take courage that you're not alone
by tunnelOFdawn

Summary

Natsume Takashi is the worst siren that Tanuma Kaname has ever met in his life. He isn’t terrible in the sense that you cry out, “Oh god, a carnivorous sea creature is out to lure me to my death!” He is terrible in the sense that you can’t help but coo, “Aww, what an adorable little dear!” And when you’re a siren, that’s not at all a compliment. Frankly, Tanuma is embarrassed for Natsume.
Life in a rural Japanese town is a quiet sort of life rife with bucolic splendor. It’s midsummer and the sun is radiant. A light blue sky plays canvas for puffy white clouds that seem like cotton balls glued onto a child’s simple drawing. A summer’s breeze gently ruffles clothing and hair. The air is heady in its freshness, no sign of humidity or big city pollutants. It’s a beautiful day out there.

Yet all the birds’ chirping and whistling wind could not mask the crackle of broken twigs and heavy panting as Tanuma flees a hulking black specter of a youkai. His legs fly as his arms pump in fear. Adrenaline electrifies his lean form into flight. His feet barely skim grass and dirt before being forced into more frantic movement.

Tanuma curses his weak spiritual abilities. He can barely see youkai and even now as he is chased, all he can see is the vague silhouette of a youkai that dwarfs him many times over. He has no idea how he managed to antagonize this silent youkai into chasing him. And oh, what a chase! It’s only been a few minutes but Tanuma can feel the strain of the chase weighing heavily on his body. He has never had a strong, healthy body. As a child, he had been sickly and even now his body was plagued with the remnants of his childhood weakness.

Soon enough, Tanuma reaches the part of the forest that encircles a sprawling saltwater lake. In a last ditch effort to get the youkai off his scent, Tanuma plunges into the lake headfirst, holding his breath and bracing for impact. With the speed the youkai has been chasing him and how far off he is, Tanuma figures the youkai will catch up to him in a minute or two and it would take a few minutes for the coast to be clear (hopefully).

Tanuma swims across the lake in an effort get as much distance as possible. After about two minutes, lungs burning, he tentatively resurfaces to clear waters with no youkai in sight. A deep inhale and exhale of relief quickly turns into a choked gasp as a soft masculine voice whispers, “Hello,” into his ear. Tanuma is not ashamed to admit that his choked gasp became a girlish shriek of fear as he flailed around in the clear blue waters of the lake.

A sense of dread creeps up on Tanuma, raising the hairs of his nape and make his heart pound, as he slowly turns face-to-face with the source of that chilling voice. A finely-formed face, with amber slits for eyes, rosebud lips, and wet dusty-blond hair choppily hacked off to his jaw, peers back at him. He looks as young as Tanuma is, and for all that Tanuma can clearly see him from the neck up (he can vaguely make out a slim torso through the water), there is an element of wrongness resonating in his bones.

The boy repeats himself in that soft voice of his, “Hello. . .Who are you?” There is a stilted undertone to his words, as though the boy isn’t quite sure of his words—isn’t quite sure how to speak to other people.

“Oh, I’m, uh, Tanuma. Tanuma Kaname.”

“Hello, Tanuma Kaname. I am Natsume Takashi. I live here.” And that very last sentence makes Tanuma’s blood run cold because this Natsume has slit eyes and now he’s saying he lives here, in this lake. But Tanuma can see him, for all his weak spiritual abilities, and that means, this youkai is powerful enough to let himself be shown. He doesn’t even look threatened by a human in his domain and that sort of quiet confidence shakes him more than that huge youkai that chased him before.
“Sorry for intruding then! I’ll just, uh, get out of your way then.” Tanuma gives his best interpretation of a harmless-friendly-human smile and quickly sets off on a swim back to land (he can only hope this youkai sees no benefit in pursuing him on land).

When Tanuma peers back, he notices Natsume smile a strangely sad smile as he stares back in silence. As absurd as it sounds, Tanuma feels a sense of regret well up in him for his abrupt departure.

“It wasn’t an invitation for you to leave. It’s been so long since a human has come to visit,” Natsume says plaintively once Tanuma has finally hoisted himself out of water and plopped himself on ground. Tanuma stares back in mute silence, enthralled by the beseeching nature of Natsume’s limpid amber eyes and his sweet, gentle voice. “Won’t you come back to me?” his voice croons, resounding with an ethereal quality.

