gasped overdramatically. “How did you know? I didn’t think anyone would be able to figure out the only car parked within a dozen meters was ours. Well, sort of ours.”

Chuuya rolled his eyes and took a step forward. He didn’t realize his strength disappeared until he was plummeting towards the ground.

“Chuuya!” A voice shrieked.

His body was pulled back up and he blinked. He looked down to find Rashomon wrapped around him. He placed his hand on the wall and tried to regain his balance. Akutagawa helped him to his feet and to the car.

“I’m okay, thank you,” Chuuya said, “I have no idea what just happened.”

“You forced yourself to work too much,” Dazai said, “you should take it easy for the rest of the day. Your muscles can’t take much more.”

Chuuya rolled his eyes but nodded. “Who said my name while I was falling?”

The other three fell silent. “No need to say,” Dazai said quickly, “we need to go.”

The man climbed into the car and Chuuya’s heart drummed loudly. He couldn’t breathe. Dazai had screamed. No that wasn’t possible, it had probably been Atsushi. The boy seemed innocent enough. But wouldn’t he had just said so? He doesn’t seem to find any shame in his emotions. He climbed into the car and looked directly at Dazai.

“Yes?” Dazai’s voice slightly wavered. It had been him.

Chuuya turned his gaze to the sidewalk. He couldn’t keep a small smile from creeping up his lips. He cared.

~

Day: 4

Dazai swerved between lanes on the dark road and Chuuya hit the side of his ribs. Dazai had made sure to drive around until long after the sun had gone down. That way King wouldn’t be able to track them as easily if he had already caught on to the switched vehicle. He whimpered and made sure his pout was extra-large for the force of the punch Chuuya had just thrown.
“Oh don’t be all innocent,” Chuuya growled, “if you hadn’t been an idiot I wouldn’t have punched you!”

“Now Chuuya-,” Dazai said, “if you’re going to be mean about my driving then you can sit in the back and Akutagawa or Atsushi can ride shotgun.”

“Why are we letting Dazai drive again?” Akutagawa asked. “I can drive and so can you.”

“I’m not letting an injured man or someone who currently refuses his body sleep, drive Akutagawa-” Dazai sing-songed making sure to emphasize the sleeping part.

Chuuya crossed his arms and his glare dug into the side of Dazai’s head. “I can drive just fine. You’re just being over the top as always and Akutagawa go to sleep for damn sake!”

“I’m fine,” the boy growled as his eyelids tried to shut but he pried them open again.

“Atsushi’s already out cold, let yourself fall asleep damn it,” Chuuya said again. Akutagawa did need to sleep, but there wasn’t much point for him to do so. Not that he or Chuuya knew that.

Akutagawa rolled his eyes. “I’m fine, besides there’s no point in sleeping now. We’re almost there.”

Dazai’s eyes widened and he glanced up in the rearview mirror. He hadn’t told any of them where they were going. The younger boy glared out the window with his chin firmly planted in his palm. He desperately needed sleep. He had probably done the same thing as Dazai had done and stayed awake for as many nights as it had been. Only Dazai was completely used to doing that with his senses on full alert. Akutagawa wasn’t, meaning he was feeling the effects far harder than Dazai was.

“We are almost there, you’re correct,” Dazai said, “but a few minutes won’t kill you.”

“There’s no point,” Akutagawa said, “besides I barely sleep anyway.”

If that was true, why was he getting hit so hard?

“Akutagawa, listen to him,” Chuuya said.

“Chuuuya, I’m fine,” Akutagawa said through gritted teeth.

Chuuya rolled his eyes. “Fine! You don’t want to listen and get the sleep you need that’s fine with me!”

A soft groan sounded from the back. “What happening?” Atsushi’s croaky voice said.

“Oops,” Chuuya muttered.

“Sorry,” Akutagawa said, “It’s nothing you should go back asleep.”

Dazai chuckled under his breath. That was definitely the pot calling the kettle black. “Akutagawa did you sleep at all?” Atsushi asked.

“That doesn’t matter-”

“Yes it does,” Atsushi interrupted Akutagawa sharply.

“I tried,” Akutagawa said.
“Bull shit,” Chuuya said.

Dazai glanced up in time to see Akutagawa slide further into his seat and stare intensely at the ground. “How do you know he didn’t try?” Atsushi asked. “He may have just given up quicker than most people.”

“It was completely quiet at one point Chuuya and I did consider the possibility that he might be asleep.” Dazai chimed in. He looked at Chuuya.

“Road!” The other man yelled.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Dazai said as he waved both hands in the air. Chuuya glared at him. He refocused on the road and pulled them back into the correct side.

“And I thought he was asleep, but then he moved so suddenly it was obvious he was just thinking,” Chuuya said.

“He was probably trying to sleep but then couldn’t,” Atsushi argued.

“He’s so tired he would have fallen asleep easily.”

“You don’t know what might be on his mind.”

“And you do?”

“I know better than you.”

“Yeah right, all you’ve ever done is fight him. Have you ever actually had a full conversation with him?”

“Yes! Because maybe we’ve been alone together for several days and were together before then. So maybe we had a conversation or two at that time. Or maybe twenty. Or perhaps forty, I’m not sure but I’m feeling correct today.”

“Wow,” Dazai said as he stared at Atsushi, “You really set him off Chuuya~”

“Shut up,” Chuuya hissed, “You know, Atsushi, I’m feeling correct today, as well. And I’m also thinking you think you’ve known him all his life. I’ve known him for years damn it! If you don’t want to look like an idiot shut up.”

“Even though you’ve known him longer somehow you have no clue how or what he thinks!”

“Shut up!” Akutagawa yelled. “Chuuya you’re right that I’m tired enough to sleep, but I’m thinking of too much at once and my head won’t calm down enough to let me.”

“That’s perfectly understandable,” Chuuya said.

“That’s literally what I said,” Atsushi said. His voice sounded very small and dejected.

“You said it differently,” Chuuya said.

Silence. Dazai chuckled again. “He really didn’t Chuuya.”

Chuuya’s mouth moved in many ways as he tried to get out whatever words were stuck in his throat. “Okay, you’re right, I’m sorry Atsushi and I’m sorry Akutagawa, I was being too, much? You know whatever.”
“Are you okay?” Akutagawa asked.

“No I am not, I am starving,” Chuuya said, “I wasn’t going to complain because Dazai would never let me hear the end of it, but my stomach is trying to eat itself currently. I’m tired and hungry and very pissy.”

“That’s because you didn’t eat any dinner despite me trying to force it into your mouth,” Dazai said. He had told the man he would be hungry later. He swerved into the parking lot of the hotel.

“I wasn’t hungry then,” Chuuya argued, “but now I am.”

“It’s probably because you used a bunch of energy,” Atsushi said. “After I’ve been running all over the place I’m normally really hungry.”

“Good thing they have a mall across the street from here,” Dazai said.

“Where?” Chuuya asked. He looked around and his eyes widened. Why did these people never pay any attention to their surroundings? Except for Akutagawa. The man was completely unphased by what Dazai had said.

“We’ll all go into the hotel and then I’ll go buy you some food,” Dazai said. Chuuya conceded and Dazai appreciated his partner not fighting him for once. He led the three sleepy men into the hotel lobby and to the front desk. He asked for a double and reached his arm towards Akutagawa.

“Do you have any other credit cards,” he whispered, “preferably under a name that isn’t connected to the one you just used?”

“Are you sure you don’t want to keep the trailing going for the other agency members?” Akutagawa asked. “Never mind, you know far better than I do and would be better at leaving a trail then I was.”

What was he talking about? Dazai had struggled to find him, and the only reason the enemy had found Akutagawa was that they had King. Dazai was thankful he knew how Akutagawa thought. Otherwise, they wouldn’t have made it on time or found him at all.

“You did a great job,” Atsushi said. “I was never worried if we were safe. I probably should have worried more than I was, but the first few nights when you seemed sure we were fine I was sure too. You did a great job so stop saying you didn’t.”

Dazai smirked. It was good Atsushi was trying to be a moral support system. Akutagawa could definitely use it with how much he had fucked up while the other man had been at the agency. Akutagawa also seemed far more comfortable around Atsushi than he had ever hoped for. The two men had learned how to deal with each other on their own.

**Mental Note:** Don’t worry so much about Akutagawa and Atsushi if anything comes up. Odds are they’ll figure it out on their own.

Akutagawa smiled a little at Atsushi and then handed a card to Dazai. At least he didn’t have to steal any more money. The poor people who never even noticed their money was missing until they arrived at their destination. He had slipped the wallet back into their pocket after he secured their cash, or if they didn’t have any he put it back straight away. Knowing their identity wasn’t stolen probably gave them some peace of mind.
Dazai paid and headed up to their room. Dazai complained the whole way about how much his legs hurt. Chuuya threatened to throttle him several times before joining in his complaining but about food instead.

Atsushi let out a cry of relief once they had made it to their hotel room and unlocked the doors. The younger boy flopped onto the bed and inhaled for several seconds before sitting upright. Dazai wandered in and glanced around the room. Two beds and a bathroom, with a television, a couple end tables, and an actual desk. An average sized hotel room but at least everyone else could sleep comfortably.

“Food, please,” Chuuya said.

Dazai knocked a pattern against the wood of one of the end tables. “That’s the pattern I’m going to make when we come back to tell you it’s us, Atsushi. I don’t want to go through having to prove it’s us again.”

“I’m going to be awake when you get back-,” Akutagawa said.

“No, you’re not,” Chuuya interrupted. “You’re going to go to sleep.”

“I already told you-”

“Akutagawa,” Dazai said, “even if you can’t sleep lay down. You’ve been very hypervigilant while we were gone, which was and is great, but you need to rest your eyes if nothing else. Both Chuuya and I are here. Atsushi can take over while we go out for fifteen minutes at the longest. He’ll be fine in that time and if you don’t rest you’re going to be even more tired tomorrow and unable to be very helpful. You may also need to sleep in the car which is fine, but try now.”

Akutagawa nodded. Chuuya motioned to the door and they left. Dazai only looked back at the other men once to see Atsushi whisper something to Akutagawa before he shut the door.

Day 5 (before sunrise):

He rolled over for the twentieth time that night and slipped out from under the covers. Akutagawa stumbled through the darkness over to the door and made sure it was locked for also the twentieth time that night. He hadn’t gotten any sleep, not even a minute. His thoughts had spiraled out of control as soon as his head hit the pillow and wouldn’t stop.

If he slept he would dream if he dreamt he would have nightmares, and if he had nightmares he would wake up in a cold sweat and perhaps wake up someone else with him. He didn’t need that to happen with Dazai around. If he prevented either Atsushi or Chuuya from sleeping or woke up Dazai he would never hear the end of it. So he had not only tried not to sleep but also been tormented by the thought of someone sneaking into their room and killing Atsushi. The thought of the other boy’s throat being cut had been a constant fear of the past several days and the torment was starting to break him. He was overflowing his endurance meter and couldn’t think of a single thing to ease his mind in order to fall asleep. He hadn’t slept well before the Agency was attacked and he’d barely slept after.

He wandered back over to the bed and decided to sit on the floor instead. That way, the Jinko
wouldn’t wake up. He leaned his head against the wall and closed his eyes. Visions of Gin walking on top of a pool of blood whispered through his mind along with blood spilling from a cold pale body that wore Atsushi’s face. Other images of mafia members sprawled across the floor also plagued his mind.

Bile rose through his throat and he forced himself to swallow it back down. He opened his eyes and they stung with tears. That was why he hated sleeping. When he slept he watched things he’d rather not. When he slept he became more emotional than he’d prefer. When he slept his mistakes became a reality. When he slept he was subjected to the torture he deserved.

“Can’t sleep?” Dazai asked. Akutagawa’s eyes snapped to him. “Sorry I startled you.” He slid down the wall to sit next to him. Akutagawa’s entire body shot off warning signals. He wanted to run or at least scoot away. The other man being so close to him made him feel weak and on edge. He stayed as still as possible and refused to look Dazai in the eyes.

His heart pounded in his chest. He couldn’t breathe. He dug his nails into his palms and dragged them as far up his arm as he dared. If Dazai noticed he’d realize how offset he was.

“I’m fine,” Akutagawa snapped.

Dazai lifted his eyebrows. Akutagawa was an idiot, Dazai could tell he wasn’t fine. Why did he always think he could make it seem like he was? “Akutagawa if there’s any way I can help, please tell me. I want to help if I can.”

Akutagawa shook his head. Dazai wanted to see his weakness so he could expel it. Akutagawa needed to show him he was fine.

“I’m fine,” he insisted. Dazai looked away from him. His stomach twisted violently and water threatened to pour from his eyes. He bit the inside of his lip hard. Metallic blood oozed across his tongue and the sharp metal taste stung his taste buds.

Dazai inhaled and closed his eyes. Akutagawa was stupid. He knew he wanted Dazai’s help but his mentor would obviously hurt him if he let his walls crumble. He needed to appear strong. He shouldn’t have been as weak as he was.

“Well if you need anything I’m here,” Dazai said. He was there, but “there” was too far away for Akutagawa to reach out and touch, let alone rely on. He nodded and Dazai stood. “I’m staying awake to watch for any sign of King. You don’t need to worry about safety tonight. Go to sleep.” It wasn’t that easy for him. Safety was only one of the reasons Akutagawa couldn’t sleep.

“No, you’re not,” Chuuya’s voice came from across the room. The redhead sat up and stretched his arms with a groan. “I refuse to allow you to stay awake all night Osamu.”

“Chuuya~,” Dazai said, “you’re hurt and Akutagawa is too tired. Neither of you is staying awake. I’m fine-”

“Bull shit. You can’t trick me Dazai I know the rainbows under your eyes aren’t designer.”

Dazai smirked and shook his head. “Tomorrow, tomorrow someone else can take over.”

Chuuya opened his mouth but was interrupted by a small, barely coherent voice. “Or I can and all of you can stop arguing.” Atsushi rose, rubbed his eyes, and scanned the room.
“You can’t stay awake very long Jinko,” Akutagawa said. Atsushi would only be able to stay awake for an hour at the longest.

“I can if I try,” Atsushi argued, “Besides I can sleep in the car tomorrow. All of you refuse to or can’t. So I’ll stay on guard duty and all of you can sleep. I’ll fall asleep in the car whether I want to or not anyway.”

Chuuya and Dazai exchanged glances. “I approve of that idea,” Chuuya said.

“That will work for tonight,” Dazai conceded. The older man reached out his hand. Akutagawa had to show Dazai he was fine. He rose on his own and moved to his bed. Dazai didn’t comment or pay him a second thought. Akutagawa’s chest rolled itself into knots.

He climbed into the bed and closed his mind to everything around him. He plugged his ears and squeezed his eyes shut as tightly as he could. Sleep still remained absent. Eventually, he gave up hope and stared blankly at the wall. The room was completely still except for the few tapping or shuffling sounds Atsushi made.

Time seemed to seep slowly through each second like thick syrup and Akutagawa wanted to pound his head into the wall. At least if he knocked himself out he would be somewhat asleep.

Seconds seeped into minutes which seeped into hours. A small ray of light peeked through the white and red curtains. If it was morning then he hadn’t managed to even sleep for five minutes. He was going to throttle someone. Most likely the first person he saw, which at that moment would be poor Atsushi. He didn’t care if he had nightmares he wanted to sleep.

Mumbles chirped around him. It was definitely morning if the early birds were waking. He gave up on sleep and tuned his ear to make out what he could. Dazai’s voice was what immediately came.

“-As before,” he whispered, “Once we’re back we’ll make Akutagawa move.”


“Be safe,” Atsushi whispered. The two other men said a quick goodbye and a small click of the door flowed through the air. He was going to have a long day.

Chapter End Notes

AAAAH!!!!! 200+ KUDOS!!!!! THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH!!!!! You're all so great and thank you so so much for all of the kudos and comments, each of them are always so nice to read and really inspire me to keep writing.

SOOOOOOOOO............................. I was happy I was able to get this out. My beta/editor/friend was able to get the chapters back to me...yesterday. I do want to be clear I did not expect anything until mid-September. I was so excited I kind of steamrolled through editing myself. But I think I caught most of the mistakes my beta didn't.

Also, Dazai was actually being nice for once, but of course I'm the author so Aku had to take it the wrong way 面白−

Also, also, I actually have a date for the post next month. My birthday. But I'm not gonna tell you what the day is ( sdf). Hint: it's around the middle of the month. Why
am I not telling you? It's after school starts and if I accidentally don't get it out when I'm planning to, I don't feel super bad then.
Also, also, also, BSD S3!!!!!!!!!!!!! that's all I'm gonna say.

I'll say hi to you all next month (ﾉ◕ヮ◕)ﾉ*:・ﾟ✧
Feel free to hit me up on tumblr twitter or in the comments :)
Breaking Point

Chapter Summary

Fun time with the whole fam. (Is this writer being sarcastic? I don't know, you'll have to read to find out)

Chapter Notes

Y'all are gonna hate me

Song = mood for whole thing
basic link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnSEUnU5xDA

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day: 5

Light pierced through the dark veils that hanged over Dazai’s eyes. They scrunched together and fluttered open. He blinked in surprise multiple times before his thoughts could clearly come to him. He had slept, he had slept like a rock. First time since he could remember he actually felt the effects of too much sleep. He shifted in bed and a hand rested on his arm. He glanced over his shoulder and met Chuuya’s half-open eyes. The edge of the shorty’s lips lightly lifted and he let go of Dazai’s arm. The redhead yawned and stretched his arms.

Chuuya’s eyes drifted to the window. Everything happening inside Dazai’s chest and head were not good signs. His heart beat rapidly increased his head spun, and his stomach folded into itself until the knots were too complicated for anyone to untie. He already knew the man was attractive but he thought he had expelled the feelings in his chest years ago. They had tried to resurface before but never to the scale, he felt them.

“I’m hungry,” Chuuya whispered. “Can we go pick up breakfast?” He looked back at Dazai. They shouldn’t separate the group. There were more chances of King finding them if they did. Nonetheless, the angry short mafia man was hungry, and Dazai didn’t want to wake the other angry mafia man, even though Akutagawa was already awake. Dazai sighed and nodded. Chuuya leaped out of the bed and Atsushi jarred back from the sudden movement. The redhead ran over to Atsushi and quickly whispered, “we’re going to get breakfast, any requests?”

“That you come back safely,” Atsushi said immediately.

“We’ll be fine,” Dazai said. The kid wasn’t convinced. “The knock will be the same as before. Once we’re back we’ll make Akutagawa move.”

“Try not to disturb him,” Chuuya whispered next. “He seems asleep.” He wasn’t, but Dazai elected not to tell Chuuya that. He might berate Akutagawa for not trying to sleep when it was obvious he was still trying.
“Be safe,” Atsushi whispered. Dazai reassured him they would and the two men slipped outside of the door.

They walked down to the lobby in silence. Dazai watched Chuuya’s movements closely. The man still seemed to be in some pain even though he hid it well. Thankfully the guards had been stupid enough to put them in the same cell so no major damage was caused. Chuuya had been exhausted sure, but worse would have come to him if Dazai hadn’t been there. And Dazai was glad he had been.

Chuuya didn’t let him open the car door for his partner. He made sure to pout in order to get the message across that he had wanted to help.

“If Akutagawa doesn’t need your help I don’t either,” Chuuya’s said playfully. He winked at Dazai but the other man made his pout grow larger.

Dazai started the car without looking at Chuuya. He refused to. The man had lost Dazai’s willingness to associate with him. “I was joking Dazai,” Chuuya said as he pulled out of the parking lot.

“You were still a meany,” Dazai huffed.

The redhead rolled his eyes. “Still, why did Akutagawa push you away?”

He sighed. “Hell if I know. I don’t understand his actions. I was wholeheartedly trying to just help him.”

Chuuya didn’t reply right away, but when he did his words didn’t seem directed at Dazai. “I wonder if he didn’t understand it in that way.”

“What do you mean?” Dazai asked.

“Sorry, I was just talking to myself,” Chuuya said quickly.

“Chuuya~,” Dazai sing-songed, “I can’t do anything for Akutagawa if you don’t help me out. I don’t have a clue of what goes on in his head~,”

“Bull shit,” Chuuya said. “You certainly have a clue. Whether you decide to react in a good manner to that is your choice.”

He understood the basic structure of how Akutagawa thought as if it was written on the back of his hand, but lately, how Akutagawa reacted, was different. Dazai was going to have to restructure the way he took how Akutagawa thought or “felt” into consideration. On top of trying to stay one step ahead of King, it would be difficult. However, if he wanted even the smallest shot of keeping his apprentice away from that slimy bastards hands, he would have to stretch himself, but he was willing to do it. He would need to use Chuuya and Atsushi as a gage to know how Akutagawa was truly reacting to Dazai. If he could do that he might be able to keep him from King. No, he would. He had to.

But did he?

~
Gin’s lungs twisted in pain. Heavy breath pulsed out of her lungs and each intake of air pained her more than the last. Her knees cramped and her legs would collapse under her weight at any moment. The other three following her didn’t seem any better off. At least they managed to escape running into the exact people they were trying to avoid. But now she knew, now she knew that nowhere was safe, not from their enemy. Given the two men they had seen didn’t seem to be pursuing them. After all who would fret about three nonability users and one an ability user who could hide them. To their enemy, they probably didn’t seem like much of a threat.

She couldn’t stop her thoughts from wondering. Why, though? If they weren’t after Gin and the others, why were they there? There was a chance they may have been next to friends, but the risk of checking was far too great. Even if there were, at that point the two men may have already had them in handcuffs.

So they had ran. Even if their allies had been close, it was safer to stay separated. That way their enemy couldn’t corner all of them at once. But no one should be alone. If one person were left separated they wouldn’t stand much of a chance. Her chest twisted. Hopefully, Ryuu was with someone else.

“What...or who...was that?” Tanizaki panted.

“I don’t know their names,” Gin said slowly, “but I noticed one of them walk by my cell multiple times. I bolted because I didn’t think we wanted to get caught.”

“You’re right but why were they there?” Tanizaki asked.

Gin didn’t reply. Hopefully just to get food. A backend diner was not an ideal place though, she didn’t like the thought that they were there to find one of them. If they were that left her with two options she knew of, Chuuya and Dazai or Ryuu.

“I hope for lunch,” Gin muttered. They wandered back to their small abandoned house still as hungry as they had left. “Any other ideas for food?”

“The kind we don’t have to pay for,” Higuchi said.

“I told you not to worry about it,” Gin said.

“I know you bumped into someone on purpose Gin,” Higuchi said, “but afterward he touched his pocket and his wallet was still in there, not even you are good enough to move so fast.”

Gin pulled out a two thousand yen bill and quirked her brow. “Who said I have to pull wallets out of people’s pockets?”

Higuchi stared at her. “I’m sort of surprised, but there’s a small part of me that just isn’t at this point.”

Gin cackled and winked at the rest of the group. “Anyway, I didn’t take a card because the owner can have it canceled. This way, we have money we can rely on.”

“Alright, should some of us go, or all of us?” Higuchi asked.

“I’m going to punch someone if I don’t get food now,” Naomi said. “And I don’t want to be without big brother.”

“If we all go together it will take longer though,” Higuchi said.
Naomi pouted. “I'll just go,” Gin said, but her legs tried to convince her not to. “I'll find a closed gas station and get back as soon as I can.”

Naomi wined and protested but Tanizaki managed to talk her out of going with Gin. She promised she’d be back in twenty minutes at the maximum. Gin knew she could get to the gas station and back in less than ten minutes, but she wanted to leave room for a detour in case any complications showed up.

Thankfully, she managed to get there, buy some snacks, and leave without having another random run in. She ran across roof to roof and could see the top of the broken house, with the holes in the ceiling.

A breeze brushed across her neck, and her legs instantly stopped. She crouched low and glanced over the side of the roof. Her eyes widened as she stared at the small running girl below her. She knew exactly who that was.

Gin looked back at the house. The girl was running towards the way Gin had just come from. She needed to help her friends first and that involved helping one of hers run from their captors. At least that’s what Gin assumed this girl was running from. She couldn’t be sure.

Quietly Gin followed the purple haired girl as she darted through street after street, and alleyway after alleyway. Once she was content that no one was following her she sat down on the ground. The skin on the front of her legs was torn and every breath seemed labored. Gin walked across the nearby roof to check their surroundings. Someone had been able to track her this far. As soon as the man watching the little girl reached for his phone. Gin hopped off the roof and wrapped her fingers around his neck. He gasped in choked pain and slapped at her hand. She waited until he had gone still before she removed any source of communication from his ears and his pockets and threw him into the alleyway.

She smiled as the girl’s eyes flew to her. Her eyes softened and tears rimmed them. “I thought you could use a little bit of help, Kyouka,” Gin winked.

She nodded and tried to rise to her feet. Her legs collapsed under her. The man rushed towards her and Gin cursed. How was he still conscious? Kyouka raised her arms and demon snow stabbed her sword into the ground in front of him. The man stumbled back and Gin hit his neck as hard as she could. Gin walked passed him as he collapsed and she helped the small girl to her feet.

“Thank you, Gin,” she muttered.

“No problem,” Gin said, “it’s good to know you’re okay.” Kyouka nodded and demon snow disappeared. “I do have to get back to the others quickly otherwise Naomi will have my head, so do you mind me giving you a piggyback ride?”

The little girl’s eyes lit up instantly. “Naomi? You mean Tanizaki Naomi?”

Gin smiled, nodded, and crouched so Kyouka could climb onto her back. The girl did. “I don’t think this is necessary, I could keep up with you on foot.”

“With your weak legs? You’ve done enough running for one day. I can carry you just fine.” Gin’s legs screamed at her that they were exhausted too but she ignored them. She kicked the man one more time for good measure and took off. She took several detours to make sure they didn’t approach the house using the same roads Kyouka had ran on.

Gin’s feet landed gracefully on the top of the roof. A large toothy smile spread across her lips as she
listened to Kyouka’s heavy breathing. When the girl had immediately fallen asleep Gin had found it hard to keep her on her back. After she positioned her a few times the little girl had been securely lying on Gin’s back.

She reached the house, hopped down from the roof, and softly knocked on the door. She immediately put a finger to her lips as the door was thrown open and Naomi’s mouth was wide. Her complaint instantly stopped as she scanned over Gin and found Kyouka sleeping soundly on her back.

Tanizaki peeked through the door with an eyebrow raised. No shouts from Naomi had probably been a surprise. Gin handed her grocery bag to the brunet who willingly took it and moved out of the doorway. As Gin entered she smiled at Higuchi and watched the older woman’s eyes slowly open wider and wider.

The girl on Gin’s back shifted uncomfortably and groaned softly. Her stomach echoed through the room and Kyouka dug her face into Gin’s shoulder. Gin burst into laughter.

“Are you a little hungry back there?” She asked.

“A little,” Kyouka replied.

Higuchi wandered over to Naomi and pulled out several large containers of noodles. Gin crouched and Kyouka slid off of her back. “Thank you,” the girl muttered. Higuchi offered her the container and a shy smile spread across her lips. Kyouka mumbled another thank you and started eating.

While they ate Naomi had forced Kyouka to sit on her lap. The little girl hadn’t fought Naomi, which Gin wouldn’t have done as well. If she had learned anything over the past couple days, it would be that when Naomi wanted something, there was no saying no.

“So Kyouka,” Naomi said, “how did you escape?”

Kyouka shoved another large bite down her throat quickly and glanced at Gin. Why did she seem ashamed of something? She muttered something and Naomi quirked her brow.

“What?”

“Tachihara distracted them and demon snow cut a path for me,” Kyouka’s eyes focused on the ground.

Did she feel bad about utilizing that pest? “Serves him right,” Gin said, “he better be helping a fair young lady like yourself. You should have seen his jaw drop after they forced us to change clothes. He didn’t understand why I went with Higuchi to change along with most of the other guards. But when I returned to our cell his expression was priceless. I wish I could have had a camera.”

“He stuttered so badly,” Higuchi chuckled.

“I am never letting him live down his, ‘u-um I, uh, ma’am.’” Gin said. “He bowed to me. He bowed he was so shocked.”

Kyouka glanced up at Gin and managed a small smile. A rare sight that Gin would accept any day from her cute face. “I still feel a little bad.”

Yeah, Gin would never admit she felt bad for him. After all, she had never pegged him as the kind of gentleman to help a young lady who had technically betrayed the mafia. Yet there Kyouka was.
There was a chance Tachihara would also receive a major punishment for attempting an escape. No, there wasn’t a chance, he was going to receive some form of a punishment.

“Where did you come from? And do you know if anyone else was there with you?” Gin asked.

Kyouka shook her head. “I know no one else was there. It was a very small back room of a moving agency.”

Gin nodded and took a large mouthful of food. They ate the rest of the food in silence.

Gin stood up and stretched her arms toward the sky. “I’ll be back in a bit, I’m going to scout around our area. I’ll make sure no one is on to us.”

“Alright but be careful,” Higuchi said.

“Will do,” Gin gave her a thumbs up.

Gin moved towards the door and spied Kyouka and Tanizaki exchange looks. They were the only two who had noticed. However, the two of them didn’t say anything. She took their silence as a good luck gesture and headed through the door towards the direction Kyouka had come from. Based on the general location she instantly knew where her partner was being held. It was time to finally be one up on that man. That way she could get Tachihara to finally shut up when he was being obnoxious.

~

Day: 5

“Are you really part of the mafia?” Chuuya had asked that question on the way back yet again.

And yet again Dazai had replied, “of course.”

His old partner went silent. They arrived back at the hotel and Chuuya’s eyes lingered on Dazai for several moments before focusing on bringing their food inside. His stomach twisted violently. Chuuya had an inkling of an idea that Dazai was lying, that was easy enough to tell. The level at which he doubted Dazai was not so easy. Did he need to think of a way to convince Chuuya? Or he could tell him the truth.

Dazai stopped abruptly. He was going to get caught in a loop of lies if he kept it up. They reached their room and Dazai knocked in the pattern he had taught Atsushi. The boy cracked the door open and peered through before opening it the rest of the way.

“I’m glad you’re okay,” Atsushi said, “not that you weren’t going to be okay, but I didn’t know if King would randomly show up, or someone else, not that I know he would, or um...a natural disaster? I don’t know, there was a possibility you could have been eaten by a giant caterpillar.”

Chuuya burst out in laughter, before slapping a hand over his mouth. His eyes widened and he leaned forward. Dazai smirked and followed Chuuya. Akutagawa was gone.

“Yes?” Akutagawa asked. Chuuya jumped and spun around. Dazai caught Chuuya as he tripped and fell forward. “S-sorry.”
“No, you’re fine, you just startled me,” Chuuya said. He stood up and brushed Dazai’s hand off. “How’d you sleep?”

He shrugged. “Fine.”

Dazai quirked his brow. He wouldn’t call Akutagawa out for lying even though he wanted the man to tell the truth. That would hit his already very broken emotional state hard.

“Oh Atsushi, do you want to hit the drink vendor outside?” Chuuya asked. Dazai narrowed his brow and glanced at Chuuya. “Dazai needs to tell Akutagawa something.”

“I do?” Dazai asked. Adrenaline thrummed through his body. He hated when Chuuya took things into his own hands.

Chuuya blankly stared at Dazai. “Don’t act like you don’t know what I’m talking about. You said you had to on the way back. Atsushi, I’d like to talk to you as well if you don’t mind.”

Atsushi looked between all of them multiple times and slowly nodded. Chuuya grabbed the boys wrist without another word and dragged him out of the room. Dazai sighed and set the food on the desk.

“What was that about?” Akutagawa asked. Should he lie? Tell a half-truth? No, if he did that his former apprentice would converse with Chuuya and Chuuya would find out the truth. Being open would put pressure on Akutagawa but he had to risk it. If he didn’t Chuuya would easily see through the deception.

“In a nutshell,” Dazai said slowly, “I’m screwed.”

Akutagawa stared blankly at him. “Did you lie to Chuuya?”

Dazai nodded. “I may, or may not have told him I’m undercover at the agency and still part of the mafia.”

Akutagawa’s brow narrowed and he paused. “How did that even come up?”

“King thinks it’s true,” Dazai said. He explained what had happened as quickly as he could and Akutagawa remained silent the whole time. His silence alone was nearly enough to set Dazai on edge. How screwed was he?

Once he had finished Akutagawa finally spoke. “What do you want me to say?”

“Your honest opinion,” Dazai grumbled. He didn’t want to hear it, but he needed to.

“Tell Chuuya the truth,” Akutagawa said without a second of hesitation, “tell him your reasoning and he may be a little upset but he should be fine. However, if you extend the lie by the time Chuuya figures it out, which you know will happen, he’s going to be super pissed off and refuse to speak with you. Also if King thinks that way there’s a chance he’ll inform other agency members to try and break their spirits. That is if he’s as bad as you say he is.”

“It’s not that simple,” Dazai said. His stomach turned. Damn this kid was irritating.

“I know it’s not, but that’s my honest answer,” Akutagawa said. “The backlash from Chuuya will be worse the longer you keep up the lie. If the agency also believes this and we manage to save them you’ll be in a corner.”
Dazai gritted his teeth. That was not the answer he was hoping for. He knew that would be the case, what Akutagawa thought would be the best course of action would counter what Dazai’s gut told him. Dazai shook his head. It wasn’t his gut. His gut told him to listen to Akutagawa, while his head, no, heart told him to lie. But he could see what Akutagawa could. King would use this false information against the agency and when they finally saved them Dazai would be trapped between keeping the lie alive or keeping the trust of the only people he could trust.

“Don’t say anything to Chuuya,” Dazai said.

Akutagawa nodded.

The pattern sounded on the door and Dazai beckoned the two men inside. Atsushi glanced about the room as he entered. His eyes were wide and his teeth dug into his lip. He met Akutagawa’s eyes and the man shrugged. Atsushi still seemed concerned and his gaze didn’t leave Akutagawa for their entire meal.

Day: 5

Atsushi yawned as he sat up in his seat. He had slept for several hours and it was already late in the afternoon. They had parked in several different places and drove around Yokohama not really looking for anything, just trying to pass time. Dazai and Chuuya were talking about some form of a plan by the time Atsushi awoke. Akutagawa was sitting quietly in the back seat next to him staring out of the window. He shifted in his seat and Akutagawa met his eyes.

“Can I lay my legs across the seat for a bit?” Atsushi asked in a groggy voice.

Akutagawa turned as well and his feet rested between Atsushi’s hip and the seat. An electric shock traveled up Atsushi’s spine. He really needed to stop being so easily effected.

“Sure,” Akutagawa replied casually.

Atsushi’s heart rammed itself into his chest. Accepting he had feelings for Akutagawa was not helping them calm down. In fact, they became more boisterous every day.

“Welcome to the land of the living Atsushi,” Dazai said with a smile.

Atsushi’s eyes widened as he glanced between the front seats. “You managed to convince him?” Atsushi asked.

“After several minutes of whining Dazai gladly gave me the driving position.” Chuuya winked at Atsushi and turned his gaze back to the road.

“His main argument was that Dazai’s driving would wake you up,” Akutagawa whispered.

The car fell silent again and Atsushi stretched his legs across the backseat. They had fallen asleep along with Atsushi and it was refreshing to have them stretched out.

“Atsushi,” Dazai said, “we’re planning to travel around and stay hidden for a few more days while we gather intel about potential bases of operation for King. If we hear any word about where any
agency or mafia might be we’ll head there and help in anyway we can. For now, that’s what we believe the plan should be.”

Atsushi nodded. “What do you think Akutagawa?”

The man’s eyes flew to Atsushi and he shook his head. “It’s fine. The plan is mostly solid, why are you asking me?”

Atsushi opened his mouth but it wasn’t his voice that spoke first. “He was just trying to include you,” Dazai snapped.

“Sorry,” Akutagawa said quickly.

“I can say that myself, Dazai,” Atsushi said, “and it was just a simple question. He wasn’t trying to be rude.”

Atsushi held eye contact with Dazai. “Alright, but if he didn’t have hostile intent why did he sound like he thought you were stupid?”

Atsushi spied Akutagawa’s posture sink. “That probably wasn’t his intent,” Atsushi said simply. “Sometimes I say things in a way I don’t mean to, it’s just habit.”

“Whatever,” Dazai said.

His chest clenched. “No, it’s not whatever.”

“Atsushi it’s fine,” Akutagawa spoke up.

“No it’s not,” Atsushi said, “not when he acts like a jerk about every sentence that comes out of your mouth.”

“I’m not trying to be a jerk,” Dazai said.

“It’s fine,” Akutagawa repeated, a little louder than last time.

“You could have fooled me,” Atsushi said.

“Atsushi, I’m-” Akutagawa began his voice above his normal volume.

“I didn’t mean to be rude, alright,” Dazai said, “just calm down.”

“No! I’m not going to! You’re being a jerk.”

“Atsushi-” Akutagawa tried to interfere.

“I’m am not trying to sound that way about everything he says.”

“Yes, you are!”

“No, I’m not,”

“Shut up Dazai. You need to be nicer for once, there’s a reason Akutagawa didn’t tell you about his dreams-”

“I’m fine, damn it!” Akutagawa yelled. Atsushi went silent. “I’m used to his tone, okay, so cut it out.”
“Akutagawa,” Chuuya said, “you shouldn’t have to be used to that.”

“Do I really sound like a jerk most of the time?” Dazai asked.

“Yeah you do,” Atsushi bit out.

“Sorry I’m a pain in the ass, Atsushi,” Dazai said, “I didn’t realize you didn’t want me around.”

“He didn’t say he didn’t want you around,” Akutagawa said.

“Really?” Dazai asked his voice was seeped in anger. “You’re sure that’s not what his words sounded like? Then, I’m sorry, I’ll try to see things from your oblivious perspective.”

Akutagawa fell completely silent. Atsushi couldn’t even hear his breathing. Dazai’s eyes widened. “I am so sorry.”

Akutagawa shook his head. “It’s fine.”

“No it’s not,” Dazai said, “crap you’re right Atsushi.”

“Not entirely,” Atsushi said, “I mean, you’re right in the sense that you’re not always trying to sound that way.”

“At the same time your outburst wasn’t okay,” Chuuya said.

“Sorry Akutagawa,” Dazai apologized again. The man didn’t respond. He hadn’t even seemed to hear. “Akutagawa?”

“It’s fine.” Akutagawa snapped.

“Whatever, if you don’t want to listen to me try, that’s your own downfall, and your own damn fault.” Dazai said with a roll of his eyes.

“Dazai!” Chuuya yelled.

Akutagawa’s whole body went rigid and Atsushi held out his hand. Akutagawa accepted it and he squeezed it. The older man slowly curled in on himself and his eyes glued to the window, but he didn’t pull his hand away. Atsushi watched as Akutagawa seemed to be deeply thinking through something. His eyes would focus in and out, his grip on Atsushi’s hand varied on how hard he squeezed it, and finally, there was the look. His eyes briefly met Atsushi’s. His pupils were wider and his face was solemn. He looked like someone had just stabbed him through the heart and he did nothing but accept his fate.

Atsushi squeezed his hand one more time as his gaze dropped. He was there for Akutagawa, no matter what he was there. They remained quiet for the rest of the car ride, only conversing about small insignificant things.


Day: 6

What could he bring with him? Akutagawa had nothing left. Every memory he could recall hurt far
too much and any material possession was in his apartment. If only his memory could have been left behind. He would gladly be free from his burden. All he wanted to keep were the memories of his sister. When it was the two of them in town, in their apartment, even in the slums. He could easily live without Dazai inside of his head, trying to manipulate him even when the man wasn’t present. He wanted to be rid of him.

Chuuya could leave too. The red head had always been there for him, but if the mafia left his memory Chuuya would too. He could live without him. Even if the thought hurt it was better than having any ties to Dazai. Akutagawa’s chest twisted and his throat felt coated in thick slime. If he didn’t want any ties to Dazai, he’d have to forget Atsushi as well. Why did he not want that to happen? Something in his head told him he would do anything to keep that from happening. Were those thoughts, and that will, Dazai’s or his? Surely they weren’t his own. Except they were. Dazai couldn’t have implanted feelings inside Akutagawa, could he? If so he wouldn’t have implanted sadness to the thought of losing someone.

He needed to leave. He couldn’t stay suffocating under Dazai’s grasp anymore and Atsushi needed to stay with Dazai and Chuuya. So why did he want to take Atsushi with him? Why did he feel pain lacing through his stomach, when he thought about leaving the tiger behind? Why did he feel like he wouldn’t be strong enough without him?

What even was strength? Was it pushing through? Was it doing something hard and not complaining? Was it standing tall when everything inside of him were scattered pieces? Was it getting back on his feet when everything, everyone, told him to stay down? It didn’t matter. He was going to stand back up, and not in the way that everyone he knew wanted him to. He couldn’t stand the pain anymore. He was going to leave, and his decision was final.

He had tried to stay another day, but nothing had been better. Atsushi had tried to stand up for him but the pain didn’t stop. His decision was final.

The door silently shut behind him. As soon as he left the building he couldn’t return. He only had until then to turn back. He kept each step quiet, as he quickly paced down the hall, down the steps, and out the doors into the streets of Yokohama.

He had tried, he had given his all, wasn’t that good enough? He had lost everything, didn’t he have a right to be upset? Didn’t he have a right to leave?

His legs stopped moving. He knew exactly where to find King. It would take him a maximum of twenty minutes to reach there by foot. So why were his legs frozen in place?

“Akutagawa!” The cry sounded from behind him. He quickly wiped any rain from his eyes and turned around.

“What are doing awake Atsushi?” He asked. He couldn’t bring himself to meet the Jinko’s eyes.

“What are doing leaving the room in the middle of the night?” Atsushi asked. Akutagawa didn’t answer, he couldn’t, not with the massive lump in his throat. “Where are you going?”

“You’re not going to like my answer,” his voice rippled with cracks. Damn it. Why did Atsushi have to effect him like this?

Atsushi’s eyes widened and his mouth opened, but no words came out. He seemed to be scrambling for what his next words should be. They didn’t matter, Akutagawa was leaving.

“Akutagawa,” Atsushi said. His voice was so small. “Where are you going? Please, at least tell me
that much.”

He inhaled until his lungs wouldn’t accept anymore. “I’m going to King.” Four words. Simple, but Atsushi physically recoiled. He must have had trouble comprehending.

“N-no, don’t, please,” Atsushi said, his words tumbled out one after the other. “We’ll figure out why, we’ll fix whatever it is, please, please don’t go.”

“Atsushi, there is no ‘fixing’ things,” tears welled up in his eyes. “I can’t be fixed!”

“Then let me come with, please,” Atsushi said, “I’ll help, I’ll.”

“I wish you could let you,” Akutagawa said, “I don’t want to go alone.”

“Then-” Atsushi began.

“But I don’t know what King’s true intentions are. If he knew how I felt about you he may use that to trap me, and force me to do something i don’t want to do. Or he could protect you and keep you from any harm. But I don’t know, and I care about you Atsushi. I don’t want you to be hurt-”

“If you leave I’ll be hurt. I’ll hurt more than I ever have.” Water poured down Atsushi’s cheeks.

Akutagawa chuckled, it was pained, but it was there. “Good point, but you’ll be safe. You’re the first person who could say anything nice that managed to break down my walls. For that, Jinko, I am truly grateful. The past several days have been some of the best days I will ever have in my life. I care about you far too much to allow the possibility of King manipulating me through you. So I’m going to leave. I’m sorry.”

He met Atsushi’s eyes for a split second, before he turned on his heel and ran down the sidewalk.

“Akutagawa!” Atsushi screamed, “Akutagawa! Ak- Ryuunosuke!”

Screams of his name followed him far beyond where the sound could reach him. Ryuunosuke. The first time Atsushi had called him by his given name and he wouldn’t hear it again. Not in the same way. He may say it in contempt or hatred but that was fine. As long as Atsushi was safe, as long as Gin was safe, as long as the people he cared for were safe, as long as the people, the people he loved were safe he would be satisfied. Atsushi was in that category. Fate always had a way of screwing him over. It always like to watch him suffer until the one thing that might make him happy was too far out of his grasp. Atsushi, he cared for Atsushi far more than just as a friend. Maybe it wasn’t love, but his feelings, the things that he wasn’t used to having happen inside of him, they were pretty damn close.

He couldn’t stuff the feelings for Atsushi. He had tried and failed miserably, but he would show them through protection. Atsushi wouldn’t see it, but he would express what he couldn’t cork the only way he knew how. He would fight like hell to ensure he was safe. He would run to King and work for him. He’d run from Atsushi and his friends because that was the only way he could protect them. After all, the only thing he was good at was running.

