Akaashi soon provided an answer by rolling down his sleeve and revealing his tan slender wrist.

Even in the rather dim light, the names on Akaashi’s wrist glinted, catching the moonbeams and reflecting them back almost beautifully.

There they were, the names Tsukishima had cursed since they had appeared on his own wrist. Each one of them, each line, each character, the same as the one on his own. It would have been completely identical had Akaashi’s name been there.

This wasn’t Tsukishima’s wrist, however, and there was something different about seeing the names on someone else’s wrist. It made it feel more real, less dreamlike. These people really were made for each other.
Bokuto Koutarou, Kuroo Tetsurou...

The last name, of course, was not Akaashi’s name like it was on Tsukishima’s wrist. Instead, it was Tsukishima’s. Tsukishima Kei. It was written in gorgeous gold, glinting ever so slightly.

He had to repeat it over and over in his head. *That was his name.*

- Inspired by [The Emotions That Guide Us](https://example.com) by mini_cutie
Seven days before his thirteenth birthday, Tsukishima received a soulmate mark. Then, a little more than a month later, Tsukishima received the second one. The third one came the year after that.

It irritated him.

There wasn’t anything odd about him receiving his marks early, of course. Sometimes people's soulmates turned fifteen before they did. No, the most unusual thing about Tsukishima's situation was not that.

It was the fact that he had three names scrawled on the inside of his wrist instead of just one. He knew them all by heart, how each one was written out, how each one looked. They gleamed, all shiny and permanent.

Trust him, he had already tried getting rid of the names. Unfortunately, the names could not be scratched off or removed. They were permanent.

He had no qualms about the names on his wrist, of course. Early in his life, Tsukishima discovered that he liked girls and boys. Though other people found that strange, he did not.

The problem was he barely wanted one soulmate and then, of course, fate decided to curse him with two more. It was like whoever wrote these names onto people's skins loved to spite the Tsukishima family.

First, it was his grandmother who never received a name. Her wrist wasn’t empty now, though. She got her husband's name tattooed there, alongside her daughter's name and both of her grandsons' names.

That didn’t change the fact that she suffered for years, thinking she was never going to be loved. Now, she spent hours talking to Tsukishima and his brother, convincing them that, if the same thing happened to them, it didn’t mean anything. It had traumatized her.

Then, it was his mother. He used to think that his mother was invincible. Her soulmate proved that wrong quickly. Though things started out happily, by the time Tsukishima was born, the honeymoon period was over.

Stories about how happy Akiteru and their parents were before things got bad were just that: stories. Fantasies. There was a reason that Tsukishima's father was never found in their household.

The last straw was Akiteru, Tsukishima's own brother. Akiteru got two names on his wrist. Sadly, upon meeting those people, he found that his name wasn't on either one of their wrists.

He didn't try to hide that from Tsukishima, unlike other things. Akiteru didn't have a choice, in any case. The revelation had broken him and changed him as a person. He was gloomy for days, depressed, unable to really act cheery. He recovered eventually but there were times where he just stared at his wrist. It scared Tsukishima.

So, yes, Tsukishima had a problem with soulmates. Whoever assigned these things seemed to shit on every single person Tsukishima cared about.

That was why he didn't want three soulmates. That’s why he didn’t want to meet his soulmates. Each one of them only meant heartbreak and sadness.
To Tsukishima Kei, soulmates spelt trouble.
“No offense but I don’t believe in soulmates.” Tsukishima explained, taking his hand back and tucking it into the pocket of his jacket.

After all, he couldn’t worry about something that he didn’t believe in.

Tsukishima had met all three of his soulmates. Not all at the same time, of course, but he met one and then the other two in turn.

It wasn’t as mind-blowing or heart wrenching as he had expected, though.

Akiteru had used to talk about how everything seemed to slow when you finally met your soulmate. The world would crumble away around you and all you could see was your soulmate, all you could feel was your soulmate.

Akiteru even described a tug, like someone took your heart and pulled it towards that person, that destined one that you get to spend your entire life with.

For Tsukishima, it wasn’t one but three.

In any case, he didn’t feel any of that. During the Nekoma practice match, months ago, he felt a twinge for Kuroo Tetsurou but there was no tug, no world disintegration, nothing more than a soft flutter.

If Tsukishima hadn't known better, he would've compared the feeling to something he felt whenever he looked at beautiful people. Which, in fairness, Kuroo Tetsurou was. However, the fact that it felt that way went completely against what Akiteru had said.

So, of course, since there was nothing there, Tsukishima ignored Kuroo Tetsurou. He ignored the smirks the captain sent his way, ignored the way his heart beat a little bit faster. Instead, he kept his attention on the match. Well, as much as he usually did, anyway.

After all, volleyball was just a club and soulmates were just fairy tales.

It was the same for Bokuto Koutarou and Akaashi Keiji. He had to admit that, like Kuroo, the two of them were handsome. Especially Akaashi who had a smile that could probably stop hearts if he wished.

There was still nothing. Just that flutter that Tsukishima usually felt. It wasn't odd, the three of them
were pretty boys after all.

Tsukishima met the other two right as the Tokyo training camp started. Well, maybe not met because, technically, they didn’t know who he was. But they were there. Kuroo was there too.

Fate was funny like that, Tsukishima supposed.

Somebody called for him and he was pulled out of his odd thoughts. He set his water bottle down as he looked up from his position on the ground. He had been watching the match between Fukurodani and Nekoma. Not out of interest for either team, of course, but, rather, out of boredom.

It seemed that Fukurodani was winning but by a small margin. The game could easily be either team’s win. Such a close game was definitely more entertaining than a lot of the other games playing at the time.

Someone called his name again and, this time, Tsukishima stood, eyes scanning the extremely large gym.

The one who called was Sugawara. He knew this because the older teen was scrambling towards where Tsukishima was.

“Yes?” His voice was level and borderline unemotional.

Sugawara, however, was all smiles “I just wanted to tell you that we’re going up next.”

Tsukishima nodded at that and he bowed his head a little to show his appreciation. Sugawara was one of the people on the team that never really irritated Tsukishima. He tolerated the older teen and even, on a certain level, respected him.

“You okay? Something on your mind?” Sugawara’s voice was soft, almost motherly, and Tsukishima had to turn his eyes away as if simply looking at Sugawara would reveal his troubles.

“Well…” The word escaped his mouth before he could even decide on saying it. He didn’t know why he said that. He didn’t know why he wanted to confide in Sugawara. The older teen would never understand.

Even then, did he have something on his mind? Tsukishima supposed that he could classify his thoughts on his soulmates as ‘something that was on his mind’ but it wasn’t like he was worrying about it, was he? He simply just… let his mind wander.

Yet, Tsukishima still thought about it for a second before he turned his eyes to Sugawara, the words coming to mind almost automatically “Do you ever find it difficult to be with both Asahi-senpai and Daichi-senpai?”

The question was sharp and straight to the point, something completely expected when it came to Tsukishima. Everything about him was sharp. He was never the type to mince words or cut corners. In fact, Tsukishima was all corners, all edges, sharp and precise.

Maybe that was why Sugawara didn’t even flinch at the question. Maybe it was just so predictable that there wasn’t anything surprising about it.

“No.” The answer was just as sharp, just as straightforward.
Unlike Sugawara, Tsukishima was surprised and a little bit flustered “I’m sorry I—”

“You have three soulmates, don’t you, Tsukishima-kun?” Sugawara lowered his voice so it was just a little bit louder than a whisper. The older teen even went so far as to take Tsukishima’s hand just to turn it over. He pushed up the sleeve, fingers gentle and soft.

The skin there was slightly raised and a little mottled. There was a big patch that looked slightly darker than the rest of Tsukishima’s skin. There’s also streaks there that puffed up slightly, crisscrossing. From Sugawara’s knowledge, they all looked like scars.

In the very middle of all of it, clear as day, were kanji that gleamed. They looked metallic as they glinted, each one reading names that Tsukishima wished he could erase from his mind.

“Yamaguchi didn’t exactly tell me…” Sugawara sounded like he was thinking out loud or perhaps choosing his words carefully “But he posed a hypothetical that sounded too much like it fit you.”

Tsukishima cursed Yamaguchi at that moment, eyes narrowing a little as his lips formed a small scowl. It wasn’t as if he minded that people knew about his situation but it felt like betrayal hearing that.

“In any case, I don’t mind your question. I like telling people about how happy I am with Asahi and Daichi. It takes some work but, in the end, it’s worth it.” Sugawara pulled Tsukishima out of his thoughts again and Tsukishima’s scowl lightened a little “Do you worry about your soulmates?”

Tsukishima’s face hardened in response and it wasn’t exactly a scowl but more of a grimace, as if the idea of him even worrying about his soulmates was a wretched idea.

Sugawara apparently found the situation funny “It’s not something you should be upset about.”

“No offense but I don’t believe in soulmates.” Tsukishima explained, taking his hand back and tucking it into the pocket of his jacket.

After all, he couldn’t be upset about something that he didn’t believe in.

“I see.” Sugawara seemed saddened by this “Is that why…”

Tsukishima let Sugawara trail off, never completing the sentence for him. It wasn’t as if he didn’t want to but, rather, he didn’t know what the older teen was getting at.

Is that why his wrist looked fucked up? Why he never really participated in everyone’s excited chattering about soulmates? Why he never liked being around people who had already found their soulmates?

Is that why he was so messed up?

Tsukishima decided to leave it at that.
Chapter Summary

He could, however, understand why the giant wanted to. He had to if he wanted to be a regular. That was what everyone who played volleyball wanted. To play, to be able to have their time in the spotlight, to be able to shine in front of the crowd. To be able to score that one point.

Tsukishima thought it was stupid.

Chapter Notes

wow i haven't touched this story since forever but, trust me, i'm alive and still here. i hope this is an okay new chapter lmao

also, this story went through a really big change. if you were reading it before, you might've noticed that i completely removed three chapters and then like totally changed a huge part of the story. if you're concerned that i'm going to go a different direction with the plot, don't worry, i'm not.

i just quickly noticed that a lot of people started figuring out the plot twist way earlier than i expected. so, i needed to change the way i wrote the story so that the plot twist actually might surprise some people.

the only real change is that the story will be more in tsukishima's point of view and that pov changes will happen if i need that or if it's more fitting but this is mainly tsukishima's pov

that's it! thanks for reading this super long super boring author's note. onto the story!

Tsukishima walked, enjoying the silence that surrounded him. However, unlike how he looked on the outside, his mind was cloudy, perhaps because of what he had said to Yamaguchi.

Though he tried to keep an aloof appearance around the shorter boy, Tsukishima very much cared about him. The crestfallen look on Yamaguchi’s face did tug at something in Tsukishima’s heart. Yamaguchi had looked excited at the prospect of Tsukishima blocking his serves.

The blonde, of course, said no.

Tsukishima just didn’t want to stay up any longer than he had to. He knew how hard his other teammates tried and tried, to improve their skills or to gain new ones. He knew how hard people who played volleyball tried.

He had seen it all before.
It didn’t make sense to him. How they all tried so hard to achieve this goal that would only keep evading them. No matter how good Karasuno got, there would always be teams that were better, teams that would beat them no matter what.

Even if they got to be the best, which was honestly unlikely, then what? In the end, there would still be rising teams, constantly challenging them until they weren’t the best anymore.

What was the use of trying when all of it would be in vain anyway? What was the use when it was all just a never-ending cycle?

“Hey, four-eyes!”

Tsukishima almost stumbled at the sudden shout but he, thankfully, caught himself. He didn’t know if his heart was beating fast because of the adrenaline from the almost fall or because of the voice that called out.

He wanted to say it was the adrenaline.

“Wanna jump some blocks for us?”

There, standing at the entrance of the gym were two familiar strangers.

The one who called out to him was Kuroo Tetsurou. He was trying to wave Tsukishima over, his usual shit-eating grin spread across his face.

Next to him stood Bokuto Koutarou. Tsukishima never had the opportunity to talk to Bokuto until now but he knew the Fukurodani Captain well. Tsukishima supposed that Bokuto must know him pretty well too because there was no confusion on Bokuto’s face when he looked at Tsukishima.

At that point, the only thing that seemed to run through Tsukishima’s mind was ‘leave now’.

So, of course, he made an effort to, a polite smile on his face “Oh, actually, I’m done for the night.”

“What?” The two seemed appalled and their voices absolutely in sync. Tsukishima wouldn’t expect any less from two close soulmates.

Bokuto spoke first, shifting to lean against the doorway of the gym “There’s no point in us practicing if we don’t have a blocker! Please?”

“Why does it have to be me?” Tsukishima really tried to keep the irritation out of his voice but, it seemed, his fear of spending time with his soul mates started to turn into annoyance “What about the rest of Fukurodani?”

Neither Bokuto nor Kuroo answered Tsukishima’s question. Instead, it was the server from earlier, the one that met Tsukishima’s eyes.

Akaashi peeked from in between Kuroo and Bokuto, expression neutral “Bokuto spikes hard and he doesn’t get tired easily so everyone in Fukurodani left early to escape practice.”

Tsukishima’s heart lurched a little at that. He told himself it was because of his disappointment and not Akaashi’s gaze. What did he expect, anyway? Obviously, they wouldn’t be trying so hard to get him to block for them if the rest of the Fukurodani team was available.

_Curse those skipping idiots_.

As a last ditch effort, Tsukishima turned to Kuroo but even he just pointed to something behind him
“I’m busy training this useless giant.”

When Tsukishima glanced further into the gym, he quickly noticed that tall giant from their match earlier that day. The same one that seemed to be goading Hinata on. He was sprawled across the floor, apparently defeated, with volleyballs surrounding him.

At the sound of Kuroo’s voice, however, the giant perked right up “I’ll jump all of the blocks!”

“If you want to be a regular on the team, you need to practice on your receive!” Kuroo quickly retorted, words harsh and sharp.

At that, the giant slumped back down, defeated once again. Tsukishima scrunched his nose at that a little. It was hard for him to relate. He barely liked playing regular volleyball, he couldn’t imagine wanting to practicing blocks.

He could understand why the giant wanted to, though. He had to if he wanted to be a regular. That was what everyone who played volleyball wanted. To play, to be able to have their time in the spotlight, to be able to shine in front of the crowd. To be able to score that one point.

Tsukishima thought it was stupid.

“Anyway, Bokuto may not look like it but he’s one of the top five best spikers in Japan.” Kuroo pulled Tsukishima out of thoughts, wrapping his arm around Bokuto as if to further prove his point “He’d be really good to practice with.”

“He isn’t in the top three so don’t get your hopes too high up.” Akaashi spoke up next, reminding Tsukishima he was there.

“Keeeiji!” Bokuto shouted out in protest, a blush starting to dust his cheeks, before he turned to Kuroo with a slightly irritated expression “And you! Don’t just laugh!”

Kuroo ignored Bokuto’s protests and, instead, directed a handsome smirk towards Tsukishima “Besides, you’re a middle blocker, right? I saw you play. Don’t you need the practice?”

Tsukishima scowled a little at that, half because of the obvious challenge in Kuroo’s voice, the other half because his heart skipped a big beat. It was unfair how good Kuroo looked.

Instead of answering, though, Tsukishima just grumbled and pushed through the trio in the doorway, expression obviously not so pleased. From the corner of his eye, he could see Bokuto raise a thumb up in approval.

In approval of what, Tsukishima didn’t care. He just wanted to get it over with.

This time, he was completely sure fate was mocking him.

Chapter End Notes

thank you for reading and for your support if you're still here, even after the huge hiatus. if you liked it, leave a kudos or a comment and it'll fuel me to update as soon as possible! thank you so much!
nerve.

Chapter Summary

Instead of really paying attention to any of what they were saying, Tsukishima lifted his hand up. He saw how red his usually pale palm looked. Probably from the blocks he had attempted before. That wasn’t his concern.

His real concern was his soulmate marks. He gripped his wrist, twisting and turning as if in a vain attempt to calm the burn of it.

There was another resounding thump as the volleyball bounced off of the floor behind Tsukishima. All he could do was sigh, palms already throbbing.

Bokuto had the opposite reaction. He shouted out and even went so far as to jump into the air, arms open and grin wide.

Akaashi didn’t seem to share the sentiment and, as he glanced at Tsukishima, the two of them sharing another look, he grabbed another volleyball “Wow, you just beat a single blocker. Congratulations, Bokuto-san.”

“Keeeeiji!” The grin fell from Bokuto’s face only to be replaced with a pout.

Before Tsukishima could say anything in response, the sound of footsteps echoed from beside him “Well, how about two blockers then?”

Tsukishima could already tell who it was even before looking. Even though that was the case, Tsukishima still looked anyway. Like always, Kuroo had that stupid smirk on his face. Glancing behind Kuroo, Tsukishima saw that the giant was sprawled across the floor yet again.

Is he dead?

Tsukishima was so distracted by the giant just groaning on the floor that he hadn’t noticed Kuroo crouching into position right next to him.

“Hey, four eyes, make sure you keep that straight in check.” Kuroo yanked Tsukishima down and, suddenly, Tsukishima felt as if he couldn’t breathe anymore.

It wasn’t as if he was breathing but he just couldn’t get air. Rather, for some reason, he felt as if he should hold his breath. Maybe it was because he was so close to Kuroo. Not just that but, if he concentrated hard enough, he could feel his soulmate mark burn under the sleeve of his jacket. It reminded him of that time he tried to burn them off of his skin.

He frowned, shaking his head. He needed to focus on what was in front of him. The match, Bokuto’s spike, Kuroo’s timing. Yet, it was hard to focus when Bokuto was right in front of him, when Kuroo’s shoulder kept brushing against his, when he could feel Akaashi’s sharp gaze.

Maybe this was what his brother was talking about when he mentioned what it felt like to meet a soulmate.
Suddenly, Tsukishima could see Kuroo jump up from the corner of his eyes. He followed almost blindly before hearing the familiar thump of the volleyball against the floor of the gym.

This time, however, it wasn’t on his side of the net. It landed there, behind Bokuto.

Bokuto stood, grumbling, obviously irritated by the fact that Kuroo could easily block his so-called renowned spike. The two of them suddenly started arguing, Bokuto of course complaining while Kuroo gloated.

Instead of really paying attention to any of what they were saying, Tsukishima lifted his hand up. He saw how red his usually pale palm looked. Probably from the blocks he had attempted before. That wasn’t his concern.

His real concern was his soulmate marks. He gripped his wrist, twisting and turning as if in a vain attempt to calm the burn of it. It didn’t work. In fact, when he slipped his hand into the sleeve, gripping at the wrist, he could feel how flushed the skin there really was. He didn’t understand why.

“Hey, Megane-kun, you have a good read on things but your block is weak.” Tsukishima’s attention was pulled away yet again and he fixed his sleeve before turning to Bokuto with a slightly irritated expression but Bokuto seemed unaware “I get worried I might break your arms or something.”

“Well, you know, I'm growing.” Tsukishima attempted to hide how irritated he really felt and, instead, straightened in an attempt to make his height over Bokuto obvious even across the net “I still have a ways to go when it comes to muscles and height.”

Bokuto really took offense to that, pouting and crossing his arms. It would’ve been really cute if it weren’t for the fact that Tsukishima was tired and that he wanted to get this practice over with. Surely Bokuto was tired by now too. The criticisms only made him even more tired. He wasn't there to practice volleyball. He was just there because they made him. So, why did he have to take all these criticisms?