Paralyzed by some unknown element, Tanuma mutely watches as Natsume’s slim form swims towards him. He doesn’t use his arms at all, propelled by an unknown force. When the water levels begin to lower for Natsume, Tanuma becomes hypnotized by the view he is now afforded—the way Natsume’s lower torso and pelvis undulate in movement. The sun magnifies the glint of silver scales. Closer now, those silver scales hug Natsume’s hips until Tanuma realizes that from the hips down, Natsume is all scales.

Natsume is beautiful. His tail shimmers in the water and in the sun. Gold and silver scales number equal on his sinuous tail. His tail is over a meter long—delicate-looking but altogether quite powerful. Its slimmness is perfect for agility and some part in Tanuma knows that if he were in water, he would never be able to escape. If he could feel anything but spellbound awe, he’d shudder in fear at how close death is.

Tanuma manages a sharp inhale as Natsume comes far, far too close to him. Gracefully slipping halfway out of the water and onto ground before him, Natsume leans forward into the crook of Tanuma’s neck. Tanuma can hear him inhale deeply before leaning in forward even more until Natsume’s nose is flush to his neck.

When Natsume’s head slightly tilts up, Tanuma can feel sharp, serrated teeth graze his pulse point.

Chapter End Notes

Title definitely influenced by Andrew Bird’s song Take Courage.

Hope you’ve enjoyed this first chapter! Open to concrit. This is my first chaptered fic and with dialogue too! I’ve only done character studies so far in my forays into fanfiction. I have a vague idea where I want to go (vague because I'm an impulse writer and haven’t outlined everything yet), so bear with me.

Very much so open to kudos and comments. ;)

Also on tumblr as tunnelOFdawn. I'm always looking for blogs to follow.
Chapter Summary

we are all powerless in the face of nature. what can we do when the storm hits, if not ride it out?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Scorching lust burns its way through Natsume’s veins, setting him alight. It heats his body into febrile fervor. His cheeks glow with a red flush that complements pupil-blown eyes. Natsume is deaf to the world outside him. Those singing birds and that murmuring wind cannot compete with the rhythmic beat of that human’s heart and Natsume’s own heavy breaths. There is a thunderstorm trapped in Natsume’s bones and every beat of that heart is like lightning striking him. Natsume is drunk on the heady passion of lust.

Bloodlust and carnal lust consume Natsume alike. He wants to do more than teasingly scrape his teeth across Tanuma’s lilywhite (with primal fear—the sort of fear Natsume’s siren call can never get rid of) neck. Yearning to devour Tanuma whole, Natsume can only release a low keen of desire. He wants to latch his teeth on Tanuma’s neck and tear. Let burning blood paint his face and drip down his throat (Tanuma’s blood in him, where it belongs).

Tanuma is his, Natsume knows. His in all the best and worst ways. He wants to devour Tanuma whole and let him make his home where he belongs—with Natsume, in Natsume, and never able to escape. Natsume wants to pluck the heart right out from Tanuma’s chest and feast on it (let Tanuma become a part of him).

Natsume wants to nip at Tanuma’s neck and suck him dry of all his fears and sorrows. He wants to leave tender bruises on his neck and claim him in front of everyone. He aches with the desire to brush his lips against this human’s lips. He wants to peck his cheeks, his forehead—anywhere he can reach and let Tanuma know of his undying love. He wants to infiltrate Tanuma’s soul with his own and twine them together. He wants the tendrils of his soul to climb into, coil around, and trail into Tanuma’s soul. Always loving and never to be parted.

Let them spend lazy summer days together, Natsume wishes. Let them swim together in this lake of theirs. Let them meet each other’s kith and kin. Let them sleep away the coldness of winter. Let them gaze at flowers in full spring bloom. Let them laugh at the scarlet leaves in their hair in fall. Let them sing in pleasure. Let them admire each other in awe.

Perhaps it would be more apt to say that greed takes ahold of Natsume and galvanizes him into action. Because that’s what Natsume is: greedy in all the right and wrong ways. It’s not his fault, not at all. He can’t help it. Natsume Takashi is a siren.

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When the primeval gods still roamed the earth, bursting with power at the seams of their physical forms, that’s when it all started—the greed of sirens. A very, very long time ago, in the oceans of the world, there lived a god, the God of Oceans. He was a lonely god, the only god in his domain and
one of those gods who could never leave his domain, lest he turn the whole world into his domain. If he stepped one foot out of his waters and onto land, then there would no longer be land. Every step he took, the ocean would trail along behind him, drowning plants and animals alike. These primeval gods were too powerful to roam free and so by consensus, they all agreed to stay in their domains of water, earth, and air.