Chapter End Notes

Was that fun?
Have so more feelios, you might need some heelios Song for last part basic link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLFBHXx2PBo

that song will come up later too (°_°)
(that is if I remember)

I enjoyed seeing all of the comments last chapter exclaiming something along the lines of "They're together finally!" I snickered at everyone.

School just started up for me and oof!!! It shouldn't impact my posting schedule too much, but I do have less time to brainstorm and I only have a couple vague plot points planned past chapter 19. I'm not sure when I'll figure out what will happen but I have plenty of time to figure it out, so hopefully, it won't impact too much. I have no idea though so no promises.

Also, if you know what an AP (Advanced Placement) class is, I'm taking one of those this year, depending on the workload that might cut into production too.

Also, also, I decided to do no other extracurriculars besides my instrument this year so no big activities will get in the way (thankfully).

Also, also, also, have a wonderful day and I hope that if you're in school as well you will not suffer too badly

Also, also, also, also, I opened this up the other day and screamed at the Kudo count. Thank you all so much!!!! There's around 240 and last time I checked was about 40 kudos ago I'm so surprised!!!! Thank you all so so so so so so sooooo much!!!!!

Feel free to comment and you can also hit me up on tumblr twitter
Chapter Summary

Atsushi reacts (he’s a little salty...okay maybe he’s a lot a salty) and Gin acts on her own (kind of)

Atsushi snorted. “Because getting away from an abusive ass is a mistake.”
“What not swear in this household,” Chuuya told him.

Chapter Notes

Some of this your gonna hate me for, some of this you might love me for...might.

Song for 1st part
Song for 2nd part

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day: 6

“Do you like Akutagawa?” Chuuya asked.

“W-what?” Atsushi’s words stumbled over his lips. “Oh, uh, he’s nicer than I originally thought so yeah, I’d like to be friends.”

Chuuya stared at Atsushi with his lips bent into a thin smile. “Atsushi, you know that’s not what I meant.” Chuuya pushed in the numbers on the vending machine and one of the drinks fell out.

Heat rushed through Atsushi’s cheeks and dyed them a thick crimson. “I-I have n-no idea wha-what you’re talking about.”

Chuuya burst into laughter. “Don’t pretend the feelings aren’t there.”

“I’m not!” Atsushi protested. His eyes widened and he slapped a hand across his mouth.

Chuuya’s lips curled up higher but he didn’t push. They collected the drinks and moved back towards the room.

“A word of advice,” Chuuya finally spoke. “You’re going to have to make the first move. If Akutagawa has feelings for you, which I will neither confirm nor deny, his self-worth is six feet in the ground. He will never make the first move.” Chuuya winked and knocked on the door back into the room.
Yeah right. Atsushi wiped his eyes as uncontrollable tears rippled down his cheeks. His head spun and his eyes hurt from crying too much. Yeah, great advice when Akutagawa wouldn’t even give him a chance to say anything. Chuuya intentions had been good when they had talked, but none of that mattered.

Why? Why had he left? His chest squeezed together and searing hot pain spiraled throughout his body. A fresh round of tears poured down his eyes. Did he say something wrong? Did he make Akutagawa feel unwelcomed? Did-

A small sob escaped his lips and Atsushi collapsed on the sidewalk. His arms trembled and nothing would stop his dams from collapsing. The waterfalls were free to rain down his fave and it would take a while to lock them back up. Tears rolled down his cheeks, one after the other with no mercy and no signs of stopping. He wrapped his arms around himself and wept into them.

Akutagawa really hated him, what other answer was there? Maybe Akutagawa went to be a spy for them, or to find Gin and then to come back. He couldn’t really be gone could he?

I’m going to leave.

I’m sorry.

No, he really was gone.

The last few tears trickled down his cheeks. He rubbed his eyes and slowly stood up. His legs shook and his arms trembled but he marched towards the hotel anyway. Nice going Dazai, now Akutagawa was gone and there was nothing any of them could do. Before he knew it the elevator doors opened and he stepped out onto their floor. Atsushi stared at his feet as they moved towards the door dragging his body along with them.

He couldn’t think. There was nothing left to think about. His eyes rose and rested on a tall form leaning against the wall outside their room. Dazai’s eyes met his and he glanced down the hall behind Atsushi. It was Dazai’s fault Akutagawa was gone. His stomach rose and rage twisted its roots into the strands of his stomach. His eyes narrowed and he refused to meet Dazai’s eyes again.

“You couldn’t bring him back,” Dazai’s voice was so soft Atsushi was barely able to hear him.

Atsushi stopped in front of the door to their room.

“No thanks to you,” Atsushi’s voice was deep and his words rolled as they came out of his mouth. He glared at Dazai, his vision far clearer than normal.

“Are you threatening me?” Dazai asked his voice far more curious than angry.

What? Atsushi glanced around the hall. His eyes instantly focused on every little spot. Oh, he had the tiger’s eyes. He looked to the door and reached for the handle.

“Atsushi, I’m sorry,” Dazai said.

Water roared through his eyes and stung them as it streaked down his cheeks. He felt his arms transform as he pulled one of them back and swung his clenched fist at Dazai. The older man held out his hand. His tiger’s arm instantly disappeared as Dazai caught his fist.

“Why the hell are you apologizing to me?” Atsushi growled. “If you felt an ounce of remorse, you would have stopped Akutagawa, you would have apologized to him, you wouldn’t be pretending you can fix it now, and you sure wouldn’t have acted like a complete ass to him. This is your fault stop pretending it isn’t. I-I hate you!” He took a deep breath and a quiet sob escaped his mouth. His words caught in his throat but he forced them out. “You hated Akutagawa don’t pretend that you didn’t. If you had cared you would have tried to help him, you would have tried to reach out to him. You didn’t do anything for him, I hate you for that. I hate you for pretending that everything is fine, I hate that you’re always so light-hearted even when you shouldn’t be, and I absolutely hate your
guts!” He collapsed onto the ground in a flurry of sobs and another round of tears poured down his cheeks. He didn’t know it was possible to cry so much.

The door flew open. “What the fuck is happening?” Chuuya said. Atsushi assumed he was in the doorway. He felt the warmth of the bandaged man as he crouched in front of Atsushi.

“Atsushi,” Dazai reached out his hand.

He slapped it away and with every piece of strength had, he pushed against Dazai’s chest. The man collapsed backward and Atsushi stood up. “What happened?” Chuuya asked. “More importantly, where is Akutagawa?”

His question set Atsushi down a whole new road of tears. The boy wrapped his arms around the redhead and pulled him into a tight hug. Chuuya wrapped his arms back around him and began to run his fingers through his hair.


“Akutagawa left,” Dazai said. He cleared his throat. “I assume he’s going to King.” He paused. “We lost him.”

Chuuya’s grip around Atsushi tightened. “We should get inside before everyone else in this hotel kills us.” He didn’t wait for a response from Dazai before leading Atsushi into the room. He sat on the edge of the bed and pulled Atsushi onto his lap. Atsushi didn’t really care, he was just glad it wasn’t only him and Dazai. He was also happy that Chuuya was so willing to comfort him. He needed another friend who wasn’t a manipulative piece of crap. Or just a piece of crap in general.

Dazai pulled up the desk’s chair and sat in front of them. They sat in silence and let Atsushi cry. He didn’t know how long he was curled up in Chuuya’s lap but nobody spoke.

Once Atsushi’s sobs had quieted down Chuuya was the first to speak up. “What are we going to do dipshit? More importantly, how are we getting our depressed boy back?”

“He’s only going to come back if he wants to Chuuya,” Dazai said. “There’s nothing we can do but hope he realizes his mistake.”

Atsushi snorted. “Because getting away from an abusive ass is a mistake.”

“Do not swear in this household,” Chuuya told him, “I understand you’re angry, but please do not take after us. He holds a good point Dazai. I don’t think you can say leaving was a mistake when you were a prime shit to him.”

“How come you can call him mean names and I can’t?” Atsushi asked.

“Because you literally just said ‘mean names’ I don’t think I need to elaborate my point, but I will for you. Everything you say is pure, don’t sully it with dirty language,” Chuuya patted Atsushi’s head and the boy chuckled.

“What?” Dazai said, “we can’t help Akutagawa. He left us, we can’t change his decision. We can only hope,” he paused, “that he won’t be content with King and will come back.”

“I strongly disagree,” Chuuya said.

“This isn’t an evaluation form,” Dazai said, “there is nothing we can do, period.”
“You mean nothing you’re willing to do,” Atsushi muttered.

Dazai opened his mouth but closed it. “Atsushi-”

“Oh, go ahead and slap me like you did Akutagawa. I doubt you’d care.”

“You did what?” Chuuya screeched.

“That was weeks ago,” Dazai said.

“So what? You still did it,” Atsushi said. “I wouldn’t tell you anything if you were abusive.”

“Atsushi, I didn’t mean to hit him,” Dazai said, “sometimes I end up doing things I don’t want to. I apologize-“

“Why are you apologizing to me?” Atsushi yelled. “If you truly were sorry you would have apologized to Akutagawa, I am so done with you.” He stood up and moved towards the door.

Fingers wrapped around his wrist and pulled him back. “Where are you going?” Dazai asked.

“Leaving,” Atsushi said, he ripped his wrist out of Dazai’s grip. “And you didn’t try to stop Akutagawa so don’t try to stop me.”

“Atsushi-” he cut Chuuya off by slamming the door behind him. He took off down the hallway. He heard the door reopen and Chuuya call after him. He pulled open the door to a stairwell and ran down them as quickly as he could. Feet pounded behind him. Atsushi must have been several flights ahead but whoever was following was catching up with him very quickly. The staircase grew wider and a hole between flights appeared. He jumped over the railing and instigated his ability as he landed on the ground floor. He rushed out of the stairs and outside the hotel building. He darted into an alleyway as his name was called out again. Chuuya was following him.

Where could he go? He ran away from the group before, which had been just Akutagawa at the time, and had been captured. Being aware of everything around him was not his specialty when all he wanted to do was be angry. Besides that, he didn’t have anywhere to go and he had no money.

*You panic and let your body carry you anywhere it wants. You normally end up exactly on top of what you’re looking for because your senses are sharper than you realize.* Atsushi’s lips quirked upwards. He stopped trying to think of where he was and where he was going and just let his feet carry him. Where they took him, he didn’t care. All he needed was somewhere to be. He needed someone he could trust and someone who he knew wouldn’t judge him or try to manipulate him.

He came to a stop in front of a small shack. He glanced behind him. He couldn’t hear Chuuya or Dazai which was a good sign. He ran his eyes over the small building. The door was old and the hinges were rusted. The light brown paint was flaking off and there were several small holes in the siding but they weren’t big enough for him to look through without his ability. Behind the building were more like it and if he looked down a massive hill he could see what looked like a town of similar buildings.

The Slums. He was in the slums. He wasn’t sure why he had brought himself here but it couldn’t hurt for him to see what was behind the door. He curled his fingers into a fist and lightly tapped against the surprisingly sturdy wood. The door flew open and a strong force hit his stomach. His vision swam and he collapsed. Surprisingly, the darkness didn’t swarm him.

Atsushi’s ears rang, noises entered them but all he could comprehend were vague shouts. Hands grabbed his arms and lifted him off the ground. He attempted to resist but could do little more but
pull weakly. He tried to open his eyes but they felt glued shut. His limp body was laid on the ground. Slowly the ringing in his ears dimmed and he could hear voices yelling back and forth.

“How was I supposed to know it was gonna be him?” someone said. Atsushi couldn’t put the voice to a name, but he knew the sound of their voice from somewhere.

“Maybe be aware of who it is next time, what if the other two had returned?” Another strangely familiar voice said.

“They’ve been gone for multiple days, and we don’t know if they’re coming back. We need to be on guard,” The first replied.

“Your brother is right,” A third voice that was soft and high pitched said.

“I don’t care, we still accidentally knocked Atsushi out,” originally the second voice said. She, at least Atsushi thought they were a she, sighed and continued; “He’s waking up by the way big brother.”

Feet shuffled towards him as he slowly managed to open his eyes. Extreme light flooded them at first and he had to close them again. He tried one more time to open them and they quickly adjusted to the brighter lighting.

He glanced at the three people standing about the room and his jaw instantly hung open. His eyes widened and he looked over their faces a few more times to make sure it was them. “Tanizaki, Naomi!” He said happily, “hey Higuchi. How are you here, how have you been, and where exactly are we?” He lifted himself to a sitting position on the futon they must have laid him on, and faced them.

“A lot happened several days ago,” Naomi began. “Do you know Gin?”

“You mean Akutagawa’s-” Higuchi slapped a hand over his mouth. His eyes widened as he realized his almost really bad mistake. After a moment Higuchi removed her hand. “I-I mean, do you mean the black lizard leader Gin?” Tanizaki and Naomi exchanged quick glances and then nodded. “I’ve heard of him.”

“You mean her,” Naomi said, “Gin is actually a girl.”

“I’ve heard of her,” Atsushi corrected himself for the second time in their brief conversation.

“She saved us,” Naomi said.

“She managed to pick the lock on our cell,” Higuchi explained. “While we were trying to find the exit we ran into them and Gin got us out.”

“A few days ago Gin also found Kyouka,” Naomi said.

Atsushi’s heart felt like it had just been given a reason to beat in his chest. “What? Where is she now?”

The three of them looked at each other as if they were seeing who would say what. “We don’t know,” Tanizaki finally said. “She and Gin disappeared right after we found Kyouka.”

“That was three days ago,” Higuchi added. “I’m starting to get worried.”

They fell silent. Where was Kyouka? At least she wasn’t still with King. “Where were you kept?”
Atsushi asked.

“Oh, right, you stayed away from our captor,” Tanizaki said.

“Uh, yeah, sort of,” Atsushi said.

“He kept us in a plain old office building by a hotel,” Tanizaki said. “He’s hiding us in plain sight.”

“Dazai was right,” Atsushi said, “King is sneaky.”

Tanizaki’s eyes widened. “King? Who’s that? Is that the guy who bombed the agency? And you know where Dazai is?”

“I just ran away from him and Chuuya because he was being a jerk,” Atsushi said. And because Akutagawa was gone. The only reason he didn’t say that was because he wasn’t sure how Tanizaki would take his emotions towards Akutagawa.

“Chuuya is okay too?” Higuchi asked.

Atsushi nodded. “And King Stephen is the man who leads the organization we’re up against. Dazai has known since the beginning. He told me and,” a large lump formed in his throat. “Akutagawa, but he also told us not to tell anyone else. That didn’t work well and I’m angry at him right now so that’s why I’m telling you.”

“Why are you angry at him?” Naomi asked.

Atsushi ran his teeth over his lip. There was no point in lying. “Because he was a jerk to Akutagawa and now we have no idea where he is.”

“You were with Akutagawa?” Higuchi asked quickly.

“‘Were’,” Atsushi repeated, “he left.”

“Oh, okay,” Higuchi said. No doubt she was disappointed. And if Gin was okay and he saw her how was he supposed to explain what happened to her?

Should he tell them Akutagawa left to go join King? It would be better if he didn’t, but if they ran into him they wouldn’t know to be on guard. But Atsushi didn’t want anyone to be wary of Akutagawa! He wanted Akutagawa to go back to them. But sometimes he didn’t get his way. They should know.

“Um Higuchi,” Atsushi said, “you especially should know that, um, we kind of do know where Akutagawa is.”

“Where?” She asked immediately.

“You see,” Atsushi said slowly and tears threatened to spill out the corners of his eyes, “Before the ADA was bombed Akutagawa was with us and he apparently started having dreams that King appeared in. He tried to convince Akutagawa to join him and said things would be better. Or that was Dazai’s guess anyway. For a while, it was just the two of us and he didn’t seem to be thinking about them at all. However, when Dazai and Chuuya found us the air between him and Dazai was always tense and Dazai was mean to him at the ADA and yesterday. So, um, I guess I should say,” his voice cracked and he tried desperately to restrain his tears. “He left to go join King.” Reality slapped him across the face again and he burst into another round of tears.
The three’s eyes dug into his skin and it felt like fire against his skin, which only caused him to cry harder.

One of them knelt next to him and wrapped their arms around him. He forced his tears to subside and looked up to the side. Naomi smiled and he wrapped his arms back around her for a quick second before lightly pushing her away. He thanked her and rubbed his eyes. They were probably bright red by that point.

“Atsushi!” The sound was very quiet and seemed far off, but he had definitely heard his name. Chuuya was still looking for him.

“I heard Chuuya call my name,” Atsushi muttered.

Silence filled the room. He heard his name again.

“You should go,” Tanizaki said. “Gin said it was better to stay together but still separated. And it seems like they’re worried.”

“I don’t care,” Atsushi said.

“That’s not true,” Naomi smiled, “you always care. Besides, they already lost someone else today. They don’t want to lose you too.”

“Maybe Chuuya but Dazai doesn’t care,” Atsushi argued.

Naomi nodded thoughtfully. “It may seem like that but Dazai is the hardest person to understand that I’ve ever met. He probably cares more than he seems to, but then again you could be right. What do you think big brother?”

“Also, Chuuya is probably worrying himself sick,” Higuchi interrupted Tanizaki. “Do you have a phone on you?” Atsushi nodded and pulled it out. “We have one too, Gin stole money to buy one and get it connected to a plan. She left it behind, probably so she could get in contact.” She reached out her hand and Atsushi gave his phone to her. After she finished typing in the number she gave it back. “Just so we have some way to contact you and vice versa.”

Atsushi nodded. They were right. He did need to go back to Dazai and Chuuya. More for Dazai’s safety than anything. He figured if the older man caused more than one person to leave Chuuya may rip him in half. He also didn’t want to worry the redhead anymore than he had.

“See you later Atsushi,” Naomi gave him another quick hug. He hugged Tanizaki and even Higuchi. He thought she would be a lot angrier than she had been from the news. Finally, Atsushi moved towards the door to leave.

“Oh, Atsushi,” Higuchi called. He looked back at her. “Don’t worry too much about Akutagawa, I’m sure he knows what he’s doing, and I’m sure he’s fine.”

“Thank you,” Atsushi managed a small smile. He inhaled deeply and moved out to regroup with the older men.

~
Gin stared at the building Kyouka had described. The sign on the office building said the moving agency was on the fifth floor. If the trend kept up she would just hack into the security cameras of every single office building in Yokohama and find where everyone was. Whoever was up to this wasn’t very creative. Either that or they were trying to have Gin and the others find them. The second thought sent shivers rolling up her spine. She shook her head. There was no room for overthinking things. She needed to focus on what she was there for.

The entrance was stationed with several guards and had far more people then her own prison building had. Either this person was stepping up their game or something else was happening. It didn’t really matter, she never had to go through the front door. Hopefully, Tachihara was ready for her to show up. Otherwise, she was going to face several complications if she had to carry him.

Gin was already exhausted from running most of the night to find this place. She had slept for maybe a couple hours in a cheap motel; even then she woke up every ten minutes because she was too anxious about being found.

She slipped into an alleyway and scaled the side of the building with little effort. She reached a fourth-floor window and glanced inside. People were running around looking for papers, making copies and phone calls. Perfect. The window popped open easily and she slipped inside the building. She made it through the room with little effort and slipped into the hallway.

She walked down the hall and found the nearest staircase. Quickly she jogged up the steps and made it to the fifth floor. Her fingers wrapped around the handle to the door and turned it. Locked. She pulled out two hairpins, crouched down, and went to work.

A small hand tapped her shoulder. Her knife was against the person’s neck before she had fully turned around. Kyouka’s arms were extended over her head and she stared at Gin. Gin stared back.

“What are you doing here?” Gin hissed.

“I thought you were coming to help Tachihara and I wanted to help you,” Kyouka said. “After all, he’s the entire reason I escaped.”

“But there was no need to put yourself in extraneous danger,” Gin said.

Kyouka shrugged. “I wanted to help because that’s what the Armed Detective Agency does.”

Gin stared down at the little girl. Well, she would have done the exact same thing so it’s wasn’t like she could scold her or anything. “If your willing I’ll take you with me on one condition,” Gin said, “you have to listen to me and wait for me to give you signals. They’ll be the standard hand signals you should know them.” Kyouka nodded. “Alright.”

Gin turned back to the door and continued work on the lock. Before long there was a small click and she pushed the door open. As quietly as she could she slipped through the door and signaled to Kyouka to stay put. Guards lined the hallway, all of their guns were out and ready to be used. They were ready for them.

There was a chance she could just sneak passed all of them, but with Kyouka’s eagerness to help she doubted the girl would stay behind. Gin scanned over the guards and quickly counted. She bet there were around twenty-five or so guards and probably more throughout the level. What she needed was a way to hack the security cameras. If she knew where Tachihara was, it would make her job far easier.
Think, think, think. What could she do? How could she incorporate Kyouka and her ability? The only idea she had would not pass well with anyone else. Only Kyouka would be down with the idea. Anyone else looking in would look down on Gin, hell Gin looked down on herself for thinking of it, but did they have any other options?

As best as she could, Gin signaled the plan to Kyouka and made sure to emphasize the running away part. Kyouka nodded in understanding and instigated her ability. She rushed through the door and bullets began to fly. Gin maneuvered through the fight and slipped behind the farthest door.

She didn’t like using the little girl as a distraction but in the end, that’s all she could really do. Gin worked better alone anyway, Kyouka could help by keeping the majority of guards out of her way. Once she was passed the door and into the long hallway behind she quickly darted to each door and opened them slightly to peeked inside. The click of a far door sounded and she ducked into a closet she had found moments earlier. A swarm of men and women dressed in black with guns strapped to their backs rushed through the first door she had come through.

A hole dug into Gin’s stomach. Maybe she should have thought of a different plan. There was no going back though. After the guards ran by, she snuck back out and over to the door they had come through. A key card was needed to open the door. Shit.

She pulled out her knife and knocked off the cover. She messed with several wires until she found the two she believed she needed. Quickly, she got to work. It took longer than she would have liked. The constant noises that plagued her mind were also a huge distraction. It sounded like Kyouka was easily taking care of them and not following the running away part of the plan, but as long as she was safe Gin didn’t have any complaints.

The light on the keypad flashed green and Gin quickly propped open the door before it switched back to locked. She decided that the next guard she saw she was going to take their badge. There was no way she was going through that process again.

The hallway beyond was short and quickly turned to the side. Gin wandered inside. Each door was locked with another keypad. Would punching them work? She hoped so. She gave up on opening each door and moved to the turn.

She peeked around the corner and her eyes rested on a tall figure. She looked like every other guard except she didn’t have a gun. A shiver raced up Gin’s spine. If she was on any other mission she would avoid this woman, but something seemed to whisper, she wanted that person’s keycard. She kept her body low and slowly put one foot in front of the other. She was inches away from the woman’s back.

A pistol was pointed between her eyes before she had a moment to notice anything else. Gin pushed as hard as she could against the ground and flew back while a lump formed in her throat. The gunshot rang through the halls and a small smoking hole appeared in the ground. Adrenaline pulsed through her veins as Gin bolted towards the woman. She lifted the gun and Gin’s legs jumped to the side. Her eyes quickly evaluated the nearest wall and she ran up it before flipping backward. The woman pointed the pistol up at her as she descended. Her heart stopped for a moment but she knew she would be fine. As the trigger was pulled, Gin managed to wrap her legs around woman’s extended arm. Her weight pulled the woman down and Gin flipped her onto her stomach. She grabbed the pistol and slammed it into the back of the woman’s head.

The woman stopped moving and Gin let out a sigh of relief. Her hands shook as she quickly rummaged through the woman’s pockets and found the keycard. She pocketed the gun and swiped the key into the nearest door. Sure enough, the door slid open without a sound. She slipped inside and quickly scanned her surroundings. One wall was covered in television screens and portrayed
different areas around the floor. There were desk chairs lining a few desks underneath the TVs and three out of five of the chairs were inhabited.

Gin backed into the furthest corner and scanned the screen. One of them showed Kyouka as demon snow hit the back of its sword into one of the guard’s stomach. She may not have run but she was definitely holding her own. Maybe Gin wouldn’t give her a lecture later. Kyouka obviously knew her own limits better than Gin did.

“This little girl has wiped out the third group. Send in the fourth and fifth,” One of the men said.

If Gin could get over to the corner by the control panel she could download a map onto her phone. But she would have a slim chance of not being spotted once over there. Why did this have to be so much more difficult than when they escaped?

Because they wanted you to escape.

She shook her head. She couldn’t think about that right now. Quietly, she crouched as low as she could and placed one foot in front of the other. Slowly she moved towards the other end of the room. The person who had spoken before barked out another order. She was only about two meters from the control panel.

The chair directly next to her spun and a man stood up. Instantly, she forced herself to stop moving. The man ran to the door and out into the hallway. Gin hurried forward and quickly opened up the side of the control panel. Thankfully the man had been too focused on whatever he had been ordered to do.

She found a way to plug in her phone and silently stood. She messed around with the control panel, a silent prayer for them not to notice her swam through her mind. Finally, she managed to copy the map onto her phone from the database and she crouched back down as the data slowly moved to her phone, one percent at a time.

“Send in one of the other backup groups. We’ll stop her with sheer numbers.”

Shit. Gin glared at her phone, her phone would obviously move faster because she was glaring. She needed to pick up the pace before they managed to knock out or worse, kill, Kyouka. The last few percents flew by. She removed her phone and as silently as she could, darted for the exit. Neither of the remaining two men spied her. She slipped out of the room with ease and opened the new map on her phone.

The cell Tachihara would be it was only down the next few hallways. She followed the path, making sure to check around each corner as she came to it. She managed to dodge around several security people. As soon as she arrived she swiped the key card and the door slid open.

The room beyond the door was dark. The light from the hall filtered into the room but there was no other source of light, there was no source of movement. He was gone.

Shit. She searched the map on her phone as quickly as she could for a back exit. Once she pinpointed it she bolted. Shit. Shit. Shit. She didn’t care who spotted her she just hoped they weren’t too late. By the time she reached the exit her ears caught an echo of feet a little ways behind her. A small group of security guards was most likely tailing her.

She threw the door to the fire escape open and descended the flights of steps skipping at least three stairs with every step. A small black car awaited her at the bottom of the steps. Normally she would have rushed to see if Tachihara was in the car, but the engine wasn’t on and there seemed to be no
reason the car was going to leave anytime soon. The metal clanged above her as the few guards ran down the fire escape after her.

The driver’s door of the black car swung open and a very tall man stepped out. His head was topped with dark brown hair that was beginning to turn a light shade of grey and rectangular glasses rested on the bridge of his slim nose. His hair was cut short and his skin was pale but not nearly as pale as Ryuunosuke’s. He wore a nice black jacket with what seemed to be a green sweater underneath. His narrow eyes met Gin’s and a small winding smile spread throughout his lips. He stepped around the front of the car and Gin quickly noted his black pants and nice shoes.

“Afternoon,” he said chipperly. The guards made it to the bottom the staircase and Gin narrowly avoided the hands that reached out to grab her. “That won’t be necessary,” The man said. He held out a card with the symbol of a crown on it, to the group of guards and they nodded to him. They remained stationed at the bottom of the steps but made no further attempt to apprehend her.

He slipped the card back into one of his pockets before speaking. “You are Gin, a Black Lizard Leader, correct?” She nodded briefly and peered at the security guards. “There is no need to concern yourself with them.” He took off his glasses and used his sweater to wipe the glass as he continued to speak. “You are quite a capable young woman. I’m very impressed with how you managed to get in and out of this building without a scratch. I have an offer for you.”

“If this is some ‘I’ll let you leave here alive if you-’ shit I’m not buying into it,” Gin said.

He slipped his glasses back on and waved his hand. “No, no, nothing of the sort. I’m here to offer you a job.” Gin’s mind recoiled. What was this man talking about? “Obviously for you, this seems obnoxious, after all, we are on opposite sides of this little, uh, feud, if we may call it that.”

“I refuse,” Gin said.

He chuckled. “Now, now, let’s think this through first.” His eyes slimmed and his smile twisted further up his mouth until he wore the cunning smirk of a poisonous snake. Gin’s heart skipped several beats, or maybe it stopped for a moment. “Certainly you can think of the benefits of working directly under your supposed enemy. An easier way to stab him in the back perhaps.” His eyes stayed locked onto hers. Desperately, she wished she could tear her gaze from his but the more she tried the more her instincts told her to keep her eyes locked on him. If the snake was going to strike she would want to see it coming. “I’m willing to permit complete safety to that man you came to rescue if you stay as one of us. Also, I’ll grant safety to all other Port Mafia members in our imprisonment.”

“And Kyouka,” Every syllable trembled out as sweat dripped down her neck and along her spine.

“Oh I’ll allow her to escape from this place, I don’t like the idea of imprisoning a thirteen-year-old any longer than I already have. Even if she could pose a potential threat.”

“What do you gain from this?” The moment the question left her mouth she wished she could take it back. His eyes slimmed even further and he straightened his back. He was getting ready to strike his prey. Gin’s legs wanted to run but she forced them to stay put. “Oh my dear, I have everything to gain from having you and your skills under me. Far more than you realize. I’ll have a very powerful piece on my side of the board, you proved that in your grand escape.”

“So you did let me escape?” Gin asked.

“Of course,” he huffed, “didn’t you think it was a little too easy?”
“Why?”

“I wasn’t sure what you were capable of and the fact that you managed to escape with three others shows me you are very capable and quick-witted. I nearly managed to corner you in that hallway. The ventilation system was a very neat way to escape but it has been done before.”

“Then why let Chuuya and Dazai go?” Gin asked. “You probably already knew what they were capable of since you seem to know so much about us already.”

“The information does not need to concern you. Will you reconsider my offer?”

It was risky. Sure she would basically have a knife at his back, but she didn’t even really know who this man was. He was definitely high up in the ranks by how he talked and that he could recruit her. But that also put her in a position of easily having her coworkers used against her. Then again if she said no he could just do the same thing.

If she joined this group she could learn more about them and their intentions. But if she didn’t she would have more of a shot of helping her coworkers. Then again Higuchi and the others already knew some of her plans, she could just focus on information. No matter what she chose one thing still bugged her.

“You also mentioned your side of the board earlier, what was that about?”

“I’m referring to a game board,” he smiled. “I’m the King on that board.”

Gin took a step back. “So you’re the leader.”

He nodded. “My name is Stephen King.”

“It’s quite a brave thing to come to offer me a job in person,” There was another reason. “Are you that confident I’ll join?”

“No at all, I was hoping that giving you the offer in person would sway you more towards joining us.”

She took another step back. “Thank you, but I respectfully decline.”

He took off his glasses and began to clean them with his shirt again. “That’s truly a shame,” King said. She took another step back. “I did realize one other thing from my observations of you though,” he slipped his glasses back on his face. “You’re far too dangerous to let roam free.”

Gin bolted down the back alley away from the car as King lifted his hand. Glass shattered behind her as everything in front of her blurred and went dark.

Chapter End Notes

So...all of you are probably used to hearing this but, uh, ha, I don't know if I'm going to be able to post next month. The last couple times I brought this up, somehow I've still managed to post, but this time I'm thinking I'm not going to be able to. If I do I will truly be stunned. This is for a couple reasons, as alway my beta and I only get so many chapters done but I'm also going to be participating in National Novel Writing Month, so I'm going to be writing my project for that and not this. Hopefully, I'll be able to
finish the next couple chapters of this before then but then beta stuff so it just seems very unlikely but who knows \_(_\).

I've actually have been done with this chapter for a while but I refrained from publishing it for this reason so the break hopefully wouldn't feel super long. Like I was done on the 7th, but I just didn't want to post super early and then have to wait possibly more than two full months.

So how did you like this chapter? Some people hoped Atsushi would react, and he did, he was MAD! I hope you liked it and I hope you have a great day.

Feel free to say hi on tumblr twitter or in the comments. I alway love comments :)
A New Beginning?

Chapter Summary

Gin and a partial family discussion. Also your new dose of Akutagawa as one of King’s men.

“What welcome back fair Atsushi, please come and be seated at the round table.”
“What table?” Chuuya asked.
“You’re supposed to use your imagination Chuuya~,”

Chapter Notes

*Looks at Kudo count* *Screams* *Checks last time I updated* *Screams again but this time into the black abyss that is my update schedule*

**Song for 1st and 3rd part** Basic Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-s1gZRjnvS

**Song for 2nd part** Basic Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ah_61Ws1lbI

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day: ?

The first glimpse of consciousness Gin received she found Kyouka sitting at her bedside a small book in hand. The girl glanced over the top of the pages and a small surprised smile glowed at Gin. Almost as soon as she noticed the small window and cream wallpaper behind her friend her vision went dark again. She heard her name called a couple times before all noise closed itself off.

The second time she briefly woke her eyes managed to skim across the cream-colored walls and the small wooden ceiling fan that slowly spun above her. The three windows that lined her room made the white sheets shine as bright as they must have been when they were first bought. Warm skin coiled around her hand. Small fingers, smaller than Kyouka’s, interlaced with hers. Her eyes blurred as she looked to the side. A large mass of blonde hair appeared in her vision before everything went dark and the screaming silence enveloped her.

The third time she woke up she immediately noticed two hushed voices discussing silently together. She turned her head to look at them. Kyouka and an older man who she swore she knew somehow, were conversing about something. It bugged Gin to no end that she wasn’t sure where she had seen the man before. Kyouka’s eyes widened as Gin’s tired eyes met hers. Everything went dark yet again.

...
Once again her eyes slowly opened to an agonizing, bright light. It slowly dimmed as her eyes adjusted and she could see the room far easier than every other time she had woken. It was a small room with only her one bed and a nightstand. Otherwise, the room was empty. Neither Kyouka nor the other two who she had seen were present. The fan above her slowly circled once, then twice, then thrice. She watched it turn and her head spun along with it. Why couldn't she remember what happened? She remembered King and a window crashing but she couldn't figure out what happened next. Her eyes looked to the window to hopefully get a glimpse outside.

All she could make out were the dull brown siding of another house. She slowly climbed out of her bed and staggered to the window. To the right was a small dirt road and beyond that, she could see a semi-busy street, but she had a feeling that she wasn’t in the normal areas she hung around in Yokohama. If she was even still in the city.

Every step she took towards the door on the far end of the room, her legs shook underneath her, but with every step, walking became easier. When she finally made it to the door the wall became a blessing to help in her tread to find Kyouka and whoever else had been there. Thank goodness she had briefly seen Kyouka, otherwise, she would be panicking that she was under King’s captivity again. The unlocked door also gave her confirmation that she was not in trouble.

Outside the door, there was a small pathway and then a railing. To her left were two more doors and to her right, a wooden staircase hung above her as it rose to another floor. Beyond the staircase, there were two more doors. To the left of the staircase was another small path and then a large window to the right and large downward staircase to the left.

Gin made sure to move carefully toward the staircase leading down. Even after her legs promised to function perfectly she still used the wall to make sure she would have support if they broke their oath. She made her way down the steps, making sure to hold tightly onto the railing.

“Are you sure there's nothing else we can do?” Kyouka’s voice came from the door next to the bottom of the stairs.

“We don’t know what ability affected her so I’m afraid not,” a lower voice said.

“Quite honestly we should be grateful she’s waking up at all. God knows what that maniacs ability is. Actually, not God, Dazai, Dazai knows but he was too fucking ignorant to care to share.” Gin’s heart skipped a beat with every word that came out of the third person’s mouth. She knew who he was.

She booked it down the rest of the steps her feet tumbling over themselves. She ignored the small hall that seemed to lead to an exit and turned into a large room. To her right was a kitchen, to her left was a sitting area, and a little way in front of her was a long table.

Four people looked up at her from the couches to her left. Kyouka, another man with grey hair who had been talking with Kyouka, and two others. A man and a little girl.

She kneeled in front of him. “Boss I’m glad to see you and Elise are alright.”

He snickered. “Welcome back to the world of the living Gin. I know you just woke up but I need you to do something without delay.”

“Oh course what is it?” Gin asked. She lifted her head and met his eyes.

“Well,” Mori glanced at Elise, “You see, Elise has-”
“I’ve wanted someone to braid my hair for the past week and Ougai sucks at it,” Elise huffed. “The president of the agency did it once and he could do it well but refused to do it again so I’ve had to live without what I want for a week now.”

“Her moods have been awful and Fukuzawa still doesn’t have the heart to give a young girl some mercy,” Mori sighed dramatically.

That’s who the other man was. The president of the agency and the leader of the mafia. Her eyes traveled around the rooms. The kitchen had dishes piled up in the sink, some clean some not. There were books littered on the table and it was evident that someone had been trying to clean, but apparently gave up. They seemed to have lived together for a while. How well had that gone?

“What about Kyouka?” Gin asked.

The other girl shrugged. “I tried, but it got too confusing.”

Gin rose and moved behind Elise. Instantly she got to work twisting one strand of hair over the other. “I’m glad you’re awake,” Elise said. “Ougai has been nothing but a bore, and Mr. Fukuzawa isn’t any better, Kyouka’s tried to be fun but she’s as stern as Mr. Fukuzawa. You’re far more fun Gin.”

“I’m flattered you think so Elise,” She smiled at the little girl and continued to weave her hair. Elise swung her legs and swayed back and forth as if she was listening to music. How had Mori escaped? How had her leader known how to get out? And how did he know about the attack on the agency? How had he even gotten in contact with the president?

“There’s no need to concern yourself,” Mori said. He grabbed a plain teacup and took a sip. “I have a plan. All I need to know is if you’re with me. No matter what may befall anyone else I need to know you’ll stick to my plan and not stray from my side like a dog who’s seen a squirrel. That includes if the squirrel is Akutagawa.”

Gin shifted uncomfortably in her seat. He definitely knew what would distract her. Could she? Could she actually leave Ryuu behind if it meant stopping King? Her fingers intertwined the last strands of Elise’s hair and paused. She knew what her answer was. When she had finished tying the end of Elise’s hair to make sure it held, she knelt before Mori again.

“I will do everything in my power to follow you to the end of time,” Gin swallowed hard, but the lump in her throat came straight back. “Even if Akutagawa Ryuunosuke is in some form of danger I will stay by your side. I swear it.”

Mori’s teacup dinged against the material of its plate. “We’ll see if you can, but until then I need you to do one other thing.”

“What is it?” Gin asked.

“Once you’re ready I need you to find where Dazai is and bring him here,” Mori said, “You’re the best candidate to not be caught by King, and whatever information Dazai has is invaluable. We need to know everything he does.”

“Consider it done,” Gin said without hesitation. Her legs shook violently as she stood. If this house was to be their base of operation she would need to have a good map of what she had access to. Easy routes to sneak in and out of the area and a way to return at least every other night to keep track of where she had and hadn’t thought of. Also, she would need a good starting plan. She sighed and bent over to stretch out her legs. Another good night of sleep would be great too, besides she had homework to do.
Day: 7

Why was he allowing himself to lose control so easily? Dazai stared at the back of their hotel room door. Small beams of sunlight poked through the curtains to light the otherwise dark room. There wasn’t even a point to turn on a light. If someone came to kill him, Death would be welcomed as always. Akutagawa was gone, and as much as Chuuya wanted to blame him for it he wasn’t completely accurate. It was mostly Dazai’s fault, he accepted that much, but if King hadn’t even come back none of this would have happened. Besides Dazai couldn’t be sure he could completely trust his old mentee until he knew Akutagawa had seen King for who he truly was. That still didn’t change the fact that Dazai was losing his composure far too easily.

Beep. The door was unlocked. Hopefully, it was an assassin. The door flung open and slammed behind the small foreboding presence.

“Nice fucking job mackerel,” Chuuya stormed passed him. The breeze of his hurricane spiraled around Dazai. “Now we’ve lost Akutagawa and Atsushi in one night, great job keeping us together.”

“Sorry you expect me to be perfect,” Dazai mumbled.

“What?” Chuuya asked harshly.

“Look if you’re that pissed just—” Dazai bit his lip. Leave me alone. Go find Kouyou. Go find Akutagawa and Atsushi. Get away from me. Stay, please. There were so many ways he could end his sentence. Some made less sense than others.

“Just what?” Chuuya hissed. “Because if you’re about to get rid of me, you can’t. Sorry to break it to you. I’ll only ditch you once I find someone else to hang around.”

Dazai took a deep breath. “Do whatever you want.”

Chuuya’s brow narrowed and his lip pressed into a straight line. “Do you even care about either of them? I was sure you would at least care about Atsushi but now I’m not so sure.”

“Do you think I care?” Dazai asked.

“You’re unbelievable,” Chuuya said.

“I’m asking you a question not making a statement Chuuya,” Dazai said. Damn, why did he have to read everything Dazai said wrong? The shortie liked to believe he was smart but then made stupid assumptions. “I want to hear from you if you think I care or not.”

Chuuya rolled his eyes and scanned Dazai over. “How am I supposed to know.”

“It’s an opinion I’m asking for Chuuya, not fact,” Dazai chuckled. Despite looking like he was amused he wanted to slap Chuuya. How did he not understand what he was saying?

“Fine,” Chuuya said, “I think that if you care you’re doing an awful job of showing it, and it seems like you don’t care and I should probably leave before you’re an ass to me too.”

At least he didn’t try to sugar coat it. “Fair enough.”
A light knock sounded on the door. Chuuya spun on his heel, grabbed the desk chair, and held it up ready to throw at the door.

Oh, good, his feeling had been right. “Calm down Chuuya~” Dazai whined. “It’s Atsushi~”

“Why on earth would he come back? I certainly wouldn’t,” Chuuya said.

“But you’re not Atsushi now are you?” Dazai slipped past Chuuya and opened the door without another thought.

The boy’s form was silhouetted in the doorway as he anxiously shifted back and forth between feet. Dazai threw his arm out with as much drama as he could muster. “Welcome back fair Atsushi, please come and be seated at the round table.”

“What table?” Chuuya asked as he lightly set down the chair.

“You’re supposed to use your imagination Chuuya~,” Dazai said.

Atsushi stepped into the room with his head hung low. “I’m sorry, but at the same time I’m not sorry,” he muttered.

“That’s fine,” Dazai said. “I’m just glad you’re back.”

“Would you be glad if Akutagawa returned?” Chuuya asked.

“Yes,” Dazai said without missing a beat, “in fact I can’t wait to see what he’ll do, hopefully, he will come back eventually.”

“He went to join King he’s not coming back,” Atsushi said.

“What if he doesn’t like it there as much as he did with us?” Dazai asked. Atsushi’s eyes widened and small light danced inside of them. “There’s always hope Atsushi, and you’re the one person I know who clings onto hope until it’s completely dead. I can’t believe you didn’t keep the hope of his return alive. Given it’s a very small hope that could easily be blown out. Normally you would still hold onto it though.”

“I guess I didn’t really think of it,” he said.

Chuuya sighed and collapsed into the chair he had been prepared to use as a weapon a minute ago. “I sure hope what you said comes true. How much of a chance is there?”

“Chuuya, where’s the fun in you knowing?” Dazai asked.

“Peace,” Chuuya said, “No fun, just peace of mind, so tell me, damn it.”

Dazai hummed. Ten percent? Twenty? He had gone a little overboard and he really had hurt Akutagawa so a solid ten to fifteen percent. But Chuuya wouldn’t like that answer so maybe he should bend the truth a little. “Ten percent in our favor.” Not a lie if you thought it through.

“So sixty?” Chuuya asked.

“Somewhere around there,” somewhere below a hundred percent.

Chuuya sighed. “That’s not my preferred answer but it’s better than fifty.”

It’s better than the truth. Dazai kept a dorkish grin as he nodded.
“There’s a chance that’s all I need,” said Atsushi. The boy collapsed onto one of the beds and buried his face into one of the pillows. “How much longer do we have this room for?”

“A few more hours,” Dazai answered. “We’ll leave in about two.”

“Okay,” Atsushi said.

“How far did you run?” Chuuya asked. “You seem tired but I’m a little curious, I couldn’t see you and I used my gravity.”

“You did what?” Dazai narrowed his brow at him and pushed out his lips like a duck beak.

“Get over yourself waste of bandages. I’m feeling a bit better today.” That was a lie. Dazai had noticed how pale Chuuya was when he walked in and how hard he was trying to have Dazai not notice his struggle to stand. That’s why he had sat down.

