The Sound Of Silence

by OuterRing

Summary

The only thing he had always known, the only thing he could ever remember being at his side, was Darkness.

Notes

Well... that's not just my first Soukoku fic... This is my first fiction ever. And this is also the first time I have tried to write something in English... 'cause English is not my native tongue... and apart from few basics I studied at school, everything else is “self-taught”... So, this is probably quite shitty, I’m sorry. (I’m a little nervous about all of this...)

Please, note that this fic will contain blood, gore, abuses, tortures, angst as well as pining, fluff, smut, humor and so on, because, well... life it’s just like that (maybe, there’s not so much gore in my life, but I’m not even a Port Mafia member...).

The title of this fic, as well as the title of the first chapter, is from the song “The Sound of Silence” by Simon & Garfunkel.
I really hope that, even if this is an absolute mess, you’ll be able to enjoy it a little…
Thanks for reading.
1) Hello Darkness, my old friend, I’ve come to talk with you again…

The Sound of Silence

Hello Darkness, my old friend,

I’ve come to talk with you again…

He didn’t know how it was like when he was born. He just knew it was in April, on the 29th to be exact, about ten years ago, or, at least, that was what was stated on the documents he had previously stolen from the archive of the orphanage he was fleeing from.

Maybe, it was a sunny day, graced by the pleasant warmth of the middle spring.

Maybe, colorful flowers were blooming in all their majesty, filling the air with their inebriating fragrances.

Maybe, some little birds were chirping happily, greeting the miracle of life occurring once again.

Maybe, his mother smiled at him fondly and beautifully, even if exhausted from the labor… and his father looked at her overwhelmed by sheer love, treasuring proudly the first sight of his dear spouse cuddling tenderly their beloved son…

He couldn’t know.

Anyways, to be honest, he didn’t think so. Because the only thing he had always known, the only thing he could ever remember being at his side, was Darkness.

Therefore, probably, Darkness was there, even the day he was born.

It was there, in a night devoid of any light, gloomy clouds concealing both the moon and the stars completely.

It was there, in expressionless faces lacking any warmth and joy, mere witnesses of a cursed new life coming into this world.

It was there, in the tears that were flowing down his cheeks, the first and the last he would have ever poured.

It was there, tangling up in his earliest breath, sinking deeply in his lungs struggling for air, settling down in all the fibers of his tiny and defenseless body.
With his first wail, Darkness claimed him as its, from that moment, on.

* * *

He suddenly woke up, hearing the sound of rough voices approaching.

“Fuck…” he murmured under his breath. He had fallen as deep without intending to, probably lulled by the waves gently hitting the cargo boat he had climbed on board clandestinely.

He crouched himself further behind the crates piled up in the hold, breath catching in his throat, hearth pounding loudly in his chest, mind racing a mile a second.

Not that he was scared, really. After what had happened early that morning, he was almost confident that he could wriggle out of it quite well, in any case. Yea… maybe, he was a little bit overconfident, considering that he hadn’t quite figured out yet what actually had occurred. All he could remember was most a sort of feeling, rather than a legitimate memory, it was as he had acted under some kind of spell casted on him…

... 

It had seemed as if he could defeat gravity… The things that he was touching had started floating around him, moving accordingly to his will, while his mind was dizzy, clouded by a thick layer of Darkness, preventing him from realizing what unmistakably was happening, considering that his hands were holding a dagger covered in blood and still there was so much blood splayed on the wall at his back and he had felt an unbounded strength raising unforgiving from the inmost of his inner self and he was indeed hearing a cacophony of voices screaming around him endlessly and the earth itself had seemed as it was shaking from the deepest of its core and…

...

His subconscious was spinning wildly and he shook his head trying to ground himself into the present. That wasn’t the right time to space out and lose concentration, he needed to be fully aware of his surroundings, to avoid any possible problem coming from the two men walking towards him.

Well, probably, even if they had found him out, they would have just put him on work as a ship’s boy, or something like that. But, in that case, he should have given some sort of an explanation, about who he was, where he came from, what the hell he was doing here… Damn, he sure hadn’t any intention to deal with that annoying stuff. To be honest, all that he wanted now was just sleeping, because he was quite tired…

Oh… so tired…
While the voices were passing past him – fortunately without detecting him - headed to the back door at the end of the hold, he managed to focus, so he could grasp some bits of conversation between the men.

“… he assured me that the crossing is going to be as smoothly as honey, no one’s going to approach us, not even to ask what time is it…” a slow chuckle followed the awful joke.

“Why he’s so sure?”

That said, a wreck laugh cracked the air, echoing through the bulkheads of the – not so big – hold, in a dissonant sound that scratched the back of his eardrums.

“Do you even know who the fuck this cargo does belong to?”

“Shit! How the hell I’m supposed to know! I’m just a newbie here!”

Another irksome laughter erupted from the throat of the former man “We’re going to deliver this in Yokohama, directly to the Port Mafia! Who do you think has the guts to stand against them? And even if there’s someone stupid enough to do so, they surely have been already dealt with…”

The voices were fading away, alongside with the steps of the two men.

Finally, he let out the breath he wasn’t even aware he was holding, mumbling quietly “Well, at least, I’ve managed to find out where we’re headed…”

He had climbed on board in a rush, hiding, just concerned about putting the longest feasible distance between him and the “orphanage” – or better, the fucking bloody mess that remained of it, as his mind, almost out of nowhere, supplied gracefully.

A creeping sensation was menacing to crawl up his skin again, immediately sneaking under the first layer of his skin and he shooed it away, biting his lips thoughtfully and drowning himself in memories.

Well, the “orphanage”… The only “home” he had ever known…

The sole thought of calling it “home” made him laugh dryly and a bitter smile cut his lips open, baring his teeth in a feral sneer.

That filthy and godforsaken prison that someone had the nerve to call “orphanage” had been merely a collector of cursed souls, those of discarded children that weren’t really intended to be taken care of… let alone, they were meant to be adopted, to find a family for their own. All the children hosted there had a sad common point: since the very moment they were born, they had been deemed “beyond salvation”. Living being so cursed, damned, tainted, rotten, that this world hadn’t a place suited for them. Better would had been not being born at all. But they were there, and so… why not try to make some profit out of them? Who could complain, in any case? He shook his head helplessly.

Sure, I couldn’t complain… I couldn’t even raise my voice to let out a single word of protest, I couldn’t scream or cry, I couldn’t ask for help, because no one would have ever came for me.

All he could do was waiting, endlessly, for the next bastard in turn with filthy hands wandering on him, sneaking under his clothes and rummaging his body with shameless lust, seeking their pleasure without any concern about the pain and the wounds they were inflicting. And the worst wounds were those which hadn’t left visible scars, those carved in his bones, those buried deeply at the bottom of his heart, in the most unreachable and obscure nook of his inner self…
The thought was enough to make him shiver in utter disgust.

... 

However, that morning… well… that morning, something had changed.

* * *

He leaned back, resting his body against the nearest crate, mouth dry, head pounding painfully, while his mind was trying to put together the scattered pieces of his memories about what exactly had happened that morning, struggling to sort out a reasonable explanation to the senseless events that had brought him there.

He could clearly remember the sour taste of bile raising in his throat when the Director had summoned him.

He had walked towards the main office with shaky legs and a dreadful foreboding clenching his guts.

He had knocked on the door and waited for the voice inside to allow him entrance.

“Come in.”

When he had entered the room, he had been “welcomed” by four pairs of eyes immediately pointing at him.

Soon after, the Director, looking at one of the “guests”, a fatty and greasy man in his fifty, had spoken: “Well, Monsieur Lescaut, this is the guy I told you about. Isn’t he quite pretty? Those auburn curls and big blue eyes sure make him look like a porcelain doll. Moreover, I assure you, he’s even quite docile. You won’t have any problem in… well, having him satisfying all your needs…”

Said man had just nodded in approval, letting his lascivious gaze wandering with unconcealed lust on any part of his body “I have to admit that he is cute, really… Nevertheless, I would have… a little taste first… You know, just to be sure he’s as sweet as he seems…”

The Director had answered without giving it a second thought, just waving a hand dismissively “Oh, please, have it your way!”

The two grunts accompanying Monsieur Lescaut had stalked towards him and grabbed his wrists tightly, immobilizing him. He had tried to react somehow, to shake off that merciless grip, to take at least a step back, but to no avail. The two men were simply too huge and strong for him to be able to do something.

Abiding by a mere hint from their boss, they had ripped off his shirt, exposing his bare skin to the sight of the disgusting man.

He couldn’t help but yell, helplessly.

Monsieur Lescaut had just curled his lips up in a mischievous grin “My, my, mon petit oiseau, there’s no need to be so scared… no one’s going to harm you… on the contrary… I’m planning to let you feel good… oh, so good…” and he had quickly approached him, to brush his greasy fingers.
throughout the exposed skin of his chest, licking his dry lips in anticipation… “You’re so soft and smooth…”

He had frozen while the hands of the man were rummaging his body, unable even to let out the slightest sound of protest. His eyes had widened in utter shock, his whole body was shaking and he would have collapsed if the two grunts hadn’t kept him upright and still.

His mind was screaming desperately, uttering all the words his mouth was unable to voice.

*I’m weak... I can do nothing... No one will ever come to help me!*

The Director, for good measure, was simply looking out of the window, without paying attention in the least to the abuse that was occurring in front of his eyes.

*This is going to happen once more... I’m at someone else mercy again... I’m useless!*

Those filthy hands were spreading their way under the brim of his slacks…

*I can’t stand this! I can’t bear this anymore! I can’t... just... I can’t…*

Greasy fingers were untidying the buttons of his slacks, while a hand had slid backward to squeeze his ass. That was too much.

Really too much…

Enough…

*I remember...*

...a heavy heat was burning my body...

...a delirious fever was clouding my mind...

...a blind rage was surging from the deepest of my guts... shaking my bones till the marrow...

...an unforgiving wrath was flowing through my veins... claiming its right to be set free...

...something born inside of me ripped my flash to shreds, tore apart my soul, digging its way through my inner self...

...and came to light.

“ENOUGH!”

He shouted, with a voice that sounded more like the roar of a demoniac beast rather than something actually human.

His rampant rage mutated in absolute calm, the kind that comes from unyielding awareness of sheer force.

*I won’t be weak anymore. No one will ever lay a finger on me. No one will dare to harm me again.*

Everything went silent and still. Deadly still. As if gravity was anchoring mercilessly to the ground everything around him. Everything but him.
The sensation of greasy hands on his body suddenly faded away, the tight grip holding his wrist run down and dissipated.

He raised his freed arms and stared at his hands, which were glowing in red.

His whole body was gleaming, engulfed in a bright, shimmering crimson light.

He shifted his gaze to look at the men that had been molesting and restraining him until a moment before.

Now, they were laying flat on the floor, faces up, mouths agape, pressed down without salvation by a nameless force.

No, it’s not nameless. I know it. I’ve ever known it. Till the day I was born. It was there, by my side. It has been there, buried inside me until now. And now it’s here, shielding me as an armor.

Darkness, my strength.

Darkness, myself.

Darkness, my sorrow.

The three men were smothering, ‘cause for them even the air had become much heavier, to the point that it was impossible to breathe, as if trying to inhale through water.

He knelt beside one of the grunt and searched for a weapon. He discarded the gun, because, somehow, it felt unfitting. In a sheath tied to the man’s calf, he found a dagger and he picked it up, holding it tight in one hand and considering it for a brief moment. He weighed it in his palm, let his index finger slide slowly alongside the sharp blade and then he nodded “This suits well.”

Without even giving it a second thought, he pressed the dagger to the throat of the man, pausing shortly to stare directly in the eyes below him, eyes that were looking at him in shock, fear and plea. But nothing could make his resolve waver. Adding a little push from his ability, - Ability? Is that so? - he sliced the dagger through soft flash. Blood spilled spurting, spreading across the grunt’s neck and pooling underneath him, in a large purple puddle.

He sauntered quietly towards the other grunt, who was trying desperately to stand up, but to no avail, considering that he wasn’t actually able to move a single muscle, not even to come out with a word.

He cut the other’s man throat with a swift motion and then turned his whole attention to Monsieur Lescaut.

He approached the man with a wide wicked grin spreading across his lips, little droplets of blood dripping slowly from the dagger laying limply in his right hand.

He pressed a heel on the man’s chest, altering the gravity a little bit more, to squeeze him further on the floor.

Monsieur Lescaut gasped for air, which was hardly filling his lungs and let out a feeble whine, while tears were running down his cheeks.

He kneeled beside the man and slid the dagger under the brim of his slacks, tearing them up with a single motion of his wrist. Next, he ripped off the shirt as well. He drew the dagger alongside the man’s skin, slowly, from his Adam’s apple to his groin, opening short shallow cuts in the process.
Staring quietly at Monsieur Lescaut, he smiled softly and murmured, “You’re really making me feel good…”

Ruthlessly, he dug the dagger in the flaccid flash of his belly, dragging it through meat effortlessly, and tore the man open.

Not a single sound left that mouth. The only noise filling the room was that of blood gurgling from lethal wounds.

He stood up and whirled his head to glare at the Director, who was sitting at his desk deadly still and terrified.

The old man stuttered few words “P-please, n-no… please… spare me… I.. I’ll give you everything you want!”

But he already had all that he wanted. He had freedom now. And the strength to fight for it and defend it.

He took few steps forward and just leaned a hand on the top of the desk. Then, with a light push of his ability, he sent the desk to crush against the wall and the Director trapped in the middle died on impact, his blood dyeing the plaster in vivid purple.

That settled, the adrenaline aroused by the massacre started to fade away and he suddenly felt empty.

He sighed deeply, eyes downcast to look at his hands, still glowing in the telltale red of his gift, now furthermore soaked in the red of thick blood. Then, he raised his head, to give a quick look at the room, reduced to a bloody mess and considered the four corpses lying there in the stillness of death.

He suddenly realized that that was the first time he had killed someone, and he wasn’t sure how to feel about it. He should feel guilt, remorse, regret, but he couldn’t really sense any of that inside him. He just felt hollow, drained and detached, awfully so.

Did those men deserve to die? Yes, they did.

Did I have the right to judge them and take their lives? Maybe. Or maybe not.

The only thing I know for sure, it’s that now they won’t be able to harm anyone, anymore.

Even so… Am I better than they were? Am I still human? Am I a monster?

Who Am I?

Darkness shifted inside him, growling huskily. It spread its tendrils throughout his whole body, as if to embrace him tenderly, to soothe him, to lull him in a merciful oblivion.

He shook his head out that useless stillness and resolved that it was time to go.

Firstly, he searched for the few documents regarding him that were stored in the archive - as if those pieces of paper could contain some sort of answer about who he was - and shoved them in the pocket of his slacks.

Thereupon, he turned his back to the gory ruins of his hellish childhood – he wasn’t sure he had ever had something that could really be called “childhood” – and headed for the door.

Here there’s nothing left for me. Or better… there’s never been. Whatever I am, there must be a place in this world suited for me, there must be a place I belong to, there must be a place to call “
The train of his thoughts was abruptly interrupted when the door of the office swung open and two employees burst into the room, probably alarmed by the previous noises – a desk crushing into a wall, sure makes some noise…

They halted in their steps, staring in horror at the scene disclosing in front of their eyes, gaping.

Soon after, they started screaming.

He stalked towards them, stretching out his arms to reach their bodies, hands glowing in red once more and with just a soft touch, he pinned them against the wall.

A sinister laughter echoed inside his head.

It seems that it’s not time to rest yet.

He walked down the hallway and reached his dorm, to pick up his scarce belongings. Then he entered the kitchen to collect few supplies. He hadn’t decided yet what to do next, but sure some “relief goods” could help, buying him time to sort it out. He didn’t stop to say farewell to anyone, ‘cause there was no one there he held dear. Finally, he headed for the exit, fleeing from his long-lasting prison to return no more. He didn’t take notice of the growing screams that were echoing in every corner of the orphanage while he was leaving, nor he paid attention to the helpless cries following each and every step leading him towards freedom. The only sound he could hear was a melancholic and bittersweet tune, chanting endlessly in his mind…

Oh, Grantors of dark disgrace,

Do not wake me again…

* * *

He opened his drowsy eyes in the dim light of the hold and just stared into nothing for quite some time.

He hadn’t decided yet if the thoughts swirling in his subconscious were actually “memories” or just hallucinations, but he resolved not to dwell on it any further.

It’s pointless to distress myself with that… Maybe, I can just…

A sudden idea popped up in his mind. He stretched out his right arm to touch one of the crate piled up beside him, waiting in trepidation for something to happen, but nothing came up. Even inside him, everything was inert and deadly hushed.

May it be that it was nothing but a reverie?

He looked at his hands utterly confused. He could clearly see traces of blood still staining his skin, ‘cause he hadn’t been able to wipe them out completely, but apart from that, there was not even the slightest shade of gleaming red.

Ohuu… So what?
Gathering up all his resolution, he focused the best he could and tried again.

This time, *something*, which was lying quietly asleep in his depths, reawakened and answered his call.

A warm stream of power flowed in waves through his veins and his body started glowing in faint crimson. He reached once more for the nearest crate, which begun to levitate slightly in the air with just one touch of his finger… to fall immediately after, hitting the ground heavily.

“Fuck! Shit! Hope I’m not going to be found out, God damn it!” he cursed bitterly.

He stood dead silent for a bit, but fortunately, no one showed up. Anyway, he resolved to try again later, maybe after some proper rest, because, actually, he was still feeling completely worn out.

He was about to close his eyes, when he noticed that the lid of the crate had broken slightly open in the impact and he couldn’t help to pry inside curiously. He gawped at it in awe: it was full to the brim with weapons of any sort. The fucking biggest amount of weapon he had ever seen. And he supposed that even the other crates might contain wares of the same kind. Maybe, he could ascertain it later.

He opened the lid further and picked up a dagger… It was a magnificent knife, whit a sharp gleaming blade and a black hilt exquisitely shaped, that fit perfectly in his hand.

A mischievous grin spread across his lips and he muttered under his breath “Uuhh… what’s that those men said before? If I recall it correctly, they stated that this cargo does belong to Yokohama Port Mafia… Fuck, there are so many weapons, I’m sure they won’t complain if I take this one for me!”

How naïve… If only he knew better than to underestimate Yokohama Port Mafia…
Chapter Summary

Better pretend to know nothing about abilities, ‘cause they’re just a death sentence.
Playing this game it’s not wise.

Chapter Notes

Well, what to say… here you are the second chapter, I really hope you’ll enjoy it, even if my English is still quite awkward… I’m sure there are a lot of mistakes, I apologize in advance… I’ve re-read this a million times and each time I’ve picked up on errors, but now I have a pounding headache and so I’ve decided to post it anyway…
As for the first chapter, the title is from the song “The Sound of Silence” by Simon & Garfunkel.
Thank you so much for reading and leaving kudos, I hope this is worth your time…

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He was chilling to the deepest of his bones, for both the cold and the tension running through his veins at the thought of his upcoming heist.

Outside, an icy wind was howling mercilessly and the wrecked windows of his shelter, covered with just scattered planks and thin cardboards, didn’t do so much to prevent the frozen air from seeping inside the dump he was occupying since his arrival in Yokohama.

He simply wrapped himself up tightly in his shoddy coat, the one he had stolen some days before from an unaware tourist, which had left it unattended on a bench while taking some pictures of the bay. The coat was indeed too big for him and it wasn’t even so warm, but… it was better than nothing.

* * *

It was almost one year now since he had settled in Yokohama, one year since he had gotten away from the nightmarish place he had been stuck into for too long to be able to wipe it out completely from his skin. He wandered if he would have ever known how to forget, or, at least, if the discomforting memories would have faded away, at some point.

However, here, well… It was not so bad. Once sneaked ashore, he had wandered for few days in the slums near the Port, until he had located an abandoned fishing shack and had settled in.

The shack was too shattered to provide any sort of shelter deserving to be called as such, it consisted barely of four metal sheets, rusted and broken in more than one spot, in which had been carved two
openings – lacking any glass – to serve as windows. The roof wasn’t in a much better condition, considering that it rained inside… but it was well located, in a nearly abandoned area of the docks near other wrecked warehouses, some of which so ruined that seemed to be about to collapse. This meant that there was no one there, apart from few vagabonds and other scums, all of them miserable humans rejected by the society just as he was. And none of them had ever taken into account the tiny smutty child wandering around the dumps and the dismantle buildings in search of something to eat, or wear, or swap.

To make sure not to draw unwanted attention, he got used to sticking a hat on his head, to hide his russet hair, which alone could give away his foreign origins and stir up trouble or any sort of unwelcomed interest. Concealing the blue of his eyes were a little more difficult, so he simply resolved not to look at anyone directly in their eyes, just keeping his downcast throughout his sporadic interactions with other human beings.

He was lucky enough not to have so many problems with the language, thanks to the fact that the miserable children hosted in the Orphanage had come from any part of the world. Therefore, back then, he had the possibility to learn bits of many different languages, including English, Spanish and German, some basics of Japanese and Chinese and, obviously, Russian, which was spoken officially, considering that the Orphanage was settled in Nakhodka.

He also spoke French, quite well to be honest, probably as a reminiscent of his earlier years. Not that he could remember anything about his parents or his country of origin, but he knew he was born in Bordeaux – he discovered so once he had laid his hands on the documents stolen from the archive. Nothing else written on those pieces of paper had been somewhat useful: he just discovered that he had been taken in when he was five, he had been given a name, and whatever records of his previous life – apart from a date and a place – had been erased.

The name he had carried on until then was not the one he was born with and so he decided to disclaim it as well.

So, I have not even a name… well, not that I really need one!

He was just too busy with taking care of himself, with surviving somehow; those petty issues didn’t bother him in the slightest. Anyway, there hadn’t been anyone who had asked him for his name, so… it was just useless, wasn’t it?

* * *

Getting used to his surroundings, he had become bolder.

In the early months of his staying in Yokohama, he had avoided people and crowded places, not daring to wander past the border of the abandoned area in which he had established his “new home”.

He had searched for food and clothes just in the dumps near the docks, not venturing to explore further spots. Sometimes, during the day, he had hidden amidst crates and cargos just to listen to the conversations between sailors and other dockworkers, at the beginning only to improve a little his comprehension of Japanese or simply to pass time… But now, having always been a fast learner, he was able to comprehend the speech quite well and he started to eavesdrop, hoping to grasp useful information about shipments, warehouses, security cameras, surveillance systems and stuffs like that.
And with his ability, well… It was a fucking piece of cake just sneaking inside warehouses and stealing few goods… Nothing too big, never too many… A slightly open window, even if way up high from the ground, was an invitation for him to enter… What real help could be some security cameras focused on the entrance door or on the aisles as well, if you could walk on the goddamned ceiling?

He could play hide-and-seek with the guards as long as he wanted to and literally take flight from the building the same way he had sneaked into, undetected.

Thus, he started robbing. And also, he find out how to resell goods in the black market.

Indeed, that was a very interesting place. There, you could buy and sell no matter what: merchandise of any kind, information about whatever you might be interested in, life and death of people you didn’t even know.

He never took it too far. He could have stolen almost whatever – provided that it was something small enough to be dealt with easily… Weight and size weren’t actually issues thanks to his ability, but wandering around lifting a fucking sport car glowing in red sure wouldn’t have gone unnoticed… - yet frankly, who would have bought weapons or ammunitions of doubtful origin from a shitty brat coming from nowhere, without asking thorny questions?

Therefore, he resolved to steal little precious “innocent” goods, such as jewelry, luxury products, antiques and stuffs like that, which he could exchange for food, clothes or money as well.

Once, he even traded a set of diamond rings for just information… very expensive information, to say the least. Nevertheless, he really needed to know more about abilities, and that, by all means, was a thorny and dangerous question that no ordinary person would have answered.

He had already heard rumors about that, but those were nothing more than warily whispered words, which might be true or just urban legends as well. He really needed to make a truth out of all the falsehoods, 'cause that was an issue that affected him very closely.

In about six months, he had managed to control his ability quite well - at least, so he thought. It was no more volatile, it responded to his commands with no delay – even if, sometimes, he still wandered if that were entirely his commands – and alongside the enhancement of his mastery, the sheer power he could draw from his inner self was strengthening. He also learnt how to deal with the aftermath, 'cause every time he got to use his ability, he ended up quite worn out, but that was slowly getting better after each use. The only thing that didn’t seem to mend in the slightest were his restless dreams, still cramped with gloomy shadows and creepy whispers.

When he asked for information about abilities in the black market, he was met with suspicious and wary looks, but the sight of the jewelry he was trading off was enough to refute any reticence. He was led in a secluded and poorly lit alleyway, where a man all cladded in black, face completely concealed by an atrocious mask symbolizing a sphinx, scrutinized him from head to toe, snorting mockingly. “What’s that do we have here? A shitty brat? And what am I supposed to do with you? You’re not even good to feed the dogs, so bony and thin!”

He didn’t rise to the bait and kept a polite behavior. “I’m here to get information about abilities.”

The man froze in the spot for a brief moment, to burst out in broken laughter immediately after. “And what the hell a snotty toddler like you could do with such an information?”
“It’s none of your business.”

The informant considered him for quite a while, before speaking again. “Who are you? Who are you working for?”

“Still, it’s none of your business.”

“I’m not giving you any information about abilities. It’s a dangerous matter, not suitable to be disclosed with the likes of you”.

He bared his teeth in a feral snarl. “I’ve already paid for this.”

The man shook his head. “So, I’ll give you your money back.” Then, with a threatening growl, he added “Or maybe, I could just slice your throat. Who will came to save you?”

He narrowed his eyes “I do not need anyone to save me. I just need the information I’ve paid for. But if you wanna slice my throat, please, give it a try…”

He took a step forward, staring unyielding in the enigmatic eyes of the sphinx. He was more than ready to activate his ability, but he hoped he didn’t have to come to that, because he had the undeniable feeling that the safest choice was keeping it secret as long as possible.

The informant laughed again, but this time it was a guffaw of sheer amusement. “Well, well, you really are a little damn cocky brat! I like that! Therefore, I’ll give you some info and one advice.”

Then he kept talking, in a more serious tone. “Abilities are special powers possessed by individuals called ability users. The types, the skills, the extent of these abilities are still largely unknown. Sure enough, common people don’t even know they exist. As those abilities could give to their wielders a troublesome amount of power as well as awkward talents, years ago the Government established the Special Ability Department which, for the sake of the community, is charged to track down, monitor and restrain the ability users, especially those who possess the strongest and most threatening abilities. But there are also other organizations interested in recruiting ability users, because, thanks to their gifts, they can provide a lot of useful services, they can successfully fulfill otherwise impossible tasks or even be brandished as “human weapons”… most of these organizations are involved in underground businesses and the most powerful and most dangerous of all it’s Yokohama Port Mafia.”

Unconsciously, his fingers reached for the dagger he had stolen months ago on that cargo boat, now hidden in the inside pocket of his coat and brushed slightly its hilt…

Yokohama Port Mafia… uhh… that name, again?

The informant continued “That’s all I’m gonna tell you about this matter. And now, brat, here’s my advice: don’t get involved in this kind of business, ‘cause too much blood have already been shed in the fight to obtain power and so much more will be spilled again and again. Better pretend to know nothing about abilities, ‘cause they’re just a death sentence. Playing this game it’s not wise”.

That said, the man disappeared behind the shadows of the filthy alleyway and he was left alone, chilly prickle tingling down his spine, crawling up to his forearms, biting slightly his numb fingers. Darkness was spreading his tendrils to envelop him in a reassuring warmth, whispering to him faint words full of promises…

Whoever is our enemy, we’ll defeat them… leave it to me… let me come to full light and I’ll bend the world to your wish…
He shivered.

Well… the situation sure enough wasn’t peaches and cream. He had to beware of potential enemies that, by all means, were incredibly powerful. He couldn’t get caught by the Special Ability Department: considering his ability, they certainly would restrain him, cage him, or worst, execute him, ‘cause he was undoubtedly dangerous, ‘cause his ability was full able to spread havoc, ‘cause he wasn’t even sure he could really control whatever was lying inside him. While, if the Port Mafia or another criminal organization succeeded in capturing him, then… they probably would just use him as a “human weapon”. He would merely become a tool in someone else’s hands… provided always that they also succeeded in taming him and his ability…

Fuck! What a goddamned shitty situation is this? Maybe I should go somewhere else? But were the fuck could I go? I do not have enough money, I do not even have any fucking documents! How am I supposed to take a train, an airplane or whatever damned means of transport? I could just sneak in again… but to go where?

He suddenly felt discouraged and confused. Yokohama was not so bad, after all… he had started to like it… he had started to even consider the wrecked fishing shack as “his home”… he didn’t really want to move… What choices did he have?

Yea… few more hits, and perhaps I’ll have enough money to buy at least some false documents on the black market… Then I’ll decide what to do, where to go… In the meanwhile, I’ll have to be careful…

* * *

Still, he was young and inexperienced and so, the urgency of the situation made him fearless, hasty, impulsive. He had to push his luck if he wanted to raise enough money as quickly as possible: the trades on the black market weren’t precisely “honest” and he never got fair prices for the merchandise he sold. Nevertheless, how could he complain? Not that those wares had been earned honestly, in any case.

Moreover, he still had to survive and he needed to use some money to buy food and other essential goods.

So, in the last two months, his robberies had become more frequent, he had stolen more valuable goods and in bigger quantities.

One day, while he was peddling his latest booty on the black market, he got confirmation that weapons were among the best-selling and high-paying goods, as he had already supposed: he eavesdropped two crooks speaking about “a certain warehouse” belonging to a “certain organization”, which was going to be stocked with the latest model of grenade illegally imported from China. And each of those grenades was worth the month salary of a ship’s Captain! Well, not that he had any idea about how much that was, but… sure, it must be a lot!

Then, he did it: his first attempt didn’t go that well, he managed to steal just two grenades, because the surveillance was very strict and he had to flee almost immediately after having sneaked into the building to avoid being found out, but he got confirmation that he could sell them for quite a remarkable amount of money. Moreover, he had the possibility to analyze better the building and his surveillance system, so he had come out with a new plan that couldn’t fail.
Or so, he thought…

In any case, everything had been settled and he was going to put his plan into practice that night.

***

Those days, in the Port Mafia headquarter, the atmosphere was quite tense - not that usually it seemed like to be at the amusement park, anyway. However, especially during the last few weeks, a series of awkward events had made things even bitter. Nothing too serious, nothing that had caused too much damage to the Port Mafia and so, until then, only low-key members had been employed to investigate on these incidents. Unfortunately, to no avail.

After more or less one whole month of search about the mortifying disappearances of Port Mafia’s property from Port Mafia’s depots – which went from antique watches to technological equipment – without being able to find out even the most trivial clue about who was behind this or how the hell they succeeded in their thefts, the situation was going downhill very fast.

Not to mention that the last heist had hit one of the most strictly surveilled warehouses, stuffed to the brim with highly explosive grenades…

So, when a tall and slender man wearing a white coat was detected while striding hastily towards the Boss’ office, everyone was immediately aware that things were about to take an extremely serious turn. His name, Mori Ougai, was one whispered in utter fear and respect by any affiliate, because he wasn’t just one of the most capable and ruthless member of the entire organization, he was even the one who would most likely become the next Port Mafia Boss.

Mori reached the huge mahogany doors of the room placed at the end of the hallway in the highest floor of the building and knocked politely. Two massive guards opened them and allowed him entrance without uttering a single word.

The Boss was lying down on his bed, face contorted in a feral snarl by anger and madness as well. Being his doctor, Mori was fully aware about the fact that, as time went on, his insanity was growing worse and alongside with it, his behavior towards both enemies and allies was deteriorating, to the point that all of his later commands had turned up in bloodbath.

The wrinkled man stared at him with dull and vicious eyes and gestured him to draw near. “Finally you are here! I’m sick of being surrounded by useless and incompetent scum! You know it, don’t you? I had to execute the idiots that I entrusted with the investigation about those petty thefts because they were not even capable to get the least result!”

Mori just looked at his Boss, his red eyes expressionless, while considering those words briefly. “Therefore he get them killed… I supposed so. Failure is not tolerated, but even so, I wonder how he thought to solve something by sending out just a bunch of newbies. Those burglaries aren’t petty… Indeed, they are peculiar, to say the least. No signs of break-in, no catch on footages… It’s crystal clear that someone out of ordinary is involved…”

Not the he was concerned about the fate of those poor subordinates, he just thought that having them killed was a waste of resources.

“Tell me, Mori, what do you think about it? Port Mafia could stand to be mocked by a whatever smuggler? Or perhaps it’s better to put an end to this embarrassing situation as soon as possible?”
The grin of the old man was unsettling and annoying.

Mori just shook his head and answered flatly, “I’ll take care of this.”

The Boss nodded pleased. “Well, I’m expecting nothing less than a full success.” Than he waved a hand dismissively and added, “I’m giving you 48 hours. Bring me results. I would be very disappointed if I had to search for a new doctor…”

The subtle threat in those words didn’t affect him in the slightest and he just murmured “Yes Boss” before taking his leave.

Once the heavy mahogany doors were closed behind him, Mori picked up his phone and dialed a number. He start speaking as soon as the receiver responded, no need to introduce himself. “Kouyou. I’ve a job for you.”

“Yes Mori-san.”

“I’m sure you’ve heard about that series of awkward thefts that have occurred lately. Well, we’re in charge to find out the culprit.”

“I see. Do you have any clue about the probable location of the next hit?”

“Mmmm… I suppose they’ll try again to ransack the warehouse where the Chinese grenades are stocked. Such a booty is just too attractive to let the opportunity slide…”

“Roger that. I’m going to set up an appropriate patrol starting from tonight.”

“Well, I’ll leave that in your hands then.” Before hanging up, he added as an afterthought “Ah, Kouyou. Take Dazai with you.”

Mori had a foreboding sense that things were going to take an interesting turn. And he couldn’t quite look forward to discovering who was behind this whole issue. Moreover, he was confident that he had made the best choice in entrusting Kouyou with this peculiar mission: after all, she was one of his most skillful subordinate, cold-blooded and cunning enough to be able to get out of the most awkward situations. Plus, having Dazai by her side could really be a trump card. The boy was still very young, but his strategic skills and his unyielding and merciless demeanor were utterly promising…

* * *

It was about 2:00 a.m. when he started moving.

The night was chilling, a freezing breeze was blowing incessantly from the sea and a light rain had begun to fall, dampening slightly all his clothes and still relentlessly seeping through the layers of fabric to turn into tiny icy needles immediately once in contact with his skin.

He shivered faintly and stuck his hat further on his wet hair.

His destination wasn’t so far and he commenced to analyze his surroundings in search for any possible hint of enemies, but the whole area seemed to be quite deserted.

*Mmmm… It’s odd… May it be that they haven’t discovered anything yet about my last heist? I was
almost expecting an increasing in surveillance, but no one’s in sight…

He approached the back of the building, being careful to avoid even the dim light coming from the scarce streetlamps and sticking to the shadows.

The last time, the high and tiny window on the back wall was open, but right now it was too dark for him to be able to see if it was still so. Therefore, he had no choice but to activate his ability and start climbing, hoping that no one would detect the red glow, which engulfed his whole body shining brightly in the darkness.

If I’m lucky, no one has noticed that open window… it’s so small and high that no one can have really figured out that I’d sneaked into through it…

Once reached the skylight, he pushed the glass carefully and it moved under the faint pressure of his fingertips.

Uuhhh, what a stroke of luck!

He sneaked inside as silently as falling snow and, after a quick look to his surroundings to check the position of the surveillance cameras, he started walking down the wall to reach the ground floor, using the high shelves as a cover.

As soon as he got to the floor, he start strolling towards the aisle where he knew the grenades were stored.

He bent over one of the crates and, sticking prudently his dagger into the lid, he broke it open.

Well… here we go!

…

Abruptly, the Hell’s gate cracked open.

…

Everything happened too fast for him to be able to think.

All the lights of the warehouse turned on and the whole place was lit up, bright as day.

He heard voices shouting and the sound of guns loading.

He saw at least five men, all dressed in black, raising their weapons towards him, aiming to kill.

He spurt on his heels, stretched his hand to reach for the nearest shelf and push it, his ability instantly activated.

The shelf crushed down towards the men and he took advantage of the mess to launch himself back through the aisles, headed for the back wall where, high up, was located the window that was his salvation.

Turning a corner, he was met by another bunch of men shooting at him. He instinctively raised one red-glowing hand as to shield himself and the bullets abruptly halted in mid-air before reaching their target, to fall uselessly on the ground immediately after.

The black-dressed grunts looked at him in utter shock for a brief moment. He was flustered as well – he had never imagined he could stop bullets – but he had no time for daydreaming. He hastily made
some crates levitate and threw them towards the men, while leaping on the nearest shelf trying to cut out his way headed for the back wall.

“The hell are you doing? Fire!!!”

Suddenly, he felt a burning prickle biting his left calf and he lost his grip on the shelf he was grabbing on to, his ability wavering.

_No fucking way! You bastards won’t kill me!_

He fell on the ground once more, blood dripping from his open wound, but he gritted his teeth against the pounding pain and started running again.

_Few steps left! Few fucking steps and I’ll be safe!_

The back wall was only few steps ahead. Another shot grazed his right cheek slightly and he turned his head back to check on his pursuers.

That was a huge mistake.

The sight of a terrifying and colossal phantom looming over him met his gaze. He froze on the spot, motionless.

_What the fucking hell is this?_

The demon was magnificent and horrifying at the same time. He was floating weightless over the ground, wielding a sharp gleaming sword and surrounded by a deadly aura that sent chilly shivers down his spine.

_An… An ability?_

Abruptly, the phantom darted over him, blade aiming at his throat. He ducked and rolled over his side to slide out of reach. He hastily reached for the nearest crates and casted them towards the creature, but they never hit the target, as the phantom floated swiftly away.

The demon charged at him once again. He dodged, whirling on his left, one arm extended to touch the phantom, in the attempt to alter its gravity and crush it on the ground, but…

_How the fuck am I supposed to be able to alter the gravity of a damned fucking spirit? How the fuck can I alter the gravity of something that I cannot even really touch? How stupid I am!_

A tremendous push crushed him roughly against the nearest wall, his back hitting the bricks forcefully. Harshly, an excruciating pain ripped through his left shoulder to spread across all his nerves, making his whole body clenching achingly. He clamped his jaw shut, to prevent even the smallest sound from escaping his lips and turned his head on his left side, to look at a sharp sword stuck in the tortured flash of his shoulder. He was literally pinned to the wall. Blood had started gushing copiously from the nasty injury and his mind was going dizzy.

_I don’t give a fuck! I won’t scream, I won’t plea, I will never shed a tear again…_

A young woman, with reddish hair and piercing violet eyes, approached him and in a threatening tone demanding a reply, asked, “Who are you?”

He didn’t answer. He didn’t even lift his head to look at the her. He was completely focused on gathering all his remaining strength to fight his way out.
Still… I’m not screwed…

The woman gripped his chin and lifted his head up forcefully, staring coldly directly in his eyes. Then, with a chilling voice, she repeated, “Who are you?”

He smirked mockingly and, in a barely-audible low growl, he answered “No one”.

The young woman glared at him annoyed, lips pressed in a thin line.

He took a deep intake and summoned the last shreds of his will, digging far down his inner self to unleash once again the tainted creature resting inside him and revel in its insanity.

Darkness purred wickedly, gladly responding to his call.

His whole body started glowing in sparkling crimson and deep cracks begun to wreck the wall at his back, crushed by the sheer force of increasing gravity, big chunks of bricks breaking off the surface and falling to the ground.

The woman took few steps back, looking at him warily. Then, she turned slightly on the left and uttered dryly a single word “Dazai.”

A lanky boy with dark brown hair strolled towards him quietly, with slow but unyielding paces, an unreadable expression plastered on his face. The wall at his back was collapsing relentlessly and the sword that was immobilizing him was slowly losing its grip. When the other boy was at an arm reach, he raised his head to stare at him and he met deep amber eyes sparkling mischievously, which locked unwavering into wide cobalt.

The boy stretched his hand out unconcernedly and softly brushed his cheek. And when he did it, the world immediately grounded itself back, gravity anchoring everything once more, his ability abruptly dispelled.

He gaped, utterly shocked “What the fuck…”

With a loud thud, something hit his head roughly and he fell into oblivion.

Chapter End Notes

Nakhodka is a port city in Primorsky Krai, Russia, located on the Trudny Peninsula jutting into the Nakhodka Bay of the Sea of Japan, about 85 kilometers (53 mi) east of Vladivostok (source: Wikipedia).
When all that you were was to be, the moment you truly were more than yourself you knew what it was to be free.