In his domain of water, the God of Oceans nurtured the plants and animals until his waters teemed with life. Yet, even then, he felt unbearably lonely. He yearned, desire, ached for companionship. And so he plucked the prettiest fish from the ocean and pricked his thumb for blood. When his blood fell upon the fish, a creature with the top half akin to his land sister’s humans and a bottom half with a scaly tail sprung fully formed from the fish.

It was a comely creature with eyes as slit as the ocean god’s and teeth as sharp as the ocean god’s. The scales of its tail were like pearls, gleaming with iridescence. The best part was that it could speak, but the lonely god never anticipated its first word. “More!” the creature keened plaintively, for you see, this creature, this siren, was imbued with the same longing for companionship that the God of Oceans had lived with for eons. But the problem here was that this creature was no god. It was not able to handle the vast, powerful loneliness of a god and so it was driven mad with longing for companionship. A chasm of greed opened up in this siren, leaving it so empty and hollow as it constantly searched for companionship.

Although the god selfishly created more of these sirens for his own sense of companionship, he was merciful enough to grant them the power to entrance all beings but their own race with the power of their voices. When they sang, the waters of the ocean begged to caress their form. When they sang, the birds of the air heeded their siren’s call and sang to them in return. When they sang, the humans of the earth flung themselves into the waters and fed the sirens with their hearts and souls. These siren’s calls helped soothe the ache of their loneliness, their greed for companionship. But even today, they still cannot help but hunger.

An unsteady prick of a canine yielding blood is all it takes to remind Natsume of what, precisely, he is doing (oh, god of waters, he’s forcefully entralling a living, thinking being into being nothing more than a living puppet for his own needs). Yet, he cannot help the quick darting of his tongue to lap up that lone drop of blood welling from this new wound. It’s a metallic taste to be sure, but it is sweet with the human’s essence.

With a grimace, Natsume pulls away from the human, no, Tanuma Kaname, and plunge himself back into the cool waters of his lake. For good measure, Natsume submerges himself into the water with coolness shocking him out of his fevered, lustful state. By now, Natsume feels the tendrils of his power withdrawing from Tanuma.

Natsume hesitantly remerges from the torso up, with a steadying hand on the earth, about a meter or so away from Tanuma. With a flush born of abject embarrassment, Natsume hazards a glance at Tanuma. That poor human is still pale with fear, fully feeling his fear, rather than experiencing it under a layer of cushioning nothingness. The human meets his eyes of his own free will with his face contorted into an expression of anger, the sort of anger you get when you experience the true breadth of your helplessness and powerlessness.

A mournful chirp escapes Natsume as he comprehends how badly he screwed up this meeting. Natsume wants to screw up his face and wail at his utter lack of control. He’s been so very lonely—lonely enough that he’s always aching and feeling a depressive lethargy. And now, the one time he could change his state of being (so alone and help me, I’ve been abandoned for far too long), he has
 messed it all up.

With a quiver to his lips, Natsume apologizes, “I’m sorry! Please forgive me. I couldn’t help myself. I know it’s no worthy excuse for doing *that* to you. . .” He cannot help but trail off as he searches for more words to express his regret and sorrow. He cannot help but watch Tanuma nervously lick his dry lips.

“What—what exactly did you do to me?” Tanuma asks in a wavering voice.

“I’m a siren. When I see a human who looks and smells as. . .” Natsume pauses with a look through his eyelashes, his voice lowering in shame, “good as you do, I can’t help but sing. Sirens, we’re born so very lonely. We can’t help it. Can’t, can’t help but *hunger*.

“I don’t want to kill you, of course! Those are just, um, very base instincts. I just want *all* of you in any way I can manage, which, uh, doesn’t really sound good, but I’m not like other sirens! In the sense that I’m not actually going to kill you. Honestly, I’m terrible at hunting humans. I’m pretty sure my grandmother mated with a human, for all that my mother apparently turned out to be a full-blooded siren. I mean, not that I ever met my mother. Died from a shark, you see, not that you’d want to see (very bloody, I’m told). . .”

Natsume cringes as he meets Tanuma’s befuddled stare. Honest to god, Natsume’s never been much of a rambler—not much a talker actually. But he just hasn’t spoken to anyone in so long that he can’t help but fill in the gaps with chatter. He lives in a lake completely closed off from any other body of water. The only access point to his home is just a spirit gate or portal that opens up every full moon. Frankly, he had stumbled upon this lake in one of his late night wanderings through the ocean, separated from his pod.