Atsushi didn’t say anything for several long, quiet seconds. Finally, he sat up bringing the pillow with him. He squeezed it tightly in his arms and blinked rapidly. Oh. His eyes were wetter than normal and a small rim of water dared to run down Atsushi’s cheeks. His eyes were also a little red along the rim.

“Um,” His voice cracked and he coughed. “I ran into others, others from the agency and mafia.”

What? Dazai stared at him accompanied by Chuuya’s wide sapphire eyes.


“They’re fine,” Atsushi cut Chuuya off, “It was Tanizaki, Naomi, and Higuchi. Apparently, Kyouka and Gin were with them but they disappeared a while ago. And we probably shouldn’t go back. They’re hiding out and since I found them, there’s now more of a risk that they’ll be found by King too. Besides Gin told them it was better to stay together but also separate. Which I assume means we shouldn’t have ten of us in the same place at the same time.”

“She’s right,” Dazai said, “Too many of us would allow King to corner us with more accuracy. How much do they know about our situation?”

“I told them everything,” Atsushi quickly said and physically backed away as if he was bracing himself for something. What was he expecting?

Dazai nodded. “Good, they need to know at least as much as you do if they want a chance of staying hidden.”

Atsushi opened his eyes and looked at Dazai as if he was the largest puzzle Atsushi would ever find.

“Aren’t you mad?”

Dazai’s eyebrows narrowed. “Why would I be?”

“Well, you told Akutagawa and me not to tell anyone back at the agency.”

“These are different circumstances. Besides I didn’t tell you anything that absolutely couldn’t be shared. You’re not that great at keeping secrets Atsushi.” The corners of Dazai’s lips lifted slightly with his last sentence.

Atsushi smiled sheepishly. “I can’t argue with that,” he squeezed the pillow tighter. “Is there anything else you can tell me about what Akutagawa is walking into?”
Dazai’s relaxed his face and softened his eyes as much as he could. “You should rest.” Atsushi didn’t need to know.

Atsushi looked like he wanted to protest but nodded anyway and laid back down, the pillow still in his arms. He burrowed his face back into it. The room fell silent. Dazai maneuvered around Chuuya and looked out of the small sliver of light between the two curtains.

A small, barely noticeable whimper came from behind him. He didn’t turn around. He focused through the small gap and surveyed the people outside. Blankets rustled and moved. The bed squeaked and Dazai finally glanced behind him. He watched Chuuya wrap his arms around Atsushi and bring him into his chest.

Dazai’s heart burned. All Chuuya was doing was comforting Atsushi. So why did he want to pry Atsushi out of Chuuya’s arms? Why did he feel so defensive about, something? Dazai didn’t even know what or who he wanted to defend. They were fine. They were friends. Probably not anything more. And even if something did grow why did he care? It didn’t concern him.

A small hole reared its head inside of Dazai’s stomach. It felt like a black hole was spinning inside of him pulling every hidden emotion and part of him to be devoured by the power of the numbing force. He bit his lip and rubbed his teeth against it until the metallically taste of blood poured into his mouth.

Chuuya quirked a brow at him and Dazai quickly turned back to the window. So far Atsushi had refrained from making any more noise, but Dazai didn’t think that was necessarily a good thing.

“Atsushi, it’s okay if you need to cry,” Dazai said. It was better to get it out right away than to try to break down later when he had already numbed down the pain. If he did he’d find himself trapped with the need to cry but without the ability to.

“Would it be okay if I was Akutagawa?” Atsushi asked quietly.

Dazai didn’t respond. How could he? Yes, it would be fine, but if it had been Akutagawa in front of him he wouldn’t have said the same thing to Akutagawa as he had to Atsushi. It wasn’t fair to Akutagawa that he seemed to treat Atsushi better, Dazai knew that, but everyone treats each individual person differently. Dazai just assumed Akutagawa realized certain things that he ended up not knowing. In Atsushi position, he would assume Akutagawa would cry if he had to but normally wouldn’t want to in front of people. Which made no sense when Dazai thought about it. Akutagawa was the least likely person to feel that he was allowed to cry in all of Yokohama. Still, Akutagawa was a completely different person than Atsushi thus Dazai would treat him differently.

Chuuya quirked his brow at Dazai. “Well?”

“You already know the answer petit mafia~” Dazai singsonged. Chuuya glared at him. “My answer isn’t ‘no’ because I’m a jerk, but because I wouldn’t think of saying it to him. He and Atsushi are two different people. I think of everyone differently.”

“Don’t call me small,” Chuuya growled.

“Whatsoever you say chibi,” Dazai replied. His lips extended into a long smile.

“You’re still calling me small!”

“No I’m implying that you’re short, they’re two very different things chibi.”

“You little-” Dazai placed a finger to his lips and Chuuya fell silent. He narrowed his eyes and Dazai
pointed at Atsushi. The tiger had already fallen asleep.

“Fine, I won’t yell at you this time,” Chuuya whispered harshly. He slowly lowered Atsushi onto the bed and grabbed an extra pillow to prop under his head.

Chuuya’s eyelids seemed to collapse on top of each other and fold until he pried them back open. “You should rest too,” Dazai said, “I feel very awake anyway.”

“Promise you’ll wake us before we have to leave?” Chuuya said. “We’ll need as much leeway as we can get.”

Dazai nodded. “Promise.”

“Also I’m taking the first shift tonight,” said Chuuya.

Dazai lifted his hands up. “I won’t stop you.”

Chuuya collapsed next to Atsushi and his breath quickly grew heavy and quiet. Dazai moved to the second bed and stared at the door.

*I hope you know what you signed up for Akutagawa.*

~

**Day: 6-7**

To Akutagawa, it scared him how easily he found King. Only a moment after leaving Atsushi a small black car pulled up next to the curb. The window rolled down and a faceless man said he was sent by Stephen King. How did King know exactly where Akutagawa had been? Had he always known? Had he never truly escaped?

He rode in the car to an almost vacant parking ramp beside a black limousine parked in the back of one of the lots. The driver instructed him to go over to the limo. Akutagawa did as he was told. Another plain person climbed out of the driver’s seat and patted him down. After he didn’t find any weapons on Ryuunosuke he opened the door.

“Is there a reason you’re lying on the ground, Rick?” An older man in a grey suit asked. His hair was short and grey and was accompanied by a mustache. He was sitting in a seat directly in front of Akutagawa. His brow was narrowed and only confusion was directed at a young man lying on the floor.

“The air conditioning hasn’t been running and you know heat and I don’t mix well.” The younger man stretched across the floor said. Rick, as he had been called, didn’t seem much older than Akutagawa. His hair was very short and dark brown.

“That doesn’t explain why you’re on the floor,” Another man on the other side of the car said. He was tall and slim and he was glaring at Rick.

“Heat rises, you ever heard of that?” Rick replied.

“Of course I have,” The other man, “but it’s barely even warm.”
“I’m sorry I’m a vampire and you’re the damn sun god. I’ll fix that for you,” Rick retorted.

The older man beside Ryuunosuke looked up from Rick and blinked several times upon realizing Akutagawa was there. “Oh, my apologies for the strange welcome Akutagawa Ryuunosuke, I did not realize you had arrived. Please come in.” He motioned to the seats beside him.

“He’s here?” Rick asked looking up from the ground. He met Akutagawa’s eyes and waved. “Hello!”

“Will you welcome our guest properly please?” The elderly man asked.

“Of course,” Rick climbed to his knees and slid into one of the seats by the man he had been arguing with.

“Come in,” the elderly man repeated. Akutagawa’s head screamed at him to turn around and leave, but he quickly ignored it and climbed into the vehicle. He sat between the two men who had greeted him. The door was firmly shut. There was no going back. Thoughts of everything that could go wrong swarmed into his head and his stomach weaved into large knots. His innards felt ready to spill across the floor the moment he let his guard down.

“Welcome,” The taller man said. “I’m Robert Stevenson, I’ve heard quite a bit about you and your ability.”

“Yeah, welcome aboard,” Rick said. “I’m the one and only Rick Riordan. I’d love to see your ability if you don’t mind.” Every fiber in Akutagawa’s muscles tensed.

“Only if you’re comfortable. I don’t want you to do anything you’re not comfortable with.”

“Uh, no, it’s not an issue,” mumbled Akutagawa.

Riordan narrowed his brow in confusion. Ryuunosuke’s coat flared to life and Rashomon hovered around the interior of the vehicle.

“That’s so cool,” Riordan said.

“You sound like a little boy at Christmas,” Stevenson said.

“I sure am.”

Akutagawa drew back Rashomon until it was just his coat again.

“That is a very strong ability,” the elderly man said. “Be proud you have it. I’m Arthur Conan Doyle, you’re Akutagawa Ryuunosuke?’”

He nodded.

“So Ryuunosuke,” Rick said. A sharp shiver pierced Akutagawa’s spine and he tried to keep his face bland of emotion.

“Rick, in Japanese culture you’re not supposed to use someone’s first name until you know them and they let you,” Doyle said.

“Oh, sorry Akutagawa,” Riordan corrected himself. “What’s your story? Why join the King of Horror, Stephen King?”

King of Horror. If Akutagawa’s stomach wasn’t as knotted as it was he may have thrown up from the shame that flooded him. Was this man truly a King of Horror? Was Dazai really trying to protect
“Stop trying to make that a thing,” Stevenson said.

“His title is a thing,” Riordan said.

“Only you use it. Besides ‘King of Horror’ makes him sound like a monster. Stephen is neither a
beast nor does he associate with them.”

“Why associate with me then?” The question had escaped Akutagawa’s mouth before he could stop
it. The vehicle fell silent and if Akutagawa hadn’t been uncomfortable before he certainly was now.

Doyle ran his tongue along his lips to wet them and opened his mouth, but Stevenson’s voice spoke
first. “Who knows why Stephen does anything. Quite honestly your ability is appalling.”

Of course. Why did he think these people would be any different from Dazai? The world had a
knack for hating him after all.

A sharp click of Doyle’s tongue sounded beside him. “Don’t be rude, I understand you don’t
appreciate his ability because it’s not your style. However, you are not going to be cruel and have
our newest recruit think that you’re behavior is how the King's Men treat others.”

“No, what you do is try to kill an entire organization and take the higher ups prisoner for some
reason. That’s how you treat others.” Akutagawa said. Why was his tongue running wild? Anger
boiled in the bottom of his stomach. It wanted to rip out of Akutagawa and strangle all of the people
around him. He wanted to be here, he hated Dazai for everything he had done. Why couldn’t he just
be satisfied?

Stevenson pulled out his phone and flipped it open. “I admit the orders lately have been-”

“Out of place,” Doyle finished for him. “But King has a plan after all he wouldn’t have lessened
security to allow people to escape without a reason.”

Allow people to escape? Others had escaped. Who? Was it possible Gin had escaped?

“I mean it’s weird we normally don’t do this big of operations,” Riordan said.

“Damn it, Rick,” Stevenson hissed. Akutagawa eyed the two of them.

Riordan stared at Stevenson for a solid minute before his eyes widened. “Are you seriously trying to
do that? Are you that low? He has a right to be angry.”

Stevenson glared at him and his eyes grew dark. “You can never be too cautious.”

Riordan seethed but before he could say anything Doyle spoke. “You are correct, Robert, but try to
read young Akutagawa’s mind again and I will demote you back to America or Great Britain before
we make it to the base.”

Stevenson murmured incoherently and shoved his phone back into his pocket. “You have no idea
what we’re getting into.”

Doyle shot a glare at Stevenson who did not return it. A threat had been made, and one that seemed
to hold a lot of power behind it. It had been made on Akutagawa’s behalf. Some of the knots in his
gut disappeared. It was dangerous to have someone who could read minds because of his constant
doubts. But there was a promise that they weren’t going to pick his brain and judge. That was more
than Dazai had ever promised to do. He had been around these people for less than ten minutes and he already felt more accepted than Dazai could make him feel in a lifetime.

They were trying to win him over though. Atsushi had wanted a friendship, never for him to be something else. Atsushi had only been frustrated with how Akutagawa thought and angry for Kyouka. Atsushi had never judged him when Akutagawa had been in the agency either, the only reason he regretted leaving was leaving him. He was sorry, but even though they were trying to win him over part of the weight in his chest lifted. The solid rock that was weighing him down turned into a leaf. The sense of pain, loneliness, and guilt was there but he could barely feel it.

It felt like the thick lake of blood that coated his skin, that large black clouds hung over, was finally a little clearer. Everyone’s lake was either clear, a little stained, or filled with only blood. Some people tried to get rid of the blood in their lake. Dazai could be thought of in that way, but something about him seemed different. He didn’t seem to be trying to clear out the blood. In fact, he had never even pretended to want to do that. He wasn’t pretending to be a good person when he knew he wasn’t. He was an idiot, but he realized something Akutagawa hadn’t until now. He could never clean his consciousness. The blood would always cling to Akutagawa’s skin and there was nothing he could do to get rid of it.

The weight firmly replaced itself back in his chest and heavier than the last time. The black hole returned and everything inside of him felt like it was being torn in two directions until the fabric of his skin was ripping. He swallowed hard as he felt emotions rise in him. He couldn’t discern what they were but he pushed them down anyway and shoved a cap on them. He needed to numb the pain before it showed. He couldn’t be this weak right away with these people.

He closed his eyes for a moment to regain his thoughts. An image of Atsushi flashed through his head as his own mind made one last attempt to break him. I miss you. But things were going to be better. He just had to keep moving down the path he chose. He had to keep moving. He had to.

“We have arrived Arthur, sir,” the door opened and Akutagawa climbed out after Doyle.

The sun blinded him for a few seconds before his eyes adjusted to the brightness. He stood on a familiar sidewalk in front of a familiar tall, slim building. He stared up his mouth agape as he gazed upon the mafia’s main headquarters. What the hell was happening?

“Right this way, Akutagawa Ryunosuke,” Doyle motioned towards the building. Stevenson and Riordan stepped out behind him. An overwhelming pressure urged him forward and he forced his trembling legs to move. What the hell, what the hell, what the hell?

The doors slid closed behind them and Doyle led him through the building he knew by the back of his hand and to the elevator that led up to Mori’s office. He followed them into the elevator and the lump in his throat turned into a boulder.

“You’re probably confused,” Doyle said. “After all the police were doing an extensive investigation, however, King has enough connection to get them and the special abilities department to stop looking for us. We were even able to use this as our current base of operations.”

“No better place to be but in plain sight I suppose,” Akutagawa muttered to himself. Still, he couldn’t shake the shivers that rippled through his spine.

The elevator halted and opened up to the long hallway that was normally dotted with armed mafia men. Only one person stood at the front of the entrance to the Mori’s office. A woman with short blonde hair and a slim body. She looked up from the ground when they entered the hallway.
“You’re several minutes late,” she said.

“We can control a lot of things but you know we can’t control traffic,” Doyle clicked his tongue. The four of them moved forward and the woman opened the door. She acknowledged Akutagawa as he passed and slipped in after them.

“Lois Lowry, a pleasure to make your acquaintance,” she said. She held out her hand and Akutagawa shook it.

“Akutagawa Ryunosuke,” he said.

The edges of her lips quirked upwards and her eyes turned soft. He pulled his hand out of hers as quickly as he could. Lowry’s brow narrowed quizzically and Akutagawa ignored the question in her eyes. He couldn’t explain why he had moved suddenly. Something had roared against his skin to run. Silently, he made a promise to not let her touch him again if he could help it.

“Welcome back,” A low more subdued voice came from further in the room.

Akutagawa scanned the office. For the most part, it was the same. At the end was Mori’s desk as it was, neat and clean. His wooden chair with red cushions stood centered behind the desk and the back wall was lined with bookshelves. A man stood by the panel of windows looking out on the town below. He was about as tall as Akutagawa maybe taller. He had short brown somewhat grey hair, rectangular glasses, and a small smile on his lips as he turned to face them.

“And welcome Akutagawa, I’m sure you’re familiar with this place so there’s no need to get you accustomed to the area have you informed him of the situation?”

“I told him how we acquired the building, nothing more,” Doyle replied.

“Then you don’t know why,” the man said. Akutagawa wasn’t sure what he should think about him. He was probably King but he seemed like, well, Dazai in a way. Akutagawa couldn’t think why they felt so similar. Maybe because the man was acting like he knew more than everyone around him?

“I’m not sure he knows it’s you, Stephen,” Doyle said.

“Oh, sorry, I—” King said.

“I know,” Akutagawa swiftly cut him off.

“Very well,” he took several steps towards them until there was only about a meter between King and Akutagawa. “I have a question for you, Akutagawa,” King said. “Do you know what I’m referring to by the Port Mafia’s jump drive?” Akutagawa shook his head. He may have been told about it at some point but if he did he didn’t remember. King shrugged. “Alright, a loss is a loss I suppose, Rick.”

“Yes, sir?” Riordan asked.

“Would you mind showing Akutagawa to our barrack building?”

“I’d be more than happy to,” Riordan said. “Try not to be sad that I’m away.”

“We’ll be more than happy that you are,” Stevenson said.

“I was being sarcastic. You know, sarcasm? Jokes? Are any of these things in your immense
“vocabulary?” Riordan asked.

“Why you-”

“That’s enough,” King interrupted them. He waved Riordan off and he led Akutagawa towards the exit.

“Oh, I almost forgot,” King said. He turned back. “Akutagawa is there anyone from the mafia who you would like me to ensure their complete safety? I don’t mind at all and it’s only fair.”

Akutagawa blinked several times. Gin. His mind screamed it, but a hard rock weighed on his stomach. “No, sir,” he replied. King nodded and waved them off again. Riordan lead him out of the room and he glanced over his shoulder but said nothing.

“You’ve been up all night, so we figured we’d let you sleep and then talk more,” Riordan said once they were inside the elevator.

“How did you know I was awake? Does it have something to do with how you found me so easily?”

Riordan smiled. “Found you? We only lost you for a little more than a week. Once Dazai and Chuuya met up with you we knew every single one of your movements.” Akutagawa’s eyes widened. “Don’t get me wrong, before they found you, you were giving all of us a run for our money. We had no clue where you were and were barely able to locate you. Then your luck ran out when you paired with Chuuya and Dazai.”

“How? What did you do to them?” Akutagawa’s gut twisted when he realized he was more interested in how King had kept track of them rather than Chuuya and Dazai’s safety. Wasn’t that what he wanted? For himself not to care?

“Wish I could tell you but I don’t know,” Riordan said, “that’s a question to ask Stephen.”

They fell silent and Riordan led him out of the building and down the street a couple blocks without a word. They arrived at an apartment building and the doors slid open as they walked inside.

No one was behind the front desk. Riordan walked behind the counter and rummaged through a drawer. He pulled out a key card and tossed it to Akutagawa.

“Your room is, 405,” he said, “most of the officers are on the bottom two floors, higher than them is the third floor than everyone else is on the fourth floor. You have to have a certain key to access each level. Yours is programmed with all of them just in case. Anyone below you doesn’t have access to your floor, but you have access to all the floors below you, basically.”

“What rank am I?” Akutagawa asked. It sounded like the top floor was for the top people, but how was that possible?

“My rank,” said Riordan. “I thought it was kind of obvious from the room breakdowns.”

“It was just,” he paused, “I guess I wasn’t expecting it.”

Riordan shrugged. “King wants you to be a high ranking King’s Man so you are. If you’re confused ask him. The King’s Men is what we call ourselves by the way. Because his last name is King and we work for him. I came up with it.” Riordan led him to the elevator and scanned his card before they rose to the fourth floor. He dropped Akutagawa off and with a quick goodbye pressed the button to go back down.
Akutagawa found his room with ease. On the front of the door under the number was a name. *Akutagawa Ryuunosuke, Knight.* He didn’t think much of it before he scanned his room card and entered.

Overall it was a basic room. A bed and a side table, a closet, a door that lead to a bathroom, and a door that led to a small kitchen. He fell onto the bed and closed his eyes. He didn’t feel like he would sleep but for once the anxious knots in his stomach untwisted. He no longer had to worry about Atsushi or Dazai. However, just that thought made the knots tie up his chest and squeeze his heart. He would be fine. In the end, this would be better. All he had to do was get past the initial pain then he would be fine. He would be fine. He was fine. He had to be fine.

Chapter End Notes

*Laughs nervously* heeeeeeeeeeeeyyyyyyy... I'm sorry this took me so long. I have been in a gigantic writing slump and I have felt completely burned out. It didn't help that I just had finals and I bought myself a Nintendo switch with Legends of Zelda Breath of the Wild. Besides school, that game has practically been my entire life. I was pondering whether I should even try updating any time soon since everything I had been writing I hated, but then I found two lovely comments, from people who asked very nicely when I was updating/if I was going to keep writing this and said that they were looking forward to it. I then immediately went and edited this entire chapter. So thank you,

Also, I've started editing the next chapter so that should be out next month. Should be. Also, also, if I start moving my writer butt I should also be posting a one-shot next month.

Also, also, also, YOU GOT TO HEAR FROM AKUTAGAWA!!!! How do you feel about how content he's starting to feel with King??? *laughs maniacally* (¬‿¬)

Also, also, also, yes I did just include Lois Lowry and Rick Riordan into this fanfic. No, I'm not sorry. Yes, I was stuck finding authors. Again no I am not sorry.

Also, also, also, also, HOLY FLIPPIN HECK THE KUDO COUNT!!!!!!!!!! I'm in awe. I am shocked. I'm!!!! THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH!!!! (■_■) IM HAPPY CRYING OMG!!!!

Also x6, I want to say a big thank to my friend Mira who looked over this chapter because I was contemplating (freaking out) that this chapter wasn't good, and I hated it, even though it's actually fine and now I like it. So thank you very, very much, Mira. This is Mira's twitter

If you want to yell at me, you can on my tumblr twitter or in the comments.
Plan and Attacked

Chapter Summary

3/4 of a family go on a shopping trip! Kind of.
Meanwhile, Gin is getting pissed trying to find them.

“You drank,” Atsushi said, “like a lot, a lot. I thought you were going to die.”

Chapter Notes

*curls up into a ball and dies*

Songs:
Part 2 and part 3 Basic link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyMBiCzM-go
Part 4 and part 5 Basic link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3iSxmKEClO
Part 6 can be either of the previous ones.
1 and 7 don't have a song.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day: 9

His first night as one of King’s Men Akutagawa hadn’t been able to sleep for fear of Gin's bloodied form appearing in his dreams or some other horror his brain might conjure of Atsushi. However, the next night his tired mind had been far too exhausted to resist sleep. Surprisingly, there were no horrors. He hadn’t dreamt at all. For once he had slept soundly through the night.

His first day back at the Port Mafia’s old office building, King had spent most of the day with Akutagawa, much to his surprise. He showed Akutagawa the few people who were going to work for him. A man who seemed to be around Kajii’s age if not a little older who gave his name as Bradbury. A basic informant who Akutagawa didn’t care to remember the name of yet. And the one who had shocked him the most, Shelley, a small girl no older than Akutagawa had been when he joined the mafia. Akutagawa wasn’t sure what the girl’s job was. He knew Bradbury’s position was to help him with any information he needed, along with the occasional tea run, but he wasn’t sure what Shelley was supposed to do for him. According to King, Shelley, worked for all four, or five including Akutagawa, of the higher-ups, but that didn’t explain what her job was.

His first assignment had been one he expected but in a weird way. King had asked for any of the Port Mafia’s headquarters where the Jumpdrive would be hidden. Akutagawa wasn’t sure what was so important about the Jumpdrive, or the reason why King wanted his hands on it so badly. Akutagawa had expected him to want a rundown of everything Akutagawa knew about the mafia, but that was not the case. King hadn’t even hinted that he would ever want that information.

Akutagawa spent two days compiling a list of everywhere he could think of. He was told that Chuuya had been entrusted with hiding it which increased the list significantly.
There was a light tap on the other side of Akutagawa’s door and he waved Bradbury over to it. Akutagawa looked up from the list that laid across the end of his bed once the door was opened.

“What’s up?” Riordan asked. He walked through the door and pulled out the chair by Akutagawa’s desk. “How have you been? You’ve barely left your room.”

“I haven’t had reason to,” Akutagawa replied.

Riordan nodded thoughtfully. “Well, hey, you’re a knight! I am too.”

Akutagawa remembered seeing that word hanging on his door. “What does that mean?”

“Like on a chessboard,” Riordan explained. “Arthur and Lois are the rooks, Stephen is the King, we’re knights, and Robert is a Bishop.”

“What about the remaining pieces?”

“For now Shelley is the Bishop, and the queen apparently left or was taken prisoner or something.”

“A mixture of both,” Akutagawa looked at the entrance where Doyle had just spoken. He nodded to Akutagawa as he entered the room. Riordan’s head lifted higher and his expression turned more serious.

“Why are both of you here?” Akutagawa asked. He would prefer they were just straightforward with him and wouldn’t make so much small talk.

Riordan snickered. “King found a mouse’s plan to find cheese, and he wants us to put it in a trap.”

“He figured out Dazai’s next move,” Doyle translated. “He wants Rick, Lois, and I to join him in order to set up a trap and if you were comfortable he was wondering if you were willing to join us. Officially, as one of The King’s Men.”

Akutagawa didn’t feel the need to ponder the request. Dazai didn’t deserve any of the little empathy Akutagawa was capable of feeling. “Do we know who’s going to be with him?”

“We assume the two who are traveling with him.”

Atsushi would be there. All Akutagawa wanted was to keep Atsushi from feeling as much pain about the whole situation as possible. However, in the end, he may end up having to fight Atsushi. It wouldn’t be anything new, they had tried to kill each other on multiple occasions, but it would be the first time since Atsushi had promised to stick by his side.

Akutagawa’s stomach dropped as the thought set in. Atsushi had promised to stick by his side and Akutagawa couldn’t even do the same for him. He pushed back that thought and met Doyle’s eyes. That didn’t matter anymore. He had made his decision.

“When do we start?”

~

Day: 9

“Chuuya!” The mattress was pushed down and another body slammed on top of him. Chuuya groaned as the new pressure made whatever was in his stomach feel volatile.

“What the fuck Dazai?” He asked.
“We have to hurry if we want to find more people before I lose their trail~” Dazai singsonged excitedly.

Chuuya’s eyes met Dazai’s and he stared at the chestnut color for a moment. “What?”

Dazai’s lips quirked upwards and his eyes crinkled into a wide childish grin. “I may have found a lead~”

Chuuya pushed Dazai off and faced Atsushi’s bed. “Kid!” He yelled.

Atsushi groaned and started to come to life. “What?” He asked groggily as he rubbed his eyes.

“Hurry up and get ready. The bandage wasting device managed to find where others are being kept.”

“Hey, hey, hey, don’t jump ahead Chuuya~” Dazai whined. “I found a trail doesn’t mean I know where they are. We still have to find the bunny hole.”

“Either way we should still move out.”

Atsushi rolled over. His body slipped and he tumbled over the edge of the bed onto the ground. He groaned but stood up before Chuuya could ask if he was okay. Dazai jumped off of the bed and collided with Atsushi. The kid yelped as Dazai tackled him onto the bed. Dazai giggled and rushed over to the computer as his inner child bled out.

“You seem in a chipper mood,” Chuuya said.

“Well it’s the first big lead I’ve managed to snag that didn’t look like an obvious trap, it could still be a trap though,” Dazai said with a shrug. He rocked back and forth in his chair and grumbled about something. With a sigh, he tried to do something else but ended up closing the laptop.

Fingers waved in front of Chuuya’s face and he recoiled in surprise. He turned to Atsushi. The kid studied Chuuya with a deep crease in his brow.

“What’s wrong?” Chuuya asked.

“Are you okay?” Atsushi asked, which wasn’t an answer.

Chuuya frowned. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“I just wanted to make sure you felt okay after last night,” Atsushi said.

Chuuya stared at him in confusion. Dazai snickered but Chuuya didn’t pay the bastard any mind.

“Last night?”

“Chuuya doesn’t do well with stress~” Dazai singsonged.

“What the hell are you going on about bandage wasting device?” Chuuya asked. Last night? Last night. He couldn’t really remember what happened, which wasn’t a good sign. “Didn’t Akutagawa leave last night?”

Atsushi’s eyes fell to the floor. Crap, Chuuya tried to think of something to say but the stupid mackerel burst into laughter.

“That was three nights ago Chuuuuuuuyaaaaaa~,” Dazai said. The prolonged version of his name pissed him off even more.
“Last night,” Chuuya paused, “last night we changed hotels and the one we’re at has a hot tub right?” Dazai held up two fingers to signal that was two nights ago. “Then what the hell happened last night?”

“You drank,” Atsushi said, “like a lot, a lot. I thought you were going to die.”

Chuuya looked between the two men. He felt fine. “How do I not have the biggest hangover ever then?”

Dazai shrugged. “Atsushi made sure to give you water and painkillers before you fell asleep and he’s probably overreacting a little. You should probably have more water and a couple of pills before the hangover hits you.”

“That’s what you told me to do Dazai,” Atsushi said, “you said you had a feeling we would need him functional today and you said that would help.”

Chuuya didn’t really care that it was Dazai’s advice that helped him. At that point he was already chugging a glass of water and making sure to take two, maybe three, of the painkillers Dazai or Atsushi must have bought.

“I still don’t understand how I don’t have a huge hangover if I drank as much as Atsushi thinks I did,” Chuuya said through gulps of water. He refilled the glass and drank more just for good measure.

“You’re angry when you’re drunk,” Atsushi said. “Also you think weird things. Like you said water is bad for your health.”

“Everyone who drinks water dies,” Dazai said.

“He’s where I must have gotten it from,” Chuuya grumbled. “Did I hurt you in any way? Physically or mentally?”

Atsushi shook his head. “No mainly you just complained about Dazai.”

“What did he say?” Dazai asked, suddenly intrigued.

“You were there!” Chuuya said.

“No I dropped you off and said I was going to take care of something Chuuya, but you obviously don’t remember that either,” Dazai said.

“After he left is when you started drinking,” Atsushi said.

Chuuya pondered it for a moment. He vaguely remembered some of it. He remembered Dazai acting weird, then leaving. Then he remembered a nearly empty bottle next to him and someone, who he assumed had been Atsushi, dragged him away from the bar.

“I think I remember that,” Chuuya said. His forehead began to throb, but the sudden headache wasn’t bad enough that he wanted to swallow the whole bottle of painkillers. It was enough that he wanted and took another, however.

“So I don’t have a safe way to get the information we need,” Dazai said.

“Do we need to use a different computer?” Chuuya asked as he left the bathroom.

He nodded. “We need hackable computers, little questions, and good wifi. Somewhere we can demo
computers and override them.”

“Shopping trip?”

“Yep.”

Dazai grabbed the laptop and set his room key on the desk. Chuuya searched for his key but after Atsushi set two on the surface he assumed the kid had confiscated his after he got drunk. They walked out of the room and to their car without any words. Dazai tried to climb into the driver’s spot, but life be damned if he let the tall-ass drive. He shoved Dazai out of the way and climbed into the front seat. He made sure Atsushi was buckled before he pulled out of their parking space.

Dazai told him where to go and Chuuya smiled to himself as he remembered bringing Elise there once to buy her sweets.

When they finally found a parking place and made their way into the building he was already about to punch Dazai. The mackerel hadn’t stopped fussing about everything Chuuya was doing wrong as he drove as if he had a right to talk. They quickly located a map of the mall and Chuuya had to deal with both Dazai and Atsushi looking over his shoulder. The 2nd floor.

A shiver rippled up Chuuya’s spine. His head snapped over his shoulder but nothing was there. Their trip was going too smoothly.

“Dazai-” Chuuya began.

“I know Chuuya~” Dazai muttered.

Instead of heading towards the store Dazai took them around to a far staircase and made it up one flight before pretending he was exhausted and couldn’t make it any further. Chuuya pretended to get angry and used the moment to scan their surrounding. Nothing looked wrong, but he missed something. Even though nothing appeared amidst, something just felt, off.

They continued up the steps and Dazai took the long way to the store. When Chuuya couldn’t take the extra trips around the mall anymore he cut for the store and the others followed. The store was moderately filled with people. The workers were helping other customers look at computers and giving them prices when he walked through the entrance. It wasn’t too full but it was still busy enough that no one would notice them. Dazai headed straight for an open laptop and Chuuya frowned at Atsushi who was still stood outside of the store.

“What?” He asked.

“I thought I was going insane, but now I think I’m sure,” Atsushi’s eyes turned to him and Chuuya observed their now fully golden color. “I think I saw Akutagawa.”

Dazai’s head snapped up from the computer. “Damn it,” he continued to type in a flurry over the keyboard letters flying out of his fingertips faster than what seemed humanly possible. Dazai was only better than Chuuya at hacking because his hands were bigger. It was only because of his stupid height.

“Dazai,” Atsushi’s voice shook. “Akutagawa, he’s definitely not alone.” The kid collapsed onto the ground and Chuuya scanned him over quickly. “I-I think King’s with him, I don’t know why but everything inside of me is screaming to run. If I don’t the tiger might make me.”

“Calm down, Atsushi,” Dazai said. His eyes quickly flickered up to Chuuya’s. What was he supposed to do? Dazai knew Atsushi way better than Chuuya did. How was he supposed to help the
When Chuuya didn’t move Dazai’s eyes returned to his and his head tilted towards Atsushi. Fine. Chuuya rolled his eyes but walked over to Atsushi. He reached out his hand to the tiger.

“Come on kid I’ll help you up,” Chuuya said. Atsushi’s scared yellow eyes looked up into his. “I know King seems scary, but trust me, Dazai can get us out of here in a heartbeat if he has to.”

“I didn’t know you thought so highly of me Chuuya~,” Dazai said.

“Shut up,” Chuuya growled. Atsushi only kept staring at him with the same worried expression creased into his facial features. “If anything bad happens I’ll just beat all of them to a bloody pulp and drag Akutagawa’s ass with us.”

Atsushi gave him a little smile and accepted Chuuya’s hand. He pulled Atsushi to his feet and immediately felt a twinge of jealousy. This kid was four years younger than Chuuya? How was he so tall?

“I don’t think you’ll be able to do that,” another voice said. Oh, joy. Chuuya turned to the entrance to see a man who was a little taller than Atsushi. His hair was dark brown and his eyes appeared to be a reddish brown. He was dressed in far less formal clothing as King and Doyle tended to, with only jeans, a button up shirt, and an unbuttoned vest.

“Good, saves me the trouble of finding you,” Chuuya said.

“Stall,” Dazai instructed quietly.

“What do you think I’m doing ass hole?” Chuuya hissed. “Quite honestly I think I will be able to do that if I try hard enough.”

The man smirked he took a step forward and slammed his hand onto one of the outlets. Blue electricity coursed around his hand. A bright flash came from a computer and the electricity vanished.

“Sorry but I’m touching a link to the electric system,” Dazai smiled at the man before he returned his focus to the computer. A large flash of light came from the man and lights flickered before Dazai’s ability kicked in to immediately counter the man’s. Dazai pulled away from the computer and closed the lid.

“Can I help you with anything?” One of the workers asked with concern lace in his tone. Chuuya glanced behind him, most of the shoppers and employees were staring at them.

Dazai didn’t reply and Chuuya had no intention to either. “We’re fine, thank you,” Atsushi replied.

“You’re Riordan Rick if I’m not mistaken,” Dazai said.

The man’s eyes widened. “How-”

“Your ability is ‘Lightning Thief’ pretty self-explanatory, you summon lightning and control electricity.”

“I know things about you too,” Riordan stuttered.

“I’m sure you do,” Dazai said, “move out of the way King and I had a deal.” He what?

“Which he said is now fulfilled,” Riordan said, “I don’t need to worry about a thing.”
“You son of a bitch,” Chuuya growled at Dazai, “what did you do?”

“Calm yourself Chuuya,” Dazai smirked, “you’re getting emotional.”

“Answer the question mackerel,” Chuuya ordered.

Dazai didn’t acknowledge him, which thoroughly pissed him off. An image flickered in the corner of Chuuya’s eye. Dazai was speaking but he didn’t pay attention. A woman stepped towards them and flashed in and out of focus but as Chuuya watched her, her form became clear. She seemed almost ghost-like, her skin had a weird shine and she was paler than Akutagawa if that was even possible. Her hair was pulled into a tight bun and when her blue eyes met Chuuya’s she smiled.

“Hello, Chuuya,” she said with a soft voice.

He froze as her identity dawned on him. He glanced around his surroundings. Dazai was still yammering, but Atsushi was staring wide-eyed at her.

“Who are you?” Atsushi asked.

“His name’s Riordan,” Dazai spoke.

Chuuya looked at him but quickly turned his attention back to- he made a disgusted growl. Dazai couldn’t sense her, which meant if he said anything the mackerel would be on alert and they already had one problem Dazai didn’t need to know that they also had to deal with damn Highsmith. The worst part was that Atsushi could see her, so if he said anything Dazai would be more concerned.

“No, I was talking about-”

“We need to go,” Chuuya interrupted.

“Go ahead hat rack, I’ll catch up,” Dazai said.

“Dazai we can’t-” Chuuya interrupted Atsushi again by grabbing his wrist and breaking into a sprint.

“You won’t get away,” Riordan held out his hand but Dazai grabbed his shoulders and brought a knee into his stomach. Chuuya snickered. What had he been saying?

Atsushi started protesting, but Chuuya only picked up his pace. He rushed down a flight of stairs and stopped abruptly upon reaching the next flight. Another woman, who seemed older than Highsmith, stood at the bottom of the steps with her hands behind her back. She stared up at them with light pale-blue eyes.

Chuuya jumped over the side of the railing and dragged Atsushi with him. He used his ability to cushion their fall and coughed violently once they hit the ground. His chest tightened and he felt like puking. Why was he still so out of it? He had most of his strength back, so why was his ability straining him so much? He ignored the pain swirling in his chest and darted towards the exit with Atsushi in tow.

A cold sensation trailed up Chuuya’s spine. Something was coming. No, someone. Chuuya pulled Atsushi back and he used his ability to fly backward as parts of the ground flew up in a loud explosion. Screams echoed through the mall.

The black bulk of a glowing red ability raised its head out of the ground. It’s black hollowed eyes flickered up and met Chuuya’s. The ability bared its fangs and hovered higher into the air. Chuuya’s chest twisted painfully in several directions. The ability reared back its head and thrashed out at
Chuuya. He pushed against the ground but his legs wouldn’t move. Shit.

The ability crashed down onto Chuuya for a brief moment before a large force knocked it off of him. He groaned. He managed to climb to his feet and look up to see the man who was standing behind the ability.

“Hello, Ryuunosuke,” Chuuya said in the least spiteful tone he could muster.

“Chuuya,” Akutagawa dead-panned. Rashomon pulled back to him and Atsushi looked up from where he was lying on the ground.

“Get up kid, and get ready,” Chuuya ordered.

“I’m not fighting him,” Atsushi said.

“He may not give us a choice.”

“Chuuya!” Chuuya’s collar was wrenched to the side and a hand passed by his arm as the woman from early tried to grab him. She seemed familiar but Chuuya couldn’t remember who she had been. Atsushi swept Chuuya into his arms and jumped backward.

“Do not-do not let her touch you,” Atsushi’s voice shook. “Everything inside of me is screaming to not let her touch you.”

“Alright I got it, set me down kid,” Atsushi listened and Chuuya kept his eyes on her. The one time he might actually need Dazai and he’s not there.

Rashomon lashed out again and Chuuya’s eyes flickered up to take care of it for only a moment before the woman was right beside him and reaching out her arm.

A bright light flashed between them and once it disappeared the woman was standing several meters away with her arm outstretched. Highsmith stood in a white kimono between Chuuya and the enemy.

She darted to the side away from Akutagawa and his compatriot. “This way,” she called to them. “Hurry or there won’t be another opening.”

Chuuya cursed under his breath and ran after her. Atsushi followed close behind. Rashomon tried to go after them but Chuuya used his ability to jump, twirl, and kick it into the nearest wall before continuing to follow Highsmith. His stomach cramped but he ignored the pain.

She brought them through the scattered crowds, around the staircases, and into the backroom of one of the restaurants. Chuuya hated the thought of being indebted to her again, but there had been no other option unless he planned on fighting close range with someone he couldn't touch. If Dazai was with him he could do it. Ew. His body shivered in disgust. When did he ever need that waste of bandages? It was gross to even think about.

They entered a small storage room and Highsmith led them to a back wall where she moved a box and revealed a small door in the floor.

“Take this tunnel and keep going straight, you’ll go up some steps, and then end up outside by several busy restaurants. They should be almost full by this time of day. Pick one and wait for Dazai, he should rendezvous with you there.”

Rage laced through Chuuya’s gut. “Did that bastard seriously make a deal? With you ?”
She smiled softly and heat raced into Chuuya’s head. That idiot was going to pay. Chuuya grumbled about how stupid this was but opened the secret door anyway.

“You have about five minutes before I can’t hold it and you’ll get trapped in the passage forever,” Highsmith said.

“Yeah, yeah,” he rolled his eyes and started to climb into it. “You coming kid?”

“Oh, yeah,” Atsushi said, “thank you for everything.” He tripped as he crouched down and fell towards Highsmith. Chuuya tried to catch him but Atsushi ended up phasing through her. The boy’s eyes flew to her and he scrambled back.

“I was going to warn you about that,” Chuuya said, “she’s not really here.”

Atsushi reached toward her but stopped. Highsmith chuckled. “You should get moving.” She smiled warmly and lights danced in eyes.

“That expression doesn’t suit you,” Chuuya said coldly.

She turned to him and her eyes softened. “I suppose it doesn’t.”

Chuuya dropped the rest of the way into the tunnel. Atsushi followed him shortly after.

“And Chuuya,” Highsmith called down, “It’s on you.” What was that supposed to mean?

The two of them quickly made their way through the tunnel. Atsushi tried to ask questions about Highsmith but he cut off anything Atsushi tried to say. He wasn’t in the mood to try to answer any long questions. Nor would he ever be. At the very least he would be up for hearing long explanations. Preferably, with Dazai’s throat being slowly crushed in his hand while the brunet talked.

~

Day: 9

Logically, if they were trying to find the other mafia or Armed Detective Agency members they would need a safe computer that couldn’t be tracked to them, so a computer store would be the best place to go. Gin found one that definitely was Dazai style. A little busy, but also quiet enough that people wouldn’t notice them. She looked over the heads of the crowds and up the staircases as she scanned over the map in her hands.

They wouldn’t be on the first floor, so she decided to start looking for them on the second. If the Bosses guess was right they would have arrived a little bit before Gin and they shouldn’t be very far ahead of her. She weaved through the crowds making sure not to bump into anyone. She moved swiftly and lightly on her feet keeping an eye out for any heads of red hair.

Her gut wrenched to the side and her heart fluttered. She could feel him. She could feel Ryuunosuke. He was somewhere by the entrance.

She bit her lip and kept moving towards the store. She was there for Dazai, nothing else. Her legs felt like jello at first but slowly she was able to place one in front of the next in the same pattern as before and made her way to the shop.

As she headed up the steps, a beam of what looked like blue electricity shot up into the air and almost as suddenly, disappeared. Gin sprinted up the steps, skipping multiple at once. She made it to
the top and turned on her heel.

Dazai and some other man were fighting, and there was no sign of Chuuya or Atsushi. The man thrust a knife towards Dazai. He easily blocked it, stepped backward, and jumped over the railing to the first floor. That suicidal idiot! She glanced down at him and he bolted away. His back had even been turned to her when he jumped which made her presence still unknown. Shit. The man’s head snapped to her direction and his brow turned downward with a confused expression. She quickly hopped onto the railing and slid down it to the bottom floor. Why did Dazai have to make this so difficult?

Her feet hit the ground and she glanced up and down the hall. Dazai was nowhere in sight nor were the other two that were supposed to be with him. Where had Chuuya been? According to the boss, they should have been together. Along with Ryuunosuke. Perhaps they had already run and Dazai had decided to quickly take care of the guy? They were probably meeting back up somewhere nearby.

Gin closed her eyes and tried to think. Where would her brother be? She had felt him by the entrance. She knew he had been there. That was the next place she should search.

_Boom!_

The people in front of her screamed and ran passed her. Whatever was happening was important. She dashed towards the action without a second thought and pushed the last people out of the way. A bright white light filled the area in front of her and she stumbled back. Her heart pounded inside her chest, and she shielded her eyes.