Chapter Summary

Do I want to be Nakahara Chuuya?

Chapter Notes

Warnings: blood and violence, mention of child abuse, Mori is an asshole, Dazai is an asshole, Chuuya is a badass (and he swears a lot).

The title of this chapter is from the song “The day you were born” by The Parlor Mob.

This chapter is a little longer than the two previous… I hope it’s not boring! Moreover, I hope that my English is getting better (sorry for any mistakes). As always, thanks you all for reading.

He feels empty. He feels drained. He feels as not even a single drop of blood has remained in his veins.

He feels tired. He feels lost. He feels as his inner self has been relentlessly torn off.

He struggles to crawl into the deepest of his core, he desperately stretches all his fibres to reach and join with the tendrils of the only thing being at his side since the day he was born, the only truth he has ever known. He needs to ensure that it’s still there… It must be there, it’s just sleeping… yet he can feel nothing… for the first time in his whole life, he does feel nothing at all…

Void is worse than Darkness. Much worse...

But he won’t give up. He can’t give up. He won’t let them strip out from his inner self what is his birthright... or even more... what is an innate and inescapable part of him...

He is Darkness...

He has just to wake it up… to wake him up...

He has just to find the right words… he has just to chant the proper tune...

And so he does...

...

Oh, Grantors of dark disgrace,

Do not wake me...
A distant sound awakened him suddenly. He blinked his sleepy eyes few times, trying to clear out the dullness clouding his dizzy mind. His back was splayed uncomfortably against a hard wall made of cold stones and all of his limbs were numb. Struggling to stand up, in the attempt to regain a little bit of sensation in his extremities, he found himself restrained by iron shackles, fastened tightly into the wall. The moment he strived to break away from those bonds, a sharp pain abruptly cut through his left shoulder, spreading swiftly throughout all his nerves. He grimaced, while unpleasant memories of what had happened previously were resurfacing, giving a troublesome explanation to his current condition.

Damn sure… they captured me…

He studied thoroughly his surroundings, trying to figure out where they were restraining him. In the dim light seeping in through small slits cut up near the ceiling, all he was able to ascertain was that the place seemed nothing more than a filthy cell, carved out in a rotten basement. He could smell, more than see, the blood that drenched each and every stone of that godforsaken prison.

Mmmnn… definitely, I've not been imprisoned by the Special Ability Department… I doubt that the Government would use such kind of shitty places to take care of their business… not even if that business relate to threatening ability users…

This left him with just the other option: an underground organization.

Should I be scared?

Probably, he should. However, being all panicked and terrified right now would be useless. Certainly, he would have to face ruthless and merciless criminals, which, sure enough, would have been up to no good. But if so… why… Why did they patch up my wounds? Why, if they’re gonna kill me, they simply haven’t let me bleed to death?

Indeed, he still felt pain coming from his injuries, but well… he was also feeling the bothersome stretching of his skin struggling against stitches underneath his clothes… They had treated him.

He tried to take a wild guess about why they were keeping him alive, about what they might want front him, while, anyway, bracing himself against the upcoming hell.

If only I could activate my ability… Holy shit! Why I don’t fucking succeed in reaching for it? What the damn-fucking-hell they did to me?

He shook his head, struggling to focus, still his mind wasn’t functioning properly, it was yet clouded by a thick layer of clumsiness and his limbs were soggy, perhaps due to blood losses, or maybe… maybe… The truth hit him as a thunderbolt.

Fuck, they drugged me! And that’s why gravity is no more within my control! Damn… I do feel nothing at all! Shitty assholes!

He couldn’t let narcotic substances blurring his will, he had to react somehow.

He growled, seething with sheer hunger. If they thought they could incapacitate him just like that, they were wholly deluding themselves! He clenched his fists so tightly that his nails, stuck in his palms, were drawing blood. He had not doubts… He had just to wait, he had just to be patient and his ability would return in full force.

No, bastards! I’m not done for! You’ll never rule me like this! You can’t control me…
But suddenly, as to prove his own words wrong, the memory of piercing amber eyes and dark brown hair stroke his mind, alongside the ghost of soft fingertips brushing his cheek. A touch that, alone, had totally annihilated his ability… and him, as well.

_Dangerous… undeniably dangerous…_

A dull thud of steps echoing throughout the narrow walls of the basement abruptly interrupted the train of his thoughts. He strengthened, standing completely still, back leant against the wall, bracing himself to face whatever was going to happen.

_They’re coming._

* * *

Before his captures came within sight, a low chilling voice cracked the silence.

“My, my, my… You’re finally awake, aren’t you?”

A tall and slender man, dressed in a white coat, strolled toward him to halt a few steps away, grinning wickedly. His flat dark hair trailed down his back, while some strands, let loose, framed a pale face where cunning red eyes shone as embers.

He didn’t make a sound, waiting.

The man pushed forward, tilting his head slightly, “Ouhh, maybe, you don’t understand me, do you?”

Still, he made not even a move.

At that point, the man chuckled evilly. “Acting as you can’t comprehend the language won’t do anything. I know you can understand me well. You may be foreigner, but you can speak Japanese, can you? Or are you just too scared to speak? Mmmnn… No, it’s not so…”

Again, not a sound, not a move. His breath was even, his eyes unyielding while staring in unreadable red embers.

You have to do more than that to force me to speak.

Suddenly, the atmosphere in the cell froze. It was as the world had just been deprived of any joy, any warmth. The man drew near, lips pressed in a thin line, face as cold as stone. Bony fingers gripped tightly his chin, while his tone became as sweet as honey, dripping death threats with each and every word he was uttering slowly “So, just as you can grasp clearly your current situation… My name is Mori Ougai and I am one of the five Executives of Yokohama Port Mafia. I’m sure you can guess fairly well that I’m a very busy man and I haven’t so much spare time to play at riddles with a shitty brat. For your sake, I advise you to start answering some questions.”

_Umph… Yokohama Port Mafia… what a shitty luck…_

He took a deep intake and murmured, “You haven’t asked any question which requires an actual answer. I am awake, I can understand you, I’m not too scared to talk. But this much, you’ve already figured out so… why reply?”
To his absolute surprise, Mori laughed, amused, “Well, well, you’ve more guts than most of the full-grown hardened criminals I have to deal with usually!”

Then, in an utter threatening tone, he continued, “But still, you missed something. Can you figure it out, brat?”

He stared at the man with a wary questioning look.

Those slender fingers tangled mercilessly in his messy red curls and pulled painfully “I’d given you my name, but you haven’t returned the courtesy yet.”

He gritted his teeth, hissing, “That’s not true. I already answered that question.”

That said, he shifted his gaze to glance at the young woman standing silently in the shadows of the dimly lit cell.

She was the one who questioned him previously in that damn warehouse.

The pull on his hair tightened and his head was yanked back, baring completely his vulnerable neck.

Mori whispered sickeningly softly against his ear, pressing sharp and harsh metal upon his throat “You really want me to buy “No one” as an actual answer?”

The close proximity with that man was nauseating, because it reawakened unwanted memories of past abuses, but he didn’t intend to budge, no matter how dangerous that was. “It’s the only answer you’ll get. ‘Cause I have no name.”

The keen edge of the scalpel grazed the soft skin of his throat, opening a shallow cut. Thin droplets of blood started spilling lazily from the wound, drawing a purple path while trailing down his pale neck.

“So, brat… Is this how you wanna deal with this? It’s a pity, really… Considering that you’re barely more than a snotty kid, I didn’t mean to be too rough on you… Instead, you’re leaving me no choice but to fully behave as the evil bastard that I am.”

With a harsh move, Mori squeezed brutally his injured shoulder, leaving him breathless.

He choked a scream rising from his throat, tears of pain were prickling the corner of his eyes and an unbearable agony overrode his mind.

For an endless minute, all that he could do was struggling to breathe. Then, the harsh grip relented and, at last, faded, but he was aware that his suffering had barely begun. The pain had forced him onto his knees, stunned, and when he lifted his head, there was a teasing glint sparkling in those mischievous eyes, which was up to no good.

“See… right now, you’re exactly where you’re meant to be… kneeling in front of me. That wasn’t so difficult, was it? Are you going to behave a little more docile now, as an obedient little puppy?”

No… I’m not! I’ve been a compliant useless toy for too long. That time is over. Better die than living that hellish disgraceful life again!

He stood, waving only slightly.

His eyes narrowed, his pupils swallowing almost entirely the blue of his irises.

His fists clenched mercilessly, tormenting the already abused flash of his palms.
His teeth bared in a feral snarl and his voice came out in a low growl.

“No.”

His body was engulfed in red, gleaming brightly in the dim light of the basement.

The floor under his feet started cracking threateningly, smashed by the sudden increase in gravity.

The air itself became heavier, affecting the breathing of all those who were in his surroundings.

* * *

*Finally, here you are.*

The corners of Mori’s lips curled up in a smug smirk.

The guy’s behavior had absolutely entertained him during all the time. It was utterly boring playing with pawns that didn’t react in the slightest to his provocations.

Thinking that he’s able to activate his ability even if he’s heavily drugged… it’s remarkable. He really is quite strong, as I supposed. He’s still rough material, but sure a material well suited for the Port Mafia. With a little work, he can become a very useful asset.

Now that he had ascertained the real worth of the boy, he had just to find a way to gain his trust. He had already something in mind, but first he had to stop the rampage, before things might go awry.

He took few precautionary steps back to distance himself from the unleashed fury, turning his head to summon his pupil, and…

Ohhh… ohhh…

That’s a first…

Even I couldn’t predict this turn of events…

Mori stood completely still and stunned for a brief moment, taking in the unique sight showing in front of his eyes.

Dazai, who till then had remained quiet and silent in the shadows as usual, just observing his mentor’s doing, had taken a small step forward and was staring intently at the other guy, the omnipresent dullness in his eyes replaced with greedy curiosity.

The smirk on Mori’s lip broadened.

Oohh… That’s really two birds with one stone… Finally, something is able to pierce through the impassive ego of my precious Demon Prodigy and solicit a reaction…

That was a chance that he absolutely couldn’t waste, a hundred of new schemes were already developing in his mind. Having found something that could pique Dazai’s interest was almost a miracle. An extremely advantageous one, indeed…

Nevertheless, all that was for later analysis.
Right now, with just a mocking smile grazing his mouth and a sickeningly sweet tone, he commanded, “Dazai, would you, please?”

* * *

Something was off.

Something was worryingly off. His ability wasn’t responding as usual. He was feeling as his insides were crushing and melting, smashing his internal organs alongside the process. He was losing clarity of thought, he was sensing the control over his gift relentlessly slipping from his mastery like water spilling through loose fingers.

He stared perturbed at the boy with amber eyes sauntering slowly towards him, a slight warning ringing in his head throughout the mess ravaging his mind.

As done previously in the warehouse, the brunette stopped at an arm reach from him. Somewhat reminiscent of what had occurred once before, he took a step back, distancing himself from the other guy. The shackles restraining his wrists were shacking under the impact of his ability, but he was still chained tightly to the wall, unable to move freely.

The boy – Dazai… that’s so they’ve called him… – was just looking at him, golden sparks gleaming brightly in deep brown eyes, a ghost smile curling his lips up the moment he slipped away to avoid his dangerous touch. Than he spoke, with a confident and quiet tone, “Better stop.”

He blinked, enraged, while his vision was blurring, “No fucking way!”

Dazai tilted his head, that piercing gaze unfaltering, “You’re bleeding.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

The brunette stretched his arms to reach for his cheek, but he pulled back further.

“There. There’s blood seeping from your mouth.” Dazai let his arm fell limply to his side and repeated “Better stop.”

He was not so naïve to fall for this, but still… something was off. He raised a hand to brush slightly his cheek, faltering faintly when his fingers met thick fluid trailing down his lower jaw.

Fuck… It seems that I’ve got not so much time left…

Thus, he decided to let go off any restrain, unleashing his ability as far as he had never done before, the last bit of his consciousness registering the breakage of the chains tying up his wrists. He turned swiftly, to jump on the wall that was crumbling into pieces and run away making use of the ceiling.

But he wasn’t fast enough.

Slender fingers gripped his right wrist tightly. Once again, everything around him immediately fell motionless and silent, nothing more daring to defy the law of gravity any longer. His ability dispelled, helplessly.

He turned abruptly, to look daggers at the boy who was holding him down, albeit through a blood glaze clouding his vision. Breathing heavily, he rumbled, “What the fuck was that?”
A smug smirk spread on Dazai’s lips, “No Longer Human.” He released his wrist slowly and deliberately lifted a hand to wipe out gently some of the blood staining his cheek. Then he added, “I can nullify whatever ability just by touch.”

He barely stood, freed but defeated, waiting for whatever was next.

* * *

Mori was delighted by the sight unravelling in front of his eyes.

He had a distinct foreboding building up in his guts, more like a certainty than a prediction.

He knew this pair could become one of the most fearsome and powerful duo the Port Mafia had ever seen. He knew they could develop into the embodiment of the Port Mafia dominion over the underworld and not just that.

He knew as well that he absolutely needed to keep them under his unyielding control, or they could became a tangible threat for him in the upcoming future.

He smiled wickedly at that thought, because… yes… they’d just remitted the keys to their oblivious souls right in his demanding hands. And they did it in front of his conscious eyes.

Dazai was the key to master that otherwise unruly brute force, which alone could smash anything on his path, included the one who possessed it.

The foreign boy was the key to breach through one of the sharpest mind he had ever acknowledged, a mind otherwise inscrutable and completely detached from the rest of this world.

They both needed the other one to live… and they were yet young and naive enough to be unaware of this. On the contrary, he was well conscious. And he had just to use this awareness to his full advantage. He had to make this partnership work, at any cost, under his tight control.

First and foremost, he had to acquire a new subordinate.

He looked intently at the red haired guy: he seemed quite worn out right now, restrain him once more wouldn’t be such a problem… but well, force him to join wouldn’t do. For this to work, it should be his own decision, he should enlist willingly.

The noise of steady steps running down the stairs that leded to the basement resonated loudly throughout the stone walls.

Sometimes, fate calls. You just have to be able to recognize the call and answer it properly.

A middle-aged man, with withe hair, a short beard and wearing a monocle on his right eye made his appearance and bowed respectfully in front of the Executive.

“Mori-san. Sorry to interrupt. There’s a crucial issue which requires your attention immediately.”

Mori acknowledged him with a slight tilt of his head, “Hirotsu. Go ahead.”

The man glanced swiftly to his surroundings to take in the situation, before proceeding without further ado.
“A rival organization has just struck our communication system. Currently, the Port Mafia headquarter is completely isolated. We can’t transmit nor receive any kind of signal.”

Mori picked up a phone from the inner pocket of his coat and stared at it: actually, it wasn’t showing up any sign of connection.

He raised a brow to the older man, “An ability user?”

“Probably so.”

“The Boss has already been informed?”

“Yes, he has. He ordered you running point.”

Mori sighed, resigned “Any clue?”

Hirotsu reached into his pocket to bring out an old tape recorder, “Just this. But we didn’t succeed to get through it. And currently we’re unable to summon anyone who could, ‘cause we’re cut off from any communication.”

He started the recording. The audio truck was heavily interfered, breaking up too frequently to be able to sort out any kind of tangible clue. Moreover, the voices recorded on the tape were undoubtedly speaking a foreign language.

He frowned, before relenting a bit when an odd idea suddenly hit his mind.

He turned up the volume and restarted the recording.

“… tu vas rencontrer les autres… parc, oui, le parc à thème… Non, dans une heure, car l’école élémentaire sera déserte… c’est à toi… avec dix hommes… je suis en charge de superviser le débarquement… le plan d’action est changé… la plage du parc… vont nous rejoindre avec quinze hommes à la gare du littoral.”

Mori looked expectantly at the redhead and beamed widely when he pinpointed a glint of recognition briefly lighting up those cobalt eyes.

As I supposed, the boy’s familiar with that tongue.

He strolled on over him and asked – more a statement than a question, indeed, “You do know what they’re saying…?”

The boy retorted mockingly, “And even if so?”

Glad to see that, even in such poor condition, struggling to just stand, with gore and dust staining his skin and dark circles popping up under his eyes, the brat hasn’t lost his fighting spirit.

Mori smiled coldly, “Well, translate that for me, and I’ll let you go.”

The boy stared at him with wide eyes, “You’re fucking kidding me?”

“No, I’m not. I never lie in this kind of negotiation.” He pause, expectantly, before adding in a barely audible whisper, “I think it’s an advantageous offer, isn’t it? The best you may ever hope to get, indeed.”
He considered the Executive thoroughly for a little while.

Actually, I’ve nothing to lose. If I don’t comply, they sure are going either to restrain me again or torture and kill me. While, if I do what I’m asked, maybe they’ll really let me go. And even if they don’t, it’s not like my situation can get worse than this…

He shifted his attention to address a question to the middle-aged man wearing the monocle: “How long ago did you take that recording?”

Hirotsu squinted at his superior, who gave an acquiescent nod, before answering, “About thirty minutes ago.”

He thought about it just a moment longer, before saying, “So, you’ve half an hour left.”

After that, he turned his head to gaze at Mori, who seemed to be completely unfazed by the urgency, still waiting for him to make up his mind and suddenly felt an awkward sort of admiration towards the cunning and cold-blooded man.

Licking his dry lips thoughtfully, he finally asked “May I listen to the recording again?”

Mori grinned delighted and switched the tape recorder on.

When the tape was over, he sighed defeated and uttered, “Well, it’s nothing actually comprehensible, but it sounds like this: …you’re going to meet the others… park, yes, the theme park… No, within an hour, because the elementary school will be empty… it’s up to you… with ten men… I’m in charge of supervising the landing… the action plan has changed… the park beach… they’re going to join us with fifteen men at the seaside station…”

Soon after, looking at Mori warily, he added, “Hope you can sort it out, that doesn’t seem to help much.”

Working through the information he just got quickly, the Executive murmured satisfied, “Indeed, it helps a lot…” and immediately put things in motion, giving blunt orders to his subordinates.

Then, he headed towards the stairs to take his leave alongside his men, but before start climbing he turned his head once more, to stare at him with sharp red embers, “Brat, you’re free to go now. But if I get to catch a glimpse of you in Port Mafia territory again, I recommend it’s because you’re coming to join our organization. Otherwise…”

He left the words unsaid, but that was already enough of a threat. Nothing needed to be added, for him to understand it unequivocally.

* * *

Completely spattered with dust and gore, he headed for his shelter, staggering alongside his way back.

Once arrived at his fishing shack, he sprawled over his thin mattress, utterly worn out. His body was
aching all over, even his insides were deeply sored.

_The aftermath has never been so hard. All I want right now it’s just sleep through this all._

However, he had to treat his wounds first. Standing painfully on his feet again, he grunted tiredly while reaching for the first aid kit. With deft hands, he cleaned up his injuries and replaced the bandages previously applied by _he didn’t fucking know who_ while he had been lying unconscious in the Port Mafia basement.

He was quite skilled in first aid, since back then, when he was in the Orphanage, no one ever treated him, nor any of the other guys, when some – _uuhhh… how to call them? Clients? Supposed stepparents? Caretakers?_ – whatever-they-were had been a little bit too rough on them.

As soon as properly rested and recovered, he would have thought about what to do next.

In all honesty, he had yet to decide if he was more upset because of the treacherous aura surrounding Mori, or because of Dazai... he hadn’t succeeded to figure him out at all. But right now, he was really too tired even to think properly.

_In any case… if he can nullify my ability, I’ll learn how to fight back even without it. I have just to become stronger…_

* * *

Thanks to the boy’s suggestions, Mori managed to strike down the rival organization without so much trouble. He pinpointed the locations of their upcoming hits unerringly and, in the next few days, he was able to track down and eradicate all their connections in Yokohama underworld. The operation was a full and irrefutable success.

Nevertheless, when the Boss summoned him, he was well aware of what was going to happen.

Therefore, he knocked on the heavy door bracing himself against the unavoidable outburst, still confident to succeed in earning his way out. Maybe, not unscathed, but it was all worth it.

The room reeked of medicines and musty and the old man was sprawled against his cushions, scrutinizing him with prickling cruel eyes.

He made a shallow bow and greeted him less than enthusiastically, “Boss, I’m here.”

The Boss took in a disgusting suction of air and spat, “Mori, my congratulations for the annihilation of that rival organization are due. However… it’s to my utmost regret that I have to ascertain that you’ve failed the mission I entrusted you with.”

_Umph, he had just waited for me to get rid of the enemy before doing his move… opportunist as ever…_

“Boss, if you let me explain…”

The first punch stroke him in his kidney, cutting off his breath immediately. He bended over, not letting a sound escape his mouth.

“I have none intention to waste my time to listen to pitiful excuses. I ordered you explicitly to dispose
of that sleazy smuggler, but, instead, you let him go. You’re gonna pay for this failure.”

A hard kick hit mercilessly the back of his knee, forcing him to kneel down.

He gritted his teeth against the pounding pain and the burning humiliation. No matter how hard they were going to beat him up, unless his life was actually at stake, better was not to react at all.

Sure, his bodyguards won’t go easy on me. Damn sadistic…

“You’re lucky that I haven’t killed you on the spot. I’m still deciding what to do with you.”

Another kick, this time straight on his face, flatten him on the ground. He didn’t even bother to feel pain anymore.

“I have to admit… knowing you, I’m sure you’ve got something on your mind. I may be inclined to listen to your reasons and, if you’re convincing enough, maybe I could spare your life.”

One of the bodyguards stepped heavily on his left hand, squeezing it hard, before grabbing him harshly by the collar of his coat and dragging him on his foot.

He spat the blood filling his mouth before answering flatly, “The boy might be a very useful asset for the Port Mafia. He has a strong ability, highly suitable for combat. With a little training, I’m sure he can become a powerful weapon.”

The Boss stared at him, briefly considering his words, “I see why you didn’t kill him. But not why you’ve let him go.”

He felt the can of a gun pressing on his lower back, the harsh cold of the metal penetrating the layers of clothes he was wearing.

Without acknowledging the impending threat, he stated quietly, “I’m having him back in less than a month.”

The old man uttered angrily, “Better be like that. There won’t be a second chance.”

Mori bowed again and then headed towards the door.

He was turning the doorknob while the Boss spoke again, a mocking note in his voice, “Tell me, Mori. That boy is really worth this much?”

Not bothering to turn his head, he just answered, “Yes, he is”.

Shutting the door closed behind his back, a smug thought crossed his mind, making him smile impishly.

Indeed, so much more than you could ever imagine…

…

He visited the infirmary to have his injuries treated before going back to his office.

When he entered his room, he was all but surprised to find Dazai there, perched atop the chair in front of his desk, waiting for him.

The boy looked at him unconcerned, just taking in his battered appearance. Indeed, that was nothing new in their routine: each and every Mafia member got to pay for their errors, no matter how high up
the ladder they were.

He sat down comfortably in his chair and then addressed his pupil, well aware of the reason that had brought him there, “Dazai-kun, what can I do for you?”

Dazai’s voice sounded almost indifferent when he talked, going straight to the point without hesitation “Mori-san, why did you let him go?”

There was no need to demand whom he was speaking about, even if Mori briefly entertained the thought to play innocent.

Instead he laughed, unamused, “My, my… the Boss has just asked me the same question!”

“And?”

He lowered his voice, demanding in a sickeningly sweet tone, “Are you expecting me to report to you about my meeting with the Boss? That’s cocky.”

He intended to push the boy, interested in finding out how far he was willing to go to reach his goal.

Dazai didn’t delude him and continued, unfaltering, “I’m not, but I can’t see the point in your doings. I thought you were planning to have him joining the organization.”

He stretched an arm across the top of his desk and gripped the boy’s wrist tightly, leaning forward. “That’s so. In any case, it’s not up to you to question my decisions.”

The boy didn’t move an inch, resolute to pursue the matter, “So, what do you intend to do next?”

Mori bared his teeth in a feral snarl, “Can’t you really figure it out by yourself?”

Dazai tilted his head slightly, eyes as cold as stone while he was considering is mentor intently, in the attempt to read his mind and pinpoint his reasons.

* * *

Dazai frowned while Kouyou entered the room, walking towards them with charming grace and innate elegance in her steps. By the way, she had just interrupted a conversation he was very keen on concluding and so he wasn’t glad at all.

Kouyou squinted at him, dismissing him immediately, unconcerned. Then she addressed her superior, with a light bow of her head, “Mori-san, I’ve got what you asked for.”

He nodded in acknowledgement and commanded, “Report.”
She put a packet on the top of the desk, sliding it towards Mori and started speaking, “You were right. The dagger we had confiscated from the boy was the one that disappeared from the shipment coming from Nakhodka almost a year ago.”

The subject of the conversation immediately picked up Dazai’s interest and he barged into, “How did you know?”

Mori pulled a dagger from the packet delivered by Kouyou and passed it to him, without saying a word. He analyzed the knife briefly and then murmured, “I see. There’s a code carved on the hilt…”

Kouyou continued, “Investigating further, I found out that an incident had occurred in Nakhodka the same day the cargo ship set sail from the port. But nor the media nor the authorities divulged the news.”

She paused, while Mori stated thoughtfully, “Something they didn’t intend to make public, then…”

The woman nodded, “That’s so. That morning an orphanage was heavily damaged and four people were brutally murdered. The bits of information I managed to obtain indicate that it was the doing of one person alone. A child, to be exact. An ability user.”

Dazai’s eyes were sparkling with eagerness.

* A building heavily smashed and four victims… Not bad at all for a tiny brat… His ability is really fascinating…

Mori pondered, “No wonder they wanted to keep silence on that. It surely would have stirred troubles, considering that an ability user was involved. A child, besides.”

Kouyou’s eyes narrowed dangerously when she proceeded, “That wasn’t the only reason. I discovered that the orphanage was entangled in not so licit affairs.”

“What do you mean?”

“The children hosted in that institution came from any part of the world, not just from Russia. And that was odd in itself. I supposed they gathered children with peculiar characteristics to use them for a specific purpose. Indeed, none of the child had ever been adopted.”

She took a deep intake and murmured outraged, “They made money out of them. The orphanage had clients to whom the Director sold the children, for just some hours or definitely, if the sum was enough.”

As far as it was true that Mori’s preferences might be a little peculiar, that unashamed display of abomination utterly disgusted him as well. Indeed, he spat ironically, “They were running a brothel forcing minors into prostitution and they were yet involved in slave trade. What a heavenly place…”

Port Mafia businesses were not exactly legal, but they had a sort of honour code. Even if the current Boss was relentlessly going insane and he was leading the organization disgracefully – his latest operations too often resulting in useless and cruel bloodbaths and waste of resources – the Port Mafia had always cared for his members. Somewhat, it was a sort of a family. And the old Boss’ psychotic behaviour was what would lead him towards his end, sooner or later.

Kouyou nodded in agreement, “No wonder that the brat went on a rampage and destroyed his prison and his jailors alongside it.”

The Port Mafia would have never tolerated for its children to be used like that. A child might be
employed in *not so licit* operations, a child might be asked to *fight and kill*. A child might have to face *death* and *gore* and *violence*. But that was their choice. Any member was offered a choice. And if you chose to join, Port Mafia took care of you and trained you to face that kind of life.

Browsing absentmindedly through the pages of the report laying on his desk, Mori asked, “Any clue about the boy?”

“All the documents were lost during the incident, but they would have been useless in any case. It seems that the boy’s past was erased when he was taken in the orphanage. I’ve just a date and a place of birth. He was given a new name as well.”

Dazai was listening intently, mulling over each and every word that was leaving Kuoyou’s mouth. Tormenting his lower lip with his teeth, he muttered thoughtfully under his breath, “So, that’s why he said he has no name…”

That wasn’t really intended to be heard, but Mori replied in any case, “I guess so. But that’s not a big deal. If he had disclaimed a name he didn’t feel as his own, all we have to do it’s just offering him a new one. And a life which can suits him alongside with it.”

His mentor stared at him, a mischievous glint sparkling in his eyes, while his fingertips were brushing purposefully a thin set of documents he had pulled from the stack of those placed in front of him, “We have just to deliver the offer.”

Dazai’s gaze trailed down to fix on the papers in his mentor’s hands and pinpointed a brand-new passport, with a photograph applied on it. He didn’t have to stare that much to recognize those features.

Clearing her throat, Kouyou asked, “If you don’t need me anymore, I’m taking my leave.”

Mori dismissed her with a nod and turned his full attention to his pupil once again.

“Hence, Dazai-kun, what do you think?”

He took some moments before replying quietly, “Restrain him and force him to join would have been pointless. That’s why you let him go.”

“Finally, you got it. For this to work, it has to be his own decision. Or better… He must be convinced that’s entirely and genuinely his own volition…”

Mori’s sly eyes seemed to pierce through his skull and tear it apart, so that his words could be carved deeply into his brain, “Dazai-kun, it’s detrimental to shackle a feral beast and compel it in satisfying your wishes. You may think you have managed to tame it, but as soon as you relent your hold, it’ll rise up against you and bite your hands, ’cause no shackles can restrain its strength and its rebellious spirit for a long time. Otherwise, if you succeed in winning its trust, if you succeed in binding its heart instead of its body… what do you think would happen?”

He felt an awkward shiver running down his spine, an unknown trepidation filling his guts with impatience and excitement, but he tried to shut down all that foreign feelings to focus on his mentor’s words. He replied then, voice flat, “You would possess the strongest and most loyal dog the Port Mafia has ever seen.”

“Right. And it’ll give you everything it has, ’cause you’ve given it the only thing it misses that’s really worth something: a place to belong.”

He didn’t need to mull over that statement for long because he knew, in the deepest of his core, that it
was undeniably true. And now, he knew exactly what he should do next.

With a quick leap, he stood on his feet, stretched a hand to grab both the passport and the dagger resting on the top of Mori’s desk and sauntered toward the exit without saying a word.

His mentor didn’t stop him, nor he added anything, actually entrusting him with the task.

…

While he was leaving the Headquarter, a flaming sun was merging with the deep water of the bay, streaking the blue of the sky in soft pink and red hues. Dazai knew full well where to go. Indeed, he had located the boy’s shelter the same day he had been freed from the Port Mafia’s restraint.

Not that he had already peeked at him, really. He had checked on him just in case… just in case the Port Mafia should have needed to find him… or whatever.

He reached the fishing shack and pried inside, warily – if possible, he preferred to avoid being flattened by random objects being thrown at him – but it was empty. No one was in sight.

*I have to admit that, to my utter surprise, the brat has managed to recover fast and completely in the span of few days, but even if so, I don’t think he has fled from his shelter already…*

He subdued the annoying feeling of anxiety that was seeping into his guts, quick and unwelcomed, and resolved to have a look to his surroundings.

The sunset over the horizon was amazing and he strode toward the pier jutting into the heart of the bay, a prickling sensation tingling his mind. Once reached the quay, he saw him immediately.

*There he is…*

The boy was sitting on the edge of the pier, bare feet dangling lazily to brush the quiet waves hitting the quay, staring dreamingly at the sun drowning in never-ending darkness. His red curls were set on fire by gleaming ray of light, and the deep blue of his eyes seemed to melt with the ocean itself.

The sight was beautiful.

He didn’t know exactly what he was feeling – he was used to feel nothing, so he wasn’t familiar with any kind of emotions – the only thing he knew for sure was that, for the first time in his life, he felt as he was at a loss for words.

Keeping his cool, he strolled cautiously towards him: the redhead was quietly sipping something from a glass bottle – *wait: that’s a beer? Really?* – and he shouldn’t have seen him, but well, better being careful…

Once he was just few steps away, a sharp voice halted him in his tracks.

“The fuck you want?”

The redhead hadn’t even bothered to turn his head and look at him in the eyes.

Dazai smirked amused, a sudden idea popping up in his mind, “Owwhh, how rude! To think that I got all out on my way here just to make a toast with you!”

This time, the guy’s stunning cobalt eyes pierced through amber ones, sharply.

“What shitty nonsense are you spouting?”
Pointing at the bottle, he took another tentative step forward, grinning widely, “Not going to tell you anything if you don’t give me a sip of that!”

The boy jumped swiftly on his feet, his whole body gleaming in telltale red, “Don’t-fucking-move-another-single-step.”

He stopped obediently, head slight tilted on the left, lips curled up in a mocking smile, “You know that that’s not gonna work with me, don’t you?”

The redhead growled aggressively, “I do. Still, I can smash this bottle on your stupid shit-head.”

“Sure, you can. But you won’t.”

“Why not? I won’t be so sure if I were you.”

He didn’t answer. He was just staring silently at the thin, lithe figure overflowing with sheer power, standing unyielding in front of him.

So frail.

So strong.

So bright.

So dark.

It was as the beginning and the end of everything were battling furiously inside that tiny body, tearing it apart and putting it together in an endless circle of contradictions. And, in the middle of that entangled mess, that boy was simply standing, uncompromising in his right to exist.

He felt a foreign warmth spreading through all his insides, gently brushing his heart and coaxing it to beat faster, affecting the air filling his lungs as a sweet addiction, enticing his apathetic mind to shake off its dullness and igniting it with sheer desire… an unbearable yearn to live.

For the first time in his life, he wanted someone to be at his side…

*Is this what they call “friendship”*?

“The fuck are you staring at?” The fierce voice of the redhead suddenly snapped him out of his musing.

He harshly smothered those foreign feelings, too unspoiled and intense to nurture if he wanted to survive in the Port Mafia and plastered his features with his usual mask of confidence.

Then he uttered, in his most well-trained uncaring tone, “Nothing in particular. It’s just that you’re really captivating.”

A soft blush and a slight stutter immediately washing over the other guy fully rewarded him.

“W-what?”

Taking advantage of that small hesitation, he covered the distance that separated them in a single leap and prized the bottle of beer from the grip of the stunned redhead.

Soon after, he gulped down the amber liquid in one shot.
“You damn bastard!”

He swiftly shift out of reach, to avoid the angry retort of the other boy, and grinned mischievously, "No need to be so pissed off, I’m gonna give you something in exchange that’s fully worth it!"

“I do not want a fucking thing from you, asshole!”

“How can you say that? You don’t even know what it is!"

“You can’t possibly have something I do care about!”

“Sure?”

He met deep blue with his best shit-eating smirk. Then, he put a hand in his pocket and pulled out the dagger, dangling it in front of the other’s eyes.

Looking at him more and more furiously, the redhead snarled, “That’s mine.”

“Wrong!” he teased.

Activating his ability again, the boy stomped on the concrete, crushing it mercilessly under his feet, “Give it back!”

Unfazed, he taunted, “Maybe, if you ask it cutely…”

Abruptly, the redhead jolted towards him, ability dispelled on mere touch, still hitting him with all his fury, enough to flat him down on the concrete.

The blow stole his breath.

Now, he was lying on his back, immobilized by the other guy, who was straddling him while restraining both his wrists in a vice grip.

_Oohh, even without his ability… how strong…_

The redhead bent forward, lowering his head threateningly, loose strands of russet curls tickling his face, teeth bared in a feral snarl, eyes darting rage.

“Give-it-back. That-is-mine.”

“Mmmmmn, well… technically, that’s not true.”

“The-fuck-are-you-talking-about?”

“That’s Port Mafia’s property.”

The grip clenching his wrists slightly relented. And again, he took advantage of the brief hesitation.

“But I’ll give you back in any case.”

“Why?”

“Oh my, because I like you!”

Cobalt eyes widened once more and the slight blush returned on those cheeks.

“Stop teasing me!”
“I’m not teasing you! I thought you reciprocate, considering the way you’re straddling me!”

Probably realizing the awkward position all at once, the redhead jerked up abruptly, releasing him completely.

“Pervert!”

“Owww, look who’s talking! It was you who jumped me!”

“’cause you were pissing me off!”

“You’re such a short temper.”

“And you’re an asshole.”

“Little ball of fury.”

“Stop calling me little, shit-face!”

“It’s not my fault if you’re so short!”

“I’m not short! It’s you… you’re a lanky bastard!”

“Mmmnn, well then. How do you want me to call you?”

The redhead stared at him warily and murmured, “There’s no need for you to call me at all.”

Game over.

His eyes darkened and his voice felt dangerously low when he whispered, barely audible, so that the redhead was compelled to focus completely on his words, “Just so you know, my name is Dazai Osamu.”

The boy took a deep intake and let out in a tired sigh, “I’d like to say that’s a pleasure, Dazai Osamu.”

He didn’t know why, but his name, while leaving those lips, felt heavy, concrete, real. That was a name belonging to a human being.

A mischievous smirk grazed his lips when he replied, softly, “I am pleased to meet you, Nakahara Chuuya.”

The boy’s eyes went impossibly wide. “W-what…”

Nevertheless, he didn’t give him the time to answer, nor to fully realize what was happening.

He stretched an arm and put the dagger directly in the hands of an astonished redhead, alongside a small envelope.

Soon after, he took his leave, without saying a word.

When he was almost out of sight, he turned his head and shouted out loud, “See you soon, Chuuya!”
He didn’t know how long he had remained completely still, stunned, trying to sort out what had just occurred.

He only knew that was late at night when he finally stepped into his wrecked shack.

He hadn’t dared to open the envelope yet, wandering if it was really wise to do it at all. Splayed on his thin mattress, in the dim light of a candle, he was keeping it in front of his eyes, arms stretched, his fingers trembling slightly.

What had happened that day was utterly absurd. The whole situation was simply illogical. That damn Dazai was fucking ridiculous!

None of this shit makes any sense!

What were they playing at?

He resolved to open the envelope: in any case, not knowing what was the game he was unwillingly playing at did no good.

He pulled out a thin set of documents.

His eyes widened in utter shock.

There was a whole life, stated on those documents. There was an identity.

That’s not my life. That’s not my identity.

But... might it be?

He stared at the passport for a long time. There was his photograph attached on it. And a birthdate printed on it. That were the only things that really belongs to him.

Obviously, there was a name printed on it, as well.

Nakahara Chuuya.

That wasn’t his name.

But, might it be?

He warily tried to pronounce it aloud as Dazai had pronounced it, at first bashfully and then more and more confident.


That’s not my name.

But, may it be?

There wasn’t a right answer to that question.

He simply couldn’t know.

He should just choose.
Do I want to play this game, whatever it is?

Do I want to be Nakahara Chuuya?

He blew out the small trembling light of the candle and went to sleep.

* * *

Mori had been sitting at his desk all the morning, flipping through a tedious report concerning a bunch of smugglers who were trying to outsmart Yokohama Port Mafia, bootlegging Russian weapons under his nose.

How stupid. How utterly stupid! They’ll be annihilated by the end of the day.

His scheming was abruptly interrupted by a faint knock on the door and this annoyed him to no end.

What’s up now? The Boss wanna me to destroy the whole NATO?

He uttered a wry “Come in” all the same.

One of his subordinates – a newbie whose name he hadn’t managed to remember yet, not that he really cared – approached him warily, an irritating stutter in his voice when he murmured, “Mori-san, t-there’s someone d-demanding to see y-you.”

He stared at the man with piercing wicked eyes, just to intimidate him a little more – he sighed mentally: that guy wasn’t suited for that kind of life – and asked drily, “At least, did you ask for their name?”

“Y-yes, Mori-san.”

“And so?” he prompted, almost losing his patience.

The reply came in a hesitant whisper, “He s-said… his name is Nakahara Chuuya.”

“Nakahara Chuuya?”

An impossible wide grin immediately spread on his lips while a whole world of possibilities was thrusting open its doors in front of his greedy eyes.

He claimed the name…

Utterly delighted, he laughed.

“Let him in.”

…

He stared intently at the boy striding confidently towards him, a bright resolute flame burning in unyielding blue eyes and welcomed him formally, still with a gentle smile gracing his features, “Nakahara Chuuya, it’s a pleasure to know you.”

Chuuuya simply bowed his head, respectfully, and replied, “Mori-san, the pleasure is all mine.”
Then, straightening firmly, he added, “I’m here to join the Port Mafia.”

Mori solemnly nodded in acknowledgement, a million schemes were already running through his head a mile a second.

*I’ll put him in Kouyou’s care, I’m confident she’ll do an excellent work in training him. Moreover, after the Boss had her lover assassinated, having to tend to a child might help her to overcome the loss... That damn geezer with his reckless actions is demolishing the whole organization!*

*Besides, this way, I’ll manage to keep Chuuya away from Dazai... I’m not going to make things easy for my little Demon Prodigy...*
And I don't want the world to see me, 'Cause I don't think that they'd understand. When everything's made to be broken, I just want you to know who I am.