“Hey, four eyes, Bo has a point. If you take things too easy, that Shorty’ll take all the glory from you.” Kuroo interrupted Tsukishima’s conversation with Bokuto only to wrap his arm around Tsukishima’s shoulders “You're in the same position as him, right?”

Suddenly, Tsukishima felt even more tired. Thoughts of Kuroo, of Bokuto, of Akaashi, of his irritating wrist, of everything, seemed to disappear. Instead, they're replaced with a heavy feeling of something dark and sticky. It was so unpleasant, so heady, clogging his chest so much that it made his body feel disgusting.

Until now, it had certainly been a sort of unspoken fact in Karasuno. How Hinata Shoyou, the sun of Karasuno, kept improving and improving. Hinata Shoyou, the boy that wouldn’t shut up, that wouldn’t sit still, had minimum skills but was a regular despite being a first year.

He always got what he wanted, always got the spotlight, always surprised people with his height and his freak quick and his fast instincts.

Hell, Hinata’s one flaw—the fact that he was as stupid as they came—still didn’t stop him. He failed the exam, sure, but he got to make it up and attend the Tokyo practice games.

What was Tsukishima compared to that? He was boring.

On the other hand, why did that matter anyway? Volleyball was just a stupid sport. Tsukishima didn’t need to be the best middle blocker. Tsukishima didn’t need to constantly improve. Tsukishima didn’t need to be a regular.
He just wanted to be able to put ‘volleyball’ on his resume, show colleges he was willing to play a sport, maybe even have an interesting topic to bring up sometimes.

Hinata Shoyou didn’t matter. Volleyball didn’t matter. His soulmate mark didn’t matter.

Finally, Tsukishima managed to pick his words carefully “I don't think I can do anything about that.”

If Kuroo looked confused, Bokuto looked even more so. Akaashi looked like his usual indifferent self but there was something that glinted in his eyes.

Still, Tsukishima continued, laugh almost empty and smile not quite reaching his eyes “There's an obvious difference between Hinata and me. A difference that I don't think I could cross.”

At that, the three upperclassmen looked taken aback. Bokuto looked almost crestfallen. For what felt like the first time since Tsukishima had met him, Kuroo’s lips weren’t pulled back in a smirk. Even the hint of something in Akaashi’s eyes had turned into a full-on frown.

Before they could say anything, however, people from Nekoma started filing in. Tsukishima couldn’t for the life of him remember their names but he knew who they were from their uniforms.

If they still had their uniforms on, where the hell had they come from? And why couldn’t they have helped out sooner?

One of them already claimed to want to help with blocks and another pulled the giant off of the floor. Tsukishima could feel irritation build up in him. They could've asked Nekoma. He didn't really need to help with blocking.

He could've saved himself the time, effort and stress.

“Well, looks like you have more people to block for you. I'll just be in the way. If you'll excuse me.” Quickly, he started to head to the doors of the gym, all the while waving goodbye to Bokuto, Kuro and Akaashi, all three of which were frozen in place.

Before he could fully leave, though, he heard Akaashi say something that made him scowl but he ignored it and continued on.

“I guess you stepped on a nerve, Kuroo.”
“You know how I never really let you see my soulmate mark?” Tsukishima kept his voice low and he hoped that Yamaguchi would get the hint to keep his the same volume.

Instead of answering, Yamaguchi stared at Tsukishima with wide eyes before nodding almost frantically. Tsukishima would have laughed if he hadn’t felt so nervous, like his stomach was twisting itself into knots.

What was he nervous for? He knew that Yamaguchi would never judge him for something so stupid as the names of his soul mates. Yamaguchi already knew that he had three of them, already knew the lengths in which Tsukishima went through to try and get rid of them. What was he so nervous about?

Maybe it was because showing Yamaguchi would make it more real? Would make the situation less of something he could ignore and more of something that was physically there, actually tangible, actually a problem?

No, that was stupid. Tsukishima pushed the thought away just as he pushed his sleeve up.

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As soon as Tsukishima entered the room Karasuno was staying in, he was met with Yamaguchi. The smaller boy was drying his hair as he sat cross-legged on his futon. From what Tsukishima could see, Yamaguchi looked less sad. At least, he didn’t look as crestfallen as he had looked before.

“Where did you go, Tsukki?”

Tsukishima expected that question so, with a small sigh, he sat down on the futon next to Yamaguchi’s. He had just finished showering. From how dry Yamaguchi’s hair was, Tsukishima could tell that Yamaguchi took his shower much earlier.

“These idiots from other teams made me practice with them.” Was Tsukishima’s answer as he placed all of his things next to his gym bag.

Yamaguchi apparently didn’t like that answer because he frowned. Quickly, Tsukishima scoffed and rolled his eyes “They didn’t really give me an option to say no. It was irritating.”
“Oh.” The expression on Yamaguchi’s face went from sad to confused “You know people from other teams?”

“Not really. I don’t even know why they asked me to--” Tsukishima quickly answered before he realised that saying what he was about to say would’ve been a lie. The last thing he would ever do to Yamaguchi was lie to him.

So, Tsukishima cleared his throat, turning his gaze away from Yamaguchi in favor of drying off his hair. He tried to think of a way to word what he wanted to say but, for some reason, he couldn’t think of anything.

“Tsukki?” Yamaguchi, of course, asked with an inquiring and worried tone in his voice. Yamaguchi did that all too often. He would worry and worry and worry, even when there was nothing to worry about.

Tsukishima, on the other hand. Well, he obviously had things to worry about. Like how to break the news to Yamaguchi. He wouldn’t be pleased about Tsukishima keeping Kuroo a secret, that was for sure. Tsukishima rarely kept anything from Yamaguchi.

Almost hastily, Tsukishima glanced around the room. Everyone else was a good distance away from the two best friends so it was easy to assume that they wouldn’t be overheard.

“You know how I never really let you see my soulmate mark?” Tsukishima kept his voice low and he hoped that Yamaguchi would get the hint to keep his the same volume.

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No, that was stupid. Tsukishima pushed the thought away just as he pushed his sleeve up.

Yamaguchi gawked, unsurprisingly gentle as he took Tsukishima’s wrist and turned it this way and that. It was almost like Yamaguchi was handling some sort of sacred treasure. It made Tsukishima both flustered and a little irritated.

After all, Tsukishima’s biggest pet peeve was when people handled him like he was made out of glass. He hated the idea that other people thought he was so weak, that he could be broken so easily, that he needed to be handled with care.

Anyone else and he would’ve snatched his arm back. However, he knew that Yamaguchi meant well. Yamaguchi wasn’t pitying him, wasn’t feeling sorry for him. Gentle and kind was just Yamaguchi’s automatic response to everything.

“Wait…” The words came out in a small mutter from Yamaguchi’s lips. Suddenly, the boy squinted up at Tsukishima “These names…”

“They’re the upperclassmen that pulled me aside to practice with me tonight.”
Even before all of the words were out of Yamaguchi’s lips, the smaller boy was already joyfully holding back his… cheers? Tsukishima didn’t know and he didn’t want to know. He gave Yamaguchi a fleeting glare before glancing back around the room.

Thankfully, nobody noticed Yamaguchi’s odd flailing. Tsukishima didn’t even understand why Yamaguchi was so frantically happy.

“Do you know what this means?” Yamaguchi muttered, shaking Tsukishima’s arm up and down like he was shaking Tsukishima’s hand.

Instead of returning the question, Tsukishima just simply raised a slender eyebrow.

“It means you were wrong. About people. About soul mates. About fate.”

At that, Tsukishima snatched his arm back before pushing his sleeve down. “It’s not like they’re my best friends. We just happen to get along. We’re still strangers.”

They hadn’t even acknowledged Tsukishima as anything other than an underclassman from a different team. How could Yamaguchi claim that Tsukishima was wrong when the four of them weren’t even close to getting together? Weren’t even mentioning the fact that the four of them were soulmates?

Suddenly, the thought that, perhaps, his name wasn’t on their wrists, like what had happened with Akiteru, crossed Tsukishima’s mind. He didn’t let the worry show on his face but, certainly, it was possible.

Yamaguchi apparently didn’t need to see the worry to know it was there "Well, I mean, you may be strangers now but they obviously want to get to know you."

"How so?" Tsukishima drawled out, tone bored as if convinced that whatever Yamaguchi had to say wasn’t going to be right.

Yamaguchi just huffed "Well, out of everyone they could've pulled aside, for some reason, they picked you, right? That can't be a coincidence."

Tsukishima paused, expression morphing from irritated to something else. The last thing that he ever liked hearing ever was that he was wrong. Still, he had to admit, it had been a hell of a coincidence that they chose him to block for them.

He's reminded of the fact that the entirety of the Nekoma team had still been practicing in another gym. He remembered wondering why they would ask him to block for them when the rest of Nekoma was available. What Yamaguchi had said made sense in context. It had been too much of a coincidence.

Still, Tsukishima was rarely wrong. Yamaguchi knew this and, yet, he still said that. Just because he met his soul mates didn’t mean that fate wouldn’t screw him over

As if giving Yamaguchi the cold shoulder, Tsukishima pulled his towel off of his shoulders and tossed it in the general direction of his gym bag. It landed directly on the bag. After seeing that, Tsukishima motioned as if he was about to turn around and lie down.

Most people would just let Tsukishima, would assume he was being grumpy or that he was angry and that he needed to be left alone. Instead, Yamaguchi placed a hand on Tsukishima’s shoulder and turned him back.
Like always when Tsukishima was being pouty, Yamaguchi smiled at him and quickly changed the subject “Speaking of soul mates…”

“Don’t say that unless you’ve confessed to Yachi.” Tsukishima quickly retorted, eyes narrowing. He had expected his words to shut Yamaguchi up.

However, from the triumphant but obviously embarrassed smile on Yamaguchi’s face, Tsukishima could already tell that it had the exact opposite effect that he had hoped. Instead of feeling irritated, though, Tsukishima could only feel impressed.

“We… talked after I practiced today…” Yamaguchi’s smile softened a little “I guess I felt a little braver…”

“Talked about what?” Tsukishima asked quickly in return though he already kind of knew the answer to the question.

They talked about being soul mates, of course.

The tall blonde never understood people who had entire conversations about being soul mates. He always thought that it was just one simple phrase. ‘I’m your soulmate’ and then it should be left at that. There wasn’t much else to talk about.

But, maybe that was just Tsukishima. After all, he wasn’t like a lot of other people. Other people could spend hours talking about soul mates. Tsukishima, on the other hand, could barely spare a sentence when talking about it to others. He couldn’t imagine what he’d say when talking to his own.

“I just… just told her she was the one on my wrist and then she told me that I was… on hers… And then we talked about other stuff… You know, to get to know each other better.” Yamaguchi interrupted Tsukishima’s train of thought.

Tsukishima smirked a little at that, causing Yamaguchi to get flustered. Still, Yamaguchi continued “I’m just glad that we’re both progressing with our soul mates.”

In Tsukishima’s mind, he disagreed. It didn't feel like he made any progress at all when it came to his soul mates. The soul mate thing was, of course, obvious. Tsukishima was almost sure that the seniors were aware that Tsukishima was their third soulmate. What Yamaguchi had said only further proved this.

Plus, Tsukishima Kei, after all, wasn’t exactly a common name.

But, then again, he couldn’t be completely sure. Mostly because, unlike Yachi and Yamaguchi, Tsukishima didn’t get a talk. The three didn’t pull him aside, didn’t talk about anything soulmate related, didn’t even talk about anything romantic. So, of course, it was hard for Tsukishima to be fully convinced.

“What, you don’t agree?” Yamaguchi saw the hesitance in Tsukishima’s expression and voiced it out loud.

Tsukishima’s face just scrunched up “I don’t know.”

It wasn’t just Yamaguchi and Yachi, either. Even the stupid shorty, Hinata, had his talk with his soulmate. It wasn’t declared, of course, but from the way that Nekoma setter had pulled Hinata aside after their first match against Nekoma, it was obvious.
Even looking at Hinata and the setter, right now, as they sat side by side on Hinata’s futon, it was clear. They understood each other, were practically inseparable. Tsukishima didn’t get that talk, didn’t understand his soulmates any better. Nothing had changed. The three of them were still strangers to him.

Yamaguchi followed Tsukishima’s gaze, quickly realizing it was on Hinata, before raising an eyebrow “Tsukki?”

Tsukishima didn’t respond, just looked away.

It was the same with all of the third years. The rest of the team had pestered it out of Sugawara one day and the setter had admitted that their relationship took a lot of work. They had to communicate often and it had started with a lengthy conversation at the very beginning, when they had first found out that they were each other’s soul mates.

So, it was obvious that Tsukishima was, yet again, the outlier here. He should’ve gotten his soulmate talk from his soul mates. Yet, they only played volleyball with him and nothing else.

“Do you wanna talk about it?” Yamaguchi offered, the usual kind smile on his face.

Tsukishima relaxed his face and decided to, instead, look indifferent “No, it’s not a big deal. It’s fine.”

Yamaguchi didn’t seem so convinced but, thankfully, he let it slide.
That calmed Yamaguchi up and even Sugawara looked excited enough “Oh, are you showing interest, Tsukishima?”

“No! I was just…” Tsukishima’s mind momentarily blanked before he hurriedly thought of a poor excuse “I'd rather hear it from you now than hear it from someone else later.”

Sugawara did not at all look like he bought it “Really?”

Yamaguchi snickered so softly that Tsukishima would've missed it had he not been so hyper aware of his surroundings.

“Jokes aside, he seemed really interested in you.” Sugawara added as if to just casually tack it on.

For Tsukishima, however, there was nothing casual in what Sugawara had said. Though he looked cool on the outside, he felt like he was about to burst into flames in the inside.

Tsukishima was honestly starting to get tired of losing these games. If he had a choice, he wouldn’t even have come to this stupid training camp. He didn’t need to train for something he cared so little for.

In fact, the most irritating part about this entire ordeal was that the main reason Karasuno kept losing was because of everyone trying out their new tricks.

Don’t get him wrong, Tsukishima couldn’t care less about what the other members of the team did. If they wanted to learn some new fancy trick, good for them. However, if those fancy tricks that they couldn’t even master were getting them to lose, obviously Tsukishima had the right to be a little ticked off.

Especially when he was being forced to run up and down that stupid hill.

Tsukishima sighed, wiping away the sweat on his forehead before glancing at Yamaguchi.

No, he shouldn’t think that way. Karasuno was a team and, though Tsukishima wasn’t at all very excited about the sport, he wouldn’t get in the way of everyone else. Even if they were digging their own graves, he wouldn’t stop them. Volleyball made these nerds happy.

That thought didn’t make Tsukishima any less irritated that he had to keep exhausting himself, though.

“Hey, everyone!” The manager from Ubugawa suddenly called out “The parents from Shinzen High gave us some watermelons! Please take a break and have some!”

What good timing. Tsukishima couldn’t handle one more lap up and down that hill. Taking a break to eat one watermelon slice would be more than enough time to rest.
So, of course, Tsukishima grabbed one and went to sit with Yamaguchi though it took Yamaguchi much longer to get his slice. Tsukishima could obviously blame the fact that he was too shy to get one from Yachi.

His friend was all too predictable at times.

Thankfully, even though Yamaguchi took forever, the two still managed to find a good spot right up against the outer gym wall.

“Oh, why aren’t you sitting with those other guys?” Yamaguchi asked Tsukishima after they had thoroughly settled down.

Tsukishima glanced away from Yamaguchi. From the corners of his eyes, he could see that Bokuto and Akaashi were seated with other teammates. Kuroo sat next to Kenma and Hinata. Probably not by choice but, since the beginning of training camp, Hinata and Kenma had become a package deal during their free times.

Yamaguchi seemed to catch up on Tsukishima’s train of thought and he let out a small chuckle “And you call me shy.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Tsukishima scowled at Yamaguchi, not at all liking the implication that he was shy. Sarcastic Tsukishima? Shy? In what dimension was that even remotely possible?

Yamaguchi wasn’t deterred “Yeah, you’re shy. You don’t want to go up to any of them because they’re with other people.”

As expected, Tsukishima’s best friend hit it right on the first guess. Bullseye. However, Tsukishima, being so prideful, didn’t want to admit to it. So, instead, he took a couple of bites from his watermelon.

That elicited another laugh from Yamaguchi who even went so far as to brush a seed away from Tsukishima’s face.

“Don’t treat me like a kid.” The taller of the two barked out softly, going so far as to even sit up straighter as if to prove his point.

Yamaguchi was unperturbed by the behavior which was obvious from the way he poorly hid his grin behind the watermelon in his hands “Sorry, Tsukki.”

Like always, Tsukishima accepted the apology albeit silently. Yamaguchi had no problem with this, most likely because he was already used to it. Instead of dwelling on it, like always, Yamaguchi changed the subject and decided to chatter about something else.

Tsukishima listened, of course. He always listened, no matter what. Yamaguchi deserved at least that much. And, as he listened, he ate. Slowly, carefully, as if wanting the moment to last.

That wasn’t wrong. He did want the moment to last. Though there was impending doom in the horizon (in the form of more practice matches and more problems), at that moment, everything felt calm enough.

It was just Tsukishima, Yamaguchi and their watermelons.

With a couple more bites, however, Tsukishima finished his watermelon and stood.

“Tsukki?” Yamaguchi raised an eyebrow.
Tsukishima simply held up his watermelon “I'll just throw this away. I'll be right back.”

And he did just that. Yachi seemed concerned that he only ate one watermelon but Tsukishima had never been a big eater anyway. When he came back, Sugawara had suddenly joined Yamaguchi on the grass.

Though not at all suspicious of the kind setter, Tsukishima still approached cautiously since he didn't want to interrupt whatever the two were chatting about.

“Ah, Tsukishima. I was looking for you!” Sugawara spotted Tsukishima soon enough and the catty grin on his face was uncharacteristically mischievous.

Tsukishima simply raised an eyebrow in response as he sat down on Yamaguchi’s other side “Why were you looking for me?”

“Well…” The smirk on Sugawara's face only grew “The Nekoma Captain approached us earlier and, you know, he talked about you.”

Everything suddenly made sense. The way Yamaguchi and Sugawara and been whispering, Sugawara's uncharacteristic expression, even the way Yamaguchi looked pleased as Tsukishima sat. It all made perfect sense.

Tsukishima's immediate reaction was, of course, to deny “I don’t… understand.”

“Isn’t Kuroo Tetsurou one of your soul mates?” The smirk on Sugawara’s expression wavered.

Yamaguchi, on the other hand, simply just chuckled “He is. Tsukki is just being shy.”

Tsukishima’s face returned to its expression from before at the mention of him being shy. “I'm not--”

“Well, he came over to apologize for whatever happened when you were practicing with him.” Sugawara looked relieved, smirk returning, and his words cut Tsukishima’s off abruptly “He said he didn't mean to make you angry.”

Yamaguchi looked surprised “He made you angry?”

“No! Well… it wasn't his fault.” Tsukishima waved the question off, ragged sigh escaping his lips as he tried to calm his heart.

What was he, a lovestruck fool? So what if Kuroo apologized? Not only did he not have a reason for apologizing but he also apologized to the someone else. That was the opposite of flattering.

Yet, knowing that, Tsukishima still found himself a little taken aback. Kuroo was concerned for him. He cared enough about him to at least check on him (albeit it was via someone else and not directly). That must've meant something.

“Tsukki, he may be your soulmate but he should treat you well.” Yamaguchi reminded Tsukishima in a voice that sounded all too motherly.