The light dimmed and she moved her arms. Ways in front of her she saw her brother and Rashomon along with some other woman and Chuuya and the Jinko running away, running straight towards her. Why were they running away from Ryuunosuke? She cursed as Chuuya passed her on the other side of the mall. What had they been doing fighting her brother? She had no information, that was her weakest point. She needed to figure out what was happening, but her mission was to bring Dazai to her boss. He would probably have answers, but, she wanted to take her brother instead.

She grumbled about how stupid this was as she turned her back on Ryuu and bolted after Chuuya. She spied him weaving through people with the Jinko close behind him. They ducked into a restaurant. She ran through the door to find it empty besides customers and employees. The two ability users were completely gone.

She growled and an overwhelming urge to punch the wall sank into her, but sadly that would draw too much attention. She was supposed to locate Dazai while Kyouka retrieved Higuchi and the Tanizakis so all of them could receive orders and stay in contact with the boss/president. So far her side was going terribly. Hopefully, Kyouka’s was going better, but seeing as they were literally hiding in the slums, which was very far from the Boss’s safe house, it would be harder. Gin rolled her eyes and set out to search for Dazai again.

~

_Day: 9_

They climbed out of a hole in the dirt right as the tunnel vanished beneath them. Throngs of people flooded passed them and long lines stretched outside of restaurants and street venders. Chuuya dragged Atsushi, who was still trying to run back to Dazai, into the most crowded restaurant that still had space and asked for a table for three.
“He’ll be fine, tiger,” Chuuya said.

Atsushi hung his head. Chuuya had seemingly done nothing to comfort the younger boy. “But he-,” the kid began.

“Did something stupid and is now going to deal with the consequences and then come find us,” Chuuya interrupted. They were lead to a table and Chuuya sighed. He briefly looked over the menu before resigning to just wine. While he waited, he pondered what Highsmith had said with a frown. He didn’t understand what she had been referring to. Given she could have made something up to confuse him. A short time passed and eventually, his wine came. Chuuya took a sip of his wine and soaked in the alcohol with delight. He was going to kill that suicidal idiot.

“Did you miss me?” Dazai asked.

Chuuya looked at the menu, then Dazai, then back at the menu. He chucked it as hard as he could at Dazai’s face. Smack! Satisfaction laced through him. “You lying piece of shit! How much damage have you done?”

“Ow! Chuuya~ what are you talking about?”

“Well, genius, you made a deal with King? What else have you done behind my back? Let me guess you went to see Highsmith last night and decided to get further in debt with her by asking her to pull our asses out of that situation? You also sold one of our souls to her. And-,”

“Wait, slow down,” Dazai held out his hand with a frown, “I did see her last night, but I didn’t ask her to save you.”

“She showed up and pulled Atsushi and us out,” Chuuya rolled his eyes, “if you hadn’t made a deal she wouldn’t have done that. And she told us you would rendezvous with us as if she had already planned this.”

Dazai’s eyes grew dark. “I never said anything about today.”

“Then why did you see her?”

“To confirm a suspicion of mine. It’s more concerning that she helped without being asked to.”

“No shit, the last thing we want is to be indebted to King’s queen.”

“Who are you talking about?” Atsushi asked.

“Highsmith Patricia,” Chuuya said, “the woman who saved us.”

“Oh, she seemed nice,” Atsushi said with a smile.

“She’s a snake that will squeeze the life out of you after she’s dug her fangs into your neck and drained you of every piece of yourself,” Chuuya said.

Atsushi’s smile instantly disappeared. “Is everyone you know mean and scary?”

“At least scary,” Chuuya conceded.

“But she seemed really nice,” Atsushi muttered.

Dazai sighed overdramatically. “For once I have to follow the shorties lead-”
“Don’t call me short!”

“-don’t let her fool you Atsushi. If you become indebted to her, you’ll never be free from her grasp.”

“Unless a tall ass saves your ass,” Chuuya mumbled.

“What do you mean?” Atsushi asked. Shit. Chuuya didn’t mean for him to hear that.

Dazai quirked his brow. He probably didn’t hear it. “Nothing,” Chuuya said. “Well, idiot, do we want to stay or move? All I have to pay for is this wine.”

“We should make a plan if they attack us again, and then leave,” Dazai said, “In simpler terms for your small brain, food, plan, leave.”

Chuuya growled. Dazai acting like the king of the world was bull shit and he didn’t have a small brain. They ordered food and Chuuya ordered another glass of wine. Atsushi pursed his lips and frowned at Chuuya when he heard his order, but when Chuuya told him he could comment, Atsushi didn’t have anything to say, supposedly.

“Alright, what info did you gather when you were attacked?” Dazai asked after they had finished eating.

“Akutagawa is with them and willing to attack us,” Chuuya said, “I believe that’s the main information we should focus on counteracting.”

“We know how Akutagawa’s ability works,” Dazai said with a wave of his hand. “Riordan’s ability is the Lightning Thief, I mentioned it briefly already. Were there any other ability users we should take note of with Akutagawa?”

“There was a woman,” Atsushi said. “She- there was something about her that made everything inside of me screamed to run. I-I’m not sure it would be good to be around her.”

“You said to not let her touch me,” Chuuya said.

Atsushi nodded. “It was just a feeling, but a really strong one. Dazai would be able to cancel whatever her ability is, but I don’t think it’s safe to make contact with her period. So even if we can nullify her ability, we would need Akutagawa or someone with a long ranged ability to fight her.”

Dazai nodded thoughtfully. “Chuuya give me a description.”

“Rude much,” Chuuya rolled his eyes.

His lips twisted into a long cheeky smile and Dazai drawled, “Pleeeaaase Chuuuuuyaaaa~”

“Alright, alright stop!” Dazai did and Chuuya continued. “She had blue eyes, short blonde hair, and only a little taller than me. That’s all I remember.”

“Alright, alright stop!” Dazai did and Chuuya continued. “She had blue eyes, short blonde hair, and only a little taller than me. That’s all I remember.”

“If you see her, don’t make contact,” Dazai said decisively, “I’ll take care of her. Atsushi, is there a chance you could fight Akutagawa?”

“I refuse,” said Atsushi immediately.

“Chuuya, what about you?”

“If he gives me no choice,” Chuuya said, “I’ll run before I fight though.”
“Great,” Dazai sighed, “then Chuuya I want you to deal with Riordan if he attacks again. Atsushi anyone else, even Akutagawa, but you can just keep him occupied if you don’t want to actually fight. If there happens to be more than three people it doesn’t really matter. Only one instruction, do not fight King. Especially if we already have our hands full. Avoid him at all costs, even if that means we get separated.”

“What should we do if Highsmith tries to help us again?” Chuuya asked.

“Unless absolutely necessary decline,” Dazai said.

“What is her ability?” Atsushi asked.

Chuuya looked at Dazai and the mackerel met his eyes. He wasn’t sure if it was a good idea for Atsushi to know. She was already terrifying without her ability, but with it the terror moved to a whole other level.

“It’s similar to Tanizaki’s ability,” Dazai said.

“I fell through her and she didn’t disappear,” Atsushi said. “That’s not similar to Tanizaki.”

There was a beat of silence before Dazai burst into a fit of laughter. Chuuya watched him with a deep frown on his face. What about this was funny?

“You fell *through* her?” Dazai asked through deep breaths. “How jarring was that?”

“I was startled,” Atsushi said.

“Her ability is more powerful than Tanizaki’s,” Dazai explained. “In simple terms, something like her spirit leaves her body. In that state she can go anywhere she wants to in a matter of seconds. What’s truly terrifying is she can affect the people around her but they can’t affect her and only the people who she chooses to see her, can see her. She’s practically invisible and invincible in that state unless something happens to her physical body, which is completely motionless while she’s gone.”

Atsushi narrowed his brow. “What about the tunnel she had us go through? Wasn’t that part of her ability?”

“She makes those to get to and fro in her ghost-like form,” Chuuya continued. “That’s why we would get trapped there if we were in there too long. Since we weren’t in her form we only had a limited amount of time before our presence caused the tunnel to cave in. I’m not sure why that is. The only information I have is what the mafia gained.”

Atsushi turned his gaze to Dazai. The waste of bandages shrugged. “I only know a little more than Chuuya’s small brain does.”

“Take that back mackerel,” Chuuya growled.

“It’s not like it wasn’t true,” Dazai said, “I always know more than you.”

Chuuya crossed his arms and refused to look at the brunet. When the check for their food came he slid it over to Dazai without a glance. Mackerel threw money onto the tray and they left as soon as their server collected it.

“We’re going to pay back whoever we stole that money from right?” Atsushi asked.

Chuuya snorted. Whoever it was, it was their own dumb fault for walking passed Dazai instead of
crossing the street.

“Of course, Atsushi,” Dazai said.

As if. Dazai wasn’t going to trouble himself with tracking down whoever he had stolen from, even if he was “in the light”. Atsushi smiled and seemed content. The kid could be called cute for his blind trust but sometimes he was more like an idiot. He definitely liked to see the best in everyone, but he could be an idiot.

Dazai led them through the crowds of people towards where they had parked their car. They made their way steadily in that direction, making sure not to appear in a hurry and draw attention. Chuuya surveyed the open scene around them. They were walking on a sidewalk beside a large grassy area with trees that dotted along the sidewalks. There were plenty of people, so if King attacked them, he would be putting other people in danger. Not that he cared, but all of the people would also serve as obstacles for him. Unless they could find a way to scare them away like Ryuunosuke had done last time.

_Crack!_

Chuuya gasped as it felt like his entire eardrum burst. A loud yelp sounded from beside him. He glanced over to see Atsushi on the ground with blood tracing down one of the hands that were covering his ears before a strong force slammed into Chuuya’s back and sent him flying. The air in his lung immediately disappeared and he tumbled across the ground. He slid to a halt and immediately began to gasp for air.

His brain pounded against his skull and ears rang violently. With some pain, he managed to lift his head from the ground. Dazai seemed to have managed to pull Atsushi back several meters from where they had been standing and now only a black swirling void stood.

The first person to exit the void was the woman from previously, then Riordan. Next stepped Doyle, if he remembered correctly, and finally Ryuunosuke with a tall man behind him. Chuuya’s eyes widened as he recognized the last man to be King. There was evidence of the years that had passed since their last encounter from the grey parts of his hair that were more prominent and a couple defined creases in his skin, but in no way did he look old.

Dazai leaned down and whispered something to Atsushi who shook his head. King’s smile was as daring as ever. He seemed to want Chuuya to wipe it off his face for him.

“Hello, King!” Dazai said happily. He took a couple steps forward and if Chuuya had had the breath to yell at the idiot he would have. “I see you found a new way of travel since your queen was stolen.”

“I see your queen hasn’t grown any taller, Dazai,” King smiled.

“Bastard,” Chuuya tried to yell but it sounded far more like a frog than his own voice.

“You stole my knight.”

“Young knight willingly came to me.”

“All the same really,” Dazai waved his hand dismissively. “You always go for the knights first, it seems, first Mori’s, then mine. Luckily we have Mori’s knight back, it would be a pain if I didn’t have my queen.”

Chuuya held back a groan as he slid his hands underneath his chest and slowly started to lift himself
“But if I recall,” Dazai slowly tapped his chin with his finger as Chuuya surveyed the scene. “Your queen is gone. Poof! Never to be seen again.” There were several onlookers, but most of the crowd had already or was still fleeing. The woman Chuuya had faced before looked up and around with a frown that Chuuya didn’t understand. He stared at her as she stepped towards a tree, looked up, and then stepped back.

“You know as well as I that’s not true,” King said, “she’s very much accessible. You went to see her a while ago if you recall.” Chuuya made sure to note that comment in his head to beat Dazai with later.

“Yet somehow she’s not on your board anymore,” Dazai pursed his lips and let out a long hmm. Atsushi was still curled up on the ground with his hands over his ears. He shivered and a small drop of blood snaked down his neck. “Did she refuse to go back to you? She probably wasn’t the first person who wanted to leave your ranks after you changed rule sets.”

King’s smile pushed up his cheeks until some of his teeth poked through. “Are you trying to coax Akutagawa into doubting me? If that’s true, then you are truly more desperate than I thought you would be. I thought I would have to break you down further before you were that desperate.”

Chuuya lifted himself up to his knees as Dazai spoke. “No, not desperate, I’m seeking out an opportunity and giving a last warning.”

Chuuya instigated his ability. “Dazai, how little faith you have-” Chuuya sped forward and swung his leg at King. Dazai let out a sound that Chuuya didn’t care to analyze. Talking was just a waste of time, a way to stall. Doyle wrenched King backward. Chuuya lifted his leg further into the air and brought it down, not on King but aimed for Ryuunosuke.

Rashomon lashed up and blocked the kick. Chuuya settled both of his feet on the shield and used it to spring backward to where Atsushi was. He tapped the kid and a red glow formed around him. Vomit bubbled in Chuuya’s stomach as it threatened to rise up his throat and he cursed under his breath. How had he already used his ability too much?

“Chuuya what was the one thing I said to absolutely not do?” Dazai asked through the gritted teeth of his bright toothy smile.

“You can have a meltdown later,” Chuuya hissed. He had Atsushi under his ability, so even if the kid couldn’t move they could still easily run. A trail of vomit would be left, but Chuuya could deal with some stomach and throat pains.

King stood back up and dusted himself off. His eyes became icy and his smile no longer lined his lips. Instead, his lips formed a thin line, void of any emotion. “You’re going to regret attacking me.” He made a sign to the people next to him and Riordan lifted his hand. Chuuya got ready to dodge behind Dazai. A black cloud formed over their heads. If he summoned actual lightning, could Dazai nullify it?

Panic flooded through Chuuya’s veins and knots tugged into life in his stomach. A bright light flashed above him. He held tightly onto Atsushi as he darted to the side and a bolt of lightning pierced the sidewalk.

_Boom!_

A black mark was left behind where the bolt had hit. Another light illuminated above and Chuuya
was running with Atsushi in his arms.

He glanced over his shoulder for a moment. Dazai attempted to reach out and grab Riordan, but Doyle seemed to have blocked his path and they were fighting hand to hand. Shit.

“Set me down,” Atsushi said in a quiet voice.

“But-”

“Just do it!” Chuuya listened and dropped Atsushi.

The boy transformed his limbs into his tiger’s and zipped over to Dazai. Chuuya dodged out of the way of another bolt and booked it towards Riordan instead of away. Electricity coursed around him until a sphere shot out around him and Chuuya had to use his ability to quickly pull back. Bile rose up his throat and spilled onto the sidewalk before he could stop it. He jumped back from Riordan as more vomit tried to pour out from his stomach. He had really overused his ability. As much as Chuuya hated listening to the mackerel, it would have really paid off to listen this once.

The clouds flashed again and Chuuya forced himself to move. He didn’t move fast enough. The lightning hit the ground and the shock wave sent him flying back. For the second time, he skidded to a halt along the ground. His vision swam and barely felt able to move. His ears rang again and the pounding in his head had only grown worse. He rolled far enough over to at least be able to see the fight.

Another light flashed above him and Chuuya pushed against the ground. The heat from the beam grazed his skin and he tumbled across the ground yet again. His body halted and his back seethed with pain. He ignored it and tried to focus on the fight again.

Dazai seemed to still be occupied with Doyle who, even from far away, Chuuya could tell had the mackerel beat in physical combat. Atsushi was avoiding the woman they had ran into earlier but was stuck dodging around a tree. She seemed to be successfully keeping him away from Dazai.

A light flashed above Chuuya and he cursed as he found no strength left in his muscles. He closed his eyes and he could almost feel the heat on his back before he was whisked away. He opened his eyes and Atsushi’s eyes were wide in panic as they darted around the scene. One of his ears still had bits of blood running down his neck.

He didn’t want to make Atsushi carry him, but Chuuya could barely find it in him to keep his eyes opened, let alone walk. He turned his head away from the kid’s chest and managed to spy Dazai, as he pulled the tackiest one on one combat move he could, and he trained a pistol on Doyle. He quickly backed away and came to stand by Atsushi.

“How are you doing?” Dazai asked.

“Been better,” Chuuya barely managed. His voice was hoarse and his throat screamed in pain when he talked.

There was a chance. They could make it to the parking ramp if they had an opening. All they needed was a distraction.

*Click!* *Clank!*

A small cylinder object landed on the ground in front of them. Chuuya’s eyes widened.

*Boom!*
Smoke dispersed everywhere and Chuuya felt as Atsushi’s entire body tensed and released the pressure from his muscles as he rushed away from the scene.

~

*Day: 9*

*Crack!*

Gin along with many others shrieked at the sudden noise. People started running passed her and a bright smile lit up her face. If people were running away, there was ninety-nine percent chance Dazai and Chuuya had something to do with the source of their fear.

She managed to spot the top of what seemed like a black swirling vortex over the top of all the people. However, if that’s where Dazai was she still had a little under a hundred meters to get to him.

She pushed through person after person after person. She could see almost the full black haze as it disappeared. Five individuals stood with their backs to her. The crowd tried to push her out of the way as they ran and she rolled her eyes. She ducked through them and managed to get fairly close.

Once the crowd was behind her she crept behind a tree and managed to scout out the best way to climb it. She couldn’t hear what Dazai had said clearly from her distance, but it had definitely been his voice. Her hand wrapped around one of the tree’s branches and hoisted herself up. One of the five she knew was Ryuunosuke, so why was he facing Dazai, Chuuya, and the Jinko like they were on opposite sides?

Gin shook her head. She wouldn’t, she *couldn’t* assume anything until she heard it from Dazai. Maybe Dazai had Ryuu pretending to be part of the King’s Men. There was no saying for sure. If only she could get closer she could hear what they were saying.

She climbed near the end of one of the branches and silently made her way to another tree, then the one after. There was only one more tree she could make it to before she would have to jump. She placed her foot onto the other branch, and then her second. She took the third step and squeaked as her back foot slipped. Her hand grabbed the branch and she managed to steady herself.

Eyes bore up into the tree and Gin stilled. She could sense the gaze of someone below searching for her. As quickly as it arrived it vanished and she silently made her way to a more hidden place behind the leaves.

Her eyes grazed over the scene once more as she was right above the five people with King. Dazai was the only one upright. Chuuya appeared to slowly be climbing to his feet a few paces back from Dazai, while the tiger-man seemed to be curled up in a ball.

A red light lit up around Chuuya and he flew forward to attack the man in the middle who appeared to be King Stephen, but actually attacked Ryuu? He flew back and Gin wasn’t sure exactly what had happened.

“You’re going to regret attacking me.” King’s voice came from below. A dark cloud formed above Gin and she cursed. She was in one bad place for lightning. Surprisingly, it flew down and struck the concrete by where Dazai and the other two had been, leaving nothing but a black mark behind.

Chaos ensued below her. Chuuya was running from the Lightning Man (she had decided to call him) while controlling the Jinko’s gravity to travel with him. Dazai was trying to get to said Lightning Man but had to go through Fist Fighting Man, which Dazai would struggle with. And the other three, King, Ryuu, and the All-Seer Woman (since Gin assumed she was the one who had been
searching for her since she was closest to the tree) were doing nothing.

Gin wasn’t quite sure if helping would make things worse or better. Also, if Ryuu saw her would that jeopardize whatever he was doing?

Chuuya dropped Atsushi and the tiger ran towards Dazai. All-Seer Woman seemed to reach out for him and he swerved to the side towards Gin and away from his original target. All-Seer kept trying to grab him but Atsushi dodged every time. Gin’s eyes widened and she clutched the tree tighter as Atsushi ran right into it.

His eyes traveled up into the branches and widened as they latched onto hers. Gin put a single finger over her lips. All-Seer reached out and he twirled around the tree. Gin scanned the battlefield again. Dazai was still stuck, and Chuuya, he was not doing well. His body laid sprawled across the ground and a bright flash appeared in the sky.

Her body tensed as she readied to moved but at the last second Chuuya shifted and his body was sent flying from the shock wave. A plan. They needed a plan, or a way to get away. More importantly, Chuuya needed help. Her eyes traveled back to the tiger and his eyes glanced back up at Gin. She motioned towards Chuuya and his eyes slowly traveled to the executive.

She couldn’t see his reaction. One second he stood beside her, the next Chuuya laid in his arms as lightning struck the concrete again. Dazai backed away from Fist Fighting Man and to his team with a gun in his hand. They needed a distraction.

Her hand slipped into her belt and pulled out a smoke grenade. She chucked it into the center of the battlefield and prepared to jump.

*Boom!*

She slipped out of the tree. She knew she couldn’t follow Dazai, after all, she was beside their enemies and Akutagawa. Moving to them would give away her position. Her boss would have to live with a little more waiting time since she had just saved her target’s life, which normally wasn’t her job. Normally she was trying to kill her target. It was a nice change of pace to be protecting instead of killing.

The smoke started to dim and she took that as her cue to leave. If she reported to Mori he could give her direction and a plan. For now, she would reconvene with her boss and then retrieve Dazai.

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*Day: 10*

Dazai hadn’t returned. Atsushi’s legs bounced against the sidewalk. The movement vibrated his whole body, and he hoped he wasn’t disturbing Chuuya too much. After the second attack, Dazai had decided it was best for them to wait to go to the parking ramp until he thought the coast was clear. Not that they could ever be sure. Dazai had told Atsushi that if King found them once he could find them again. He also said that if King found them once he could find them again. He also said that King would wait to attack again until they weren’t expecting it.

Chuuya hadn’t woken up since they had managed to escape. Atsushi worried he wasn’t going to wake up or that he was seriously injured. Dazai said not to worry, despite Chuuya’s small injury, but he said that about almost everything, especially things Atsushi should be worried about.

Gin had really helped them. Atsushi decided not to tell Dazai it was her for multiple reasons. One, Dazai probably had a pretty good idea it was her and two, he was fairly sure King was listening to them somehow. He didn’t want King to know it had been her.
Dazai had left Atsushi and Chuuya to scout out the surrounding area for an easy path back to their stolen car. He’d been gone for about a half an hour, and Atsushi’s stomach grew tighter with every passing second. Chuuya still didn’t show any signs of waking and if King showed up, Atsushi wasn’t sure how well he’d be able to run. He was tired, they had slept outside all night and Atsushi had been too nervous to sleep for more than ten minutes at a time. Also depending on where he went, how long would it take Dazai to find them again? Last time they had been separated, it barely took him any time at all, but would it be harder with so many places to look?

He ran his fingers through Chuuya’s hair nervously. He didn’t realize he was doing it until a hand lightly tapped his own. His eyes met Chuuya’s.

“Morning,” Chuuya said. He glanced around them and frowned. “Why are we sitting in an alleyway?”

Atsushi pulled his fingers out of Chuuya’s hair and tried to gather his thoughts. He quickly explained Dazai’s decision and where the other man was along with where they currently were. Chuuya nodded at the end of his explanation and they fell into an awkward silence.

“Don’t worry yourself too much, Dazai will be fine on his own.” Chuuya pushed against Atsushi. “Especially since he’s perfectly fine making deals with the enemy on his own.”

“You shouldn’t sit up yet,” Atsushi protested. The redhead didn’t listen to him. Chuuya managed to rise into a sitting position with only a little swaying. When he seemed mostly stable the redhead laid his head onto Atsushi’s shoulder with a small sigh.

“I feel like crap,” He muttered.

Atsushi laid his head onto Chuuya’s. “Where do you hurt most?”

“Headache mainly,” Chuuya said. “I also have stomach pains and a few muscles that want to die. Also, my back is completely numb.”

“Can you walk?” A new voice asked. Atsushi smiled and relief swarmed him as he looked up at Dazai. “The sooner we move the better.”

“I think so,” Chuuya said. “It might take me a bit to be fully balanced, but I’ll be fine.”

Dazai offered Chuuya his hand but the shorter man slapped it away. Atsushi and Chuuya stood up and like he had said, Chuuya swayed for a few seconds before gaining himself and standing fully upright.

Dazai led them through back roads and main streets with ease as if he had done it a million times before. Which he might have, Atsushi couldn’t be sure. Chuuya and Dazai barely argued, Atsushi doubted Chuuya had it in him. They didn’t converse much and the whole trip felt prolonged. They finally made it to where their car was parked and he immediately felt uneasy. The dark clouds above them had been there before they had headed out, but they still posed an uneasy sensation.

Dazai led them into the ramp, up to the second floor, and they walked towards the car. Fear rushed through Atsushi’s veins. His stomach lurch forward and his legs glued in place. The three of them were less than five meters away. What was the issue? Chuuya and Dazai moved forward without any hesitation in their steps. He tried to force his legs forward but they didn’t move. Atsushi looked down. Nothing was wrong.

“What’s wrong?” Dazai asked.
“I don’t know,” Atsushi said. His voice sounded shaky, his entire body was shaking, but he didn’t know why. Something just felt off. “My legs won’t move.”

Dazai frowned and Chuuya and he made eye contact. “I can carry you if you need,” Chuuya said.

Atsushi shook his head. “My stomach- I just- I feel like we shouldn’t be here.”

“Why?” Dazai asked.

“I don’t know. I just- I feel like we need to leave.”

“You’re probably just shaken up after yesterday,” Chuuya said. “Do you need me to carry you?”

Atsushi shook his head harder trying to get his point across. “It’s not- I’m not- the tiger’s trying to warn me.”

“About what?”

“I don’t know!” Atsushi said his voice rising.

“Calm down, it’s your imagination Atsushi,” Chuuya said. Atsushi swallowed hard and his entire body shook harder. The redhead reached out his hand. “Come on.”

Atsushi forced himself to lace his finger’s through Chuuya’s. The older man tugged his arm and he stumbled forward. Chuuya caught him and helped him upright. “See?”

Atsushi tried to take a deep breath but his lungs wouldn’t accept the air. Little breaths escaped his lips and grew more rapid as his chest squeezed together. “Atsushi?” Chuuya’s voice sounded distant and Atsushi’s vision blurred in and out of focus.

“We shouldn’t be here,” He said, his voice barely more than a whisper. His legs gave way under him and Dazai grabbed his other arm.

“Atsushi you need breathe,” Dazai said. He was little more than another voice in Atsushi’s head as his ears shut out almost every sound to prepare for something.

Crack!

The noise that had once sent him sprawling hit his eardrums as a whisper. Atsushi looked up his vision still blurred as figures emerged from the void. He closed his eyes. Please! Please help me!

He pushed Dazai away, his arms and legs transformed and every cloud in Atsushi’s eyes disappeared and gave way to clear and bright sight. There were only four people this time. The woman, Riordan, King, and Akutagawa. Atsushi’s stomach tried to wrench itself out of him. He wanted to reach out and grab Akutagawa. He wanted to convince him to come back. He wanted to force Akutagawa to come back. But he hadn’t been happy, or safe, with the three of them. He couldn’t force Akutagawa to come back to a toxic environment. That wasn’t fair or kind. Atsushi wanted his partner to be happy, but he wished Akutagawa could be happy with the three of them.

“Should we pick up from where we left off?” King asked a small smirk formed on his lips. “Or would we like to have a tall level headed chat this time.”

“I’m going to kill you,” Chuuya said.

“I don’t think it’s possible for Chuuya to be a bigger man,” Dazai said.
“Alright, you’re first mackerel,” Chuuya said.

King took a step forward and every muscle in Atsushi’s body went rigid. King’s hand moved up and rested itself on Akutagawa’s shoulder. A gesture that Akutagawa himself seemed to be surprised by.

“Get your filthy hand off of him!” Atsushi jumped and swung his head around at the sounded of Dazai’s icy voice. His eyes were darker than the night sky and his entire face filled with murderous intent. Atsushi swallowed.

The corners of King’s lips tugged upwards and he smiled devilishly at Dazai. “You had your chance Osamu. If I recall, you’re the one who pushed Akutagawa into a corner. He gave you a chance to prove you cared and you did no such thing. It’s your own fault for not reaching out to him.”

“He’s strong enough to reach out to himself,” Dazai said smoothly.

King shook his head. “You expect every human to be like you and you destroy everyone around you because of it.”

Atsushi’s eyes widened as the black barrel of a pistol found its way to be pointed at King. He gazed in shock at the almost entirely red-brown voids that had become Dazai’s eyes. “I expect no one to be like me.”

*Bang! Bang! Bang!*

Atsushi screamed in surprise and ducked as a flurry of bullets shot out all around him. Dazai and Chuuya ducked next to him and he felt Dazai’s free hand encircle his arm in a tight grasp.

*Crack!*

A strong wind slashed through the air. Atsushi managed to raise his head and caught a glimpse of King and his men as they ran into the black swirling hole. He swore Akutagawa’s eyes met his for a split second but he wasn’t sure. He hoped they had.

The portal, thing, Atsushi didn’t know quite what it was, disappeared and the bullets stopped. Complete silence filled the room for several prolonged seconds maybe even minutes. The door to another set of steps flew open and slammed against the wall. Their savior for a second time stepped through. Atsushi smiled as Gin, with a giant gun strapped to her back, gave them a little wave.

*~*

**Day: 10**

Dazai watched the bullets fly through the air and King immediately pulled Akutagawa into the portal. The other members of his group covered their heads and rushed in. Dazai snickered. Who thought they would be saved by the last person he would have thought of? The portal closed and after a minute or so of silence, the door to the steps of the parking ramp flew open. Gin with her hair pulled back, in her full black clothing, a mask over her mouth, and with a giant gun slung over her shoulder rushed into the room with a knife drawn. She showed them a little wave and sheathed the knife.

Dazai clapped his hands together. “Thanks for the save,” he said without dropping his smile. She put a finger to her lips and motioned them forward. Dazai pointed at the car in question and she made a slashing motion across her throat. She motioned them towards the door more aggressively and Dazai shrugged before following her instructions.
Gin lead them down the stairs and onto the sidewalk of the bustling city. She darted down the sidewalk and the three men followed her without question. She needed to bring them somewhere and Dazai wouldn’t complain. He already knew it was her, there was no doubt in his mind that this was Akutagawa’s little sister. He had no fear that she might be a clone or mirage of some sort.

She brought them through the alleyways and stopped abruptly after one turn. “There aren’t any cameras here, so take off any excess clothing.”

“What?” Atsushi asked.

“Hats, jackets, ties, belts, vests, gloves, suspenders, sheaths, take all of your excess clothing off and do not argue with me,” Gin warned.

Chuuya immediately complied and Dazai and Atsushi did a few seconds later. He took off his jacket and threw it at Gin and began to take off his vest. Dazai figured Gin needed to proof them for trackers or any other form of a device.

“Alright while I search these check your pockets and the seams of the clothing you have on for any trackers, recording devices, or anything else.” Gin reached into her pocket and pulled out a lighter. “If you find anything in any of your clothing burn it along with that item. I know one of you has something on you. The informant said it was either Chuuya or Dazai, but I want you to double check as well, Atsushi.”

The boy nodded and started checking his pockets and running his hands along the seams of his pants. Dazai searched his clothes as well and ended up just taking off his shoes to double check those. Chuuya ran his fingers through his long hair and Dazai couldn’t help but be entranced as the orange hair tumbled down his back.

“Dazai,” he heard Gin snicker behind her mask, “focus.”

“I am,” he pouted at her and continued to search his shoes.

When he found nothing on him he shook his head and she threw his coat, vest, and other items back at him.

“Please be in Chuuya’s hat,” Dazai said as he put his hand together.

“You just want to burn my hat!” Chuuya yelled.

“Well it looks so awful it’s only natural I would wish for it to be gone,” Dazai said.

Gin grabbed Chuuya’s hat and looked it over. “Sorry Dazai, not in here.”

“Are you sure?” Dazai asked. “Out of everything we could lose that would be the best option, and I think even King would want Chuuya to get rid of it.”

“Yes, she’s sure,” Chuuya growled, “it’s in here anyway.” Chuuya held up his shoe and Gin tossed him the lighter. He took out a small round device from between the heel and actual material of his boot. He crushed it underneath the other shoe and then burned both of his shoes, along with the remains of the tracker. Dazai was glad that they had found it. After all, if King thought their bargain was fulfilled, why should he hold up his end of the deal?

**Mental Note:** Get Chuuya shoes.

“Alright, is everyone else clear?” Gin asked.
Atsushi nodded. “I didn’t find anything.”

Gin passed back Chuuya and Atsushi’s other clothing and continued to lead them through the back alley system. They made it to the very outskirts of Yokohama and to a small neighborhood lined with houses.

“There’s still a risk in bringing Dazai and Chuuya here,” Gin explained, “you’re basically like a walking King disease since you were in his captivity. I was as well but you two are far more valuable than King originally believed I was. So if at any point you find any form of a device on you tell us immediately. You cannot leave without instructions and a safe and unseen route, and at no time are you allowed to come back without someone coming to get you first.”

“Isn’t this a little extreme for a safe house?” Chuuya asked. Dazai was a little worried about where they were headed since there were such extreme cautions. He was more worried about who might be their than the actual place, however.

Their guide brought them up the steps of a brick house with a small fenced in yard. Gin knocked on the door in a simple pattern and the door cracked open. A small girl in a red dress with long blonde hair appeared. Dazai swallowed hard as he instantly recognized her as Elise.

“Rintarou! Mister Fukuzawa! Dazai, Chuuya, and the tiger-man are here!” She called back as she swung the door open proudly standing in front of them.

Mori was the first to step into the entryway. He smiled at Dazai and he gave his cheesiest fake smile back.

“Hello, Dazai,” Mori said. “I’m going to have a nice little chat with you.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was a bitch. In total, it was 28 pages. Holy heck, it took forever to get it as good as I wanted it to be. The complete editing process took me forever. BUT IT WAS WORTH IT!!

Also, who thought I forgot about Patricia Highsmith? Don’t worry, I totally did. But in the long run, it worked out better this way.

Also, also, I apparently like to torture myself by having to find more authors. Thus Lois Lowry and Ray Bradbury were born.

Anyway, I’m glad I was able to get this out to all of you actually on time. I have a couple more chapters to edit before I have no idea what to do for this story so let's hope I get some ideas within the next few months (ง‚′耑‹̥眉 insurgents(

Also, also, also, where I live, I have spring break next month and I will be on vacation, so I probably won't update until the end of the month.

I'm excited to hear what all of you think about this chapter so don't hesitate to comment, I love hearing your reactions (ง'̀-'́'̀'̀)

You can also hit me up on tumblr and/or twitter though I'm barely on twitter.

Also, also, also, also, HAVE SOME GLITTER (ง'̀-'́'̀'̀)ﾉ*:° ‿˚`‼️ I don't know what that was I just like glitter and it's really late.

Hopefully, I'll see y'all next chapter (ง'̀-'́'̀'̀)
Chapter Summary

Dazai and Mori + Fukuzawa, have a lovely (or not?) chat.

“I heard an interesting rumor, Osamu,” Mori continued as he poured water into another glass. Dazai frowned at the use of his given name and took a sip of the drink. Mori moved back to the table with another cup and looked Dazai in the eyes. “Apparently, you’re still working for me?”

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: suicidal thoughts. Will be marked with /// but there’s an important scene is after it’s over so I marked the end with a second ///, it’s only for a few paragraphs.

Part 2 and 4 basic link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9fJKzfoVDQ
v=6NS8S4E29Vc&list=PLjEA2Z8fYn0HRT9NEmU6LMsFUnetIQilzR&index=16&t=0s
Part 4, basic link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CctCZieAbNU
The end of part 4 basic link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6NS8S4E29Vc&list=PLjEA2Z8fYn0HRT9NEmU6LMsFUnetIQilzR&index=16&t=0s

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day: 10

The first thing Dazai noticed upon entering the facility, was that the house was far too large to only house five of them. Mori planned to have the building be a main hub of operations to get rid of King, it was child’s play for Dazai to notice that. Even so, they didn’t need a house with a five-meter-long table, a lounging area the size of a baseball field, and eight bedrooms. He didn’t know if that’s how big the room actually was, but the lounging area appeared large enough for him to assume. He assumed Fukuzawa and Mori had separate rooms, but at least four people could fit in each bedroom, possibly five or six.

The building had definitely been purchased after Dazai left, but for a hidden base, it stood out like one red flower in a field of white. Dazai would make sure to complain to Mori about how much space was unneeded. Given Elise might have demanded such a big place, that would have been out of Mori’s control, but that didn’t mean Dazai wouldn’t complain.

Elise decided it was her job to show Atsushi every single room in the house. When Dazai followed the two of them she made a sour face at him but didn’t whine. Chuuya disappeared, but he was most likely talking with Mori about any resources for his injury. Gin also told Dazai she wanted to talk with him later, no doubt about Akutagawa, but she said she would wait until after he and Mori talked.
In retrospect, the house wasn’t as big as it had seemed. The main living space was overly large, but the bedrooms didn’t match the size. They weren’t much bigger than half the size of Dazai’s apartment. Four of the bedrooms were on the second level along with one of the house’s two bathrooms.

Elise led them through, pointing out each of the rooms and if they had any occupancy. She, of course, had her own room, on the top floor, but Gin and Kyouka shared one of the last rooms on the second floor.

“Kyouka is here?” Atsushi asked.

“She left yesterday for some mission or something,” Elise said, “she should be back sometime soon.”

Atsushi nodded and smiled at Elise, but Kyouka’s absence obviously worried him.

Elise showed them up a wibbly wooden staircase and to the top floor. Her room was the largest they had seen so far, it was as large as Dazai’s entire apartment, possibly bigger. Atsushi’s eyes widened as he looked around the room. She then pointed out Mori’s room, which they were not allowed to enter.

Dazai figured none of them were allowed in unless Elise said they could. According to her, neither of them were allowed in, and Dazai assumed he couldn’t talk her into it.

The President’s room was on the other side of a small hallway from Mori’s. His room, Elise showed both of them. It seemed the same as everyone else’s but had another door on the far side of the room.

“That’s the planning room,” Elise said, a pout formed on her lips as she continued, “Rintarou and Mister Fukuzawa spend to much time in there and even I’m not allowed inside. That’s the only place I hear them arguing though. If they can’t get along outside of that room they don’t talk to each other.”

An argument zone. They probably had plenty of things they didn’t argue about, but how they would operate would not be one of those subjects. Keeping their heads underground would be Mori’s answer, while the President would want to take more of an action to secure the safety of the agency. An argument that they wouldn’t want to drag outside of that room. Elise was Mori’s precious girl, but she was also his ability. It wouldn’t be fair for her to be inside with them, even though the president could handle himself.

Once the tour ended they descended the stairs in silence. When they were moving down the second flight Gin’s voice pierced the silent cloud that had formed around them. “What do you mean she’s not back yet?”

“Kyouka hasn’t returned, as I said,” Mori said.

“But she left before I did, and it shouldn’t have taken her more than eight hours.” Gin said. Her voice gained speed every second. “It’s been at least a day.”

“How far was she going?” Atsushi immediately asked.

Gin’s attention turned to him and she shook her head. “It depends, but she should be back by now. She was going to go find Higuchi and the Tanizakis. She even called them to arrange a meeting. If that call was tapped into though, that could have caused a problem.”

Atsushi plopped down onto the couch beside Gin and ran through every single thing that could have happened, no matter how crazy it was. Gin continuously pointed out that his ideas were too weird or
impossible, but a few of them appeared to put her on edge, as well.

While they were sitting Mori had tried to make eye contact with Dazai multiple times but he refused to acknowledge it. Mori hadn’t mentioned when they were going to have their chat, but Dazai knew it would be as soon as his old mentor had a chance to whisk him away. Atsushi being in a constant state of anxiety was extremely helpful for Dazai. He could pretend he needed to stick by Atsushi’s side to calm him down as long as Kyouka was gone.

His bull shit was cut short and Doom signed his name when a fateful phone call buzzed the President’s phone. He picked it up and listened to whoever talked on the other end. He said a quick response and ended the call.

“Kyouka’s not going to be able to make it back until tomorrow,” the President spoke. “She ran into some trouble and decided it was best to wait before returning.” Atsushi’s leg bounced higher and faster.

“I suppose it can’t be helped,” Atsushi muttered. Dazai patted the younger man’s shoulder and nodded.

“She’ll be back by tomorrow,” Mori said with and waved his hand dismissively. “Elise, did you show them where the meeting room is?” The little girl nodded. “Fantastic, Dazai meet me up there in five minutes.”

Crap. Dazai forced a smile. Five-ty? Yeah Mori definitely said fifty minutes, actually did he say five hours? No Dazai heard five days.

“And I did not say fifteen minutes, fifty minutes, five hours, five days, five months, or five years. I said five. Minutes.” Mori walked out of the room without giving him a second glance.

Dazai’s bottom lip jutted out and he flopped on top of Atsushi and Gin’s laps. “I’ll meet you up there was well,” The President said and headed in the same direction Mori had.

“Why is everyone bullying me today?” Dazai muttered to himself. The youngest Akutagawa patted his head.

Gin gave Dazai a small pep talk in her soothing and cute voice and after five minutes had passed she pushed him off of her and Atsushi’s laps. He dragged his feet towards the steps with a massive pout. He stomped up the first flight but tiptoed up the second. He wanted everyone to think he was going to be annoying later, but he didn't want Mori to know he had won yet. Dazai snuck into Fukuzawa’s room and crept up to the further door.

“I know it wasn’t part of the plan Fukuzawa,” Mori said from beyond the door. “Something is off and I’m hoping Dazai will tell us what.”

“He may not have all of the answers you think he does.”

“He’ll have some of them.”

Dazai rolled his eyes and threw open the door. He gathered every single complaint he could think of against Mori inside of his brain and reared to spew them out. A single chess board in the middle of the room stopped him dead in his tracks. The pieces were about the board in defensive positions. A bishop, a rook, and a knight were a few spots away from the king, queen, and a second bishop, Mori was leaning over the board moving the pieces and Dazai couldn’t stop himself from glaring.

“It’s wrong,” Dazai deadpanned.
Mori looked up at him with a frown. “What is?”

“You’re board, it’s wrong.” He took a step forward and shooed Mori away despite the older man’s protest. Dazai removed one of the white knights and placed it where the black one should be. He placed the black knight on his side of the board and paused. He shook his head and continued to set up the pieces. That was an idea for a different time. He scattered the pawns beyond a line of black and moved the major pieces around the board. The white knight was placed beside the black king and Dazai bit his lip so hard it bled. He took the black queen and set it on a white square, the closest to the center as he could. After he finished Mori scanned over the board and reached his hand towards it. Dazai slapped it away and the older man glared at him.

“You’re going to wreck it,” Dazai said.

“Why is their one of our main pieces on King’s side?” Mori asked, “Who possibly classifies as the main piece who hasn’t escaped except Kouyou?”

“They were never caught,” Dazai folded his arms with a humph! “They’re doing reconnaissance, and if you must know it’s Akutagawa Ryuunosuke.”

Mori stared at him with utter disbelief. “Let me get this right. You sent Akutagawa Ryuunosuke to do reconnaissance?”

“Well Atsushi can’t lie for the life of him and Chuuya can barely use his ability without puking,” Dazai said, “Who else was I going to send? I couldn’t go and leave an idiot, a sick kid, and an anxious bean to fend for themselves. That would just be rude.”

“So you left the sick kid to fend for himself?” Mori asked.

“Exactly,” Dazai said with a dismissive wave. “He’ll be fine.” He glanced out the door and when he didn’t see anyone he closed it firmly. He scanned the room. A single light in the ceiling was the only form of a light present. A futon leaned upright against the wall and the only other form of furniture, besides the table in the middle, was a small desk with a large pitcher of water and plastic cups set on top. “You wanted to talk?”

“Well, you already answered where Akutagawa is,” Mori said with a sigh. He moved to the far end of the room and poured water into a cup. Mori offered it to Dazai and the mafia boss looked at Fukuzawa. The President nodded.

“I heard an interesting rumor, Osamu,” Mori continued as he poured water into another glass. Dazai frowned at the use of his given name and took a sip of the drink. Mori moved back to the table with another cup and looked Dazai in the eyes. “You’re still working for me?”

Dazai’s water spewed out of his mouth, and he made sure to get some on his old boss. “Where on earth did you hear that?”

Mori wiped his face with a handkerchief and replied. “King’s men told me.” Dazai’s calm expression faltered for a moment and he cursed himself for it. Mori’s lips quirked into a long devilish smile. “And if I’m not mistaken Chuuya believes this to be true. I wonder, how he would react to another one of your lies coming to light?”

“You wouldn’t dare-”

“No I wouldn’t,” Mori said, “but be careful, even you can only make so many outlandish lies before they crumble in on each other. When Chuuya finds out, and I’m sure he will, let’s hope it comes out your mouth and not someone else’s.”
“Why would you say something like that?” The president asked.