Chapter Summary

I can understand now why he chose to be No Longer Human.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: tons of angst, bickering, swearing, a little bit of fluff, underage drinking, mention of abuse, emotional disaster…

The title of this chapter is from the song “Iris” by Goo Goo Dolls (and it says a lot).

This chapter is yet longer than the previous one… and it’s an awkward mess (as my English, still… sometimes I don’t even know what I’m writing…). There are just too many things I wanna put in it. I’m sorry. I needed to write a little bit more about Chuuya’s past and I needed to disclose something about Dazai’s past as well… bear with me.

Anyway, read at your own risk!

Thanks for your time and your patience!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Things were going smooth in the last few days.

Finally, the Boss seemed to have exhausted his latest burst of anger and madness that had led to the disintegration of a cargo boat belonging to a trivial bunch of crooks, unfortunately together with a whole squad of Port Mafia members. They had perished because the ship they had attacked was stuffed to the brim with highly unstable explosives instead of - as the information they had obtained stated - drug supply and so the whole squad had blown up the moment they had opened fire.

If only the Boss had paid attention to his suggestions… He had argued that the informant wasn’t reliable, that it would have been better to investigate further before taking action, that they could simply confiscate the ship instead of sinking it. Regrettably, nothing he had said had brought the geezer to his senses. The Boss had ordered to blow up the cargo boat when it was offshore “as a reminder for those who dare to defy Port Mafia’s supremacy.” This had resulted in the annihilation of a petty rival organization, which could have been forced into collaboration instead – with benefits for both parties – in the unnecessary squandering of expensive explosives and in the sorrowful useless death of five valuable Mafia members. Not to mention, the exhausting work behind the scenes he had had to carry out to calm things down and silence the – legitimate – protests of the “shadow government”.

Unacceptable… We can’t go on like this much longer. The Boss is relentlessly leading the Port
Mafia to the demise. I had to make a move as soon as possible, before it’s too late for all of us.

Above all, I need to evaluate carefully which reliable assets I’m gonna have at my disposal to rule over the mess, both within and outside the Organization, necessarily resulting as a consequence of the Boss’ unexpected passing away.

Speaking of which…

A steady knock on the door announced the arrival of his awaited guests.

“Come in.”

Kouyou entered the room, immediately followed by Hirotsu. They both greeted him respectfully, before taking a seat in response to a wave of his hand.

“So… how’s the men’s morale?”

Hirotsu slightly adjusted his monocle before responding, “As I’m sure you already imagine, it’s not so high. I’m saying this not out of disrespect, but almost everyone in the Port Mafia is wondering when the next scatterbrained order from the Boss will result in their inevitable death. Dissatisfaction and fear are resulting in a lot of desertions and we have neither the time nor the resources to go after and punish each defector, considering all the exhausting missions that we have to carry out.”

Then he added, as an afterthought, “I’m sorry, Mori-san, but I’m afraid that, if things don’t get better or, at least, relent, Port Mafia can count its time in hours…”

He nodded, deep in thought, “Unfortunately, I can do nothing but agree. My efforts to contain the Boss’ detrimental behavior are becoming more and more useless and each and every of his latest plans of action is having devastating effects not just on our enemies, but on our members as well.”

He sighed, desolated and continued, “And bribing men with raise in salary or prize money has not so much appeal, considering that once you’re dead, you can find no use for money. Not to mention that we’re quickly running out of funds. A serious change of direction would be needed as soon as possible.”

Striving to contain her disdain, Kouyou uttered, “If I may ask, what you mean to do?”

He stared at the young woman thoughtfully – she has never forgiven the Boss for the assassination of her lover but even so, she is still loyal to the Organization – and responded half-heartedly, “Just wait. I’m confident that a suitable opportunity will arise soon. Right now, please keep you men under control. And safe. As best as you can.”

He waited for them both to nod in agreement before changing the topic of the conversation.

“How’s progressing our little Chuuya-kun? He’s turned fourteen a little while ago, isn’t he?”

The harsh glint in Kouyou’s eyes softened a bit, “He is.” Without concealing a hint of proud, she went on, “I have to admit that he’s getting results beyond our expectations. His martial arts are becoming more refined with each passing day and he’s managed to effectively combine gravity manipulation and combat skills. He still lacks in expertise, but during the most recent sessions, he’s successfully landed several direct hits. Lately he’s been blocking all Golden Demon’s cutting blows and he’s counterattacking efficaciously.”

Laughing quietly, Hirotsu added, “I have to admit that it’s going to take some time for my poor old bones to recover from the latest blow he delivered… His strength is really beyond question.”
As much as he was utterly satisfied to hear that, he still needed further confirmations, “What about the mastery of his ability? Has it ever gone out of control?”

Kouyou shook her head, “No, it hasn’t. Looks like he succeeds in restraining and directing his power without failure. Even during the most taxing sessions and forcing him to push his ability to the limit, there haven’t been incidents.” Lowering her voice to nothing more than a murmur, she continued, “That’s why there’s no need for Dazai-kun to continue attending Chuuya’s training… he’s more of a distraction than a real help…”

In response to that argument, he simply laughed amused, “Well, well, Kouyou-chan! I know you do not like Dazai-kun that much!”

She denied fervently, “Mori-san, it’s not that I don’t like him, it’s just that Dazai spends most of his time annoying Chuuya instead of helping him in making any progress.”

“And isn’t this funny? My, my, Kouyou, they’re still child after all!” Suddenly, the laughter died on his lips and his tone dropped below freezing, the mirth in his eyes completely erased, “I feel sorry that there’s no room for childhood in the Port Mafia…”

Abruptly going back to the discussion, he stated seriously, “Hence, Chuuya’s ready to go out on missions…”

Kouyou barged into, a light concern grazing her pretty features, “Well, he’s been already taking part in missions by my side for over two years, now…”

“I know that. But I think he’s ready to go solo…”

To that claim, the woman eyes’ went impossibly wide and, swallowing a lump restraining her throat, she whispered dumbfounded, “Solo?”

He smiled reassuringly, “Or maybe with a partner, I have to decide it yet. I have no doubt he’s going to make an excellent squad leader in the future, once he gets some hands-on experience, but right now he’s too young to lead a team and still he needs to break from you to complete his training. Moreover, I’m convinced that his fighting skills and his ability are more suitable to carry out missions which require little or none involvement of others. What do you think, Hirotsu?”

The man considered his superior’s assertions for a while, before answering cautiously but frankly, “I think he’s ready. He’s never shown fear nor hesitation. He’s thoughtful when he takes action, he never lets his short temper overcoming his wisdom. Even if he has already proved to be more than capable to work in team, yes… his loner attitude qualifies him better for solo missions. Nevertheless, considering his young age, his lack of experience and the risks inherent in underworld activities, I would recommend him working with a trustworthy partner, so they could watch their backs.”

That’s exactly my point…

He bit back a smug smile threatening to spread over his lips – a partnership then, uh? And who could ever be a suitable partner for Chuuya-kun? – and instead responded aloof, “I’ll think this through.”

Kouyou made a last attempt to keep her “child” a little bit longer under her wing and rebutted, “Chuuya’s not so much a loner, he gets along well with almost everyone, he’s always done a good teamwork, I think he’s a valuable member of my team…”

“No one’s going to deny that, but, tell me: having joined in for three years now, if he’s not such a loner as you’ve just said, I’m sure you can mention the name of, at least, one friend of his.”
The silence that followed said more than any word could.

“I see… Well, we’re done here, you can go.”

Left alone once again, he mused over his options, assessing the possible outcome of any course of action.

He had already made up his mind, he had just to put things in motion, in order to reach his goal: *restore Port Mafia’s indisputable dominion over Yokohama underworld and keep the balance in the City.*

* * *

He kicked opened the door of his room and stumbled inside without even bothering to close it behind him, just dragging his sore limbs to sink in the welcoming softness of his mattress, face buried in the cushion that muffled his low growl.

“Fuck… today Hirotsu-san hasn’t gone easy on me at all… I’m aching in places I didn’t even know existed…”

All that he wanted right now was just sleeping through the soreness of his exhausted body, but he couldn’t.

Sigh…

He had to meet with Kouyou-ane-san, who had insisted to have him for a tea later that afternoon and he would never decline and invitation from her. To be honest, he would never refuse anything to her, after all she had done for him.

He smiled softly, reminiscing the day that had marked the beginning of his new life.

*I still remember the utter astonishment on Ane-san’s charming face when Mori-san summoned her to notify that, starting from then, she would have had a pupil. I’m sure that she wasn’t so glad at the beginning… Maybe, she thought I would have been just a nuisance and perhaps I have been, really. However, she has been taking care of me since then, she has given me a home, she’s training me in combat and she’s teaching me so many things…*

Laughing to himself, he remembered all the times she had scolded him for a million reasons – not that he didn’t deserve it, really.

*Kouyou-san is so strict and severe sometimes, she’s such an older sis!*

But he recalled as well every time she had tended to his bruises after a particularly harsh session, every time she had cooked something special just for him, every time she had stroke his hair maternally.

*She’s the closest thing to a family that I have ever had…*

There was another memory of that day that he couldn’t get out of his mind. A thought that annoyed him to no end, ‘cause he hadn’t manage to comprehend it yet. As almost everything related to *the bandaged bastard*, to be honest. Dazai still was an absolute mystery to him… A mystery he didn’t
Those deep brown eyes, narrowing dangerously, gaze inclement and defiant completely focused into Mori’s one while his mentor was saying that I would have moved in with Kouyou. Still, I don’t understand the meaning of that.

Maybe, he was pissed off because the only other boy around his age was being sent to live outside Port Mafia headquarter, but it’s a bit of a stretch.

For what he knew, Kouyou was occupying the top floor of a brothel run by the Organization in the Red Light District since the day she had affiliated, about ten years ago. And, in any case, the distance hadn’t stopped Dazai from breaking into his room every now and then, completely unconcerned about privacy and alien to the very concept of personal space. His unwelcomed visits had started almost immediately and never ceased, so that, at some point along the line, he had even got unwillingly used to that…

The first time Dazai sneaked into his room, was on the second day he had moved in with Kouyou and he had been completely taken aback.

The bastard should just have been thankful that I hadn’t killed him on the spot!

Whether he wanted it or not, memories began to whirl through his mind, projecting clear images of that day.

…

He was quietly splayed on his soft new bed, still taking in the indescribable pleasure of having a room of his own for the first time in his life – and what a room, indeed! – when the door suddenly thrust open, loudly slamming into the wall.

He jumped up highly alerted, immediately activating his ability, more than ready to fight back, just to witness a lanky brown hair guy stumbling into the room, a shit-eating grin plastered on his annoying face, shouting aloud “Chuuya~”

He almost got a heart attack.

He blinked several times, utterly stunned, almost incredulous about what his eyes were seeing in front of him and when he recovered from the loss of speech, he growled, “What the fuck are you doing here?”

Dazai looked at him innocently and replied, “But obviously! I’m here to make sure you have settled in nicely!”

“Can’t you just knock on the door like any normal person?”

“So, you’re glad to see me! I’m so happy!”

He stared at him in confusion, “And how the hell did you jump to this conclusion?”

“You’ve just said that if I’ve knocked, you’d let me in!”

“I’ve never said anything like that!”

“But that’s implicit, Chuuya!”

The bastard strolled unfazed towards his bed and flopped on it.
He just sighed annoyed and spat, “So what?”

“Uuhhh, can’t I just miss you?”

“No, you can’t!”

Clenching his chest with a flourish, he recited, “How rude! I could die of a broken heart if you treat me this way!”

“What a disgrace.”

“You’re meanie.”

“You’re a dumbass.”

“You’re mini.”

“If you don’t get out of here immediately, I’ll throw your sorrow ass straight out of the window!”

“But you don’t even know why I’m here!”

“I don’t give a shit!”

Suddenly, the daunting impression that they could have gone on like that for hours washed over him. So, he decided reluctantly to surrender, “Why are you here?”

Dazai beamed with smug satisfaction, “I’ve just thought we should give a name to your ability.”

Again, he blinked in confusion. Getting through the mental process of the unintelligible boy in front of him was beyond his reach, “A name to my ability? Why?”

‘cause it should have a name.”

“Well, I’ll think it through.”

“But Chuuya ~ ! That’s useless!”

“Ahh?”

“See, your brain it’s just too tiny! You can’t think properly!”

He was done with that shit.

He stomped enraged towards the other boy and gripped his shirt harshly, pulling his face closer to his, while snarling threateningly, “It’s still smart enough to plan your death.”

Dazai’s gaze darkened abruptly, locking unflinching into his and piercing through his skull like a hot knife through butter, sending chilling unpleasant shivers down his spine. No matter how much of a play he could put on, he absolutely was unnerving and dangerous.

The bastard hummed softly, breathing sickeningly sweet words directly onto his skin, “No need to get so worked up, I’ve already chosen a perfect suitable name…”

Somewhere, deep inside him, his inner self twitched in the awareness that Dazai was used to obtain always what he wanted, in one way or another. Moreover, he was just too tired to battle over such a petty question. He slowly released the grip, and straightening quietly, he gave in for the second time
in the span of few minutes.

“And what the fuck of a name is it?”

Dazai smiled contently and cooed, “For the tainted sorrow.”

...

That had been the first of an infinity of arguments between the two of them, most of which – if not all... - had ended with him surrendering to Dazai’s whimsical whims, ‘cause dealing with the bandaged bastard when it came to mind games was way too exhausting for him. Completely draining. And it wasn’t worth the pain.

Tsk... There’s not so much you can do when you're up against the “almighty Demon Prodigy of Yokohama Port Mafia”... He beats around the bush until you play exactly into his hands... But definitely I always get my revenge...

A smug grin painted his lips while reminiscing each and every time he had beaten up the bastard, pretty hard to say the least. Dazai could undoubtedly outsmart him, but when it came to hand to hand combat not even nullifying his ability was good for something.

No shit! Ability or not, I’m stronger than him. Well, not that he’s a weakling or something... hmpf... better not tell him that I think he’s a worthy opponent or he’s going to puff up like a peacock and tease me to no end...

Indeed, their coaching was quite different. While the precious social misfit was being trained mostly in strategy, tactic and stuff like that, his own instruction principally focused on hand to hand combat and armed fighting. They sparred sometimes – and that was one of the thing giving him an undeniable pleasure – and Dazai assisted to his lessons concerning the mastery of his ability – and that was hellish, ‘cause Dazai never failed to harass him to no end! – but they didn’t interact – fortunately – in any other training activity.

The rivalry between the two of them was well known by any Port Mafia member at that point and pretty much everyone had already witnessed at least one their infamous bickering - the insulting nicknames they had been incessantly throwing at each other rapidly increasing in number and becoming more and more creative.

Tsk... That damned bastard’s head is just stuffed to the brim with bandages! He had the nerve to come up with “hat-rack” lately... just because I keep wearing hats out of habit... I had to do that back then, to hide my foreign features, you idiot! Crap, I’ll never hear the end of it...

Even if... so far, I’ve noticed that Dazai’s like that only with me... ‘cause with anyone else he’s just the detached, cunning, heinous Demon Prodigy that Mori-san’s shaping into a flawless future Mafia Boss and who doesn’t give a shit to even speak a word to you...

Mpfh... how lucky I am...

Rolling over on his back, he stared at the ceiling thoughtfully, mulling over the unexpected turn his life had taken and the million things that had happened since the day he enlisted. Of course, not everything had been nice, there had been even some pretty tough moments, troublesome missions ended in bloodshed, too many wounds to tend to at the end of the day, most physical, other – the hardest to heal - psychological.

Nevertheless, he was fine with that. Port Mafia wasn’t a humanitarian organization, after all. And he had been aware of that since the very beginning.
Three years ago, I chose to join the Port Mafia. Hence, I am Port Mafia, in flesh and blood. I don’t regret it, no matter what.

After all, here’s not so bad…

He closed his eyes delighted, savoring the softness and the warmth of the blankets embracing him for just a moment more, before stretching his sore limbs and sat on the edge of the bed.

I wonder how the meeting between Mori-san, Ane-san and Hirotsu-san is going… when I left the headquarter, she looked a little worried… Mmnn, the situation has been pretty tense, lately.

Who knows if the shit-head is attending the meeting as well… hmpf, hope not, or else he’s gonna showing off endlessly about him being there while I’ve been sent home like a shitty obedient brat.

He stood and started heading towards the bathroom to take a shower and make himself ready for his meeting with Ane-san, stripping off his clothes and discarding them randomly on the floor while walking. When the hot water start flowing down his bare skin, pleasantly, he felt his sore muscles relax and his body swiftly easing the stress.

Uff... I really needed this so much.

Getting out of the shower, he wrapped a towel around his hips and went back to his bedroom, still deep in his own thoughts. Unsurprisingly, he had to come to a sudden stop when he was still on the threshold.

Like it was nothing, there he was: pleasantly splayed on his bed, humming some sort of creepy tune while reading better not to know what.

He just sighed utterly annoyed and braced himself for the upcoming quarrel.

* * *

…

At first, he had been quiet disappointed to find Chuuya’s room empty when he had sneaked into.

Still, I’m sure he was headed home when he left the headquarter…

But then he had spotted the clothes scattered all over the floor and heard the shower running.

Mmmm… think I’m gonna wait for the hat-rack to be done!

…

When the redhead entered the room, he buried himself in the book he was pretending to read, playing dumb, as he hadn’t noticed him at all.

Indeed he had, all too well. How could he possibly not? Even if he weren’t a thoroughly trained Port Mafia member, used to spot any insignificant detail in his surrounding, searching for anything that could make the difference between a dead man and a live man, it was impossible not to notice Chuuya’s presence.
Especially, not if he was like this…

…half-naked, just covered with a tiny towel wrapped around his hips, red wet curls sticking on his soft pale skin in a vivid contrast, his lithe and perfectly shaped muscles gleaming in the light reflected by a myriad of drops running down his smooth body.

Not for the first time since when they had met, he found himself thinking that Chuuya was beautiful.

A low growled “Bastard…” snapped him out of his reverie, so he raised his head to look in those mesmerizing cobalt eyes – well, fuck… – and, in his most playful tone, he greeted, “Chuuuyaaa~! I was dying of boredom while waiting for you! But you’re forgiven: it’s well known that it takes a long for pretty ladies to get ready!”

The redhead scowled at him, “Perhaps, you’re saying that I’m a pretty lady?”

He retaliated with his best ingenuous look and cooed, “Obviously! With such big blue eyes and silky long hair, what else could you be?”

Chuuya rolled his eyes irritated and retorted, “Anyway, thank you so much for the “pretty” thing.”

Fuck… he’s getting better and better in counterstriking my taunts…

Not giving him the time to formulate a proper answer, the redhead continued, a mischievous smirk curling his lips up, “Must be why you always stare that much.”

“It’s not my fault. You’re almost naked.”

Weak…

“What an excuse! You’re in my bedroom! And I just got out of the shower!”

Chuuya crossed the room with wide steady steps, halted in front of his wardrobe and, once opened the doors, started to pick up some clothes in a rush.

That kind of situation – seeing each other half-naked and making fun of that – wasn’t so infrequent between the two of them, considering that they often used the common showers of Port Mafia training room and obviously they didn’t miss a chance to bicker.

Still… he sat on the edge of the bed, taking some brief moments to clear his mind before going back for more. He narrowed his eyes and fixed his piercing gaze straight in the middle of the other’s shoulder blades, so intensely that he was sure Chuuya could feel it and then whined teasingly, “Noooo, Chibi, please! Don’t get dressed! Don’t cover your captivating body with filthy unsuitable clothes which can’t possibly do your beauty justice!”

The redhead half-turned his body, looked daggers at him and, in a swift motion, teared off the towel from his hips and thrown it towards him, while shouting enraged, “Put that damn towel on your dingy eyes and stop staring!”

Catching the towel without fail, he smiled wickedly.

No doubt you’ve got better in playing this game, but this isn’t still enough to kick my ass…

He got up quietly and without making a single noise, he ambled towards Chuuya, whom was standing back turned, now just in his underwear, still busy in picking up his clothes, too infuriate to notice him approaching.
He stopped within an inch from him and placed a hand on Chuuya’s shoulder, his fingertips then slowly brushing down the smooth skin of his right arm and finally gripping his wrist softly. He pulled slightly backward, to have the redhead’s bare back resting against his chest and tilted his head forward to bury his nose in the crock of Chuuya’s neck. Then he breathed sweetly against his skin, “You smell good.”

Chuuya froze completely.

They were both well aware that Chuuya could easily crush him on the ground with a single swift move if he wanted so, but he didn’t.

He couldn’t say how long they lingered like that, in that awkward position, too close and intimate to fit properly in any sort of previous interaction between the two of them.

He wasn’t even sure about why they were like that, but he didn’t bother in any case: that was just so undeniably pleasing, all his senses were melting unconsciously in the oblivion of that proximity.

Somewhere along the line, the redhead inhaled profoundly, breaking the spell with a faint murmur, “And stop clinging as well.”

He released his grip gently and took few steps back, restoring between them the personal space that had been zeroed until a second ago.

Then he mumbled, almost warily, “I’m gonna borrow your bath foam.”

A dry reply followed immediately, “No fucking way!”

The game has just started again…

“But it smells so good!”

“Fuck, Dazai!”

“Mnnnn… I may consider it, if you really wanna to… but let me say that we’re still a little underage for that!”

Chuuya just rolled his eyes and kept dressing.

“Chuuu~, you haven’t to put on all those layers if you want…”

The redhead cut him off abruptly, “Don’t-even-think-to-say-that-again!”

He whined, utterly offended, “But it wasn’t me who proposed that!”

They were bickering again, as always.

And that was “good and safe”, ‘cause that was what they did best, what they were used to do.

It has been like this at all times, between the two of us… and maybe it has to be.

…”

They were both comfortably seated on the bed when Chuuya broke the silence again, “I’m not sure I wanna know, but may I dare to ask why the hell you’re here? Have you not to attend the meeting with Mori-san?”
He smiled impishly, “I’m sure my brilliance could have been a crucial factor in resolving any problem that they may be discussing, but unfortunately I’ve something more important to do.”

Chuuya rolled his eyes in annoyance and sighed heavily, “And what could that ever be?”

Pulling out some papers from the outer pocket of his jacket, he pronounced few cryptic words, “I’ve found out some interesting information.”

He almost smiled in seeing sheer curiosity lighting up the redhead’s features while he was asking, “About what?”

He remained dead silent, just to build up a little bit of suspense.

“Dazai…”

“Mnnnn…”

“What’s the meaning of this if you’re not going to say a thing?”

“Maybe if you ask nicely…”

“Maybe if I rip off those papers from your filthy hands and just force them down your throat…”

He looked at him with puppy eyes and pouted, “Little Chuu’s always meanie!”

Chuuya sighed deeply for the umpteenth time and resigned, “Dazai, would you mind to be so kind to enlighten me about what you discovered, please?”

He beamed, “Good boy!”

“So?”

Dropping his smile, a hint of seriousness coating his voice, he asserted, “Your birth parents.”

Chuuya looked at him in confusion, his brows furrowed in utter disbelief, “How’s that even possible? I thought that any information about my past had gone lost long ago…”

“I did some research.”

Still dumbfounded, the redhead prompted, “And what did you discover?”

*The time has come, for me, to step up the game to a whole new level…*

Even though…

… a foreign sensation resembling uneasiness was unreasonably crawling up his skin, something he wasn’t able to pinpoint while determining the most effective way to achieve his objective.

Discarding the unwelcomed feeling, he started speaking in a flat tone, devoid of any emotion, just focusing on stating facts, “Well. Looks like your birth parents perished in some sort of terrorist attack. They were in Paris when an unknown weapon leveled their home. They were the only casualties: in the absence of additional proofs, the case was closed and the incident was labeled as an act of terror. In that period, in France, similar occurrences weren’t so infrequent, as a matter of fact the terror threat had been raised to Red.”

He paused purposely, to underline his final words, “Just a four years old child survived the tragedy.
Maybe, you wanna know what the name of that child was.”

There was much more to disclose than that.

There was so much more at stake.

He was just waiting for the hat-rack to realize it by himself.

He was just waiting for Chuuya to decide what his next move should have been.

He was not in a rush; he had to play this game with the utmost care.

_Tell me, Chuuya…_

_Do you wanna stake your claim on your birth name?_

_Or are you going to live with the name given you by the Port Mafia, which bestowed on you the blessing of a new “Family”?_

The redhead couldn’t possibly outsmart him, but he was all but stupid. Indeed, Chuuya didn’t answer to the question concealed in his last remark and demanded instead, voice surprisingly quiet but cautious, “Dazai, can you please show me those pictures?”

_Here we go…_

_Can you see it, Chuuya?_

_Can you see who you are?_

He shifted his eyes downcast to stare at his own hands, mind wandering briefly and straying from the path he had settled on the very day the two of them had met. However, he regained his cool in a heartbeat and handed over the slightly crumpled pictures without saying a word.

Chuuya took the pictures, hands trembling faintly, as if somehow he was aware of what he would have seen. An icy, deadly silence spread through the room, thick as a morning mist and it was as if the time itself had ceased ticking ahead.

He looked intently at Chuuya, who was analyzing the photos, as still as stone, pale as a ghost, any drop of blood drained from his face.

The pictures showed the images of a wildly shattered house, deep cracks wrecking the floor, creepy holes cutting open the walls, chunks of ruins scattered everywhere. It was as a heinous force had crashed and torn the building, making it shrinking and imploding brutally. A force bending _everything_ to his will, mercilessly.

A feral growl, so deep and distant as if coming from an unfathomable abyss not even belonging to this world, broke the silence.

“Tell me, Osamu…”

He shivered.

Chuuya never called him by his given name. Never.

That was disturbing, unsettling.
That call cut through his guts, reaching his innermost depths with bewildering ease.

*Why?*

He turned his head to lock unreadable brown eyes into cobalt ones, which were relentlessly sinking in the abyss of a bottomless ocean.

He felt the overwhelming force lying in that depths luring him, dragging him forward, engulfing him with senseless inebriating warmth.

Than that force spoke again, its voice an enchanting tune echoing in his skull as if coming from the deepest of his own insides, “… what sort of weapon do you think might have ever done such kind of damages?”

He shook his head and inhaled sharply, craving for air as if his brain was at a loss for oxygen. His own words sounded muffled, as those of a man drowning in a stormy sea.

“There’s no need to ask. We both know the answer.”

What he could read on Chuuya’s face wasn’t rage, nor anger. He could have dealt with those; he was used to face his fury.

In those bottomless eyes there was nothing but sorrow. An unbearable sorrow, shifting, twirling, spreading his tainting tendrils throughout Chuuya’s body, devouring his light and dooming him to Darkness.

… *For the Tainted Sorrow. Never a name could have been more appropriate…*

Chuuya stretched an arm towards him, soft lithe fingers cupped his chin gently and a smooth thumb stroke his lips faintly.

“Tell me, Osamu… What did you want to prove with this, that I’m even more of a monster than you are?”

His heart stop beating. His mind started screaming. But he couldn’t force any word out of his mouth.

*Chuuya… I just want you to see that you need me!*

He felt the urge to reach for the warm hand brushing slightly the skin of his cheeks and intertwined their fingers. An overwhelming wave of feelings jolted through that bare contact, filling to the brim his insides that until then had known nothing but *void*.

Whatever it was that was ravaging inside Chuuya’s body, whatever it was that was feeding the battle between Darkness and Light, whatever it was that had wiped out his void in an instant, that wasn’t an ability.

‘Cause it wasn’t dispelled by touch.

*What had I awakened?*

*This is not For the Tainted Sorrow…*

... *still…*

... *this is Chuuya…*
... strong, beautiful, uncompromising.

Chuuya broke the contact disentangling their fingers and then started speaking again, eyes averted, voice coated in anguish but still.

“I don’t fucking care about his name. No matter what happened to that four years old child. Never mind who he was. He died back then, alongside his parents and his birth name.”

He sighed deeply, his features still reflecting a soul torn by conflicting emotions, and continued, “I don’t fucking care about the child imprisoned in that hellish orphanage. No matter what they did to him. He died as well, four years ago, his fake name buried with him.”

Then, he raised his red head to stare at him, eyes mirroring deep sorrow and unwavering strength at once, his voice a barely audible whisper, yet unyielding, “I am Nakahara Chuuya.”

Well.

He had reached his goal.

Chuuya had placed his trust in the Port Mafia once more; he had just claimed this life over again.

He had discarded any connection with his past, he had chosen his new family over his birth family, whatever it might be.

He was full aware now that he could hurt his family, that he had done it before.

And he knew as well that there was only one person, in this world, who could prevent him from causing damages to the ones he loved. Only one person able to dispel the unruly, wild force lying inside him, so that he couldn’t hurt anyone, anymore.

Nakahara Chuuya needed Dazai Osamu.

Nakahara Chuuya needed to be at Dazai Osamu’s side.

That was what he wanted. That was what he had planned.

But when he looked into those amazing blue eyes filled with sorrow, he wasn’t so sure anymore.

What have I done?

“Chuuya, I…”

Chuuya shook his head and stood quietly, without saying another single word. Then he walked out of the room, closing the door behind him firmly.

He didn’t know how long he had remained there, staring in the nothing, his mind replaying everything that had happened over and over again trying to find out what he had done wrong.

‘Cause he had done something wrong, even if he wasn’t fully able to understand what it was.

By the way, whatever it was, he wanted, he really wanted, to fix it, somehow.

* * *
Three days had passed since then. Three whole days without catching even a slight glimpse of the bastard.

Ane-san had sensed that something was wrong, but fortunately, she hadn’t insisted on talking through it.

To be honest, he didn’t want to talk at all, so he had focused on physical training, which could do a lot to calm his shattered nerves.

He wasn’t still able to put together all the scattered pieces of what had happened that day, the sharp shreds of too many conflicting emotions still scratching his insides, keeping alive his sorrow, clenching his heart in a vice grip.

He had mulled over it one million times, he had dissect any single event thoroughly, he had reason it out until his head had started splitting. However, some memories were so deeply drown in overwhelming feelings that it was impossible for him to analyze them distinctly.

Still, he was sure about few things.

*Guilt* was the first feeling he could recognize clearly. He had caused the death of his birth parents. And this grief would have gnawed at his insides for the rest of his life. Even if he couldn’t remember anything about them, even if they were strangers to him, without so much as a blurred memory of their faces, they had been his *parents*. Probably there hadn’t been so much, back then, that a four years old child could have done to stop the rampage of the terrifying force lying inside him. Still… his ability had killed them.

*No, this is unfair. I killed them.*

Now, he had to learn how to live with that sorrow.

He didn’t even dare to imagine how his life might have been if they were still alive, if he could have had a *family*, if he might have been happy. He didn’t deserve it.

*I am a monster.*

He would have cried, if he could. But not even a single tear had fallen down his cheeks, he couldn’t let it go, nothing could ease the pain clenching his heart. He needed to be strong.

*Hurt* was the second feeling he could pull apart from the entangled mess of his emotions. And what annoyed him to no end, was the awareness that was *Dazai* who could hurt him to this point, that was *Dazai* who could shake his insides and awaken the innermost instincts buried at the bottom of his soul.

He didn’t intend to mull over any other emotion that he might or might not have felt that day, he hadn’t the slightest intention of acknowledging any sort of odd, disturbing feeling that might or might not have crossed his inner self.

Why the bastard had decided to hurt him deliberately was something he intended to find out soon. Why the bastard had so much power over him was something he couldn’t comprehend, but he needed to. Definitely.

He had to find out *whatever* that could help him to unravel the unreadable, cryptic, detached mind of the damned Demon Prodigy, a key that could open at least a chink in that impenetrable façade of
him. He needed to start somewhere. Thus, he had decided to make some research of his own – as the bastard had already made in his regard – but the only thing he had managed to come up with was relying on the information the Port Mafia surely possessed about him.

The problem was that such kind of information was kept in a safe room in the archive of the headquarter – as Ane-san had explained him, not without a questioning expression painted on her face – and only the Boss and the Executives could access it. Asking for a special permission was out of question, no one would ever give him their approval over such a petty request, so he could do nothing but forcing his way in.

A small smug smile curled his lips up while reminiscing his early thefts, the ones he had carried out at the expenses of Port Mafia’s properties. It felt like forever since back then.

*Look like that turned out…*

What he was going to do might be extremely dangerous. If he was caught, they sure would punish him, maybe they could even banish him, or worst, kill him. He might fuck up everything.

Still, he needed to know. He was resolute in his decision to try and pay the price for it, if that was the case.

It was late at night when he headed for the headquarter. It should be almost empty right now… not because everyone was at home sleeping quietly, simply because the most part of the activities carried on by Port Mafia took place in the dead of night. So, everyone was out, doing their job.

He entered the building almost unnoticed and went downstairs, as the archive was situated in the basement. Tonight, he intended to give just a look: he had to analyze the security system and the lock that safeguarded the vault if he had to come up with a plan to break into.

The archive was a wide room, filled with high filing cabinets neatly placed right next to each other to form many aisles resembling almost a labyrinth. As expected, no one was inside.

Without turning on the neon lights to avoid drawing unwanted attention, he headed toward the end of the room, where he knew the safe room was placed. The many rows of cabinets ended few meters before the back wall and a wide desk was placed in front of the door that lead to the vault. There was a small lamp on the top of the desk. It was lit up. The faint flash of light was illuminating a folder resting there. He warily approached the desk and studied it for a brief moment. Nothing was written on the cover. So, he opened it. And gaped.

The file was thin, there weren’t so many documents inside, but on the first page was written a name. *Dazai Osamu.*

*Fuck.*

*What the fuck?*

*What the fucking hell?*

Who had placed that folder within his reach?

He should have been either Mori-san or… the bastard himself, somehow? It must be so, he couldn’t think to anyone else.

Well but… why?
And how the hell did they know he would have come here with that specific purpose in mind? Tonight?

*Damned cunning manipulative bastards… the both of them, definitely.*

*Like master, like disciple. Even if, in this case, I bet on the latter.*

Anyway, he grabbed the file without further ado and headed back home.

…

Once alone, in the quiet safety of his bedroom, he opened the folder and started examining it.

As he had already noticed, there were very few documents, most of which looked like reports written by Mori himself – *he recognized the calligraphy* – while others resembled… *medical files?* There were also few papers issued by some sort of Authority, the Police probably.

Maybe he shouldn’t have been so eager to start digging into it, maybe it wasn’t worth staying up all night. Yet he did.

He read and reread each single paper more than once.

To try to understand.

He crossed the references noted down on Mori’s report with the other documents at his disposal and put all the pieces of the puzzle together.

And finally, he found out the *meaning* of all of that.

…

Everything had started with a mission gone wrong eight years ago.

A Port Mafia squad had been charged to track down and eliminate a couple of low-key criminals who were meddling in the drug trade run by the Organization. They were husband and wife, drug addicts and they shouldn’t have been so troublesome if not for the fact that the woman was an *ability user*.

According to Mori’s report, «… *by mere touch, the woman can rob you of your five senses, reducing you to nothingness. This ability is extremely dangerous. Still, their drug dependency is so far advanced that their mental faculties are already irremediably compromised. Recovery is not possible. - - - They’re robbing, cheating and committing murders out of sheer necessity drug-induced. Looks like their withdrawals are becoming more frequent and more violent. - - - They are beyond any control. I recommend restraint or annihilation, before things may get worse.*»

There were also charts and analysis a little too “technical” for him to comprehend.

*Sometimes, I forget that Mori-san is an actual Doctor.*

In any case, a three members squad – one of which an ability user as well – had been sent to get rid of the “problem”. And things went awry.

According to the Police’s report, «*An anonymous call informed our Office about gunshots coming from a shack situated near the docks… - - - …there were five corpses. Two of them has been identified as the couple who inhabited the shack. The other three are still unidentified. - - - There is a survivor: a six years old child, probably the couple’s son. - - - When we broke in, the boy was*...
standing completely still, covered in blood and held tightly the gun that – as we had ascertained later – had shot the five bullets. - - - The boy had said nothing but “I killed them.” - - - We think that the child is in a state of shock. He needs medical treatment. - - - It’s impossible to reconstruct exactly the events.»

There was a picture of that child, took on the scene.

He was scrawny, dirty, badly undernourished. His brown hair were greasy and flat. His brown-amber eyes were dull and hollow. His skin was bruised and scarred. He was wearing filthy and ripped clothes.

He didn’t even seem to be human.

The following pages reported about the various investigations Mori had carried on searching for any sort of involvement of a rival organization in the incident. But he got nowhere. As written on the report, «I had been left with just one option: track down the boy and hope he had recovered enough from the shock to be able to give me useful information.»

However, due to a troublesome uprising in the Northeast he had to deal with, Mori had been able to resume the investigation only six months later, «When I arrived at the orphanage that had hosted the child, I discovered that the boy was no more there. Anyway, I managed to gather information speaking with one of the caretaker. If I may express a personal opinion, I would say that what I found out is puzzling. The attendant told me that the child was incredibly smart: indeed, when he arrived, he was already able to read and write almost perfectly and he knew more than basics of mathematic and science. And he was just six. How he managed to acquire such knowledge, it’s still to be determined – especially considering his family background. The caretaker added that the boy never played nor spoke with the other children, because, as the boy himself had said, “the other children are boring.”»

He took a moment to visualize the pout showing off on a six-years-old-bastard’s face while stating that and he almost smiled, almost fondly. Almost.

Umpf… I can totally see him… a pain in the ass still when he was six!

The report continued with more about the conversation between Mori and the attendant, «Moreover, his body was completely covered in scars and bruises, probably “a gift” from his drug-addicted parents, but even when asked, the boy never answered. Not that it was necessary, anyway: the cigarette burns and the marks on his back spoke for themselves. Time passing, the child still remained absolutely isolated from any other person. At first, they thought that it was common, taking into account the shocking tragedy he had assisted. They considered that the boy probably needed just some more time to recover. However, one day they spot him while cutting the flesh of his own forearm with a small knife and the only explanation he gave was, “I was curious to find out if my insides are the same of those of the others, ‘cause I think I’m different from anyone else. I don’t belong to the humans.” After that, the orphanage had the child committed to a mental hospital.»

He needed to stop reading for a while. The picture that was beginning to take shape in his mind was upsetting. As much as he had always knew that Dazai was complicated, to say the least, the information he was prying into were explaining much more than he had ever dared to ask for. He had been given access to the most intimate and private aspects of Dazai’s past. And he still didn’t know why he was allowed so.

The final part of Mori’s report concerned his meeting with Dazai, who was actually hospitalized in a mental institution. «When I first caught a glimpse of the boy, I thought he was really beyond any salvation. His eyes were dull, hollow, he carried himself as if nothing around him actually existed,
he was completely detached as if nothing could affect him. When a nurse brought the child in the visiting room, I noticed that his body was almost entirely covered with bandages. I asked the nurse for an explanation before entering the room in my turn. She said that hiding from the boy’s view the marks left from the abuses he had suffered in his past seemed to be effective in preventing the boy from self-harming.»

He had never asked Dazai what was behind his damned bandages. He had never cared. Or maybe… he had always preferred not to know, because somehow he had already recognized the signs left from abuses…

Fuck… Now I’ll even feel like shit in mocking him for his creepy bandages! Darn troublesome mummy!

He took a deep insight before continuing reading.

«However, when I entered the room and sat in front of the child, my perspective changed radically. He was staring at me, head slightly tilted, with eyes all but dull and hollow. His gaze was sharp, cunning, unyielding. He was studying me, thoroughly. He was perceptive and penetrating.

I’m reporting here below the whole conversation, with the add of few notes that may be useful for future analysis.

– (M): Mori – (B): Boy –

(B) What do you want? You’re not a doctor. Or better… you may be a doctor, but you’re not here to examine me.

(M) You are right. I’m a doctor, but I’m not here to examine you. I just want to ask you few questions.

(B) About what?

(M) The death of your parents.

--- Note: The boy narrows his eyes almost threateningly. This denotes strong will, it’s quite interesting.

(B) I have already answered about that matter. I have nothing else to say.

(M) You did. You declared that you killed your parents and the three man who were there with them.

(B) It’s so. But no one believed me back then.

(M) I may be inclined in believing you now. I’m just curious about how a six years old child might have killed five all-grown persons fully armed. Moreover, two of them were ability users.

--- Note: The boy is evaluating me thoroughly. Disclosing few information, I’ve picked up his attention. And mentioning abilities seems to have speeded things up.

(B) Who are you?