Tsukishima quickly ignored the advice and simply shrugged “He hasn't done anything bad. Trust me.”

“From what I heard--and I was there--Tsukishima sounds about right.” Sugawara backed Tsukishima up before tsKing “Though, really, you shouldn't let him compare you to anyone else.”

Yamaguchi looked like he was thoroughly left out of the loop which was only partially right “What
did Kuroo-san say anyway?”

“Something along the lines of… the fact Hinata would probably be better than me soon.” Tsukishima answered the question almost noncommittally, expecting the same reaction from Yamaguchi.

That was wrong because Yamaguchi quickly looked like he was holding back a frown.

Before some “Tsukki is the coolest’ tirade started, Tsukishima quickly changed the subject “So, uhhh… is that all he said?”

That calmed Yamaguchi up and even Sugawara looked excited enough “Oh, are you showing interest, Tsukishima?”

“No! I was just…” Tsukishima’s mind momentarily blanked before he hurriedly thought of a poor excuse “I’d rather hear it from you now than hear it from someone else later.”

Sugawara did not at all look like he bought it “Really?”

Yamaguchi snickered so softly that Tsukishima would've missed it had he not been so hyper-aware of his surroundings.

“Jokes aside, he seemed really interested in you.” Sugawara added as if to just casually tack it on. "Very concerned too. Like he really didn't want to get on your bad side.”

For Tsukishima, however, there was nothing casual in what Sugawara had said. Though he looked cool on the outside, he felt like he was about to burst into flames in the inside.

Sugawara and Yamaguchi just grinned at him, apparently finding his fake disinterest both obvious and entertaining.

Caring about Tsukishima aside, surely, if Kuroo went that far, it meant that, most likely, Kuroo knew who he was.

“And, uhhh, Kuroo-san mentioned me by name?” The words slipped Tsukishima’s mouth before he could stop himself, eyes hesitant in meeting Sugawara’s gaze.

At that, Sugawara gave a pleased but surprised expressing before nodding “Yeah.”

“He also said that you practiced with them.” Sugawara added, pretending to be angry but barely succeeding “If you’re going to practice with them, practice with us too.”

Tsukishima just sighed, pretending to be bothered by the thought. Though, that didn’t lessen the fast beat of his heart.

*Kuroo knew who he was*. 
“I guess… Well… I’m certainly not at ease.” Asahi shrugged.

That wasn’t the answer that Tsukishima was looking for. He expected Asahi to perhaps say something definite. Instead, his answer was wishy-washy. On the fence.

Tsukishima didn’t even exactly know why he was pursuing the subject. He supposed that he wanted to know why everyone else was trying so hard when, obviously, they would always be overtaken by someone else that was better.

Perhaps, the answer that Tsukishima was looking for was something along the lines of an empowering speech? Something to encourage him? But, even if that was Asahi’s answer, would he let himself be encouraged?

It felt like the hundredth time or maybe was it the thousandth? Either way, Tsukishima was sure that he could walk up this hill with his eyes closed by now.

Thankfully, the day was about to end and Tsukishima would be able to sneak off while everyone else slaved over practice. At least, that’s what he hoped on doing.

Panting a little, Tsukishima paused at the foot of the hill, wiping away the sweat on his forehead. For some reason, he felt like he might be stopped and forced to practice by those three stooges again. Part of him hoped for it but the other part of him didn’t want to care.

“Here.” At the sound of Azumane’s voice, Tsukishima looked up only to see a water bottle being offered to both him and Yamaguchi. He followed the hand and quickly saw that it certainly was Azumane.

Yamaguchi practically snatched the bottle up and, hesitantly, Tsukishima accepted. His confusion was quickly cleared up when Azumane motioned to the outside wall of the gym “You guys have time to talk?”

Tsukishima didn’t think that Azumane would approach either of them without a reason. Apparently, his reason had been to talk. About what, though, Tsukishima had no clue.

The two of them agreed anyway. It wasn’t like Tsukishima had a reason to say no and Yamaguchi was always a yes man.

At first, there was silence and Tsukishima could feel the awkwardness crawling up his spine. Eventually, Azumane finally spoke “Yamaguchi, your serve’s getting much better.”

Tsukishima tried to tamp down his irritation. Why had Azumane called them over? Was it seriously just to make small talk? Did he not have any other reason?
Yamaguchi, ever the friendly and polite one, didn’t seem to have the same qualms “Th-Thank you so much!”

“I still have to improve my success rate.” Azumane continued, laughing nervously as he rubbed at the back of his neck.

Tsukishima thought the small talk was getting rather boring.

It wasn’t as if he didn’t like talking to Azumane. Truthfully, he was much more willing to make friends than he looked. It was just hard to relate to other people. Like Azumane for example. Tsukishima really just couldn’t wrap his mind around why Azumane felt the need to pull them aside just for a little bit of small talk.

It was possible that the upperclassman just wanted to make friends, perhaps even relate to the first years, but, surely, if that was the case, he would only pull Yamaguchi aside. After all, Tsukishima had a reputation of not exactly being a social butterfly.

“Asahi-senpai?” Tsukishima suddenly spoke up, drawing the attention away from Yamaguchi

“Doesn’t it feel kind of hopeless?”

“Huh?” Azumane looked both nervous and confused.

“You know, since Hinata and his immense talent seem to be slowly catching up to you.” Tsukishima clarified and, to his surprise, Azumane laughed albeit nervously.

“I guess… Well… I’m certainly not at ease.” Azumane shrugged.

That wasn’t the answer that Tsukishima was looking for. He expected Azumane to perhaps say something definite. Instead, his answer was wishy-washy. On the fence. Tsukishima didn’t even exactly know why he was pursuing the subject. He supposed that he wanted to know why everyone else was trying so hard when, obviously, they would always be overtaken by someone else that was better.

Perhaps, the answer that Tsukishima was looking for was something along the lines of an empowering speech? Something to encourage him? But, even if that was Azumane’s answer, would he let himself be encouraged?

“I’m sure that Hinata’s still obsessing over being the ace of the team.” Tsukishima added after the conversation hit a lull and Azumane seemed less nervous at the mention of that.

“Yeah, that’s probably true.” He agreed and his expression slowly morphed until he had a small smile on his face “Hinata keeps on changing just to get that title. I can’t complain though.”

Tsukishima raised an eyebrow which prompted Azumane to continue “Uhhh, well, it is because of Hinata that everyone suddenly wanted to improve and change too.”

That was more along the lines of what Tsukishima expected. Something cheesy and cliche about how the improvement of one person prompts improvement from everyone. He had heard it before. Players always needed someone else to challenge them, to drive them to become better, to improve. It was the same thing over and over again.

“You should be careful, you know. Hinata’s probably going to crash into you again in his pursuit to steal your title.” Tsukishima decided to joke in an attempt to lighten the mood he had inevitably caused.
That time, Azumane seemed to laugh for real “Oh, that? I understand why he did that, though.”

Tsukishima couldn’t say the same thing.

When the younger didn’t respond, Azumane glanced at him “I guess we’re in the same boat, huh? Our positions kind of make Hinata our rival, right?”

Tsukishima couldn’t respond to that. He couldn’t exactly call himself Hinata’s rival. That would imply that he actively tried to be better than Hinata and that Hinata drove him to change, just like he drove everyone else to change.

It would also imply that Tsukishima did the same for Hinata.

However, it wasn’t like that. Tsukishima didn’t know what it was like but it definitely wasn’t like that.

He suddenly remembered what he said last night, to those three volleyball players. To his soul mates . Yes, it was more like that. Hinata was unreachable and the gap between them was too far apart, was too much. Even Tsukishima, with his long arms and his long legs, couldn’t hope to reach out or run up to Hinata’s level.

Suddenly, Azumane pushed off of the wall, his pleasant expression making way for a more determined one “Even if Hinata does change, I don’t plan on losing to him.”

There it was. The answer that Tsukishima had expected. That was all everyone ever talked about. Losing. Winning. Practicing. In a sport like volleyball, it only made sense.

Maybe he was the one in the wrong. After all, he was the one that chose to play volleyball. If he had that much of a problem with everyone else tiring themselves out for a sport with no payoff, he probably should just leave.

Chapter End Notes

omg thank you so much for reaching this far into the story!!! im so very thankful for you reading these chapters and i hope with all of my heart that you liked them!!! if you did, leave a kudos and a comment!!! i would really appreciate it
hands.

Chapter Summary

“Could it be… you're worried that you won't get along with your soul mates?”

Though Yamaguchi’s guess wasn’t entirely correct, Tsukishima supposed that he was partially right. However, mostly, Yamaguchi was wrong. In Tsukishima’s mind, his friend would also be his number one priority.

That didn’t change the fact that, yes, Tsukishima did worry about his soulmates.

Chapter Notes

heyooo here i am, updating again after so long!!!

“Hey, do you ever think about how easy it is for Asahi-senpai, Daichi-senpai and Koushi-senpai?” Tsukishima asked absentmindedly as he fiddled with a weed growing in front of him.

After Azumane had left, claiming he wanted to practice more before the next match, Yamaguchi and Tsukishima had sat down, opting to just rest. What Azumane had said, however, still hadn't left Tsukishima.

It made him realize that, though Azumane seemed soft-spoken and easily scared, there was still a side to him that was just as volleyball crazed as everyone else. It was hard for Tsukishima to wrap his mind around. Even Azumane had this desire, this drive. He didn't know where he got it from.

In any case, Yamaguchi shrugged before finally answering Tsukishima’s question “Yeah, I guess it looks like it.”

“Even you and Yachi. You guys have it pretty easy too.” Tsukishima added, less absentmindedly but it definitely wasn't meant as a jab at Yamaguchi.

Yamaguchi didn't seem to think that because he quickly frowned but didn’t say anything.

“Even Hinata and his soulmate…” Tsukishima continued to mumble in an effort to break the silence between him and his friend but his voice trailed off this time.

A look of realization crossed Yamaguchi’s face but it quickly dimmed, returning to the confused look he had seconds before “Easy compared to who?”

Tsukishima shrugged. He didn't want to say himself because it felt selfish. Which seemed pretty uncharacteristic of Tsukishima Kei, the player that goaded everyone else, that always said whatever was on his mind. But, then again, when it came to Yamaguchi, Tsukishima always became a bit more cautious.

“I'm just saying.” Tsukishima settled on saying, his words a little harsh “It feels like a lot of people
get along well with their soul mates."

That response didn't make the situation any better. Instead, what Tsukishima had said seemed to confuse and bewilder Yamaguchi "What?"

Tsukishima felt foolish for even bringing it up.

Yamaguchi seemed to sense this because he hesitantly placed a hand on Tsukishima's shoulder “Uh, no, sorry. What I meant was… I guess…”

In response to Yamaguchi’s stuttering, Tsukishima couldn't help but give him a sharp look.

“I just! I'm not used to talking about this kind of stuff with you…” Yamaguchi chuckled but it was obviously out of a nervous habit.

Either way, Yamaguchi had a point. Tsukishima didn't often talk about things like soul mates. In the past, he had even actively avoided it.

It wasn't as if that was rare. Kageyama avoided talking about his too. People respected both of their wishes. In the process, both Kageyama and especially Tsukishima were rather isolated from everyone else.

At least Kageyama could relate to the others in a different way. Like everyone else on the team, Kageyama had the same drive. Tsukishima didn’t. Maybe that was why Yamaguchi felt awkward about the talk. Yeah, they were best friends, but these kinds of topics usually went untouched.

“But… I want to be used to it.” Yamaguchi had suddenly added, pulling Tsukishima out of his thoughts.

Slowly, Tsukishima nodded though he didn't let his guard down. Yamaguchi chuckled at that “Usually, people don’t talk about how much this person or that person gets along with their soulmate so I don't really know what to say…”

When Tsukishima raised an eyebrow at that, as if to silently ask why, Yamaguchi continued with a small sigh “Well, they're your soulmate. They're made for you and you're made for them. You **have** to get along. Right?”

“At least, that's what most people think. So, that kind of stuff isn't talked about.” Yamaguchi added but as more of an afterthought.

“Isn't that stupid, though? No matter what, your soulmate is still a person. You're bound to not get along with them eventually.” Tsukishima couldn't help but point out, his confused expression looking more like a scowl. “You won’t always get along them.”

Yamaguchi seemed to nod as if agreeing but not completely “That's true but I think, since you're supposed to be together, anything you guys disagree on would be too small to matter.”

Yamaguchi then smiled as if reassured by his thoughts “Why would fate pair you with someone you wouldn't get along with?”

That was a good question. Why would fate pair you with someone you wouldn't get along with? The answer to that would also contain the answer to the questions ‘Why would fate pair everyone else but you?’ and ‘Why would fate pair you with someone that would only abuse you?’.

Simply put, the answer was that fate never cared. Though humanity would love to believe that fate
The names on their wrists weren't something that took years to plan, that took careful coordination and skill. The marks weren't randomized, of course not, but they weren't made with care.

Whoever was in charge of them was a lazy asshole.

But, seeing the hopeful expression on Yamaguchi’s face prevented Tsukishima from voicing his thoughts. Usually, he would freely tell his best friend about all of it, every single nihilistic pessimistic thought. This time, he couldn't.

He knew for a fact that, for someone like Yamaguchi who didn't have the best self-confidence, the soulmate system was a saving grace. It meant that, no matter what, he would have someone. That was why people like Tsukishima were few and far in between. A lot of people wanted to put faith into a system that made sure they would never end up lonely.

Maybe that was why Tsukishima didn't say anything. Yamaguchi was going through things with Yachi, discovering uncharted territory and all of that. He couldn't bare to discourage Yamaguchi when it was the last thing he needed.

So, instead, Tsukishima just shrugged “I guess… I hope you're right.”

At that response, Yamaguchi almost looked like a fish out of water. Tsukishima noticed this and quickly scoffed “What?”

“Oh, well, I was expecting the usual… but you're actually being agreeable?” Yamaguchi obviously meant it jokingly but it still prickled just a little.

His best friend wasn't wrong. Of course not. It wasn't like Tsukishima’s beliefs have changed either. He just didn't think that Yamaguchi wanted to hear the same thing over and over again.

“Could it be… you're worried that you won't get along with your soul mates?”

Though Yamaguchi’s guess wasn’t entirely correct, Tsukishima supposed that he was partially right. However, mostly, Yamaguchi was wrong. In Tsukishima’s mind, his friend would also be his number one priority. That didn’t change the fact that, yes, Tsukishima did worry about his soulmates.

He mostly worried about how relationship was going. There still wasn't any sign they were acknowledging him as their soulmate and, so, he was constantly worried. What if they weren't his soulmates after all? But, at the end of the day, getting along with them was also definitely a worry.

When Tsukishima didn't reply, Yamaguchi laughed and patted Tsukishima’s back “You're always so nice whenever you're worried.”

“No way.” Tsukishima quickly shot that idea down, grumpily ripping out the weed he had been fiddling with as if to let out his anger.

“Ah, sometimes I forget how childish you are!” Yamaguchi took the weed and threw it away “Anyway, you're so silly, Tsukki. Of course you'll get along with them.”

*How?* Tsukishima was quiet when he wasn't being a smartass. He wasn't passionate about volleyball. He found it hard to socialize with other people. How was he supposed to get along with people like Kuroo, who was cool and aloof? Or Bokuto, who was sociable and loud? Or Akaashi, who always knew what to say?
Instead of saying that out loud, Tsukishima just nodded.

Yamaguchi looked concerned by Tsukishima’s lack of a response. Before he could say anything, however, somebody stepped out.

From the corner of his eye, Tsukishima could see it was Akaashi. However, for some weird reason, he couldn’t find it in himself to turn and face the setter.

“Sawamura-san asked me to call the both of you over.” Akaashi stated rather plainly.

Even without looking, Tsukishima could already see Yamaguchi’s horribly hidden smirk. He decided to ignore it.

As Tsukishima was about to stand, though, Yamaguchi used him as a crutch and stood first. It caused Tsukishima to fall back down. Tsukishima couldn’t help but narrow his eyes at his friend but, before he could get up and scold Yamaguchi, Akaashi had walked over and offered his hand.

It wasn’t the arm with Akaashi’s soulmate marks, it was clear from the lack of names on his wrist, but it was Akaashi’s hand nonetheless.

Tsukishima was used to being helped up. No matter what, Sugawara always tried to help him up when he could, even when he didn’t need to. However, at that moment, it was different and Tsukishima could tell. This wasn’t just anyone, this was Akaashi.

Not wanting to waste time and obviously not wanting to be weird, Tsukishima just graciously accepted the hand and let Akaashi help pull him up.

Tsukishima didn’t know what he was expecting. Certainly, it wasn’t the tingle that ran down his arm. It definitely wasn’t the way his heart suddenly beat way faster, the way he felt nervous just from holding Akaashi’s hands--

But no, they weren’t holding hands. Akaashi was just helping him up.

In Tsukishima’s daze. He didn’t notice Akaashi pulling too hard. So, since he gave so little resistance, Tsukishima stumbled forward, chest bumping against Akaashi’s.

There it was. The flutter, the fast heartbeat, the tingle down his spine. It was like his body couldn’t decide on how to react so it just chose to make him feel a jumble of things he couldn't understand.

“Oh, sorry, Tsukishima-san.” Akaashi quickly apologised but he didn’t seem to be backing off.

Tsukishima looked down at Akaashi, down at his pretty face and his long eyelashes and his soft skin. Just as quickly as he looked, Tsukishima suddenly turned away and let out a small grunt.

Instead of responding, Tsukishima quickly made a move to leave. He noticed that Akaashi wasn’t moving but decided that it wasn’t any of his business.

All he could really think about was how Akaashi had called his name. Tsukishima. It wasn’t a big deal. At least, that was what Tsukishima wanted to tell himself.

But, Kuroo knowing Tsukishima’s name and Akaashi knowing his name too must’ve meant something. If not something profound, it at least meant that they knew who Tsukishima was. It meant that they knew he was their soulmate.
Chapter Summary

_Volleyball was just a club. Soul mates were just fairytales. None of it mattered._ Because, once they did start mattering, all that could ever come out of them was pain and hurt and sadness. He knew this first hand.

Tsukishima was definitely sure that this was, at least, his millionth climb up this stupid fucking hill. It felt like Karasuno lost every single one of its matches today and he couldn’t keep up anymore.

He paused, resting his hands on his knees. His throat felt painful and his mouth tasted like blood. Every inhale felt like it pierced at the flesh in his neck, felt like an ice cube being swallowed down his throat. It was too much. He was definitely at his limit.

He could hear footsteps and then he felt a hand on his back “Tsukki, are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” Tsukishima nodded abruptly before pushing Yamaguchi’s hand away

Even with his eyes trained on the grass in front of him, Tsukishima could practically see the concerned expression on his friend’s face. It was Yamaguchi’s default expression whenever he tended to worry about everything and anything. Which happened more often than not.

After a pause, however, Yamaguchi turned “Okay, I’ll go ahead then.”

When Yamaguchi was a ways away, Tsukishima finally looked up. He was the only one left near the bottom of the hill. Everyone else was way higher up, closer to completing their laps than he was.

It felt too real, like his position on this hill was his exact position in life. Everyone else was improving, getting better, and he was stuck in the same spot. But, wasn’t that his own doing? He was the one that wasn’t practicing hard like everyone else. He _chose_ to lag behind, _chose_ not to take volleyball seriously. _Volleyball was just some after school club._ That’s what he truthfully believed.

So, how come he felt this way?