The President’s brow pushed down into a glared. Dazai swallowed. If Mori wasn’t in the room Dazai might have squirmed.

“President,” Dazai started, thinking through each word carefully. “That’s what King believed, he knows the reason why I left, but he assumed that I used that reason to appear as if I had changed. He thinks I was sent to infiltrate the agency not that I actually left. When I was confronted about it I figured the best solution was to go along with King’s misconception. That way he wouldn’t try to use any of the agency members against me. Not that he could, but he would try.”

“You could have figured out what to do from there,” Fukuzawa said sternly. “No one would have blamed you for sacrificing them to resist leaking information. There was no reason to lie.”

I would have given in. The words pushed on the front of Dazai’s mouth but he kept it shut. “I felt the risk of the lie outweighed the harm of the agency. If their suffering could be evaded I believed it was the optimal solution. I’m sorry if you don’t like my calculation, but-”

“I do not appreciate your lie, especially since you are now my employee, but that’s not the main issue,” The President said.

“Then I don’t understand what is,” Dazai said.

“Most of the agency is under King’s thumb right now,” The President began, “Did you think that he would use that lie to ruin their hopes of being saved or finding a way out? Did you think there was a chance the lie would be worse than their physical harm? If Kunikida thinks you’re part of the mafia, if any of them think that and you come across them, they are not going to trust you.”

“Then I’ll simply have to prove them wrong and explain the situation-”

“And then end up telling Chuuya the truth through the agency, which will anger him and make him resent you,” Mori interrupted. “You’re backing yourself into a corner Dazai-”

“I know what I’m doing, not that you ever believed I could do something without you,” Dazai said. He had already heard this whole lecture from Akutagawa he didn’t need to hear it again.

“I’m giving you a warning-”

“And I don’t need it.”

Mori pursed his lips. “If you believe you have the world in the palm your hand, as you so often do, I can’t show you you’re wrong.”

Dazai smirked and he let his eyes fade into hollow darkness. “Unlike you, I have the world in my palm, you just don’t like admitting that, to me, you’re not immortal.”

Mori’s eyes narrowed. Dazai lit his eyes back up and smiled at the President. “Any more questions?”

“What’s King’s ability?” Mori said shortly.

Dazai frowned. “Why would I know?”

The President made eye contact with Mori. “This is the one thing I never pushed you on, but we need to know.”

“I don’t know, Mori.”
“Last time we faced King you said he held a terrifying power, but you never cared to elaborate. If his power is not an ability we definitely need to know.”

He didn’t remember that at all. Dazai stared at Mori. He should remember a power like that. If he didn’t, they had an issue. “Are you sure you’re not making that up?”

Mori narrowed his brow and scanned over Dazai. “Positive”

“I,” Dazai paused. “I don’t remember.”

Day: 11

Akutagawa rolled over in his bed and his eyes fluttered open. Knots tied up his stomach as he tried to remember the dream he just had. Something about it had been strange but he didn’t quite remember what he had seen. Only one image appeared vividly. He could see King sitting in Mori’s chair, but the peculiar part was that he had never seen King in the chair. The dream had felt as real as a memory, but it wasn’t his own. He could also clearly remember one sentence. I have no right to preach about the rights and wrongs of the world, but what you’re doing. I don’t think it’s right. The more he thought about it the more confused he became.

A shiver traveled up his spine and he pulled the blankets over his head. Why was it so cold? He sluggishly climbed out from under the covers and checked the thermostat. Who had the idea to run the air conditioning down to the fifties? He turned it back up and returned to his bed.

Cold but smooth skin touched his back and shot upright. He glanced around but saw no one. Ghosts weren’t real, but his heart still pounded in his ears as his eyes desperately searched for the source.

“Hello, Ryuunosuke.”

Rashomon lashed out and crashed into the kitchen. A woman’s feet lightly rested on the floor and she turned back to him. A small and soft smile spread across her lips and she raised her hand. “I’m sorry for startling you-”

A knock sounded on the door and Riordan’s voice came through. “I heard a loud noise, are you okay?”

He opened his mouth to say something about this strange woman, but something stopped him. A small voice in his head whispered not to. He trusted Riordan more than this new voice, but there was something about it that felt warm and welcoming.

“Everything’s fine,” he said. Most of his thoughts yelled at him to tell Riordan, to tell him about this woman, but he felt more comfortable with little voice than the loud ones. The loud thoughts chilled him while the small one gave him the same warmth that Atsushi’s voice did. “I startled myself.”

“Okay, if you’re sure,” Riordan’s steps sounded down the hall and a door shut.

The woman tucked one of the long strands of her dark brown hair behind her ear. Her feet were bare and she wore a white kimono. Maybe what had kept him from saying anything was that she looked a little like an older version of Gin. Then again Akutagawa could have made up that analyzation since
he hadn’t seen his sister in so long.

“I’m surprised you didn’t say anything,” the woman said, “I misjudged the new men’s alertness.”

“Who are you?” Akutagawa asked.

“My apologies, I’m Highsmith, Patricia. I’m King’s old queen.”

Akutagawa’s eyes widened. Riordan mentioned she had been captured and she left. “How did you get in here? Why are you here?”

She took a deep breath. “It’s easier to show you, however, King cannot know you left this room, that’s why I came to visit you in person. As to how I got in, I’m familiar with his tricks.”

What was she talking about? She moved towards his bed and he pulled in his legs to give her a place to sit. She crossed her legs and reached out her arms. “It will be easier to explain why I’m here if you just take my hands.” Akutagawa looked at her hands and then back at her unsure of what would happen. “I want to show you who King is, and why I left. My ability will give you a spirit-like form that you can move around like without being seen, that’s how I normally travel. That way no one will be able to see us. I would have come in that state but in order to bring you with me, I need to touch you outside of that form. Take my hands.”

Akutagawa hesitantly reached out his arms and grabbed her hands. Instantly, he felt like a bullet had been drilled through his skull. His lungs were squeezed into a puddle and his body went entirely numb. He squeezed his eyes shut and a force jerked him forward. He stumbled off of his bed and found Highsmith’s hand still hanging on to his.

“How do you feel?” She asked.

“Dizzy,” he replied.

She pointed behind him. He spun around and his headache grew. He stared at, well, himself, still holding on to Highsmith’s hands, but his eyes were shut. Gravity hadn’t caused him to fall over; he sat exactly as he had been.

“I normally don’t trust people that quickly,” Akutagawa said, unsure of how loud he could speak.

“Be as loud as you want.” She said as if reading his mind. “The only people who I allow to hear and see us can. Also, you don’t have to trust me, not yet.”

She walked through the closed door and Akutagawa had to reevaluate what had happened several times. Her head poked back through and she pursed her lips. “Come on, people can’t see these forms but they can see us sitting on the bed and if King finds me with you it won’t be good. If they kill our actual bodies we’ll die so let’s hope no one finds us.”

Akutagawa started to regret grabbing her hands. He followed her through the door, which he closed his eyes to do so he wouldn’t have to watch the impact that was supposed to happen. She led him down the stairs and away from both the small apartment building and the mafia building. She explained not to run into anyone. He couldn’t touch things unless he focused on being able to, but he couldn’t walk through living beings without focusing on being able to do that. In summary, can’t touch nonliving things, but he’ll touch living things since he didn’t know how to do the opposite of either. Avoid people, he could easily do that.

She brought him to a smaller building a little ways from the main mafia building. It was easy enough to sneak into a building when you didn’t have to open the door. The few guards that were around
stared at the door from where they sat and drank out of flasks. He didn’t have to worry about running into them.

Highsmith led him past the guards and to an elevator. Akutagawa’s gut turned as they walked through the elevator door. Thankfully there was an actual elevator on the other side and not just the shaft. Based on the height and window count of the building there should have only been four buttons, maybe a fifth, but there were far more. F, 1, 2, 3, B1, B2, B3, all the way to B15. She clicked B4 and the elevator began its descent.

The door slid open and showed a long hallway with a sharp turn at the end. Several metal doors with round windows towards the top lined the hall. A guard looked up from where they sat and frowned at the elevator only for a moment before going back to whatever he had been doing. The queen strolled down the hallway. As Akutagawa followed he glanced into the windows and his heart sunk. He didn’t see any agency or mafia members, there were regular people, women, men, kids, and even animals. There appeared to be a family in each cell. He followed quickly and closely to Patricia’s heels. They moved around the corner and a metal door with a staircase sign stood at the end. They moved down the hall and stopped just short of the door at their apparent destination.

It was a door like all the rest except for the sign by this door stared up at Akutagawa. It read: *Riordan*. He didn’t know the man that well, but he was the one person who had tried to talk to Akutagawa. After they returned from going after Dazai, Chuuya, and Atsushi he had invited himself into Akutagawa’s room to have a party. He brought alcohol and cookies. Akutagawa hadn’t had either but watched Riordan eat and drink almost all of it instead. Even though Rashomon had to carry a very drunk Riordan back to the room next to Akutagawa’s, he had enjoyed himself. Out of all of the King’s Men, Riordan had tried to get to know him, besides King himself. He understood right away that Akutagawa preferred not to talk and Riordan didn’t hesitate to talk for hours without asking more than a few questions.

King had tried to talk to him as well, but Akutagawa always felt daunted and there was something different about the vibe Riordan gave off. It was somewhat similar to Atsushi’s, but also closely resembled Chuuya’s. Sometimes Riordan even reminded him of Gin. Overall, he was easy to be comfortable around. So why was there a sign with his name?

He peeked through the window. The room was small and there were two beds inside, a woman far older than Riordan sat on one of them with a book in her hand, and in the other was a boy tucked under the covers. The kid seemed to be in his later childhood but not quite a teen.

A light hand rested on Akutagawa’s shoulder. Highsmith looked up at him and motioned him away from the door to another.

Through that next window was another small room with two beds. The sign on the outside read a name he didn’t know but when he looked inside he immediately knew why Highsmith also showed him this one. There were a boy and a girl, both very young. The boy looked the same as the girl and the girl Akutagawa could identify as Leena. A twinge of guilt pulled at his chest as he realized he had completely forgotten the little girl existed. The boy must have been her brother and wherever their parents were it wasn’t near them. None of the signs had the same last name.

“This is what King does,” Highsmith said, finally breaking the silence. “The other people were Rick Riordan’s family. His father is somewhere else in this building. The boy was his little brother. These two kids he found had lost their parents while on vacation and quickly was able to capture them in order to bait the agency. Leena had been forced to in order to protect her brother whom King used as leverage. Each of these people is the families of one of the King’s Men. Some people work for King willingly but if he finds someone with an ability he will use the people they care about as leverage.
Tell me, is there anyone King knows you care about? If they’re here I can free them for you.”

“No, he doesn’t know,” Akutagawa said, “why would you free who I care about but not all of these people?”

Highsmith sighed. “Even if I did, King would pretend he still had them in custody and they would have to go into hiding anyways. The first three basement floors are for file storage but all of the other floor’s are like this. There are just too many. As for you,” She inhaled deeply, “I was hoping this would show you King’s true colors. Even though you were a member of the Port Mafia I was hoping you may feel an urge to return to Dazai and the others.”

Akutagawa blinked. “I don’t understand.”

“Someone has to save these people,” Highsmith said, “I don’t have the power to do that and keep all of them hidden. I can’t take King down on my own, I’ve tried. But this,” She motioned around them, “this has to stop.”

“I can’t do that,” Akutagawa said, “I wouldn’t even know how to.”

“You don’t have to do it alone,” Highsmith said. “I would go back to Dazai with you. You have others you can rely on, this is not something anyone can or should have to do on their own. Defeating King is not as simple as killing or arresting King and his men. Not all of the people working for him are at fault. Getting Dazai to realize this is not a simple operation is why I am not planning to leave you when you return.”

“I’m not sure I can go back,” Akutagawa said. The thought of meeting Dazai’s eyes was already unpleasant but he wasn’t sure he could actually do it.

“I wasn’t sure you could either,” Highsmith said. “But after watching Dazai’s reaction when King touched you I’m sure you’re welcomed back. King should have an idea of where they are.”

“What if I don’t want to leave?” The question came naturally and it wasn’t necessarily untrue. Sure what King was doing didn’t seem right, it wasn’t right, but that had been Akutagawa’s life until several weeks previously. Besides sticking by King meant he wouldn’t have to deal with Dazai. King would protect him.

And he could run away forever. Run like he always did.

“I can’t force you to,” Highsmith said, “but if you kept someone from King before you knew about this, do you trust him? What haven’t you told him because you don’t believe you can trust him?”

Gin. Gin was the answer to both of those questions. He could trust no one with his sister.

Atsushi had known about her. He had known about her and had never used her against him. He had even helped Akutagawa. They had been together, and when they were alone they had been fine. Everything had been fine without Dazai. He wanted to be with Atsushi. Not Dazai. He didn’t mind being with King but he would have one fear. Gin. He could never contact her. He could never protect her. He could never see her again.

His stomach stirred and Rashomon flared out. Hell, King had probably hurt her, maybe still was. Akutagawa had tried to casually slip it into conversation with Riordan but had never gotten an answer. He didn’t know where she was or if she was okay. What should he do?

Highsmith smiled shyly. “Don’t think about what you should do. Think about what you want to do. That’s all that matters.”
What did he want? “Why do you want to help?” Akutagawa asked. “If you were once working with King why help now?”

“King and I disagreed,” she motioned around them again. “I knew he was doing this and left. This is the last chance to stop him before he does something irrational. Riordan didn’t call him the King of Horror for nothing. I believe he was warning you from the beginning. Besides, I’ve avoided this war long enough and it’s time I joined in, on the appropriate side this time around.”

~

Day: 11

At first, Atsushi thought staying up all night would be hard, but with every muscle constantly tensed it had been easier than trying to sleep. He only had trouble when Chuuya asked if he was going to bed soon and he said yes. He never liked lying but what if Kyouka showed up in the middle of the night? What if no one heard her so she was stuck outside all night? Even though the President said she was staying somewhere else, he was too worried to sleep. He remembered slightly dozing off on the couch but he quickly woke up when his thoughts led to Kyouka not showing up at all.

In the morning Chuuya was the first person downstairs. At first, he didn’t notice Atsushi but after he found a cup of coffee and walked over to the couches his eyes widened and he said good morning. He asked how Atsushi slept, and Atsushi said fine, which made his stomach turn with guilty for lying again. Chuuya rubbed his hand through Atsushi’s hair and smiled softly before he sat in one of the chairs. Eventually, everyone else trickled in Dazai being the last around noon, by which time Atsushi lost all control over his bubbling panic since Kyouka still hadn’t returned.

Light conversations traveled around him but nothing said interrupted Atsushi’s train of thought. Not until a yell sent the tracks up in flames.

“You fucking did what!” Chuuya’s eyes were latched onto Gin’s and she held up her hands defensively. “You know it’s stupid as hell to go off on your own right now!”

“Calm down, shorty,” Dazai interrupted, “besides she said it was several days ago.”

“And? That doesn’t make me want to give her a lecture any less!”

“Tachihara wasn’t there if that makes you any happier,” Gin said.

Chuuya’s eyes widened even further and filled to the brim with anger. “You took a fucking risk as big as going into the den of a fucking lion and you weren’t even sure he would be there?”

“I had to take that risk,” Gin said.

“What the hell did you get out of it?” Chuuya asked.

“Information on other facilities,” Gin answered. “I’m not an idiot, Chuuya, I wouldn’t take a risk like that without having a secondary reason. I downloaded some information onto my phone while I was looking for Tachihara. Besides, I know what I’m doing and I didn’t get hurt.”

“How did you get hurt?” Dazai asked. “You seem fine now.”
Gin glared at Dazai and quirked her brows in an annoyed fashion. “Really? If you wanted to know you could have asked me when Chuuya wasn’t around.”

“You did get hurt!” Chuuya yelled. “I fucking- this is what I mean by-”

“Yes and no, alright!” Gin said. “I sort of got hurt. I don’t know what King did but I ended up passing out for like, maybe a day. Kyouka jumped through a window and saved me, though so no real harm was done.”

“Kyouka was with you?” Atsushi asked.

“You ran into King?” Chuuya screeched.

“You’re alive?” Dazai asked.

“Yes, yes, and yes,” Gin said. “Kyouka just showed up, it wasn’t my idea. King ended up being there when I made my escape to offer me a job. As miraculous as it sounds, I am alive even after declining King’s, uh, generous offer.”

Atsushi’s gut twisted. King had gone after Gin too? Did Akutagawa know that? Did King know about Gin and Akutagawa’s connection? Was either of them safe?

“Drat, you should have accepted the offer and become a double agent,” Dazai said.

“Dazai!” Chuuya yelled. “That is the stupidest decision she could have made.”

Dazai opened his mouth, but a light knock on the door sharply interrupted them. Atsushi tripped over the couch as he dashed to the door. Chuuya caught him and kept him from flinging the door open. Elise hovered over to the door.

Atsushi managed to slip out of Chuuya’s hold after the man loosened it slightly, and he darted around the corner to the entryway. Four figures stood in the doorway. The Tanizakis, Higuchi, and Kyouka. Tanizaki looked up apparently a little stunned by Elise and made eye contact with Atsushi. His eyes widened further and he waved. Naomi squeaked as she saw Atsushi and a small force he had been anticipating ran into his chest.

He wrapped his arms around Kyouka and squeezed her tightly. Finally, he was with her. Even if they had to part, she was safe, and they would be able to be together again. He squeezed her tighter and she coughed a little but she didn’t tell him he was hugging her too hard. She was safe. Tanizaki and Naomi were safe. The President was safe. Even Higuchi, Dazai, Chuuya, Gin, and the Port Mafia boss were safe. But Akutagawa wasn’t safe. Neither was Kunikida, Yosano, Ranpo, Kenji, nor anyone else. They would be. He swore they would be. He would save them.

Kyouka pushed Atsushi away and took a backpack off of her shoulder. She unzipped it and pulled out a large bag of candies and sweets followed by a cake.

“For being late,” she said as she offered them to Elise.

The girl’s face lit up. She grabbed the treats and rushed into the kitchen where she yelled at the Port Mafia boss to slice the cake. Kyouka watched her run into the kitchen fondly and zipped up the backpack.

“How long are you staying?” Kyouka asked. Her eyes twinkled reminding Atsushi of how much he had missed her.
He shook his head. “I don’t know. Dazai was saying not long but I hope for a little longer. We can’t all stay clumped together, though.”

“He plans to open another base,” Dazai said. Kyouka grabbed Atsushi’s hand and led him into the adjacent room. Dazai was sprawled across the couch and waved at them as they entered. He also waved at Tanizaki, Naomi, and Higuchi as they followed.

They each sat down and Dazai sat up with a groan. He still made sure to take up the entire couch but in a more upright position.

“Mori has a small office space but doesn’t want to occupy it until there’s more of us. We’re planning to have two operating points. Eventually three. The first point will be here. Everyone besides Atsushi, Chuuya, and I will be staying. Once we’ve managed to find at least one more person we’ll establish the second point and the four of us will work from there.” They used to be four, thanks to Dazai that wasn’t the case. Atsushi looked at Gin. He should tell her. Dazai’s eyes briefly turned to Chuuya with a sad gaze but then returned to his phone. Atsushi pondered what the look meant for a moment before he figured it hadn’t meant anything.

Elise ran in and sat directly between Atsushi and Kyouka. Atsushi had to re-examine her cake multiple times. The whole thing was in front of her on a plate along with several of the bagged sweets. What had been the point of cutting it if she was going to eat the whole thing?

“When are we leaving?” Atsushi asked.

“Late tonight,” Dazai said.

Atsushi nodded his head and after a beat of silence, Elise began talking to Kyouka. Separate conversation commenced around him and he was left to examine them. Atsushi rose from the second couch and walked over to Gin. “Can I talk to you somewhere else?”

Gin looked up at him. Her eyes softened and she nodded. They headed up to the second floor and into Gin and Kyouka’s room.

Atsushi opened his mouth to speak but Gin raised a hand to stop him. “If you wanted to talk about Ryuu I already know. The boss and Fukuzawa think he’s doing reconnaissance. Dazai promised to tell me if there were any changes. Such as knowing we had completely lost him or if he returns.”

Atsushi stared at her in disbelief. She had known exactly what he was going to say. As if reading his mind she continued. “Dazai said you’d feel guilty and want to tell me.”

“I’m sorry,” Atsushi said. “I tried to stop him, but that’s just an excuse. I should have done more for him and protected him from Dazai—”

“There was no way you could have,” Gin said as she crossed her arms and leaned heavily on one leg. “I know you think you should have been some hero but the relationship between my brother and Dazai is far more complex than you think. Ryuu himself doesn’t even know how complex it is most of the time. He thinks he admires Dazai so it hurts when Dazai scolds him. If you observe the two of them for more than a day you realize the issue is far bigger than just that. Neither you, I, nor anyone else can fix the pain between them for them. Trust me, I’ve tried. If anything good came from Ryuu going to King it’s that Dazai had a huge reality check thrown in his face and hopefully Ryuu had the same thing.”

Atsushi felt a weight lift that he hadn’t known was sitting in his chest and on his shoulders. “I still think I could have done more.”
“I can’t stop you from thinking that, but Atsushi, I’m going to tell you a secret about Ryuu.” She tapped her forehead. “Most things up here aren’t in the best of shape. The fact that you even made an effort to help him made more of an impact than you think. Also, if you think it’s your fault he left Ryuu will literally kill you. It was his decision and his alone. No one could change what he decided and if I see him I don’t plan to try to win him over or something stupid like that. I do not approve of what he chose and it was not my decision to make. There was nothing more you could have done.”

Rain fell down Atsushi’s face and he collapsed to his knees. Gin pulled him into a hug and let him cry into her shoulder. She was warm and the feeling of his head buried into her shoulder reminded him of Akutagawa. If he closed his eyes tight enough he could almost imagine she was him.

“If you see Ryuu can you give him a message for me?” Gin asked quietly.

“Mhmm,” Atsushi’s entire body shook but she was so comfortable she seemed to tell him not to worry with her very presences.

“Tell him he needs more cuddles,” Gin said. Atsushi chuckled and Gin ran her fingers through his hair. Even that small action calmed him.

“He needs far more cuddles,” Atsushi said.

“See? Even the tiger agrees.”

Atsushi shuddered slightly but calmed down with a deep breath. They sat on the floor for several minutes before Dazai’s loud voice sounded below and an enraged Chuuya’s voice quickly followed in a flurry of insults.

“We should see what’s happening,” Atsushi said.

“Dazai probably just called him short,” Gin said but stood up anyway. She helped Atsushi up and they moved into the hall outside of the door.

“Thank you, Gin,” Atsushi said.

She smiled. “If what Chuuya told me is true, I should be thanking you.”

She quickly turned and marched out the door leaving Atsushi to wonder what exactly Chuuya said.

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*Day: 12*

“King wanted to know if any of your old buddies have tried to contact you,” Akutagawa looked up from where he sat surveying the entrance to the Port Mafia’s old building. His eyes met Riordan’s and he shook his head.

His eyes lingered on Riordan for longer than they should have before they darted to the door. Guard duty wasn’t fun but it was easy and it made him feel like he was actually doing something.

“Cool, cool,” Riordan sighed and sat down in one of the chairs next to him. “I have successfully finished running a whole bunch of errands because we apparently didn’t bring enough staff. You got stuck with guard duty, Lois got stuck guarding another facility, Arthur and that idiot Robert is on
another hunt, and worst of all King is sitting at his desk drinking wine. That’s what I want to be doing right now! But of course, I have to run around bringing messages, check to make sure our buildings are secure, check on agency and mafia members, and so on.”

Akutagawa tried not to show any change in his expression at the mention of mafia members. “Anyone, you want me to tell you about?” Riordan whispered. “I won’t tell Stephen although I can’t promise he won’t hear.”

“In general, just give me a wide scope,” Akutagawa said. He didn’t want them to know particular interests, not after seeing all of those people the previous night.

“Well,” Riordan pursed his lips, “the lemon guy has been complaining about a lack of experimental possibilities or something like that,” Akutagawa snorted at the nickname. “The old guy doesn’t complain, he doesn’t say anything or even looks at you which is a little nerve-wracking. The band-aid guy is constantly screaming about what idiots we are and how we’re gonna die and talking big which is annoying.” Definitely Tachihara. “The red-haired lady, she’s pretty by the way,” Riordan laughed a little, “she has somehow charmed her way into getting warm tea and biscuits with every meal along with comforters, fluffy pillows, a mattress, and information on everyone else.” Riordan rolled his eyes in disbelief. Akutagawa snickered. Kouyou had that skill. When Riordan made no sign of continuing to speak Akutagawa frowned.

“What about the other black lizard leader?” Akutagawa asked.

Riordan’s smile faltered and his expression turned grim. “Don’t bring that one up around Stephen,” he warned, “he let her go in an attempt to view her power and it didn’t go his way. She managed to completely escape him and we have no clue where she is.” Akutagawa used every part of himself to keep from looking relieved and instead surprised. “Stephen is still very spiteful about a failed plan. She’s the first person to be able to dodge him so dramatically beside the boss of the Port Mafia and you. Also thanks to her we lost track of Dazai and those other two. He’s extra pissed about that. I doubt she’ll survive if Stephen sees her again.”

Good thing King didn’t know they were related. “Is there anyone you care about King’s protecting?” Akutagawa asked.

Riordan’s eyes flew to meet his. “Where’s this coming from?”

Akutagawa shrugged. “King offered it me, I don’t know if there is anyone but I’ve been thinking about it. Just in case there is anyone before it’s too late.”

Riordan paused. “Definitely tell him. I have a little brother he’s protecting.” Riordan met his eyes and he seemed like he was desperately trying to convey something even while his smile remained the same. Akutagawa looked back in his with as much confidence as he could to tell him he knew.

“I’m a little worried,” Akutagawa muttered.

“Of what?”

“That if there was anyone, King would use them against me,” Akutagawa said. Riordan’s eyes widened as they kept locked eye contact. “I know he wouldn’t, but it’s still a concern.”

“He wouldn’t do that,” Riordan’s eyes told a completely different story. Don’t trust him.

Akutagawa nodded and stood up. “Guard the door for me, I’m going to talk to King.” He strolled towards the elevator.
“You’re going to leave your job to me? That’s low!”

Akutagawa didn’t hear any of the other complaints after the door slid shut. It slid open and he walked into the hall and over to the door. He knocked and King’s voice sounded for him to come in. Akutagawa peeked through the door and sure enough, a wine bottle sat on the desk and King was leaning back in Mori’s chair with a drink in his hand.

King set down the cup and stood up. “I heard you and Riordan talking downstairs,” King said. Akutagawa thought that was a possibility. “Is there anyone you want me to look after?”

“I don’t know,” Akutagawa said.

“There has to be some reason you came here,” King said.

Akutagawa waited letting a firm silence set in before speaking again. “Who was the queen?” He asked. King’s eyes turned to ice and he looked away.

“Patricia Highsmith,” he said. “She was a close friend of mine for many years and my most valuable piece. We were inseparable when we were kids. Did you ever have someone like that?”

“I did, once,” Akutagawa said, “that was a long time ago.”

King turned to him his expression completely blank. “You’re lying to me.” Akutagawa’s heart fluttered. “I’ll ask you again, is there anyone you want me to look after?”

“No,” Akutagawa said. “He can take care of himself.” It was a reach to mislead by gender, but if he had to he would.

“Why do you not trust me, Ryuuunosuke?” King asked. Akutagawa flinched. “You did tell Osamu only the people who have earned the privilege and you trust can use your first name no? I believe Osamu said that list consisted of Chuuya and Gin if I’m not mistaken. In conclusion, you believe you don’t need my aid because the two of them have already managed to slip away, but by the time you realize and can find them in an instant it will be too late. If you wish for me to protect them I will-”

“By protecting you mean keep them locked up so you can use them as leverage like you’re doing with Riordan’s family?” Akutagawa asked. His chest roared with rage. He didn’t know where his sense of right and wrong came from but he definitely knew what King was doing, was wrong. Hell, Akutagawa would have done the same thing several weeks ago even with the slight guilt it would have caused him, but something had changed as if he wasn’t willing to do it, and he wasn’t sure why.

King’s eyes widened. “Patricia,” he hissed.

“Give me some credit I had enough of a sense not say anything about Gin and Chuuya,” Akutagawa said. “Look, I don’t plan to leave, period. I don’t plan to work against you, period. All I want is some clear answers. What’s this jump drive, why are you telling me to search for it when I don’t even know what it is, and how many people are you using as leverage? Also, how did you know about that conversation? I understand you’re everywhere but that was before you attacked the agency and- Leena. Never mind I know now.”

King glared at Akutagawa for only a moment before he took a deep breath and eased the creases in his face. “The jump drive is the one chance the Port Mafia has to be restarted,” King said. “It’s a fail-safe of sorts, with all of the main information they would need to reboot the system. The reason I have had you look for it is that before I attacked the Port Mafia I went to see Patricia in one of their cells. She told me that even though Dazai Osamu was still working for the Port Mafia he was acting
like he was part of the agency,” Akutagawa made his eyes widen but were more shocked at King’s stupidity. “He was not in charge of hiding the jump drive. She said Nakahara Chuuya had been given that task. When I asked her for further information she said nothing except for that you were the key to finding it.”

Akutagawa nodded thoughtfully. “I have no idea what she meant,” Akutagawa said. “How would she even know that?”

“She calls it a “calculation” which in its true essence that’s all it is,” King said, “her ability allows her to observe anyone she wants to for however long she wants to she can follow them without them ever knowing. She gathers all sorts of information and is able to know through her calculations the best way to achieve a goal. Either that or she just knows something and only will give you a clue. My guess is she saw where Chuuya had hidden it which she never confirmed but she does know where it is and she said you were the way to find it.”

“Like Dazai’s feelings?” Akutagawa asked.

“Somewhat,” King said, “but it’s far more of a suggestion and a calculated guess. Even if she gets it perfect. However, her calculations are based around humans and relationships when it comes to a plan’s specifics they don’t come in handy as much. Unless she knows someone’s general movements but that kind of memorization is not her specialty.” He moved to the chess board and picked up the black queen. After a beat, he continued. “We needed people. More than we had, and while I didn’t like it I chose a path that entailed my hands getting dirty. Patricia always became attached to everyone she met and did not like my decision. I sent her into a position that made her backlash even worse. In the end, I lost more than I gained and now we’re here.” He sighed. “I intended to bring her back but her stubbornness to compromise kept that from happening. I told her I’d slowly start letting people go as they became unneeded but she still refused. We were inseparable at one point.” He set the queen down and picked up the white knight that was set by the black king and a black knight. Akutagawa wondered if something like that would have happened to him and Gin if she had disagreed with his choice to join the mafia.

He held both knights out to Akutagawa. “I can’t force you to understand my decisions but I will not control you, it’s your choice to make.” His eyes became downcast and he turned away from Akutagawa. “I won’t stop you, but you are a huge help, and if we need to compromise I’m willing to.”

Akutagawa pocketed both knights.

“How are you feeling today?” King asked as he sat back down at Mori’s desk. Akutagawa frowned at the sudden change in mood but shrugged. “If anything is ever eating at you let me know.”

Akutagawa moved over to the chessboard laying on King’s table. It wasn’t right.

“I have no right to preach about the rights and wrongs of the world,” Akutagawa started. “But what you’re doing. I don’t think it’s right.”

“Where does this sense of justice come from?” King asked.

He pulled out the white knight and stared at it. “I’m not sure.” He pocketed it again. He had always had the feeling that what he did in life was wrong but until lately he had ignored it. He turned on his heel.

“If you have any other questions, my doors always open,” he said.
Akutagawa left before King could say anything else. He had tried to compromise with Highsmith? If that was the case why had she said she couldn’t have done anything? Had she just been holding some stupid grudge? Akutagawa had thought Patricia had been serious about him being awful.

He could have lied. Akutagawa shook his head. King sounded sincere. He was willing to compromise with Akutagawa, and maybe that was the best thing for Akutagawa to do. He would stay in a place that he felt safe, but-

But he wouldn’t be with Atsushi. He wouldn’t be comfortable with Chuuya or Gin being around King. Riordan said King was pissed and would kill Gin. Highsmith said if any of the hostages escaped King would still use the person they were held for. Everyone’s individual voices lurked in Akutagawa’s head and made his legs go numb. His stomach swirled and he swore he was going to be sick. The elevator doors slid open.

“About time,” Riordan yelled, “I’ve been holding your job for nearly- are you okay? You don’t look so good.”


“Sure, I’ve finished the majority of my job for the day anyway,” Riordan said.

Akutagawa led Riordan back to the apartments. He set both of the knights on the front desk and dragged Riordan out of the back door. The sun had begun to set and cast a dark shadow behind the building. The man seemed concerned when Akutagawa turned to him.

“You do realize King is using your family to control you, right?” Akutagawa asked

Riordan’s eyes widened. “You do know. How?”

“Can’t explain, but last night I saw them,” Akutagawa said.

“Are-are they alright, how are they doing?” He asked.

“Your brother was sleeping and your mom was reading, they both looked healthy and fine,” Akutagawa said.

Riordan let out a deep breath. “Thank you, I needed that.”

“Why haven’t you tried to save them?” Akutagawa asked.

Riordan looked at him and his eyes unfocused. “I tried, I learned the hard way not to.” He held out his hand and clenched his fist. “King had one of his men hold a knife to my brother’s neck and told me that I could hit my father with my ability or watch him slit my little brother’s throat. My dad survived but I have no idea where he is.”

Akutagawa stared at him. “I felt bad for King a minute ago,” Akutagawa said dumbly.

Riordan smiled weakly. “He’s good at playing the victim. He paints the truth with a few lies to make it seem better. It’s how he gets people into his web before he sucks them dry. We should head inside before he realizes something is amiss. Those knights probably had radios in them.”

Akutagawa nodded. They headed inside and Akutagawa grabbed the chess pieces. Once they made it to Akutagawa’s room he started tea and he and Riordan discussed little things. They never brought up families again that night. After King had nearly made Akutagawa think Highsmith was the bad
guy he had little bandwidth to discuss harder topics anyway. He definitely didn’t want to talk about what was making him feel so off. He needed some time to breathe. The tea finished and Akutagawa grabbed the few leftover cookies Riordan had brought the previous day.

They drank and ate in peace. Riordan told him some stories about the different things he had been able to do as one of King’s knights. Akutagawa even told him some of the interesting stories from his time in the mafia, the ones that didn’t just entail him getting a name and murdering that person. Those weren’t very interesting. The people made for very interesting dreams though.

Eventually, Riordan said he had to leave and Akutagawa cleaned up. He put away the few dishes and headed towards his bed. He wanted to sleep for a whole night and hopefully, Highsmith wouldn't show up again. He reached into his left pocket and pulled out the black knight. When he fished inside the other pocket he couldn’t find the white knight. He set the black one behind something in case there was a camera and dug through his pocket further.

His hand trail the seam and his fingers found a hole in the corner of the pocket that led inside the coat. He growled and removed Rashomon. He ripped the thread that held the pocket together and dug down to the bottom of his coat. His hand ran over a large bit of plastic and he sighed in relief. When his fingers felt the rest he frowned and pulled it out. It didn’t feel like the knight. Whatever it was easily made it out of the hole and Akutagawa stared at the item in his hand. The hard plastic end was black and on the other side was a small chunk of square metal.

*You’re the key to finding it*. Chuuya that idiot. When had he had the audacity to hide the fucking jump drive inside of *Rashomon*?

“Hello, Ryuunosuke,” Akutagawa chucked the jump drive at the person. Highsmith caught it and she quirked her brow. “Careful, radios can’t hear me but they can sure hear you, so definitely find the knight.”

Akutagawa breathed heavily and he glared intensely at Highsmith. Why did she have to continuously scare him? He fished through his coat again and found no other surprises besides the knight. He put Rashomon back on and stared at the two chess pieces. He was really going to have to decide his side.

Highsmith offered him the jump drive, and Akutagawa put it in the pocket that didn’t have a hole.

“You need to decide because you either leave tonight, or you’re never leaving,” Highsmith warned.

He stared at the knights stupidly. Was it even a choice? Akutagawa rolled his eyes. Two people had tried to manipulate him. One person hadn’t been there long enough and the last had tried his damned best. King had acted the exact same way Dazai always did. He sugarcoated the truth to control people. The only reason it slipped past Akutagawa this time was that he had wanted to believe King was different. Akutagawa dropped the black knight and used Rashomon to crush it under his foot. He then did the white to avoid keeping any recorders. Screw King. Screw Dazai. He was going back to the other side of the board for his sister and Atsushi. No one else mattered. The side itself didn’t even matter to him. What he wanted was to be with the two of them.

“How do we get back?” Akutagawa asked. “I have someone I want to talk to and someone I dread.”

Highsmith smiled. “You could take a day to just be with Atsushi before you return to Dazai.”

“That’s a good idea,” Akutagawa slipped out the door into the hallway and the ghost-like form of Highsmith followed. He had one problem, he had no clue how to find Atsushi.
“You wouldn’t happen to know where Atsushi is would you?” Akutagawa whispered.

Highsmith shook her head. “I lost track of them about two days ago if I can get a general sense of where they are I could quickly search for them.”

There was only one place he could do that. Akutagawa took a deep breath and headed towards the main headquarters. The trip was fast, and when he entered the guard nodded to him without a second thought. Akutagawa hoped his hunch was right.

He took the elevator down to the old archive room and found the computer sitting exactly where it normally was. With a deep breath he began to type into the keyboard, each key pressed down easily against his hands. Highsmith stayed outside the door to watch for any threats and Akutagawa mentally thanked her for it.

Finally, he found a file of a tracker named: **Soukoku**. He opened it and broke past the password barrier with a little difficulty. He bit his lip as he evaluated the file. The last signal that had been sent out before the trail disappeared completely, had been two days ago, the same time Highsmith had lost track of them. Riordan had mentioned Gin was causing trouble like the badass she was born to be.

He took a picture of the location and paused. Without a second thought, he pulled out the jump drive and plugged it into the computer. Akutagawa made copies of all of King’s main files and dragged them onto the jump drive. The data moved over and he shut down the computer. He pulled out the jump drive and Highsmith phased through the door with wide, panicked eyes.

“Hide!” She yelled and grabbed his wrist. She pulled him behind shelves of data and the door flew open.

“Akutagawa Ryuunosuke is down here without permission. Spread out, find him, and then bring him to King.” Feet pounded against the ground and ran in different directions.

“Did you get the information?” Highsmith asked. Akutagawa showed her the picture on his phone. She nodded, closed her eyes, and placed her hand on the wall. A small door appeared and swung open. “Follow me and don’t look behind you.” Akutagawa did as she instructed.

The walls beyond the door were complete dirt and little lights floated in the air. The noises from the room quickly faded as they weaved around corners and up steps.

Why couldn’t he look behind him? What was so wrong with glancing back? Akutagawa cursed at his curiosity and peered over his shoulder. His stomach lurched forward as the entire hall behind him was gone and the disappearing space was gaining on them. Highsmith picked up speed and dragged him in front of another door.

Highsmith threw open the new door. The floor disappeared underneath Akutagawa and he could feel himself start to fall. Highsmith pulled him through the door.

He stumbled out into the alleyway and ran into the opposite wall. His eyes darted down and scanned over the ground. He was still there. He turned around. The door was completely gone and Highsmith was panting.

“I never realized how stressful that is to get through in time,” Highsmith took a deep breath. “It only collapses easily when people are outside of my current state.”

“Surely people have traveled with you like that before?”

Highsmith shook her head. “I’ve only sent people through or brought them through in my state.
There was no need to do it this way before.” Akutagawa glanced around the corner at both ends of the alley. The night was completely dark and he wasn’t sure how he would possibly find Atsushi within the entire city. Hell, he might have even left Yokohama for the time being.

Highsmith rested her hand on his shoulder and squeezed it reassuringly. “I’ll find them, stay here and stay hidden.”

She placed her hand on the wall and another door appeared. She entered and disappeared as the door slammed behind her.

The air stilled. No breeze blew through the alley, only a little light poked into the crevasse of the big city from the streets beyond. A can fell against the ground and a cat scurried across the ground as it chased a small group of mice. Then the area went quiet again. Not a sound emerged except for Akutagawa’s small breaths. The stars slowly moved across the sky, and eventually, he sat on the cold ground below him.

Time passed slowly, and the chilled air did little to calm him from the panic that slowly rose through his chest. He tucked his head into his knees and Rashomon wrapped tighter around him. In the dark, his mind wandered to the bloodstained and darkened areas in his mind, with no mercy from the relentless thoughts.

He had left his sister to die. Dazai hated him. He would never be able to live up to that older man’s expectations. He was useless. He could do nothing right. His life was worthless. No one cared. He was a coward. He ran from everything. He didn’t deserve to live. No one would be able to trust him again. He was too indecisive. What was he even doing? How could anyone care for a traitor? He might as well betray them again, it would shock no one. He had no value. He should kill himself.

A small light shined into his head and his heart and mind instantly calmed as the warm sensation surrounded him. With him, he would be fine. With him, he had worth. With him, Akutagawa was safe and accepted. He knew Atsushi would welcome him back with a smile and the tension from the darkness eased.

A door appeared next to Akutagawa and Highsmith stepped out. She looked down at him and smiled warmly. She reached out her hand and he took it. Without a word, they rushed through the tunnel until they made it to the other door. They moved through in time and emerged in front of a tall building with dotted lights all the way up. A hotel. His stomach twisted violently and sweat trailed down his neck. Was he sure they would want him?

"Is Atsushi inside?” He asked.

Highsmith nodded. “Along with the other two.” She pulled him forward and into the parking lot. Akutagawa scanned over the cars as his head swirled in circles.

His legs turned into foam and when Highsmith tugged on his arm again his knees buckled to the crust of the earth. His stomach turned over on itself and his throat constricted. The dark clouds opened above them drops of water poured from the sky.

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They wouldn’t want him back. Why would they? He had abandoned them he deserved to be abandoned too. There was no way any of them would want to see him. Dazai would be disgusted, Chuuya would be disappointed, and Atsushi, Atsushi would hate him. The rain pierced his skin and stung as it seeped into the cracks of his many masks. Atsushi had yelled after him and Akutagawa hadn’t even looked back. The Jinko would absolutely despise him, and Akutagawa completely
deserved it. He deserved to die. He didn’t have a right to exist. No one, not even his sister, would care if he disappeared from the world forever. They would all be happier. Their lives would be better. He needed to die. There wasn’t a choice, he needed to die. The world wanted him to. The rain was just a reminder that things came and went. His life should be shorter than a storm. Dazai and Chuuya wanted him to die. Gin wanted him to die. Atsushi ...his stomach rose up his throat. Atsushi wanted him to die. That had to be the truth. After all, Akutagawa had abandoned him. There was no way any of them wanted him.

His vision blurred and everything around him didn’t matter as the darkness of the night enwrapped him in fear and despair.

He deserved to die. No one needed him. No one wanted him. Everyone wanted him to die, to kill himself. Everyone wanted him to find a way to kill himself.

Akutagawa's vision began to blink out and he couldn’t feel the air in his lungs anymore. There was barely any oxygen entering or exiting his system. The feeling of a tight rope around his neck had choked it out. He felt everything in his head spin and spin until nothing around him felt real and the world became a distant color in the void of darkness.

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Hands firmly grabbed his shoulders and pulled him into this person’s chest. Gentle words were whispered between what seemed to be small cries. Akutagawa blinked and he tried to comprehend what was happening. A thumb trailed in circles around his back and tears ran down Akutagawa’s face. He pushed against the person as hard as he could but was barely able to do anything. They loosened their embrace on Akutagawa and his grey eyes met the sunset eyes above him. The pelting rain seemed to lighten as soon as he realized who was above him.

Tears trailed down the other’s smiling face and the rope around Akutagawa’s neck vanished.

“Welcome back Akutagawa,” Atsushi said and let out a choked gasp. Akutagawa blinked at Atsushi trying to understand why the other boy was so happy to see him. “I missed you so much. Please don’t ever leave like that again.”

Oh. Atsushi did want him back, Atsushi wanted him around. Atsushi didn’t want him to die. Akutagawa collapsed into Atsushi’s arms and dug his face into the boy's chest. Everything inside of Akutagawa’s chest, every knot in his stomach, every thought that plagued him, disappeared. All of his pain bubbled up his throat and he released it with one uneven scream before his emotions turned into a fountain of soft gasps. He inhaled and exhaled as a tiny smile tugged on his lips and his body finally relaxed into Atsushi’s warm embrace.