(M) I’ll tell you. First, you’ll answer my questions.

(B) What do I have to gain?

--- Note: Cunning. He’s carrying on a negotiation without even knowing. This talent may be quite
useful.

(M) If I like your answers, I’ll get you out of here.

(B) What if you don’t?

(M) Nothing will change for you. So, what do you have to lose?

(B) Deal.

--- Note: he’s resolute. Another valuable aptitude.

(M) Well then. What happened that day?

(B) When the three men broke in, mother and father were in the kitchen snorting cocaine. Mother succeeded somehow in incapacitating one of the men gripping his wrist. The guy, deprived of all his senses, stared rampaging furiously and blindly, throwing around aimless shots, endangering his own fellows as well. Taking advantage of the mess, father pulled out a gun while mother was facing the other ability user. Still, when the man activated his ability, parents were immobilized by snakes twirling up their bodies.”

--- Note: he never referred to his parents using the “possessive”. It’s just “mother”, “father”, “parents”. I guess he didn’t think they belonged to a family.

(M) You weren’t affected?

(B) I wasn’t. The snakes were strangling father and he let fall the gun he was holding, so I picked it up. No one was paying attention to me. I shot the rampaging guy first. Mother managed to reach and incapacitate the guy with the ability, who was trying to immobilize me as well with his snakes.

(M) But he didn’t managed.

(B) No, he didn’t.

--- Note: there’s something odd. I can’t figure out why Snake didn’t succeeded in using his ability with this boy.

(B) I shot again, twice, and killed the other two guys.

(M) May I ask why you killed your parents as well?

(B) I was still holding the gun in my hands. Mother walked towards me, trying to incapacitate me as well, as she always did.

(M) Your mother used her ability on you?

(B) She did.

(M) Why?

(B) When I was hungry, when I didn’t succeed in sleeping, when I was crying, when I was asking for something, whenever I was annoying. She disabled me, so that I could feel nothing at all and whatever was the problem, it was solved.

--- Note: He’s speaking with utmost indifference. His mother had disabled him for six years. She had deprived him of his five senses for six years. Who knows how many times and for how long. No
wonder that this boy seems to be a little “detached”.

(M) You said that “she tried”. She didn’t manage to rob you of your senses?

(B) No, she didn’t.

(M) Why?

(B) I don’t know. Lately, her ability wasn’t working with me anymore. I think I’d grown used to it, somewhat. Maybe I got immune. In any case, father picked up a gun from one of the dead guys and aimed at me. Both the adrenaline and the drug running through their veins had overexcited them. They had gone completely mad. I guessed that when they looked at me, they didn’t see me, but another enemy trying to kill them. So, it was either me or parents. I shot twice again and here I am.

--- Note: he was able to keep the cool in such a desperate situation. He killed five persons with five bullets – two of them were his birth parents – never missing a shot. And he was just six. This is material well suited for the Port Mafia.

(M) And you reported all of this to the Police?

(B) I did, but they didn’t believe me. They thought I was in a state of shock. They didn’t even put my testimony in their report. How incompetent.

--- Note: Thinking about it. His mother’s ability wasn’t working on him anymore. I don’t think it’s possible to become immune to an ability. Indeed, it seems that Snake’s ability didn’t work on him as well. I have a guess. I’m going to try something.

(M) Can you do me a favor?

(B) What is it?

(M) Can you take my hand for just a moment?

(B) … fine.

--- Note: when the boy was taking my hand, I tried to summon Elise. But I didn’t managed. This boy is gifted. This boy has the ability to nullify whatever other ability just by touch. Amazing.

(B) So?

(M) Well. I am Mori Ougai, a member of Yokohama Port Mafia. I’m interested in taking you as my pupil. What do you think about this?

(B) What do I have to gain?

(M) You’re quite skilled. You might even become Boss, in the future. You might rule over Yokohama underworld as you please.

(B) This sounds boring.

(M) My, my, this is everything but boring, I swear!

(B) Well then, I’ll join. Not that I really have any other interesting alternative.

(M) I’m glad to welcome you in the Port Mafia family. Do you want to keep your name? Or do you prefer to choose a new one?
B) A new one is better.

(M) Well then. What this name will be? I’ll have your brand-new documents specially made.

B) Dazai Osamu.

--- Note: Not a glimpse of hesitation. I like it. I’m going to use (D): Dazai instead of (B): Boy, from now on.

(M) Please to meet you, Dazai-kun.

(D) Please to meet you, Mori-san.

(M) There’s something else, but we can discuss this while heading toward the headquarter.

(D) What is it?

(M) You’re an ability user.

(D) Am I?

(M) You are. You can disable any other ability just by touch. I’ve proved it myself. When you were keeping my hand, I tried to summon my ability but I couldn’t. That’s why your mother didn’t manage to incapacitate you anymore. That’s why Snake didn’t manage to use his ability on you. Some abilities show themselves since birth. Other reveal themselves later. Indeed, your ability is a very interesting one. Do you have a name for it as well?

(D) Yes, I do. No Longer Human. »

The report ended like that.

He felt dizzy, slightly confused. An odd empathy had settled in his guts, warming him up awkwardly but not unpleasantly.

Now, there was so much more to mull over.

Now, there was so much more he knew about Dazai. Even if he was sure that it wasn’t still enough to fully comprehend the other boy. Not enough to pierce through the Demon Prodigy’s soul. Probably, he would never get to understand Dazai fully, not even in a million years. However, he felt as he was a little bit closer to his impenetrable heart: he was given the key he had demanded for, he had just to find out how to use it properly.

He was more than sure, now, that Dazai had left the folder there, on that desk, for him to find. Maybe, it was just his awkward way to say “I’m sorry”. Maybe it was just his way to compensate him for having pried in his past.

The similarities and the differences between their wretched pasts were both striking, but he was sure they could work them out. The question was… did they want that?

There wasn’t any room for pity in their lives, nor for regrets or compassion. Maybe, the true meaning in sharing their pasts was just to give voice to their craving for belonging.

His mother could steal a man his five senses and cut him out from the word of the living. I can’t even imagine how it is not to sense anything. I don’t even dare to conceive how it should have been to live like that for six years.
Not being able to feel anything… And when he regained his senses, maybe he just felt too much to be able to bear with it. I guess it was better trying not to feel anything anymore. I wonder how he hadn’t gone completely crazy.

Anyway, I can understand now why he chose to be No Longer Human.

He was deadly tired, but there wasn’t time to rest. The sun was rising and he had a report he needed to give back. A report he shouldn’t have been allowed to read at all.

* * *

Having breakfast with Elise-chan had been exhausting as always. She had whined to no end because her favorite chocolate-and-strawberry cheesecake was over and the vanilla-and-raspberries cheesecake tasted like shit in comparison. To appease her and calm down her tantrums, he had to promise her that they would go shopping later that afternoon.

Sigh… she’s gonna squander my bank account once again… But I can’t help it! She’s so cute when she gets angry!

He hadn’t even started working on his planned schedule for the day, when a knock on the door took him by surprise.

Who could be so early in the morning? As far as I know, there isn’t any urgency that requires my intervention…

Not that he could really ignore whomever it was, in any case and so he uttered dryly, “Come on in.”

By the way, when he saw Chuuya striding towards his desk, face tired and pale, eyes black ringed, evidently sleep-deprived, but definitely not less resolute and unwavering than usual, he really was puzzled. Obviously, he didn’t show any of that on his stone-shaped features and welcomed him instead, “Chuuya-kun, nice to see you. Indeed, I didn’t know you were a morning person! There’s anything I can do for you?”

Standing still in front of his desk, Chuuya simply bowed respectfully and greeted back, “Mori-san.”

The redhead added nothing more and just slid a folder on the top of his desk, wordlessly.

He stretched a hand to reach for the file and, once grabbed, he opened the cover and read the name written on it.

Dazai Osamu.

What?

How did he get this?

Or maybe…

A glimpse of utter shock flashed in his eyes for a brief moment but he regained his cool in a heartbeat. Then, waving a hand dismissively, he just said, “I see. If it’s all, you can go.”

Chuuya bowed again and exited the room, still wordlessly.
Left alone, he let a wide delighted grin cut through his face.

*Looks like my precious Demon Prodigy has started moving. Perfect timing, indeed!*

*The time has come, for me, to put things in motion and turn the tables.*

*Finally, an opportunity has arisen…*

* * *

It was late at night and he was just lying on his bed, unsleeping, mind still too entangled in a mess of speculations to be able to find a proper rest.

A soft knock on his door shook him out of his restless trance.

*Who the fuck?*

He sat on the edge of the bed, alerted, and muttered warily, “Get in…”

Of all the people in the world, the one he was less ready to face entered the room. His heart missed a beat when he looked into those deep unfathomable amber eyes. He braced himself, steadying his resolve: if the bastard had the guts to show his annoying face, he sure wasn’t going to give up!

*Well then… let’s start.*

“No, I know well that asking you questions it’s pointless, ‘cause I’ll never manage to get a single straight answer, still… Why?”

Dazai walked forward, halting a few steps from him, “If you already know that much, why bother to ask at all?”

“cause I’ll get to carve some fucking words of sense out of that damn mouth of yours, first of then.”

“Stubborn.”

“Never said I’m not. So, why?”

Dazai moved forward further, stopping at an inch from him. Again, the bastard was zeroing the personal space between them, looming over him with a mischievous grin plastered on his face. He had not even the slightest intention to budge, so he held that annoying stare, unflinching.

“But Chuuya… how can I possibly understand what are you speaking about? You’re too vague. Do you prefer me to come back when your brain is able to function properly? It could take a while, but still…”

Indeed, his taunt lacked the usual bite.

He stood, in the narrow space between the bed and the bastard, ever so quietly and gripped softly Dazai’s collar, pulling faintly forward, so that they were at eye level and then breathed calmly, “Stop playing dumb. You know exactly what I’m asking, so just answer!”

He released the grip and waited for him to reply, without breaking eye contact, not even for blinking.
Dazai inhaled deeply and stated, with a steady but surprisingly soft voice, “I just want you to know who I am.”

He let out the breathe he didn’t even know he was holding back and shook his head slightly, smiling sincerely, “I didn’t need to read that stuff to know who you are. That’s not who you are.”

Dazai was visibly taken aback by his statement, but he still managed to ask quietly, “And who do you think I am?”

He smirked smugly and retorted, “A fucking bastard.”

Silence fell again between the two of them. He moved to sit on the bed once more, while Dazai was standing still in front of him.

Out of nowhere, the brunet murmured, not even bothering to sound convincing, “This afternoon, the Boss died of a serious illness. His dying wish was for Mori to succeed him.”

He stared at him dumbfounded for a long minute. That wasn’t the whole truth, obviously, but probably, for once in his life, it wasn’t Dazai’s choice to lie to him. Anyway, whatever had happened, nothing could change the fact that Mori Ougai was the new Boss of Yokohama Port Mafia.

_Things are going to change… I wonder if it’s for the better or for the worse… I think it’s a change for the better, Mori-san might be very good for the Port Mafia. Still… Umph, we’ll see._

He didn’t express any of that aloud, there was no need. He said instead, “Wait here.”

Dazai looked at him questioningly, but, for once, complied.

…

When he was back in his room, Dazai was already comfortably splayed over his bed, the usual teasing glint gleaming in his eyes in full force.

He rolled his eyes and scowled, “Can’t you at least take off your filthy shoes and your dingy coat?”

“Ohh… if Chibi wanna me to undress, all he has to do is just ask!”

He stripped off his coat with a flourish while adding, “Just promise me you’re not going to compromise my virtue!”

“Tsk. Do you even have any virtue?”

“You can see that!”

“Not in the slightest!”

“Oh my, Chibi! You’re so short that even your sight is so badly compromised?”

“You really are annoying! To think that I took my sorry ass downstairs to steal a bottle and make a toast with you. Tks… unworthy.”

“A toast? Why?”

“To a new beginning.”
In brown-amber eyes that were locked into his, behind the curtains of coldness and detachment, behind the many masks of fake smiles and hollow cheerfulness, he could see a soft and warm glimpse of sincere happiness.

“Hat-rack…”

“Shit-head?”

“That’s not whiskey… that’s it?”

“Mmmm, yes, I think so. On the label here, it does read ‘Peat’s Beast – An intensely peated single malt scotch whiskey’.”

“I see… Peat’s Beast, then? It sounds oddly appropriate…”

“Let’s go than.”

“Chuu~… you know that, with that thing, we’re going to get spectacularly wasted, don’t you?”

“Yeah, so?”

“You sure you’re not gonna attempt to my virtue?”

“Aargghh, fuck Dazai! Stop spouting shit and hand over that damn bottle!”

“… indeed, you said “fuck” again…”

“… God help me…”

…

They drunk. They got badly wasted. They threw up their souls, holding each other’s foreheads while bended over the sink. They drunk again. They laughed foolishly, they bickered, they puked once more. Finally, exhausted, they collapsed on the bed, half-dressed, half-conscious, completely uncaring about the world existing outside that room.

They fell asleep almost immediately, back to back, basking in the warmth of that physical contact.

A blurred thought crossed his mind lazily, before the oblivion took it away.

*What are we? Friends? I don’t think we are friends, that’s not it… still we’re close… awkwardly close… I’ve never been that close to anyone else in my life*…

Chapter End Notes

I’m going abroad next week and probably I’ll have no time to write at all, sigh. So, I don’t think I’ll manage to update on Sunday, but I’ll do as soon as possible.
The old Boss’ death had opened the Pandora’s Box.

Port Mafia was under a full-scale attack: they were facing one of the most severe crisis in a really long time. Enemies were arising from within and without, aiming at tearing it apart as a pack of wolves chewing up the flashes of a dying pray.

Opposite factions inside the Organization were battling furiously, taking advantage of the uncertainty that had followed the old Boss’ unexpected demise to gain more power and rip the leadership from
Mori’s hands.

Rival gangs were fighting harshly to expand their influence all over the underworld and increase their profits to the detriment of the Organization’s earnings.

Oftentimes, new beginnings are all but smooth: the Port Mafia’s supremacy was threatened on all fronts.

But his enemies should have known better than to underestimate him. Indeed, he had predicted this all too well, a long time ago. By the way, instead of bathing in blood his arise, unleashing his murderous rampage upon his opponents and annihilating those who dared to raise their heads against him – in the same way his predecessor had done for years, as a matter of fact – he preferred by far working behind the curtains, to re-establish connections, alliances and collaborations, which could strengthen the Port Mafia’s dominion in the long term.

The time to strike fear into the heart of each and every human being at the mention of the Port Mafia’s name will come very soon. By now, I have to restore the internal order and regain the full control over underworld activities.

However, a new organization, which had settled in Yokohama in the last few months, was causing him the major problems and it was nothing that he could take lightly: it was the Mancuso Cosca, a clan associated with Cosa Nostra.

They were relentlessly taking over both the sex and drug trafficking, spreading their connections quickly through Yokohama underworld, thanks to their long-standing experience in handling illegal operations. They sure were all but newbies: admittedly, all the brainless retaliations against them carried out under the leadership of the previous Boss had ended up in nothing but useless massacres.

Mancuso Cosca had established its headquarter in a huge mansion located near the Nature reserve of Kanazawa ward and the whole place was heavily guarded by about fifty picciotti, according to the information that Port Mafia had managed to collect. The Capo of the Cosca was Salvatore Mancuso, a short fat man in his fifty, which was reported being smart, tough and ruthless. However, the real deal was his right-hand man, known only as Dante, a quite mysterious guy who always wore a half-mask covering the left side of his face. Rumors said that he was extremely strong and unpredictable, to the point that no opponent had managed to land a direct hit against him so far.

Taking them head-on was definitely out of question: Mancuso Cosca was heavily armed, thoroughly commanded and could count on a large bunch of men, while Port Mafia was pitifully short of fighters right now, as its members were busy in dealing with enough battles on several fronts.

It was with this purpose in mind – gathering information – that he had sent his pupil to look over the Mancuso’s mansion. The problem was that Dazai hadn’t reported back in forty-eight hours.

Either, he’s already dead or he has been captured. Even if, knowing Dazai, I think it’s highly doubtful that he got himself killed like a rookie. It’s more than likely that he’s up to something… Damn, he should have steered out of trouble, it was just a reconnaissance mission. If I were seeking for a direct confrontation, I would have sent a larger team, but being spotted was exactly what I was trying to avoid. Darn cocky brat, acting on his own… better be worth it.

He sighed deeply, reconsidering once again the whole situation and the move he had already planned to do, in order to identify any possible flaw.

Well, Dazai… you let me no choice that taking the trail you have already marked by yourself… Be sure to play your cards right, ‘cause if this is not gonna work, you may have a lot to lose… That’s
“Well, this should be a plus, you might succeed in grabbing valuable information while being there. You’re just supposed to sneak inside, climbing up the security wall from the rear. Using your ability, it shouldn’t be so much of a deal.” Then, pointing is index on the map stretched on the desk between the two of them, he proceeded, “You’ll get to this grating that leads to the basements. Once ripped it out of the ground, you should be able to enter and reach this cell…” he indicated another point on the chart, “I’ve no doubt that Dazai is imprisoned there, it’s the most likely place.” He raised his head to lock his gaze with Chuuya’s and demanded, voice low and uncompromising, “Set him free and then retreat.”
We can’t afford to lose another battle, or Port Mafia’s dominion could suffer a fatal blow.

Chuuya just nodded and rose, a steady resolution painted on his oh so young face. The boy bowed respectfully, ready to take his leave and fulfill his task as ordered, but was stopped in his tracks when he added, as an afterthought, “Chuuya-kun, one last thing. Don’t get caught. Avoid head-on confrontation, until it’s possible. We are already wasting men and spilling blood on too many unrelenting fights.”

The boy half-turned and questioned, voice muffled but still, “And if it’s not possible?”

A mischievous smirked spread on his lips, while answering, unforgiving, “Get rid of as many enemies as you can, but still, take both you sorry asses back to the base. I’m more then sure that Dazai has already something in mind to get out from there, once freed. You can manage it.”

Chuuya blushed faintly, probably realizing at once about his previous poor choice of words, quite inappropriate while you were speaking to your Boss, but kept his cool and answered, “Consider it done, Boss.”

* * *

While he was heading back home to get himself ready for the upcoming mission, his head was spinning with a million thoughts. He had – almost – managed to rein in his emotions during the meeting with Mori-san, but now they were flowing wildly through his system and he really needed to calm down before taking any action.

I’m not bothered because it’s my first solo mission, I’m used to fend for myself. I’ve always been on my own… one more time makes no difference.

I have to admit that I’m a little bit flattered… If the Boss committed such a delicate task to me, this means that he deems me worthy of his trust… I’m gonna do my best to fulfill the expectations. I don’t want to disappoint him, nor Ane-san… nor anyone else…

I’m not concerned, really… That’s nothing I can’t do! I’m anxious to go into the field, it’s just a rescue mission, I can handle it. I’m strong enough… I’m skilled enough… I… Fuck…

In the middle of that maelstrom of emotions, there was a frantic feeling, sneaking slyly under his skin, crawling up his veins slowly but relentlessly, circling his stomach as a beast waiting for the right moment to strike a fatal blow to its worn out pray. He tried hard not to acknowledge it, he did his best to smother it into the deepest reaches of his mind and he almost got it… but eventually it exploded in full force, making him trembling from head to toe for a moment that seemed to last indefinitely.

Fear…

I’m scared…

… but it’s not my own life I’m worried about…

Fuck, fuck, fuck! That damn bastard had really to let himself get caught? I don’t even know if he’s still alive! But if he is… oh, if he is, he’s gonna pay up for this fucking huge mess until his dying breath!
Idiot, good-for-nothing, goddamn asshole! If you don’t even know how to stay out of trouble, tell me… what do you use that fucking bright mind of yours for? Shitty dickhead! Dumbass!

He went on like that, cursing and insulting Dazai, until he reached his room. He still continued while picking up a pair of black slacks, a black shirt, a black jacket, a black coat, his black trademark hat and got himself dressed. He kept going while putting on a pair of black gloves, because, well… If I have to use my ability, heaven forbid that the shitty bastard get to touch me accidentally, nullifying me at the worst possible time. Better to cover my skin as much as possible, to prevent any unwanted contact with that bony and filthy fingers of him! As if he’s really capable to keep his disgusting hands to himself!

He stopped cursing just to say goodbye to Kouyou, who was clearly worried sick about him.

She stared at him with wide eyes clouded with concern and, sighing heavily, she murmured resigned, “Lad… you sure…?”

He beamed at her his best reassuring smile and answered quietly, “Ane-san, there’s no need to worry. You taught me well. I’ll make you proud of me.”

Kuoyou stretched her arms to squeeze him tightly in a warm affectionate embrace, humming softly while stroking his hair gently, “I’m already proud of you. I’ll always be.”

Then she released him and dismissed him saying firmly, “Be careful.”

He nodded and responded, “I’ll be” while taking his leave.

He started swearing under his breath again while heading towards the Mancuso’s mansion, his steps cutting swiftly through the shadows of the night. And he continued until he thought he had exhausted his streak of insults, until his fear was completely wrapped up in anger, just like his body was coated in black, hiding him – hiding it – from the sight of the rest of the world.

When he reached his destination, his mind settled down and focused immediately: in his thoughts now, there was nothing but the mission. He took few moments to steady his breath, to strengthen his resolve, to replay in his head all the information Mori had given him and then he was ready to take action.

Activating his ability, he climbed up the rear wall and slipped inside with no one noticing him: almost five men were patrolling the perimeter, but he moved as an incorporeal ghost, silent and light, a creature rightfully belonging to an endless night.

He spotted the grating and eradicated it from its joints with a delicate swift of a wrist slightly gleaming in red, engendering just a faint whoosh, which faded unnoticed into the whisper of the wind.

He sneaked inside the basement and headed cautiously towards the cell that Mori had indicated him previously, his soundless steps on the ceiling impossible to spot even for the many security cameras placed all over.

He got there. And for an infinitesimal moment, his heart stopped beating.

In the dim light of soft bulbs illuminating the cell, Dazai stood, his wrists tightly chained to the wall, his head bended forward and resting helplessly on his chin, his brown hair soaked in blood dripping from a nasty gash on his temple. That wasn’t the only visible injury: his clothes were ripped in several places, baring the tormented and severely beaten-up skin underneath and blood was flowing inexorably from multiple wounds, pooling at his feet in a large crimson puddle.
When he spotted Dazai’s chest raising faintly, inhaling a shallow intake of air, he started breathing again as well.

*I made it in time… he’s still alive…*

Two men, fully armed, were guarding the entrance of the prison: not so much of a threat, indeed… that wasn’t the actual problem. He focused and studied thoroughly his surroundings, to assess carefully his scarce options.

*If I knock out the guards, the security cameras will caught sight of the fight and the alarm will ring all over the mansion at once.*

*If I take out just one or two security cameras first… maybe, I can buy us valuable minutes before the enemy realize what’s going on.*

Moving soundlessly throughout the ceiling, he swiftly cut the security camera monitoring the entrance to the cell where Dazai was imprisoned and redirected a little the one watching over the hallway connecting that room to the one he was coming from, hoping no one would notice so soon. The other two cameras weren’t a nuisance, ‘cause they were fixed on spots where he wasn’t planning to make an appearance. Then he landed gracefully behind the guards, dagger unsheathed ready to strike and, with a sharp move, he sliced the throat of the first man, who went down shooting blood without even having the time to scream. The second man turned towards him, stunned and slow, *oh, too slow* to get him. He darted a red-gleaming hand forward, gripping harshly the chin of his opponent and smashed his head against the bars of the cell, unmerciful. The man was killed instantly and his lifeless body collapsed in a heap on the ground.

When he shifted his gaze to look inside the cell, his eyes came to a sudden halt the moment they met deep brown sparkling with amber hues: Dazai had raised his head and was staring at him intently, with a shit-eating grin plastered on his damn annoying face.

* Bloody hell… How can he be like that even in such bad shape? Still the full-of-fucking-himself bandaged-bastard-Dazai-Osamu?*

He scowled at him and barked, “Fucking staring even when chained up half-dead against a wall?”

Dazai’s voice was strained and shaky when he spoke, but, needless to say, his teasing habits were as sharp as ever, “Can’t I worship the sight of my beloved Prince Charming who has come to save me so bravely?”

Rolling his eyes, he gripped tightly the cell lock and crushed it under the pressure of overwhelming gravity, muttering annoyed, “Tsk, just because Mori-san ordered me.”

“But Chuuyaaaaa~! There’s no need to tell lies! You can openly admit that you were worried stiff about me and you’d rushed in here even before the Boss commanded it!”

*Cunning bastard… Not so far from the truth indeed… But I’d rather die than admit it!*

He shrugged dismissively and spat, “You wish… As if I give a shit about your sorry ass!”

Dazai half-smirked evilly, baring his teeth ominously. His eyes, which were piercing harshly and unwavering through his skull, darkened abruptly, sinking the both of them in a bottomless pit of sinful damnation. The few words he hummed in a sickeningly soft tone sounded like a death sentence, “Chuuya… you *care* about me…”

He let that declaration linger in the still air between the two them for a brief moment, neither
acknowledging nor denying it. *Fighting this battle against you is not worth the struggle! Still... No matter how right you may be, you're not allowed to drag me down with you, manipulative bastard!*

Stomping enraged towards him, he growled, “We have no time for you childish mind game! We must get out of here now!”

“Mmmnn... so, I guess I need you to break my shackles... unless you have some smutty idea to suggest, having me chained to the wall, completely at your mercy for once...”

“Fuck Dazai!”

“Oh yes, that’s the exact point!”

“Enough.” He stood dead still, his mouth an inch from the bastard’s face and breathed straight on his skin, “Don’t you dare to lay one of those filthy fingers of yours on me. Not even any other part of your disgusting body.”

The annoying grin on the bastard’s face widened impossibly, “Don’t worry Chibi, I’ll leave it to you... You can do anything you want to me...”

Stretching decisively his arms forward, he clutched the chains and pulverized them in a heartbeat. Then he swiftly jumped back, to avoid any contact with Dazai who, released so suddenly from his restraints, fell forward on his knees, moaning uncomfortably: the severe blood loss and the pain caused by his wounds were undoubtedly taking a harsh toll on his body.

He bit back firmly the urge to help him and snorted instead, “Better if you can walk by yourself, I wouldn’t carry you even if I could, useless nullifier!”

Dazai faltered for a brief moment before straightening as best as he could and retorted, “My, my... That goes without saying... I’ll just wait for the appropriate moment to bask in your warm embrace...”

“Hurry up asshole. It won’t take long for the Mancusos to realize what’s going on.”

Without even flinching, the bastard stated in a smooth tone, “We still have five minutes left.”

“How do you know?” he asked, leading the way towards their escape as fast as Dazai’s could follow.

The brunet smirked smugly, despite the heavy breath that gave away his struggle, “Of course I do, Chuuya~! Do you really think I haven’t already planned this in all aspects?” Then, with a teasing tone, he continued, “Oww, sorry... I forgot that you can’t think at all...”

He hadn’t time to rise to the bait, so he just scowled at him and grunted, “Wait there” before activating his ability to climb the wall of the adjacent room and redirect the security camera watching over their way through it.

When he landed his feet back on the floor, a sudden realization hit him in full force. Turning his head to stare at the brunet, he scolded, “Ohi bastard. Don’t tell me you got caught on purpose.”

Dazai beamed impishly, “Amazing Chuuya! You got it! Did you really figure it out all by yourself?”

Shaking his head almost desperately, he cursed, “Goddamnit Dazai, you really are a huge pain in my ass! I should have let you rot in here!”
“You meanie!”

Still, there was no time to investigate further that folly right now; he would have got the truth out of him later. As slowly and painfully as possible, obviously.

“Shush and tie this rope round your waist!”

“Mmnnn, I didn’t even know that you were so interested in bondage…”

“Dazai!”

They had reached their way out of the basement and he had planned to climb and slide towards it first, to drag up that dysfunctional deadweight of a bastard immediately later, using a rope and his ability, hopefully.

Dazai’s hands were trembling visibly while tying himself up, despite all his boldness. He clenched his teeth and cussed wordlessly, Shitty dumbass! Acting all high and mighty as ever, but his injuries are much serious than he wanna show indeed!

However, he said nothing but “Gimme the line” before scaling the wall. Once on the top, he tried to drag the brunet up, but his ability didn’t work in the slightest to relieve Dazai’s weight, restricting its effectiveness, fruitlessly, to the gravity of the rope in itself.

He cursed under his breath, “Fuck, useless as I suspected. I guess I’m going to do this the old-fashioned way.”

Increasing his own gravity, he grounded himself deeply into the field, folded his left arm with a 90-degree angle and started wrapping the rope tightly around it, securing it between his palm and his elbow, while pulling strongly with his right hand. That was extremely laborious and he felt just sick thinking to the high security wall that was awaiting them immediately afterwards. Then, he felt even worse when he saw Dazai grasping the edge of the opening and lifting himself up, the exertion reopening his injuries and more of his blood spilling on the ground.

He growled a hoarse “Idiot…” while walking towards him. “You fine?”

Dazai straightened with a soft pained moan and replied in a strained voice, “I could never let my Chibi do all the rough work alone, could I?” Soon after he continued hurriedly, “They’ll be on us in less than two minutes. If we don’t managed to get over the security wall undetected, just tear it down with your ability and then run. There’s a sewer entrance fifty meter south the rear wall, we’ll escape through the underground sewerage network. They’ll have trouble in chasing after us down there.”

He just nodded in acknowledgment and leaded the way towards the rear wall. They hadn’t made more than few steps when an eerie laugh coming out from nothing froze them in their tracks.

“Buon Dio, cosa abbiamo qui? E bravo il mio Cesare, che come sempre aveva ragione… Sembra proprio che un altro moccioso si sia intrufolato qui per cercare di liberare il suo fastidioso compare! Che ci dovrei mai fare con questi due scugnizzi, secondo voi?”

[“Dear Lord, what do we have here? Atta boy, Cesare, you were right as always… Looks like another brat had sneaked inside trying to free his annoying comrade. What do you think I should ever do with these two raggamuffins?”]

Another chilling laughter cut through the otherwise immobile air of the night. They both turned around warily to search for the source of those noises. And their eyes were met by an utterly troublesome sight: Salvatore Mancuso in person was facing them, with a wide complacent grin
plastered on his greasy round face. On his right, there was a tall, slender man with medium-length dark hair, probably in his thirties, wearing a half mask covering his features one-sidedly. It was a red leather mask, shaped as the face of a hellish demon with a long pointed horn twisting up from his temple, which lent him an extremely unsettling appearance.

*He must be the one known as Dante... Just looking at him sends cold shivers down my spine... He sure is dangerous...*

On his right, stood a young guy of average height, with short and curly brown hair, pleasant but harsh features, hazel eyes piercing through them omnisciently.

*I guess... he’s the one the Mancuso’s Boss called “Cesare”... bothersome, to say the least... I couldn’t grasp their speech in full, but, in any case... it sounded like he’s the one who spotted us... Damn!*

Behind the trio, a whole squadron of about twenty men, each one armed with a *lupara*, was aiming straight at them, just waiting for orders to shot. They were trapped: the huge mansion loomed over their backs, a wall of gunfire stood in front of them, cutting off their sole escape route completely.

*Fuck, fuck, fuck! We’re fucked up!*

He half-turned slowly to stare at Dazai – who had locked his gaze, unmovable, on the scene unfolding in front of them – and breathed in shakily, “Have you predicted this much?”

The brunet shook his head faintly, “I haven’t.”

“What the fuck are we gonna do?”

Dazai tilted his head quietly towards him, his amber eyes drown deeply in darkness, his voice deadly soft while whispering, “Fight or die... I suppose.” There wasn’t the slightest hint of hesitation in his words.

He swallowed dryly and cursed once more “Fuck...” before straightening his back, taking on a fighting stance.

*If the bastard wanna fight, he’s gonna have his damn fight, bloody hell! Even if I wonder how the fuck he presumes to give battle in those poor conditions, furthermore unarmed!*

Salvatore Mancuso was still chuckling mischievously, clearly making fun of their struggle, “Ma guardali! Sti scugnizzi vogliono davvero combattere! La loro determinazione è quasi commovente...”

[“Well, look at them! These urchins really wanna fight! Their determination is almost moving...”]

Then, the Mancuso’s Boss patted smugly Cesare’s shoulder and demanded mockingly, “Dimmi picciotto: questi mocciosi... quale brillante piano stanno escogitando per batterci?”

[“Tell me, *picciotto*: these brats... what brilliant plan are they coming up with in order to defeat us?”]

Cesare stared intently at them for a brief moment, before responding firmly but quite frustrated, “Il rosso è pronto a combattere. Per ora, ha deciso che attaccherà prima i nostri compari armati di lupara per indebolire la nostra potenza di fuoco, partendo dagli uomini che si trovano sulla destra dello schieramento. Capo, penso che questo ragazzo abbia un *dono* e che la sua abilità in combattimento sia da non sottovalutare. Mentre l’altro... ancora una volta, non riesco a *vedere* nessuna delle sue
intenzioni, mi dispiace.”

[“The redhead is ready to fight. Right now, he has decided to attack our comrades armed with *lupara* shotguns first to weaken our firepower, starting from the men on the right-hand side of the deployment. *Capo*, I think that this guy has an *ability* and that his combat skills should not be underestimated. While the other one… once again, I don’t succeed in reading any of his purposes, I’m sorry.”]

_Crap, this is getting worse and worse! From what I could gather, that damn Cesare knows exactly what I’m gonna do! What the hell!_

“Dazai…”

“Mmmn…”

“If I have understood correctly… the man named Cesare is a fucking ability user.”

“I guess so. I think his ability has something to do with *mind-reading* or whatever.”

“But he can’t read through your mind.”

“Obviously, he can’t. We’re lucky, considering that I’m the one using a brain, here…”

_I hope that the bandaged bastard is observing and scheming fruitfully, otherwise… we’re utterly fucked up._

“Asshole… Do you need time to asses our situation?”

“I do.”

“Fine then. I’ll buy you some.”

Meanwhile, the greasy Mafioso was considering them thoroughly, probably in the light of what Cesare had stated before, “A questo punto, posso solo supporre che entrambe abbiano un *dono*… è quasi un peccato doverli ammazzare, sarei davvero curioso di scoprire cosa sono capaci di fare…”

[“At this point, I can just assume that they’re both ability users… it’s almost a pity that we have to kill them, I’d be rather curious to find out what they’re able to do …”]

The eerie noise of guns loading jolted him into action. He took a step forward and, staring at his enemy unyielding, he uttered, “Credimi. Per il tuo bene, è molto meglio che tu non lo sappia…”

[“Trust me. For you sake, it’s much better if you never know…”]

Salvatore Mancuso gaped for a brief moment, visibly stunned, but in a heartbeat, he regained his composure and an amused wide grin cut in half his round face when he exclaimed, “Oh cielo! Quindi il moccioso dai capelli rossi parla italiano?”

[“Oh my! So, the red-haired brat does speak Italian?”]

“Abbastanza bene da capire cosa avete detto fino ad ora.”

[“Well enough to understand what you said until now.”]

“Davvero interessante… Immagino quindi sia inutile continuare questa piccolo farsa, che ne dici?”
“Really interesting… Therefore, I suppose it’s pointless to continue with this little charade, isn’t it?”

He shrugged and replied indifferent, “Fa’ come vuoi, per me è lo stesso.”

“Do what you want, I don’t care.”

That remark made the Mancuso’s Boss burst out laughing, but the evil laughter died abruptly on his lips when he growled, shifting unconcernedly to Japanese, “So, I guess you’ve figured out what Cesare is able to do…”

He nodded slightly and replied, “Sort of… He’s undeniably an ability user.”

“Well, I’ll be magnanimous. I’ll explain that much, as you’re gonna die in any case… His ability’s name is Alea iacta est, which means “The die is cast”: it enables him to read through any of your resolve, in the exact moment you make your choice and the possibilities you were considering until a moment before pass the point of no return, becoming a “decision taken”. There’s no action you can undertake that he’s not able to fathom at once.”

“Ohhh… no action he can’t fathom… sure?”

“Damn cocky brat… you’re so confident just because Cesare didn’t succeed in reading the thoughts of your annoying comrade? Do you think this could really make a difference? Take a better look to your situation, right now. You’re surrounded, hopelessly.”

He snickered teasingly, “No, no… don’t bother. There’s no need to investigate my comrade’s mind, it’s just stuffed with useless bandages, nothing more!”

Fuck… if he can read my intentions, but not Dazai’s, this means that…

“Chuuya…” a gentle whisper coming just inches away from his back caught his full attention immediately, “…you see, I can’t share my plan with you. You’ve just to follow me, blindly.” He felt Dazai taking a deep intake before exhaling softly against the bare skin of his neck, humming quietly, “Do you trust me?”

Those words, breathed out so warmly, tickled his nape, eliciting an odd shiver that ran through his whole system, shaking him intensely. That question, demanding something he wasn’t sure he could or would ever give, sank deeply in his heart, unanswered. He just shook his head faintly and sighed, resigned, “Tsk… as if I have a choice…”

Even in a desperate situation like that, when both their lives were at a stake, Dazai’s mere words were able to cut through his soul like a hot knife through butter; but he had no time to brood about what was upsetting his insides, ’cause ever since then, the world outside started falling apart, too fast for him to comprehend.

…

Activating For the Tainted Sorrow, he stomped a feet heavily on the ground, opening deep cracks on the field in front of him. His enemies staggered, visibly shocked by the sudden turn of events. Dazai leapt forward, aiming for the nearest mafioso holding a lupara, his elbow darting swiftly to hit his opponent’s jaw, incapacitating him at once. The brunet picked up the shotgun and opened fire.

Nineteen lupare immediately started firing back.

Fuck…
He sprang forward and followed Dazai, who had spurted on his heels rushing towards the toolshed on his left. The brunet shot two men straightly in their foreheads, killing them on the spot, while dodging the hit of a third enemy aiming at his chest. He swiftly raised a leg glowing in red and kicked the man in the back, crushing him on the ground. Then he stopped, facing their opponents while Dazai was breaking down the door of the toolshed. Keeping his arms stretched in front of him to halt the hail of bullets shot at them, he hammered a foot massively on the ground, opening more broad fractures that shattered the ground beneath their enemies’ feet, making them loose balance and fell forward. He spun around and leapt through the open door of the toolshed slamming it behind him, for whatever it was worth, able to start breathing again once inside, even if for just a little while. Panting laboriously because of the heavy toll the exertion was requiring to his already battered body, Dazai expounded, “Just eighty meters more and we’ll reach the security wall…” He had just the time to nod before a hail of fire rained down on the shed, riddling roughly its thin walls and unhinging the door. Shielding the both of them from that massive attack, in a rush he reached for anything he could make levitate, relentlessly throwing sharp tools towards their attackers, before jumping through the rear window of their wrecked shelter, sprinting forward once again.

Dazai was bleeding copiously from both his old re-opened wounds and a couple of new ones, while he was feeling burning prickles biting his left shoulder and his lower back. Clenching his teeth, he unsheathed his dagger, slicing hastily the throat of one man after another, his eyes struggling to track the bastard’s movements trying hard to support and defend him the best he could. When he heard a troublesome noise coming from his back, he shouted, “Dazai, more foes are showing up!”

Fuck, fuck! Eight enemies down… how many more to go?

The brunet had dropped the empty shotgun he was holding to clench his fingers around the throat of the man in front of him, strangling him tightly. Soon after, he shoved a hand under his rival’s jacket, pulling out a grenade, before kicking away the lifeless body unconcernedly. Baring his teeth, he snarled ferociously, “Finally, here’s what I was looking for…”

Keeping the bomb firmly in his fist, Dazai turned around to stare at him, his eyes dark and icy, his voice uncompromising while declaring, “I’m gonna cut out our getaway through flash and blood.”

Enemies kept coming at them, bullets were fired relentlessly at them, but the bastard, never losing his nerve, pulled the pin out of the grenade, launching it in the direction of their pursuers. They didn’t wait for the explosion: without wasting a second more, they dashed towards the perimeter wall, running side by side. The bomb blew up with a deafening blast when they were no more than thirty meters away from their salvation. They almost made it…

With a loud thunder, a fire whip smashed the earth between the two of them, cracking open a horrid chasm regurgitating flames. The quake made them lose their balance and they both fell on the ground, separated by a wall of fire.

“What the hell…?”

Any sound had ceased abruptly, the only noises reverberating in his skull were those of flames crackling and his own heartbeats thundering in his chest. Ominously, a satanic speech broke the silence, freezing the blood running through his veins and stealing all the air from his lungs, leaving him petrified.