It was the same with soul mates. Everyone else was getting new soul mates or getting along with their soul mates. Hinata found his, Sugawara was happy with his, Yamaguchi was making progress with his. Everyone was _except for Tsukishima_. But, wasn’t that his fault too? For not approaching _them_? For waiting instead of making a move?

Maybe he was just fated to be that way. Maybe he was meant to lag behind, meant to sulk in the shadows, never in the spotlight, never moving faster than an inch an hour.

_But did that really matter?_ Did he really care? Should he?

Tsukishima growled before he continued on to finish his laps.

After all of that self-deprecation and all of the running that he did, Tsukishima honestly didn’t want to do anymore. He wasn’t in the mood to try and socialize. He wasn’t up for putting on a polite mask. He didn’t want to do anything else but sleep.
He just wanted to get the hell out of the gym and into a futon. Maybe he could sleep away this slump that he seemed to have entered.

“Hey, four-eyes!”

Unfortunately, fate really wasn’t kind to him at all.

“Would you help us out with spiking practice again?” Bokuto walked over, that usual childish glee in his eyes. Tsukishima wondered if he looked so happy at the prospect of playing volleyball or if it was something else.

After a moment of thought, Tsukishima decided he didn’t want it to be something else. He wouldn’t let himself hope for something like that. So, instead, Tsukishima waved Bokuto off “I'm sorry but I'll pass.”

Bokuto didn’t seem to get the hint, however, because he placed a hand on Tsukishima’s upper arm “Is it because of what Tetsu said? He didn’t mean to offend you.”

“No, it’s not about that. I can’t hold a grudge against Kuroo-san when what he said was true.” Tsukishima desperately tried to ignore the way his upper arm seemed to tingle and the way his heart beat just a little faster at the lack of space between the two of them.

Bokuto didn’t seem to like that answer because his grip tightened “Tsukki.”

“Don’t call me that, Bokuto-san.” The words left Tsukishima’s lips before he could stop himself. He was doing it again. He was pushing people away and, this time, it was his soulmate. He didn’t understand why he needed to do that. Earlier, he had been so worried about his soulmate? Wasn’t this his chance? Why did such angry words come to him so easily?

Thankfully, Bokuto took the mean words in stride and smiled weakly “Can I call you Kei, then?”

So they knew his name. This thought zinged through Tsukishima’s brain like a bolt of lightning and his heart beat twice as fast. All three of them knew his name. Not just his last name, his first name too.

“Just call me Tsukishima.” Tsukishima quickly tried to recover, pushing away his jumbled thoughts. He was tired. He didn’t want to deal with this. He couldn’t let himself be convinced otherwise. But--

That weak smile fell from Bokuto’s lips and all Tsukishima wanted to do was make him smile. It was an odd feeling, one he wasn’t used to getting when it came to strangers like Bokuto. But, then again, Bokuto was his soulmate.

“Listen, why don’t you just ask another player. I’m sure there’s someone else.” Tsukishima looked away from Bokuto as he tried to hide how awkward he felt. He wasn’t used to trying to placate other people.

He was forced to look back when Bokuto tugged at his arm “It can’t be anyone else. It has to be you.”

Tsukishima felt his stomach drop but not exactly in a bad way. For some reason, it felt good or, maybe, pleasant. Like the way Akaashi and Bokuto made his limbs tingle. Except, really, it wasn’t a good thing because Tsukishima didn’t want it... right?

He was already conflicted when it came to his feelings about volleyball and his soulmates. He didn't want to have to think about all of his convoluted problems right then and there. He wanted a break.
Volleyball was just a club. Soul mates were just fairytales. None of it mattered. He reminded himself again and again because, once they did start mattering, all that could ever come out of them was pain and hurt and sadness. He knew this first hand.

“Whatever.” Tsukishima waved Bokuto off and, finally, the ace’s grip fell from Tsukishima’s arm. Quickly but as casually as he could, Tsukishima tried to leave, not even sparing a glance behind him.

However, before he could really get out of the gym, he was stopped again. Not by Kuroo or Akaashi or Yamaguchi. Or really anyone he would’ve rather seen.

Instead, he was stopped by Hinata, the absolute bane of his existence “Hey, hey, you know that ace spiker from Fukurodani?”

Tired of being intercepted, Tsukishima simply and briefly nodded before continuing on to the gym exit.

Hinata, like Bokuto, didn’t quit “Why wouldn't you want to practice against a spiker like that? Isn't that a missed opportunity?”

Tsukishima had enough. He just wanted to rest. He just wanted to get away, to find some peace and quiet, to stop feeling like shit. “Shut up. Unlike you, I don't have infinite stamina.”

There was the squeak of sneakers and, suddenly, Tsukishima could feel everyone’s eyes on him. It made his body feel like it was on fire and encased in ice all at the same time. He needed to escape. He needed to go.

“God, you give me a headache.” He couldn’t control his words as they left his mouth and he couldn’t control his legs as they guided him out the gym.

“Tsukki?” He could hear Yamaguchi call out but even that didn’t stop him.

He was tired.
Suddenly, Tsukishima was yanked forward and the fists that gripped at his shirt bumped against his chest as he was jolted.

If the Yamaguchi before was unfamiliar, surely this Yamaguchi, whose eyes watered and whose face scrunched up into an almost uncharacteristically strong scowl, was a complete stranger.

“What else do we need other than pride?” He screamed, voice ringing inside of Tsukishima’s ears, bouncing around in his skull, vibrating through his bones.

Even before he turned around, Tsukishima already knew who was calling out his name. The voice was so familiar, he could pick it out of a crowd without any difficulties. Usually, hearing that voice made him happy because, of course, Yamaguchi was one of his only friends, his closest friend. There wasn’t a time in his life where he didn’t want to be around Yamaguchi.

Even when he was angry, Yamaguchi placated him. Even when he was upset, Yamaguchi cheered him up. It was the same the other way around. How could he ever not want to be around someone that always brought out the better in him?

However, for what he could call the first time in the history of their friendship, Tsukishima didn’t want to see Yamaguchi, didn’t want to talk to him, just wanted to lay down and sleep for five hundred years.

Still, he stopped and turned around. He was greeted by Yamaguchi who leaned forward, hands resting on his knees, panting as if he had ran the entire way there. Tsukishima was a little surprised. Yamaguchi wasn’t the type to full-sprint anywhere or even yell at the top of his lungs.

Whatever he had to say must’ve been important.

“What?” The word left Tsukishima’s lips before he could stop himself and his tone held less emotion than he would’ve liked.

It didn’t seem to stop Yamaguchi though because the boy simply stood straighter, apparently having caught his breath “Tsuki, you were always able to do anything while being cool and smart. I’ve always been jealous of that.”

Tsukishima’s eyebrows furrowed and his voice involuntarily turned harsher, rougher, more irritated
“And? So?”

That didn’t leave a blow to Yamaguchi either which continued to surprise Tsukishima. Instead, Yamaguchi looked more determined “So, I’ve never let that stop me. You have always been someone I strive to be like, someone that’s like a goal to me. Rather than discourage me, you always motivate me to do better.”

Tsukishima’s heart stopped in his chest and his mouth felt dry. He had never even imagined that Yamaguchi would feel this way, would look so fierce and determined as he told Tsukishima this himself.

It was almost like the Yamaguchi that stood in front of him wasn’t the same Yamaguchi he had spent most of his life with.

“So.” Yamaguchi continued, emphasizing the word as his eyes burned with a look that was completely foreign to Tsukishima “I don’t understand why you’re being extremely lame!”

Lame. The word had left Yamaguchi’s mouth with a tone of anger but all Tsukishima could think was that the word felt like something Yamaguchi would say, that Yamaguchi calling him lame as an insult would be a very Yamaguchi thing to do.

Before Tsukishima could reply with something witty or snarky, Yamaguchi still continued “I know you feel the same way about Hinata.”

That definitely had to top the list of surprising things Yamaguchi had said. It was so surprising that Tsukishima was momentarily stunned and his brain seemed empty of anything, void of thoughts for just that one second.

“But, instead of letting him be your motivation, instead of trying to fight and be better than him, like I am with you, all you’re doing is letting him win.” Yamaguchi continued on and on, as if his words were never going to stop

“It’s honestly the lamest thing I’ve ever seen. You don’t only do yourself but also everyone else a disservice.” Yamaguchi even went so far as it poke at Tsukishima, finger jamming against Tsukishima’s chest “We all try so hard and yet, here you are, one of the smartest and tallest and most talented players, just barely skirting by even though you could do so much more.”

Yamaguchi really wasn’t going to stop surprising Tsukishima, not with his attitude, not with his words, not with his conviction. It made Tsukishima proud of his friend but it also made him scowl. It was all too tiring.

Still, he said nothing in his defense. He couldn’t gather the words, couldn’t find it in himself to deny that Yamaguchi was partially right.

Tsukishima wouldn’t call himself one of the most talented players in Karasuno. That was impossible, especially when you compared him to Hinata and Kageyama, to Nishinoya and Sawamura. But it was true that he always let Hinata win. The effort wasn’t worth it.

“What do you mean the effort isn’t worth it?” Yamaguchi snapped and he looked much angrier than before, much more determined, much more.

Tsukishima hadn’t even realised that he had said that out loud. Still, he hesitated before growling, the sound almost pathetic but still strong “Don’t you get it?”

“No matter how much I try, no matter how hard I try, no matter what I do, the effort will never be
worth it. There will always be a better person than me, people will always prefer someone else over me, people will always beat me.” The words came out monotone but Tsukishima’s chest wrenched with grief as he said them, like each syllable broke a wall inside of him, revealed the soft weaknesses in him.

There was nothing he hated more than looking weak.

Suddenly, Tsukishima was yanked forward and the fists that gripped at his shirt bumped against his chest as he was jolted.

If the Yamaguchi before was unfamiliar, surely this Yamaguchi, whose eyes watered and whose face scrunched up into an almost uncharacteristically strong scowl, was a complete stranger.

“What else do we need other than pride?” He screamed, voice ringing inside of Tsukishima’s ears, bouncing around in his skull, vibrating through his bones.

Tsukishima’s eyes were wide, as if to take in Yamaguchi, to take in the way the moon shone on him, on the both of them, take in this unknown part of Yamaguchi, this fiery determined part of him that Tsukishima had never seen before.

Something cracked then, something in Tsukishima’s chest. It was like an egg and whatever was inside, whatever cracked, spread through him, warm and viscous, taking over him, giving him this feeling he didn’t understand.

His eyes watered too, as if to match Yamaguchi’s.

“Even if it’s momentary, even if it’s just for a second, there’s that feeling of pride we get from when we achieve things that we work for.” Yamaguchi’s voice cracked and his fire faded but only just a little bit “Why do you think you don’t deserve to be proud of yourself, just this once?”

Yamaguchi then scoffed, the sound crackling and painful “You think I didn’t notice? When I asked you if something was going on with your soulmates, you glanced at Hinata. When Asahi-senpai talked about improving, you immediately started talking about Hinata. When you were talking about how everyone else--about how Hinata --got along so well with their soulmates, you were implying that you weren’t.”

“Tsukki, don’t let Hinata stop you from being happy.”

That definitely pushed all of the jumbles of thoughts out of Tsukishima’s head. He didn’t know what else to say and, apparently, neither did Yamaguchi because, as Yamaguchi let go of his shirt, a silence stretched on between them.

It wasn’t Hinata. Tsukishima could admit, at least, that Yamaguchi was right. But it was more than Hinata, it was more than just the rivalry between them. There was something else, something untouched.

Still, Tsukishima couldn’t deny the fact that what Yamaguchi said changed something in him.

Eventually, Tsukishima couldn’t help but laugh, a soft snickering laugh, as his lips stretched into a soft grin “Yamaguchi, when the hell did you suddenly become so cool?”

The expression on Yamaguchi’s face morphed from fiery and determined to its usual; wide eyed, confused, kind of lost. It made Tsukishima snicker again but, slowly, the smile fell from his face as he realised what he needed to do.
“You’re actually really cool, you know.” Tsukishima muttered, again, as if to clarify.

Yamaguchi only grew even more confused, especially as Tsukishima moved past him, a certain destination in mind.
moments.

Chapter Summary

“Is volleyball fun for you?” Bokuto was the first to break the silence and, when Tsukishima shrugged, he continued “Maybe that’s because you suck.”

Tsukishima scowled at that and Akaashi gave him an apologetic expression. However, before either of them could respond, Bokuto suddenly chuckled “I’m a third-year and I’ve been to Nationals so I’m better than you. Like, way better.”

Way to be humble. Tsukishima couldn’t help but think.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“What else do we need other than pride?”

Tsukishima had walked all this way after his shouting match with Yamaguchi. He walked and walked, head full of thoughts, and he stopped by the doorway, still plagued with jumbled feelings.

His chest still ached with something he couldn’t understand, something warm and thick, and, for the first time in forever, he didn’t ignore it. There was that voice in his head that said no, he shouldn’t be there and he didn’t listen to it.

“There’s something I’d like to ask you.” The words slipped his tongue before he was sure he was ready to ask them but, this time, it wasn’t unprepared. The entire walk to the gym, all he could think of were those words.

“Sure, go ahead and ask.” Bokuto seemed pleasantly surprised. In fact, all three of them were and their eyes on him made the words more difficult to get out. Still, Tsukishima wouldn’t leave without an answer.

“Both of your schools are sometimes considered powerhouses, right?” Tsukishima started off and, before Bokuto and Kuroo could interrupt, he quickly continued. “Even if you made it to nationals, actually winning there would be difficult, right?”

Kuroo, looking more irritated by the second, attempted a half-hearted smirk “I hope there’s a point to this.”

“It’s just a hypothetical, don’t get too angry.” Akaashi placed a hand on Kuroo’s shoulder before looking to Tsukishima as if to tell him to continue.

Tsukishima felt more hesitant but, since he started, he might as well finish “Volleyball is just a club and maybe you’ll get to write in your resume ‘I worked really hard in my high school’s volleyball team.’. I seriously can’t figure out how everyone can be so determined about it.”

There was a pause in the conversation, as if the three of them had to let the words sink in. Tsukishima had no doubt that his question stumped them. For most of the players he’d asked or, rather, overheard, it was all instinctual.
“Is volleyball fun for you?” Bokuto was the first to break the silence and, when Tsukishima shrugged, he continued “Maybe that's because you suck.”

Tsukishima scowled at that and Akaashi gave him an apologetic expression. However, before either of them could respond, Bokuto suddenly chuckled “I'm a third-year and I've been to Nationals so I'm better than you. Like, way better.”

Way to be humble. Tsukishima couldn’t help but think. He waited though because, surely, Bokuto had some sort of message, like a big idea that would, perhaps, answer all of Tsukishima’s questions.

In any case, Bokuto continued, smile still broad “So, it might surprise you to hear but I know how you feel. I only started recently thinking volleyball was fun.”

Bokuto was right. Tsukishima was surprised. For someone who looked like a happy puppy at the prospect of playing volleyball, Bokuto had felt just the same way Tsukishima did? It almost sounded impossible, like Tsukishima had misheard. But, no, he didn’t.

“Well, I only started to really like playing ever since my straight became usable in matches.” Bokuto laughed as if that fact was a funny joke or, perhaps, his proudest moment “My cross hits that I was really good at kept getting blocked.”

Tsukishima knew the feeling and he nodded as if to show he was still listening.

“At the next tournament, the same players that kept blocking my cross hits couldn't even touch my straights.” Bokuto’s grin only widened and he looked down at his hand as if it held some sort of magic. Tsukishima knew it didn’t but, still, it was almost believable.

Bokuto then turned back to him “It all depends on if you have that moment. The joy you feel beating the guy in front of you, the rush of adrenaline when people glare at you from across the net because they can’t beat you, the thrill of seeing people scramble for a volleyball that you sent to the floor. That’s everything.”

That tightness in Tsukishima’s chest doubled but there was something else behind the feeling. It was like his body could imagine exactly how it felt to be there, in the moment Bokuto was describing. The adrenaline rush. Feeling proud of yourself, like nothing else mattered but that achievement.

Bokuto snapped Tsukishima out of his train of thought “Well, at least, that's how it is for me.”

There was another lull in the conversation and Tsukishima didn’t know what to say so he didn’t say anything at all.

The person who broke the pause this time was Kuroo who looked at Tsukishima like he was a puzzle “Anyway, that all doesn’t matter.”

“What do you mean?” Bokuto was immediately offended and Tsukishima could imagine him puffing up like an angry owl.

Kuroo just chuckled before directing a smirk at Tsukishima, his eyes staring right through Tsukishima’s soul “You’ve already had that moment, haven’t you?”

Tsukishima paused, unsure, his face scrunching up in confusion. Bokuto looked equally confused “If he has, why would he be asking?”

“Because.” Kuroo just hummed, gaze still trained on Tsukishima “I don’t know your history or anything but you seem like the type of person to be extra cautious.”
“Like, when something bad happens to someone else or something bad happens to you once, you try your best to avoid that thing.” Kuroo elaborated since both Tsukishima and Bokuto looked confused.

“Deep down, you love volleyball. It's true, I see it. Sometimes, when you're faced with a challenge, you have this fierce look that says you enjoy it.” Kuroo continued seeing as Tsukishima hadn't said anything to show he either denied or agreed with Kuroo’s claims. “Yet, you're here, saying you don't.”

Tsukishima couldn't really say anything to deny that. Really, he couldn't find it in himself to say anything. After all, wasn’t it true?

His brother had been hurt by volleyball and so his solution was to deny caring about it the same way his brother did. He didn’t want to get hurt like Akiteru, didn’t want to cry in the dark the same way Akiteru cried. He loved volleyball, he looked up to his brother.

No matter how much he loved the sport, however, he was even more scared of getting hurt.

It was the same with soul mates, wasn’t it? His entire family had been burned by this fate that assigned these names so he just assumed that he would be burned too, would be hurt and stomped on too.

But, wasn’t the fact that Bokuto was here for him proof that he wouldn’t be hurt? Wasn’t Kuroo understanding him better than he understood himself proof that they wouldn’t hurt him?

Yamaguchi had been his friend for god knows how long and, yes, he understood how Tsukishima felt to a certain degree, but he didn’t understand Tsukishima like these upperclassmen did. If they understood Tsukishima so well, why would they ever think of hurting him?

“I hit the nail on the head, didn’t I?” Kuroo looked extremely pleased with himself but his smirk seemed softer, like he wasn’t happy because he got it right but because he helped Tsukishima.

All Tsukishima could respond with was a small dumb nod.

“I'm guessing someone you know tried really hard at volleyball and didn't get results they wanted?” Kuroo asked, contemplative expression on his face “And you saw how hard they tried and how heartbroken they were when nothing happened for them?”

Tsukishima’s face scrunched up a little “How do you know it wasn't me?”

“Are you kidding? If you tried, you'd be a bonafide Ace.” Kuroo answered all too easily, all too quickly, like he had been so sure of that fact.

It made Tsukishima’s chest ache so, instead, he said nothing.

Kuroo snickered a little but his expression was still kind as he slinked over and wrapped an arm around Tsukishima’s shoulders “Listen, it's true that we’re scared of things for a reason but you should never let fear rule your life.”

“When things hurt you, that just means you care about them a lot and there’s nothing wrong with caring. We need to care about things. And a little pain is good every once in a while.” Kuroo added almost like an afterthought but his words still shook Tsukishima to his very core.