And for all that he had ended up alone here, he had figured that it wasn’t so different from his time in the ocean. Natsume had always been the odd one in his pod. After the death of his father, young Natsume had been found by his grandmother, who promptly left him to the care of the nearest pod and went off on her way alone to do whatever she did, like chasing sharks instead of letting them chase her and driving humans crazy without even using her voice (she particularly liked stealing fish off the tiny boats of those human fishermen and sometimes just pushing a human overboard into shallow waters with a cackle and a smile). His pod, like all other siren pods, liked to spend their time enthralling humans and feasting on them for sustenance.

Natsume was actually pretty terrible at the feasting-on-humans part. He never really had the killing instinct required to finish them off. Moreover, the one time he had mimicked a fellow siren in using a sultry croon and flirtatious words, he had immediately flushed a deep red and started sputtering in embarrassment when the human started to lean in for a kiss (the other sirens called that the kiss of death—feint a kiss and go in for the jugular before the human managed to muster enough of a fear-induced will to escape the hold of their voices). So yeah, Natsume hasn’t had his first kiss and human either yet. He mainly subsisted on just eating fish and what else he could scrounge up.

After a moment of mutual silence in which both Natsume and Tanuma mulled over Natsume’s embarrassing torrent of words, Natsume watched a tiny smile pull up the edges of Tanuma’s mouth. “So, I smell *and* look good, don’t I?” Tanuma chuckles with what Natsume classifies as a sort of a good-natured, easygoing amusement.

“Um, yes, can we, would you mind, if we started over, please? I wouldn’t mind making a friend,” Natsume says with a tentative smile. “I’m Natsume Takashi, a siren who definitely does not kill people.”

“Well, I’m Tanuma Kaname, a human who definitely doesn’t kill people and sweet sirens like you.”
Natsume inadvertently lets out a flattered little chirp at the phrase “sweet sirens”.

This human, Natsume dares to think, seems nice.

Chapter End Notes

Hope the dialogue flows well and is in character! I'm always open to input.

Very much so open to kudos and comments. :)

Also on tumblr as tunnelOFdawn. I'm always looking for blogs to follow.
knowing

Chapter Summary

will we know each other quick?
will we know each other slow?
as time continues to tick,
let's hope love is a smooth flow.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

(Tanuma is vaguely impressed with his suave delivery. He gives himself a mental pat on the back.)

Talking to Natsume is surprisingly easy, Tanuma discovers. There is a rhythm to the ebb and flow of their conversation that feels well-worn and familiar. It feels like coming home—to a home you built up frame by frame, tile by tile as your belongings become indistinguishable from one another. And when it storms, you huddle up together and listen to the symphony of raindrops following on your ceramic roofing. When the wind howls and moans, you take courage in the fact that you are not alone—no longer alone. What a nice home you have, you say to each other.

Tanuma and Natsume spend an hour or so in conversation and companionable silences. They talk about themselves: their hobbies (Tanuma admits to an interest in watercolor painting; in turn, Natsume reveals his fascination with origami, a fascination that oft resulted in sodden paper until he encountered a kōzo youkai who created very, very durable washi); their life’s ambitions (an artist, perhaps an art teacher, Tanuma muses; oh, I think helping the other youkai is enough of a job, Natsume says with a wry smile); their favorite colors (there’s beauty in a raven’s feathers—that black feather shining blue-purple; that deep blue that grows as you travel through the ocean depths; and so on and so forth.

(Do you remember when you made a new friend? And how you would begin to know each other, so slow and so quick that it seemed like your knowing was an inevitability, the clicking of a key slotting in, of an opened door. There was the thrill of learning something new and the thrill of being learned in turn. You exist in the moments between you and them. You’d ask each other questions, and discover points of intersection and points of divergence. It was a heady feeling making such a connection, wasn’t it? Don’t we all strive to enmesh in each other’s lives? Don’t we want to be part of something more than just individuality? We’re all social creatures in the end.)

That instant connection Natsume experienced echoes in Tanuma. And in time, this burgeoning friendship will alight with the passion of their desires (sparked by their first meeting and fed by their growing intimacy).

In time. . .(it’s a question of whether this time will be smoothly continuous or wracked with pauses, because if you listen closely, there is the crinkle of paper and the hiss of arrows).

Chapter End Notes
I might revisit this fic later when I regain motivation and interest. I figure if there's actually still subscribers, it's better to leave no one hanging, hence this short conclusion.

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