“Pitiful naïve brats… did you really believe we’d let you go like that?”
away the fog clouding his view and he was able to see: no more than ten meters opposite him, Dante was standing, completely still, his arms stretched out, an eerie portal arising from them.

*Heaven help us... that's another ability...*

An evil smirk was deforming frighteningly the masked man’s visible features, who resumed talking in a sinister roar, “As you can see, Cesare is not the sole ability user the Mancuso Cosca can wield. I’m Dante and my ability is *Inferno*: I can open the Hell’s gate and bend its eternal flames to my will. Can you face them?” He paused for a brief moment, glancing nastily towards them, his voice an ominous murmur when he casted his curse, “But don’t forget what it’s that they say about those who cross its threshold… “*Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch’entrate.***

[“Leave every hope, ye who enter.”]

*Shit... How can gravity manipulation stop the hellfire? What can For the Tainted sorrow do against the Hell itself?*

*Something*, buried in sheer darkness at the bottom of the innermost depths of his self, suddenly awakened, starting to howl menacingly and pacing impatient, like a feral beast trapped in a steel cage. For a brief moment, he sunk deep in the lulling chorus of a million voices, chanting endlessly an alluring soft, sad tune… He was abruptly jolted back into reality when a fire whip darted out from the Hell’s gate that laid open on Dante’s shoulders, abiding by a swift motion of just one of his fingers and hit Dazai’s chest in a flash.

*Dazai!*

That was in vain. The hellfire went extinct the exact moment it touched Dazai’s skin, scorching slightly his already wretched clothes, but leaving not even a scar on his body. Without losing his composure, Dante stated quietly, “I see… just as we thought, you’re an ability user as well. I guess… you can render useless any other ability, can you?”

The impact of the blow had been strong enough to knock Dazai down: he managed to straighten somehow, before responding flatly, “What if so?”

Dante sneered puckishly and spat, “Still answering to a question with another question, as you did during the interrogation? You’re incredibly stubborn, really. Fine by me, after all it doesn’t matter that much...” The sadistic grin that twisted Dante’s lips was forbidding. “It means that, if I can’t get rid of you using *Inferno*, I’ve just to ascertain if you’re bulletproof as well...”

Two guns fired almost simultaneously, both hitting flawlessly their target. Dazai flew a meter backwards, helplessly, smashing harshly into the ground: the bullets had pierced through his left leg and the right side of his chest, knocking him down once again, barely conscious. A worryingly large crimson puddle started pooling immediately underneath his wrecked body.

*Dazai...*

The scene unfolding in front of his eyes had left him paralyzed.

*Dazai...*

His whole body wasn’t responding to his command. His mind was screaming, begging him to move, but he couldn’t. It was as trying to run through thick mud trapping his legs.

*Dazai...*
He couldn’t reach him, he couldn’t think, he couldn’t even breath… he could do nothing, nothing at all. He was useless, worthless, hopeless… he was still a vulnerable tiny child waiting powerless for the next bastard coming to abuse him, someway.

*No! I’m not that child anymore! That pitiful child died long ago. I’m Nakahara Chuuya and I’m gonna complete my mission. No matter what.*

“Dazai!”

All the hair stuck in his lungs finally found its way out from his mouth and he shouted wildly, breaking the curse that was keeping him trapped. Jumping hastily over the flaming ditch separating the two of them, he knelt by Dazai’s side in a split second. When he got a closer look to that body laying deadly still in front of him, a vice grip clenched his heart, crushing it in sheer fear, despite his resolve to keep his cool.

*This is bad, really bad… Looks like the bullets haven’t struck any vital point, still… he’s bleeding once again so much… too much… He’s gonna bleeding to death…*

He stretched his hand to reach for Dazai’s wrist to check his pulse, but a hoarse yet unyielding “Don’t” stopped his fingers mid-air.

*He’s still conscious…*

Letting his arm drop limply by his side, he fixed his gaze on Dazai’s chest, which was barely raising. Each shallow intake of air was producing an ominous gurgling noise, which indicated undoubtedly that at least one of his lung was punctured and soaked with blood. He shifted his eyes to look at Dazai’s face, pale and contorted in pain, feeling the urge to establish at least eye-contact – the only contact they were allowed to have, right now – but the brunet’s eyelids remained firmly closed.

Dante’s wicked laughter resonate in the otherwise still air surrounding them, “So, you’re not bulletproof, after all! Cocky brat, finally you’ve got what you deserve…” Then, in a mocking tone, he continued, “Hey, redhead! I’ll be merciful and I’ll give you two minutes to mourn your fallen comrade. Albeit, if I were you, I wouldn’t be so sad: you two won’t be separated for long… You’re gonna reunite with him in Hell very soon!”

He wasn’t even paying attention to his enemies, he wasn’t concerned about them anymore. By that time, the feral best roaring enraged inside him had almost crushed the bars of its prison and it wouldn’t take long for it to break free completely. He had just to *let it go*…

All of his senses were focused on the agonizing body of his frie… of his partn… tsk, of the bastard laying defenceless in front of him. His voice faltered a bit when he spoke, “Dazai… how bad is it? Can you move?”

Dazai took a trembling shallow breath and replied in a strained whisper, “Chuuuya… there’s no need to worry about me. You can do nothing, you can’t even touch me, or else… your ability will be nullified and you won’t be able to escape anymore.”

“Bastard, that’s not what I asked. Answer my fucking questions.”

“So rude Chibi… and so silly. Your questions are pointless, I’m done for. As long as I would love to pass away hold tightly in your warm embrace, there’s no reason for you to die here. You can make it. Run Chuuya.”

“Tsk, asshole, you can’t die like this. No one but me can kill you.”
Dazai opened his eyes to look at him one last time, deep-brown clouded with pain met startling cobalt, almost fondly and a soft smile graced his lips genuinely for once, “What about a double suicide? I would love that even more, it would be so romantic… But I guess there’s no time for that, you have to go now. Run Chuuya.”

“Fuck no. Can you move, a little bit, at least?”

Dazai sighed deeply, his voice barely audible, his eyes closing once again, utterly exhausted, “Chibi, stop being so impossibly stubborn, I know that it’s hard to separate from me, ’cause I’m absolutely irresistible… but you’ve no time left. Run away Chuuya, please.”

“Irresistible my ass…”

“Chibi, go.”

“No. I won’t run. I’m not letting you die here, you’re coming back with me. All I need to know is if you can move. Can you?”

“Hmpf… you’re an obstinate hat-rack… I can. I don’t know exactly how long it is before I pass out, but I guess… fifteen minutes, maybe.”

“That will do. I don’t think I can last any longer, anyway…”

I won’t run. I’m strong enough. I just have to let it go… I have just to let it come to light…

He started rolling up his sleeves, quietly.

I need to bare my skin, in order to give him the possibility to reach for me…

“Chuuya, what are you doing?”

He peeled his gloves away, silently.

I need to give him the possibility to bring me back.

“Chuuya…?”

A warning cry broke the silence, abruptly. “Capo… scappate! Scappate tutti, ora!”

[“Capo… run! All of you, run away, now!”]

Cesare was shouting desperately, at the top of his lungs, while his comrades were staring at him utterly puzzled, not being able to understand in the least what was going to happen.

Ohhh right… he can see… he knows.

Dazai struggled to sit, a violent coughing fit shaking harshly his body because of the exertion, but when brown eyes searched for his blue ones, there wasn’t pain in them. His sufferance had been replaced with nothing but grave concern.

So he knows, as well.

“Chuuya, please, don’t…”

Smiling mildly, he cut him off, his voice soft and distant, already drown deeply in the unfathomable abyss of darkness thrown open inside him, “Osamu… I trust you.”
Then he stood, straight and unyielding, quietly taking few steps forward while his voice joined the chorus of millions chanting endlessly a soft, sad tune.

His tune.

And, for the first time in his life, he pronounced it, aloud.

“Oh, Grantors of dark disgrace,

Do not wake me again.”

In a heartbeat, darkness engulfed the Earth itself, spreading havoc along its path. The force able to bend everything to his will started tearing the world apart, overwhelming.

Chapter End Notes

The “right” translation for the Italian word “dono” is “gift”, while “ability” is translated with “abilità” or “capacità”. But, honestly, I think that the meaning of “ability”, in this case, is better expressed by the Italian word “dono”, so I’m using it instead.

Cesare is based on Gaius Julius Caesar and Alea iacta est is a Latin phrase attributed to him.

Dante is based on Dante Alighieri and Inferno it’s the first cantica of the Divine Comedy. The line “Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch’entrate.” [“Leave every hope, ye who enter.”] is still from Divine Comedy, Inferno, Canto III.
I’ve put my trust in you, pushed as far as I can go and for all this, there’s only one thing you should know.

Chapter Summary

I promise you.

Chapter Notes

The title of this chapter is from the song “In the End”, by Linkin Park.

Sorry for the late update, my life is quite a mess these days. I have too many things to do… and that’s why this chapter it’s almost not edited (sorry for any mistake)... but tomorrow I’m leaving again and I’ll be out for another week, I just want to post it before leaving.

The next update will be posted… as soon as possible, I promise!

Thank you very much for reading!

“Chuuya…”

The world around him was collapsing with breath-taking speed, devastated by a terrifying force that wasn’t under any control. A vortex of sheer power raged on everything standing in its path: abysmal crevices smashed the ground, running deep and fast through the soil which was cracking under the pressure of increasing gravity, plants were being uprooted from the field, rocks and debris were revolving vortically, crashing any obstacle they met alongside their orbit.

At the heart of that maelstrom of destruction, he was standing, ominous dark and purple tendrils crawling up his limbs, engulfing his whole body like a sinister cobweb, the blue of his eyes entirely swallowed up by a merciless oblivion, his pupils reduced to a pinprick of nothingness. He was the beating core of the Earth itself and gravity was revolving everything around him, with no escape.

For the second time since they met, he felt the undeniable sensation that the beginning and the end of everything were battling inexorably inside the innermost depths of that unyielding creature, wrecking him cruelly until he would have had no more strength left to put his pieces together one final time and thus nothing would have remained of him. The same savage force that was shattering the world outside, was relentlessly destroying his insides just as much.

Whether he wanted to admit it or not, that fierce creature had slowly become the beginning and the end of his life, rooting himself deeply into his own mind, his own heart, a creature who had entrusted his everything to him, calling forth his given name, whispering, without any hesitation, nothing more than mere words, which however had sunk into him, chaining him uncompromisingly.

“Osamu… I trust you”.

In front of that awesome sight, unbearable and conflicting emotions were tearing apart his conscience violently, making him tremble from the bottom of his soul. He was mesmerized, intoxicated,
helplessly drawn forward by the irresistible siren call of Chuuya’s unleashed power. He was racked by the crazy desire to let that terrifying force free to wreak havoc on their enemies until their total annihilation and the urge to reach for the redhead, to touch him and dispel the curse that was consuming him mercilessly. He was devoured by the unbearable need to bring him back and keep him safe in his arms.

*Chuuya is mine, to wield… Chuuya is mine, to save… Chuuya is mine, mine…*

As if he was trapped in a nightmare, he watched helplessly while Dante, shouting unintelligible words, shot a storming rain of fire whips at Chuuya, the devastating force of the impact shaking violently all their surroundings. But not even those eternal flames, born into the deepest abyss of the Hell itself, could do something to hinder the overwhelming power the redhead had unleashed. Even the hellfire shattered in vain against an insurmountable graviton field, fading away miserably.

Their enemies were screaming terrified, running wildly, hysterically, trying to escape somehow that mass destruction triggered upon them: countless bodies were already laying lifeless on the ground, hit without salvation by the lethal debris rotating furiously in the air, other foes had been swallowed up by the ground cracked open beneath them.

Nevertheless, all of that wasn’t still enough, that wasn’t the end of it. An eerie laughter, which didn’t resemble in the slightest to any sound a human being could ever emit, cut through the roar of that raging storm, freezing the blood running wildly in his veins.

*Chuuya… is this you? Or this isn’t you anymore?*

Thin pinpricks darker than an endless night started forming on the tips of Chuuya’s fingers, buzzing ominously while becoming bigger and bigger with each passing second and, finally, combining to create terrifying globes of compressed gravity.

*F-fuck… those are…*

The first black hole Chuuya shot crunched half of Dante’s body, his entrails pouring out in a repugnant heap on the ground, his Hell’s Gate dissolving into nothing, pathetically powerless. The followings made a carnage. Their enemies were dropping like flies while Chuuya was hovering above them, darting at lightning speed, firing at them his cataclysmic bombs of compressed gravity: there was no place to get out of that wrath, no escape from that overwhelming force, no God to pray to attain salvation. Even the mansion, heavily riddled, had started collapsing on itself and huge chunks of bricks and concrete were crushing onto the ground.

With each black hole forming on Chuuya’s fingertips, his limbs were relentlessly swallowed the more and more by a forbidding obscurity that crawled up his arms, spreading through his neck, marring his smooth pale skin, tainting his whole body, dooming him to a darkness where no light could ever dwell. Chuuya was sinking himself into an ocean of *damnatio* from which resurfacing was no more possible, he was condemning himself to a fate worse than death, he was letting that curse consuming him to the bone, until nothing would be left of him. Chuuya was undergoing all of that solely for him, to save his life.

*Fuck… fuck… How much time has passed since all of this started? How long can he endure like that before it’s too late to bring him back? I need to hurry… I need to…*

Suddenly, he spotted Salvatore Mancuso and Cesare running desperately towards a breach cut open in the rear wall, in a pitiful attempt to escape with their lives.

*Mmm… so they’ve survived… I guess that Cesare’s ability has been somehow effective to predict
Chuuya’s attacks even in this state, so they’ve made it alive until now… What a pity that you can’t read my mind in the slightest…

A feral grin cut open his lips, unforgiving. Crawling on the field, his nails digging deeply into the soil while he was painfully dragging forward his seriously injured body, he reached for a shotgun laying abandoned in the lifeless hand of one of the countless enemies fallen under the ruthless hits of Chuuya’s ability and picked it up. Aiming flawlessly at his enemies’ heads, he opened fire: two shots, two hits, without even flinching…

Now, none of their opponents was standing anymore, all of them had been defeated, destroyed, reduced to nothingness. Still, the redhead’s rampage hadn’t come to a halt: he was throwing random black holes almost everywhere, useless, senseless, laughing madly while his whole body had started to collapse definitively. Ominous streaks of blood were pouring from his ears, his mouth, his eyes, indicating unmistakably that Chuuya’s internal organs were crushing and melting under the unbearable pressure of his own ability. This wasn’t the first time he had seen something like that: back then, when Chuuya had been imprisoned in Port Mafia’s basement, he had already bled while trying to resort to his ability, still… this time was different… This time, darkness was inexorably taking over his body, not even the faintest ray of light was able to escape its massive crush anymore.

Chuuya, stop now, please… that’s enough, we won…

But the redhead couldn’t stop himself, he hadn’t any control on that gift, not in that form… he would have gone on like that until death.

This isn’t For the Tainted Sorrow anymore. This is something more terrifying, unforgiving… this is an endless decay, a rottenness that devours him from the inside, in exchange for an overwhelming but short-lived power… the true form of Chuuya’s ability is nothing less than Corruption itself…

The redhead’s black holes were becoming the more and more tenuous and unstable: Corruption was exhausting completely Chuuya’s vital force.

I have to reach for him, before he passes the point of no return, before it’s too late… ‘cause it’s not too late already, I’ll bring him back, I have to…

He straightened painfully and moved few tentative steps forward, faltering, stumbling: he himself was so close to pass out due to his severe blood losses that he hadn’t even enough strength left to call Chuuya’s attention. Still, he had to… he needed to… he had to close the distance between the two of them if he wanted to save Chuuya’s life… his life… their lives…

So, he took a deep intake and shouted at the top of his lungs: “Chuuuya!”

Unfortunately, that wasn’t enough: the redhead went on undisturbed with his trail of destruction without so much as turning his head, his eerie laughter rising above any other audible sound.

Damn… damn! No… That’s not how this end… I can’t lose him… He put his trust in me, he put his life in my hands, I’m not gonna betrayed him, I’m not gonna leaving him behind!

With the sheer force of desperation, he dragged his limbs forward further, any step provoking an excruciating pain transfixing his heavily injured body and cried out loud with everything he got left, “Chuuuyaaaaa!!!”

This time, the redhead stopped his rampage to pinpoint the source of that noise and, once spotted him, he landed few steps away from him, an ominous grin splitting his face in half, tears of blood streaking the darkened skin of his face, not even a glint of recognition sparkling in his eyes, which
were swallowed up entirely by utter oblivion.

A staggering step forward, “Chuuya…”

New pinpricks of compressed gravity were forming on Chuuya’s fingertips.

Fuck… can No Longer Human nullify even his black holes? Or I’m going to die engulfed by one of them? Fuck, who cares…

Another faltering step forward, right arm stretching desperately to reach, “Chuuya, please…”

Take my hand Chuuya… I’ll bring you back, I swear…

Ominous globes of absolute darkness were fusing together to create an ultimate black hole.

A last step, almost a leap and he zeroed the distance existing between the two of them, his heart delivered frantically on the tips of those fingers which were extended impossibly forward, begging to brush, just brush, an infinitesimal portion of the redhead’s bared skin to finally dispel that lethal gift.

Chuuya released his projectile. He dodged and stumbled, grabbing tightly Chuuya’s wrist with all he had. A telltale flash of azure light enveloped the two of them. He breathed deeply, he breathed as he had never breathed in his whole life before that moment and whispered, voice broken, “You can rest now, Chuuya…”

They both fell on the ground in a heap, completely worn out, half-dead, fatally injured, his right hand not releasing the vice grip clenching Chuuya’s wrist, his left hand moving frantically to stroke Chuuya’s cheeks, his jaw, his lips, to wipe out some of the gore staining his skin, brushing his red curls soaked with blood, praying, begging, screaming, “Chuuya please, open your eyes, please…”

I had never imagined it could be like this… I have never imagined your true ability could damage you so much, could drive you to the door’s death… I have never imagined it could be so dangerous, painful, alienating… I’m sorry Chuuya… please, forgive me… please, open your eyes…

His redhead was barely breathing, each intake of air gurgling in his ruined lungs, each exhalation provoking violent coughing fits shaking mercilessly his already wrecked body, his eyes closed shut, not a glimpse of ocean blue responding to his endless calls.

No, no… you’re not dying in my arms like this… I refuse.

Gathering a strength he didn’t even know he still possessed, he dragged the two of them as far as he could from the collapsing mansion, from the corpses of their enemies scattered all over that place, from the deep cracks cut open in the ground and rested his back against the trunk of a tree situated at the boundary of the Nature reserve, keeping the redhead tightly, desperately, in his arms, their chests impossibly close as to force Chuuya’s heart to beat in unison with his own.

I swear Chuuya… I swear… I’ll become flawless… I’ll predict everything… My plans will never fail… so you won’t have to resort to Corruption never again…

Searching frantically for something in Chuuya’s pocket, he finally pulled out a phone and murmured, “Hold on Chuuya, I’m gonna call for help.” A strangled sob broke his voice before he could bring himself to continue, whispering under his breath, “Don’t leave me Chuuya, please…”

* * *
It was at least four hours since Chuuya had undertaken his rescue mission and this prolonged silence didn’t look good. In the slightest. According to his plan, the redhead should have been done with the whole thing in no more than two hours…

*If everything had gone smooth, he should have reported back already, with Dazai safe and sound by his side… Maybe… I’ve overestimated his skills?*

He sighed heavily and squinted at his clock one more time, displeased: Port Mafia couldn’t afford to suffer another defeat, its dominion was already on the verge of collapsing and it would have been extremely troublesome to resurface from the bottom of the pit they were slowly sinking into. Still, when his phone buzzed, he reached out calmly to pick it up, first glancing at the incoming number.

*Oh, finally here you are.*

When he answered the call, his usually detached voice was almost jovial, “Chuuya-kun, I’m glad to…”

Something akin to a barely audible growl came from the other end of the phone, cutting him abruptly, “We need extraction.”

He blinked twice, slightly puzzled, “Dazai-kun?”

A harsh coughing fit, then just “Boss…”

For Dazai to be so bad off, their current condition had really to be alarming so he asked, quickly, “Are you both injured?”

“We are… Chuuya’s dying from internal bleeding, I’m… I’m… it doesn’t matter. Boss, we need extraction now.” Dazai’s voice was hoarse and broken.

Despite the undeniable urgency, he needed to have just one more piece of information to assess the situation properly and set in motion the appropriate countermeasures, so he questioned briskly, “The enemy?”

A dry reply, “Annihilated.”

To this statement, he couldn’t help but gape, dumbfounded, utter incredulity seeping into his otherwise expressionless voice for once, “What?”

Another raucous cough, followed by a faint whisper, “Burnt to ashes…” before the line went dead.

*How is this even possible? Do they have really defeated all by themselves a whole enemy organization which had more than fifty members fully armed and thoroughly trained, in less than one night? Well… I guess I’ll find it out once there, now I’ve just not to be late to give them support…*

He had no time to dwell on such issues: from what little he knew, the two guys’ lives were in real peril and he had to work fast to ensure their rescue. He stood briskly, resolved to take action of his own, when someone barged in hastily, almost unhinging the door. Coming to an abrupt halt, he looked carefully at the middle-aged man who had rushed into his room and now was bent over, panting harshly.

*For Hirotsu to act like this… What’s up now?*
Keeping his tone even, he demanded, “Hirotsu, something’s off?”

The white-haired man took a deep intake to catch his breath and replied, hurriedly, “Mori-san, I’m sorry for my inappropriate behaviour, but we’ve just intercepted a police transmission requesting immediate intervention of the Special Assault Team to deal with a major incident…”

He nodded and prompted the man to continue with his report quickly, “Please, proceed.”

“The Special Ability Department seems to be involved as well…”

Mmnn… this may be bad, really… but still, we’re in a hurry right now…

“Hirotsu, do you mind to continue you report while we go to get a car? Dazai-kun has just called requesting for extraction, ‘cause he and Chuuya-kun are severely injured and…”

Hirotsu turned pale, his voice faltering slightly while stating, “So they’re still alive…”, then, raising his gaze to stare at him, the man added, “Indeed, the major incident concerns the Mancuso’s mansion… It seems that the whole place had been completely destroyed by a terrifying force that’s still to be identified… No one survived…”

They shared a brief look and jolted into action, “So we need to rush.”

... When they got there, the whole area was packed with police and Special Forces, two helicopters were flying over the wrecked ruins of what, once, was a luxurious mansion, now razed to the ground. The air was permeated with a sickening and persisting smell of blood mixed with the thick dust raising from the debris scattered all over the place. The field itself was deeply smashed, cut open brutally by a force similar to a ten-point earthquake.

What the hell..? Could this be…?

Tracking the GPS signal from Chuuya’s phone, they managed to reach the guys unnoticed, making use of a side street that was scarcely more than a trail through the Nature reserve. It was almost a miracle that the boys had succeeded in distancing themselves so much from the scene of the massacre in those poor conditions… they were both unconscious, barely alive.

Dazai was resting with his back laying against the wide trunk of an oak, his clothes were ripped and torn, injuries were scattered all over his body. At a first glance, the worst seemed to be a nasty gash on his temple and the holes in the right part of his upper chest and in his left legs, evidences that he had been shot. The redhead he was keeping tightly in his arms was still bleeding faintly from his ears, his mouth, his eyes.

Internal bleeding… and they both have already lost so much blood… we haven’t so much time left…

They picked up the boys carefully and laid them on the back seat of the car. Before heading towards the medical facility run by doctors affiliated with the Mafia, where he had two operating rooms already prepared to treat the guys, he shot a final glance to the ruins that remained of Mancuso’s clan and shivered a little, both in satisfaction and slight concern.

If this is the doing of Chuuya’s ability, no one will be able to stop Yokohama Port Mafia anymore.

Nevertheless, an afterthought sneaked into his mind slyly, almost a foreboding…

No one but Dazai Osamu himself…
To find out what had happened exactly during that mission he had to wait for the two guys to regain consciousness, but he was sure that both Dazai and Chuuya would make it.

Indeed, his wait was more than pleasing. Even if, luckily, the investigations conducted by law enforcement weren’t able to identify any culprit nor to find out decisive evidences about that ruthless and overwhelming massacre – maybe even thanks to just some little manipulations… – a rumour started spreading instantly throughout Yokohama underworld. A rumour that resulted in countless rival organizations – the same ones that, until 24 hours before, were fighting harshly to contend for Port Mafia’s dominion over the criminal world – knocking meekly at his door, asking, almost begging, to affiliate, to collaborate, pledging their allegiance to Yokohama Port Mafia from that moment, on.

The time to strike fear into the hearts of his enemies and his allies as well had come back, in full force. And the tale whispered by everybody’s lips with utter awe and fear was about a new duo, whose strength was almost impossible to withstand. A duo that could wipe out an entire enemy organization in less than one night, mercilessly. A *partnership* born into the darkness, which was the criminal underworld’s worst enemy. They called them “Double Black”, and, exactly how he had predicted four years ago, they became the most fearsome and powerful duo the Port Mafia had ever seen in its history, the embodiment of Port Mafia’s dominion over Yokohama underworld.

A wide grin cut his face in half: finally, his plan had paid off and now he had just to keep the guys under his strict control, using them for the benefit of the whole Mafia and strengthening its power. He already knew well what his next move should have been: he had not even to wonder anymore who might ever be a suitable *partner* for the little redhead… Fate – maybe with just a little help… - had already decided for them all.

* * *

He woke up in a hospital bed. His body was aching almost everywhere, new bandages were wrapped around his chest, his legs, his head; his mind was numbed by sedatives, he didn’t know how long he had lain there unconscious or how exactly he got out of that *Inferno* alive… still… his very first thought the moment he opened his eyes was *Chuuya*…

*Where is he? Is he safe?*

He *needed* to know that *now*, or else he would have gone mad. He straightened the best he could, his left leg giving in under the weight of his own body immediately, his skin stretching and struggling against the stitches underneath his bandages.

*Fuck…*

He reached for a crutch placed next to his bed and limped out of his room without further ado. His head was spinning furiously and a stiff pain was transfixing his body with each staggering step, still…

*Chuuya…*

In the middle of a hospital corridor, a nurse tried to stop him and bring him back, but the stare he shot at her was so cold that the poor woman shivered with utter fear and led him to Chuuya’s room.
instead, as soon as requested to.

When he entered, Chuuya was lying dead still on a bed, his arms and his chest hooked up to too many machines monitoring his health status. The room was completely silent, except for the dull buzz and the intermittent beep of the medical electrical equipment. A young woman was sit on a chair next to Chuuya’s bed, her pretty violet eyes black ringed for lack of sleep, her soft fingertips trailing gently through red curls. When she heard the click of the door closing behind him, she turned her head to look at him, her features crumpled with deep concern and murmured, “Dazai-kun, you… you should be resting…”

He shook his head faintly and replied just, “I’m fine” even if the obvious teetering in his steps while he approached the bed to sit on the chair opposite to Kouyou was telling a completely different story.

Once he was seated, he stared intently at Chuuya’s beautiful face, taking in the ghost pallor of his skin, the sporadic tense of his delicate features, the utter exhaustion and the harsh pain written on any line of his lithe body. He sighed, deeply and stretched a hand to grab softly Chuuya’s wrist, his thumb brushing sweetly that tender flesh, drawing circles over his pulse beating faintly, muttering under his breath, “If only I’d gotten you earlier… If only I had known before how devastating your true ability is…”

Kouyou was looking at him silently, maybe a little confused by his uncharacteristic behavior – or maybe not – just waiting for him to phrase the questions he needed to be answered. So, he gathered his resolve and brought himself to ask, “How is he doing?”

The woman took a shaking intake and whispered, “He has undergone a serious surgical procedure, which has lasted for twelve hours… The operation has been successful and he’s stable now, still…” Kouyou paused for a brief moment to steady her breath before continuing, “… still he’s been lying unconscious since then… It’s 48 hours now… The doctors said they have no idea when he’ll wake up…”

To those words, he felt sheer terror sank into his guts, shaking his insides violently. He couldn’t… he just couldn’t bring himself to think that he would have never seen those astounding blue eyes opening once again. He wouldn’t have bickered with him anymore. He wouldn’t have heard his voice calling his given name, he wouldn’t have kept him in his arms… nevermore.

He didn’t let any of those feelings surface on his features nor he let them affect his voice: he was Port Mafia’s Demon Prodigy, he couldn’t afford it. He just shook his head and stated, quietly, “Chuuya’s strong. He’ll make it.”

A soft smile curled up Kouyou’s lips while she replied confidently, “You’re right. Chuuya will never give up.” Then, lowering her gaze to glance at Chuuya’s sleeping face one more, she added, “We’ve just to wait.”

…

In the three days following, he never left Chuuya’s side. All Kouyou’s suggestions to get some proper rest instead of laying perched up uncomfortably on the chair next to the redhead’s hospital bed were to no avail. He spent his time keeping vigil on Chuuya’s vulnerable body, his eyes checking any minute the faint raising of his chest, any shallow breath a proof that he was still alive. He started studying restlessly any book concerning tactic and strategy he was able to get his hands on, with a determination he had never had in his whole life before then. He had a specific purpose in mind now and he had absolutely no intention to fail: any of his future action plan would have been so flawless, so unerring, that Chuuya would no longer have needed to unleash Corruption to get out of tough situation.
Unluckily, things never turn out the way you plan. Especially if you’re up against the almighty Boss of Yokohama Port Mafia.

At the end of his third day stand watching the redhead’s bedside, finally the doctors said that Chuuya’s conditions were getting decisively better and likely, he would have reawakened soon. To that news, his heart screamed with joy and he let out a deep sigh of relief… Still… it was too soon, he was too naive… Even though expected, his Boss’ summon sank deep into his guts, an ominous foreboding shaking his insides harshly…

He knocked on that door reluctantly.

“Finally, Dazai-kun! I’m so glad to see you on your feet! How are you?”

His Boss’ voice sounded relaxed, satisfied, even too much… “I’m fine Boss.”

“Oh, I’m happy to hear that!” than, gesturing to the chair in front of his desk, Mori added, “Please, take a seat, we have so much to discuss…”

He didn’t like in the slightest the sharp glint that crossed Mori’s eyes for nothing more than a split second, still he could do nothing but comply. “If it’s for the report about my latest mission, I…”

His mentor cut him abruptly, grinning mischievously, “Oh my, Dazai-kun, I appreciate your efficiency, still there’s no need to rush…” his grin widened impossibly, splitting his face in half while he continued, “… or are you such in a hurry to go back to Chuuya’s bedside? From what I heard from the doctors, he’s going to regain consciousness very soon, but there’s no need for you to be there when this happen, considering that, from now on, you’ll have plenty of time to be at his side…”

He swallowed, dryly, the ominous foreboding grating worryingly against any of his synapses, “What do you mean?”

Damn… what he’s up to?

Another chilling smirk preceded a small dismissing wave of his hands, “Well, well… first things first. Why did you decided to get yourself caught?”

Collecting his thoughts that were still wandering a little bit too randomly across his mind – too many things had happened that night and he hadn’t yet succeeded in sorting them out properly, however he absolutely needed to focus or else Mori would have had his way with him – he started his report, quietly. “When I got there, I found out that gathering information from the outside was impossible: their communication system was completely isolated, I wasn’t able to intercept even a single transmission. So, I decided to break into the system from the inside…”

Mori nodded and muttered, “I see… did you managed to find out something interesting then?”

“When they captured me, they brought me, recklessly, into their boss’ office to question me. I managed to plant a bug there and luckily, they didn’t find out the receiver hidden into my clock. As I predicted, I was able to eavesdrop their communications from the inside.”

“Mmmmm… well done. Even if the Mancuso’s Cosca is no longer a problem, I guess you succeeded in identifying other groups affiliated with them, which might be…”
“I did. They were conducting negotiations and businesses with major groups based in Russia and China in order to strengthen their power over Yokohama underworld and…”

His Boss cut him off abruptly, “Well, well… I’ll expect a detailed report concerning those groups, so we’ll set in motion the appropriate countermeasures to prevent any possible threat coming from them. And now…” Mori raised his gaze, his red eyes burning more than caustic embers were piercing through his skull mercilessly, “… what exactly had happened when Chuuya came to rescue you?”

Now, here’s where things get complicated… I have to play my cards very carefully…

He gulped down a tight knot clenching his throat and opened his mouth to report the facts, most of the facts, the truth, more or less… he was planning to skip just some, well, unnecessary details about Chuuya’s ability, still…

Mori shot him a death stare, unyielding, demanding, all-knowing, his tone chilling and lethal when he spoke in a whisper, “Dazai-kun… I saw with my own eyes the results of Chuuya’s doing… so, before you start speaking, even if I have no doubt that this goes without saying, I strongly advise you… Don’t attempt to utter a single lie, a mere half-truth… I’ll find them out, in a way or another, sooner or later… you know this much… and someone will pay then, harshly, painfully… That someone won’t be necessarily you… Understood?”

Damn cunning bastard… you let me no choice right now… but if you think I’ll let you play with Chuuya’s life for as long as you want, this means you’re underestimating me… and this is a fatal error.

He narrowed his eyes, threateningly, unforgiving and stated, coldly, “You saw this coming from the beginning, did you?”

Mori smirked smugly, unimpressed, “I did. I’ve been pulling the strings since the first very moment Chuuya-kun entered your life, without you even noticing. And right now you’re so tangled up that it’s too late for the both of you to take as much as a tiny step back. So tell me, Dazai-kun… what happened exactly that night?”

You won this round… I admit defeat for now… Still… be well aware that a time will come when you won’t be able to state a claim on our lives anymore…

Right there, right then, he could do nothing but report painstakingly any single event that occurred that night. So, biting back harshly any retort, he started his recount, voice even, eyes unreadable, any line of his body relaxed and still… his ominous promise of an unavoidable redemption lingering between the two of them unmistakably and stated, “Corruption destroyed the Hell itself.”

“What’s Corruption?”

“The true form of Chuuya’s ability.”

“He has no control over it, has he?”

“He hasn’t.”

“I see…”

When he finished his report – accurate, impartial, detached – Mori smiled broadly, utterly satisfied, and commanded, intransigent, “Well then… starting from today, you and Chuuya-kun are partners.”

He lowered his eyelids and hummed, softly, “That’s so?”
His mentor laughed amused and teased, “Yes. It’s an order. I see no other option than to put to good use the overwhelming, extremely convenient, yet, sadly, otherwise unrestrained force that Chuuya’s ability can unleash…”

His eyes darkened abruptly, indefinitely, while the words that left his mouth were coming from a bottomless abyss. “And you really think that I’ll let Chuuya resort to Corruption to fulfil Port Mafia’s requirements, considering the devastating toll it has on his body?”

Mori shrugged unconcerned, “What do you want me to say? Try your best not to… I can’t wait to see what you’re going to do…” then, staring at him playfully, he mocked, once again, “You see… it’s not your call. It’s not even mine… Fate has already decided for all of us. The whole Yokohama underworld has already named you “Double Black”… You’re not going to disappoint it, are you?”

“I won’t let you play with his life.”

His mentor shook his head sarcastically but stated in a deadly serious tone, “I’m not playing with your lives, you’re a fool if you think so. But you have never to forget something: you’re both Port Mafia, it was your own decision to be so. Thus, you have to do what’s best for the sake of Port Mafia. You do really think that Chuuya-kun would refuse to comply with an order just because his life is at stake?”

No, he won’t. He’s just too loyal… and even if he would have any hesitation, you’ll find a way to force him to obey, I’m more than sure about this…”

“I take it from your silence that you understand perfectly. However, let me just add… You have a choice, you can refuse to become his partner, I’m not so unreasonable…” Mori tilted his head, his eyes gleaming with sheer malice when he murmured, “… in this case, you’ve just to sit back and watch while his ability consumes him to his very bones and destroys his body… Sure, that would be an inconvenience for me, ‘cause I’ll get to use Corruption just one more time… this means that I’ll have to choose the timing very carefully…”

Mori sighed heavily, feigning concern, before concluding, “Or else, you could become his partner, so you’ll be at his side to nullify his ability and keep him alive every time it’s needed… You see, Dazai-kun… this is entirely your choice… what are you going to do?”

Damn bastard… I’ve got it… I’ve grown sick of this pointless game…

Standing up a little more abruptly than intended, he growled a hoarse, “I guess there’s no need for me to answer…” before taking his leave without waiting for his Boss to dismiss him.

He already had a hand on the doorknob when his mentor’s gaze pierced through his nape and his voice cast on him his last curse in a sickeningly sweet tone, “My precious pupil, I want you to remember this very well: Chuuya-kun is not yours… He is Port Mafia’s… and I am Port Mafia…”

Without acknowledging this latest statement with so much as a flinch, he headed out the door and shut it behind him.

So… is this your challenge? You really think I’ll fall for it? By now, you should know better than forcing me to play it your way… I’ll find my way to keep him safe…

The very day that marked the beginning of their partnership, he took his decision.
He blinked twice, thrice, gasping slightly, trying to force the air to enter his lungs and enable him to take a deep intake, maybe oxygen will be able to clear his mind a little… He felt dizzy, confused, his body was aching harshly all over, he had no idea where he was, how long he’d been wherever he was, what the fuck was going on… All that he was aware of right then was the gentle touch of a hand brushing through his hair softly, reassuringly. Any effort he made to move, to speak, to focus, was still too much for his exhausted body and the strain made him shiver violently, his vision blurred even more, his voice tangled up in his throat helplessly before he managed to stutter a single word, “D-Dazai…”

The hand came to a halt, lingering warmly on his right cheek while a soft voice replied, sweetly and slightly amused, “Ohh, so Dazai’s your first concern… Really, you don’t have to worry about him, he’s fine.”

Recognizing the voice, he turned his head to stare in tender violet eyes, still confused and maybe blushing faintly before stumbling, weakly, “A-ane-san… I… I’m just… I’m n-not… it’s t-that… h-he was…”

Damn, I don’t even succeed in phrasing a fucking sentence! Shit, shit, I’m not concerned about him, I don’t even know why the fuck I’ve stuttered his stupid name! I don’t give a shit about that bastard… I… He… He’s alive…

Smothering a deep sigh of relief, he snorted annoyed indeed, still trying to give a voice to his complaints, but Kouyou’s melodious chuckle cut him off teasingly, “Lad, you don’t have to explain anything to me, it’s none of my business. You’ll sort it out with Dazai-kun later, I guess…”

Catching his breath, he finally managed to pronounce some coherent words, his voice still broken and hoarse because of the prolonged lack of use, “I… I’ve nothing to discuss w-with the shitty bastard… I… He… He’s alive…

Kouyou fluffed up a little his cushions, helped him to straighten and sit up with his back resting comfortably on them and then handed him a glass of water, her delicate fingers brushing gently his hand while murmuring affectionately, “You have… sure you have. I’m proud of you. Even if this costed you this much, too much…”

Her words, her fondness, were so heart-warming that he treasured all of them deep inside him and smiled sincerely while replying, “Thank you, Ane-san. You make my day. Everyday.” Then, looking at her pretty face marked by tiredness, he lowered his head, apologetic and expressed his regret meekly, “I’m sorry to have worried you so much… and for all the trouble I’ve caused…”

She let out a soft huff and responded, “You have nothing to apologize for. Sure, it has been long waiting for you to wake up for five days, still…”

Slightly taken aback by her latest words, he barged in maybe a little too briskly and demanded, “I’ve been unconscious for five days?”

She nodded faintly and confirmed, a feeble note of concern still seeping into her voice, “That’s so. Your surgery was anything but a joke… but this doesn’t matter now. We’ll discuss everything with the doctors once you’ve recovered properly.”

“Umph… The aftermath has never been so harsh, but I’ll be back on my feet in no time, I swear…”
Kouyou smiled warmly and replied, “We were sure that that wouldn’t have been enough to knock you out!”

He looked at her, slightly puzzled and asked, “We…?”

“Yes… both me and Dazai-kun.”

This time, when he heard his name, something akin to a foreign feeling of uneasiness crossed his mind for a split second, clenching his heart painfully yet too fleeting for him to grasp it clearly. Nevertheless, Kouyou didn’t miss that emotion that darkened his eyes even if just for a brief moment… and maybe she knew, even all too well, what it might be, because she chuckled again, softly, and murmured, “He has never left your bedside since the day he woke up, not even to eat or to sleep properly.” Then, laughing amused, she added, “Indeed, I have never managed to get rid of him in the last three days, no matter how hard I tried! If he’s not here right now, it’s just because the Boss summoned him and he couldn’t help but comply, unwillingly. He’ll be back very soon, you’ll see.”