Before Tsukishima could really respond, though, Bokuto’s grip was on his arm and he was suddenly being dragged away “Alright, we answered your question now help with blocking.”
“Wait—” Tsukishima protested, surprised by what Bokuto was saying. From Kuroo’s and Akaashi’s expressions, he could already see that he wouldn’t be able to escape.

Thankfully, Bokuto let go of Tsukishima’s arm. Not to let Tsukishima leave, of course, but to get a volleyball for them to practice with. Kuroo followed suit, probably to annoy Bokuto.

Akaashi stayed behind.

“Hey.” Akaashi muttered, voice so quiet Tsukishima almost couldn’t hear him. “I… don’t really have anything inspiring to say like those two…”

Tsukishima opened his mouth to say that it was fine but Akaashi raised his hand to stop Tsukishima. Wanting to hear Akaashi out, Tsukishima closed his mouth and listened.

“I’ve always loved volleyball so I don’t understand how you couldn’t… But, all I can say is that, if you end up getting hurt, by volleyball or whatever else…” Akaashi hesitated, expression devoid of emotion but his tone betraying how nervous he actually felt “We’re here for you.”

Tsukishima’s heart soared at that and he felt much more emotional than he did before. If what Kuroo had said hadn’t convinced him that fate finally made the right choice, he was definitely convinced of it now.

“You don’t know us, I understand. We’re just some upperclassmen you met just this week but… You know …” Akaashi seemed to fumble with his words, something Tsukishima was surprised to see. Quickly, though, Tsukishima nodded. Akaashi must’ve been referencing the fact that, though he didn’t know the three of them well, that didn’t change the fact that the four of them were soul mates. The fact that Akaashi would even mention something like that almost made Tsukishima grin but, instead, he settled for a small smile “I know. I understand.”

Akaashi smiled back, as if relieved, and Tsukishima knew right then and there that there was no way the three of them could ever hurt him.

Chapter End Notes

ok, hope these few chapters weren't too fastpaced. they kind of really mostly follow the pace of the anime. that and the catalyst triggered tsukishima's development so ofc its gunna be a little fast at first. it's gunna definitely slow down after this.

i didn't include the scene where yamaguchi yells at tsukishima which is sad. its a really important scene. but, i figured that i didn't want to vomit the scene back out? i feel as if i couldn't rewrite that scene any better than the way it was written? idk if that makes sense? i might try my hand at writing that scene differently but mostly i feel like it would stay the same so i didn't include it.

i hope you guys liked the chapters i put up! if you liked it, leave a kudos or a comment! i'll try to update as soon as i can. thank you!
That definitely took all three upperclassmen off guard. At least, it looked like it from their shocked expressions. Bokuto was the one who looked the most surprised and, if Tsukishima didn't know better, he would've said that Bokuto looked a little pleased or maybe even bashful.

Either way, the three were really blowing their reactions out of proportion and Tsukishima couldn't help but be flustered.

It was the very next day when Tsukishima gave in and decided to practice with his three soulmates.

“First, you need to visualize it, see the trajectory of the ball in your head.” Kuroo mimicked the motions of a ball flying through the air “Then, concentrate your strength to your fingertips so you're not blown back.”

Kuroo then put his arms up to show Tsukishima exactly what position he had to hold “Put your hands in front of you instead of over your head. That’ll give you more leverage.”

Tsukishima slowly nodded, drinking up all of this information and even going so far as to copying Kuroo’s position. He felt pleased, especially when Kuroo enthusiastically nodded as if in approval of Tsukishima’s stance.

“Now that you have that down, make this annoying owl shut up!” Kuroo laughed, pointing an accusatory finger at Bokuto who stood on the other side of the net.

Bokuto, in response, scoffed “You wish he could beat me!”

“Why don’t we see for ourselves, Bokuto-san?” Akaashi announced almost monotonously, volleyball already in his hands.

“Keiji, you’re always so cold to me…” Bokuto pouted at that but, at Akaashi’s insistence, took his place next to the net, golden eyes meeting Tsukishima’s own light ones.

“Don’t break my arms, Bokuto-san.” Tsukishima couldn’t help but taunt a little except his heart wasn’t exactly all that into his teasing.

He was mostly nervous because, after all, he had a history of not being able to block the Fukurodani Captain’s spikes. They've been at this for what felt like an hour and, still, Tsukishima struggled. So, it was no surprise that he felt anxious.

Either Bokuto didn’t notice this or he didn’t care because he simply smirked, sending Tsukishima’s chest a flutter “I’ll make you eat your words, you cheeky middle blocker.”

Then, Tsukishima heard Akaashi’s voice, something along the lines of ‘set, go.’ but his eyes never
left Bokuto’s. Eventually, though, Bokuto’s attention was obviously ripped away from Tsukishima by the volleyball.

One second, Tsukishima was staring at Bokuto’s face, the next, he was staring at Bokuto’s abdomen. Bokuto had jumped. It made Tsukishima panic just a little bit. He quickly steeled himself though, closed his eyes, *concentrated*. 

He wasn’t supposed to jump at the same time as the spiker. He was supposed to stagger his timing, wait till the opportune moment, put his hands in front of him instead of above him, *concentrate on his fingertips* --

There was a thump. It was the sound of the volleyball hitting the court. It took Tsukishima a second to realise but, quickly, he noticed that the volleyball, the same volleyball that Bokuto had spiked, was there, right behind Bokuto, rolling casually along.

There was a beat of silence before Tsukishima turned his wide eyes to Kuroo. When their eyes met, Kuroo’s expression spread into a lazy grin but it was obvious from the way his eyes sparkled that he was thoroughly proud of Tsukishima.

Tsukishima, on the other hand, buzzed with excitement. He wanted to be *cool*, wanted to come off as aloof about his little victory, but his chest swelled and a grin threatened to burst onto his face.

“Oh, Bokuto-san? I thought you were going to make me eat my words?” Tsukishima quickly turned to Bokuto, his old sarcastic self returning momentarily. He knew he should try and be more respectful of his upperclassmen but, in all honesty, Bokuto had started it.

Even Akaashi seemed to agree. The setter smirked just a little bit, hand coming up to cover his mouth as he glanced at Bokuto to his left.

Surprisingly, Bokuto wasn’t at all phased. In fact, he looked the happiest out of all four of them. Immediately, when he had snapped out of his daze, he ducked under the net and scooped Tsukishima into a big hug “Megane-kun! You blocked my straight!”

“I blocked your straight.” Tsukishima repeated, less enthusiastically and almost as if to confirm it had happened for real.

Bokuto did that weird loud chant that both he and Kuroo repeated at times, shaking Tsukishima a little as his hug tightened “This is what I call improvement!”

Then, as if quickly realising it, Bokuto let go of Tsukishima and placed his hands on the younger boy’s shoulders “You better not use this against us when we’re doing practice matches!”

“Bo, what else would he use it for?” Kuroo strode over, snickering as if Bokuto had just made a funny joke “You better just hope that Fukurodani won’t be doing any matches against Karasuno.”

Bokuto made an indignant noise but was quickly placated by Akaashi who walked over and placed a hand on Bokuto’s back “Why don’t we take a break?”

Though the Fukurodani Captain was still slightly pouting, everyone agreed. Even Tsukishima who still felt energetic and just a little bit keyed up also wanted to sit down and calm himself.

His very first victory against a renowned spiker was exciting but he wouldn’t be able to concentrate properly if he didn’t take a breather.

When the four of them had finally sat down and Tsukishima was guzzling a water bottle, Kuroo
spoke up “By the way, I was talking to your Captain and he had mentioned that the team didn’t even know whether or not you had a brother.”

Tsukishima almost choked on his water but, thankfully, he managed to swallow the gulp down before looking to Kuroo and frowning. Could this be the same time Kuroo had talked to Sawamura about upsetting Tsukishima?

Either way, slowly, Tsukishima nodded “Yeah, I don’t talk about my brother with them… It just never comes up, I guess.”

“So, you really did have a brother that used to play for Karasuno?” Kuroo looked fascinated and Tsukishima couldn’t find it in himself to be annoyed.

After all, Tsukishima knew little about Kuroo but he definitely knew that Kuroo was a curious person. Kuroo was just curious about Tsukishima’s family, that was all. It wasn’t as if he was stepping over any boundaries. They were soulmates and that meant they should know about each others families. It made sense in Tsukishima’s mind.

Bokuto seemed to quickly become curious as well “Oh? You had a brother that played volleyball too? That sounds like fun.”

“Do… you guys have siblings?” Tsukishima asked a little cautiously, instinctively leaning against the wall as he pulled his long legs up to his chest.

Akaashi shook his head and Bokuto did too “No way but I think having a little sister would’ve been really cool.”

Kuroo nodded at that before grimacing “The thought of there being a female version of you makes me cringe.”

Bokuto was appalled by that comment and Akaashi smiled almost slyly as he agreed “I can barely handle one of you, Bokuto-san.”

At the thought of Bokuto and a little sister, Tsukishima couldn’t help but imagine Bokuto as a girl. He momentarily wondered if Bokuto’s white hair was natural before quickly shutting that idea down. Of course it wasn’t natural.

Then, his train of thought travelled to what Bokuto would look like, hair all naturally black and not at all spiked up by globs of gel. Bokuto was already very handsome and he barely made any effort to be so. Tsukishima could imagine Bokuto as one of those people that were gorgeous without trying. Suddenly, Tsukishima felt shy about imagining Bokuto, hair unstyled, that handsome smirk on his face.

Kuroo quickly took note, it seemed, because the Captain chuckled, ruffling Tsukishima's hair “What are you thinking about, huh, four eyes?”

“Probably me as a girl, huuuh?” Bokuto teased as well, that handsome smirk Tsukishima had just thought about spread across his lips.

Tsukishima scoffed, trying his best not to get flustered despite the heat spreading across his neck and ears “No, I wasn’t thinking of you as a girl, Bokuto-san.”

“I was just wondering what you’d look like with natural hair.” Tsukishima added, almost as an afterthought “And I thought… that would look very handsome.”
That definitely took all three upperclassmen off guard. At least, it looked like it from their shocked expressions. Bokuto was the one who looked the most surprised and, if Tsukishima didn't know better, he would've said that Bokuto looked a little pleased or maybe even bashful.

Either way, the three were really blowing their reactions out of proportion and Tsukishima couldn't help but be flustered.

“Megane-kun, could it be that… you're into brunettes?” Bokuto finally broke the silence and Tsukishima felt the sudden need to hit him.

Kuroo played along, of course, gasping as he ran a hand through his hair “Tsukki, don't tell me you're into me because of my hair!”

“Don’t call me that.” Tsukishima had said out of habit before grumbling a little, now obviously flustered “In any case, Kuroo-san, you have a lot of redeeming qualities. If I was into you, it definitely wouldn't be for your hair.”

That earned another long silence. The three looked shocked again but, this time, there was no doubt about it. Kuroo had an obvious blush on his face.

Bokuto cackled “Tetsu, you're so good at dishing it but you can never receive, huh?”

In retaliation, Kuroo shoved at Bokuto, other hand coming up to cover one of his pink cheeks “It just caught me off guard is all!”

Tsukishima couldn't find it in himself to revel in the fact that he flustered Kuroo. Instead, he just grew even more flustered himself. His heart thundered in his chest and his mouth felt dry yet his palms sweaty. He couldn't help but look down at his hands, berating himself for acting like a lovesick school girl.

“Oh, say something about Keiji too!” Bokuto recovered from his momentary fall to the ground, wrapping an arm around Akaashi.

Tsukishima felt pressured and, as he looked up at Akaashi through his eyelashes, he could see that Akaashi looked nervous as well. Tsukishima immediately felt confused. Still, he replied cautiously “I'm sure I don't have to say anything about Akaashi-san's good looks seeing as he probably hears compliments all the time.”

Bokuto practically howled at that, entertained as hell. Akaashi sat there, stock still. The look on his face hinted at surprise but nothing more. Kuroo, on the other hand, was still petrified from before.

“I don’t get it.” Tsukishima snapped, hands moving up to cup his own cheeks angrily as if that would help in cooling them down.

Bokuto took a moment to calm himself, golden eyes wide as he stared at Tsukishima “What?”

“He doesn't get it…” Kuroo repeated but not to answer Bokuto's question. Rather, from his almost bitter tone, Tsukishima could guess that he was repeating the words out of disbelief.

Bokuto looked from Kuroo to Tsukishima, eyes still slightly wide before laughing but almost nervously “You’re not… flirting?”

It was Tsukishima’s turn to be absolutely surprised and the heat from before turned even hotter, almost to the point of searing. The fast pace of his heart turned even faster and his stomach twisted from inside his torso.
Quickly he covered his face and turned away, his embarrassment turning into anger “Why would I?”

There was a beat of silence before Bokuto was reaching forward, trying to get Tsukishima to face them, amusement playing in his tone “Oi, oi, oi. It’s okay, don’t be so embarrassed! It’s okay to flirt with us. Duh.”

Slowly, Tsukishima turned back to the group, expression still grumpy and cheeks still hot “What?”

“Of course it’s okay for you to flirt with us.” Bokuto repeated his sentiment and, when Tsukishima turned to him, there was that smirk. Except, this time, his expression looked less mischevious and more shy.

Quickly, Tsukishima pushed Bokuto’s hands away “I wasn’t flirting.”

Kuroo huffed “That’s a bit hard to believe.”

Tsukishima felt a little irritated by that but decided to let Kuroo off the hook. Instead, he turned his attention to the one person that hadn’t spoken up in a while. What Tsukishima saw surprised him.

Akaashi’s hand covered his lower face while the other one pressed flat against the floor. He hadn’t moved a single inch from his cross-legged position but he wasn’t exactly looking at them anymore. Still, even with the hand and the way Akaashi’s head was turned, it was still obvious that his cheeks were pink.

Bokuto let out a surprised noise “Oh! Keiji is so hard to catch off guard! I can’t believe you did that without even trying, Tsukki.”

Tsukishima was about to open his mouth to tell Bokuto to stop calling him that when Akaashi let out a shuddering breath that sounded even rougher coming from the spaces between his fingers.

“It’s… hard not to be flustered when Tsukishma-san is so… cute and honest.” Akaashi struggled with his words, voice muffled under his palm.

Tsukishima felt even more flustered and it was like the two of them were having a contest between who could turn redder.

Bokuto laughed, jovially, clapping a hand onto Akaashi’s back. Part of Tsukishima wanted to be offended at being called cute, especially by someone much smaller and cuter than him. He couldn’t find it in himself to do so, however.

Still, Tsukishima thought, it would’ve been great if he got swallowed up by a black hole so he could escape this awkward moment.

Chapter End Notes

finally updated! make sure you check out the chapter called purpose that i also just added right into the middle of the story. it's basically my take on that whole convo yama and tsukki had outside where yama was like 'WHAT ELSE DO WE NEED OTHER THAN PRIDE' and i was kinda proud of that chapter.

anyway, thank you for reading this far into this story! i hope you enjoyed it as much as i enjoyed writing it. if you liked it, leave a kudos or a comment. it'll really make my day!
thank you so much and i'll try to update as soon as i possibly can!
Chapter Summary

“Akaashi-san?” Yamaguchi spoke up, interrupting the both of them. There was a curious expression on his face “You call your soulmates by their last name?”

Tsukishima sent Yamaguchi a look that practically said ‘says the guy who can’t call Yachi by her first name’ but said nothing.

After the emotional moment between the four of them (and that rather embarrassing one that Tsukishima preferred to forget about), Tsukishima was rarely seen without the two Captains and their setter.

During breaks and after training, the four of them were together, in the third gym, practicing and joking around. When Tsukishima wasn’t with Yamaguchi or wasn’t doing something he was told to do, he was with them. Even in passing, he would say hi to them, greet them, give them small nods of his head as if acknowledging them.

It was on the fifth day that something changed. In the morning, where Tsukishima usually just suffered through Yamaguchi and Yachi’s awkward silences, the three upperclassmen joined them.

“Tsukki!” Bokuto called out as he scrambled for the seat next to Tsukishima, one hand holding up his tray while the other wrapped around Tsukishima’s shoulders.

Kuroo sat next to Bokuto, gently putting down his tray as he snickered “No wonder you’re so stick thin, Tsukki, you barely eat in the mornings.”

“I’m sorry about this, Tsukishima-san.” Akaashi sat on the other side of Tsukishima, less boisterous than the other two. Despite his words, he looked much more pleased to be sitting next to Tsukishima. He didn’t look apologetic at all.

Yamaguchi and Yachi, who had sat across from Tsukishima, looked awkward as they watched on. Yachi even almost looked like she was about to get up and Yamaguchi looked about ready to join her.

Tsukishima, not wanting either of his friends to feel left out, quickly cleared his throat. “I told you not to call me Tsukki. Only my friends can call me that.”

Yamaguchi’s eyes almost seemed to sparkle and Kuroo groaned, obviously complaining “What are we to you then?”

“You know what you are.” Tsukishima replied in the same arrogant tone, his cheeks heating only slightly. Quickly, he changed the subject “These are my friends, by the way. Yamaguchi and Yachi.”

“Hello, nice to meet you.” Yachi gave a little wave, small shy smile on her face “I’m Yachi Hitoka, first year Karasuno Manager.”

Yamaguchi was definitely much shier as he gave an even smaller wave “I’m Yamaguchi Tadashi,
first year, Karasuno’s P-Pinch… Server.”

“Oh, yeah, Tsukki has told us all about the two of you.” Bokuto seemed to completely ignore the fact that the two first years in front of him were at all timid and intimidated by him and, instead, replied with a bright grin “I hope he’s told you about us too.”

“Y-Yeah!” Yamaguchi looked taken aback by how bright Bokuto was (something that didn’t surprise Tsukishima) and he looked almost like he was struggling to reply “He’s told u-us about you too. Th-Thanks for t-taking care of him for us.”

Bokuto waved away the sentiment “Don’t be so formal!”

“Ah, Bokuto, just give it a rest will you? You’re so bright so early in the morning.” Kuroo finally put an end to Yamaguchi’s suffering by wrapping an arm around Bokuto and putting him in a headlock. Unfortunately, because Bokuto’s arm was wrapped around Tsukishima’s shoulders, he went down with Bokuto.

“Before roughhousing, Tetsurou-san, Koutarou-san, please double check that you’re not unnecessarily dragging anyone in with you.” Tsukishima tried to sound angry instead of embarrassed as he pried Bokuto’s arm away from his shoulders.

Bokuto and Kuroo just laughed. Tsukishima shot both Yachi and Yamaguchi an apologetic expression. Surprisingly, that was usually a job for Akaashi but he seemed more interested with the food on Tsukishima’s plate.

“Kuroo-san is right. You do eat very little, Tsukishima-san.” Akaashi made a loud observation before Tsukishima could even ask any questions.

Slowly, Tsukishima nodded before sighing raggedly when Akaashi started moving food from his tray to Tsukishima’s “Keiji-senpai.”

Akaashi definitely hesitated a little at the sound of his first name. He was always like that and, eventually, he would always recover.

Meanwhile, Bokuto whined “Why do Tetsu and I get ‘ -san ’ while Keiji gets ‘ -senpai ’?”

“Oh? I thought it was obvious since ‘ senpai ’ is something you call someone you look up to?” Tsukishima turned his attention away from Akaashi and to Bokuto, smirk obvious on his face.

Bokuto flinched back, holding a hand to his chest as if to show how hurt he was. Kuroo quickly pushed forward to look at Tsukishima “I get Bo not being someone you look up to but I’m a middle blocker! You’re not a setter, Tsukki! You don’t need to look up to one!”