Chapter End Notes

He's BAAAACK!!!!

Let's all quickly acknowledge the fact that I am, uuuuuuuuuuuuuuh, late. This chapter was kind of awful to edit and for the majority of last month I was in the mood of "if I edit, I'm going to hate everything." So I postponed until now.

FYI Chuuya got new shoes. There is no scene for that but he did get shoes. Dazai pulled through for once and got him a pair of shoes.
Anyway, Akutagawa is finally back. I edited his return at least five times. I wanted to do it right, and for all of the angst, there has been I decided there needed to be a little fluff.

So I should be back next month...I should. For now I leave you with a song I used previously that has returned for an entirely different reason Here just the link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2My17vPGOiG

Have fun trying to figure out what it's for (°_°) and if you figure out what part it's referencing in the chapter why is it referencing that? What evil plan could I be concocting?

ALSO ALSO, BSD SEASON 3!!!! I'M SO HYPED OMG!!!!!!! I'M NOT SURE I CAN WAIT UNTIL TOMORROW AAAAAHHHHH!!!!

If you want to say hi you can on tumblr twitter or in the comments

Have a great day!
Drive

Chapter Summary

Akutagawa and Atsushi have a bonding experience.

Chapter Notes

Is this mainly Shin Soukoku? Absolutely.
Is this me having fun, kind of messing around, and also focusing on some plot?
Definitely.
Are the two of them on a date? Probably.

Songs
Part 1
or you can use https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPHa59Yya9Y
Also Part 1
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dS5GfL9F7L4
(Also I imagine Highsmith singing the song above, for reasons ;)).
Part 3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1K6ztEk80I

Reminder that parts are separated by "~"
Also, there is no particular song for part 2

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day: 13

The pain locked up inside of Akutagawa flooded through Atsushi's veins. The heaviness and ache of all the burdens he carried sunk into Atsushi’s flesh and the weight flattened his heart. He held Akutagawa tightly in his arms. The man silently cried into his chest and Atsushi’s limbs sagged, powerless to help him. He didn’t know what caused him to have so much pain, but he wanted to take it all away. His finger slipped easily through Akutagawa’s hair slowly as he tried to replicate the comfort Chuuya had given him days before.

Akutagawa’s tears turned into labored breaths and he hugged Atsushi tighter.

After several long minutes, Akutagawa pushed away and quickly wiped his eyes. Atsushi smiled as Akutagawa removed his hands and stared at the ground. The rims of his eyes were bright red and his eyes remained glassy.

“I don’t mean to rush you,” a voice above him said. Atsushi jumped and his head snapped to Highsmith. He had forgotten she was there. His sheer excitement and panic after she quickly awoke him had caused him to forget about her. “But are you planning to go inside? I feel you should decide.”

Akutagawa shook his head and wiped one of his eyes again. He pulled away his finger and scowled
at the drop of water on it. “I really don’t want to, at least for a bit, but I probably should,” he ran his hand along his pants and looked up at her. Highsmith nodded.

“We don’t have to right now, but if we don’t what do you want to do?” Atsushi asked. A small idea wiggled into his brain and he smiled. “We could go on a road trip if you want? Best way to avoid Dazai for a while at least.”

Akutagawa nodded. “A break is the last thing I hoped to have, but that sounds great.” Atsushi’s heart rocketed into his throat and threatened to burst his windpipe with how hard it was beating. Akutagawa smiled. It was small but it was beautiful.

“Are you okay?” Highsmith asked him.

“Wha-what? Of course, I’m okay, why wouldn’t I be? I’m fine.” Atsushi said.

Akutagawa’s brow popped up, “Your face is red.”

Highsmith smirked, “Alright, if you’re sure.”

“Anyway, I think the car is around here,” Atsushi said trying, and probably failing miserably, to change the subject.

They had changed cars after leaving the President and the others. In fact, the boss of the Port Mafia had provided them with one so they didn’t have to take one from another poor, helpless civilian. That wasn’t his actual reason, but Atsushi pretended it was. Atsushi had even been allowed to drive a bit, even though he was still practicing, and it was far easier to not freak out when he wasn’t afraid everyone knew he was inside a borrowed car. Technically a stolen one, since everyone kept insisting it couldn’t be borrowed if he hadn’t asked. Even Kyouka had betrayed him when Dazai had brought it up.

Atsushi brought him to a white van with filled in back windows that looked like a van used for equipment. Dazai had called it a kidnapping van, but that title made Atsushi nervous to drive it so he ignored the older man.

Atsushi pulled out the key, which Chuuya had confiscated from Dazai when he started talking about swallowing it for a suicide method and which Atsushi had taken from Chuuya after he got drunk, and unlocked the doors. Akutagawa eyes trailed over the van and met Atsushi’s.

“There’s a lot I’m going to have to fill you in on,” Atsushi said. “Oh, first can you check your clothes for voice recorders, trackers, or whatever? I kind of forgot.”

Akutagawa nodded and Atsushi stood shifting his weight back and forth between feet as he did.

“When are you planning to come back?” Highsmith asked.

Akutagawa finished examining his coat and turned to her. “Sometime tonight? Maybe tomorrow. If we have the van they won’t really be able to go anywhere.”

“I’ll appear at midnight and if you aren’t here then I will appear again at five AM and wait until you come. Then we’ll head in together. Alright?”

Akutagawa nodded and climbed into the passenger seat. Highsmith turned away and Atsushi watched as she disappeared. After he was sure she wasn’t there he climbed into the vehicle and turned it on.
They drove in silence for long, painstaking minutes, before starting a little small-talk and then ceasing conversation. Little conversations came and went as they found a small coffee shop and bought some breakfast. They went back to the car and Akutagawa took the driving position. Atsushi didn’t fight him for it. He figured it would give Akutagawa something to do besides thinking and acknowledging the awkward air. Then again, Atsushi could be the only one who was fretting over the silence.

“Have you ever noticed how much everyone bends the truth?” Akutagawa asked as Atsushi took a bite of his pastry. “Especially when they’re trying to manipulate others.”

Atsushi nodded slowly a little confused about where Akutagawa was taking the conversation.

“Yeah, I mean, Dazai does it daily whether he’s trying to or not. I’m not sure Chuuya does though.”

“He does,” Akutagawa said. “Normally he’s not trying to though. Dazai does it better but they’re constantly using each other.”

“Really?” Atsushi asked. When he thought about it he could definitely see Chuuya using Dazai’s need for his ability. At the same time, Dazai does something for Chuuya or says something so he can use Chuuya’s ability. It was all quite complicated but the more he thought about the more he began to understand and realize why they didn’t always get along.

“I guess they do. Why do you ask?”

Akutagawa took a moment before he replied. “King was the same way. Possibly worse than Dazai.” He paused again. “No, he was worse. I was hoping he would be different and that Dazai was lying when he said King was manipulative, but he was telling the truth. I was even willing to blind myself to the evidence in order to see King as different. All of the signs were there and I refused to see them until I was forced to.”

“I’m sorry,” Atsushi said, “that sucks, but I’m happy that he didn’t turn out to be a good person, otherwise you wouldn’t have come back.” He smiled sheepishly a bit concerned Akutagawa may find his comment harmful.

He didn’t reply and knots tied tightly in the middle of Atsushi’s stomach. He swallowed hard as Akutagawa seemed to be whisked away in thought. His eyes couldn’t help but be drawn to the slight indent of his brow and the small pursing of his lips. Atsushi’s vision wandered over the details of Akutagawa’s expression, noting what each part could mean and picturing the slight changes that would happen when he changed expressions.

He couldn’t figure out what to say. Part of him just wanted to know what was wrong and how he could help, but he wasn’t completely sure something was wrong or if Akutagawa would be able to identify it. A lump coated Atsushi’s throat and he quietly watched Akutagawa’s face contort in different expressions examining each one. Atsushi’s chest rose and fluttered, he pushed the lump free from his throat, and his words tumbled out.

“Are you okay? Sorry, if that’s pushy I have no clue if you’re not okay, I just want to know if you need help, and I want to help if I can so-”

“Atsushi, it’s alright to just ask, even if you’re not sure. Also, I just panicked in a parking lot so that’s a reason you could draw on if you need one.”

Atsushi let a beat of silence pass before continuing. “So are you okay?”

“I’m okay now. I just, I thought,” he paused, “I thought you’d hate me for betraying you and going to King.”
“Originally I was a little pissed,” Atsushi admitted, “but in the end, I was sadder and I was angry at Dazai.”

“What did he think about your anger?” Akutagawa asked instantly more attentive.

“Well,” Atsushi said. Pink began to creep up his cheeks and flushed his skin in embarrassment. “I may have, sort of, run away for a bit.”

Akutagawa pulled the car over onto the side of the road and looked at Atsushi. He dug his way further into the seat as Akutagawa’s glare burned a hole through his skull.

“You did what? You do realize how dangerous that was?”

“Yeah, but all I had to do was let my instinct take over as you told me, and I found Tanizaki, Naomi, and Higuchi,” Atsushi said. Akutagawa blinked at him in obvious shock. “Also we found the President and Mr. Mori a few days ago when Gin saved us. And-”

“Slow down,” Akutagawa said as he held out his hand to gesture for Atsushi to stop. “You saw the boss, the president of the agency and my sister?”

“And later Kyouka showed up with the other three I had seen before then.”

Akutagawa nodded slowly and his eyes flickered down. “Gin’s okay?”

Atsushi nodded. “She’s the one who saved us when, well, when you and King attacked us for,” he quickly counted with his fingers, “the second and third time. She saved us twice.”

“Yeah, she’s been pissing King off like the badass she was born to be. How much does the boss know about what I did?”

“That you’re doing reconnaissance at King’s,” Atsushi said with a small smile, “Courtesy lie of Dazai.”

“So he thought I’d come back?”

Atsushi narrowed his brow. “I don’t know. He said there was a sixty percent chance that you would come back, I think, but I’m not sure. It’s kind of hard to remember everything that’s happened and I’m pretty sure the way Dazai worded it and the way Chuuya interpreted it did not mean the same thing.”

“Has he lied anymore since I left?”

“Dazai?” Akutagawa nodded. “Not that I know of, besides to Mr. Mori. He wasn’t even doing a lot of lying when you were with us though, was he?”

Akutagawa’s brow narrowed and Atsushi frowned. “He didn’t tell you, that’s surprising.”

Atsushi blinked. He lied about something that Atsushi didn’t know about?

“Speaking of Dazai,” Akutagawa took in a sharp breath from the beginning of Atsushi’s sentence. “I’m not going to ask too much, but is there anything more I can do to help when we go back?”

Akutagawa shook his head. “You’re already trying your best. Before you were trying to help, but I became so lost inside my head I couldn’t see it. I don’t think there’s anything else you can do.”

“Alright, but if you need me, try to signal me, and I said this a while ago, but if it feels like I’m not
on your side and you need me at that moment drag me back to your side. It may be hard but I’m awful at mind reading. Sometimes I do it out of luck, but that’s because I’m worried I’m doing something wrong and somehow guess what you’re thinking.”

“Fair.”

He pulled back onto the road and they drove another mile or two in silence before Atsushi prepared to ask his next question but Akutagawa spoke first.

“How did Dazai react when I left?” His hands tightened around the steering wheel as he asked and Atsushi watched the rest of his body grow tense.

Atsushi hummed. How had he reacted? Atsushi was enveloped with anger and tears at that point, he couldn’t quite remember. However, he could see the first look Dazai gave. When he had looked up his eyes turned hollow.

“I think he felt lost,” Atsushi said.

Akutagawa snorted. “Don’t lie to me.”

“I’m not.”

“You can tell me he was relieved I’m not going to hate you for it.”

“But he wasn’t!”

“Yes, he fucking was!” Akutagawa yelled. “There’s no way he would have ever feel anything because of me that is completely impossible.”

“Why do you keep telling yourself that? I was there, I saw him Akutagawa, and I know it’s hard to believe but he was—I’m not sure, but he seemed distant.”

“If you’re not sure then you’re wrong.”

“That’s not how anything works. Just because I don’t know doesn’t guarantee what I think is wrong, just like how what Dazai thinks about you or me doesn’t guarantee he’s right. Why do you keep assuming Dazai hates you?”

Akutagawa swallowed. “I don’t know.”

“Akutagawa if you keep avoiding everything inside of yourself, and all of your self doubt you’ll only make your mental state worse and worse.”

“I don’t know.” His arms grew stiffer and Atsushi’s chest tightened. He took a deep breath as pressure built up his throat.

“Akutagawa, when will you realize you’re enou—”

“I don’t know!”

The pressure in his chest evaporated and Atsushi’s eyes widened. He mumbled an apology and silence followed. He gazed out of the side window and took a deep breath.

“Can I ask you another question?” He asked as softly as he could.

Akutagawa nodded stiffly.
“What do you want me to say?” Atsushi asked.

Akutagawa blinked multiple times as if Atsushi had caught him off guard.

“I’m not sure.”

The trip continued in silence, but the tension that had plagued the car was now gone leaving a more natural quiet.

A drop of water landed on the windshield and the wipers quickly drove it away. Then a few more fell and they were removed as well. The pattern continued until a sudden rush of water was dumped from the sky.

Akutagawa cursed as the car swerved slightly and the wipers drastically increased speed. The water poured and a heavy mist set across the road. Atsushi glanced around to make sure nothing was too close to them. Akutagawa’s face contorted and he squinted his eyes.

Atsushi activated his ability. A dim red burned into his eyes and they widened.

“Brakes!” Atsushi yelled. Akutagawa jammed the brakes and whatever little friction their tires had left disappeared. The back end of the car spun and Atsushi held onto his seat. Akutagawa yanked on the wheel and somehow rolled down the window. Rashomon flared out of the opening and dug into the concrete. Slowly the car stopped and Akutagawa managed to pull it back into the correct part of the road, right behind the brake lights of another vehicle.

Boom!

Atsushi squeaked. Akutagawa quirked his brow but quickly turned his attention back to the slowly moving cars in front of him. A large vein of light stretched across the sky and Atsushi prepared for another burst of noise. It soon came and he relaxed into his seat. It was just regular thunder. It had nothing to do with that ability user.

“This is going to make stopping anywhere a pain in the ass,” Akutagawa growled.

“Why would we stop?” Atsushi asked. He didn’t understand what the other man was talking about in the slightest.

“Well, I assumed at some point you’d want to stop, probably closer to noon, to get some food and use the restroom but if you’re fine without any basic necessities all day we can skip them.”

“Oh,” the thought hadn’t even crossed his mind. “No, we need food, I’m not letting you go the whole day without something to eat.”

A smaller rumble rolled over them and Atsushi’s breath hitched in his throat. He wasn’t really scared of thunder it just unsettled him, especially after what happened with King. He closed his eyes and leaned his seat back a bit further. He hoped Kyouka was doing alright.

“I’m scared,” The words tumbled out of Akutagawa’s mouth so fast Atsushi could barely separate the syllables.

“Of what?” Atsushi asked. He opened his eyes to view his partner’s still stoic face.

“How Dazai will react,” Akutagawa said. Atsushi opened his mouth but was quickly cut off. “You see all of the good sides of him so you think I have nothing to be afraid of, but you don’t know him like I do. You don’t know what he was like in the mafia. You don’t know how he treated everyone
who betrayed him or messed up. I know he’s not the same person, but changing doesn’t erase the past. How I think of him can’t be changed overnight. You can’t understand how it feels to be in constant fear of what he’ll do next and how much more painful it will be from the last time.”

“I do,” Atsushi said without hesitation. “Not in regards to Dazai, that’s for sure, but I know the gut-wrenching fear that lays in the bottom of your stomach. The fear that makes you want to throw up every time you know you did something wrong because it’s only a matter of time before he finds out. I know the feeling of every part of your body shaking as you think about what’s coming. I know how it feels when every muscle contracts when he draws back his fist. That’s exactly how I felt every day in the orphanage. Even when I did nothing wrong I knew the moment I saw my mentor I would have to deal with some kind of abuse.”

Akutagawa took a deep breath. “Every time Dazai would so-called ‘train me’ he wouldn’t stop until I couldn’t move a single muscle. He knew how to turn a simple sentence into my worst nightmare. Whenever I messed up the physical abuse didn’t hurt nearly as much as the words he wove did.”

Atsushi wasn’t sure what to make of that. Dazai had been an ass hole for the past several weeks, but before that he had just been obnoxious. Part of Atsushi wanted to defend Dazai, but that wasn’t fair to Akutagawa. He was being open with Atsushi, he couldn’t possibly side with Dazai. Besides that, Akutagawa was right. Atsushi hadn’t known Dazai when he was in the Port Mafia, so how could he possibly know what Akutagawa went through because of him? He could relate to Akutagawa’s experience through his own, but his mentor and Dazai were two different people. Atsushi would have to remember to ask Dazai for some stories about his time at the mafia to get his head wrapped around Akutagawa’s experience more.

Silence filled their car as Akutagawa drove slowly through the rain. When the thick, dark clouds showed no signs of dispersing, they decided to pull over to get some lunch. Akutagawa pulled into a parking spot and brought Atsushi into a restaurant. He was surprised that they were stopping to sit someplace and eat instead of taking it on the road and unwelcome thoughts accompanied his surprise. What if Akutagawa hadn’t actually left King and was meeting someone to turn him over? Atsushi knew this wasn’t true but the thought didn’t stop biting at him even when he tried to dismiss it.

They were brought to a table and Atsushi scanned the room multiple times. Nothing was amiss. Atsushi bit his lip. Akutagawa was back for sure. How could he know that? How could he be certain Akutagawa wanted to be with them? He slapped both sides of his face and Akutagawa’s eyes darted to him. His brow narrowed and Atsushi reassured him with a small smile.

Akutagawa didn’t deserve for Atsushi to think like that. It was obvious he was back on their side from how torn he had been and how much he had shared with Atsushi. He was back and it was alright for Atsushi to be happy about it. They ordered food and Akutagawa stared at Atsushi for a moment.

“What’s wrong?” Atsushi asked.

“I was going to say something, but I think you’ll hate me for it,” Akutagawa said. The edge of his lips twitched upwards as if he was resisting the urge to smile.

“I wouldn’t hate you for anything,” Atsushi said a little concerned.

“It’s alright to doubt that I actually left King’s side,” Akutagawa said. Atsushi stared at him. Oh. He thought Atsushi would hate it because he just read his mind again.

“Alright, maybe I’m a little mad,” Atsushi smiled.
Akutagawa shrugged. “You shouldn’t be an open book if you don’t want to be read.”

“Alright smarty pants,” Atsushi said in a mocking voice even though he was smiling.

Akutagawa snorted. His eyes glazed over for a second and then refocused on Atsushi. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For trusting me and being willing to be alone with me even after I left. I really needed a break.”

“No problem,” Atsushi scanned over Akutagawa. “Are you going to be okay with going back?”

He nodded slowly. “I think so. Besides, there’s not really a choice. We have to go back. I know some things Dazai needs to factor into his plans.”

Atsushi nodded slowly. Curiosity pulled and the edges of his lips but he kept the questions inside of his head. Akutagawa’s eyes had glazed over again and Atsushi didn’t want to interrupt his thought process. They ordered food and waited in silence for it to come. Once it arrived they quickly ate and neither of them spoke until they had paid and decided to head back to the car.

~

Day: 13

The moment he opened his eyes Chuuya knew something was wrong. One, he stared at an empty bed across the room where the tiger man should have been sitting since they had previously decided he would take the early morning watch. Two, Dazai was supposed to be asleep next to Chuuya, yet he was nowhere in sight. Three, breakfast on the ground floor of the hotel wouldn't be served for another thirty minutes. Something was definitely wrong.

He rose and immediately searched the room for any signs of where they might have gone. When he found none and had investigated the hallway and the lobby only to find neither of them. He returned to the room entirely pissed and worried. It was likely that they had just gone for a walk to talk about something and didn’t want to disturb Chuuya. It was also likely that there was an attack somewhere nearby that they went to check out. There was also the possibility that they were kidnapped which was unlikely since Chuuya would have been as well. What unsettled him the most, was that they should have left some sort of note behind, but he had found none.

Finally, a noise came from outside the door as the handle unlocked and Dazai slipped quietly into the room.

“Where's Atsushi?” Chuuya asked immediately.

Dazai whipped around and a nervous smile played on his lips. “Morning Chuuya~ did the chibi sleep well?”

“Answer the damn question.”

“Would you believe me if I said out for a quick jog?”

“Not a chance.”
Dazai’s smile disappeared and he sighed. “I was actually hoping you might have some idea.”

Chuuya’s heart stopped. “You don’t know.”

“I woke up and he was nowhere in sight. I checked around the hotel and couldn’t find him. I asked the attendants and no one could remember seeing him leave which makes me believe he left a while ago. Finally, I checked the parking lot and the van we were using is gone.”

He moved over to the desk and flipped open his computer.

“He didn’t leave any sign? No note?”

“There was nothing.”

Anger roared through Chuuya’s chest. “So we’ve lost him again?”

“Yes, but luckily I felt like this might happen and placed a tracking device on him.” A black screen appeared on his computer and Dazai plugged in headphones. “I can check his location and hopefully I’ll be able to hear what he’s saying.”

“My word,” Chuuya rolled his eyes. “To think someone who keeps running off is our main chance to get Akutagawa back since you’re too much of an asshole to be capable of that.”

“Thanks, Chuuya, that makes me feel great. Besides it wasn’t likely he’d come back anyway.”

“You said there was a sixty percent chance.”

“I said there’s about ten percent in our favor.”

“Yeah, six-,”

“Ten percent, Chuuya-”

“You said yes when I asked!”

“I said it was somewhere around there.”

“Ten is not somewhere around be sixty.”

“Add fifty and it sure is.”

“You are an unbelievable, waste of bandages.”

Dazai laughed. “No need to worry, that percentage just jumped to sixty, maybe even eighty.”

Chuuya’s eyes widened. “What?”

Dazai slipped the headphones off his ears and handed them to Chuuya. He slipped them over his ears and voices flooded his head.

“I don’t know okay!” Akutagawa?

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to push you,” that was Atsushi.

“They’re together?” Chuuya asked.

Dazai nodded and reached for the headphones. Chuuya quickly took them off and held them away
from Dazai. “Shouldn’t you let them talk? Akutagawa might reach out to Atsushi because he thinks we’re not listening. Wearing these would defeat the point and it’s an invasion of privacy.”

“And wearing those is the only way I can figure out how to not be a jackass because he sure won’t tell me himself.”

Chuuya pondered it for a moment. “I’ll allow it, but only if I can listen too.”

Dazai smirked. “Isn’t listening an invasion of privacy.”

“Shut up and get to work,” Chuuya handed the headphones to him and Dazai obeyed.

He had lied to Chuuya about the likelihood of Akutagawa returning. Even if he said the truth, in his own way, leading Chuuya on was not alright. The fact that Dazai had done so so easily reaffirmed the truth he didn’t want to believe and had tried desperately to ignore. Because if Dazai lied about that, what else had he lied about?

“Mackerel,” Chuuya began.

“Yeah?”

“Did you lie to me?”

“Depends on what you’re talking about?”

“Still being a member of the mafia. That was a lie, right?”

Dazai looked up from where he worked and into Chuuya’s eyes. “Chuuya I already told you—”

“I know but you have to understand that is really hard to believe.”

“Chuuya,” Dazai said, “have some faith in me. I know it’s hard to do but yes I am still a member of the Port Mafia.”

There was so much power and warmth in Dazai’s voice how could Chuuya not believe him? How could he keep fighting what this man was trying to tell him again and again? Even though his head screamed at him not to listen, Chuuya was going to allow himself to believe in what Dazai said. He would believe this once.

Thunk! Thunk! Chuuya watched Dazai’s eyes narrow. The bandage wasting device stood up and moved towards the window. He drew back the curtains to show an unmoving dark grey sky. Pellets of water hit the window and slowly began to drown the city below in an avalanche of rain. A distant rumble of thunder pierced through the window and Chuuya’s stomach turned. He knew this was a natural storm, but he could only remember how badly his ass had been kicked by King’s ability user.

Dazai moved back to the computer clicked a couple more things before he removed the headphones.

“I’m scared,” Chuuya’s gut turned. That was Akutagawa’s voice. He glanced down at Dazai. They shouldn’t be listening to this especially after that proclamation.

“Of what?” Atsushi asked. They definitely shouldn’t be listening.

“How Dazai will react,” Akutagawa said. Dazai shifted and Chuuya’s chest sunk. “You see all of the good sides of him so you think I have nothing to be afraid of, but you don’t know him like I do. You don’t know what he was like in the mafia. You don’t know how he treated everyone who betrayed him or messed up.” How was Dazai going to react when he saw Akutagawa now that he
had told Atsushi that? “I know he’s not the same person as he was, but how I think of him is the exact same way I thought of him while he was still in the mafia. You can’t understand how it feels to be in constant fear of what he’ll do next and how painful it will be from the last time.” Akutagawa had called him a different person. That surprised Chuuya.

“I do,” Atsushi said. “Not in regards to Dazai, that’s for sure, but I know the gut-wrenching fear that lays in the bottom of your stomach. The fear that makes you want to throw up every time you know you did something wrong because it’s only a matter of time before he finds out. I know the feeling of every part of your body shaking as you think about what’s coming. I know how it feels when every muscle contracts when he draws back his fist. That’s exactly how I felt every day in the orphanage. Even when I did nothing wrong I knew the moment I saw my mentor I would have to deal with some kind of physical abuse. Probably mental as well.”

Chuuya couldn’t take it. He muted the computer and surprisingly Dazai didn’t stop him. Dazai laced his fingers between each other and stared intensely at the wall.

“We shouldn’t have listened to that,” Chuuya said.

“Fine as long as you promise you won’t listen to them again.”

“Why? So you can have something else to use against him?”

“So I know what to say to him so I don’t scare him,” Dazai’s eyes met Chuuya’s. “Especially when he comes back. There’s not a doubt in my mind that he’ll put up a wall that will make him seem unmoved and not scared. It’s good that I know he actually is so that I don’t cause his fear to spike.”

That was understandable. Even though it felt wrong, Chuuya started to be glad they had listened.

Dazai unmuted the computer and they were met with nothing but silence on the other end. Chuuya shut the computer lid and made sure Dazai looked him in the eyes.

“Promise me you won’t listen to them again.”

Dazai sighed. “Fine as long as you promise you won’t tell them we listened in.”

Chuuya nodded. They were going to have to wait for them to return to see what was going on. Hopefully, they wouldn’t return too late at night, Chuuya actually wanted to sleep.

“Wait,” Chuuya said, “How far in advance did you see this coming? You told us to buy this room for multiple nights.”

Dazai smiled. “I had a feeling we might need more than one.”

“Dazai.”

“I didn’t know Akutagawa was going to return if that’s what you’re asking. I actually thought my feeling was wrong if you can believe that. It just seemed too unlikely, but I was wrong about initially thinking I was wrong. So you could say I was right.”

Chuuya stared at him with wide eyes. He just admitted he was wrong with barely any attempt to make it seem like he was right. He just admitted it in front of Chuuya. Blood rushed to his face and his words stuck in his throat. Something so small should not affect him like this. He wished the other two were here.
Day 13:

Upon returning to the car, Atsushi managed to convince Akutagawa to let him drive even though it was still raining. At first, Atsushi’s hands trembled against the wheel and he slowly drove as the rain pelted the windshield. After several minutes, however, the tense lines in his body eased and he managed to increase speed. The trip restarted in silence and to Atsushi’s amazement Akutagawa fell asleep. He hadn’t realized how tired Akutagawa must have been. The other man had come back in the middle of the night which probably meant Akutagawa hadn’t gotten an ounce of sleep.

The minutes slipped into hours and Atsushi felt more secure in his own driving skills. By the time the clouds began to part, Atsushi was certain he could handle driving in the rain.

Akutagawa stirred when the rain clouds had grown distant and had become coated in orange and pink sunlight. Atsushi had pulled over for some food about an hour earlier and now offered Akutagawa some. The other man accepted it without any complaint.

He finished the food and spoke, “Pull over.”

“Uh, what?” Atsushi stumbled.

“Pull over, I want to bring you somewhere,” Akutagawa said.

He pulled over and Akutagawa and he switched seats.

Atsushi watched Yokohama roll by and he tried to figure out where they were headed based on the buildings but for a while, he couldn’t figure it out. Then they passed a few recognizable areas and headed towards the port.

“This is mafia territory right?” Atsushi asked.

Akutagawa nodded, pulled over, and climbed out of the car. Atsushi followed him. Akutagawa led him passed some warehouses and to the water. They approached the bay and Akutagawa brought him down some steps, across a skinny little path, and pointed out at the sky.

Atsushi inhaled sharply as he took in the view for the first time. The sun was almost set and the clouds were illuminated with an array of pinks, oranges, yellows, and a few purples. A slice of the sun still peered over the horizon of the ocean and slowly dipped beneath causing the clouds to glow even brighter with color.

“Wow,” Atsushi whispered.

“Gin found this little nook,” Akutagawa said he sat down on the little cobblestone path and hung his legs over the ledge. Atsushi did the same and kept his eyes locked on the colors.

Atsushi inhaled sharply as he took in the view for the first time. The sun was almost set and the clouds were illuminated with an array of pinks, oranges, yellows, and a few purples. A slice of the sun still peered over the horizon of the ocean and slowly dipped beneath causing the clouds to glow even brighter with color.

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Atsushi slipped his hand into Akutagawa’s causing his own heart to flutter and after a period of silence he built up the courage to talk.

“What caused you to want to leave King?”

Akutagawa took a deep breath. After another beat of silence, he answered. “Some of the people who work for him, well most, are only working for him because he has their families in captivity. The
main person I was around, his parents and little brother are in captivity right now. I don’t know what set me off, but that wasn’t okay with me. Maybe it was the thought of Gin being used, even though she can fend for herself, I couldn’t overcome my opposition to King’s actions and still work for him."

“Where were they being held?”

“King is using the mafia’s main base as his base of operation. They were being kept in a building a little ways away from that base. I also managed to get some information on my way out about other people as well.”

Atsushi nodded slowly. “So that’s why he was the same as Dazai and other people you know?”

Akutagawa started to nod but then shook his head. “No. Dazai is better than King. I know that now. He may be an asshole but he’s not a complete dick.”

Atsushi chuckled. “He kind of is.”

A shy smile spread across Akutagawa’s lips. “To me yeah, but not most people. He is a fluid liar though.”

“He is an absolute dick to you.”

“Swear again and I will throw you into the water.”

“You and Chuuya, my word. Why can’t I call Dazai mean words too?”

“You’re too innocent the majority of the time, and the sentence you just said—”

“Proves your point, yeah, yeah,” Atsushi pouted.

His eyes locked onto Akutagawa’s and he watched the swirling bright grey sparkle in the light. There was a kind of dark greediness embedded in his partner’s eyes that made Atsushi’s heart flip and his lungs struggled to work. Had the curve of his jaw always been that sharp?

“Your eyes remind me of this place, of the sunset,” Akutagawa said in a hushed voice. “They’re beautiful.”

Heat rushed up to Atsushi’s face and the inside of his chest felt so light he was positive he wouldn’t have to try to float on top of the water. He could feel his body lean closer to Akutagawa’s and the other’s doing the same in return. Atsushi’s blood rushed through his head as Akutagawa’s breath hit his face, their lips inches apart.

“What if we went?” Atsushi said as the epiphany slapped him across the cheek.

“What?” Akutagawa asked. The other boy leaned back and so did Atsushi.

“We know where King is holding some of the people you mentioned. Why don’t we go and free them?”

“It’s not that simple,” Akutagawa said, “There are floors on floors of people there aren’t enough places to hide that many. I don’t even know if any of them speak Japanese.”

“But you speak quite a few languages,” Atsushi said.

“Not every single one on the planet,” Akutagawa said. “Maybe four, more like three, I was just
lucky Leena spoke one of them.”

“We’ll be fine,” Atsushi said.

“We can’t free everyone otherwise King will just capture them all again. If the mafia was still in operation we would be able to hide them all, but it’s not.”

“Alright so we choose specifically who we save. Do you have information on the people in the building?”

“Possibly, but we don’t have the technology to extract the information right now.”

“Then we’ll wing it.”

Akutagawa opened his mouth to protest but closed it. “Fine, I know about a few people, Leena and her brother and then Riordan’s family. The issue is that I don’t know where Riordan’s father is, just his mother and brother, there were so many levels we won’t have time to look at them all.”

“I can use my tiger eye,” Atsushi said. He was certain he could make it work.

Akutagawa slowly shook his head in either disappointment or disbelief, Atsushi couldn’t quite tell. “Sure, why the hell not? We’ll be looking for any agency or mafia members and anyone with the last name Riordan.”

Atsushi smiled. “Then we get back with the information you gathered and some people we saved, Dazai will have no right to be a dick to you—” his body struck against the water and the cold temperature pierced his skin sapping his body heat away. He pulled himself to the top and gasped for air. “Hey!”

Akutagawa sat above him smirking wildly. “I warned you.”

Atsushi glared at him. “Alright, now help me get out.”

Rashomon’s tendril wrapped around his waist and pulled him out of the water. He shivered in the crisp evening air and briefly considered pushing the other boy in but decided not upon remembering how sick he constantly is. His partner draped his coat over Atsushi’s shoulder and he stared at the older boy. He had handed over his ability without hesitation.

They headed back to the car with their fingers interlocked. Darkness began to surround the sky and Atsushi couldn’t help but think about what might have happened if he had controlled his thoughts and not let his idea spill out of his mouth. After all, Akutagawa’s lips had been so close to his. What had almost happened? The situation was difficult for him to grasp but he decided to focus on their mission rather than the pool of emotion that swirled in his chest.

Chapter End Notes

Only a day late, I think that's pretty good for me. I'm planning to post again this month it will just be later on. No promises though. After this chapter, I'm planning to only post twice more before I take a quick hiatus. It's still two chapters away, and it will make sense why I need it and I'll explain more once we get there.

Anyway, can I just say I so enjoyed, writing the "almost a kiss but not quite" part? It was a little cliche but I so enjoyed that scene. I was smirking and smiling like a dork the
whole time I wrote it. (๑•̀ㅁ•́ฅ)
Also, I feel like I should quickly mention the song "Drive" by Halsey. I was listening to that song when I first thought of the idea of this chapter. The song doesn't relate to the chapter as much as it was originally going to, but if you feel like listening to it you can probably pick out where in the song I got certain ideas from. Such as the title for this chapter ;)).
Also, also, thank you all sooooo much for 400+ kudos!!! I'm!!! ▭ o ▭ I can't believe there are so many people who like this fic. Thank you all sooo much for the support. Thank you, thank you, thank you. All of your support means the world to me. Your kudos and comments really keep me wanting to write this and I appreciate each of you lovely humans so much.
Also, also, also, HAPPY PRIDE MONTH!!! Whether you are part of the LGBT+ community or not, happy pride month! Each of you is a beautiful, wonderful person, and no matter what you identify as, keep making this world a wonderful place.
I hope you have a great day, month, and year. (ง•̀osaloon•́)ง*:*✧

Feel free to talk to me on tumblr, twitter or in the comments.
Rescue Team

Chapter Summary

They save some people.

“Wait,” Atsushi grabbed the back of Akutagawa’s coat. He turned to Atsushi and quirked his brow. “Back at the port, were we having a moment?”
“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Chapter Notes

Look at that. I posted when I said I would.

Songs
Part 1 and Part 2 plain link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SWYoEOU2fI (This is the song I used to get into the mood of those two parts for writing).

No songs for part 3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day: 14

The closer they traveled to the former Port Mafia’s base, the stronger Akutagawa’s anxiety became. He knew the reason wasn’t the constant fear that the tiger would trip and give away their location, but he liked to believe it was. It was more likely to have to do with the constant channel of heat that pulsed through his veins every time Atsushi slightly bumped into him. He had somehow coerced Akutagawa to completely open himself up and to show him how broken he felt. He still wondered how long it would take for Atsushi to use it against him.

When they had sat by the port their faces had been so close he could feel Atsushi’s breath on his. Akutagawa wasn’t sure whether he was upset or glad that Atsushi had interrupted whatever that was. He wasn’t sure about a lot of things inside of his chest. Every time he tried to distract himself it never worked. His thoughts somehow came full circle back to how bright and vibrant Atsushi’s eyes were and how soft his lips looked, which caused his chest to contort in weird directions.

When they were almost to the hidden prison, Akutagawa grabbed Atsushi and used his ability to propel them to the roof of the building directly adjacent. He observed the area below and turned to Atsushi.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if they’re expecting us.”

Atsushi shrugged, “Dazai would tell us not to, and King probably thinks you reconvened with him. This is my dumb idea so hopefully, they aren’t.”

“I wouldn’t say dumb. Reckless? Yes. Dumb? Probably not,” Akutagawa let his eyes scan around
He pushed the floor they needed and the elevator began its descent. They quickly arrived at the floor and the doors stretched open.

“Who’s there?” The guard called.

Akutagawa nodded at Atsushi and darted towards the guard quickly using Rashomon to sweep under his legs, but he made sure to let a few bullets fly first. The more noise the better. The doors slid shut behind him and he rushed around the corner and towards the Riordan family’s cell. His ability sliced through the door and it toppled down. Before he looked at them he cut through the other door,
Rashomon swept up the two kids, who let out a startled yelp, and he was back in the door frame facing the Riordans. An alarm blared through the building and hurt his ears but he ignored it.

“Out, now!” Akutagawa yelled over the alarm. Mrs. Riordan did not move and neither did her son. Akutagawa growled and made Rashomon bare its teeth. “Out!” The two complied instantly and Akutagawa dragged them towards the staircase. The door flew open and long gun barrels pointed into the hallway.

Bullets flew through the air and Rashomon easily consumed them. His ability flew into the guards and shoved them down the stairs. He wanted them to follow him and if he killed any of them Atsushi would have a fit. He took off up the flights of stairs and it wasn’t long before his breathing grew labored.

Why was he carrying both of the kids? Why did he also have to practically carry the Riordan’s asses as well? Why was he getting out of the building faster than he could? He cursed and slowed down his pace much to the dismay of the panicked Mrs. Riordan who tried to make him go faster. One of the doors up the steps swung open and several people came tumbling down, shooting at Akutagawa and the others. His eyes widened as he realized the woman was outside Rashomon’s range. In a swift movement, he tossed the little girl and her brother to the side, propelled himself forward, and managed to step in front of Mrs. Riordan. The bullets were easily devoured by Rashomon.

Akutagawa started pushing Mrs. Riordan towards the other two where her son had ended up as well. She stared at him in disbelief as he lifted Leena and her brother back up along with Rick’s little brother. He looked into Mrs. Riordan’s eyes and tried to shove all the answers to her questions into them, but the more her eyes flickered around his face he knew she didn’t understand.

The echo of bullets stopped and Rashomon lashed out, swept under their attackers’ legs and he bolted up the stairs again. After they were up one set of steps the pounding of feet above and below them grew so close Akutagawa swore he would be able to see them within the next few seconds.

Shit. No matter what Atsushi thought the possibility might be, King had known. Akutagawa darted back down the steps, into the hallway that the other guards had just come from, and dragged Mrs. Riordan in with him. He slammed the door shut and wrapped Rashomon over it like a web. Energy thrummed through Akutagawa veins and he started shaking from the pure adrenaline that coursed through him. Worry, anxiety, and adrenaline, his favorite combo in no situation ever. Worry because he knew there were only two floors left but he was unsure on how to make it successfully without getting someone killed. Anxiety, because he could feel Mrs. Riordan’s gaze as it pierced his skin looking for answers. Finally, adrenaline, because why the hell not? He needed another thing to cause his panic attack to come back. One was enough for a day but the next was already rising in his throat.

He took a deep breath. Wham! The door shook but Rashomon held fine. He needed to focus, find a way out, and bring as many guards with him as possible. Atsushi would have already looked on this floor he knew there wasn’t a shot at the elevator being an escape and the stairs were currently swarmed with guards. Akutagawa bit his lip. He knew he couldn’t get through all of their attackers on his own.

“There’s an elevator-” Mrs. Riordan began.

“Not an option,” Akutagawa said.

“Why not? If you want to hold us hostage for some-”

“I’m going to say this once,” Akutagawa said, his panic poured out into his sentences in harsh tones. “Test me and I will leave you behind, don’t give me suggestions, I know what I’m doing, and if you
couldn’t tell your royal *highness* this is a rescue operation, so shut up and let me do my job.” This wasn’t really his job. His job was actually to murder people, but she didn’t need to know that.

*Wham!*

“Well you’re doing an awful job of it,” she said. Great. He was rescuing a complete brat. Did this woman seriously raise Riordan?

“Mommy are we going to be okay?” The little Riordan asked from where Akutagawa had forgotten Rashomon was holding him.

“We’re going to be fine,” Akutagawa interrupted, “I need a minute to think.”

*Wham!* The door bent in slightly and Rashomon caved a little. He needed a solution, an easy solution. *Wham!* The door nearly broke and Rashomon could barely hold it. Most of the guards were by the door by now. A plan hit him hard and fast. It was definitely something Chuuya would come up with, so not completely trustworthy but it was the best shot he had. He used the rest of Rashomon to wrap around Mrs. Riordan who tried to protest, but Akutagawa paid no mind to her. Hopefully, this would work. He rammed Rashomon into the door and the remaining pieces flew out. The guards stumbled back and Akutagawa launched the other four up and over a flight of steps before pulling himself after.

His feet hit the steps and Rashomon unwrapped from Mrs. Riordan and her son. She grabbed him instantly and Akutagawa yelled at them to run. They quickly complied and rushed up the steps. Akutagawa set Leena and her brother down and grabbed their hands before he followed. They made it up the final flight of steps with the feet of all the guards close behind them. Mrs. Riordan thankfully waited for Akutagawa to get there before proceeding to open the door.

Lines upon lines of men were crouched by the door guns pointed at them. Shit. Bullets flew and Rashomon had to wrap around them in a small cocoon of a shield. He wished he had practiced this move more because it quickly cracked.

An order to stop firing was barked out and Akutagawa swore because of the voice he heard. He lowered Rashomon and Mrs. Riordan tried to tell him to keep up the shield. If she tried to tell him how to use his ability again, he was going to show her what he normally used it for.

“Akutagawa Ryuunosuke, you are a fool,” King said. Akutagawa glared at him. “Did you truly expect me to not suspect you would return for these people? The reason you left was because of them.”

“What can I say I have a knack for following ideas,” Akutagawa said. Especially when it followed someone's face being exceptionally close to his. He scanned over the people and could not see Riordan. Lowry and Doyle were there, but no one else. Of course, King had to have his right and left-hand ability users.

“You’re a fool and an idiot for coming alone,” King said. Did he seem disappointed? Akutagawa was a little disappointed as well since King was the idiot.

“I may be a fool but I’m not an idiot.”

“Your actions speak otherwise.”

“No my actions say I’m not an idiot.”

“I just said you’re an idiot for coming alone.”
“And I said I’m not an idiot, so what does that tell us about what actually happened?”

King snickered and shook his head. Akutagawa couldn’t stop a smile from creeping onto his face. How did King still not get it? He was rumored to be as smart as Dazai?

King met his eyes and frowned. Then Akutagawa’s smile grew as the realization finally came to King and shock set into his eyes.

*Ding!*

---

*Day: 14*

Atsushi quickly realized after Akutagawa left that this was *way* too easy. He got to skip the first three floors since they were for filing and storage. B5, no one there. All the guards had already left, which allowed Atsushi to walk down the halls of each floor. By the time he reached B6, he could hear faint gunshots and his stomach turned cold. He hoped Akutagawa was okay. Atsushi checked the time and he had barely been investigating the hallways for a minute. Not only had the elevator rides been short but he hadn’t found anyone. That is if “anyone” was defined as the people he knew and the other Riordan. He passed tons and tons of people who he didn’t know, civilians, which made his gut knot up and pull itself taught.

*You’re worthless!* Atsushi shook his head. No. He was going to come back for them. They didn’t have a place to keep all of these people safe, but they would eventually. He moved forward and tried his best not to look back at all of the people.

B7 no one there. B8 no one there. B9 no one there. B10 no one there. B11. The doors opened and his heart stopped in his chest. He rushed forward and sliced open the metal door only to then realize Akutagawa had told him to come back for people he found. In the end, it probably didn’t matter though. If there was an alarm, he couldn’t hear it over the commotion above him.