That assertion left him utterly staggered: for Dazai to behave like that… it was so uncharacteristic… Without even realizing it, he gaped speechless, his mouth opening and closing wordlessly a couple of time before he persuaded some sort of sound to get out of it, “W-What? The b-bastard did what? N-no, no, forget it… I don’t care, really… it’s not that, I…”

Fuck, fuck, stuttering again like a damn snotty kid! What the fuck is going on? What the fuck is Ane-san talking about? The bastard never leaving my bedside, tsk… sure it’s because he’s up to something… probably, some sort of shitty prank to harass me…

Well, maybe, if he was being honest, he could admit that the awkward grip clenching his heart painfully until a second before had faded away suddenly, replaced by a pleasant warm that was spreading throughout his whole body, still… he was planning to admit nothing, even to himself.

Kouyou mused, quietly, “Lad, that’s not surprising. After what you’ve been through together, it only makes sense that now you’re searching for each other.”

He grumbled, annoyed, and retorted, “Whatever… definitely, the social misfit was there just to pester me since the moment I’d open my eyes once again…”

Dropping the argument, Kouyou simply answered, “If you say so…” before adding, quietly, “Now, you need to rest a little bit more.”

Yawning loudly, he agreed, “Right…” and then, brushing her hand gently, he continued, “Thank you, Ane-san…”

With a soft smile curling her lips up, she leaned forward to press a gentle kiss on his forehead and whispered, “You don’t have to thank me. You’re my precious pupil.”

He replied with a sweet smile and closed his eyes, falling asleep almost immediately.

When he reawakened, some hours later, the room was silent and in near total darkness: probably, it was the middle of the night. He could just see a soft light coming from his back, so he stretched his sore limbs and half-turned to pinpoint the source of that brightness. A quiet voice halted him on the spot, chilling his blood, making his heart miss a beat.

“If it’s bothering you, I’ll switch it off.”
He breathed deeply, shutting his eyes once again, in an effort to focus, just focus…

“No… no. It doesn’t matter.”

“How are you?”

Dazai’s voice sneaked under his skin, crawled up his nerves, spread through his whole body, making him shudder slightly.

He sighed, deeply and murmured, “I feel like shit.”

“You look like shit.”

“Ohhh, why, thank you.” He opened his eyes, ocean blue searching for amber brown in the dim light of the bedside lamp. When he locked his gaze into Dazai’s, a jolt of electricity run through his system, shaking him, biting him, warming him, tearing him apart and putting him together anew in the flash of a moment: a sensation he couldn’t place. All at once, as soon as he made eye contact, for a fleeting moment he grasped a glint shining brightly in those amber eyes, the spark of conflicting emotions fighting harshly inside that sharp mind, mirroring the struggle that was storming inside a soul too twisted and inscrutable for him to comprehend it somehow. However, no matter what… he tried to look into it… there was… relief? guilt? concern? regret? resolution? longing…?

No, wait, wait no… that’s way too dangerous… I’m not sure I can face that right now, whatever it is…

Snorting annoyed, he bit back, “Tsk, asshole… do you think you look much better than me with all those new bandages wrapped around your stupid body?”

“Chuuya…”

The way his name left Dazai’s lips was too intense, too intimate, too close… To make matters worse, the brunet stretched a hand, reaching for him, his deft fingers playing softly with his red curls. A tight knot clenched his throat, preventing any breath of air from exiting his lungs. He couldn’t help but stutter, faintly, “D-Dazai?”

“Mnnn… Sure, I look even more handsome…”

He scoffed, strained, “Dumbass…”

Dazai’s fingertips trailed along his temple, his cheek, lingered some moments on his lips, brushing them softly, before continuing their paths alongside his jaw, his neck. He was speechless, petrified, mesmerized. His mind had gone blank once again, helplessly.

Dazai, what…? What’s this?

He needed, he absolutely needed, to break that spell…

He needed to…

Moving slowly, as if in a dream, he stretched his right arm, his hand reaching for Dazai’s one, intertwining their fingers to halt their motion and just whispered his name, again, “Dazai?”

Not freeing his hand from that hold, the brunet looked at him, his amber-brown eyes piercing through his skull, his soul, his heart with an overwhelming and unsettling force.

Wordlessly, he just waited, his heart beating maybe a little too fast.
After what seemed like an eternity, Dazai finally asked, voice even, “What do you remember of that night, after you activated Corruption?”

He sighed, heavily, released Dazai’s hand and shift to straighten a little, sitting up with his back laying against the cushion.

“Well… I can’t say I remember… Wait: what’s Corruption?”

Dazai replied unconcerned, “But it’s the name of the true form of your ability, obviously!” and then, with his all-too-familiar shit-eating grin, he added, “I guess that’s too much for your tiny brain to figure it out all by itself…”

Safe ground.

He rolled his eyes, annoyed and grumbled, “Bastard… So you get to choose the name of my ability once again?”

“Sure, I did.”

He snorted, defeated, “Yeah, yeah, okay… why not?” and then continued, “Whatever… It’s appropriate, I guess…”

“Of course it is. It’s something rooted much more deeply inside you… something more devastating and degenerating than For the Tainted Sorrow…”

“Umpf, I know. I may not remember anything of that night… I may not have any control over it… still… I’ve been feeling it clearly inside me, shifting, roaring, clenching, infecting, claiming… since the day I was born.”

Dazai moved to sit on the edge of the bed right beside him and locking their gazes, he started speaking again, quietly, unhurriedly, “I supposed so… Then, I think it’s just fair to tell you what happened exactly… what Corruption can do… and what it does to you.”

He smiled sadly and replied, “I think I have already some sort of idea about it, but still… yes, please, tell me.”

…

When Dazai finished his account, he felt a little dizzy, confused, but not surprised. Sure, one thing was imagining it… entirely different was to listen to the reality of the situation described by someone else’s lips. Still…

Still… I knew it. That’s what I am. I know what I am…

Gathering his scattered thoughts, he steadied his uneven breath and asked, “What’s now?”

Dazai stared at him wordlessly for a whole minute, before answering, with an awkward sorrowful note in his tone, “Now, we’re partner.”

Looking at the brunet slightly puzzled, he questioned, “What do you mean?”

“The Boss decided that, from now on, we’re working as partner.”

He chuckled, unamused, “Fuck… what a shitty luck… Now I’m feeling even worse than before…”

Dazai retort lacked any real bite, “Yeah… that makes me sick as much…”
Then, dropping any act, he asked again, his voice quiet, almost resigned, “So… the Boss wants me to use Corruption again, I suppose…”

The brunet just nodded, “That’s so.”

“And you’re there to stop the rampage, considering that I have absolutely no control over Corruption. So… I need you… I need No Longer Human to disable me…”

Another nod, another dry reply, “Correct.”

“Right… right then… I’m a weapon after all…” he lowered his head, staring at his own hands which were laying abandoned in his laps and smirked, wryly, “… an extremely powerful weapon, to be honest, even if a little hard to manage, maybe… umph… I guess that Port Mafia can do nothing but make use of me, in any case…”

“Chuuuya…”

Dazai reached out, his slender fingers grabbed his chin gently but firmly and coaxed it to raise once again to make eye contact. His eyes were bright and deep, his voice was low and serious when he spoke, “Chuuuya… I’m going to make you a promise. But you have to promise me something too.”

A deep intake preceded his brisk reply, “Do I have a choice?”

“Yes, you have. You’ll always have.”

He studied thoroughly Dazai’s gaze searching for a deceit and, finding none, he nodded, accordingly. Therefore, Dazai’s fingers shifted backward to take hold of his nape, entangled in soft red curls and dragged his head forward to bump their forehead lightly one against the other.

“I vow that… when we’re old enough… I’ll ask you to marry me. And you’ve to promise me to say ‘yes’…”

Straining against Dazai’s hold without freeing himself, he barked, angrily, “W-What the fuck are you saying? Fucking idiot! I don’t know what the fuck I was expecting from a fucking bastard like you! Fuck!”

The brunet chuckled impishly and mocked, “Chibi, if you’re so eager to fuck me, we do not necessarily to wait to be married, you know this…”

“And if you wanna die so bad, you don’t have necessarily to provoke me this much, all you have to do it’s just ask!”

“Oh, fine then, I’ll ask… Chibi, do you wanna fuck me?”

Writhing against Dazai’s grip again – the bastard taking advantage from his fleeting moment of weakness, since he hadn’t recovered yet – he scowled enraged, “Damn! You’re just a shitty pervert, you…” but he halted abruptly when the brunet dragged him forward further, their mouths an inch apart, now.

“Chuuuya…”

This time, Dazai breathed his name directly against his lips, the hot puff of air tingling his skin teasingly. He froze. Too close... Any playful tone erased from his voice as if it had never existed, when he spoke again his words were nothing more than a murmur… still their solemnity was unmistakable, “Chuuuya… I promise I’ll do everything in my power to defeat our enemies without
you having to activate \textit{Corruption}. But if this is not enough, if you have to resort to it, then… I’ll do everything in my power to nullify it within the shortest time possible, so your body won’t be damaged this much anymore, so you won’t have to suffer this much anymore.” He took a trembling intake before proceeding, “Promise me… promise me that you’ll never activate \textit{Corruption} if I’m not there to stop you… to bring you back…”

The intimate touch of those words made him shiver, shaking his depth relentlessly, they reached for his core and vowed their defiance straight to \textit{Corruption}, which was laying unsettled inside him writhing helplessly, a mere witness of the revelation of a bond stronger than gravity itself.

He closed his eyes, focusing on what he was feeling deep inside him, still not acknowledging it fully, still uncertain if he had to listen to his heart or not, and whispered, hesitantly, “Dazai, I can’t… if I’m ordered to, I…”

“Chuuya, promise me.” Unfaltering.

“Dazai, I’m Port Mafia, I…”

“Chuuya, promise me, please.” Sweet, still… unyielding.

“Osamu…”

“Promise me, \textit{partner}.” Irrefutable.

“Well… I promise you, \textit{partner}.” Unbreakable.

* * *

That night, laying on the bed beside his \textit{partner}, keeping him close in a warm embrace, the redhead’s chest raising and lowering quietly, his heart beating steadily, his beautiful face blissfully asleep, alive… so alive… he made another silent vow.

\textit{Chuuya… one day, everyone will be able to see who you really are… that you’re worth much more than your mere ability… that you’re irreplaceable… that Port Mafia can’t do without you, independently from Corruption… That day, no one will be able to force you to activate Corruption anymore if it means you’re dead, because they can’t afford to lose you. And that day, finally, I’ll do the only thing I can really do to keep you safe… even if this means… even if this means not being at your side anymore. Without me, you won’t unleash Corruption ever again. You promised me. Without me, you won’t be doomed to resort to that curse that consumes you to the very bone ever again. I’m not letting Corruption have you. I’ll let no one and nothing have you. Because you’re mine… Even if I have to give up on you, you’ll always be mine. And I swear to keep you safe, no matter what…}
Too young, too proud, too foolish. (Tomorrow could be too late)

Chapter Summary

When you have to deal with Dazai Osamu, the best you can do is try to survive… And, sure as shit, I'll survive… no matter what…

Chapter Notes

The title of this chapter is from the song “Tomorrow” by The Cranberries.
This chapter is a mess… ‘cause things are going down, slowly but relentlessly… To put it bluntly, it’s an emotional disaster.
First part is narrative pov, second part is Dazai’s pov, and third part is Chuuya’s pov.
Sorry for any mistake and thank you very much for reading!

Two years went by since the day they became partners, since the day when everything had changed.

They were still young, too young to deal with a life made of blood, gore, violence and nothing more, but they were doing it, all too well… They were barely sixteen now and yet they were rightfully the most fearsome duo the whole Yokohama underworld had ever seen.

Nakahara Chuuya had become the strongest martial artist in the Port Mafia: his fighting skills were unrivalled, whether he used For the Tainted Sorrow or not. His opponents didn’t stand a chance against him in hand to hand combat and not even an armed conflict did improve their chances to defeat him in the slightest. Whilst he was still hot-headed and short-tempered, when it came to give battle he was awfully cool and focused: a perfect killing machine, relentless, unwavering, devastating. Chuuya’s mastering of gravity manipulation had grown in strength, power and stamina, he had razor sharp reflexes, any of his blow was fast, precise and lethal. Not to mention that, if he got to activate Corruption, well… his enemies could do nothing but die helplessly, erased from this world as they had never even existed.

Dazai Osamu had become, simply, No Longer Human. Any of his plan was faultless. Any of his strategy gave no quarter. Any of his scheme was terrific. His logic was unerring. He was ruthless and merciless, ha had no fear nor hesitation. Nor heart. Not just his enemies, but even any Port Mafia member had started to murmur that he had made a deal with the devil, trading his own soul, because he was so buried in darkness that no emotion was able to pierce through him anymore. He was unreadable, detached, unfathomable. Above all, he had started to seek death, obsessively, but even Death itself seemed to be scared by Dazai Osamu, ‘cause it refused to answer his calls over and over again.

No possibilities were left to the enemies that had to face Double Black: their rivals could just choose if they preferred to be wiped out by the strongest weapon or by the sharpest brain the Port Mafia could brandish.

In all of this, they both kept their promises: Chuuya had never unleashed Corruption if Dazai wasn’t by his side; Dazai had effectively run each mission in order to minimize the need to resort to it. But
nothing else had remained of their previous relationship: their interactions were the more and more similar to a fight than a partnership. When they were together, they did nothing but argue, fiercely, bitterly, harshly. Moreover, things seemed to be escalating between them since Dazai had become one of the five Port Mafia Executive: rumour said that their rivalry was irreconcilable, that they hated each other intensely, that they were incompatible, still… When they were on a mission, when they took the battlefield, they understand each other instantly and flawlessly, with a mere glance, without a single word, fighting side by side as if they shared the same body, the same mind, the same soul. Those who had seen the duo working together had said that it was like beholding a perfectly synchronized dance of life and death: mesmerizing, absolute, unforgiving.

No one had a reasonable explanation for Dazai’s behaviour: he had always been the heinous Demon Prodigy that Mori was raising to be the next Port Mafia Boss and even if only few people had knowledge of the truth behind Dazai’s past and thus the reason he was detached, everyone knew that he had always been impassive, emotionless, brutal. Though, right now, he was so cold that just one of his stares could freeze you on the spot, just one barely whispered word could stop the beating of your heart in your chest. And when it came to interact with Chuuya, well… things got even worse. His actions were incoherent, conflicting, irrational, at times bordering on insane possessiveness, other times closed to pure evil. Chuuya, on his part, acted as he wasn’t affected in the slightest by his partner’s behaviour, as if Dazai’s endlessly wavering between genius and madness could do nothing to undermine his steel core: indeed, the redhead dealt with any conflict head-on, matching the brunet blow-for-blow, teeth bared, fists clenched. What was actually going on inside Chuuya’s heart was something no one was able to figure out, given that he didn’t let anything leak out: the deep blue of his eyes solely reflected utter determination, the fierce red of his hair mirrored the unwavering resolve burning in his deepest. He was a warrior and so he was doing what he did best: fighting, against the whole word if it was necessary, never giving up even when this meant fighting against himself.

Stubborn, overwhelming, unfaltering Chuuya…

And if sometimes, observing the tension written in any line of their bodies, the strain carved on their so young features, it almost seemed to catch a glimpse of something completely different from hatred and rivalry, it was undoubtedly nothing more than a mere impression…

Just Mori looked at all of this, smirking impishly, with some ideas crossing his mind. Under the pretence of building up their – to say the least – troublesome partnership, he ordered the two guys to move in together and share a two-bedroom apartment not too far from the Port Mafia Headquarter. Kouyou was horrified and genuinely concerned about his pupil’s welfare; Hirotsu was puzzled and actually worried about the welfare of the whole neighbourhood. Chuuya just swallowed dryly and relocated his wine collection first, so if the bastard gets too annoying, I’ll drown my anger in alcohol… mmmm, or else, I could drown the asshole in the bathtub… or throw him out of the window… right… what floor this apartment is located on? Dazai stared at his mentor with dull and expressionless eyes, lips pressed in a thin line and moved his scarce belongings without uttering a single word.

However, just this one, Mori intuition was wrong: he was convinced that the reason behind Dazai’s behaviour was trying to smother whatever feeling he harboured for his partner and thus, cutting the strings that were tying up tightly the both of them. The same strings that Mori had been pulling for years and that, even now, were tangling up the two guys helplessly whether they wanted to admit it or not. And Mori couldn’t let Dazai freeing them, ‘cause this would have been too dangerous.

Nevertheless, it wasn’t so simple… Nothing was ever simple when you had to deal with Dazai Osamu. Probably, there was only one person who had really understood which was Dazai’s purpose: no one but Oda Sakunosuke had managed, somehow, to find a way to read the illegible soul of the Port Mafia Demon Prodigy, yet he had too much respect for Dazai’s feelings to interfere howsoever.
By the time I leave, you’ll be hating me so fiercely and for such a long time that my disappearance won’t hurt you anymore... it will be just a relief... Hate me, Chuuya, please...

* * *

It was early morning and Chuuya entered the living room yawning faintly while stretching his numb limbs with the grace of a feline.

“Ohi mackerel, did you sleep on the couch once again? You do know you have a bed inside that dingy room of yours, don’t you?”

Deep blue eyes slightly clouded by a veil of sleepiness locked into his amber ones, studying him thoroughly for a brief moment. Then, furrowing his eyebrows, the redhead grumbled, “Umph, you didn’t sleep at all, did you?”

He just shrugged dismissively and replied, “If you’re so concerned about the quality of my sleep, why don’t you tuck me in and sing me a lullaby?”

“Idiot. What if I just strangle you until you pass out?”

He let his gaze roam deliberately all over Chuuya’s perfectly shaped body, following any line of his muscles, starkly defined by the skin-tight shirt he was wearing. Then, with his eyes lingering on the soft curve of Chuuya’s lips, he murmured – managing somehow to keep his voice even, “What if you just fuck me to exhaustion?”

Chuuya rolled his eyes and spat, “Damn perv, stop staring!” while heading toward the small kitchen to make breakfast.

Tilting his head to give a better look to, ehm..., Chuuya’s tight ass – I should stop this... it’s way too dangerous, still... - he couldn’t help but keep talking, a smug smirk surfacing on his mouth while teasing, “But that would help so much to relieve my stress...”

Without even looking at him, the redhead retorted, “And choking you would do wonders to relieve my stress.”

He got off the couch, strolled quietly towards his partner and halting just an inch from his back, he leaned forward to whisper in his ear, lips almost brushing Chuuya’s earlobe, “No one said you can’t strangle me while screwing me, Chuuya... You can well fuck me to death, if you like so...”

In response, the redhead jabbed him in the ribs and snarled, “Asshole, don’t tempt me! In such a way, if I manage to get rid of you definitively, it might just be worth it!”

He laughed, amused – sincerely amused – and warm puffs of air messed up Chuuya’s red curls, “Oh my, Chibi, I swear... I’m worth it! And if the first time does not meet your requirements, you can go on until you’re totally satisfied!”

Chuuya stomped annoyed on his feet, shoved him back briskly and almost slammed a cup of freshly made coffee in his hands, countering, “Tsk, that would take too long and I’ve only got one life.”
“Owww, you’re really hard to please… but we can give it a try!”

“No fucking way, dumbass!”

“I promise I’ll let you strangle me!”

“Choke on your coffee, bastard!”

“But it isn’t hot enough! You’re much hotter!”

“Fuck you, Dazai.”

“Fuck me, Chuuya…”

…

Sometimes, when no one else could see, in the quietness of their shared apartment, they were just like that, bickering, laughing, teasing light-heartedly. But that was dangerous, too intimate, too close… and he couldn’t afford it. So, most of the times, things were completely different.

…

They were cornered in a blind alley of a godforsaken district on the outskirts of Yokohama, crouched down behind some trashcans – not that those could really offer some sort of shelter… – a hail of fire raining over their heads unrelentingly. Things were going sour.

Actually, the criminal group they had been ordered to subdue could count on many more men and many more weapons than stated in the reports he had studied to plan their mission. Above all, among their ranks, there was a goddamn dangerous ability user, whose name and gift had never been mentioned once in any intelligence he got his hands on.

I wonder if there’s a leak in our intelligence network or else… someone deliberately hid the information…

As far as he had been able to figure out until then, that guy was a weapons collector and his ability – called War Machine – enabled him to summon any sort of weapon within his collection, without restraint. That meant that, right now, they were facing a fucking tank and, at least, a dozen rocket launchers.

“I hope he hasn’t a shitty combat aircraft in his collection, or else we’re completely fucked up!” Chuuya was panting heavily, the struggle to keep at bay somehow the cannon shots and the rockets fired at them using For the Tainted Sorrow was taking a harsh toll on his body.

“Yeah… better than than a nuclear bomb, in any case…” He was bleeding copiously: a bullet had pierced through his left forearm and another one had grazed his temple, so his vision was blurred by the blood flowing over his eyes.

Umpf… I can still bleed… so, it seems that I’m only human, after all…

Yet, he didn’t miss the concern in Chuuya’s gaze when the redhead stared at him, asking ever so quietly, “Can you make it?”

He straightened the best he could and replied, voice cold and firm, “By now, you should know that’s not enough to take me down.”

Chuuya swore under his breath, halted in mid-air a heavy chunk of concrete that had broken from the
warehouse looming over them and threw it towards their enemies. The hail of fire was devastating everything: the buildings surrounding them, heavily riddled by cannon shots and rockets, had started to collapse on themselves and huge ruins were crushing onto the ground.

“Backup is coming?”

“They’ll be there in ten minutes. Anyway, I don’t think there’s much they can do against a tank, unless they’re coming with a fucking bazooka, so…”

Chuuya cut him off abruptly and asserted, “That’s enough. They won’t get caught in Corruption’s rampage: in ten minutes, either I wipe the enemy out or I die.”

Then the redhead approached him and, being very careful not to come into contact with his bare skin, undid the knot of his tie and fastened it tightly around his left forearm, just above his wound, to stop the bleeding. All that Chuuya said was, “Don’t pass out” before turning his back and heading towards their enemies without any hesitation.

He could do nothing but watch while his partner pulled off his gloves, rolled up his sleeves and pronounced aloud the cursed words that were able to set free the terrifying force laying inside him. The world around him started to fall apart once again, caught in the overwhelming grips of increasing gravity. He gulped down the bile burning his throat.

Chuuya… I’m sorry…

Three minutes.

That was how long it took Corruption to annihilate their enemies. Chuuya crushed the tank with his bare hands, reduced the rocket launchers to ashes laughing eerily and his black holes swallowed everything in their paths, mercilessly.

Three minutes.

That was how long it took him to sneak behind that damn ability user and nullify him, so that he definitively ceased to call forth a whole arsenal and shoot it at Chuuya. Slicing his throat with Chuuya’s dagger as slowly and painfully as possible gave him the most immense pleasure.

Three minutes.

Such a long time to endure under the curse of Corruption. Too long…

When he managed to reach for Chuuya and nullify his ability, the redhead was already bleeding worryingly from his mouth, his ears, his eyes. The moment he touched his bare skin, taking him in his arms to support his wrecked body, Chuuya’s eyes managed to focus for a brief moment, a faint glimpse of recognition crossing them fleetingly before shutting down. The redhead lost consciousness, too exhausted and badly injured to stand the unbearable pain brought about by the true form of his ability.

What if one day I don’t make it in time? What if one day I don’t succeed in bringing you back? What if one day all I can do is watching while Corruption consumes you to the bone?

Chuuya…

…”

“Dazai? What are you doing here?”
“Odasaku, how disappointing! What do you think I’m doing in a bar?”

“Well, I can see that. I thought you were still recovering, giving that you had been seriously wounded during your latest mission, no more than two days ago…”

“Umpf, I was growing bored… laying in a bed isn’t really my thing…”

“Yeah… but the amount of bandages wrapped up around your body is increasing at an alarming rate. Maybe resting a little is not such a bad idea…”

He laughed, trying to sound amused, but he knew that that wasn’t enough to fool Odasaku, “I look more handsome like this, don’t I?”

Oda shook his head faintly and replied, “If you say so… By the way, if you’re so bad off… how’s your partner?”

He shrugged, unconvincingly, “I guess he’s still recovering.”

“Mmmn… How come you do not know that? Are you not supposed to be at his side?”

Somewhat, Odasaku always managed to speak straight to his conscience, even if his friend was too considerate to ever pushed things too far. When he answered, his eyes darkened, clouded by a thick layer of an emotion he didn’t want to acknowledge, “Chuuya can fend for himself.”

Taking in his mood better than anyone else ever could, Oda dropped the argument and, smiling quietly, raised his glass instead, “Let’s make a toast then.”

“To what?”

“Your boredom. Otherwise, you wouldn’t be here.”

He grinned and trilled, “Sounds good to avoid going stir crazy with boredom!”

…

Every time Chuuya was badly injured, he ended up like this. Every time Chuuya was recovering from the aftermath of Corruption and guilt, remorse and sorrow were making a killing of the underlying feelings buried deeply inside him, Oda was the only one able to keep him grounded to this world. Without him, he would have long gone completely mad.

* * *

He woke up in a hospital bed. Once again. All around him was quiet and silent, the only thing moving was a familiar hand brushing gently his hair. He blinked his eyes a couple of time to shoo away a little bit of dizziness still clouding his aching head and turned cautiously on his left to greet his mentor, “Ane-san… by my bedside one more time… I’m sorry…”

She smiled gracefully and murmured, “I already told you that you have nothing to be sorry for. You’ll be always my precious lad and I’ll keep watching over you as long as I live.”

He grabbed her hand lightly, pressed a soft kiss on her fingers and smiled back, even if, maybe, a little bit sadly, “Thank you, Ane-san. I don’t deserve all this affection.”
Then he closed his eyes to rest any longer, without saying another word. He didn’t ask about Dazai. He knew the bastard was alive, or else, he would have been long dead, helplessly smashed by his own ability. He also knew that Dazai wasn’t there, ‘cause he never was when he reawakened from the deep coma in which Corruption sank him. After that night, two years ago, when they became partners, Dazai had never been there for him anymore.

Sure enough, the damned bastard has dragged his sorry ass somewhere to waste time drinking alcohol and spouting nonsensess. He won’t have written a single word of the report about our latest mission and I’ll have to do all the work once I get out from here, as usual… That sucks…

He sighed, deeply.

Actually, he didn’t give a shit. He was fine like that, all by himself, as he had always been. He was fine even if they were partners in name only… he didn’t need Dazai. Or better, he needed him for nothing but nullifying Corruption, he didn’t have any ulterior motive to be at his side, he didn’t…

Fuck… I don’t understand him in the slightest… Sometimes, the way in which he looks at me is so penetrating that almost burns holes in my soul. Other times his voice is so cold that freezes the blood in my veins... He has always been a bastard, still... since we became partners, he’s been more insufferable than ever. I don’t understand what changed... Goddammit, dealing with him is pure hell... tsk... he’s almost more disturbing than Corruption itself...

He sighed deeply once again, keeping his eyes firmly closed. Kouyou’s hand moved to brush softly his cheeks and she leaned forward to press a light kiss on his forehead. Surely, she had a hunch about what sort of thoughts were crossing his mind, but she didn’t ask. She never asked, but she was always there. And he was so grateful to her for her love and devotion. She was the family he had never dared even to dream about.

…

It was late afternoon when the doctors finally released him from the hospital: he had been stuck in there for a whole week and, frankly, he couldn’t stand it any longer. Even if he had recovered almost completely, Ane-san insisted on taking him home: since he had moved in with the bastard, they hadn’t so many chances to spend time together, so he was glad to accept her offer.

On the way home, Kouyou first briefed him on the latest events in Yokohama underworld and then they made small talks. It was really enjoyable and so he was in a good mood when he waved goodbye to her once they got to his front door.

When he entered the apartment, it was completely silent and in near total darkness, just barely lit up by the streetlights coming in through the windows.

Umpf... so Dazai’s not there... I guess he’s still wandering around uselessly, that damn waste of space...

He walked in without even bothering to turn on the light in the living room: indeed, he was planning to head straight to his room, take a shower and a nap soon after. When he went past the couch, he suddenly saw him, snugly slumped onto the cushions, sound asleep.

Ahh? Dazai’s sleeping? This is a once-in-a-lifetime event!

A mischievous grin spread on his lips, while a wicked idea suddenly popped up in his mind.

What should I do? Maybe just scare him to death? Throw a bucket of cold water on him? Mpf... I'm not such a bastard... I could just cut some locks of his stupid hair...
He approached the couch, careful not to make the faintest noise, his dagger already unsheathed firmly in one hand… and froze. In the dim light, scattered on the floor, he saw an empty bottle of whiskey first and what seemed to be a bottle of sleeping pills right after. His heart missed a beat.

What…?

He picked up the bottle of pills: it was empty as well.

Damn! Damn! Fucking idiot!

Alcohol and sleeping pills… were those enough to kill him? How long ago did he swallowed them? How many did he take?

Is it too late?

A wave of pure fear washed over him, paralyzing him for a brief moment. No fuck… I need to hurry… He clenched his fists tightly and his nails sank deeply into his palms, drawing blood until the subtle pain spreading through his hands helped him to focus.

Shit!

He knelt briskly beside the couch and, pressing two slightly trembling fingers on Dazai’s carotid, he checked the pulse… one second… please… two seconds… please… one beat… an eternity… another beat… faint, slow, but it was still there. His partner was still breathing… he was still alive…

Bastard, dumbass, shithead!

He sat on the couch beside Dazai and shook his shoulders, trying to awaken him.

“Dazai, ohi… Idiot, wake up.”

No response.

Clenching his teeth to keep inside any panicked wheeze, he sunk his fingers in Dazai’s flesh, gripping tightly, shaking harshly, speaking loudly, almost shouting.

“Bastard, open your eyes! You’re not allowed to pass away like this! I’m the only one who can kill you!”

No response.

Halfway between pissed off and frightened, he buried his fingers in Dazai’s hair and pulled roughly, forcing the bastard’s head up and yelled straight into his eardrums, “Fuck Dazai! Wake up! Wake up, goddammit! Wake up… please…”

Keeping his eyes still closed and wobbling his head faintly, the brunet finally made some sort of noise, something similar to a slurred speech, “Mmmn… Chuuu… wwhat… doo youuu… waa… ant…”

Letting a deep sigh of relief escape his lungs, he slid his left arm around Dazai’s shoulders, lifting him up a little bit and, with a steady and clear voice, he uttered, “Open your mouth.”

“Mgh… nooo…”

Gripping his partner’s jaw with his right hand, he pressed his fingers harshly into the juncture of Dazai’s mandible, trying to force it down, and pronounced again, “Open-your-mouth.”
Luckily, this time the brunet complied, “Aahhh…”

Without giving it a second thought, he showed two fingers down Dazai’s throat while pressing against the bastard’s shoulders to compel him to bend forward. The brunet writhed weakly, choking and sputtering around the fingers obstructing his throat, but finally he threw up. He went on forcing Dazai to puke until his stomach was completely empty and he was retching only bile. Then he released his hold and laid the brunet down on the cushions once again.

He stood, swearing under his breath and headed towards the bathroom to get something to clean up that mess. He washed up his partner’s mouth and face with a wet towel, cleansed the couch and the floor, prepared an herbal ted and helped Dazai to drink it. Neither one of them said a word, because there wasn’t anything to say, because there was no need to speak at all. That wasn’t the first time that Dazai had made something utterly stupid and, likely, it would not be the last. That wasn’t the first time that he had to patch up and put together his sorry excuse for a partner and, likely, it would not be the last.

Finally, he sat on the couch, at Dazai’s side once again and asked quietly, “How do you feel?”

Without opening his eyes, the brunet replied hoarsely, “Shit.”

He scowled at him and mumbled, “I guess so… What the hell, idiot…”

This time, Dazai turned his head and peered at him intensely before speaking, “I just wanted to sleep.”

There was an awkward light in his gaze, a glimpse of something he couldn’t pinpoint. He shook his head and grumbled, “Whatever Dazai… if it’s so, as I already told you, at least don’t sleep on this damned couch.” Exhaling a deep sigh, he offered, “Let’s get you into bed.”

Despite is obvious sickness, the brunet managed to smirk impishly and teased, “I’ve known all along that, sooner or later, you would have taken me to bed. It’s just a pity that, right now, I don’t feel so hot…”

He rolled his eyes and muttered, “Idiot…” before helping Dazai to stand and dragging him to his bedroom.

He slumped the brunet onto the bed and turned to leave just saying, “Goodnight, asshole” but a hand gripped his wrist, lightly and yet firmly. He stopped then and started to protest, “Fuck, what’s now, just sleep…” but another hand reach his waist, seized his shirt and pulled back.

“Oh Dazai, what…”

Dazai was too sick and weak right now to succeed in throwing him off balance, but the bastard clung to him dead weight and pulled back once again. This time he stumbled, Dazai’s weight dragged them down and they both collapsed on the bed in a mess of limbs.

He hadn’t even the time to realize what was happening, because the brunet was on him surprisingly quickly, especially for someone who had just thrown his guts up. Dazai straddled him, leant forward to clench both his wrists with his slender fingers, keeping him pinned against the mattress.

Right there and then, he could have freed himself with frightening ease – they were both well aware of that – still he didn’t. He waited, with his eyes locked into Dazai’s, observing almost mesmerized the conflicting emotions storming inside those bottomless brown-amber pits. He wasn’t able to grasp what kind of feelings were battling inside his partner’s soul at that moment, all that he knew was that, for once, Dazai’s gaze wasn’t dull, nor empty, nor cold. Therefore, he just waited, wordlessly,
for Dazai to make up his mind, while his own heart was beating *maybe* a little too fast and his own
breath was *maybe* a little uneven, but that was just because… *just because…* umpf, *probably* I
haven’t recovered completely yet and I’m feeling a little sick as well… Damn Dazai… what are you
going to do now?

After what felt like an eternity, Dazai released his hold and shifted his weight, freeing him. But just
for a brief moment. Indeed, the brunet laid down on the bed beside him, pulled him close, holding
him in his arms, burying his face in the crook of his neck, intertwining their fingers and their legs,
without saying a single word. That was too intimate, too warm… They had never been this close
before… so close yet… so far away… because he didn’t understand him… he couldn’t… *why the
hell are you like this now?* He was well aware that even if he had asked, he wouldn’t have got any
straight answer…

*You’re a fucking mess Dazai… and I’m not even sure if I want to unravel you… I’m not sure I
wanna take on whatever truth lies behind all of this…*

He waited for his heart to stop hammering in his chest, for his breath to become even and then he
closed his eyes, trying to sleep.

*Fine then… if that’s what you want right now, I suppose that this is what I have to deal with right
now…*

Sure enough, Dazai was a mess. Sure enough, he wasn’t much better.

…

When morning came, sparkling rays of light seeping in through the curtains woke him up. He
stretched his numb limbs and yawned loudly, blinking his eyes a couple of times to adjust his sight to
that brightness.

*Mmnn… I have to admit that I feel well rested for the first time in a while…*

Then he half-turned to his right and faced *his partner*, who was laying in the bed beside him, his
right arm folded to hold up his head, his chin lazily propped on his palm. He considered the brunet
for a little while before speaking quietly, “Do you have some meeting?”

Indeed, Dazai was already washed and dressed, ready to go out. The brunet only nodded slightly, his
amber-brown eyes not breaking eye-contact, not even for a second.

“I see… how are you feeling?”

Again, not a word left Dazai’s mouth. He was merely staring at him, his gaze now wandering all
over his face, so intense that he could almost feel it physically brushing his red curls that were
gleaming in the morning light, tickling his cheeks, his jaw, grazing the bare skin of his neck, stroking
teasingly his lips, before going back to lock into his blue eyes. A feverish light was burning deeply
into those amber-brown pits, mirroring the mayhem of clashing emotions fighting furiously into
Dazai’s inner self, none of them able to prevail.

That passionate gaze made him shiver to the bone and an awkward warmth started spreading
helplessly.

*Shit… Again? The fuck is this? How’s that I feel completely chained? Damn… that’s way too
dangerous…*

Trying to broke the spell that was keeping him stuck, he took a deep intake and growled, maybe
stuttering just a little, “D-Dazai, what the hell…?”

But he didn’t get to finish speaking, ’cause the brunet stretched his left arm, his slender fingers moved to brush some curls away from his face, before sliding backwards, reaching his nape and entangling in his hair.

At that point, he was completely taken aback.

With a quiet motion, Dazai leant forward, his fingers keeping him trapped, gentle but firm, his lips on him before he could even realize what was going on. He froze and burnt at the same time.

Dazai’s right hand felt for his neck, grasping it softly, his thumb stroked tenderly his skin, drawing circles on his pulse point, while parting his lips slightly to suck teasingly his lower lip. Those lips, so soft and wet, moving hotly on his mouth, were sending jolts of pure electricity down his spine and he was relentlessly losing any control over his reactions. That kiss was stealing his breath, making his heart pounding like mad and shattering his sanity. What was more, his body was responding on its own, demanding, needing, craving.

He darted out his left hand, entangled his fingers in Dazai’s hair to pull his head forward further, while parting his lips to deepen the kiss. The brunet tilted his head to have better access to his mouth and shove his tongue inside, devouring him with a passion that knew no restraint. He bit and sucked Dazai’s lips hungrily, licked the inside of his mouth, twisting their tongues in a desperate battle. He hadn’t the slightest idea how long they had been doing… whatever they were doing, all that he was aware of right now was that he was straddling Dazai’s lap without even knowing how, that Dazai’s hands had sneaked under his shirt to seize his waist and that their bodies were pressed so tightly that denying the reciprocal arousal was impossible.

Damn… controlling my instincts like this… it’s almost as easy as controlling Corruption…

When Dazai trailed his tongue down his neck, sinking his teeth into the soft flesh once reached the base, he couldn’t help but rock his hips forward, grinding their groins one against the other and an eager moan escaped his mouth, helplessly.

Clenching harshly his red curls, the bastard yanked his head back, separating their bodies abruptly. Then, gripping his shoulders and shifting his weight, Dazai jolted to slam him on the mattress once again, pinning him down with his hands.

Their eyes locked into a too hot gaze. They were both panting heavily, their faces were flushed, their hair dishevelled. Tell-tale hickeys were already popping up, scattered all over every inch of their exposed skin.

Goddammit… that’s a huge mess...

Abruptly, Dazai’s eyes darkened even more and the brunet leant forward once again, pressed their lips together in an unbearably soft kiss, so sweet and bitter, so passionate and desperate, that his mind went completely blank, overwhelmed by some sort of feeling he didn’t even know existed but that, for good measure, he wished to deny until death.

Dazai broke the kiss and brushed his cheek with his slender fingers one last time, gently, before standing and taking his leave, without saying a word.

He suddenly felt a harsh cold clenching his heart. Still…

Now that I think about it, Dazai hasn’t said a single word since yesterday evening… How uncharacteristic…
still, he sure hadn’t the slightest intention to run after him. To be honest, he was utterly taken aback once again: the bastard’s behaviour was too contradictory for him to be able to react somehow. So, maybe, doing nothing was the best solution. He sighed, deeply, and resolved to take a shower, hoping that that could help to clear up his mind – and to cool him down… - at least a little bit…

He had no intention to dwell on what had happened, nor to find a meaning, or a reason, for all of that. He buried somewhere deep inside him whatever odd sensation he might have felt and decided not to face it until it was absolutely indispensable.

*Tsk… Maybe, I’ll never need to cope with that… maybe all of that was just the outcome of alcohol, pills, exhaustion and stress...* *Fuck… I’m not sure it’s wise to pursue the truth…*

…

Fortunately, *his partner* helped him a lot with this *quest for denial*. Actually, without as much as saying goodbye, the bastard disappeared for a whole month, stuck somewhere in China to handle the negotiations with a Triad gang interested in establishing a long-term cooperation with Yokohama Port Mafia.

During his mission abroad, Dazai didn’t send him a single message, nor he did make a call. He was aware that the bastard was still alive just thanks to the reports that Dazai dispatched to Mori.

*Okay, fine like this… I don’t give a shit, in any case…*

…

Sure, he didn’t give a shit. Sure, Dazai’s kisses weren’t still burning as hell onto his skin each time he got to think about him, carving holes in his heart. Sure, this prolonged silence meant nothing to him.