Yachi giggled at that as if entertained by the thought and Yamaguchi managed a small smile. Tsukishima didn’t even acknowledge Kuroo’s outburst and, instead, turned back to Akaashi as if redying himself to deny more food.

Like Tsukishima had predicted, after a while, Akaashi had simply continued. There was a glint in his eyes and his expression seemed disgruntled despite the fact that, to most people, Akaashi probably looked expressionless.

That was a trick that Tsukishima was slowly learning. If he tried slowly and looked closely, Akaashi’s monotony was actually anything but. Akaashi was actually very expressive but only in small details. His mouth would twitch, his eyes would gleam, his eyebrow would shift ever so slightly upwards.
They were the small details that most people would ignore but, when Tsukishima saw them, he put them together into a picture of exactly how Akaashi truly felt.

In any case, at the moment, Akaashi seemed determined to get Tsukishima to eat more. He always seemed to take the more motherly role out of the four of them. Tsukishima, on the other hand, was never really one to eat much.

“Just let him eat however much he wants.” Kuroo leaned forward to look directly at Akaashi, pulling Bokuto forward with him. Bokuto grunted in protest, grumbling but more because of Kuroo than anything else.

“Kuroo-san.” Akaashi sighed, shaking his head, opening his mouth to retort something probably clever (Akaashi was known for things like that).

“Akaashi-san?” Yamaguchi spoke up, interrupting the both of them. There was a curious expression on his face “You call your soulmates by their last name?”

Tsukishima sent Yamaguchi a look that practically said ‘says the guy who can’t call Yachi by her first name’ but said nothing.

In fairness, he was also curious about that. He had never really heard Akaashi refer to any of the three of them by anything other than their last names and ‘-san’. Most soulmates were the exact opposite. Tsukishima wasn’t the biggest fan of pet names but most people were.

Akaashi finally halted right in the middle of moving a few pieces of egg. “Ah, that.”

“Don’t let his coldness fool you, Yamaguchi, Keiji is actually very shy.” Kuroo didn’t hesitate to answer for Akaashi, making Akaashi more noticeably shy.

Akaashi quickly opened his mouth to, most likely, deny Kuroo’s statement but Yamaguchi’s entertained chuckle beat him to it “Tsukki is the same.”

“Huh?” Tsukishima gawked at his best friend, looking almost disgusted by the thought. He couldn’t believe Yamaguchi was bringing that up again and in front of Tsukishima’s soulmates too.

Bokuto and Kuroo seemed to eat it all up though or, at least, from what Tsukishima could tell. Bokuto even went so far as to shrug off Kuroo’s arm and lean forward as if interested “Really? Our Kei-chan? Shy? I can’t even imagine it.”

“Don’t call me that either.” Tsukishima quickly snapped, eyes narrowing as he directed his glare at the Captain sitting next to him.

Yamaguchi relaxed at this, looking less nervous and more comfortable “Yeah, he’s not one to approach people since he’s so shy so I’m glad the three of you… approached? First?”

Tsukishima wanted to bang his head against the table. From the way Yamaguchi’s sentence lifted at the end, it sounded more like a question. An embarrassing question at that. Tsukishima wanted to come off as confident and that was not how Yamaguchi made him seem.

Yachi, who had stayed silent this entire time, nodded in agreement “Yeah, Tsukki-san is like that. At least, for me, I had to befriend him and not the other way around.”

“I can see that, though.” Kuroo decided to put his two cents in, looking down the table at Tsukishima, a smile on his face that made Tsukishima’s heart skip a beat “But, really, Tsukki was the one that approached us.”
Tsukishima’s cheeks flushed when Yamaguchi directed a startled expression at him. Instead of replying, he poked at his food and put some in his mouth.

Thankfully, instead of continuing, Yamaguchi just chuckled and nodded “That’s really interesting.”

“I guess.” Tsukishima petulantly answered back before grumbling as he checked the time “You know, we only have like thirty minutes to finish breakfast now, right?”

At that, everybody hurried to eat. Fortunately for Tsukishima, the discussion they were having was quickly forgotten.
comfort.

Chapter Summary

“I’m not saying that they’ve changed that about you.” Yamaguchi quickly added, sighing, his breath ragged as he tried to explain exactly what it was he meant “But I can see that they make you… want to change for the better, I guess?”

Tsukishima let the words settle in his mind before he, too, sighed “Yeah.”

Yamaguchi finally looked up, smile on his face “Yeah?”

“Yeah.” Tsukishima repeated one more time before wrapping his arm around Yamaguchi’s shoulders and pulling him close

“So, your soulmates are really nice.” Yamaguchi whispered to him right after plopping down next to him.

They were on break after running up and down those hills all over again. Tsukishima was so tired of it that he wished the team could just stop losing. However, that wasn’t possible at the moment since everyone was still trying to get used to their new skills.

At least the gaps in the scores were narrowing.

Instead of giving Yamaguchi an intelligible response, Tsukishima just snorted, tired, before glugging down a little bit more water.

Their water bottles had been kept in the cooler by Yachi so the water was cold, unpleasantly so. As he swallowed it down, the water stung at his parched throat. Some of it even dribbled down the corner of his mouth, icy and wet. Tsukishima quickly wiped it away.

“And you approached them?” Yamaguchi nudged at Tsukishima with his elbow, trying to get the response he so wanted. For the first time in their relationship, Tsukishima couldn’t tell what Yamaguchi wanted to hear.

Instead, Tsukishima put his water bottle down and stared at it as if it would contain the answers he wanted. Why was he so nervous about having this kind of conversation with Yamaguchi?

“I’m glad about this, Tsukki.” Yamaguchi seemed to sense that Tsukishima was hesitant, confused, so he tried to help the conversation along “They seem really good for you.”

“You’ve always… tried to pretend to be cool.” Yamaguchi lost a little bit of his confidence and he turned away from Tsukishima, fiddling with his own fingers “Which, worked, of course. But it was always so hard to… approach you. And you never approached other people.”

“I’m not saying that they’ve changed that about you.” Yamaguchi quickly added, sighing, his breath ragged as he tried to explain exactly what it was he meant “But I can see that they make you… want to change for the better, I guess?”

Tsukishima let the words settle in his mind before he, too, sighed “Yeah.”
Yamaguchi finally looked up, smile on his face “Yeah?”

“Yeah.” Tsukishima repeated one more time before wrapping his arm around Yamaguchi’s shoulders and pulling him close “They do… make me want to push past what I’m comfortable with… and it’s hard but… I like it.”

Yamaguchi laughed at that, curling into Tsukishima’s side as he grinned. “To think I’d live long enough to hear you say that.”

“You sound like an old man.” Tsukishima grumbled in reply, scoffing as he pushed Yamaguchi away.

“There’s the old you.” Yamaguchi sat up straight, stretching his arms out with that same grin still stretched across his lips.

He then hesitated as he relaxed his body, going back to his previous position of fiddling with his fingers “I think that’s what soulmates are for.”

Tsukishima raised an eyebrow before getting the gist of what Yamaguchi was trying to say “That they make us want to be better people?”

“Yeah.” Yamaguchi nodded slowly as if hesitant though his expression showed one of confidence like he was sure about what he was saying.

For a second, Tsukishima paused before he nodded “Yeah.”

Yamaguchi was back to laughing as if the two of them repeating ‘yeah’ was a good joke. Eventually, he stopped, sighing but not out of tiredness but rather fondness “I know this… because I feel the same about Yachi.”

“You do?” Tsukishima prompted. He knew that for a fact already but he wanted to hear Yamaguchi out. He just wanted to continue the conversation.

Maybe he didn’t know how to start conversations like this but talking to Yamaguchi about these things, about things that he held near and dear to his heart, made Tsukishima unbelievably happy. Especially when Yamaguchi seemed to share the sentiment.

In any case, how Yamaguchi felt about Yachi was obvious. Tsukishima had seen how Yamaguchi acted around Yachi now. Before, when he had first figured out they were soulmates, Yamaguchi always interacted with her like he was treading on broken eggshells. Now, it was different.

Yamaguchi would initiate things. There were times where they stood or sat next to one another, awkward and silent, but those silences were slowly decreasing. More and more, they were finding things to talk about without prompting from Tsukishima himself.

Honestly, it made Tsukishima proud.

“Yeah.” Yamaguchi’s voice pulled Tsukishima out of his thoughts “She makes me want to be… more confident… about myself.”

“How so?”

“I don’t know. It’s like… she encourages me all the time and, when I do something outside of my comfort zone, she’s always there to support me.” Yamaguchi rubbed at the back of his neck.
Tsukishima nodded slowly before playfully huffing “Don’t I do that?”

Yamaguchi laughed, shoving Tsukishima on the shoulder “Of course.”

“You… also support me, especially when I’m outside of my comfort zone and I appreciate that. It’s nice.” Yamaguchi elaborated as if he wanted to prove a point before pouting a little “Though, you always try to push me out of my comfort zone. With her, she doesn’t have to push me.”

Tsukishima slowly nodded again. He understood that feeling. Yamaguchi pushed him out of his comfort zone often, whether it was making friends with Yachi or trying to talk about his feelings.

With Bokuto and Akaashi and Kuroo, they didn’t need to push him. He stepped forward all on his own, as if he was desperate to catch up with them, to walk on the same pace as them. Thinking about it that way, it sounded bad. Really, Tsukishima liked it.

Before, Yamaguchi pushing him out of his comfort zone was hard because he knew he had to but he still had a stubborn streak within him that made him feel like he had to say no.

With Tsukishima’s three soulmates, it was different. Stepping out of his comfort zone wasn’t so scary anymore now that he knew he had someone to catch him. He didn’t have to be stubborn anymore. He could do things at his pace.

“I understand that.” Tsukishima finally spoke up, nodding.

Yamaguchi nodded right back, pout falling into a small smile “You understand because you feel the same way, right?”

Tsukishima nodded again and Yamaguchi glanced up. Tsukishima followed his gaze to Azumane, Sugawara and Sawamura.

Sugawara was animatedly talking about something, neither of them could hear what it was. Sawamura seemed to be intently listening, focused expression on his face. Azumane, on the other hand, had a soft look, his smile gentle.

“I think it’s the same for Asahi-senpai too.” Yamaguchi spoke softly as if not wanting to get noticed by either of the three upperclassmen “Daichi-senpai and Koushi-senpai too.”

“I can see Asahi-senpai but definitely not Daichi-senpai and Koushi-senpai.” Tsukishima’s eyebrows furrowed forward as he squinted at the three of them as if doing so would reveal exactly what Yamaguchi meant.

Yamaguchi glanced at Tsukishima “Well, now, it might not seem like it but Daichi-senpai and Koushi-senpai weren’t always so…”

“Adult? Mature?” Tsukishima offered a few words before raising an eyebrow “Wait, how would you know something like that?”

“It’s because I always listen when Koushi-senpai when he reminisces about how they were like when they were first years like us.” Yamaguchi practically bragged though, in Tsukishima’s eyes, it wasn’t really anything to brag about.

Tsukishima decided to indulge his friend, though “So, what did you learn from his little stories about the good ol’ days?”

“Just that Daichi-senpai used to not be so confident about leading and that he used to be much more
emotional and stressed out.” Yamaguchi shrugged, glancing back over at the trio as if scared they’d overhear “And that Koushi-senpai wasn’t so outgoing at first.”

“I guess, if that’s true, they kind of balance themselves out?” Tsukishima finally agreed before scoffing and directing his gaze to Kageyama and Hinata who were arguing once again “I wonder if it’ll ever happen to them.”

It was true that Hinata had already met his soulmate. It was Kuroo’s best friend, Kenma. So, perhaps, his mellowing out would finally happen soon. Unlike Hinata, Kenma tended to be quiet and withdrawn. Surprisingly, it had started rubbing off on Hinata (though that’s mostly because of the fact that Kenma didn’t like noisy places).

Kageyama, on the other hand, was another thing. He hadn’t met his soulmate (or he has and he didn’t want to say). So, who knew when Kageyama would finally give up being so uptight and socially awkward.

Yamaguchi laughed boisterously, finally replying “Hopefully, they’ll chill out soon.”
support.

Chapter Summary

“You know, Fukurodani lost again.” Bokuto pointed accusingly at Tsukishima when he finally reached the poor boy, golden eyes blazing with disproportionate passion.

“Koutarou-san… shouldn’t you be angry at yourself for losing instead of being angry at me for not watching?” Tsukishima stated as calmly as he could while pushing Bokuto’s hand down.

Later that day, Tsukishima’s soulmates approached him.

“Tsukki, just the boy we were looking for.” Kuroo waved as he walked over, that same catty grin stretched across his handsome face. It was obvious that, unlike the rest of Karasuno, all three of them had just finished a match.

Bokuto had told Tsukishima about how he was so excited to fight against Nekoma again and that, since Karasuno didn’t have a sixth match that day, Tsukishima should come watch.

Bokuto had also promised that he would win the match for Tsukishima if he wanted. Akaashi had hastily agreed in that subtle way of his. Tsukishima was sure the entire gym overheard and, from the way Kuroo had been cackling, Tsukishima could tell it was hilarious (to them).

Then, to make matters worse, Kuroo joined in, declaring that, if Tsukishima cheered for him, he’d make sure to crush Fukurodani singlehandedly.

It had become more and more apparent to Tsukishima that the two were merely joking around and wanted to, of course, embarrass him. That was becoming a reoccurring theme and, obviously, Tsukishima was growing tired of it.

Needless to say, Tsukishima had not gone. Mostly because he didn’t want to be teased about it later on by his teammates (or, even worse, anyone that wasn’t in the Karasuno team). He might have subtly glanced over now and again, asking Yamaguchi or Yachi what the score was and other such things. Nobody needed to know about that though.

What Tsukishima was wondering now was why they had been looking for him.

“You know, Fukurodani lost again.” Bokuto pointed accusingly at Tsukishima when he finally reached the poor boy, golden eyes blazing with disproportionate passion.

“Koutarou-san… shouldn’t you be angry at yourself for losing instead of being angry at me for not watching?” Tsukishima stated as calmly as he could while pushing Bokuto’s hand down. In reality, he felt rather… sad? Anxious? Something unfamiliar bubbled in Tsukishima’s chest and he couldn’t, for the life of him, tell exactly what it was.

Either way, Kuroo seemed entertained at least but there was something else there “Hey, Nekoma won fair and square okay?”

“Keiji was totally out of his element! He was so distracted!” Bokuto snatched his hand away from
Tsukishima to point it at Akaashi this time “We lost because Tsukishima wasn’t there!”

Tsukishima’s eyes flickered from Bokuto to Akaashi, the only person that hadn’t really said anything the entire time. This time, even Tsukishima couldn’t tell what emotion was on Akaashi’s face.

Tsukishima was sure that, probably, Kuroo and Bokuto could. That made Tsukishima just a little bit jealous but also happy. The happy part was less about Akaashi’s expression and more about how distracted Akaashi was. Did Akaashi really want him there that much?

“I wasn’t distracted, Bokuto-san. Perhaps, if you had spent less time complaining during the game, we could’ve won.” Akaashi finally spoke, eyes narrowing almost angrily at Bokuto. Then, he turned to Tsukishima, expression softening considerably as he sat down beside the lanky blonde “How was your day?”

Tsukishima tried to ignore the way his heart beat fast in his chest. Akaashi was always so beautiful that, sometimes, when it really struck Tsukishima, his mind went blank and he couldn’t find the words he wanted to exactly say. Immediately, the previous topic blew right out of his mind.

So, he glanced at Kuroo and Bokuto, both of them also situating themselves so they sat next to Tsukishima.

That didn’t help either. Both Bokuto and Kuroo were also very handsome. In fact, all three of them were. They had the kind of good looks that were incomparable. Each one of them had their strong points and, in the end, they were their own kind of beauty. Together, the three of them were absolutely eye-catching. It was honestly kind of irritating.

“Uh… it was fine, I guess.” Tsukishima finally answered, distracting himself with the shine of the gym floor, before panicking and quickly adding “I think, by the end of this training, I’ll have super muscular legs. We’re losing so much that all we’re doing is running.”

Thinking it over in his head, Tsukishima couldn’t help but cringe internally. ‘Super muscular legs?’ Was that really the best he could come up with? Was he really that bad at continuing conversations?

Now, he truly knew how Yamaguchi felt. Yamaguchi had often needed Tsukishima’s help to continue conversations for him with Yachi.

It had taken some time to get used to because Tsukishima didn’t know how to continue conversations either. After all, he was the type to deliver witty one-liners or ignore people entirely. When conversations needed to be continued, Tsukishima always left it to whoever he was talking to.

He had never really found himself wanting to talk to anyone so much that he tried to continue the conversation himself.

Yet, there he was, attempting and failing. If only his skills with continuing Yamaguchi’s conversations with Yachi also applied here. Or, if only, Yamaguchi was there to return the favor.

Thankfully, after a pause of silence, Bokuto replied “Don’t worry about it, Tsukki! Muscular legs are very handsome!”

“Now that I’m thinking about it, you have pretty nice legs, don’t you, Tsukki?” Kuroo also decided to put his own two cents into the conversation, peering down at Tsukishima’s long shapely legs as if finally seeing them in the light for the first time.

“First off, stop calling me Tsukki.” Tsukishima quickly grew irritated before pushing Kuroo’s face back as if to get the Captain as far away from Tsukishima’s legs as possible “Second, don’t say that
about my legs.”

“Why not, Tsukki? You have thunder thighs. Be proud of them!” It was like Tsukishima’s irritation flew right over Bokuto’s head and Bokuto even went so far as to slap Tsukishima’s thigh.

Tsukishima’s face burned and his hand moved from pushing Kuroo away to pushing Bokuto’s hand away. Either way, the two didn’t seem to mind but the sparkle in their eyes made something like dread fill Tsukishima’s stomach.

“Woah, Tsukki, from afar, your legs are great but touching them--” Bokuto looked down at his hand like it had touched gold before looking at Tsukishima like he was made of it “I’d even dare say that you have better thighs than I do! Than Akaashi does!”

Tsukishima’s face burned even brighter. Distantly, he couldn’t help but compare the Bokuto of now to the Bokuto of that night, when Tsukishima had approached them with his question. Bokuto had been looking at his hand the same exact way.

To think he actually briefly looked up to this idiot.

“Shut up about my legs.” Tsukishima managed to say without stuttering despite the fact that his heart wasn’t so calm “Why were you guys looking for me again?”

“Oh, well, since we met your friend … Yamaguchi, was it?” Akaashi, thankfully, took Tsukishima’s cue to change the subject, expression unreadable “He was pretty nice, wasn’t he?”

“Yeah, he’s like my closest friend.” Tsukishima answered back unsurely, not exactly knowing where Akaashi was going with this.

Kuroo quickly sensed this and the joking air to him from earlier seemed to lessen “We just wanted to… make sure you have good friends.”

Tsukishima nodded slowly, trying to let the words sink in, before furrowing his eyebrows “What do you… mean?”

“I don’t know.” Bokuto’s sigh was ragged and, though he still had a childish tone to his voice, he was much more serious than Tsukishima could remember him ever being “We were worried because we felt like you had no one else to go to about your problems and that’s why you went to us.”

Tsukishima took a couple of seconds to let this sink in too before chuckling a little. The laugh was empty and sarcastic “No, Yamaguchi is the best friend I could’ve ever asked for. Nobody knows me better than him and vice versa. There’s no way I wouldn’t feel comfortable going to him about--”

He paused because, in truth, he had been hesitant to come forward to Yamaguchi about his feelings of inadequacy and his hesitance in accepting that he cared about certain things. Still, that was less Yamaguchi and more Tsukishima.