An older looking man groggily gazed up from his bed at Atsushi seemingly confused at his appearance and actions.

“Uh, hi,” Atsushi stammered, “You’re Mr. Riordan right? I think his name was Rick, uh, Rick’s dad?” The man nodded slowly. “Oh, good, I’m busting you out. My partner already has your wife and son, not Rick, the other one, I don’t know his name.”

The man stared at him before replying, “I’m sorry, but I’m staying here.”

Atsushi blinked as he reran the man’s sentence several times in his head. “Uh, well, okay. I can’t force you to leave I guess. I mean it messes up the plan, but if you want to stay, I guess it’s your choice.”

Atsushi spun around and walked back towards the elevator. He was still somewhat in shock when he hit the button to go down. The man wanted to stay, there was nothing he could do to force him to go, but why confused Atsushi. If what Akutagawa said was true, than Riordan Rick had been forced to hurt his father with his own ability. Why someone would want to stay in a place like that, was beyond him.

*Ding!* The doors slid open and Atsushi walked in. He turned around to push the button and found
Mr. Riordan standing next to him. Atsushi stared at him for a moment and he stared back. Atsushi hit B12 and started moving towards the next floor. Mr. Riordan seemed a bit confused but he didn’t ask Atsushi so he didn’t say anything.

There was no one on B12 so they headed down. No one on B13. No one on B14. Atsushi felt like he might faint from the silence. B15. The doors slid open and Atsushi felt like a stiff robot walking out of the elevator. Mr. Riordan followed him and the eerie cloud of silence traveled with them.

They made it to the end of the hallway and Atsushi stared at a cell. No one was inside and the door appeared to have been sliced off by its hinges. He stared and his confusion grew. A sword sliced a few of his hairs and Atsushi screamed. He stumbled back and frantically moved away from the source of the attack.

“Oh, it’s you,” A proper yet disdained voice said. He slightly calmed down as soon as he realized who it was.

“Hello, Miss Kouyou,” Atsushi said quietly. Her arms were crossed, her hair was down, and she wore a plain white kimono like the one he had first seen Highsmith in. She glared furiously at Atsushi and he had to scan the hallway to stop from meeting her eyes. He spied a strangely familiar man with orange hair standing beside her with a plain white shirt and matching pants.

“You’re the detective who dumped me with the baby in the carriage!” he yelled.

Atsushi stared at him. What was he talking about? “I don’t remember that.”

“You better remember bastard because I need to pay you back for that!”

“Shut up, Tachihara,” Kouyou said. “What are you doing here boy? And you better know where Kyouka is.”

Atsushi squeaked as she raised her abilities sword. “I do! I do know where she is. Also, Akutagawa and I are in the middle of rescuing people, I’m searching for, well, you two I guess since you’re the only ones we know here.”

Kouyou stared at him for a minute. “That’s not a joke is it?”

Atsushi shook his head a little confused.

“Since when does Akutagawa not try to kill you every ten seconds?”

Oh. That’s what she was confused about. “Since we had to tolerate each other for almost a month? I don’t know how long it’s been since all of you were captured.”

“He managed to get out?”

Another loud noise boomed above them and interrupted Kouyou. There were more gunshots but they continued to grow distant.

“I forgot we were on a time limit,” Atsushi muttered, “We need to go now.”

“I’m leading this operation now and you will answer my questions,” Kouyou said.

“Okay,” Atsushi said.

“What is happening?” Mr. Riordan asked.
“This will all make a lot more sense in ten to twenty minutes, now I can’t really explain it,” Atsushi said.

“Who is he?” Tachihara asked pointedly at Mr. Riordan.

“He,” He paused, he took a deep breath and squared his shoulders. “If you want to get out of here you’ll follow my lead.” Atsushi grabbed Mr. Riordan’s wrist and led him back to the elevator.

He clicked the up button and tried to keep his spine straight as Kouyou’s glare dug into his back trying to force him to cave to her. Finally, the gaze disappeared and she stepped up next to him.

“Very well, lead the way Jinko,” Kouyou said.

Ding!

The doors slid open and they walked in. Atsushi hit the ground level floor and the cloud of awkward silence reappeared. Yeah, this was definitely too easy that is if he didn’t include the woman who wanted him dead. However, he had a feeling once the doors opened it would get harder.

Ding!

Yep. He was right. The flood of guards pointing guns at the stairwell confirmed his theory. A man, King if he recalled correctly, whipped his head towards them and Atsushi gave a little wave, unsure of what else to do.

“Akutagawa you’re okay,” Kouyou said happily. Atsushi wasn’t sure if he had ever seen her so happy.

“Hello, Kouyou,” he said slowly. She pursed her lips and glared at him. “Hello, big sis,” he seemed to correct himself.

“Does no one care that we have guns pointed at us?” A woman asked from beside Akutagawa.

“We have guns pointed at us every other day, this is nothing special,” Kouyou said with a wave of her hand. Atsushi snorted and Akutagawa and he smiled at each other. Atsushi’s chest felt like it was going to explode. Akutagawa was smiling. In a situation of complete stress, he was smiling.

“Are you done being hooligans?” King asked.

“That’s all we ever are King,” Kouyou said, “You just suck our will to live you filthy leach. ‘The next time you try to go after Chuuya I will make sure I run my sword through your throat.’ I told you that years ago, so tell me, what the hell did you do to him and do I need to follow through on my promise.”

“He tortured Chuuya for information,” Akutagawa piped up.

Bloodlust radiated from her and her ability flew towards King in seconds. The guns began to fire at the four of them and her ability had to focus on countering the bullets which made her swear.

Atsushi barely managed to see Akutagawa and the other four as they escaped out the door. They got away safely, which was good. Now his group just needed to find a way out. Kouyou was the one protecting them and it would take a bit to make it through all of the people. It was obvious Akutagawa hadn’t killed anyone which made Atsushi really happy.

There was a brief break in bullets and Atsushi darted underneath Kouyou’s sword and towards King
with his ability activated. The woman he had fought at the mall stepped in front of him, reached out, and Atsushi slid under her. A trail of bullets followed him and the woman yelled at the guards for shooting. Kouyou shoved King and the other two back with her ability and ran to the door. Atsushi let the other three get through the door before he followed.

Fire laced up his back and he grimaced at the small impact. He kept pushing forward, barely keeping himself from keeling over, and he bit his lip to distract himself from the pain in his back.

“Boy, you’ve been shot!” Mr. Riordan yelled at him. The man stopped running. Atsushi quickly grabbed his wrist and dragged him along.

“It’ll heal!” He yelled back. Mr. Riordan still seemed thoroughly concerned but he kept moving.

After they had run for a while Kouyou instructed him to take the lead. They quickly looked around the area and when they couldn’t see anyone who had followed them Atsushi led them towards the rendezvous point.

A few dozen meters away, Atsushi made them check for tracking devices or anything of the sort. Atsushi also checked himself and was thoroughly confused when he dug out a small rectangular device. It wasn’t the same kind King had put on Chuuya.

Dazai.

Atsushi crushed it underneath his foot. He still hadn’t forgiven the older man for causing Akutagawa to leave. When no one else found anything he led them towards the coffee shop.

~

Day: 15 (Early Morning)

Akutagawa tapped his foot in an unknown rhythm against the hard wooden floor to try and calm himself down. He was glad the coffee shop had twenty-four-hour service otherwise there wouldn’t be anywhere they could meet. The baristas had thoroughly hated their presence. One of them had been taking a nap and the other had been reading. Akutagawa didn’t want to bother them but Mrs. Riordan would not shut up. In order to get her to be quiet, he bought all four of them a drink much to the dismay of the disgruntled workers.

Then they were sitting, and sitting, and sitting. His stomach turned, and turned, and turned until he was ready to puke. He shouldn’t have left them behind. He was positive Kouyou could handle herself and would be able to protect everyone if something went south, but with how long they were taking he wasn’t sure leaving had been a good choice.

“You’re going to give yourself health issues,” Mrs. Riordan said.

“Thank you for your comment, it helps me so much,” Akutagawa quipped.

She went silent and Akutagawa continued tapping his foot. He was either going to have a panic attack or puke, he wasn’t sure which would come first. A light hand placed itself on Akutagawa’s arm and he had to restrain from glaring at her. Leena opened her mouth.

“You speak in any other language and I will kick you out of this rescue squad,” Akutagawa said.
“Sorry about before,” Leena said sheepishly.

“You did it for him, right?” Akutagawa said pointing at her brother. She nodded. “Then we’re cool, I would have done the same thing.”

The bell above the door rang and Atsushi ran in with the other three trailing behind. All of the tension flooded out of him in a large sigh. The tiger ran right up to him and shifted wildly between feet with a wicked and happy smile.

“We did it!” He squeaked.

Akutagawa nodded slowly. “Did you remember to have them check?”

Atsushi nodded multiple times. A man who he assumed was Mr. Riordan ran passed them and embraced his wife and son. Atsushi’s smile grew even wider. He held up his hands and Akutagawa willfully high fived them. He peered around the boy at Kouyou. She frowned and made eye contact with him.

“Where’s Dazai? I figured he was behind this.”

Atsushi looked at Akutagawa and he took a deep breath. “If Dazai was here he would be busy being disappointed in us for being idiots and acting on our own.”

Her eyes widened and the edges of her lips pulled upwards. “You little genius. This was your plan wasn’t it?”

Akutagawa nodded, “But it was the Jinko’s-,” Fingers jabbed into his side and Akutagawa rolled his eyes. “Atsushi, it was Atsushi’s idea.”

“Please don’t be a jerk again now that you’re around other mafia members,” Atsushi said.

Akutagawa narrowed his brow. “I’m not being a jerk.”

Atsushi held up his two fingers with a little distance between them. “A little bit, you’re being a little bit of one, but don’t worry about it.”

“Well, now I’m worried about it.”

“You don’t have to be.”

“Well, I am.”

“You wouldn’t happen to have a gun on you would you, Akutagawa?” Tachihara asked, “I know it’s not really your thing but it would be appreciated.”

“Shut up, Tachihara,” Akutagawa said.

“Come on man!”

“I do,” Atsushi pulled out the gun Akutagawa had given to him and handed it to Tachihara. The man took it slowly and Akutagawa smirked at him.

“It’s Chuuya’s,” Atsushi said.

Tachihara looked at Akutagawa as if for confirmation. “You have two reasons not to worry. First, It’s Atsushi, he wouldn’t own a gun unless someone told him to. Second, I’m the one who found it
and made him carry it.”

Tachihara attached it to his belt without any further questions.

“We should get back as soon as possible,” Atsushi said, “We have a vehicle—wait, do we have enough seats?”

Akutagawa pondered the question and shook his head. “We have seven seats and there’s nine of us.”

“I’ll drive,” Kouyou said.

“With all due respect, no you won’t, but you can have one of the better back seats,” Akutagawa said. He didn’t want her to absolutely kill him for saying no, so giving her a good seat was worth it. “Leena can double buckle with her brother, and Tachihara can double buckle with the Riordan kid.”

“I can what?” Tachihara asked.

“Now that we’ve decided that, we can go,” Kouyou said.

“I’m not doing that,” Tachihara said, “let’s just get a different car.”

“No!” Atsushi screeched. “Not again, I cannot do another one, I already know about four and my morality can’t take another.”

“Four?” Akutagawa asked.

“There was ours, and then the one Dazai and Chuuya had, then the four of us had to switch, and then after you, you know, Dazai thought we should switch again.”

Akutagawa snorted.

“Shut up,” Atsushi said as a light pink crawled up his cheeks. Akutagawa smirked at him and Atsushi pouted. Shyness laced up Akutagawa and he could feel himself look away, but the last thing he wanted to do was stop looking at Atsushi. Or stop thinking about the sunset, and the dock, and his breath—No, he needed to focus on these people, he could fantasize late at night when he couldn’t sleep.

They managed to fit everyone in the van, once Tachihara accepted his fate, and surprisingly everything went smoothly. They managed to reach the hotel without any issues and only a light argument between Kouyou and, well, Atsushi, but she kind of argued on his behalf. Which meant she practically argued against herself.

They all climbed out and headed towards the door. Highsmith stood in front and she smiled at Akutagawa as he approached.

“I see you took a little detour,” she nodded back towards everyone but her smile never faded.

“You bitch,” Kouyou said in a low growl.

“You bitch,” Kouyou said in a low growl.

“Hello, Kouyou, it’s been a while.”

“Ryuunosuke what the hell is going on?”

“I don’t know what happened between her and everyone before,” Akutagawa said, “but I wouldn’t be here now if it wasn’t for her so play nice.”
“I’m not going to-” He cut her off by walking through the doors of the hotel. Highsmith followed along with everyone else and an unhappy Kouyou.

“Atsushi could you lead us to the room?” Akutagawa asked. The tiger nodded with a smile, led them up the stairs, and to the door where Atsushi knocked lightly in a pattern he recognized.

The door swung open and they were greeted with a short redhead.

“What the fuck?”

Chapter End Notes

SURPRISE!!! KOUYOU’S BACK!!! and Tachihara. I apologize for how I picked on Tachihara, I really like his character in the series but I had fun picking on him anyway ;).

Alright, moving on, this isn't as big of a chapter as normal so that's why I'm planning to post in July before my short hiatus. Again I'll talk about that more next time I post, which might actually be sooner than normal but no promises I tend to not keep those when it comes to my schedule. I really hope you enjoyed this chapter!

I don't really have anything else to say so I hope you have a great day, year, and life! (づ。◕‿‿◕。)づ

Feel free to say hi on my tumblr twitter or in the comments.
Crossed Roads Part IV

Chapter Summary

Fluff then stress then...Romance???

Chapter Notes


A quick reminder that parts are separated by: ~
A time jump is: ...
So that means ... does not start a new part.

I only have one song for this chapter. Important song for part 3 So this song should fit in the text fairly well with an average reading speed but depending on how fast/slow you read it will vary. The only part that does not fit well is the second instrumental because it's long and there's not that much text. The song is for Akutagawa's POV and I recommend hitting the play button when Akutagawa sees the radio if you want to listen while you read. You can, of course, listen after/before but some of the lyrics are written in the chapter.

I hope you enjoy! (づ。◕‿‿◕。)づ

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day 14:

“Ow!” The bandage wasting device whined after Chuuya planted his foot into Dazai’s side and pushed him off of the bed. “Chuuya~ why would you do that?”

He rolled his eyes. Why wouldn’t he? “There’s a whole other bed Mackerel so use it. I don’t want to sleep next to you any longer than I have to.”

“But what if Atsushi comes back?”

“Then he’ll knock and we’ll know it’s him. So get out.”

“No!” He flopped on the bed and rolled up in the cover pulling whatever warmth Chuuya had away.

With a groan, he attempted to walk towards the other bed. Dazai grabbed the back of his shirt and pulled him back onto the bed.

“Don’t take your warmth with you,” Dazai whined. Chuuya glared at him and the taller man pouted.

“I’ll stay for as long as you take to answer a question.”
“Fine.”

“Did you plan for Akutagawa to leave us from the beginning?”

Dazai nodded a little before he stopped abruptly, narrowed his brows, and shook his head. “Not initially, the idea came to me a little after we had all met up. I figured it was the best route but I overdid it.” He paused and Chuuya held back a response.

He wanted to agree that he had or make a snippy comment, but Dazai was telling the truth if Chuuya shut him down now, how was he any better than Dazai?

After Dazai’s eyes scanned over Chuuya’s face he continued. “I’m glad he reached out to Atsushi, I thought he wasn’t going to come back. I can’t help but wonder what I didn’t factor in, though. Maybe someone who works with King? Someone had to have tipped him off, but who?”

Chuuya shrugged. “Even you can’t know everything.” Dazai pressed his lips into a tight frown. “Now move.”

His frown quickly turned into a pout and he rapidly batted his eyelashes. “Come on Chuuya, it will be cold in the other bed. I don’t want to be cold!”

“To bad so sad, move.”

“No, if you want me to move you’ll have to make me.”

Chuuya popped up an eyebrow. “Are you sure you want to poke that bear?”

Dazai extended his pout. “Fine! Only because you’ll probably kick me out of the room if I don’t.” He slid off the bed and flopped onto the floor. He used his feet to push himself barely even a centimeter forward. He repeated this action a couple of times before he faced Chuuya with another pout.

“Fine, get up here,” Dazai’s face morphed into a smile and he launched into the bed. Chuuya knew he shouldn’t have given in, he knew he should have held his ground, but his fondness for the tall-ass had overwhelmed him.

Chuuya flopped over and eyed the door. His eyelids grew heavier with every passing second but he refused to lose consciousness. He wanted to be awake when Atsushi, and hopefully Akutagawa, returned. A shiver rippled up his spine.

“What are you doing?” Chuuya asked. His waist burned as Dazai’s arm wrapped around him and his hand slipped between the bed and his hip. His cheeks lit on fire and Dazai snuggled his face into the back of Chuuya’s neck. He stilled. His lips felt numb and the small ember in his stomach erupted into sparks that flew up to his chest and through his mouth in short breaths.

“I’m glad you’re still here,” Dazai muttered.

He rested his hand on Dazai’s arm. Chuuya wasn’t quite sure what to say or do. The silence was deafening and Chuuya wanted to break it. If he did he was afraid his voice would crack or that whatever he said would make the situation more awkward.

Dazai’s breath brushed against the bare skin of Chuuya’s neck and he shuddered again and again. His breath grew deeper and longer until it felt like he was asleep. Carefully, Chuuya shifted around to face Dazai. He was actually asleep.
Chuuya smirked and slowly moved his fingers through Dazai’s tangled mess of hair. Whenever his fingers caught on a knot he would gently pull them through and then continue. His eyelids dropped and his mind went quiet. Sleep overwhelmed him.

…

Day 15:

Cold fingers brushed against his neck and Chuuya’s eyes flew open. They latched onto Dazai’s and the mackerel smiled.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to wake you.”

“What time is it?” He asked quietly.

“Somewhere between four and five is my guess.”

Chuuya pushed lightly against Dazai’s chest and immediately regretted their new distance. Cold air swept around him and he shivered. He moved closer to Dazai and the man’s breath stuttered which made Chuuya smile.

“Why is it so cold in here?” He groaned.

“I don’t mind it so much, it forces you to be closer to me.”

“Someone’s a little flirty today.”

“Am I ever not?”

“Lately you haven’t been. It’s nice to see you being your good, old, crappy self.”

“Is my personality crappy or just attractive?”

“Maybe both.”

Dazai chuckled. “I really am glad you’re here. I don’t know what I’d do if you weren’t.” His eyes fell away from Chuuya’s and his heart clenched. He couldn’t stand this.

He placed his hand on Dazai’s cheek. “As long as you’re not an ass hole I’ll be staying.”

He lifted up Dazai’s face and made him meet his eyes. Dazai slammed his lips into Chuuya’s and the redhead squeaked. The kiss was sloppy and almost as quickly as Dazai kissed him he pulled away.

Chuuya stared at him and the other man stared back. What felt like minutes slipped by and no words were spoken.

“Dazai-”

A light knock sounded on the door and Chuuya jumped. He sat up and his head snapped to the door. That had to be Atsushi. He toppled out of the bed and ran towards the door.

“Don’t open it if we’re not sure who it is!” He disregarded Dazai’s word and threw open the door.
The two boys were standing there. His chest swelled with relief before he looked up. There were...more? “What the fuck?” Chuuya yelled.

“Language, Chuuya,” Kouyou said.

“Who, wha-how, huh?”

“Sushi had an epiphany and we decided to help some people out,” Akutagawa said. Chuuya’s gaze locked onto Akutagawa. He was there. That was actually him. Atsushi brought him back. Chuuya pushed his way through the door frame and wrapped his arms around him. “I missed you.”

“Oh, uh, hey,” he muttered.

“You better not beat yourself up over,” Chuuya’s eyes quickly darted to the others, “you know what. I’ve already forgiven you.”

“Thanks,” He could barely hear Akutagawa’s voice.

Slow claps started behind Chuuya. He glanced over his shoulder and the bandage wasting device whistled loudly.

“This is impressive you two. What’s wrong Akutagawa?”

Chuuya looked at the man who had just returned to them. His lips were pointed slightly down and he seemed to be staring passed Dazai. When Chuuya looked nothing was there.

“You didn’t have to head in ahead of us,” Akutagawa said.

“Who-” His heart stilled. She was there. That damn bitch was standing in the middle of the hotel room behind Dazai. “Highsmith,” he hissed.

“What do you have against her?” Akutagawa asked, “I wouldn’t have come back if it wasn’t for her.”

“I don’t blame you for not knowing, Akutagawa,” Dazai said, “why did you help him, Highsmith?”

Her lips quirked upward in the exact look Chuuya despised. “You’ve asked for my help plenty of times before, stop worrying. I think you have other issues to deal with.” She motioned to the people outside the door and Chuuya took a moment to evaluate the five he didn’t know. Why were there so many kids? He really hated King.

“Everyone come inside and fill me in,” Dazai instructed. All of the people obeyed and Chuuya shut the door behind them.

Kouyou immediately ordered that tea would be gathered. Dazai quickly decided that Atsushi would go buy some. Chuuya said that was not a good idea and they started arguing about how to acquire tea. He thought it was probably one of the stupidest things they had ever argued about, and they had argued about some pretty stupid shit.

“Chuuya!” Dazai said exasperatedly when Chuuya started going off about Dazai’s inconsideracy. Their eyes met. Oh. Dazai was freaking out. He was actually starting to panic a little. He hadn’t expected all of these people to show up. He hadn’t predicted this.

Chuuya nodded slowly. “How about you go get tea, Atsushi and Akutagawa will get these five a room, and I’ll catch Tachihara and Kouyou up and vice versa. How does that sound?”
After a minute of dead silence, Dazai nodded stiffly. Good, hopefully giving Dazai some time alone would get him to calm down. Atsushi and Akutagawa headed out shortly after Dazai.

As quickly as he could, Chuuya spewed out information about what had happened to the other two mafia members. However, he mentioned nothing about why Akutagawa had been gone.

In the end, Kouyou nodded slowly and smiled at him. “I believe you purposefully dodged around the subject of Akutagawa’s supposed absence from your meeting with Mori. Would you care to explain?”

“I sent him to do reconnaissance,” Dazai piped in from the doorway. He slipped inside with several types of tea stacked on top of each other in his arms. Chuuya heard Highsmith snort in the corner of the room and Chuuya shot as many daggers at her as he could with his eyes.

“What do you mean?” Asked Kouyou.

Dazai maneuvered to the desk and slipped the boxes noiselessly onto the surface. “King had been messing with Ryuunosuke’s head while he was camping out at the agency, I assume you told them about that,” Chuuya nodded. “So, I figured he would be the most convincing person to send to get information, with a small risk of him never returning.”

“If you knew why he was gone why were you so excited to see him Chuuya?” Kouyou asked.

“I wasn’t aware he was returning to us,” Chuuya said. The lie was so easy to say that he felt grossly similar to Dazai.

Her eyes trailed over Chuuya before she focused on his partner. “Why would you send him?”

“As I said, he was the most convincing,” Dazai said, “besides Chuuya was still a little injured-”

“Bull shit!”

“Says the one who literally fainted from using his ability too much a few days ago,” Dazai stared at him for a few seconds before continuing. “Atsushi can’t lie convincingly to save his life, and I couldn’t very well convince King I’m on his side.”

Kouyou sighed. “Your reasoning is sound, but it was still reckless.”

Click! The door opened and Atsushi entered with Akutagawa trailing behind him. “Alright, everyone is set up in the other room. They’re just a few doors down from us.”

“Thank you, both of you,” Chuuya said. Atsushi smiled and Akutagawa eyes remained fastened to the ground.

“If you think I was risky, big sis,” Dazai said. “I want to know how risky our two rescue boys were.” He pulled out a kettle and Chuuya started helping him make tea.

“We did a bit of improvisation but-” Akutagawa started.

“It was really easy, at least my part was,” Atsushi said. Dazai frowned. Chuuya didn’t believe him either. “Though that was Akutagawa’s doing, I went from floor to floor and I didn't run into a single guard.”

Chuuya turned to Akutagawa. “Well?”

He shrugged. “I drew all of the attention to me so the Jinko could check each floor with little
danger.” Chuuya poured the hot water over the bags and let them steep. Loose leaf tea would definitely be better but they didn’t have that luxury.

“That’s also risky,” Kouyou said, “I’m sure there were better options available.”

“It worked,” Akutagawa said.

“It was the easiest solution,” Dazai said. Chuuya stared in awe at the taller man. Was he actually backing up Akutagawa? “And it allowed Atsushi an easier path to all of you. It was a good plan Akutagawa, especially since Atsushi probably came up with the idea last minute.”

Akutagawa stared at him. “Uh, oh, thanks.” His gaze moved to the floor and Chuuya could not believe what he had just witnessed.

“Chuuya, the tea,” Kouyou said sweetly.

“Oh, right, thanks.” He removed the bags and brought over the cups. “Atsushi, can you help me bring the remaining drinks to the other room?”

He nodded and picked up some of the cups. As soon as they were outside of the door Chuuya started levitating the cups. Atsushi yelped as the cups raised out of his hands and Chuuya pressed a finger against his lips.

“Sorry for using you, but Dazai would have given me one of his dumb looks if I used my ability in front of him.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Atsushi said, “how much did you two argue while I was gone?”

“Not as much as normal but we still argued a bit and-” he stopped abruptly. Shit. Shi- fuck. Holy-they had kissed. They had kissed. They had kissed? The thought was so strange it was hard to believe he hadn’t been hallucinating.

“Chuuya?” Atsushi asked.

“It’s nothing, sorry,” he walked faster and Atsushi followed. The kid didn’t need to know.

~

Day 15:

What was Chuuya’s plan? He had left Dazai completely alone with Akutagawa besides the three others in the room of course, but the knots in his stomach convinced him that they practically weren’t there. Highsmith and Akutagawa seemed quite buddy-buddy, which did not sit well with him. Whatever Highsmith had in store for Akutagawa wasn’t happening on Dazai’s watch.

Mental Note: Monitor Highsmith.

“So,” Kouyou said breaking the long and awkward silence. “What brings you to this part of town,
Highsmith?” Dazai nearly laughed at how sickly sweet her voice sounded.

“Wouldn’t you love to know?” Highsmith said. “That information is up to Dazai’s discretion apparently.”

“I don’t know why you’re here,” Dazai said.

“I’m here because you messed up badly enough to where I had to step in, in order to ensure all of your survival.”

Kouyou erupted into laughter. “Ensure our survival? Oh no, sweetheart, we’re not going to survive, we’re going to win.”

_Click!_

The door opened and Chuuya slipped inside without Atsushi. Before Dazai could ask where the boy was Chuuya was already speaking. “Atsushi is currently helping the other room with tea.” He scanned the room and Dazai figured he was trying to figure out what he had missed. “Did you tell them yet?”

Dazai frowned. “Tell them what?”

“That you’re still a part of the mafia.”

The room fell silent and Dazai’s mind dove into a frantic war again. If he told them the truth Chuuya would be pissed. If he didn’t tell them the truth he would be digging an even bigger grave for himself. Given he welcomed death freely, but he wasn’t quite sure that he wanted to go via death by his lies collapsing to the ground and Chuuya killing him. However, he was already too deep to go back so soon. He needed a couple more days.

“You’re joking, right?” Kouyou said.

Dazai shook his head slowly. “No, he’s not.”

Akutagawa coughed next to him and they made eye contact. Despite Akutagawa’s eyes screaming ‘what the hell?’ he didn’t say anything.

“I don’t believe that for one second,” Kouyou said. “You may be able to convince Chuuya because he actually has faith in you, but my faith died ages ago.”

“That defies all of my intelligence,” Highsmith said.

“Why do you believe him, Chuuya?”

“Because I’ve asked ten million times and the answer has remained consistent.”

“But-”

“I know he’s a thoroughbred liar, big sis, but maybe against my better judgment, I’ve decided to trust him and that’s where I’m going to stand.”

Dazai’s chest ached.

“Dazai,” Akutagawa said, “hallway, now, please.”

“Akutagawa, I know it’s weird-” Chuuya started.
“No, it’s fine, we can talk,” Dazai interrupted. He let Akutagawa lead him out of the room before he stopped to make sure no one had followed them. “What’s up?”

“You still haven’t told Chuuya?”

Dazai bit his lip. “No, I haven’t found a good time.”

“Now would be a great time.”

“And make him seem like an idiot in front of big sis?”

“It’s better than saying nothing, and letting the lie extend further.”

“Mmm, I’m not so sure it is.”

Akutagawa stared at him for a split second before he turned away and crossed his arms. “Fine, you can do whatever you want, I won’t say anything.”

“Thank you.”

“Although, if you don’t tell Chuuya within the next week, then I’ll tell him myself.”

Dazai’s gut twisted. “How about two weeks?”

“One week,” Akutagawa restated. “Also,” he glanced back at the door, sighed, and turned back to Dazai. “I don’t know what your plan to take down King was, but that has to change slightly.” Dazai frowned but let him continue. “Most of the workers under King are only helping him because he has some form of leverage. Most of their families are currently held, hostage. That’s how he manipulated Leena and someone else whom I worked alongside. There are a bunch more people he has hostage as well so I’m assuming most of his staff is composed of those kinds of people.”

Dazai nodded slowly. That did screw up some of the things Dazai planned but he was far more impressed with Akutagawa. The boy was actually thinking about the welfare of others and not unfairly harming people. He took a deep breath and rustled Akutagawa’s hair.

“I’m impressed, good job.” Hopefully, that would be abrupt enough.

Akutagawa stared at him with wide eyes. Dazai took that as a sign that he had indeed understood clearly and not misinterpreted his meaning.

“What’s going on?” Atsushi’s voice came as no surprise to Dazai. He figured the boy would be coming back soon. He was glad he had managed to make the conversation short enough to fit in their time frame.

“It’s nothing,” Akutagawa said before Dazai had a chance to. Atsushi pursed his lips and narrowed his eyes at Dazai.

“It’s nothing,” Dazai said, “you don’t need to worry.”

His worried expression didn’t leave but he nodded and quickly moved next to Akutagawa. Both of them walked to the door and Dazai followed them back inside. He was glad that the two of them were closer mainly because that meant Akutagawa had someone to rely on who wasn’t Highsmith. Then again, if Akutagawa did trust Highsmith, he had a reason to. Until he knew what her motives were he wasn’t going to question Akutagawa’s trust. Chuuya definitely would, but Dazai would try to trust Ryuunosuke, instead of his hatred. Maybe he would fail, maybe he wouldn’t, but he resigned
himself to try.

They entered the room to find Kouyou with her head in her hands. She looked up at them with worry.

“When you four were alone, how did you not cause a natural disaster?”

“We did,” Dazai reassured her, “You just don’t know what we caused, yet.”

Her eyes glazed over and her hand rested on her temple. “I don’t think I want to know.”

Dazai opened his mouth to ask why she said so when a light knock sounded against the door. The room stilled and he couldn’t hear anyone’s breath.

He inched back towards the door and peered out of the peephole. A light blue-green snow slowly fell outside of the door. Dazai cracked it open cautiously and the ability faded to reveal Tanizaki standing before him. He stepped passed Dazai and Dazai shut the door.

“I’m here to bring Dazai, Kouyou, I hope that’s right, and one other person, but I don’t remember who it is,” Tanizaki said.

“Tachihara most likely,” Dazai said. What did Mori want?

“Yeah, I think it was,” Tanizaki said, “uh, the sooner I take the three of you back the less I have to confer with scary mafia boss man.”

“It may be four of us,” Dazai said, “Akutagawa deserves to see Gin.”

Tanizaki’s eyes widened. “Akutagawa’s back?” His eyes flickered in the direction of Akutagawa and Atsushi. “How pissed were you when Dazai told you the real reason why he was gone?”

Atsushi’s brow creased down. “What?”

“Because you thought he had actually gone to join King when we ran into you,” Tanizaki said. Atsushi had told them that much? If Tanizaki had said a word to Mori, the Port Mafia Boss would know that Dazai had lied to him. This was bad.

“Yeah I was really mad,” Atsushi chuckled unconvincingly. Tanizaki frowned at him but didn’t ask anything.

“Anyway,” Dazai said excitedly, to hopefully draw the attention off of them. “As I was saying, Akutagawa deserves to see Gin.”

“I don’t need to,” Akutagawa said.

Dazai frowned but made sure to not look angry. “Are you sure? I figured you’d want to.”

Akutagawa shrugged. “It would be nice but I’ve waited this long I can wait a bit longer. Besides, the Boss wouldn’t be too happy about you bending the rules that much.”

“Who cares what he thinks,” Dazai folded his arms and pouted. “But if you’re fine then I suppose Tanizaki will just take the three of us back.”

He sighed dramatically and made note of the slight bend of Akutagawa’s lips upwards. Good, he hadn’t taken that the wrong way. Did he have to worry about everything he said to Ryununosuke? Because he already felt exhausted.
The three of them said farewell and Dazai made clear that Chuuya was in charge. Dazai watched Highsmith but she didn’t seem phased that they were leaving. With a quick look to Chuuya, his old partner managed to understand Dazai’s message. Watch her.

With a sigh, he followed Tanizaki down the hall.

“Dazai,” Kouyou said. He turned to her and when Tanizaki and Tachihara stopped as well she waved them off.

Tanizaki’s brow narrowed in concern. “Don’t worry about us, we’ll catch up,” Dazai said.

Both of them listened and disappeared down the stairwell.

Once they were gone Kouyou continued. “Chuuya and I both came to the conclusion that you’re likely lying. However, he has resigned to believe you by saying, ‘I’ll probably get hurt but it wouldn’t be the first time.’ I hope you’re proud of yourself.”

She swept past him. Maybe he should have told Chuuya by now. No, he should have. The day before would have been a great time to do it, but of course, he let the chance slip by. The lie would deteriorate eventually but they needed more time. Chuuya’s feelings would sadly have to wait.

He followed Kouyou out of the building with thoughts spinning through his head and he climbed into the car that inevitably would take them to Mori.

~

Day 15:

Dazai had left. Akutagawa felt both relieved and disappointed. He had managed to tell Dazai what he and Highsmith had been thinking and Dazai appeared to have accepted it well. However, anxiety bit at his stomach whenever he stopped to even briefly, consider the possibility of Dazai not following through with what he had said. The anxiety pulled and pulled until he had ripped part of the layer of skin off of his bottom lip.

Hopefully, Dazai would plan how to talk to Chuuya. Akutagawa wasn’t sure he had enough bravery to tell Chuuya. His threat had possibly been empty.

“Well,” Highsmith said, “I’m going to go confer with the people Akutagawa and Atsushi rescued. I’ll see if they know anything about King’s hideouts. I doubt it, but it’s worth a shot.”

“Not on your own you’re not,” Chuuya said. “I’ll be doing the same, don’t kill each other you two.”

“Shouldn’t I be saying that to the two of you?” Akutagawa asked as both Highsmith and Chuuya walked out the door.

“Don’t worry we can play nice,” Highsmith said. They glared at each other intensely and the door shut behind them.

“Should we maybe go with them?” Atsushi asked.

Yes, is what Akutagawa would say, but he didn’t feel like it. “They should be fine. Besides, I don’t feel like playing babysitter today.” He laid down and let out a prolonged sigh.
“Did Dazai say anything mean when you two were talking?” Atsushi asked.

The question took Akutagawa slightly off guard and he sat up. “No, surprisingly, I told him about all of the people under King’s control and he was very accepting of the idea that he would need to recalculate. Which makes me more nervous for some reason.”

“Were you expecting something bad?”

He nodded. “Though I suppose I wasn’t really sure. I just assumed he’d react poorly.”

Atsushi smiled sweetly and wrapped his arms around him. Akutagawa relaxed into the hug and thanked him. He wished the knots in his stomach could unravel but the more he tried to relax the tighter they grew. He knew Kouyou had noticed the inconsistencies in the stories of his whereabouts and his reason, but he wasn’t sure if she would tell Mori about them or not.

As if sensing Akutagawa’s stress Atsushi squeezed tighter with one of his arms and grabbed his hand with the other. Electricity shot up Akutagawa’s arm and his cheeks grew warm. He needed something to distract himself from the strange things in his chest.

His eyes scanned the room and rested on a small radio. He moved over and started fiddling with the machine.

The quiet tune vibrated out of the speakers and Akutagawa reached out his hand. Atsushi blushed lightly and muttered something.

“What?”

“I don’t know how to dance.”

“That’s all?” He asked flatly. “Don’t worry, I dance with Gin sometimes. She made me learn, so I can teach you.”

When we woke up the world was figured out.

Atsushi’s blush faded slightly as he accepted Akutagawa’s hand. He led Atsushi through the basic movements before matching the speed of the music.

This brilliant light is brighter than we’ve known, without our darkness to prove it so.

The lyrics played lightly in the background and the more he listened the more his cheeks flushed. He desperately attempted to keep a straight face but he felt his mask begin to crumble.

You’re enough, you’re enough, you’re enough, you are enough. These little words somehow they’re changing us.
Akutagawa tried to keep the movements very basic for Atsushi but it didn’t seem to do much.

“Sorry,” Atsushi said as his feet stepped on top of Akutagawa’s.

“Don’t worry about it. I knew you were a complete klutz before we started.”

“Wow, thanks Akutagawa,” Atsushi smiled and pushed his face a little closer to Akutagawa's.

*When we grew up, our shadows grew up too.*

“*Know-it-all.*”

*But they’re just old ghosts that we grow attached to.*

“Oh? I’m a know it all?”

*The tragic flaw is that they hide the truth.*

Akutagawa quickly twirled Atsushi and the boy squeaked as he stumbled over his own feet. “Not fair!”

Akutagawa pulled Atsushi back in and the Jinko took too big of a step. Their noses bumped into each other and both of them went rigid.

*I promise you...*

It was just like when they were at the port. Only now Akutagawa’s heart was trying to break his ribs and he was positive Atsushi could feel the sweat that streamed down his palms.

He stared into Atsushi’s eyes. Throughout everything, Atsushi had always been beside him.

“You’re eyes are beautiful, I will never stop saying that,” Akutagawa said, his voice quieter than he meant for it to be.

“Ryuunosuke,” Atsushi said, his voice even softer than Akutagawa’s, but his given name immediately stuck out. Surprisingly, he didn’t mind that Atsushi used it. “You’re enough.”

*So let our shadows fall away like dust.*
Akutagawa’s body started closing the small distance and he welcomed the Jinko’s shaky breath as it dusted his lips. His eyes shut as Atsushi leaned in and their lips sloppily pressed against each other.

**Wham!**

The two men shoved each other away, Akutagawa slammed the power button on the radio, and Chuuya let out a frustrated growl as he made his presence well known. “That damn woman doesn’t know when to-” he stopped, looked between them, and frowned. “Am I interrupting something?”

“No,” they answered simultaneously.

Chuuya’s eyebrows popped up. “I can go-”

“You’re fine, what’s the issue?” Akutagawa growled.

His eyes grazed over the two of them before answering. “Highsmith is talking shit about big sis. We were arguing and our rescuees are just confused. I got too angry to stay without killing someone.”

Highsmith stepped through Chuuya and a shadow covered his face. “I’m leaving for the day,” she announced. “Someone says you’ll be perfectly fine dealing with your new responsibility on your own so I’ll see where you’ve failed tomorrow.”

“Says the person who doesn’t even have the decency to really be here,” Chuuya growled, “sure your gonna help, you’re gonna help from your safe little shell where there’s no chance of being harmed while we put ourselves in danger.”

Akutagawa opened his mouth but she disappeared before he could say anything. “What happened to 'we can play nice’?”

“She makes that impossible,” Chuuya growled. “She’s basically trying to make me mad at her.”

“Are you sure you’re not doing that to her?” Akutagawa asked.

Chuuya glared at him. “I know she helped you in some way, but you have no idea what she did. Don’t put your faith in her, otherwise, you’re setting yourself up for disappointment.”

Akutagawa shrugged. “I do that at least three times a week. For instance, I put my faith in your ability to play nice, and that didn’t work out.”

“Watch it, Akutagawa, I'm not afraid to yell at you.”

"Good, I'm glad you're not going to hold back on me." He turned away from Chuuya and turned the music back on. He let it play as he flopped onto the nearest bed with a long, deep breath. He was a bit disappointed that Chuuya couldn't get along with Highsmith, but he had no clue what happened between them so it wasn't his place to judge.

Chuuya moved to the bed across from him and so did Atsushi. If they didn't talk, there was a chance that he might actually fall asleep. His body felt exhausted and every part of him was ready to sleep. A gentle hand rested on his head and he peeked up from his pillow. Atsushi smiled at him and a flood of heat extended from his chest into his cheeks. He immediately redirected his face into his pillow.

"Alright, what did I interrupted?” Chuuya's voice broke through Akutagawa's embarrassment.
"Nothing," Atsushi said. He immediately removed his hand from Akutagawa’s head. Akutagawa turned his head and caught Atsushi’s face covered in a light pink shade. Akutagawa didn’t have to look at Chuuya to know he wasn’t convinced.

With a sigh, Akutagawa made the decision to confirm Chuuya’s suspicion. "If you blush that hard I’m not going to be able to lie with such a cute face in front of me."

Atsushi’s cheeks grew a darker shade of crimson and his face collapsed into his hands. Chuuya popped up a brow at Akutagawa. He had to bite his lip to keep himself from snickering.

"I feel as though I should leave you two alone," Chuuya said.

Akutagawa shook his head. "You’re fine, you gave me an opportunity to antagonize Atsushi further and I was not going to let it slip by."

"I hate you right now," Atsushi said.

Akutagawa shrugged.

Chuuya’s smile faltered and he looked at the door.

"On a similar note. You don’t happen to want Dazai to come back, do you?" Akutagawa asked.

"No, why would I want that?" Chuuya asked quickly. Too quickly.

Akutagawa snickered. "Are you sure? It seems like something happened between you two."

Chuuya’s eyes widened and he immediately glared at him. Akutagawa stared back at him. If Chuuya was going to pry, so was he.

“What the hell are you insinuating?"

“Oh, good God Chuuya, you can’t seriously expect me to believe that the two of you were in a room alone together, all night and nothing happened.”

Chuuya coughed into his hand and looked away. Did he just steal Akutagawa’s misdirection tactic? Not fair. Akutagawa narrowed his eyes and glared emotionlessly at Chuuya. He shifted uncomfortably and a slight pink highlighted the older man’s cheeks. “Nothing happened.”

Akutagawa snorted. “Yeah right."

“Okay, okay, we kissed like three seconds before you showed up but nothing really happened.”

He had not expected that. He had anticipated some kind of moment, but not that abrupt of one. How had Dazai managed to get Chuuya calm enough to sweet-talk his way in? Especially when he was lying straight to Chuuya’s face.

“Good God, why did I tell you two that?” Chuuya seemed to ask himself more than them.

“Dazai, kissed you?” Atsushi asked.

“Is it too late to say ‘no’?"

“Don’t worry, nothings happening between anyone,” Akutagawa said. He winked and Chuuya glared at him. Now he knew that if he said anything Ryuunosuke would tell everyone about the kiss.
I hope you enjoyed this chapter as much as I enjoyed writing it!!
So I have mentioned that I am going on hiatus. There are a couple of reasons why I’m taking this hiatus. One, I only have a little more than a month until I start school again. Two, I need to reread this story because there are quite a few threads I don’t remember that I want to make sure I don’t leave out of the chapters to come. This came to my attention when one of you lovely people commented on a past chapter and I didn’t remember what happened in said chapter until I had read about half of it. Three, I need some time to plan out the next few chapters. Some of the ones coming up that I’ve briefly planned are super long and complicated because of several explanations that are coming up. I need extra time to write those and ensure they address everything that I have briefly mentioned in previous chapters.
Thank you for your understanding and I hope you’ll return once I’m back. I think I’ll post again in October or November it depends on how quickly I do the above tasks. I appreciate your love and comments so much and thank you all for sticking with my crazy posting schedule.

Feel free to bug me on my tumblr twitter or in the comments below! ʕ•ᴥ•ʔ
Reframe

Chapter Summary

Dazai returns from meeting with the President and Mori and starts to put the next parts of the plan into action.

Chapter Notes

I'm back and ready to go!!!