*When you have to deal with Dazai Osamu, the best you can do is try to survive… And, sure as shit, I’ll survive… no matter what…*
Where there is desire there is gonna be a flame, where there is a flame, someone's bound to get burned.

Chapter Summary

You are mine.

Chapter Notes

The title of this chapter is from the song “Try” by Pink.

Some lines are from the short story “A Heartless dog”, written by Asagiri and published in the extras of volume 6: I’ve marked them like this «« … »». The story is about the first time Akutagawa and Dazai met, I’m just going to hint at it, from Dazai’s Pov.

Thie first part is Dazai's pov, the second part is Chuuya's pov and at the end there are few lines that are Dazai's pov again.

Well... this chapter is smut and angst.
And right now it's really late, I'm tired and I'm not even sure about what I'm writing, so... bear with me... I'm sorry for any mistake.
Thank you for reading.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The solo mission in China was pure blessing: a whole month without his partner. He needed time to think, he needed time to clear up his mind, he needed time to regain his cool. He was fucking things up: it was almost impossible for him to stay put with Chuuya hanging around him, it was getting harder and harder for him to maintain control. Just doing nothing when Chuuya was close to him, when Chuuya looked at him with his captivating blue eyes, when Chuuya treated him as if he cared despite everything, was quite beyond him: he had already endured it for too long and now he couldn’t take it anymore.

He needed time on his own and yet, he was cursing any single moment he had to spend away from him. He wanted him, in a way he had never wanted anything else in his life. That longing was driving him completely mad and – honestly – he hadn’t the slightest idea how to deal with it. That was why, that night, he hadn’t trusted himself to utter a single word: he could have ended up saying something he would have regretted for the rest of his life, something he couldn’t afford to say. Something like... “Chuuya... I think I...”

“...Dazai-san is here to represent the interests of Yokohama Port Mafia. So, I give him the floor to present the course of action that Yokohama Port Mafia intends to...”

Hearing his name being called upon, he focused his attention back on the discussion that was taking place in the meeting room, swearing under his breath at his own foolishness. Damn... that’s not really the right time to space out... that’s not me...
Thankfully, he handled the meeting with his trademark coolness and his innate brilliance, managing to turn the tide in Port Mafia’s favour with frightening ease: Mori’s teachings were really useful, after all. Moreover, the fact that his audience tended to underestimate him because of his young age was a card he fully exploited to his advantage.

Still, as soon as the assembly ended, all his thoughts run back to his partner, resuming the course they were following no more than a few hours before, with no escape. There was just one thing he was sure about: if he really wanted to have Chuuya hating him, kissing him hadn’t been a smart move, but he couldn’t help it, really… Just thinking back to his lips on Chuuya’s skin set his blood on fire and any fibre of his body craved for more almost painfully. He absolutely had to come up with something to get out of that mess and he had to do that right away.

*I can’t deny what I’ve done, still… I can blame it on alcohol and pills… or I can just ignore it, ignore him… or maybe I can push things to the limit… I can set up another conflict to exacerbate our relationship… I can let him think that that was just another mind game, another way to keep him under my thumb, chained to my will… I’m just a bastard, after all…

God… what I’m even doing…?

…

Hence, the first thing he did when he came back to Yokohama was to report diligently to Mori about the outcome of his latest mission. His Boss even seemed to be pleased with the result he had managed to obtain – *not that he really cared about his praise*.

“Let me say, Dazai-kun… Another job well done. You can take a couple of days off, if you feel so.” Mori’s eyes sparkled evilly while he continued, “I can grant *your partner* a couple of days off as well, if you wish for some time to spend together… I’m sure you missed each other a lot, during this month-long separation…”

To that comment, he just raised an eyebrow and replied, coldly, “Thank you, Boss, I appreciate very much your consideration. However, I’ve already something on my agenda in the coming days.”

Mori weighed his words for some moments, humming thoughtfully, before responding, “I see… it must be a very important job… Care to share?”

He stood, quietly, and just stated, “I’ll update you once the job is done” while taking his leave.

…

The second thing he did, was to go out drinking with Oda and Ango, to celebrate his return. Maybe, he dragged things out for a little bit too long – *indeed, there wasn’t so much to celebrate…* - still, his companions didn’t complain that much. If they had some sort of hint about why he wasn’t so eager to return home, they kept it to themselves.

“Dazai, we don’t really have to make a toast for *any single day* you’ve just spent in China… you know that…”

“Naahhh, Ango, you’re such a spoilsport! I didn’t get to drink decent whisky in that godforsaken place! I have to make up for it!”

“At least, don’t put it all on my tab!”

“Yeah, yeah… what a nuisance… The next round is on Odasaku, then!”
“What if I say no?”

“Ooww, Odasaku… you can’t do this to meeew! I thought you were happy to have me back!”

His puppy eyes were worth something, because Oda sighed resigned and conceded, “Fine… but just one last drink, you’re killing the whole bar!”

He beamed and shouted to the bartender, “Another Smokehead, please!”

…

The third thing he did that night was to go rescuing a silent rabid dog.

He was keeping an eye on him for quite some time now: the brat was an abandoned, malnourished and sickly orphan, living in the slums like many other wretched children. Still… that guy had potential and not just because he had a quite interesting ability – even if those who had heard about his gift had dismissed it as useless… poor fools… From what he knew, the guy could manipulate the shape of the garments he wore: coming to think of it, that was something he could work with, the conceivable uses of that ability already unfolding in front of his eyes and opening an intriguing set of possibilities that he intended to exploit fully.

Right now, the poor thing that was standing in front of him was clearly exhausted, badly wounded but still determined to take his revenge on the criminals who had killed his companions. He smiled at that sight and started to play his game confidently, «I am Dazai. Dazai Osamu of the Port Mafia.»

Undoubtedly, the boy had been caught off guard by his unexpected appearance, yet he didn’t run away, nor he trembled with fear when hearing his name and he didn’t show the slightest hesitation while introducing himself, «I am…»

Fully intending to lead the game by his own rules, he cut him off briskly, «I know who you are. Akutagawa-kun, correct? I’ve been waiting for you.»

Then he went on speaking quietly and dissected unerringly Akutagawa’s own plan to exact his revenge. He could read easily the thoughts crossing the boy’s mind, the conflicting feelings seething into his heart and the puzzlement shaking his resolve while he was explaining him the reason that brought him there. «You asked me why I killed these guys, right? That’s simple, it’s my gift to you. You don’t look like the type to be bought with money or status, so I figured this would be the sort of payment that would attract your attention.»

He decided to not give Akutagawa time to overthink and went straight to the point, «I want to persuade you into joining the Port Mafia.»

Akutagawa’s instincts were able to sense clearly the subtle danger hidden in his words and the threat he could represent. Without giving it a second thought, the boy decided to face the danger straight away, leaping forward all of a sudden, turning his own sleeve into a blade and aiming at his throat, firmly resolved to get rid of him. Still, he didn’t need to move an inch, ‘cause, obviously, Akutagawa’s ability was dispelled by mere touch and his blow vanished into nothing against his neck.

He smirked, quietly.

Exactly as I expected… a little rabid dog more than ready to snap… heartless, merciless, resolute: a material well suited to become Port Mafia. I could easily shape him into a perfect killing machine, with a thorough training.
The complete failure of his attack left the boy utterly stunned and so, without further ado, he immediately seized the occasion to state the terms of his offer: he made clear that he wouldn’t force Akutagawa into becoming his subordinate, ‘cause that should have been entirely his decision. But if the boy chose to accept, if he was ready to walk down the road of hell, he would grant him any desire.

« «Is there anything you wish for? »»

« «I want to find a reason… a meaning to my life. »»

*The world has never given him any chance, nor a reason to live, nor an opportunity to prove his value. I’ll give him this much.*

He did it. He promised it.

« «I will give you one. »»

He took the boy on. Because he always managed to get what he wanted, in one way or another.

*I’m Mori’s Demon Prodigy. I’m a Port Mafia’s Executive. I’m Odasaku’s friend. I’m gonna be Akutagawa’s mentor. The only thing I could never be, is Chuuya’s partner…*

...

When he finally went back home it was late at night and the lights in the living room were shut down.

*Well… Chuuya’s probably already sleeping… Better this way, that’s exactly what I was counting on…*

As much as he wanted to see *him*, as much as he needed to see *him*, he wasn’t sure he was ready to face *his partner*, not yet. He took off his coat and the bandages covering his right eye, tossing them somewhere on the couch, and moved few steps further into the room.

Suddenly he halted, utterly shocked. A surprise was awaiting him: something he had never seen coming, something he had never foreseen, something he wasn’t prepared to take on, not even in his worst nightmares.

The door to Chuuya’s room was ajar and light was seeping in through it. Not just light. Also voices.

Chuuya was there, more than awake and he was not alone.

Chuuya was there, more than awake and he was not alone.

The blood running through his veins froze. His heart stopped beating. His mind went blank, completely unable to form a single coherent thought while he was taking in what was going on.

*Chuuya’s there… and he’s not alone…*

He wasn’t ready to handle the wave of emotions that rushed throughout his entire being, shattering any cell of his body, destroying everything on their paths with an overwhelming violence. Rage, jealousy, fear, desperation, regret, yearning and something else, even deeper, even more undeniable, made a killing of his certainties, of his confidence, of his convictions.

Hot moans and teasing giggles were coming from the room. Unequivocally. He was petrified. Than a soft voice whined, “Chuuya…”

*A girl.*
When a croaky intake of air was finally able to find its way down his lungs, he realized that he wasn’t even breathing anymore. He gasped, helplessly, choking on the air that was painfully filling his aching chest. His mind started to run in circle, chasing around that single thought… *a girl, a girl, a girl…* 

*Thank God… it’s a girl… ’cause if it were a man, I…*

Thank God, he heard that voice before doing anything crazy. Because, if it were a man, he would have burst into the room and sliced the man’s throat, without giving it a second thought. He couldn’t bear the idea of a man putting his hands all over Chuuya… if it was a girl, the thought was just slightly more tolerable… however…

… *Chuuya… is mine…*

That was something he had never considered before. The idea that Chuuya could find someone, man or woman, had never crossed his mind.

*Why not? I’m such an idiot… Chuuya’s gorgeous… It’s a fact that Port Mafia’s life is not suitable for a certain kind of relationships, but still… why not? Why shouldn’t he find someone? Might have I taken him for granted?*

Right, maybe they were both underage and should not bother about relationships, but still… If you were Port Mafia, being “underage” didn’t make much sense. Underage… for what? Drinking? Fucking? Blackmailing? Killing? Dying?

He knew for sure that Chuuya had had sex before. *His partner* was a creature made of burning passions, so alive, so strong, so impulsive… not even his history of abuse had been enough to limit Chuuya’s hunger for life, he had fought against it, he had overcome his past, he had defeated his ghosts. So… either it was during an undercover mission, or with a girl in the brothel, or just a random hook-up, they both had already had sex, even if they had never talked about it. He didn’t even want to *think* about Chuuya sleeping with someone, let alone to *talk* about it with him… the thought in itself was enough to drive him wild…

But right then and there, that wasn’t even a mere speculation anymore… ‘cause just a few steps away from him, Chuuya was getting laid… and he realized all of a sudden that he couldn’t – *he really couldn’t* – stand it.

*I haven’t the slightest intention to share what is mine…*

He clenched his teeth until his jawbone ached under the pressure, he sunk his nails into his palms until they drew blood, he was seething with too many feelings to be able to seize control over them.

*I don’t know what I’m going to do once the time to leave Chuuya’s side will come… still, until then…*

… something buried deeply inside him raised to claim, undeniable, irrefutable, incontrovertible…

… *You are mine…*

… *And I’m gonna take what is mine…*

He almost wanted to howl his yearning, but he managed somehow to rein in the storm of his desires. His blood started to circulate smooth in his veins once again, his heart stopped thundering in his chest, his breath became even.
I’ll own you…

Without making the slightest noise, he moved few more steps inside the room, until he was standing straight in front of Chuuya’s room.

Unfortunately, not the best idea he ever had…

Through the half-open door, he saw them. They were standing in front of the bed, just in their underwear, and Chuuya was embracing a pretty blond girl from behind, his arms wrapped possessively around her waist, his lips on her neck, kissing eagerly her smooth skin, his bare chest pressed tightly on her back. The girl was keeping her eyes closed, her head abandoned backward to grant him access to any part of her body he could desire and her mouth, agape, was letting escape delighted moans at each kiss he pressed onto her neck.

Chuuya’s deft fingers started roaming all over her body, brushing the perfect skin of her inner thighs, lifting her underskirt to sneak underneath, his left hand gripped her tit and his fingertips started to stroke her nipple, circling and pinching it softly. His other hand slid down slowly, under her panties and crawled between her legs to worm his way into her… The girl exhaled a needy whine and spread her legs further apart, while wobbling her hips back to rub her ass against Chuuya’s groin.

Panting hotly, Chuuya tilted his head forward and pressed hungrily his lips on hers, devouring her mouth, entrapping her in his grip even more, leaving her no escape.

…

He shuddered, unable to take his eyes off that sight, half-mad with jealousy, half insanely turned on… Chuuya… Beads of sweats were gleaming on Chuuya’s pale skin, trailing down his lithe muscles, his captivating blue eyes were half-lidded in pleasure, his face was flushed with sheer lust, his striking red curls were sticking to his soaked neck, heavy moans were escaping his parted lips…

God… I have never seen anything more exciting… he’s breathtaking… astounding… intoxicating… irresistible…

As if sensing the intensity of that gaze fixed on him, Chuuya diverted his attention from the girl lying in his arms, raised his head and stared straight ahead, through the half-open door, locking his blue eyes clouded with lust in his – not less inflamed – amber-brown ones.

Even in the dim light of the living room, their eyes engaged in a fierce battle of will.

Not even bothering to stop fondling the blond girl, the redhead narrowed his eyes and looked daggers at him. In that withering look, he could unmistakably read Chuuya’s silent protest: what the fuck do you want?

He smirked ominously, while his eyes were sinking in a bottomless ocean of endless darkness. His unyielding gaze pierced through Chuuya’s skull, claiming, commanding, raising his wordless challenge: You can fuck any pretty girl you want… yet, there is only one person whom you belong to… you can’t get away, I won’t let you…

Chuuya frowned at him, lifted a hand to flip him off and, with a swift motion, seized the girl’s waist and twirled to lay her down on the bed. Then he took hold of her legs to spread them out and humped her shamelessly, not caring in the slightest about him watching.

Ohh… I see… so you have no intention to make this easy… well, let’s fight then… it makes things much more interesting…
Even if they hadn’t exchanged a word, he knew for sure that his partner had got his message: between the two of them, speaking was no longer needed. Thus, the challenge was ongoing and now he had just to play this through.

He turned his back to that confounding sight and sauntered towards his room, where another restless night was awaiting him.

…

The following morning he was up early, just past dawn: he had a disciple to train now, better start sooner than later. In any case, he hadn’t slept at all last night, so… he might as well get ready to go out.

*Mpf… how was I supposed to sleep with all that fucking mess?*

The redhead had made nothing to muffle the shameless and lewd noises that he and his “booty call” had made all night long, every sound of their sexual performance had been clearly audible throughout the whole apartment – *the entire neighbourhood, probably…* The hat-rack hadn’t even bothered to close the door of his room.

*So, I guess… that was your first move, Chuuya… wasn’t it? I have to admit that it has been pretty tough…*

Maybe, if he was being honest, he could admit that it hadn’t been just “pretty tough”. Maybe, if he was being honest, he could recognize that, last night, any moans, any whine, any wheeze, had stabbed him in the heart painfully. Maybe, if he was being honest, he could acknowledge that, beside jealousy, anger, possessiveness, longing, he had felt something much more intense, much deeper, much stronger, much more *dangerous*… something that maybe was the source of any other emotion he was feeling.

But he wasn’t being honest, even with himself. Because all he had to do right now was to win the challenge. And he had already planned his next move.

While heading toward the Headquarter, he focused on that and left everything else behind.

* * *

He woke up with a pounding headache and a mess of limbs entangled to his body. Turning to his left, he saw a dishevelled mane of blond hair resting on the cushion next to him, still sound asleep. Her pretty pink lips were slightly parted, letting escape soft puffs of air that were tingling his neck. He remembered well the sweet taste of that mouth, just as much as he remembered well any kind of sounds coming out of it. He sighed, pensive.

*Oh, yeah… it was kind of fun, last night… wasn’t it?*

He couldn’t deny that he had enjoyed it, it had been quite pleasurable, so… what was the creeping sensation smouldering under his skin, crawling into his nerves, clawing harshly at his heart?

For a brief moment, he closed his eyes once again, pondering.

*Uhmm… undoubtedly it’s because I drank too much…*
Indeed, the evening before he had run into the girl at a pub, they had had a couple of drinks – well, okay… maybe more than just a couple… - he had brought her home and then they had hooked up. All night long. Almost wildly. She was pretty, she smelled good, she tasted good, and, to be honest, she was quite talented…

So… what’s wrong?

Suddenly, the memory of sharp amber-brown eyes beckoning him, cutting through his skull, sinking to the bottom of his soul and rewriting any cell of his body to carve his name into them, flashed into his mind, so intense and passionate to make him shudder helplessly.

Shaking his head vehemently to erase that awkward image from his brain, he started cussing under his breath, utterly annoyed.

Fuck… the bastard is back… and who gives a shit?

He couldn’t stand him. He would have never let him fuck up his life, his mind, his heart, his everything, once again.

That damned shitty idiot… a whole month… not a fucking word… screw you…

Maybe, if he was being honest, he could admit that that prolonged silence had been “pretty tough” to bear. Maybe, if he was being honest, he could recognize that, last night, when he had seen him in the dim light of the living room, his heart had missed more than just one beat. Maybe, if he was being honest, he could acknowledge that, in the last month, he had struggled to smother the memory of his kisses still burning all over his skin in each senseless one night stand, that he had tried, almost desperately, to drown a persistent, nameless and yet overwhelming feeling in each drink he had gulped down.

But he wasn’t being honest, even with himself. Because all he had to do right now was...

Damn! It’s fucking late! I must go to the Headquarter or else I’m fucking toasted! Shit… I suppose that I have to wake her up first…

…

…

Oh fucking hell… I don’t even remember what the fuck is her name… Goddammit… I guess I have to cope with it somehow…

Sighing deeply, he brushed her hair gently and leant down to whisper softly into her ear, “Darling… it’s late… I have to go to… to work… wake up, please.”

…

After having dumped the girl somewhere – he didn’t even need to tell her that there wouldn’t be a second time, that was clear enough from the start – he rushed towards the Port Mafia Headquarter. He was hurrying just because it was already 10.00 and he had a meeting with Hirotsu in less than half an hour, there wasn’t any ulterior motive, really. He wasn’t wondering if the bandaged bastard was already there, giving that he had long since left their shared apartment when he woke up that morning.

Whatever… I’m gonna ignore him in any case! My head’s still hurting enough without having him around to make things worse!
He discussed with Hirotsu about the training schedule of the new recruits for almost two hours and then they headed towards the weapons room to check the new equipment they were going to put to use in the upcoming missions.

They were chatting agreeably while going down the hallway that leaded to the storage rooms, until, just around a corner, an utterly annoying voice coming from behind him got on his nerves at once.

“Oh my, look who finally made it!”

Without as much as batting an eyelid, he went on walking down the corridor.

Ignore him, ignore him, ignore him…

As if it were that simple…

Indeed, Dazai continued speaking, undeterred by his coolness, “Oww… I see… your sex noises last night were so loud to deafen you…”

Beside him, Hirotsu cleared his throat, slightly embarrassed. Trying in vain to swallow down his growing irritation, he turned his head to glare at his partner, who was standing a few steps from him, and barked, “Go fuck yourself, Dazai…”

The bastard smirked teasingly, his uncovered brown eye chained unwavering with his blue ones – why the hell the idiot keeps on bandaging his right eye when he isn’t at home, is still to be determined – and his tone was casual when he replied, “Right, right… actually, you leave me no choice, as you’d rather fuck pretty blond girls than me…”

He blushed violently – no, he wasn’t flushing, he was just seething with anger, he wasn’t thinking back to anything awkward happened between the two of them more or less one month ago – and stamped a heavy foot on the ground, shaking the floorboards, “Damn pervert! Just stop peeking through the door of someone else’s room!”

“… if you were less exhibitionist and maybe just closed it…”

“And the fuck why? You weren’t even supposed to be home!”

“Fine then, next time I’ll give you 24 hours notice…”

“Tsk… don’t bother asshole… I know you’re too busy to just call…”

Dazai’s piercing gaze darkened abruptly, scanning him thoroughly, cutting his mind open and when it reached the bottom of his soul, a dangerous glint shone across it for a fleeting moment.

Why… why it always looks like he can read easily through me? I fucking hate him…

Then a smug grin, which was up to no good, spread wide onto the brunet’s lips.

Fuck… I’m screwed… I’ve just said something I shouldn’t have… something he’s gonna use against me… I’ll never hear the end of it…

He braced himself to face whatever shit the bastard was going to throw at him and scowled at the brunet, who was sauntering quietly towards him with his hands showed into his pockets.

Darn… even after all those years, winning one of his damned mind games is almost impossible…
but if you think I’m gonna give up lightly, you’re delusional… I’ll fight you tooth and nails…

Once they were no more than few inches apart, with slow and calculated movements, Dazai raised a hand to stroke his cheek, his fingertips brushed softly his lips before following the line of his jawbone and trailing down slowly to rest on his neck.

He managed somehow not to move a muscle, not to react in the slightest to that touch – always like this… damn manipulative bastard… - just waiting patiently for the upcoming blow.

Dazai’s voice was low and mocking when he spoke, “Chuuya… if I’d known you missed me that much, I would have called you every day…”

Narrowing his eyes, he murmured, scathingly, “What a pity I wouldn’t have time to answer you…”

The bastard smirked impishly and retorted, “Too busy drowning your sorrows in alcohol?”

How the fuck…?

Darting a gloved hand forward, he clenched his fingers tightly around his partner’s neck and spat, in a low growl, “Unfortunately, I can’t drown you in alcohol…”

The smirk on Dazai’s face didn’t fade away, while he responded in a sickeningly sweet tone, “So… you’re saying that I’m your sorrow?”

He swallowed, dryly. Why did he feel like any of his most private thoughts was carved in capital letters onto his skin? Why did Dazai know him so intimately? Why did he have so much power on him? Why could he reach so deeply inside him and ravage his soul? Why…?

Strengthening his hold on the bastard’s neck, he countered, “Tsk, so cocky… you’re just a pain in the ass…”

That annoyingly cunning light flashed in his brown-amber pit of damnation once again. He could do nothing but brace himself for another blow. Unfortunately, that wasn’t enough.

Choking lightly on the hand restraining his throat, Dazai muttered, hoarsely, “You don’t even know how much I’d like to be a pleasant pain in your ass…”

Enraged, frustrated and confounded out of his mind, he finally snapped, and with a rough push, he pinned the bastard against the wall, his fingers still locking the bastard’s neck in a tight stranglehold. Dazai didn’t even flinch and kept his unreadable gaze fixed on him, sneering.

Charging menacingly, he roared, “Dazai… it’s not even ten minutes and I’m fucking fed up with you!”

Suddenly, something grasped firmly his wrist and pulled back, trying to loosen his grip around Dazai’s neck. He closed his eyes and took a deep intake, to calm down a little before looking sideways at the pitifully pale and skinny boy with short black hair turning white at the tips of his side bangs who was struggling to restrain him: despite his sickly appearance, his gaze was fierce and utterly resolute, almost threatening.

The boy was wearing a long, black coat – one of Dazai’s coat, as he recognized at first glance – that he could transform somehow into a sort of shadow-like beast, whose claws, as of now, were clenched harshly around his wrist.

An ability… mmmnn… not bad…
Without budging an inch, he scowled at the guy and uttered, coldly, “Brat, you better let go…”

In response, the boy charged ahead stubbornly, manipulating his coat into forming one more claw that clenched his other wrist.

He shook his head utterly annoyed and, sighing deeply, grumbled, “I see… don’t say I didn’t warn you…”

The moment he released his grip around Dazai’s neck, his body started glowing in red and, without further notice, the boy was smashed quite harshly into the ground, mercilessly crushed by the increased gravity of his own coat.

For few seconds, everything remained still and quiet, *For the Tainted Sorrow* was affecting even the air in its surroundings, making it heavier. Then Dazai stretched a hand towards him and tapped playfully his forehead, dispelling his ability at once, while protesting jokingly, “Ohi, hat-rack, don’t ruin my disciple!”

*Ahh? Disciple? Oh my, really? Poor boy…*

He tilted his head to glare at his partner and hissed, “If he’s your disciple, than keep him in line, idiot!”

In the meanwhile, Hirotsu approached the boy to help him get up, looking at him almost apologetic, “Lad, don’t mind them. They’re always like that…”

The boy swiped away briskly the hand stretched towards him and stood wobbling slightly, rage and humiliation seething in his dark eyes. Dazai shot at him a chilling smile and rebuked him, “Akutagawa-kun, you must learn to better assess your adversary, before charging blindly ahead. Or you’re dead. This short angry redhead…” and the bastard gestured at him with a flourish, “… is my partner, Nakahara Chuuya, the other half of Double Black.”

Dazai continued speaking without pause, addressing at him in a lighter tone, “Hat-rack, let me introduce you to Akutagawa Ryuunosuke, my new subordinate, provided that he can make it…”

While processing the new information, the boy was looking at him with pure hatred. He sighed, mentally, and just looked back at him thoughtfully, without saying a word.

*Fine then… he’s gonna be a tough one… Umpf… whatever, he’s quite talented, he can become something, really…*

He had been almost in the same position no more than five years before, so he could understand what Akutagawa was feeling, probably better than anyone else. A slender build, not suited for close combat, a powerful ability that he didn’t know how to exploit fully ‘cause no one had ever taught him, a history of abuses, starvation and misery, a wretched life without a means of escape, an unbearable thirst for a chance to prove his worth. He took his decision with no hesitation, nodding slightly to acknowledge the boy. “Akutagawa-kun, welcome to Yokohama Port Mafia. You’re really not bad, I’m just sorry you’re Dazai’s subordinate. Believe me, that’s a fucking disgrace…”

Dazai’s tone was low and dangerous while he remarked, “Oh my, Chuuya, don’t be so rude… Do I really need to pull rank?”

Not intimidated by that subtle threat, he narrowed his eyes, looking dagger at the Executive – what bothered him the most about Dazai weren’t his intimidations… he could deal with them. His problem was entirely something else… and growled, “Right, Mister Executive… In any case, this doesn’t change the fact that you’re already disgraceful enough as a partner, I don’t want even to
imagine what it means having you as a mentor… that would make me sick!”

Reaching out all of a sudden to seize his wrist in a vice grip, Dazai pulled him back harshly, keeping his back squeezed against his chest, while tilting his head forward to brush his earlobe teasingly with his soft lips and whispered, in a sickeningly sweet tone, “That’s no good, Chuuya… Do you want me to punish you for insubordination?”

He smothered vehemently the bothersome shudder born into his guts before it could shake his whole body helplessly.

*This is just another one of your wicked game, isn’t it? Well then… two can play at it…*

Raising his chin, he turned his head so that their mouths were just an infinitesimal inch apart now. Then, pursuing deliberately his lower lip with his tongue and with eyes that were shining brightly with a defiant glint, he murmured hotly, straight onto his partner skin, “Give it a try…”

He observed, satisfied – and maybe a little bit concerned as well… what was this new game he was playing at? He wasn’t sure about it, in the slightest… - while a clash of emotions darted fleetingly into Dazai’s uncovered eye, cracking, even if just for a brief moment, his mask of cold detachment.

Then, smirking maliciously, the bastard dragged his mouth down his neck and sunk his teeth into his collarbone, humming *almost content*, “It will be my pleasure…” before releasing his hold onto him.

He flipped him off for good measure and strolled towards Akutagawa, who was still looking askance at him. Not bothered by his gloomy appearance, he patted the boy’s shoulder and murmured quietly, so that just Akutagawa could hear his words, “If you’re here, it’s just because you have potential. Take advantage of it fully.”

The boy didn’t react to his speech, still that wasn’t so important, not as of now. *He’ll learn… just like I did…*

Immediately after, he noticed for the first time a tiny creature standing silently behind Akutagawa. It was a skinny girl, with long black hair and dark eyes, who was glaring at him with a cold gaze and lips pressed in a thin line.

*Oh my… another troublesome stray dog? Damn… she’s very young, barely more than a child… and she looks so frail… and yet so strong willed… Umpf, life sucks, really…*

Approaching the girl with a gentle smile, he asked, softly, “And who you are?”

An annoying voice behind him replied, “She’s Gin, Akutagawa’s little sister.”

Ignoring *his partner* as if that was the sole purpose of his life, he continued addressing the girl, “You’re Dazai’s subordinate as well?”

Without saying a word, Gin just shook her head slowly. He sighed, relieved, “Lucky girl… Are you an ability user?”

The girl shook her head again, in denial.

*Urgh… not an ability to help her surviving in this filthy world of ours… Honestly, if I think about it, I’m not even sure if it’s a curse or a blessing… still… this means that she really needs to learn how to fight her way out on her own steam…*

So, he looked at Gin thoughtfully and proposed, “Then… what if I teach you how to fight with
knives? Would it be fine?”

The tiny girl considered him warily for some moments before nodding firmly, in acknowledgment.

He smiled again, satisfied, and asserted, “Done. See you soon then.”

Immediately after, he took his leave, without as much as nodding to the bastard and Hirotsu tailed him wordlessly. But obviously, he wasn’t allowed to go away just like that…

“Chuuya~, I’ll be home for dinner! Will you cook something special for your beloved partner?”

Rolling his eyes, he growled, “Poison” and then continued to walk down the hallway, hoping to be able to accomplish his day’s duties without further delay…

…

It was late afternoon when he finally managed to come back home and he was, in all honesty, dead tired. The day had been pretty tough and, to make things worse, the other night he hadn’t slept that much. So, he was planning to take a shower, to eat something and then sleep 12 hours, to get his strength back.

But, in the first place, he uncorked a bottle of Amarone, poured himself a big glass and flopped down on the couch, because, fuck, I deserve it!

He fell sound asleep, in, probably, less than five minutes…

…

Mmmnn… what’s this? What…

He wasn’t sure if he was dreaming or if there was really something brushing his skin with touches light as a feather, following the outline of his features in an endless circle, as if to capture his essence and imprint it in a memory that could never fade away…

That odd sensation sank deeply into him, sending shivers down his spine.

He opened his eyes, blinking a couple of time to take in his surroundings: he was still lying on the couch and the room was plunged into the darkness, except for a faint light coming from a table lamp.

Fuck… it must be almost night… how long have I slept?

The moment he had woken up, the sensation of fingertips lingering onto his skin had disappeared at once, so… either it was a dream, or…

He dared to turn his head to glance to his left and there, sat on the edge of couch beside him, was…

“Dazai? What…?”

Two fingers pressed lightly onto his lips, to shush him. He frowned, his eyes carrying on the protest that his mouth was forbidden to express.

Dazai’s eyes – both Dazai’s eyes… his right eye now uncovered… - were transfixing his blue ones, piercing through his skull, his mind, his soul, his heart, once again. There was something gleaming feverishly inside them, something intense, almost desperate, undoubtedly dangerous… Something he wasn’t sure he could face.

Damn… no… Dazai… wait…
He sighed, deeply, hoping that a fresh intake of air could help his brain to function better… He had no doubt that he would have had to focus hard to deal with whatever was going to happen…

When finally Dazai spoke, his voice was almost dreamy, “Chuuya… you’re so beautiful when you’re asleep…”

Well… okay… fuck…

Soft fingertips stroked his lips gently, before releasing his mouth. He swallowed and replied, dryly, “So, should I fell into an eternal sleep to satisfy your aesthetic?”

The brunet smirked impishly and countered, “Provided that I might wake you up with a kiss…”

“Tsk… I’d rather sleep for a million years than be awakened like that…”

Entangling his slender fingers in his red curls to hold him still, Dazai leaned forward, bumping their foreheads together, their lips so close that they were stealing each other’s breaths – assuming they were still able to breathe, at that point… - and murmured, “Liar.”

_Goddammit…_

He did his best to keep his voice even, “Why should I lie? I hate you.”

The brunet giggled – and warm puffs of air tormented his skin – and replied, quietly, “I hope so.”

Rolling his eyes, he sneered, “Don’t worry, hating you it’s not that hard…”

“You sure?”

“I’m sure, bastard…”

“So you’re saying…” and the brunet shifted his body to lay down on the couch next to him, “… that you don’t want this…” his right leg wormed his way in between his ones, “… as much as I want it?” and his teeth bit teasingly his lower lip.

He froze and smothered harshly a gasp that was menacing to escape his throat, struggling to cool down.

_What the hell…? Fucking manipulative bastard…_

He took few moments to rein in his instincts and, when he was confident enough he could speak without breathing out any kind of awkward sound, he growled, quite enraged, “Dazai… what kind of sick game are you playing at, this time?”

The brunet tilted his head slightly backward to smirk at him mischievously, “Mmn… why should I tell you? It’s no fun, that way…”

“Shitty asshole… I guess that, in any case, you do have no intention of quitting until you get what you want, do you?”

Dazai sneaked his right hand underneath his shirt and started tickling his skin, his fingertips tracing slowly the lines of his muscles until they reached his upper chest, where they stopped to pinch his nipple teasingly, “I don’t. But you already know that.”

This time, he allowed a low moan to escape his mouth and watched, fascinated, the way that sound ignited Dazai’s gaze with mad desire. Keeping his eyes locked unwavering into amber-brown ones,
he murmured, quietly yet firmly, “And you know I’ll never give up fighting you, no matter how many of your fucking games I have to lose?”

To that statement, something else crossed Dazai’s gaze, yet so fleeting that he wasn’t able to grasp it clearly. The brunet’s voice was almost broken when he replied, “I know… I know it all too well… and that’s one of the reasons why I…”

Whatever it was that he was saying, his partner didn’t finish speaking and just looked at him so intensely that he felt his heart melting. Again. Dazai stretched a hand to reach for his nape, entangled his fingers in his red curls and pulled, searching blindly for his lips, kissing him so passionately that his whole body was washed over by an overwhelming surge of longing.

Damn… this is madness… insane… we should stop before it’s too late, but… Fuck… I don’t wanna stop…

He tilted his head and pressed forward eagerly to deepen the kiss, parting his lips to give Dazai full access to his mouth, breathlessly, while Dazai’s tongue started ravaging his inside with feral hunger. That intimacy was enough to open wide cracks in his self-control, to tear down his inner walls, to pulverize his defence mechanisms. It was hot… so hot… too hot… his whole body was set on fire, burning wildly with a desire he had never felt before.

Hell… this is hell… no, this is worse than hell…

Losing any grip on his sanity, he darted his hands forward, trying frantically to unbutton Dazai’s shirt, almost tearing it to shreds in the urge to reach for his bare skin somehow, sinking his fingernails in his shoulder blades while his teeth snapped ferociously at Dazai’s neck, ripping his bandages and digging deeply into his flesh until he drew blood.

The brunet breathed out a low-pitched howl, half pained, half aroused and, gripping tightly his hair, yanked his head back to regain control over their – maybe – a little too heavy and furious making out. For endless moment, they did nothing but stare at each other, their gazes mad with lust, panting harshly while trying to catch their breaths.

God… How far are we going to take this? I’m losing it…

He licked his own lips slowly, lustfully, savouring the metallic taste of his partner’s blood on the tip of his tongue. Completely captivated, Dazai’s eyes followed greedily that lecherous motion, then the brunet extended a hand to fondle his lips with his thumb, stroking them languidly, sensually and finally coaxed his mouth to open once more, leaning forward to kiss him again and again.

Dazai unfastened the buttons of his crumpled shirt, taking it off and grabbed his shoulders to lay him down, then his mouth started immediately to search for its path alongside his neck, continued exploring his bared chest, tingling, teasing… his tongue drew circles around his nipples and his lips closed to suck them greedily. Then he went on biting and licking his ribs, sinking his teeth in the tender flesh of his belly and kept going down, all the way down…

He was gasping shamelessly, endless moans of ecstasy were escaping his parted lips, an arm was folded over his closed eyes, his other hand was entangled firmly in the brunet’s hair. When Dazai’s deft fingers undid the zip of his slacks, he could do nothing but lift his hips to make it easier to take them off.

Now, he was laying completely naked, on display for Dazai’s lustful gaze and he was feeling it devouring any inch of his bare skin, mapping hungrily any line, any curve of his body.
The cold inside the room was not enough to cool down his heated skin.

When Dazai laid on top of him, grinding his still half-dressed body against his naked one, he shuddered, helplessly, keeping his eyes firmly closed and covered with his folded arm.

Suddenly, he felt Dazai’s fingers reaching his neck, to fasten something around it with swift and deft motions. He moved a hand almost warily to touch the thing: it was cold, smooth, probably made of leather… the realization hit him as a thunderbolt… Wait, wait… is this a choker?

His eyes swung open and he stared in amber-brown eyes that were gleaming smugly.

“Ohi, bastard… What the hell is this?”

The brunet tilted his head and replied, feigning innocence, “Oh my… what do you think it is? It’s just a gift…”

He grasped the thing constricting his neck and started pulling angrily, “If you really believe that you can put a fucking collar around my neck, you are nothing more than a shitty…”

Dazai’s right hand darted swiftly to seize his wrist, clenching it in a vice grip and halting him abruptly.

In response, he growled, lowly, dangerously and his eyes narrowed in a silent threat.

But the bastard was relentless: his left hand reached for his other wrist, grabbing it harshly and then trapping both his arms over his head with a rough motion.

He was well aware that he could free himself, he was physically stronger… yet, he didn’t.

Dazai’s voice was hoarse and deep when he spoke, “Chuuya… I have to admit that I significantly underestimated the effect that this choker would have had on your naked body… I’m not letting you take it off… You’re gorgeous… You are mine.”

He breathed in, slowly, deeply, trying despairingly to clear his mind, because those words that were creeping up his skin were hotter, more intense, more intimate than any touch could ever be. He forced his voice to get out of his mouth from the bottom of his throat, “So… do you think you have a claim on me?”

“I do.” Not a moment of hesitation.

He laughed, unamused, “You’re a fool… Are you sure you do know what you’re staking you claim on? Are you sure you do know who I am?”

Dazai’s eyes shone with a dark glint when he replied, “I do. I know you better than anyone else.”

A long, deep sigh left his lungs, “Maybe… but if it’s so, you should know well… that Corruption is not just my ability… it’s an innate part of me… I’m marked, tainted, cursed, since the very day I was born. I am Corruption. So, tell me, Dazai… are you sure you can deal with this?”

A sad, yet beautiful, smile found his way onto Dazai’s lips, “Chuuya… Never forget that I’m the only one who can dispel Corruption just by touch…”

“Right… a mere No Longer Human’s touch can nullify Corruption… Still… can you tame me just by touch?”

Not a word left Dazai’s mouth. There was no need for it. The answer to his question was written on
Dazai’s gaze, an answer that, for once, he could read openly. Tho… an answer that he refused to acknowledge, ‘cause he had never seen anything like that in his partner’s eyes and it was more dangerous than any threat, more scaring than any menace, it made him hope, it made him want, it made him feel things that he wasn’t allowed to feel.

He closed his eyes, choosing not to see.

It’s easier, much easier… just to believe that all of this is nothing more than an act…

Dazai moved slightly, adjusting the grip over his wrists, now clenching them with just one of his hands, while the other one slid down slowly, alongside his check, his neck, his collarbone, his arm, his leg… to crawl up his inner thigh, the touch of those fingertips delicate as a lover’s kiss. Finally, that hand reached his groin and started brushing alongside his throbbing erection, his thumb stroking heavenly his pulsing length up to his tip, where it begun to draw circles to spread his leaking precum all over his heated skin.

He bit harshly his lower lip to stifle a needing cry, but he couldn’t stop his hips from bucking forward to meet that bewildering touch.

God… Dazai… I’m going out of my mind…

As if responding to his silent request, Dazai’s leant forward to lick his neck, his tongue sneaking underneath the choker, his teeth biting the soft flesh around it, his lips sucking greedily his sweaty skin, while his hand shifted to clench his cock tightly and started pumping it at a steady pace.