He hadn’t hesitated because he was scared of what Yamaguchi would say or what he would do. Mostly, he was scared of admitting it to himself.

“So, the two of you are really close?” Akaashi asked slowly and Tsukishima tried to identify the confusing tone to Akaashi’s voice but, instead, came up flat.

Still, he quickly nodded. He had never been one to deny that he was close to Yamaguchi. It was one of the things he was proud of the most. Befriending Yamaguchi and letting him in was one of the best decisions Tsukishima had ever made.
“Ah, okay.” Bokuto grinned, nodding quickly. There was something under his grin though, something Tsukishima couldn’t identify yet again.

Frustration bubbled under his skin. The three of them were like him, so good at hiding away how they truly felt. Tsukishima was sure the three of them could identify what was going on with each other but, at that moment, since he was the newest edition to the relationship, he couldn’t.

He felt like an outsider. Like he was disjointed. Like there was some hidden meaning behind the conversation that he wasn’t privy to.

“Okay, what the hell is going on? Why are you talking to me about Yamaguchi?” Tsukishima finally snapped, looking much more irritated than he’d ever looked before.

The three hesitated before Kuroo sighed, ragged like Bokuto’s earlier sigh “Well, we’re worried about you. After training… you’ll go back to Miyagi and we’ll stay here.”

“So..?” Tsukishima felt fear grip at his heart, tendrils of it spreading through his chest, wrapping around his lungs, making it a little hard to breathe because, to be honest, he hadn’t really considered that at all. But they had. They cared enough about him to.

That lessened the fear a little, enough that he could continue “We’ll keep in touch, right?”

“Yeah, of course. That’s shouldn’t even be a question.” Bokuto huffed as if playfully angry about the fact that Tsukishima even considered getting rid of the three of them.

However, Akaashi butted in lightly “We’re just worried because we won’t be there, physically. We’ll only be able to do so much for you when we’re this far away.”

Tsukishima finally understood and the tentacles of fear that gripped his organs retracted. He felt like he could breathe again. They were just worried about him. They thought that, perhaps, being so far away, they wouldn’t be able to support him as much as they were at that moment.

They wanted to make sure he was fully supported.

“Look, I have Yamaguchi, alright? He’s like… one of the best things that’s ever happened to me. He supports me like almost nobody else does. So, you don’t have to worry.” Tsukishima waved away their concerns and they seemed to relax a bit at that revelation.

Tsukishima then hesitated before almost grumpily adding “Plus, I didn’t go to you guys because I didn’t feel like there was anyone else to go to.”

He had thought the three of them understood. Tsukishima had went to them because they were his soulmates, because he wanted to give them a chance to prove him wrong, that soulmates were good and that they were only ever good.

They did just that.

Still, that explanation felt too much, too personal. He wanted to say it, wanted them to know, but it wouldn’t leave his lips.

Instead, he blushed, flustered as he stared at the ground “I went to you guys because… you guys… are you… I wasn’t just looking for anyone .”

A flashback suddenly passed through Tsukishima’s mind. It was of that night, when he had come to them, when he had asked them that fateful question. Before all of that, before he had stormed off,
before even Yamaguchi had yelled at him, Bokuto had approached him.

He had said words that made Tsukishima understand and, suddenly, Tsukishima was saying them too “It couldn’t have been anyone else. It has to be the three of you.”

From the looks on their faces, Tsukishima came to the conclusion that they, too, understood now.

His conclusion was supported by the sudden hugs he received from Kuroo and Bokuto, both of them yelling incoherently. From over Bokuto’s shoulder, Tsukishima could see Akaashi. His expression was, at first, blank. Slowly, however, a smile--big, broad, genuine--spread across the setter’s lips.

Tsukishima felt like nothing could go wrong.
Chapter Summary

Now, Tsukishima was part of this, whatever this was, has been for a while. It worked so flawlessly, so seamlessly. They brought the best out of Tsukishima so often that Tsukishima worried he wasn’t offering much to them. Still, they seemed happy to be around him and he was happy to be with them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was a week later that something happened.

During that week, Tsukishima got into a pattern. He would wake up, eat breakfast with his soulmates, do practice matches, take a break with Yamaguchi (and occasionally with his soulmates), do more practice matches, eat dinner, spend time with his soulmates in the third gym. It was all like a cycle and he quite enjoyed it.

It was comfortable and Tsukishima finally found that one spark that everyone in volleyball seemed to have. Suddenly, the sport he was so scared of caring about was suddenly so much easier to care for.

He didn’t have to be scared about getting hurt or getting disappointed because, yes, that was going to happen but he didn’t have to deal with those feelings of frustration by himself. He had Bokuto and Kuroo and Akaashi to help.

Right at that moment, Tsukishima found himself at the end of the day, where he usually was, hanging out at the hill outside of the third gym.

Though the outside was cold, Tsukishima felt warm. He wanted to attribute it to his sports jacket but that wasn’t it. Rather, he wasn’t physically warm, he supposed, but it was a comfortable warmth he felt in his chest.

He didn’t know what it was but perhaps it was simply just being able to see the stars that made him so cozy. That or… Tsukishima glanced at the boys surrounding him.

“You did good today, Tsukki.” Bokuto suddenly but happily told Tsukishima from his position on the grass right next to the lanky blonde.

Bokuto’s loud voice attracted the attention of Akaashi, who sat a little bit lower on the hill, and Kuroo, who sat the closest to the top between the four of them.

They were so often in these positions that it surprised Tsukishima that there weren’t any human shaped indents in the grass. The gym doors, of course, were wide open and so were the lights inside, illuminating them a little. The moon also helped with that, casting faint moonbeams on them.

Tsukishima had thought that his only memories of this hill would be the running Karasuno had to do as a penalty. He was happy to see that wasn’t the case. Usually, he was grumpy about having to run up the slope but, now that he had these memories to reminisce on, it wasn’t so frustrating.
“I don’t need to hear that from you, Koutarou-san.” Tsukishima finally answered though it came out as more of a sneer “But, I guess, thanks anyway.”

Bokuto gasped loudly in response, making a grab for Akaashi. “Keiji! Tsukki is so mean to me!”

Akaashi kept his face devoid of any emotion except a hint of a smirk and the gleam of amusement in his eyes “Bokuto-san, as a third year, I would have expected you to be able to handle this yourself.”

Tsukishima had to stifle his snickers with his hand. Bokuto, however, let out another whine, pouting childishly but endearingly like he always did. This, of course, caused Kuroo to give him a little shove with his foot.

This caused both boys to start bickering and for Akaashi to quickly intervene.

At that very moment, an odd thought entered Tsukishima’s mind. It was odd that these three looked so perfect for each other despite the fact that they contrasted so much. It was hard for Tsukishima to imagine that these three were soulmates. At the same time, it was hard not to.

Sometimes, it felt like their personalities clashed all too much. Bokuto and Kuroo argued often, poor Akaashi had so much to deal with always having to intervene and Kuroo never seemed to talk to Akaashi much. It was all too unbalanced.

At least, it probably was to people who barely knew them. Tsukishima noticed something, though. Under that chaos was something comforting. Despite everything all three of them did, they always ended back together.

Call it an unfortunate choice on fate’s part or fate’s grandest design.

Now, Tsukishima was part of this, whatever this was, has been for a while. It worked so flawlessly, so seamlessly. They brought the best out of Tsukishima so often that Tsukishima worried he wasn’t offering much to them. Still, they seemed happy to be around him and he was happy to be with them.

If that was an unfortunate choice, Tsukishima could only imagine how great things were when fate made a decent choice.

At that thought, Tsukishima’s hand absentmindedly gripped his own wrist. Though it was covered by a sleeve, the skin underneath burned. Not literally, of course. The skin simply felt hotter than usual, like that specific area of skin was flushed. If it was out of anxiety or anticipation, the blonde boy couldn’t tell.

Sometimes, that happened. He didn’t know why but, usually, it wasn’t because of anything bad. It burned when he got flustered or shy or whenever any of his soulmates got too close. This time, it felt different.

“You okay, Tsukki?” Kuroo’s voice pulled the kid out of his thoughts “Something bothering you?”

With his usual poker face, Tsukishima shook his head. “Not at all.”

There’s a short silence but it was neither awkward nor piercing.

“That’s good.” Akaashi finally piped up and his relief somewhat calmed Tsukishima “Some people are bothered by the fact that the three of us are soulmates. I’m glad you’re not one of them.”

“Obviously.” Bokuto added unhelpfully.
Of course, he wouldn't be one of them. Why would he? His face scrunched up at that a little. That statement had come out of nowhere and Tsukishima didn't quite understand. Still, before he could voice his confusion, someone beat him to speaking.

“Oh, yeah, speaking of…” Kuroo spoke up, eyes trained on Tsukishima “I know we asked if you had a brother but I wanted to ask if you had a sister too, Tsukki.”

“A sister?” What an odd thing to ask. In fact, it had taken Tsukishima aback “Uhm, why?”

At that question, Bokuto’s usual energy drained from him. It was like that time in court where he had an entire pass blocked by Tsukishima himself. Bokuto looked down, glancing almost worriedly at Kuroo.

Tsukishima only grew even more confused and his wrist burned even more.

Akaashi soon provided an answer by rolling down his sleeve and revealing his tan slender wrist.

Tsukishima hesitated a little, feeling as if he'd breached some sort of barrier. Sure, they were soulmates, but were they close enough that Tsukishima was allowed to look? Eventually, though, his curiosity took over.

Even in the rather dim light, the names on Akaashi’s wrist glinted, catching the moonbeams and reflecting them back almost beautifully.

There they were, the names Tsukishima had cursed since they had appeared on his own wrist. The names Tsukishima found himself falling in love with the past few days. Each one of them, each line, each character, the same as the one on his own.

It would have been completely identical had Akaashi’s name been there.

This wasn’t Tsukishima’s wrist, however, and there was something different about seeing the names on someone else’s wrist. It made it feel more real, less dreamlike. These people really were made for each other.

Bokuto Koutarou, Kuroo Tetsurou …

The last name, of course, was not Akaashi’s name like it was on Tsukishima’s wrist. Instead, it was Tsukishima’s. Tsukishima Kei. It was written in gorgeous gold, glinting ever so slightly.

He had to repeat it over and over in his head. That was his name.

Tsukishima quickly pushed the thought away. Of course it was his name. Why wouldn’t it be? He had known for the longest time that it was him, they all have. Still, it was… different, nice, assuring, seeing that it was him, that it was really him--

“We have a soulmate with the same last name as you so we thought…” Kuroo lets the sentence trail off, voice dropping until there was nothing but the lingering thought in the air.

The problem struck Tsukishima like a volleyball headed directly towards his torso. He felt the same breathlessness, the same sudden thump of pain against his chest. There was a hint of something, some sort of panicked feeling. He had thought they knew it was him, that the golden characters on their wrists were his name.

Maybe Tsukishima was overthinking it. After all, all he had to do was explain himself, tell them the truth. Then, everything would be fine.
Taking a calming shuddering breath, Tsukishima laughed “No, I don’t have a sister.”

Suddenly, at that answer, before Tsukishima could say anything else, Bokuto fell back. Before, he had been tense but, like a puppet whose strings had been cut, the Captain relaxed, letting himself lie against the grassy slope.

Tsukishima could find no calm from Bokuto’s relief. Suddenly, things didn’t feel as simple anymore.

The thud of pain returned to Tsukishima but, this time, it happened in time with the beat of his heart. Over and over, like it hurt for his heart to continue pumping blood into his veins.

“What, you don’t want to meet your third soulmate?” Tsukishima posed the question as condescendingly and snarkily as he possibly could and, surprisingly, at that moment, he felt like an impersonator trying to pretend to be Tsukishima Kei.

It didn’t matter either way. The silence that followed was still as thick as Tsukishima had feared it would be.

Inside the hush, Tsukishima found himself wondering whether he had hit the nail right on the head. If that was the case, however … Well, the boy would rather not think about that.

That hint of something started to spread. At first, it was just a small tingle of anxiety. Now, it felt like it encompassed his entire body. The feeling swallowed him whole, stuck to him like a second skin, constricted at him and made it harder to breathe.

“It’s not that we don’t want to meet our soulmate, Tsukishima-san.” Akaashi finally broke the silence, sounding too much like a criminal that had just been caught red-handed. “Have you received your mark yet?”

A sudden heat came over Tsukishima and he found himself shaking his head, mouth dry and mind almost reeling. “September.”

He wondered if this was what it felt like to be Akiteru, his own brother. He wondered if it felt this lonely, felt this isolating. Did Akiteru feel like he caught on fire when he, too, lied about his soulmate mark, something nobody should ever need to lie about?

Mostly, Tsukishima felt panicked about his lie, scared that they would call him out on it. Would they realise that Tsukishima was old enough? That Tsukishima, like many of his teammates, should’ve gotten his mark already?

Akaashi nodded, drawing Tsukishima out of his odd mental tangent. He looked like he understood but there was something else in there.

Bokuto, on the other hand, looked confused “Huh? I thought Yamaguchi was…”

“…my soulmate?” Tsukishima tried to ignore how numb his tongue felt as he said that, like the words were so disgusting that his body refused to acknowledge that he even said them. Quickly, he shook his head “No, no, no. His soulmate is Yachi--”

Akaashi nodded again as he interrupted Tsukishima “You must understand then, Tsukishima-san, that we--”

“We’re completely fine with just the three of us….” It was Kuroo’s turn to interrupt and his words felt almost rude. He didn’t finish his sentence though, just let it trail off like he couldn’t bring himself to say the rest.
This time, Tsukishima could finish the sentence for Kuroo.

_We are complete, the three of us. There’s no space for a fourth. A fourth would only ruin everything._

In this case, Tsukishima was the fourth, wasn’t he?

The boy couldn’t understand why he found his words choking in his throat. He could easily tell them that he was their soulmate, that the character spelling out Hotaru was actually read as Kei, that he was right there in front of them.

After all, Tsukishima Kei, the youngest member of a family that had been cursed by fate, used to adamantly state that he didn’t believe in soulmates. He didn’t believe that he needed them. He always told himself that he would never really accept his when they would come.

So what if these three beautiful boys made him believe, just for a brief amount of time, otherwise? So what if they made him realise how wonderful soulmates were? It didn’t matter. He was still the same walled-off jaded Tsukishima Kei. It was easy enough to shove them back out and put back the locks on his heart.

Why would he care that fate turned the tables on him? He had believed it would for so long, was it really a surprise that it finally did?

Yet, even with that, Tsukishima’s mouth simply tasted like bile. The thought of them not wanting him and him telling them their last soulmate sat in front of them… It made him sick. His body felt flooded with lava. Every heartbeat was punctuated by a throb of pain. His wrist burned worse now and, sadly, this time, Tsukishima could tell why.

“Man, I feel bad for your soulmate.” The words left his mouth before he could stop them. He supposed he meant it as a joke, made it as sarcastic as his usual humour, but it was not taken as such.

Akaashi’s face scrunched up as if he was upset or angry or in pain. Tsukishima didn’t know him well enough to discern which (that was a lie, he just didn’t want to be able to). The sudden thought that Akaashi’s face looked much handsomer smiling made him dizzy.

That smile that he had given Tsukishima felt dirty now. Like a distant memory that he managed to fuck up, managed to remember wrong, managed to put on a pedestal when, really, Akaashi was probably just laughing at him. His smile was beautiful but it wasn’t for him.

Bokuto gave Tsukishima a shove, for saying what he said or for upsetting Akaashi, it wasn’t apparent. He was sure, however, that there was a satisfaction in the way the dirt underneath his elbow scratched at his skin through his sleeve.

Kuroo said nothing.

“You don’t understand.” Bokuto’s voice was loud and heavy but with anger or sadness Tsukishima could not tell.

He couldn’t seem to tell anything now. His world felt flipped or his mind felt dizzy or something was wrong. There were so many signs that pointed to the fact that they knew, that they had acknowledged he was their fourth.

He had thought it was so obvious. This entire time, had he just seemed like a pathetic loser? Someone who clung to people that showed him even the smallest amount of affection?

Moments where he would try his best to flirt with them or flatter them jabbed at his brain, moments
where they would ruffle his hair and hug him close constricted in his chest, such precious memories felt heavy in his stomach. He had thought that--

Instead, he scoffed as he stood and dusted himself off. He was about to snap too, retort something clever like ‘Whatever helps you sleep at night, Koutarou-san’, but the ring of his phone interrupted him.

Tsukishima fished his phone out of his pocket and took a glance at the caller ID “Ah, my team is probably looking for me.”

It was a feat that Tsukishima managed to keep his voice level despite how much he wanted to fall apart right then and there. He didn’t know why he felt that way but the urge to just fall and never get up was strong.

He wanted to--

Instead, he answered the phone, pressed it to his ear and started walking away. He spared only a wave for the three older boys he left behind.

Chapter End Notes

thank you so much for reading this far into the story! i hope you loved it and you loved that good twist! if you did, please holler at me in the comments or leave a nice sweet kudos. thank youuu lots.

ill try to update as soon as possible and i already have the next two chapters kind of written but i also kind of want to leave you guys this little cliffhanger for now and just let it stew for a little. so you guys can really feel the angst? either way, the story will be updated.

also, please keep in mind that i've updated the tags for the story and to really be mindful of them. it hasn't appeared yet in the story, of course, but those tags will most definitely apply to the next few chapters. i wouldn't want to trigger or upset anyone so i tried to make the tags as accurate as possible without spoiling anything.

update (15/11/18) - so i went over the whole story just to like polish a few things. i had realised i misspelled a lot of words and i decided i wanted tsukki to be spelled with two k's so i changed that. i also changed asahi's name to azumane just because i wanted everyone to be referred to by their last names if that makes sense (lmao didn't realise till i looked it up that asahi is his first name). also added a couple of paragraphs just to describe in extra detail a couple of stuff
Yamaguchi liked to think that their friendship was strengthened even more after their yelling match in the corridors of the training school. He had poured his heart out, all of it, every insecurity and feeling, to Tsukishima and, later on, Tsukishima had done the same.

Maybe that was why Yamaguchi felt wrong. Maybe their friendship or, to be more specific, their closeness, allowed him some sort of sixth sense. A Tsukishima sense, for lack of a better term.

Either way, though he preferred not to call on nights like this, (because, he supposed, Tsukishima would want some privacy) he reasoned that tonight was an exception because of the nagging feeling in his head.

It wasn’t odd for Tsukishima to be out at this time of night. For some reason, some of the upperclassmen from the other teams had taken a liking to him so the four of them were found practicing. Sometimes, Hinata or other team members would even join.

Well, then again, those upperclassmen hadn’t gotten close to Tsukishima for just any random reason. They were soul mates. Which was why Yamaguchi was sure that something was developing between them during their late night ‘practices’.

Tsukishima had previously even admitted that they made him a better person (Yamaguchi admitted the same about Yachi). Plus, it made Tsukishima happier, that was obvious, so on nights that he was out late, Yamaguchi tried not to worry too much.

However, as he sat there on top of his futon, Yamaguchi couldn’t help but feel odd. Not a misplaced kind of odd where he felt as if he forgot something. Rather, it was the kind of odd that made him feel like something was wrong.

It was stupid, of course, and even Kageyama agreed when Yamaguchi said he felt as much.