Songs: For the whole chapter Plain link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRgIJQXgZVk

The song doesn't match perfectly but I like the mood of it and I think it works fairly well, just not for every scene.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Day 16:

Chuuya’s blood boiled with rage. He glared intensely at her, but it didn’t even phase Highsmith’s calm composure. She smiled at him and he had to use every ounce of his self-control to keep himself from punching her. What was she doing back? He was hoping she had left permanently.

“Good morning Chuuya.”

“Why didn’t you just walk through the door, since you assume you’re allowed to come in?” He asked.

Her smile didn’t fade.

“Let her through, Chuuya,” Did Akutagawa just order him? Chuuya must have interpreted his tone wrong. What could possibly give him the right to order an executive around? He turned his glare to the younger man. “Please.”

“Fine.” He walked away from the door and kept his back straight as he dropped onto one of the beds and monitored her movements. She moved to Akutagawa and started quietly conversing with him much to Chuuya’s aggravation. He rolled his eyes, and without acknowledging anyone else he stood up, left the room and head towards the rest of their group. He refused to be in a room with her longer than he had to.

The door to the other room opened before he had a chance to swipe the keycard and a little girl stood at the entrance. She didn’t seem much younger than Kyouka and if he remembered her name correctly it was Lana, or Leana, or something.

“Morning Mr. Nakahara,” She said. “Is Atsushi going to be coming over?”

“Uh, yeah, eventually,” Chuuya said. He didn’t know if he would, but Chuuya assumed if he told
Atsushi that Layna, that wasn’t it, wanted to see him he’d head over. “I’m just here to check up on everyone.”

The little girl smiled and let him through. Overall, shoving five people into one room wasn’t the end of the world. Kids reported a few arguments that had taken place, mainly between Mr. and Mrs. Riordan, but everything else seemed to be fine. They all had a sufficient amount of food jammed inside their small fridge and everything that came with the room had been restocked.

"Mr. Nakahara," Mr. Riordan spoke up just as Chuuya had finished looking through their food supply for the second time. "Do any of you know anything about our son? Rick Riordan, we are anxious to hear any news."

That's why their last name was so familiar. Chuuya had to use every fiber in his being to keep himself from scowling. "I may have a little, but Akutagawa would have more recent news. I doubt he'll be here any time soon with the infinite amounts of scheming he's doing." He internally rolled his eyes. Chuuya wasn't salty. It wasn't like he could prevent Akutagawa from talking with Highsmith.

"Anything is fine," Mrs. Riordan said.

"Alright," Chuuya turned to them and quickly debated how much he should tell them. In the end, though, he wasn't the type of person to have a big filter, "Where should I start. He has attacked us on two different occasions. The second time he fucked me up pretty badly, my back is still sore, though not as bad as it was." Their faces turned downcast and he figured he may have been a little harsh. "In all fairness, if he hadn't hurt me I would have hurt him. It was a fight, though, that doesn't mean I'm not salty."

"I apologize for his actions," Mr. Riordan said.

Chuuya waved his hand dismissively. "The only reason I didn't pummel him to death is that I've been out of it, and by that point, my ability had already strained me too much. Otherwise, I would be apologizing to you right now."

"I suppose you need to say that to support your ego," Highsmith's voice flooded the room and his rage erupted. Using his ability, he chucked a chair at her and he felt sick as Akutagawa blocked it. "Better watch out you don't want to end up puking all over the carpet."

He growled and turned from her refusing to make eye contact with anyone.

"That was unnecessarily hostile, Highsmith," Akutagawa said.

Chuuya's eyes widened in surprise and he glanced back at them. Highsmith opened her mouth to respond but Akutagawa walked passed her and didn't acknowledge her surprised expression. Atsushi followed him slowly and met Chuuya's eyes with a small smile.

The little girl ran up to Atsushi and wrapped her arms around his waist. "Leena!" He said with excitement. "I'm glad to see you." She grabbed his hand and pulled him towards her brother. The three of them began conversing and Atsushi smiled the whole time. Chuuya smirked at how much Atsushi seemed to enjoy being around these kids. Given, Leena, probably reminded him of Kyouka. Now if Chuuya could just memorize, Leena's name, he would be golden. Not that he could remember anyone else's name, but it was a good start.

The little girl dragged Akutagawa into their conversation and Chuuya held back his laughter. Akutagawa’s discomfort was written all throughout his stiff posture. His humor was ruined the moment Highsmith stepped beside him. He made a point to glare at her every chance he had and
immediately wished to leave the vicinity. If Dazai was here at least he would have someone to hate Highsmith with, but Mori had to make both Dazai and Kouyou go back to the house. Dazai hadn't even been phased by the request. That bastard had probably been anticipating it.

With a hefty sigh, Chuuya moved beside Ryunosuke and pretended to pay attention to what they were talking about. He most definitely didn't hear any of it.

Eventually, everyone's stomachs called them to eat something and Chuuya, Atsushi, and Akutagawa returned to their room followed, sadly, by Highsmith. Chuuya did his best to ignore her but her bright white Kimono made that practically impossible.

Hours passed and they did little activities to pass the time. The four of them ended up traveling to the store and buying a deck of cards just so they would have something to do. This escalated into gigantic games of Uno, which caused a lot of cursing and apologies, mainly from Chuuya who apologized for cursing. The one time Atsushi cursed Akutagawa threatened to find a body of water and push him in, which caused them to explain that Akutagawa had actually pushed him into the water. Also, Atsushi went into a good ten-minute rant about how unfair it was that he was the only one who wasn't allowed to curse. Akutagawa joked about how he would let the children curse but not Atsushi which set Atsushi off on an even longer rant. At which point Akutagawa smiled slightly and Chuuya was overwhelmingly happy that Akutagawa seemed content.

Then there was the fateful knock. Halfway through a game when Akutagawa had just made Chuuya draw four, a light, upbeat knock sounded. Akutagawa went rigid at the sound, Atsushi grabbed his hand, and Chuuya groaned. The dumbass was back, not that he minded, but no one else needed to know that.

Chuuya rose to his feet and begrudgingly opened the door. Akutagawa tried to protest the fact that Chuuya hadn't even checked who it was but at that point, it was already too late. Dazai crashed through the door and immediately draped his arms over Chuuya's shoulders.

"Hello Chibi!" Dazai's eyes scanned the room and a devilish smile formed on his lips, "Are you playing Uno? Without me?"

"You're not allowed to play."

Dazai gasped dramatically and placed a hand on his chest. "Are you worried your pride is going to be hurt when I win?"

Chuuya snorted, "My pride is already thoroughly bruised by the reigning champ, Akutagawa."

"He's won three times in a row," Atsushi said exasperately.

"After you won twice," Akutagawa protested.

"Only after the kids decimated us multiple times," Atsushi said.

"I lost every single game," Chuuya said begrudgingly.

Dazai snickered and grabbed cards despite his ban. Chuuya's eyes drifted to the door and pursed his lips as he found no one else. Mori must have wanted Kouyou to stay there. He rejoined the circle and picked up his hand. Dazai looked at his hand, snickered, and Chuuya knew his doom was signed off. Like he had expected Dazai won. The man had the entire group pounding their heads into the wall within the next seven rounds. His cards? Six wilds and a red four. Chuuya was ready to kill him even though he had seen it coming.
Luckily for Chuuya, everyone agreed with him and Dazai was immediately banned from playing. They dealt the next round and Dazai pouted as they went to extraneous measures to keep the cards away from him. The mackerel then decided to start whining and Chuuya couldn’t hold back his smile.

"So," Chuuya said, "How was your trip."

Dazai whining cut off sharply took a deep breath, and Chuuya prepared himself for the complaints he assumed would follow. "Well, first, Akutagawa, Gin's doing okay, and upon hearing you rescued Tachihara she said and I’m using her exact words, ‘Damn it Ryuu why do you always ruin my plans.'"

Akutagawa smirked and mumbled something but Chuuya couldn’t hear what and he doubted Dazai could either. Atsushi shifted closer to Akutagawa and leaned on him a little as if he had heard. Of course, Atsushi heard him, if Chuuya had learned anything it was that Atsushi heard everything. The Uno game continued and Dazai gave a very brief overview without going into details about what Mori wanted to talk about. Chuuya assumed it was because he wasn't supposed to and there were former hostages in the room who couldn’t be trusted. While Atsushi and Akutagawa had searched them for anything King might have planted, there was always a risk.

"Did you ever find that tracker, Dazai?" Highsmith asked as she set down a skip much to Atsushi's dismay. What was she talking about?

"Yeah, it was in Chuuya's shoe," Dazai said.

"You knew there was a tracker on one of us before we found it?" Chuuya asked his voice filled with anger.

Dazai nodded slowly and his eyes flickered over Chuuya. "It was part of the deal I made with King."

Chuuya's chest exploded. Right, he forgot about that bullshit. "You know you never cared to tell me what shit you promised him," he hissed. He set down a reverse and glared as many daggers at Dazai as possible.

"Chuuya," Dazai started.

"Yeah, whatever, either tell me what you said or just stay quiet. You'll change the subject anyway."

There was silence. "I'll tell you later."

"Don't bother," Chuuya said, he set down his hand and said he forfeited. Akutagawa looked over at him with a concerned expression, but Chuuya didn't return eye contact. He stood up and left the room without looking back. Dazai called after him but he kept walking. He passed their room and resigned to get some air, before heading over to the staircase.

"Chuuya~"

He moved faster and once he was in the stairwell he took off, running down them as fast as he could. He made it to the bottom and burst out into the entrance of the hotel, before quickly navigating out of the building and onto the sidewalk outside. He ran about a block, passing a few restaurants, stores, and bars before he slowed down and decided to head back. He turned around and found Dazai bent halfway over and panting. Chuuya rolled his eyes. Drama queen. He walked swiftly passed Dazai with full intentions to leave him there to die, but the other man grabbed his arm before he could get very far.
"Wait, you're right I should have told you already."

"I never said anything like that, you just don't have the courage to tell Atsushi and Akutagawa so you have to tell me separately. You're too afraid they'll make you into a villain."

"That's not true, Chuuya."

"Than what is? Because half of what comes out of your mouth lies."

Dazai frowned. "Are you talking about where I'm working again?" What? "I already told you I'm still working for the port mafia, what more do you want?"

Oh. Why was that the first thing he thought of? "No that's not what I'm talking about. I'm just saying that in general, you tend to lie every other sentence at least."

"Look, I don't know what you want me to do but at least let me tell you about the deal, I shouldn't have kept that from you for this long."

Chuuya crossed his arms and pursed his lips but looked up at Dazai expectantly. The bandage wasting device shoved his hands into his pockets and started. "When we were still in King's captivity, he showed up at one point after I told one of his men that I had a proposition. King came and he said it was going to have to be an extremely good deal for him to let both of us go. I said that if he let us go he could put a tracker on us. Of course, that wasn't good enough for him and he wanted more information then what I was willing to give. So he told me exactly what I had to tell him and I did. He put a tracker on one of us and let us go. I went to Highsmith to confirm my suspicion that he had put it on you."

"What did he want you to tell him?" Chuuya asked. Dazai fell silent and made no sign of answering. "So when it comes down to what's really important you won't tell me?" He still didn't reply. "Thanks, Osamu, I feel so much better." Chuuya stomped back to the hotel.

Day 16:

The tension in Akutagawa's gut hadn't disappeared since Dazai had returned. Atsushi stayed close to his side the whole time which both relieved Akutagawa and made him panic. If Dazai noticed how close they seemed to be, he was afraid the older man would think something happened. Which something did happen, but it was almost as if it hadn't actually happened, and they hadn't mentioned it once since it happened. He wasn't quite sure how he felt about not talking with Atsushi but he wasn't sure he wanted to bring it up. Despite that, he struggled to make eye contact with anyone. Everything felt distant and separated from himself. The entire course of the Uno game had barely registered to him. He had slowly been disconnecting as the day progressed and Dazai's return had substantially worsened the feeling.

Once Dazai and Chuuya had disappeared the walls grew no further apart, in fact, the room had continued slowly closing in around him and an overwhelming pressure to get out festered in the pit of his stomach. Atsushi seemed completely oblivious to his rising state of panic and heightened awareness of his surroundings. He didn't blame his partner, Akutagawa had remained fairly quiet all day, so it wasn't like his distance was a sudden development. The whole morning he'd felt off but his growing distance from reality made his nerves tense.
Atsushi and Highsmith started a conversation after the end of the round and Akutagawa could barely understand the topic changes. He understood an eighth of what they said before his head felt too crowded to stay put, so he left. He easily slipped out figuring that if he was back within the next few minutes no one would notice.

The noises that swarmed his head slowly quieted. Chuuya stomped up the hall sending his thoughts straight back into a loud cluttered mess and he disappeared inside their room. The door slammed shut behind him and Akutagawa’s body tightened. Did Dazai tell him? When he didn’t see his old mentor following he figured it would be a bit before he returned. With a deep breath to ease the tension in his body, he trekked over to the stairwell and used it to get outside.

The air was fairly cold and the wind stung against his skin but anything was better than being stuck inside of that cramped room. Several cars sped by and he evaluated the small buildings across the street, trying to ground himself in reality. He headed back towards the hotel after a couple of minutes and stopped abruptly as he caught Dazai entering a bar across the street. His eyes instinctively narrowed at the sight and his head screamed at him to go back inside and ignore the older man’s actions. His feet started to head toward the bar before his body had been instructed to do the opposite. Something about this was off. He knew Dazai would see him coming but he still decided to try to sneak over.

He made it across the street and peeked through one of the two large windows. Dazai was sitting alone at a table in the back and his finger tapped to the rhythm of something. Or was it rhythm? Was it something else?

A man stepped up to the table and slid in across from Dazai. Akutagawa’s eyes widened as the man glanced over his shoulder. Bradbury.

Akutagawa pulled himself out of view as his already jumbled thoughts swarmed with confusion. Several ideas flooded his head but one stood out more than the others. Bradbury was working for the Port Mafia. Atsushi had told Akutagawa that there was an informant for the Port Mafia under King, but he hadn’t imagined it was anyone that high in status.

The door opened and he was almost able to duck into the general store next door, but Dazai’s cheeky smile stopped him in his tracks.


No. At least that would have been his answer if his tongue hadn’t been paralyzed in place. Now he wished he had told Atsushi where he was going. If he had the tiger would have checked on him by now.

His entire body shook as he followed Dazai into the bar. He made sure to shove his hands into his pockets so the shaking wouldn’t be as obvious. Bradbury nodded at him as their eyes met and Akutagawa immediately broke eye contact. The rest of the bar was about halfway filled and most of the customers were busy with something else. The bar top was what the main space occupied, which gave the bartender plenty to do and only a couple of the other tables had occupants. None of the conversations caught his attention though his head was too clouded to tell what any of the topics were.

He sat next to Dazai and immediately failed to comprehend what they were talking about. The space around him had become the walls of a small box where he was the only thing enclosed. He couldn’t see what was outside but everyone else knew what was inside. Something small and weak. The walls seemed to cave in around him and his legs were glued to the floor by the strongest adhesive he knew. Shame.
Bradbury knew exactly what Akutagawa did. He knew exactly what Akutagawa had told King. He knew exactly what Akutagawa had done and planned to do. Worst of all he knew how quickly Akutagawa had turned on Dazai and the others. Dazai probably knew all of it too. He would have tried to figure out how much had been leaked through Bradbury, and if Bradbury was really Mori’s informant, he would tell Dazai everything.

Akutagawa couldn’t breathe, he couldn’t feel his lungs and he couldn’t feel any other part of his body. He could only sense the intoxicating darkness he was being dragged into. The same darkness he thrived in, the same darkness he rested in the same darkness he consumed every day. Yet it no longer welcomed him. It spat at his feet and tormented him by pulling every insecurity out from behind his flesh and drowning him in his weakness. However, this darkness was the only place he knew how to live. If it had taught him anything over the years, it was that there was no escape. Not after his entire world had been sewn into its flesh.

A hand rested on his shoulder and Akutagawa jolted back into the moment. Reality slammed against him as his surroundings came back into his conscious and he tore his shoulder out of Dazai’s grasp. His lungs burned and his throat was dormant, but the one attempt he made to breathe was met with failure.


He looked away from Dazai but didn't respond. He couldn't. His vision swam and he attempted to breathe again but with no success. His entire body was rigid and tense and no matter how much he urged it to let up it wouldn’t. If he couldn't figure out how to breathe he was going to be an utter burden to everyone. Well, more of one than he already was.

Dazai talked to him in a hushed voice and helped him through a breathing exercise. It managed to ease his panic enough to appear normal.

"Are you okay?" Dazai asked as soon as he had straightened himself upright.

"Yeah," Akutagawa's head still spun but at least he could breathe again. For the most part, the walls were back to the way they were, but everything still felt distant to him. He didn't have any solution to fix it and resigned to feeling weird for the rest of the day. He figured no one would really care anyway, so he'd keep it to himself.

Dazai's eyes scanned over him once more before he returned to his previous conversation with Bradbury. They talked about how King was in an uproar about several things. One, Akutagawa had just left. Two, he knew some information had been copied and taken. Three, he had lost all chance at finding the Jump Drive. This caught Dazai’s attention and inquired for more information when, much to Akutagawa's dismay, Bradbury told Dazai that Akutagawa would know more. Right. His hand wrapped around the Jumpdrive that was still hidden in his pocket.

Akutagawa wasn't sure how to interpret Dazai's reaction. He seemed almost concerned, maybe a little agitated, but nothing explained why. Akutagawa's chest seized up again and he froze in place. The panic had returned with an overwhelming vengeance. He held it back as well as he could and only let little pieces slip out in sudden, quick breaths. Bradbury informed Dazai that there was nothing else he had to give and took his leave. Dazai typed something quickly into his phone and offered a hand to Akutagawa to help him up but he didn't accept. Not after his panic attack. He couldn't admit to Dazai that he needed the help or that it was welcomed so he made sure to push it away. They headed back to the hotel and almost remained silent the whole way. Almost.

They walked through the front doors and stepped around the line that had formed in front of the
They hit the button for the elevator and each second they had to wait for it to arrive was torturous for Akutagawa. He could feel every little glance Dazai gave him and could barely stand the pressure. His breath sped up again and he begged for his throat to not choke out the air.

"So, Akutagawa," Dazai started and Akutagawa immediately regretted ever leaving the hotel room. He would have rather broken down in there than be standing beside Dazai. "Before you left, about the things I said, um." He paused.

The older man opened his mouth before he shut it again and the elevator could not get there any sooner. He was wrong. The elevator arrived and an overwhelming thought dawned on him. They were now going to be in a confined space alone for at least thirty seconds, hopefully, less. The doors shut and nothing could keep him from regretting their decision to take the elevator.

"I don't know what to say," Dazai kind of laughed, but it was more of a painful way to try to lighten the mood. It didn't work. "Look, I, I am, I'm still not sure how to say this, but I'm-" The doors opened and Dazai immediately closed his mouth as Atsushi tumbled right into them. Both of them caught him and he looked up in surprise.

"Akutagawa!" The boy's eyes were laced with concern, but once he realized Akutagawa and Dazai were together the concern only grew.

They stepped out of the elevator and Atsushi started frantically asking where Akutagawa had been.

"I stepped outside for some fresh air and got a little sidetracked," he explained, "I was going to try to be back before you noticed so you wouldn't freak out, sorry."

"No, that's okay you don't have to apologize, I was just worried because Chuuya was all mad and Dazai wasn't back yet and you had disappeared, and then Highsmith disappeared. I figured out about a minute later that she and Chuuya had resumed arguing and everything got out of hand quickly. Basically, what I'm trying to say is I'm glad you're alright, both of you, and if Chuuya sees you Dazai he may kill you. He's not in a good mood."

"Really?" Dazai asked excitedly. He rushed to the room and as soon as he opened the door a chair flew out. He narrowly avoided it and slowly leaned his head inside.

There was silence from the room he had just attempted to enter and when Akutagawa made it to the entrance he could tell that Chuuya hadn't been trying to hit Dazai, but Highsmith. Which didn't make sense because Highsmith was still technically an illusion.

Atsushi rushed into the room and started trying to calm Chuuya and Highsmith down which had the opposite effect and caused both of them to point their fingers at each other, which solved nothing. Akutagawa let out a little sigh and wanted to groan but held it back. His eyes briefly met Dazai's but the older man seemed to contemplate something briefly before turning away from him. Akutagawa knew what Dazai had wanted to tell him. He knew everything Akutagawa had done. He would have wanted to tell Akutagawa he was disappointed in him.

Akutagawa walked into the room with a tight knot in his stomach and barely any capability to breathe. Dazai's disappointed gaze dug into his skin. He swore that water dared to rush past the rims of his eyes but life be damned if he was going to break. Not a chance while Chuuya and Highsmith were going at it.

Their arguing grew louder and despite Atsushi's best efforts, it grew far worse. Akutagawa didn't attempt to stop them, despite how stupid it was. All they were doing were screaming curses at each other. Well, mostly Chuuya was cursing, Highsmith was coming up with clever retorts, but Chuuya
also came up with a couple. He had given up after the end of the previous day. At least for the most part. Atsushi eventually backed away from them and the three onlookers just stared silently at them.

Atsushi turned to Akutagawa with worried eyes and rested a hand on his arm. Akutagawa wasn't sure what happened but that touch caused all of the air in his lungs to leave him and not in a good way. The care in Atsushi's eyes made him sick and Dazai eyes made his entire insides feel explosive. The shouts around him rang out and pushed into his overly crowded mind, heightening all of his loud thoughts. His heartbeat picked up speed and once again he every last bit of air had left his lungs. All clarity in his line of sight vanished and complete panic enwrapped him.

Without any warning, his legs collapsed under him. Atsushi yelled his name and the other shouts stopped. Someone else grabbed him but he couldn't tell who. Nothing made sense. He had gotten over the panic. He had pulled through the trigger from earlier so why was it back? He grabbed at Atsushi's shirt as all feeling in the rest of his body disappeared. There was no longer a sense of noise and he couldn't comprehend anything happening around him. This feeling wasn't new but what had caused it? He had pushed through the previous panic.

The elevator. He had tried to calm the panic back then but suddenly gotten distracted and it must have lingered. He closed his eyes tight and with only a slight realization of a feeling, managed to suck in some air. He started to feel the rise and fall of his chest at the same time he felt Atsushi's hand making little circles on his back. He managed to comprehend that there was another argument taking place but he didn't try to figure out what was happening. At least not until he realized that the person yelling was Atsushi.

"I told you I don't know," Dazai said.

"Bull shit!" Atsushi yelled, "You had been talking with him for some time, you must have triggered this!"

"He did freak out when we were together and yes I probably caused it but I didn't say anything."

Atsushi inhaled deeply but before he could yell again Akutagawa tapped his chest to signal that he was present. Atsushi looked down at him as he started to shift. All four of the others protested as he tried to sit on his own but he didn't listen. His entire body trembled and shivered as he forced himself to move. He wasn't going to be able to sit up. With that realization, he lowered himself back into Atsushi's arms with some trouble but managed. Even after Atsushi started holding him up again, his body didn't stop shaking.

"It wasn't Dazai's fault," Akutagawa said, his voice also trembled, "At least not purposefully."

"See," Dazai said exasperatedly. "I definitely caused it, but that doesn't mean I know how."

Akutagawa took a deep breath and his eyelids begged for him to sleep, but he refused. "I just panicked, because that's what I tend to do."

"Why?" Atsushi asked. His arms tightened around Akutagawa and he dug his head into his neck. This both turned Akutagawa's face a shade darker and caused a new dose of panic to threaten to rise. Thankfully, Atsushi's comfort, though mildly embarrassing, was enough to help him suppress it. "Why did you panic?"

He shrugged. "I don't know."

Atsushi lifted his hand and glared down at him. "As far as I've seen you normally have a trigger."

Shit. Was he really that easy to understand?
"Was it because of the informant?" Dazai asked.

"The what?" Chuuya snapped.

"I met with Mori's informant. Well, one of them," Dazai said.

Akutagawa nodded slowly. "Yeah, I think."

Dazai popped up his brow and Atsushi pursed his lips.

"Yes, yes it was," Akutagawa said, "He was one of the main people working for me during the few days I was with King. You were talking with him and I just kind of panicked."

"Okay, that's what triggered you the first time, but what about this time? Was it for the same reason."

Akutagawa shook his head slowly. He wasn't even sure it was the elevator ride anymore. Something told him it was the fact that Dazai had been talking with him. No, it made more sense if it was about his unfinished words.

"I'm sorry," Akutagawa muttered.

"For what?" Atsushi asked.

Akutagawa's chest twisted into a thousand knots and he couldn't breathe again. He forced himself to take in a shaky breath and his head fell into his hands.

"For leaving. For betraying all of you."

Atsushi opened his mouth but closed it. His embrace tightened around Akutagawa’s shoulders.

"You don’t have to feel sorry," Dazai said. "I can't stop you from feeling that way, but it's my fault you left in the first place."

"Yes and no," Akutagawa said. "The dreams are what started making me consider it."

"But I pushed you to go, on purpose of course," Akutagawa lifted his head to look directly at him as did Atsushi. "What? I knew Akutagawa would need to know what King was like to avoid having him leave when I couldn't afford him to. However, my 'push' was more of a stab and a shove." He took a deep breath. "What I was trying to say on the elevator," Akutagawa's body tensed. "Was that I'm sorry. I know that doesn't make anything better, but I want you to know I am sorry. I hurt you. I hurt you far more than I meant to. I only meant to make you uncomfortable enough to make you leave, not hurt you as badly as I did. I went too far and I'm sorry."

Every thought in Akutagawa's head stopped. He was actually apologizing. Akutagawa was going to break. He could feel the pressure of everything inside of him trying to burst through the lock he was desperately trying to reinforce.

"Please remember to breathe," Dazai said.

Akutagawa took a deep breath as he realized he had stopped breathing. Again.

"Sorry," he said.

"You don’t have to apologize."

"Oh, sorry." Akutagawa bit his lip. He said it again.
Dazai chuckled and reached out. "Can I touch you?"

Akutagawa nodded stiffly and Dazai set his hand on his head. The older man pet his head a little before he pulled away. Akutagawa wasn't sure how to feel. Part of him wanted to melt, part of him wanted to cry, and part of him wanted to hug Dazai. Instead of moving he just sat in Atsushi's arms, not sure what he was supposed to do.

"Also," Dazai said, "All of the shit I put you through wasn't just about getting you to go to King's side for a bit, I can't pretend that. I'm also just an ass hole who decided to use you as an emotional punching bag for my stress. Sorry."

Akutagawa finally made eye contact with him. Dazai's arms wrapped around him and he melted into his touch. Atsushi let him take over holding up Akutagawa for a bit before Dazai seemed to try to give him back to Atsushi. Akutagawa interrupted the pass off by shooing both of them off and sitting up on his own. All of them seemed worried but once he was upright he leaned his weight against the wall as to not strain his still shaking frame.

"If you're willing," Dazai said slowly, "which you totally do not have to be, I was wondering if I could ask you about something the informant said."

"Dazai," Chuuya hissed.

"No it's okay," Akutagawa said. "What is it?"

"Do you know why King thinks you're the key to find the Port Mafia's Jumpdrive?"

Akutagawa swallowed and Chuuya's face went pale.

"They think that?" the redhead asked.

"Yes," Highsmith interrupted, "Because I told them that."

Chuuya glared at her. "So you are helping them? You little shit. You don't even bother to actually be here and then you try to act like you're actually trying to fight King-"

"You're lucky I didn't tell him exactly where it was!" Highsmith yelled, "Especially since he took the courtesy of putting a knife to my throat."

"What do you mean she's not here?" Dazai asked. "That's actually Highsmith, she's not using her ability."

Chuuya turned to him with his glare. "Yes, she is."

"Obviously not, after all, she's not that stupid. At this point, King will know she's not a neutral party and he knew where she was, it's far safer to be here in her actual body. Also, she's not paler than Akutagawa, that's how I can tell."

"I don't believe you."

Highsmith rolled her eyes and then closed them. Then there were two Highsmiths. Her still form and the specter beside her. Dazai reached out, touched her actual body's arm, and her spectral form dissolved. Highsmith smiled smugly at Chuuya and his ear flushed red.

Before he could start yelling Akutagawa spoke, "Yeah, about the jump drive," He reached into his pocket and grabbed it. "I have one question Chuuya." He opened his hand in front of them and
turned his attention to the older man. "What the fuck."

"Oh, you found it, impressive."

"It's not impressive, not when you decide to hide it in my fucking coat. What if I had accidentally destroyed it with Rashomon?"

Chuuya shrugged. "I figured if it was already in Rashomon no harm could be done."

"What the hell?" Dazai asked. "Out of everywhere, you could put it what were you thinking? How did you even get it inside of his ability?"

Chuuya smirked. "In my defense, I was really drunk when I decided to put it there, and it was a split-second decision. I somehow managed to get Akutagawa drunk as well and he had passed out at that point. I found a hole in one of his pockets, which when his ability was active, I figured wouldn't be noticed. So then I slipped in the Jump Drive." Dazai stared at him with either awe or disappointment. "Let's just be glad I remembered where it was and that Rashomon actually protected it."

"But that's not safe," Dazai said, "You told me it was safe."

"I said it was mostly safe, and I was right when I said it was in the safest possible place. It was such a dumb and drunk decision neither you nor King could figure it out."

"Because you put it in fucking Rashomon."

Chuuya shrugged, "It worked."

"How long has it been in my coat for?" Akutagawa asked.

"Four years."

Akutagawa and Dazai looked at each other then back at Chuuya. "That was a stupid decision."

"I was drunk!"

Akutagawa handed it to Dazai without a second thought. "I put extra information on it when I left King. I don’t know what it’s about but I hope it’s worth something."

"I have no doubt it will be."

Akutagawa’s face burned a little.

"Why give it to the bandage wasting device?"

"I’m not giving the one chance to reestablish the Port Mafia to someone who decided to hide it when he was drunk."

Chuuya glared at Dazai but Akutagawa easily read it as half-hearted.

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Day 16:
If Chuuya had purposefully put the Jumpdrive in Rashomon, Dazai might have thought it was clever. However, since he did it when he was drunk it was stupid. Who hides something that important when they’re drunk? Dazai had been in charge of hiding it before but he had never fathomed Rashomon would be a good idea.

He rolled his eyes and sat up in bed. The other three in the room were asleep. Highsmith had agreed to meet him in one of the public restrooms to discuss her role in moving their responsibility to one of the safehouses they were going to establish. Mori had been very clear about which safe house was first. While Dazai didn't like following what Mori told him, it helped that the safe house was similar to the Agency's office.

He slipped out from under the blankets and grabbed his laptop. Well, it wasn't his, but he had made it his own. His hand silently turned the handle to the room and he slipped outside. An hour, that's all he had until Highsmith showed up. He went to the bathroom and flipped open his laptop. He grabbed the Jumpdrive from his pocket and plugged it in.

It synced with the computer and he clicked on the interior files. He could delete it all. He could get rid of the Mafia entirely, but part of him couldn't. Part of him knew that they were needed in order to keep the balance in the city. If the Port Mafia disappeared the gangs in town would have room to do what they willed and the dark side of Yokohama would grow relentless.

He clicked through each file and evaluated the contents. The files Akutagawa had added were easy enough to find. There was a major gap between the date of the mafia's files and these ones. The contents of them stared up at him and his eyes widened as he memorized the floor plans, the general patterns of movement for each of the prisoners, and several other details. This could change everything. His smile grew as he scanned over more and more. Well done Akutagawa. He raced through the words until an idea clicked into place and his chest sank. He kept his features as neutral as possible but as his mind expanded the idea, fear coiled in the pit of his stomach. It couldn’t be the only way to win. The deeper the fear dug its fangs into him, the more certain he was. It had to be that way, it was the only viable option.

Day 17:

The morning started before five A.M. Dazai woke Chuuya and the other two much to their dismay as Highsmith roused the other room. Chuuya swore, Atsushi groaned, and Akutagawa frowned deeper than normal. They somehow managed to get everyone out of the hotel and down to the parking lot without too much fuss. The three children with them couldn't keep their eyes open past the elevator ride, but Akutagawa used Rashomon to carry them.

Atsushi appeared to nearly have a heart attack when the van they approached was not the one they had been using. That one was too small to fit all of them, so Dazai had taken the time to acquire another, larger van. Akutagawa also helped Atsushi by supporting half of his weight after the shock. Dazai smirked when Akutagawa tried to comfort him. They had grown closer than Dazai had expected.

Chuuya took the driving position and once everyone was accounted for Dazai started giving him directions. They took a longer path than they needed just in case they were being followed, as always. When they finally arrived at the little corner where the large building stood, he climbed out
of the van and resolved to only bring Chuuya with him inside. The two of them walked in and when Dazai presented the keys with him at the front desk they pointed him to the correct floor, even though he already knew which one it was.

When they arrived at the floor they found on large office space, a bathroom, and a small kitchen. There were no signs that anyone could live here, but it would have to do. The office space had several desks set up, chairs, and a couch. The few lights provided a dull glow and kept most of the room fairly dark. The walls were barren except for the couple windows and the floor was a bland gray. The kitchen didn't have anything besides a fridge, a microwave, and the same dull colors. They could make this work. After a few minutes of evaluating what they would need they returned to the van.

Dazai gave the keys to Atsushi and gave him and Akutagawa the task of slowly bringing everyone up to the floor. Highsmith already had her task and with a nod left the main group. He and Chuuya went out to buy food and bedding. The trip took a couple of hours and once they returned they found everyone in the office. They had already begun a game of Uno and Highsmith had returned. Both of them brought the bags in and Dazai tasked Atsushi with helping Chuuya while he went to observe the game. After all, he had done enough work for one day.

It wasn't long until everything was set up and Atsushi and Chuuya returned to the group. With the few things they had bought the space was infinitely homier. Sleeping spaces would be an issue but they could figure that out later. Unsurprisingly, Chuuya and Highsmith started arguing under their breath, about the additional benefits of playing Uno? They both argued for the same side but somehow turned it into an argument on who was more right when they were both right. As soon as they started Akutagawa's face turned dead and Dazai couldn't help but chuckle. Chuuya had full right to be pissed at her, but they did need Highsmith in order to defeat King for real this time. At least in their current position they did. Her ability was of great use to them. Atsushi grabbed Akutagawa's hand, and the gesture definitely did not go unnoticed by Dazai but he pretended to see nothing, like last time.

Atsushi's eyes moved to Dazai's and he seemed to be trying to communicate. Dazai instantly understood but he wasn't sure what he could do about it. With a sigh, he figured he could at least try to say something.

"Chuuya~" Dazai singsonged, "If you and Highsmith don’t mind I think every one is getting a little bored with the constant bickering." Chuuya's dark glare turned on him. "You have a right to be angry at her, but I don't want Atsushi and Ryuunosuke to suffer because of it."

The use of Akutagawa's given name seemed to catch the boy off guard but he didn't protest this time. Chuuya grumbled under his breath but stopped the argument much to Dazai's surprise. Highsmith also fell quiet.

The rest of the day passed slowly. Uno grew boring after a few hours and they were left with barely anything to do but to try to make the space they were in a little more comfortable. The three kids started to play some sort of an imaginary game together and the rest of them tried to organize the space and make it inhabitable. Dazai discussed what they should do the next day with Atsushi, Akutagawa, Chuuya, and Highsmith, mainly going over supplies and figuring out what else they would need and divided up each task. He briefly talked with Highsmith and she confirmed the whereabouts of the last Riordan. He thanked her for checking and began fiddling with the files he had pulled off of the Jump Drive. There wasn't much to evaluate, but he liked to reevaluate each piece for anything he might have missed the first time he looked at each location. He ran through multiple predictions of where everyone would be moved next, a few standing out more than the others.
At one point he called Akutagawa over and asked him if he had been to any of the places. He said no. Dazai thanked him anyway and muttered, "Good job getting this information."

Akutagawa nodded but Dazai was glad to catch the little smile that almost snuck into Akutagawa's lips before he stilled his expression.

When the day ended, finding space for everyone to sleep had been difficult. There was a single couch in the corner of the room along with a recliner chair which everyone collectively decided the three little kids would get. Despite the fact that Dazai would prefer sleeping on the couch, their life would quickly become more of a shit show if they had three small gremlins who hadn't slept. The rest of them found various places on the floor and used blankets, or an air mattress if they were lucky enough to have one of the two Chuuya and he had bought, as their beds. He, Chuuya, Akutagawa, and Atsushi all laid by each other.

Several hours of silence passed and Dazai found it difficult to sleep. He was sure almost everyone was asleep, but the restlessness beside him told him that both Chuuya and Atsushi were awake. When the light whispering started he couldn't help but smile. The only people asleep were those whom Atsushi and Akutagawa had saved. Dazai didn't attempt to overhear Atsushi and Chuuya's conversation, but since they were directly next to him he heard every word of it. The way it started, did not look good for anyone to be able to remain asleep. Not with Chuuya's temper.

"Are you awake?" Atsushi whispered.

"Do you think I am?" Chuuya replied.

"I was just wondering."

"I'm sure you were wondering more than that if you talked."

Atsushi paused. "Why do you hate Highsmith so much?"

Dead silence.

"Besides that, there's got to be more than that for you to be so angry at her. I mean half of the things you argue about are pointless."

"Last time she infiltrated the Port Mafia, and she did some things that I can't forgive her for."

Dazai could almost hear the gears in Atsushi's brain turn as he waited to respond. "Why not? Is there really no way she can redeem herself?"

Dazai felt the anger that hummed around Chuuya lessen. "Go to bed tiger."

Atsushi conceded and rolled over. Another half-hour passed and Dazai was sure Atsushi was asleep but he could sense the tight muscles in Chuuya's back.

"What do you think about his question?" Dazai asked him quietly.

Chuuuya jumped slightly and turned to face Dazai. He shook his head. "I don't know. You seem to have forgiven her."

"Not really," Dazai said, "Her ability is valuable, that's about as far as any forgiveness goes for me. There's no way I'll let her as in on the plan as you are."
In the darkness, it was hard to catch the darkening shade of Chuuya's cheeks, but he swore he saw it. "Shut up, Osamu, you don't tell me anything."

"I do too," he protested.

Chuuya booped his nose. "Go to bed loser."

Dazai pouted but Chuuya turned back around before he could acknowledge it. Dazai closed his eyes but his mind buzzed with untouched ideas. They infiltrated every tired part of him and made his mind more awake than it already was. His thoughts traveled throughout the stream of ideas and he paused on a very curious strand. The main basin of the idea was intriguing and the path it followed struck a strong chord with him. He knew keeping everything secret wasn't good for either Atsushi or Akutagawa's chance of defeating King. They needed all the information they could get, so why keep anything secret anymore? It wasn't like they were going to tell Mori, so was there a need for all of the secrets?

~

Day 17:

Atsushi woke to find Dazai buzzing with energy and Chuuya sitting on a desk with a cup of coffee. The others were slowly waking and the amount of coffee that was being consumed seemed ridiculous. They had almost gotten through an entire package already, which both frightened and impressed him. The day started slow but once Akutagawa was awake and had also consumed an unreasonable amount of caffeine, Dazai had them leave.

They parted with their separate lists and Atsushi was glad to have time with Akutagawa again. They made it halfway through their list with only a little conversation but it was still nice. Eventually, Atsushi laced his fingers through Akutagawa's and the older man didn't protest. They walked through the remaining stores quickly and grabbed whatever the list said, along with some additional things Atsushi thought the kids would appreciate. That included treats and games. Akutagawa even gave him a few suggestions and warmth swirled in Atsushi’s chest whenever he did.

It was noon by the time they finished the list and decided to head back towards the office, or safehouse, or whatever it was. They were halfway back when Akutagawa stopped. The other man's hand gripped tighter in his own and he seemed to struggle to meet Atsushi’s worried gaze.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing is exactly wrong, I was just thinking, and struggling to bring up what I was thinking.”

Atsushi squeezed his hand reassuringly. “Whatever it is just say it, it’ll be okay.”

“Alright,” He paused, “Jinko we kissed.”

Atsushi’s heart slammed against his chest and quickly increased the speed at which it beat. His face warmed and where he held Akutagawa’s hand buzzed.

“It’s just that, I don’t want to pretend nothing happened. When Chuuya walked in, it made me realize something did or is still happening. I’m sorry if that makes you uncomfortable-;”
Atsushi placed his hand on Akutagawa’s cheek and made him meet his eyes. “It’s okay to bring it up, you don’t have to worry that I’ll get mad, I won’t. We should talk about it, I just don’t exactly know how to.”

He smiled and continued to hold Akutagawa’s cheek as the older man closed his eyes and took a deep breath. His eyes reopened.

“Thank you, sorry, I called you Jinko.”

Atsushi chuckled. “It wasn’t filled with malice so I don’t mind.”

“That was the problem before?”

“That and you had screamed it every time you tried to kill me so it made me uncomfortable.”

Akutagawa’s head snapped to the side. He pulled Atsushi towards one of the many coffee shops they had passed without explanation. The doors opened and much to Atsushi’s surprise Dazai, Chuuya, and Highsmith were inside. He frowned as he realized that Chuuya and Highsmith were arguing with Dazai. He wasn’t sure if this concerned him or brought him happiness. On one hand, Chuuya and Highsmith must have agreed on something, on the other hand, it was at Dazai’s expense.

The rest of the shop was fairly full only one table was vacant and the yellow walls brought joy to him with how sunny the room felt.

"I thought I saw the van," Ryuunosuke said as he let go of Atsushi's hand and moved towards their friends. Atsushi followed.

"Oh good, you two made it!" Dazai said happily. Highsmith glared at him and Chuuya growled. "I know you aren’t psyched about this, but they'll need to know sooner or later. This way we won’t have to tell anyone else."

"Fine," Highsmith sighed.

"No, not fine," Chuuya said.

“Come on, Chuuya~, Akutagawa leaving us has opened my eyes~“

Chuuya snorted, “That’s a load of bull. I can see you snickering to yourself.”

"Chuuya~ if we hear Highsmith's parts we'll know more about what happened than we already do~."

Chuuya opened his mouth but shut it again. What were they talking about? Atsushi couldn't think of any related topic, except for...what happened last time Dazai and Chuuya fought King.

"Fine," Chuuya grumbled. "But only because we'll also gain information."

"Great!" Dazai said happily, "Akutagawa, Atsushi, please sit down, we're going to be here for a while." They both did as he said. "Who wants to start?"

"This was your idea tall ass," Chuuya grumbled. “Besides it started with you anyway.”

"Alright, I suppose my idea I get to start," Dazai said, "Well, I had a realization last night, neither of you has any idea what transpired last time. So, we're going to tell you. It's going to take a while."
Atsushi sat straighter in his chair and focused his attention on what Dazai said. He wasn't sure why Dazai had decided this all of a sudden but Akutagawa seemed more than ready to hear the story so he decided he was as well.

~

Day 16:

“And he is totally bull shitting Chuuya, again!” Kouyou yelled as she continued complaining to Gin. The younger woman didn’t mind letting Kouyou complain but she wished there was some news that didn’t just involve double black. “Akutagawa totally knows Dazai is lying. When Dazai elaborately tried to convince us he was on our side Ryuunosuke gave him the ‘you dumb bitch what the fuck’ look.” Gin could imagine it at that very moment. At least she got a little update on Ryuu before they returned to Chuuya central.

Gin smiled and continued to nod her head every once in a while as she sipped her tea and stared through Kouyou to enter her own thoughts. The boss stepped through the threshold of the door into the living room and Kouyou immediately stopped from explaining all of the reasons he wasn’t a mafia member.

“Let’s just hope Dazai can do his job and retrieve the doctor while maintaining his lies. Gin are you ready to scout around the area again?”

She stood up, immediately bowed, and rushed passed him. Anything to get away from the Dazai rant. Again, the updates were nice, but it was beginning to be a bit much, especially since all she wanted to hear were things about her brother. She was very happy he was back but also concerned about his well being. Then again, he had Atsushi by his side, so really, she had nothing to worry about.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for being patient while I figured out what I was doing next. I wanted to post this chapter sooner but then school hit me real hard with the workload. I hope you enjoyed the chapter and I hope y'all are excited about the next update because I am!!! These next to chapters are going to cover a lot of content and are kind of just CHAOS. I'll explain more in the beginning notes next month so I won't take to much of your time, hope to see you then (・أس��)。

If you wanna talk I have a tumblr twitter or you can use the comments (ง๑̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̀ ﾔﾟ ﾀ ★)(ง๑̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̀ ﾔﾟ ﾀ ★)

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