“Do you think something bad has happened?” Sugawara decided to insert his couple of cents into the conversation, a gentle expression on his face that only hinted at concern.
Yamaguchi had to pause for a second to consider it but, in the end, he nodded, eyebrows furrowing together “I don’t know why…”

Sugawara continued to have the same expression on his face except that concern started bleeding through in the way he gently frowned “How about you call him to see if he’s okay?”

At that suggestion, Yamaguchi stretched over, grabbing his cell phone. He knew Tsukishima’s number by heart, mostly because they had long conversations on the phone constantly, but he didn’t need to type it out. Tsukishima was Yamaguchi’s second emergency contact.

After all, no matter how anybody viewed the two of them, they were best friends. Whenever something was wrong, Yamaguchi never hesitated to tell Tsukishima. The two of them had a silent agreement that there would never be any judgement in their friendship, only support.

Yamaguchi liked to think that their friendship was strengthened even more after their yelling match in the corridors of the training school. He had poured his heart out, all of it, every insecurity and feeling, to Tsukishima and, later on, Tsukishima had done the same.

Maybe that was why Yamaguchi felt wrong. Maybe their friendship or, to be more specific, their closeness, allowed him some sort of sixth sense. A Tsukishima sense, for lack of a better term.

Either way, though he preferred not to call on nights like this, (because, he supposed, Tsukishima would want some privacy) he reasoned that tonight was an exception because of the nagging feeling in his head.

When he finally brought himself to call, Tsukishima answered the phone but didn't speak. That only made Yamaguchi worry even more and he was convinced that his Tsukishima sense was much more accurate than he had thought.

Before he could open his mouth and say something, however, Tsukishima's voice rang from the other side “Yamaguchi?”

Hearing Tsukishima’s voice on the other end of the phone didn’t seem to provide Yamaguchi the relief he had wanted. In fact, it resulted in the opposite.

Something about Tsukishima’s voice was clipped and tight like he was, perhaps, holding his breath or struggling with the syllables.

“Tsukki? Is something wrong?” Yamaguchi didn’t hesitate, his voice coated with worry.

There was a long inhale, shaky and forced, but Tsukishima’s voice stayed monotone and level “It won’t stop bleeding.”

“What?” The words left Yamaguchi’s mouth in a rush and he quickly stood, eyes wide and free hand clenched “Tsukki, where are you? Tell me where you are.”

Yamaguchi’s obvious panic had attracted the attention of the rest of Karasuno as well as worry Sugawara who stood when Yamaguchi had.

“What's going on?” Sugawara placed a gentle hand on Yamaguchi’s shoulder. It was comforting, especially since Yamaguchi didn't feel exactly as courageous as he looked.

“Is something happening with Tsukishima?” Nishinoya seemed to butt in too but he didn't stand, just leaned closer as if to lend an ear.
The demands for information went unanswered. Yamaguchi paid his upperclassmen no mind as he continued to strain his ear for Tsukishima’s voice.

Sadly, Yamaguchi’s question went unanswered too which, of course, only made him worry more “Tsukki, you need to tell me where you are! You obviously need help and we--"

The sliding door of the room suddenly opened. Every single Karasuno player as well as Kenma, who had come because of Hinata, flinched, obviously surprised.

“Tsukki!” Yamaguchi moved first, unperturbed by the way Tsukishima closed the door as if he had been chased.

Next to move was Sawamura who stood to walk over to Tsukishima “Is everything alright, Tsukishima?”

Upon closer inspection, Tsukishima’s eyes were red. There were tear stains on his cheeks and his glasses fogged a little, probably from his evaporating tears.

The most concerning thing was Tsukishima’s rolled up sleeve. His other hand was on his wrist and--

“Tsukki, no!” Yamaguchi was fast, snatching up Tsukishima’s hand and prying it off of Tsukishima’s wrist.

Yamaguchi swallowed, forcing the bile back down his throat. It tasted bitter in his mouth but he managed to stay strong for his friend. Staying strong, however, proved hard when he looked directly at the mess of scratches and blood that was Tsukishima’s wrist so, instead, Yamaguchi focused on Tsukishima’s face.

Tsukishima’s eyes looked so empty “Yamaguchi.”

“Sorry, Tsukki.” Yamaguchi replied, half out of habit and the other half out of a twisted sense of guilt.

He knew that, sometimes, Tsukishima made himself feel better that way. Tsukishima would scratch at his wrist absentmindedly when he was frustrated or upset. He did it till blood burst through or until the patch of skin would redden. Yamaguchi never understood why or how it made him feel better.

Tsukishima told him it was because he wanted to get rid of the soulmate names or that, sometimes, the pain felt better than the frustration. Yamaguchi never understood that either. But he thought it had gotten better. Tsukishima rarely did it in the first place but, in the past few weeks, he hadn’t done it at all.

By now, everyone started to realise that there was a real problem going on.

Sawamura, who had seen Tsukishima’s wrist, quickly started ushering both him and Yamaguchi further into the room. Sugawara scrambled to grab a first aid kit before he settled in right next to Tsukishima’s futon.

Everyone else either scrambled to sit near Tsukishima’s futon or kept their distance (specifically Azumane who couldn’t handle blood or injury of any kind)

When Sawamura, Tsukishima and Yamaguchi finally reached Tsukishima’s futon, Sawamura made Tsukishima sit.

Yamaguchi couldn’t help but worry about how pliable Tsukishima was being. Instead of his usual
sarcastic and stubborn self, Tsukishima simply followed as if he was too tired to do much of anything else.

He didn't know if it was more to comfort Tsukishima or to comfort himself but Yamaguchi squeezed Tsukishima’s free wrist. Part of Yamaguchi hoped it would pull a reaction out of this shocked stone-faced version of Tsukishima. It didn't.

Finally, after hesitating a little, Sugawara took Tsukishima’s injured wrist, holding it gently by the back of it so as to not touch the scratches “Oh, Tsukishima.”

“Did someone do this to you?” Nishinoya leaned closer to Tsukishima, anger obviously bubbling but not yet overflowing.

After another silent moment, Tsukishima shook his head “Does it look like someone else did this to me?”

At that, he lifted his other hand despite the fact that Yamaguchi’s hand was attached to his wrist. From the blood on his fingertips and in the crevices of his nails, it sufficed to say that he clawed at his own skin.

Yamaguchi could at least be relieved by the fact that Tsukishima had sarcastically answered which, of course, meant that he was slowly feeling better.

However, this had been the worst of case of scratching that Tsukishima had ever done so Yamaguchi didn’t allow himself to feel relieved. Something must’ve made Tsukishima do this and, whatever it was, it wasn’t good.

Nishinoya seemed to feel the same way but that didn't stop the libero from frowning “Tsukishima, why?”

At that, Tsukishima sniffled, attracting everyone but Sugawara’s attention away from his injuries and to his face.

Tsukishima was rarely ever not stone-faced. Though him being pliable was rare, he was often just as unemotional in front of the team. If he wasn't stoic, he was smirking. If he wasn't smirking, he was scowling. Those were the only expressions they've ever seen him make.

However, there, in the middle of the room, Tsukishima began to cry.

He shook Yamaguchi’s hand away to take off his glasses, probably so as to not smudge them any further. Yamaguchi took the pair of glasses from his hand, allowing Tsukishima to rub away the tears that fell.

Sugawara, who had been busy cleaning the scratches and bandaging them, finally finished. Afterwards, he gently held his free hand out “Let's clean the blood from your hand, hm?”

Tsukishima nodded almost dumbly, giving Sugawara his other hand before using his injured one to angrily wipe away more tears.

Nobody dared speak, too worried about upsetting Tsukishima any further. Finally, the silence was broken by a shuddering breath from Tsukishima. He started at the sheets of his futon, not wanting to really look at anyone.

“My soul mates... they don’t want me.” Everyone was surprised by the dry laugh that left Tsukishima’s lips and by the words that he spoke
Yamaguchi’s head snapped to the side so he could look Tsukishima in the eyes. Tsukishima didn’t return the gaze. It was obvious to Yamaguchi, though, that the smile on Tsukishima’s face was painfully fake seeing as it didn’t reach his heartbroken looking eyes.

Quickly, though, that painful smile turned into anger. His face scrunched up as if he was in some sort of pain. Yamaguchi’s first reaction, of course, was to try and relieve it except, this time, Yamaguchi couldn’t and that hurt him more than anything.

Still, it was odd to hear something like that from Tsukishima, the boy that had adamantly stated he never really cared about his soul mates or the names on his wrist. Then again, it was equally odd to see Tsukishima, the strongest boy Yamaguchi knew, crying so forcefully.

Even when the two of them had found out that Tsukishima’s older brother was lying about being the ace of Karasuno, Tsukishima hadn’t reacted at all. His face had been blank, devoid of any emotion. At that the time, Yamaguchi had been concerned but he immediately learned that was just how Tsukishima coped.

Instead of feeling these heavy emotions, Tsukishima simply put them aside. Tried to ignore them. Tried to bottle them up. What did that say about his pain, about his sadness, right at that moment that he couldn’t push it aside?

Yamaguchi could understand, though. They had spoken about it several times. Tsukishima truly was happy with his three soulmates. Yamaguchi had seen it with his own two eyes. How could they suddenly change their mind?

Chapter End Notes

basically tldr: yamaguchi worries about tsukishima because he feels like something’s wrong. he's proven right when tsukishima comes back from practice with self harm injuries. tsukishima then breaks down to everyone (after a bit of prodding) about the fact that his soulmates didn't want him.
Chapter Summary

Yamaguchi was ready to fight, maybe even pack a few punches. It frustrated him how they asked without even thinking, like the Tsukishima they knew, the one that brash and all edges and corners, was only ever just that. But he wasn’t. There was more to Tsukishima than that.

There was more to people than just what they showed others.

Chapter Notes

tw again lmao sorry... so there's some like suicidal ideation at the end? it's not very explicit? it's just like an offhanded comment? so i won't do like the whole summary thing, especially since it's really only at the very end. if anyone has a problem with this chapter or they really don't want to risk reading it, just comment and i'd love to summarize the entire chapter for you or maybe even add a summary at the very end

“Oh, Tsukishima.” Sugawara muttered yet again as he finished up cleaning the blood off of Tsukishima’s hand with a wet wipe.

“Who are they?” Tanaka spoke up for the first time, his tone venomous and his teeth almost looking shark like.

Seeing Nishinoya’s burning glare and the dark look on Sawamura’s face, it seemed that a few others in Karasuno shared the sentiment. Surprisingly, even Hinata and Kageyama looked ready to start a fight.

Yamaguchi was hesitant to answer. He didn’t know what Tsukishima wanted and, so, he didn’t want to say something that would further upset him.

From beside Hinata, Kenma pressed forward, placing a hand on Tsukishima’s shoulder, before looking to Hinata “It’s Kuroo, Bokuto and Akaashi.”

“Kuroo?” Hinata shouted out, almost like a parrot, before placing a hand over his face to copy the Nekoma captain’s infamous fringe “You mean that guy you always hang around with?”

Kenma cringed before he pushed Hinata’s hand away from his face. Still, he nodded. Yamaguchi quickly turned to Tsukishima as if to check how okay Tsukishima was with everybody knowing.

Tsukishima, on the other hand, was still steadily looking down at his futon, tears slowly dripping from the corners of his eyes. He looked resigned like the fight in him was gone which, of course, seemed impossible. Yet, there it was.
Sawamura stood up at that moment as if ready to charge out and get Kuroo. Everyone was aware who Kuroo’s two other soulmates were. The three of them were never found apart. It should’ve been obvious that they were the ones since Tsukishima was often found with them.

It wasn’t like Tsukishima actively stated that they were his soulmates, though. There was even a period of time where they had thought Yamaguchi was Tsukishima’s soulmate since they had been so close. After that was cleared up, they tended not to jump to conclusions.

Now, they knew for sure and they wanted revenge or, at least, an explanation.

However, a tug at his pants made him hesitate. He looked down to see Kageyama with the usual dark glare on his face.

“Don’t do anything.” Kageyama spoke but his words felt forced.

Nishinoya quickly protested “Do nothing? How could you--”

“I-I'm not sure if I'm right, senpai, but these people... are still Tsukishima's soulmates.” Kageyama continued to sound cautious, like he didn't really want to say the words but that he had to “They may have hurt him but... he still loves them, right?"

Tsukishima cried just a little more at that. It was true. Though they had hurt him, though they had adamantly stated that they didn't want him, he still didn't speak up when he could've easily told them it was them.

He knew how much they didn't want to come off as the villains, how much they wanted to preserve the friendship between the four of them. He saw it in the way Akaashi spoke to him. The setter was cautious, gentle. He didn't want to spook Tsukishima. He wanted Tsukishima to understand.

It was hard to understand.

Still, the last thing he wanted was for the three of them to be confronted. If he wanted a confrontation, he would’ve just confronted them at that moment, when they had told him.

No, confrontation wouldn’t happen. Tsukishima would never tell them. Selfishly because he didn't want to ruin his relationship with them. Unselfishly because he didn't want them to know what they had done to him, so that they could keep their conscience clean.

He wanted to put them above everything. So, in a way, Kageyama was right. From how Tsukishima didn’t protest, everyone could guess that Kageyama had hit the nail right on the head.

Hinata looked doubtfully at Kageyama “How would you know something like that?”

Everyone else perked up at the question because, obviously, Kageyama wasn't exactly the foremost expert in feelings. He was emotionally stunted and socially awkward. He could barely even give out compliments on the court and that wasn't because he didn't want to.

It seemed the subject of why was touchy. After a second of debating in his mind, as if trying to figure out whether or not to say the truth, Kageyama grumbled “My soulmates didn’t want me either.”

Everyone's eyes were suddenly on Kageyama instead of Tsukishima. Their gazes beat down on him and he could feel his face flush hotter.

Still, he continued “My soulmates... were Kunimi and Kindaichi... from Kitagawa Daichi.”
There was a pause of silence as everyone took in that information before Hinata shouted out loud “Isn't that Mr. Spiky Radish and Mr. Lazy Face?”

When Hinata had made hand gestures to help jog everyone's memories, Kenma quickly stopped him by hugging him and restricting his arms. Hinata squirmed a little but he got the idea and quickly stopped, pouting and angry but not at Kenma.

“The reason why you… you… you didn't want to be called…” Tsukishima shakily spoke, fresh tears in his eyes as his face scrunched up.

Kageyama waved the thought away “It's fine. You didn't know.”

Tsukishima could see now why it was so hard for Kageyama, for people, to really relate with him or speak to him. It wasn't because he didn't care about volleyball as much or because he didn't care about soulmates as much.

He was stuck in his own world, accepting his own excuses for things. He was perceptive with other people's emotions but he often failed to look at the big picture.

Tsukishima should've known that Kageyama must've had an excuse for why he didn't want to be called the King of the Court.

There was another silence, nobody knew what to say.

Then, Ennoshita cleared his throat “You know, I'm not an expert at this or anything but… I've had experience with soulmate troubles and, sometimes, you just have to talk to them about it.”

“Chika-chan?” Nishinoya and Tanaka snapped out of their glares, looking to Ennoshita like they didn't know what he was talking about. Ennoshita simply put both of them in a tight headlock, his expression reading obviously angry but trying to conceal it under a smile.

Kageyama sighed, rubbing at his face. Tsukishima sighed too, furiously wiping at his eyes despite the fact that it stung as he did so.

“Are you… okay enough to tell us what happened?” Sugawara turned the attention back to Tsukishima, worried expression evident on his face but his tone being more cautious “You don’t have to if you don’t want to but--”

“The four of you seemed to get along pretty well.” Hinata interrupted rather inelegantly, quickly ruining the tone of sensitivity in Sugawara’s question.

Yamaguchi even went so far as to glare at Hinata who seemed unphased by the rather rotten expression. If looks could kill, Yamaguchi would, in fact, be a murderer. Kenma, on the other hand, just seemed tired of how Hinata just barrelled through everything, metaphorically and literally.

Tsukishima surprisingly still answered “They thought the name on their wrist was ‘Hotaru’ instead of ‘Kei’ so… this entire time, they had just… seen me as a friend…”

Yamaguchi would’ve laughed at the irony if it had been any other situation. The one thing that Tsukishima hated more than anything else, his number one pet peeve since they met in middle school, was when people called him Hotaru.

He had claimed, back then, that it was just because Hotaru was such an unfitting name. Yamaguchi wouldn’t argue that but, still, it was cruel of fate to have it happen yet again and with Tsukishima’s soulmates.
“So you cleared it up with them, right?” Azumane had joined them after he was sure that the blood was gone and he wouldn’t get the need to throw up.

Instead of the confident yes that the team members had expected, Tsukishima hesitated “No, of course not.”

“How? Tsukishima, why not?” Nishinoya pressed forward, just as mindlessly as Hinata had been only minutes before. Ennoshita tightened his neck hold as if in punishment.

Tsukishima curled into himself, trying hard to, perhaps, hide “It was hard… to…”

“C’mon, you’re Tsukishima Kei. If anyone could have the courage to say something that’s hard to say, it would be you.” Tanaka was next to ask with the same lack of sensitivity as the other two.

Yamaguchi was ready to fight, maybe even pack a few punches. It frustrated him how they asked without even thinking, like the Tsukishima they knew, the one that brash and all edges and corners, was only ever just that. But he wasn’t. There was more to Tsukishima than that.

There was more to people than just what they showed others.

“It wasn’t… that… I just…” A fresh wave of tears suddenly pricked at Tsukishima’s eyes but he held them back, tired of just crying his heart out like some rom-com heroine. Still, the tears forced themselves out and Tsukishima momentarily felt like he couldn’t breathe “They were so relieved to hear that they wouldn’t be meeting their third soulmate… So relieved that I…”

This time, when everyone turned to Kageyama as if he had all the answers just because his soulmates didn’t want him either, Kageyama couldn’t find the words to comfort Tsukishima. He wanted to have the words, wanted to be able to say something. But he just didn’t have it.

“Who am I to ruin their night by telling them bad news?” Tsukishima added and, finally, his usual haughty tone accompanied his words but they didn’t feel familiar like everyone had expected it to be.

Instead, it was out of place, like Tsukishima was desperately trying to act a certain way, trying to reassure them that he was okay. It was obvious he wasn’t.

“Hey, Tsukishima, its okay. We understand.” Sawamura shook his head as if telling Tsukishima that he didn’t need to pretend he was okay. After the rollercoaster ride of emotions Tsukishima had felt that night, the last thing he should be was okay. He didn’t need to be okay.

Instead, Tsukishima rubbed angrily at his eyes as if wiping away the remnants of his tears or, maybe, trying to rub hard enough to wake himself up from a nightmare. Maybe, if he rubbed at his eyes hard enough, they would never open again.

Unfortunately, it didn’t work.

Chapter End Notes

thank you so much for reading this far. i know that was such a doozie of a chapter. it was definitely emotional for me. if you got a little emotional or if you liked it, leave a kudos and a comment!!! i’ll try to update as soon as i can but it’s finals week here. while you’re waiting for an update, why don’t you hop on over to the companion fic to this one: the emotions that guide us? it’s basically the plot of this fic but in the point of view
of kuroo/akaashi/bokuto!!!

I don't plan on updating this one until I catch that fic up so hopefully you want to go check that one out lmao

If you wanna get some updates, my tumblr is mini-ghost-writer and my twitter is minikkukkungi. There's not much on either of them but like... if you wanna, follow anyway lmao. On my twitter, there's a poll up on which story you guys want updated asap? So if you wanna vote on that, hmu!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!