His fingers moved frantically, searching for something to grab hold of, sinking into the cushions of the couch to steady himself. An extreme pleasure was washing over any cell of his body, wiping out any reasoning, shaking him mercilessly, helplessly, shattering all his nerves, stealing any of his breaths…

Aahh… damn… I can’t take it any longer…

When he arched his spine to bury himself deeper into Dazai’s hold, the brunet grabbed his hips to push him down firmly, flattening him on the couch one more time and then slid backwards and crouched between his spread legs. Then, he let his hands wander on his body once again, his right one gliding forward to get back hold of his cock while his left one slipped backwards to grasp his ass, fondling it before letting one of his fingers sneak down to reach his entrance. Dazai’s fingertip started circling his hole teasingly, rubbing it slowly, spreading something cold all around it, something like a gel…

Wait, that’s lube… where the hell does he…

His train of thought was abruptly interrupted when Dazai slipped a finger inside him and started thrusting in and out relentlessly. When a perfectly angled thrust reached his soft spot, a jolt of electricity cut through his spine, eliciting a whine of unbearable need from the bottom of his guts. He shoved his head back, abandoning it on the cushion, his mouth helplessly agape unable to keep inside his feverish noises, his hips bucking back and forth frantically to match the pace of Dazai’s double stimulation.

When the brunet slid in a second finger, working in and out to open him more and more, scissoring him unabated, his inner walls crumbled definitely and, for the first time since they’d started having sex, he couldn’t help but call his partner’s name aloud, enraptured, “Aahh, D-Dazai…”

Hearing his voice calling his name, Dazai slowed down and struggling, in vain, to rein in his arousal,
he finally spoke, his voice heavy and broken, “Chuuya… is my touch… enough… to give you pleasure?”

Damn controlling… possessive… manipulative bastard…

He raised his head to stare straight in those amber-brown eyes dazzled with lust, and chasing after his own breath, he managed to scowl, “Stop being… and idiot.”

But he should know better than to think that his partner would let him get away with that.

Indeed, Dazai leant forward, pressing him down with his weight, forcing his legs to open further while he laid down in between them, stretching to bury his nose into his neck, his teeth biting teasingly his earlobe while humming softly onto his skin, “Or do you wanna me… to touch you in another way?”

He grasped Dazai’s hair and yanked his head back harshly, growling, “You’re the fucking genius, you’re supposed to know that already.”

The bastard ground his groin forward and teased, “No way… Ask me what you want, Chuuya…”

Clenching his teeth to keep inside the umpteenth lustful moan, he grumbled, “Bastard… Do you wanna make me beg?”

Dazai smirked smugly and replied, “Yes, I do.”

He had already lost himself in that insane game, he had no more control over his own instincts, still… he hadn’t the slightest intention to give up. He couldn’t. So he pulled Dazai’s head so close that their lips were brushing enticingly with each word that left his mouth, “Fine then… but if it’s so, you better know this… for every time I beg you, you’ll beg me twice.”

Dazai’s smirk widened against his lips, “Aww… how cocky… I’ll never beg you, Chuuya…”

“Are you sure?”

“You know it… my predictions are never wrong.”

He smiled and breathed his reply hotly, confidently, onto his partner’s mouth, “Osamu… about this one, you’ll beg on your knees to be proven wrong.”

Something deep inside Dazai’s gaze snapped and the leftovers of his control gone in an instant, overwhelmed by an urge that knew no restraints. He jerked backward, fumbling frantically with the zip of his own slacks until he managed to free his own erection, coating it with lube and pumping it briskly a couple of time before sliding forward once again, dragging it against his entrance, his tip teasing his hole slowly, leisurely.

Groaning frustrated, he writhed and budged his hips forward further, yearning for a deeper friction.

Steading his throbbing cock with a hand, Dazai shoved the bare tip inside, waiting for him to relax, for his tight hole to loosen more, before grabbing his legs below the knees to bend them backward until they were resting against his chest and then angled himself to thrust in fully.

He cried, helplessly, desperately, in both pain and need, his words a mess of barely comprehensible sounds when they came out of his mouth, “Ahh… D-Dazai… Dazai… please… fuck me…”

He begged. His partner obliged.
Burying himself deeply inside him, Dazai started ramming in and out wildly, heatedly, incoherent and desperate moans streaming out of his mouth unabated. He dug his nails into the cushions to anchor himself, rocking his hips back and forth furiously to match the brunet’s feverish pace.

Dazai’s thrusts became the more and more delirious with each passing moment, while the both of them were reaching their unrestrained climax. Without stopping nor relenting, the brunet released his legs, leant down to slide his hands beneath his back and dragged him forward so to have him straddling his lap now. Then the brunet shifted his grip to grab hold of his waist and went on pounding into him, his fingernails digging into his soft flesh while yanking his hips down to meet his pushes up. He clawed at Dazai’s shoulder blades and threw his head back, his eyes half lidded, his mouth agape, his body undone.

Shoving a hand between their closely pressed bodies, Dazai grabbed hold of his neglected cock, squeezing tightly, pumping crazily and, completely out of breath, panted, “Look at me, Chuuya…”

He tilted his head forward, losing himself even more in those amber-brown eyes, his mouth by now able to pronounce just a single word, “Dazai…”

Dazai’s lips searched for his ones blindly while he murmured, almost touched, “Chuuya… come… come for me…”

To those words, his orgasm burst into him violently, with an intensity he had never felt before, making him shiver and writhe savagely. He howled his overwhelming pleasure straight into his partner mouth, while his body was clenching tightly around Dazai’s, trapping him in an inescapable cage.

Dazai squeezed him in an impossibly close embrace, penetrated him to the bottom with a last desperate thrust while his orgasm exploded in full force and he came inside him, his body shook by uncontrollable spasms and his mouth repeating a sole, delirious, word, “Mine, mine, mine…”

…

God, why… why I feel like this… so satisfied… so fulfilled… so complete… I’ve never felt anything like this before… why this is so perfect… Damn Dazai… it’s you… but why?

* * *

He didn’t know how long he had been staring at the serene features of his partner, quietly asleep beside him in their shared bed. All he knew was that Chuuya was beautiful, mesmerizing, irreplaceable. And he was irremediably intoxicated, enraptured, enamored.

The intensity of his feelings for his partner was almost scaring, disarming. He had lost himself inside Chuuya and he didn’t know how to come back. Or, maybe, he didn’t want to.

All of that was fool, insane, extremely dangerous. But it didn’t matter, ‘cause everything that mattered right then and there was the unbelievable creature snoring softly at his side.

Nothing else.

When he stretched a hand to brush away an astonishing curl of red hair from Chuuya’s face, his partner woke up, those captivating blue eyes immediately searching for him, that delicious mouth
yawning lazily, that captivating voice… well…

“Ohi, idiot, stop staring.”

Well… that’s Chuuya…

“Oww, Chibi… so rude, even if it’s early morning!”

“Yeah, it’s early morning and you’re already wasting time just staring at me. It’s weird!”

“I can’t help it! You’re so beautiful!”

“Asshole, don’t use me as an excuse not to get to work!”

Still, he didn’t miss the soft blush spreading on the redhead’s cheeks, despite his biting answer. He smiled and conceded a soft surrender, “Right… right… I’m going to get a shower, then…”

An unfathomable glint shone fleetingly in Chuuya’s eyes. Something he couldn’t read.

“Hat-rack? What…?”

But he didn’t get to finish speaking, because Chuuya leant forward, his hands reaching for his neck, starting to remove his bandages quietly. He was utterly taken aback.

“Chibi… what are you doing…?”

“Mmmn… if you wanna get a shower, you have to take your stupid bandages off, before…”

“Sure, but… Chuuya, what…?”

His breath caught into his throat, while his partner was unwrapping his messed bandages, slowly, deliberately, letting them fall onto their shared bed in a tangled heap, while his lips moved to kiss any of his scars, his tongue licked every bruises, his mouth sucked all the scrapes scattered throughout his whole body, erasing the pain and the sorrowful memories those marks had been taking with them until now.

His partner was writing a new story onto his skin: a story made of passion, of desire, of belonging… A story he wasn’t sure he could live…

I wanna die. Right here. Right now. It would be perfect.

Finally, he begged. Twice. Not aloud, not with words.

His mind begged desperately while Chuuya’s kisses were unravelling him, so softly, so intimately, so intensely, that he couldn’t help shivering deeply and yearning for more.

His mind begged for things to be different.

His body begged madly while Chuuya found his way inside him, stealing his sanity, his soul, his heart… stealing everything from him and then… filling his void with something so passionate, so sincere, so overwhelming that he couldn’t help to be bonded to him eternally.

His body begged for this moment to last forever.

But they were Port Mafia. And there was no room for feelings in their lives.
Rashoumon is described as a shadow-like beast made up of what could be dark matter. I’m no expert, but, for all I know, even if dark matter has never been directly detected, it responds to the force of gravity. So, I suppose that For the Tainted Sorrow may work on Rashoumon.

Smokehead is a single malt Scotch whisky.

Amarone is a quite expensive Italian red wine, produced in the province of Verona.
It's hard, so hard, it's tearing out my heart. It's hard letting you go.

Chapter Summary

I’ll do what I have to do in order to survive... but how to live, it’s my choice.

Chapter Notes

The title of this chapter is from the song “(It's Hard) Letting You Go” by Bon Jovi. So... I guess there’s no need to point out what this chapter is about. There are few quotes from “Dazai Osamu and the Dark Era” written by Asagiri: they’re marked like this, «« ... »» even if I’m sure you recognize them...

As the pov changes quite frequently, I’ve marked it at the beginning of each part. Oda’s pov is the only one that’s in “first person”, because... well, it’s Oda.

This chapter was very hard to write... I’m almost drained and, like always, right now it’s really late, but as I have to catch a plane in three hours, I wanted to post it before leaving.

I did my best, I hope it’s worth your time.

Thank you for reading.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*** Akutagawa ***

He discovered very soon that having to deal with Dazai Osamu was all but easily done. His mentor was extremely brutal, ruthless, hard to please. His “lessons” looked more like an uninterrupted conflict than a proper training, he was constantly under pressure, under scrutiny, pushed to his limits, mortified and punished without mercy for every slightest error he made.

It was really hard, but he was fine with that. Because he was more than ready to do whatever it took to prove his worth to Dazai-san and finally gain his approval.

I’ll surpass myself; I’ll go beyond my limits, I’ll become stronger, unrivalled! And when that day comes, Dazai-san can do nothing but acknowledge me!

It was six months now since he had joined Yokohama Port Mafia and, finally, Dazai-san sent him on his first solo mission. It was nothing difficult, nor dangerous... mpf... to be honest, it was a quite silly assignment: he had just to chase down a Mafia member turned traitor who was suspected of having stolen some information from the Port Mafia’s archives before defecting.

Still, this could be a good occasion to prove myself.

Moreover, this time, no one would get in his way. He utterly despised teamwork: his supposed comrades were just a bunch of useless weaklings, nothing more than a hindrance. He was more than able to fulfil this mission alone, he didn’t need any help.
So, he did it. He hunted down the traitor, killed him without a second thought and threw the corpse into Yokohama Bay.

… if everything in life were that simple…

Right now, he was pinned against one of the wall of the training room, his mentor’s fingers clenched tightly around his neck, his uncovered eyes darkening with utter discontentment and his voice low and threatening when he spoke, “Akutagawa-kun, tell me… perhaps you know what you did wrong?”

He struggled to breathe despite the hand constricting his throat and replied, as confidently as he was able to manage, “Dazai-san, I completed the mission…”

“Wrong.” His mentor’s fingers squeezed even more.

Choking helplessly, he tried again to make his point, “I killed the traitor…”

Dazai-san cut him off abruptly, “Exactly” and then, gazing coldly at him, continued, “and still, you can’t see what you did wrong, can you?”

_I don’t understand… why he’s so pissed off? I executed that vile man who dared to betray the Port Mafia…_

The fact that he gave no answer was an answer in itself.

His mentor snorted, “Killing him was not the purpose of the mission I entrusted you with. I ordered you to _chase-him-down_. What do you think I meant by that?”

He swallowed painfully and grumbled, “That scum deserved to die…”

The fingers choking him were pressing tighter and tighter, mercilessly, “Maybe… but it’s not up to you to decide that. All you have to do is to obey my orders. Unfortunately, it seems like you’re not even able to do that much and I don’t think you’ll ever learn. You’re just a useless rabid dog that can do nothing but bite.”

His mentor’s harsh words hurt him more than the grip on his neck. He would rebut that that wasn’t true, that he could do better, but a violent coughing fit started shaking his mistreated body while oxygen couldn’t reach his lungs anymore and thus the voice died in his throat.

In the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of someone moving. Dazai-san’s partner, who until then had remained uninvolved, just watching silently with his back leaning on the far wall, was now walking towards them unhurriedly. Nakahara stopped when he had Dazai-san in his line of sight and just stared at him wordlessly. In his striking blue eyes, there wasn’t any kind of judgment or demur. Still, that quiet gaze was anything but dull: there was a relentless gleam shining inside it, even if he couldn’t understand what it meant.

Dazai-san was looking right back at him with an intensity that was almost frightening, his gaze as unreadable as ever.

Whatever was the significance concealed in that nonverbal communication, was beyond his comprehension. Still, there was just one thing he was sure about, something he had learnt in his early
days in the Port Mafia: just one person in all Yokohama – *maybe in the entire world*… - was allowed to stare at Dazai Osamu that way. Anyone else would long be dead.

Nakahara broke the prolonged silence, uttering slightly annoyed, “If you’ve finished playing with your puppy, we have work to do.”

Dazai-san just looked at his partner a moment longer, then released the grip clenching his neck and took his leave without saying a word.

No more restrained but not even supported, he collapsed in a heap on the ground, panting harshly, struggling to catch his breath. Nakahara approached him quietly, squinting at him while lighting up a cigarette. He took a deep drag and, looking at the smoke blown away from his mouth in white puffs, he spoke, barely louder than a whisper, “A corpse can’t be interrogated. A corpse thrown into Yokohama Bay can’t even be searched.”

He grated his teeth, stifling angrily another coughing fit while straining to stand up, “And so what?”

Nakahara sighed almost meekly and, turning his head to look at him, explained, “We needed to find out what kind of information the traitor stole from the archives, because this could have helped in establishing who ordered the hit and thus in taking the appropriate countermeasures.”

Narrowing his eyes, he asked, sceptic, “Dazai-san told you this much?”

A sarcastic – yet, somehow, sad – smirk curled Nakahara’s lips up when he replied, “Obviously no, he didn’t. Dazai never reveals any of his true purposes, he never discloses any detail he deems unnecessary for you to know, he never, never, shares every steps of his plans with anyone.”

“If it’s so… how did you know that?”

Smashing the cigarette under his heel, Nakahara replied, dismissingly, “Tsk… Akutagawa-kun, you better learn sooner than later how to read between the lines of your mentor’s modus operandi, otherwise you won’t last long.” Then he headed towards the door of the training room without adding anything else.

Still seething with anger for what had just happened, he peered at Nakahara’s back, while the redhead was taking his leave.

*I can’t stand him.*

Right, he couldn’t stand him. He couldn’t stand anyone but Dazai-san. However…

*However, why Nakahara told me those things… he didn’t have to…*

He hated deeply how much his voice sounded hesitant when he called, “Nakahara-san…”

The redhead halted and half-turned to look at him with a questioning gaze.

Still… he couldn’t bring himself to say what he meant, because the words “Thank you” couldn’t leave his mouth, no matter how hard he tried.

However, a knowing smile widened on Nakahara-san’s lips when he declared, “I am *not* your mentor, just Chuuya is fine” before turning and walking towards the exit.

He mulled it over in his mind for quite a while, considering the absurdity of the whole thing.

Sure… He looked up to his mentor: no matter how ruthless, merciless and heartless Dazai-san could
be, he was the one who saved him from the slums and offered him a possibility, a *reason to live*, and so, he was willing to do whatever it took to match his mentor’s requirements. Dazai-san was intransigent and demanded him to achieve the impossible: this continuing challenge compelled him to go all out any time.

Surprisingly, Chuuya-san looked completely different from Dazai-san, in such a way that he couldn’t help but wonder how it was possible that the two of them could really work together and even being *partners*. And not just whatever partners. They were the most fearsome and powerful duo the whole Yokohama underworld had ever seen. So, maybe…

He contemplated those thoughts one moment longer, before shaking his head and finally admitting, *Mpf… maybe Chuuya-san is worth respect as well…*

* * * Chuuya * * *

He walked down the hallway that led to the parking unhurriedly, lost in his thought.

*Umpf… poor Akutagawa… having Dazai Osamu as a mentor is pure hell… Even if I can understand why the bastard is acting this way with him, this doesn’t mean that I like it that much… Tsk… I suppose that nice manner would be useless to produce results in Akutagawa’s training, the boy is too stubborn, too rabid and needs to be pushed to the limits to achieve something, but still! Dazai is a fucking asshole, really… I wonder if Mori-san was like that with him… or maybe even worse…*

To be honest, right now, he wasn’t so eager to face *his partner* and, surely, was in no hurry to martyr himself and take the blow of Dazai’s frustration. Still, he knew better than to delude himself and hope that it’d have been different, this time.

He sighed, resigned.

*Tsk… it sounds like I’m Dazai’s outlet… for his anger, his dissatisfaction, his stress… and the worst thing is that I’m even used to that… which is saying a lot about what a sorry excuse for a partnership we do have…*

The moment he stepped into the parking, a harsh grip clenched his shoulders abruptly, smashing his back against the wall. He didn’t even flinch.

*Okay… let’s go…*

*“Bastard…”*

*“Hat-rack…”*

*“So… to what do I owe this special treatment?”*

*“Chuuya… Do I need to have a reason to pin you against a wall?”*

Dazai’s tone was everything but comforting and the subtle threat seeping through it, unconcealed, made the hair stood up on the back of his neck.

Just staring at *his partner* scornfully, he mocked, “Of course, not… Go ahead and do as you fucking
Dazai leaned forward, his lips searching for his neck, his teeth nipping the soft skin around his choker, “Mmnn… or I’m supposed to ask for your permission?”

“Tsk… as if whatever I say is worth something…”

“Oww Chibi, don’t be so defeatist… even if…” and Dazai’s teeth sank harshly and deeply into his neck, drawing blood, “… after all, it doesn’t look like you asked for my permission before meddling in the training of my disciple…”

Here we are…

Gripping harshly Dazai’s hair to yank his head back, he growled, “I didn’t interfere.”

“Oh my, you didn’t… really?” Dazai’s hands sneaked underneath his shirt, clawing at his waist, “if it’s so, then, I guess there’s no reason to punish you…”

Baring his teeth and leaning forward, so close by to spit his protest onto his partner’s lips, he snarled, “I don’t give a shit about how you’re training your pets!”

The bastard laughed, unamused, “And so, what was the meaning behind your gaze? Don’t tell me that you were just jealous because I was playing with someone that wasn’t you…”

Rolling his eyes, annoyed, he retorted, “Don’t get your hopes up, I’ll never be jealous of you, asshole.”

Dazai’s right hand trailed down his hip and then shifted to brush enticingly his groin, his fingernails scraping purposefully against the zip of his slacks. Despite all his irritation, he had to smother the gasp that that simple touch was able to stir. He cursed his own madness in his mind and bit harshly his lower lip to keep inside any lewd noise. How it was that Dazai was able to turn him on like that in no time, was still an unfathomable mystery – maybe shutting out obstinately the sole true reason didn’t help in the slightest in solving it…

Fuck… we’re still inside Port Mafia’s Headquarter… this is reckless, foolish…

Obviously, the bastard didn’t miss his struggle to keep at bay any kind of eager response and, smirking impishly, teased, “I like the way your body always react to my kinky games… you can’t help but play… can you?” while his slender fingers were already fumbling to get rid of his slacks.

Goddamnit… okay… fuck off good judgment, it’s not that I have so much left of it, for fuck sake!

Narrowing his eyes, he stared defiant at his partner and, pursuing his lips with his tongue, sinfully, alluringly, he whispered, “And who said that this is your game?”

They were jumping each other in less than a second, devouring each other’s mouths, tearing each other’s clothes off, struggling to reach blindly each other’s bare skin with fangs and claws. Their passion was so ferocious that had long since lost any shred of humanity.

…”

Lately, their disputes always ended like this: instead of bickering until exhaustion as they did when they were younger, they had started using sex to allay the tension between the two of them. The only problem was that when they had sex, it looked more like a fierce battle than a proper intercourse.
Well, maybe there was even another problem, but obviously, they’d rather die than to acknowledge it...

The problem was that, unlike their minds, their hearts and their words, their bodies couldn’t lie.

*** Dazai ***

“Oh my, Dazai… today is June 19… happy birthday!”

Oda raised his glass to him and continued, “How old are you today? Seventeen?”

He just nodded sluggishly, and replied, “Yeah, right… it looks like I have no choice but to grow one year older, as I haven’t managed to die already…”

“Aren’t you supposed to celebrate?”

Smirking mockingly, he replied, “Oww, but I’m celebrating, don’t you see? I’m gonna drink a whisky for each damned year I’ve been living…”

“Mpf… Dazai… maybe something a little less devil-may-care would be better…”

“Odasaku please… since Ango isn’t here, this doesn’t mean that you have to be the party popper instead!”

Oda shook his head, stoically, and murmured, “You know you’re not gonna die this way… you’ll just have to deal with a massive hangover, tomorrow morning…”

He gulped down the umpteenth glass of whisky and beamed, “Maybe, if I woo Death convincingly enough, it will answer my prayers, in the end…” Then, dropping his playful tone, he asserted, «Man fears death and yet, at the same time, man is drawn to death. Death is endlessly consumed by man in cities and in literature. It is a singular event in one’s life that none may reverse. That is what I desire.»»

His friend looked at him intently, studying him for some moments, before stating, quietly, “Yeah, but… precisely because death is a singular event in one’s life, something irreversible and not repeatable, dying a senseless death is... wasteful.”

He looked back at Oda, tilting his head slightly while pondering his words attentively and then questioned, “So… you’re saying that I should find a reason to die?”

Oda smiled, maybe a little bit sadly, and replied, “That would be something...” Then, gazing at him with utterly sincere eyes, he continued, “Dazai… looking for something worth dying for it’s easier than finding something worth living for... and, in the end, it might even be the same thing...”

As always, Odasaku could read him better than anyone else, and this marvelled him, no matter how many times this had already happened. He swirled the whisky in his glass languidly, observing the circles created by the amber liquid slowly dissolving into nothingness. Shrugging apathetically, he conceded, “You may be right... but still...” His tone dropped to a barely audible murmur, «Anything I would never want to lose will be lost. It is given that everything that is worth wanting will be lost the moment I obtain it. There’s nothing worth pursuing at the cost of prolonging a life of suffering.»»
Shaking his head one more time, Oda responded patiently, “You do know why you lose things the moment you obtain them? 'cause that’s also the moment you stop feeling that compelling desire to fight that push you forward. For a brief moment, you feel fulfilled, but what follows is just void, 'cause you feel like you have no more purpose in life. The result is that, once you obtain something, you immediately lose interest in it and you spiral helplessly down towards the bottom of the abyss once again. Still… there are things that will never be truly yours… there are things that you’re gonna chase after your entire life… there are things that are worth fighting for endlessly just to find a way of holding them tightly in your hands.”

He mulled over those words for quite some time, searching for a flaw, but he did find none.

Right… Flawless… Odasaku, you’re really flawless…

Lifting his head to stare at his friend, he asked, quietly, “Did you find such things?”

The fond smile that spread onto Oda’s lips was an answer in itself. A warm light danced in his eyes, while he was undoubtedly thinking about the five children that he had adopted, who were waiting for him at home. Anyway, nodding slightly, he answered, “Yeah, I did.”

He acknowledged his friend’s response with a crooked grin, but a tired exhale left his lips when he stated, “Still… there’s nothing like that for me, in this world…”

Patting his beck gently, Oda raised a brow, sceptical, and asserted, “Are you sure?” Then he stood up and took his leave, waving at him dismissively, “Go home, Dazai…”

He remained sat for some minutes more, sipping slowly his last whisky, a whole life of nothingness replaying into his head while he was searching for a small opening to escape his void.

If he found one, he didn’t recognize it: he hadn’t opened his eyes, not yet.

Odasaku… you’re the one who has come the closest to understand me… When my mental stability wavers, when the abyss of my own madness beckon me, your presence is like a beacon which helps me following the narrow path that twists and turns between the unbearable void and the unrestrained mayhem of feelings that wrecks my insides each time I…

Right. It was late. Really late. He should go home… but he wasn’t sure he could. Not yet.

…

The apartment was dark and silent when he opened the door. Not that he was expecting anything different: it was almost dawn, since he had wandered aimlessly all night long, purposefully doing everything he could to avoid coming back home in time to celebrate his birthday with his partner.

Chuuya hadn’t called him, nor had sent him any message – asking where the hell he was… Chuuya never did anything like that, never showed that he cared… yet, he knew, without a doubt, that the redhead had been waiting for him.

Mmn… I’m positive the hat-rack is mad as hell…

After all, that was exactly his purpose: failing him once again, so that Chuuya could do nothing but hating him the more and more. He absolutely had to destroy whatever incomprehensible bond was linking the two of them, so he was being an asshole any chance he got.

When he strolled towards the kitchen to get a glass of water, he saw a bottle placed on the counter. Curious, he grabbed it, to give a closer look. It was a bottle of whisky. Empty. When he read the
label, his heart broke into a million pieces.

‘Peat’s Beast’.

The first whisky the two of them drank together, almost three years ago.

The one of their first toast, “for a new beginning”, that day in which Mori had killed the previous Boss and had become the new Boss of Yokohama Port Mafia.

The whisky they got wasted on the night they shared a bed for the first time, just sleeping back to back.

Three years ago. They had laughed and bickered. It looked like a whole life ago. Things had changed so much that he didn’t even know where to start putting the pieces together so that he could try to understand something about what they had become.

I guess... Chuuya bought this one to celebrate whit me... and when I didn’t come back home, he chugged the whole bottle in spite...

Idiot...

Now he’s probably dead drunk...

Big idiot...

He squeezed the bottle so tightly in his hand that he almost broke it. He couldn’t understand why he was feeling so bad...

That was what I wanted, after all... That is what I want...

Maybe. Or maybe not.

Hurting him is what I do best...

It had to be like that. It couldn’t be different. Or could it be?

Hate me... hate me, please... I don’t deserve you...

With his heart aching so intensely that he could barely breathe, he glanced at the couch first, considering to slump onto it and just try to sleep it off as he was used to do long ago, in a time that seemed so far away. Then his gaze fell on the closed door of his room, a room with a bed that he hadn’t used anymore over the last year, because it didn’t matter how harshly they fought during the day: at night, they always ended up sharing the same bed, in a way or another.

A couple of idiots.

Slowly, he headed towards Chuuya’s room, their room as of now, tossing his clothes on the floor while walking, opening the door noiselessly, laying on the bed at his partner’s side as gingerly as possible, taking in the unmistakable scent of Chuuya’s skin mingled with the pungent smell of whisky, stretching his arms to pull Chuuya close in his embrace.

I’m a complete idiot.

Half-asleep, half-drunk, the redhead protested weakly, “What’s it...”

Brushing his hair soothingly, he murmured, “Sleep Chibi...”
Suddenly realizing what was going on the moment he heard his voice, Chuuya struggled to free himself from the arms holding him and pushing him back quite harshly, grumbled, “What the fuck do you want?”

He studied intently for some moments his partner’s wide eyes, astounding even when reddened from too much alcohol and lack of proper sleep, fired up with a rage so fierce that could burn the iciest heart, and replied, voice flat, “My birthday present.”

Chuuya’s body was shaken by a jolt of wild anger when he bit back, almost shouting, “Go fuck yourself bastard! It’s not even your birthday anymore, it’s fucking late!”

Chuuya… you’re a creature made of pure instincts… always so passionate, unrelenting, devastating… you burn so bright, both in light and darkness, in bliss and despair, you tear my chest open and fill it with so many emotions that I don’t even know where to start sorting them out.

Drowning his feelings in an ocean of pure nothingness one more time, he demanded, unyielding, “Still… I want a sip of what is mine.” Then, he darted a hand forward, clenched tightly the redhead curls on the back of his head and dragged him close, clashing their lips in a rough kiss, forcing his way into his partner’s mouth with tongue and teeth.

For endless moments, Chuuya froze, unable to react, completely taken aback.

Then, he felt the sharp bite of cold metal pressing against his jugular, just above the edge of his bandages. Somehow, Chuuya had managed to reach for his dagger and was holding it to his throat. He didn’t budge an inch. Chuuya neither.

The redhead roared, straight into his mouth, “Let-go-off-me.”

He smirked onto Chuuya’s lips and breathed, “Or you’ll do what, exactly?”

“I’ll slice your throat.” Not a moment’s hesitation.

Still… he leant forward further, pressing his neck against the sharp blade until some drops of blood start pouring from a shallow cut and mocked, “Do that.”

Chuuya didn’t move an inch, neither reducing nor increasing the pressure of the hand holding the dagger and whispered, in a chilling tone, “I’d rather not. It would be a fucking mess having to justify the murder of a damn Port Mafia Executive.”

He laughed, the blade grazing his skin at each tremor of his throat, “I don’t see the problem: you could just take my place, then.”

Chuuya’s answer was trenchant, “The mere thought makes me sick.”

Whit a brisk movement, he grabbed the hand that was holding the dagger, his fingers closing on Chuuya’s, forcing him to sink the blade further into his flesh. Chuuya’s fist resisted the push firmly.

Smirking smugly, he teased, “See Chibi… the real problem is that you can’t bring yourself to kill me…”

Chuuya yanked his arm back harshly and spat, furiously, “Go die somewhere else, bastard.” Then he turned his back to him and laid down on the bed once again.

He remained silent and still, observing the rising and falling of his partner’s shoulders until his breath became even and deep. Then he lied beside him, pulled him close, surrounding him in a warm
embrace once more and buried his nose in the crook of his neck, breathing in deeply his intoxicating scent.

Finally, he fell asleep, with a litany playing again and again in his mind, endlessly…

*I'm sorry Chuuya... I'm sorry... I'm sorry...*

**Mori**

“Elise-chan, please, don’t draw on those financial reports… I still need to analyse them…”

“Rintarou, you dork! You promised you’d buy me a new sketch pad, but you still haven’t! So I’m going to draw wherever I want until I get it!”

“Oh my, Elise-chan… I’ve been busy in the last few days… but if you give me those reports back, I promise that…”

“Words, words, words! You never keep your promises! And, in any case, those are just useless figures, I don’t see why you do have to analyse them! My drawings are much more interesting!”

Indeed, Elise wasn’t completely wrong: he didn’t really need to examine the results of the latest transactions, he already knew that they were beyond expectations. The Port Mafia’s profits had been increasing considerably since he had become Boss three years ago and the growth in the last year had been almost exponential. And more than half of those incomes were the result of Dazai’s operations.

*My Demon Prodigy has really grown up.*

Still…

“Rintarouuuu!!! At least, are you listening to me? You were making that stupid face once again!”

The *melodious* sound of Elise’s voice cut through his thoughts like a sharp blade, “My dear, there’s no need to make a fuss, I’m here… What is this time?”

Elise pouted and shoved under his nose an awkward drawings, whining loudly, “Look at it! Isn’t it beautiful?”

To be honest, it took him a few moments to decipher the picture, but finally he got it. “Ohh… I see… This is Double Black, isn’t it?” Well… if it weren’t for the odd strips covering up one of the two figures like a mummy and for the excessively big hat hanging over the head of the other, he wasn’t sure he could have been able to figure it out at all… And that would have been a complete disaster.

Elise trilled excited, “Sure, it is! Isn’t it amazing?”

He smiled, sharply, “Yes… it is…”

Double Black is really amazing… When working together, Dazai and Chuuya are overwhelming. No adversary has been able to oppose them until now. They have annihilated uncountable enemies, they have subdued countless rival organizations, they have successfully fulfilled a myriad of missions. As I predicted long ago, they are the most powerful Duo the Port Mafia has ever seen in its history.
Going into a sulk, Elise started throwing a tantrum, “Uff, Rintarou, I’m getting deadly bored! I want an ice-cream and I want it now!”

How was it possible to say “no” to Elise, when she was making that adorable face?

“Okay, okay… I’m coming… Just go to get your coat, I’m waiting for you here.”

“Finally! It’ll only take a second!”

When Elise run out of the room, his thoughts retraced the path that they were following before the interruption. He propped his chin on his folded hands, pensive.

You’re not ready, not yet. If you’d get to rule over the Port Mafia just the way you are now, you’ll lead it to its ruin. You still have much to learn.

Back then, fate willed that it was me giving you your greatest strength and your greatest weakness, but finding the balance was up to you. And you didn’t make it yet, because, I guess… you can’t find it until you’re here.

You have immense potential, you’re the brightest mind I have ever seen… but you have to realize you real strength on you own: if you remain here, you’ll become nothing more than a monster, even worse than the previous Boss.

I can’t let you go on like this for much longer, so… the time for you to leave the Port Mafia is approaching. I’m confident the events that I’ve already set in motion will lead you towards the “right path”. I’m curious to see what you’ll become, I’m curious to see if what I predicted long ago will come true...

You need to complete your personal growth and become what you’re meant to be, and when that day finally come, I have no doubt… you’ll came back to claim what’s rightfully yours.

It won’t be easy without my right-hand man, however I have to do what’s best for Yokohama Port Mafia… and even if you’re one of its most valuable resources, right now Port Mafia it’s better off without you.

I’ll wait for your return, Dazai-kun.

“Rintarouuuu!!! I’m ready! Hurry up!”

“Right, right, here I am!”

*** Oda ***

“Tell me Dazai, why do you wear that bandage covering up you right eye? You’re not injured, are you?”
Smirking at his bespectacled friend, Dazai taunted, “Oh my Ango! Is it not obvious? It’s just to kill the boredom!”

Ango stared at him, sceptical, “I’m not really sure I wanna know it, but still… What do you mean?”

“Well… Truth is that I’m too talented and so, in order to give my enemies some sort of advantage, I decided to confront them one-eyed, just to keep things a little more interesting…”

Their common friend sounded even more sceptical, but decided to play along, “And does that work…?”

“Umpf… unfortunately, I didn’t manage to get any stimulating confrontation… Maybe, next time I should just take the field completely blinded…”

Shaking his head, resigned, Ango scolded, “Mpf… Dazai, you’re a crazy man!”

I barged in, stating, “Dazai… for how much I have to admit that that sounds like you, in all honesty I don’t think that’s the truth…”

Dazai was sniggering playfully, “All right, all right… Odasaku, you got me! Indeed, it’s exactly the opposite!”

Ango looked almost frustrated while asking, “So, is it really just an act? You’re devious, Dazai!”

“Yeah, whatever you say, Ango! However, keeping my right eye bandaged makes my enemies suppose that’s my weak spot… and so, they have a tendency to attack me on my right side. Like this, it’s just easier to predict their moves!”

“If it’s so, why don’t you go on a mission with one arm in a cast, hiding a weapon inside it? It’d be a great move…”

Dazai beamed brightly, “Oh my, Ango! You know, this is a really good idea! I’m gonna try that immediately, as I’m going to work right now!” Then he stood up, waving dramatically while sauntering towards the exit.

Ango murmured a defeated ‘foolish’ under his breath and went on sipping his drink thoughtfully.

I stood up in turn and tailed Dazai outside.

There was just one more thing that I wanted to say to him. It wouldn’t have been easy, yet… I had to. Because he was lying, to the world, to himself, and I wasn’t even sure he was aware of it.

So, I reached him and called his name.

“Dazai…”

He stopped a few feet away and turned back to glance at me, slightly puzzled, “Mmmn?”

I tried to smile, but maybe I didn’t get to do it very convincingly and just said, “One day, you’ll be able to look at this world with both your eyes wide open.”

A sharp glint of pure astonishment crossed his uncovered eye for a fleeting moment.

He knew then.

He understood, beyond any doubt, what I was speaking about.
He knew that he was just refusing to see the truth, probably to make his life more tolerable.

I was well aware that living a whole existence in a world made of darkness, emptiness and loneliness was all but easy. I had long since figured out that his mind was able to comprehend this world too deeply for his heart to stand it. But still… deny the truth was not a solution.

He could open his eyes on a better world, he should do that, sooner or later. I believed in him.

After few moments, Dazai nodded quietly, acknowledging my words with a simple “I hope you’re right” before vanishing in the shadows of the night.

…

Somehow, I could understand his loneliness, I could see through his façade of dullness, detachment, carelessness. I could see the child struggling to reach, to belong, to *exist*. He was too brilliant to be able to find happiness, relief or peace; what he was able to feel was so intense and unbearable that he could do nothing but try desperately not to feel at all.

We were friends, but still… I had never dared to interfere with his *privacy*. I regretted this. I thought I should. Because he was relentlessly sinking the more and more into an abyss of darkness. Because he was drowning himself helplessly in an ocean of desperation. Because he was losing his mind, unable to deal with feelings so overwhelming that were inexorably killing him.

All of that was just too much for him to bear. He absolutely had to find a compromise with his inner demons.

*Dazai... you need to learn... how to live, how to feel, how to love. Or else, you'll wander in darkness until it will devour completely your soul.*

*You've got to find yourself before you can find your reason for living. And as it stands right now... you won't find anything here, 'cause you're just going through life blinded by your own choice.*

*Leave everything behind, start anew, become a better man. Open your eyes. It will do you good.*

... and maybe one day... if you're meant to be together, you will be reunited. As things stand now, you're doing nothing more than hurting each other. This is not your time, nor your place...*

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* * * Chuuya * * *

“Mmmn, Hat-rack, what’s up with that face? Don’t tell me that someone dared to steal your precious hat...”

When he entered the apartment, the bastard was smirking at him, comfortably sprawled on the couch, just reading a stupid book. In other words, he was wasting time, as usual.

Scowling at him, he responded, flatly, “Ohi, good-for-nothing... Your bandages have finally blinded you? Don’t you see that I’m wearing *my hat on my head* right now?”

Dazai’s shit-eating grin only widened while he replied, innocently, “Oooh... really? I’m sorry, you’re just so short that I don’t get to see your head past the back of the couch...”

An angry protest was rising from the bottom of his guts, but he shut it down: he hadn’t time for petty
bickering right now. So, he just ignored the bastard and stomped into the bedroom.

But a loud holler reached him from the living room, “Chiibii… if you were so eager to get into bed, you could have just say so…”

“Shut the hell up!”

“Chiibii… do you wanna me to put my mouth to a better use?”

*Oh my God… the bastard even seems to be in a good mood… this means that I’ll never hear the end of it!*

“Yeah, just swallow that stupid book of yours and choke on it!”

Fortunately, the annoying voice shushed for some moments. Sighing relieved, he went on picking up his clothes from the closet and putting them in a bag.

“Chibi…” The voice was really close now: indeed, Dazai was standing behind his back, even if he hadn’t even heard him approaching.

*Sneaky bastard…*

“What?”

“What are you doing?”

“What do you think I’m doing?”

“I can see what you’re doing, but why?”

“Why do you think I’m doing what I’m doing?”

“Chuuuya…” Dazai’s voice had lost any playfulness.

He turned to stare at his partner and uttered, quietly, “I’m packing. The Boss ordered me to go on a mission in Europe. The Port Mafia has to finalize several deals with organizations based in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and England and so, as I can speak more than one foreign language, Mori’s sending me in.”

“How long are you going for?”

“Umpf… at least three months, I guess…”

“When are you leaving?”

“Tomorrow morning.”

“Such a short notice.”

He shrugged, unconcerned, “The Boss leads, I follow. Besides, it’s a quite important mission, I’m honoured Mori-san entrusted me with it.”

“I see…”

Dazai’s voice was a barely audible whisper and his face was paler than a ghost. The brunet turned away abruptly, leaving the bedroom without adding anything else.
He was slightly taken aback by his partner’s sudden change in mood, but he didn’t give it much thought: guessing what sort of insane idea was crossing the bastard’s mind was beyond him, now and always.

Anyway, Dazai stayed oddly quiet and silent in the other room for as long as he finished the preparing for his long-lasting mission and took a shower.

The moment he entered the living room, the brunet’s gaze pierced through his skull so intensely that he felt almost paralyzed.

W-what now?

He remained completely still, just breathing deeply in an effort to keep his head from spinning while Dazai’s eyes were following the path of each droplet dripping from his wet hair, slowly trailing down his temples, his cheeks, his neck, damping the shirt that was sticking to his chest.

When he found in himself the strength to murmur “Dazai…”, his partner seemed to awaken from his trance, got off the couch briskly, almost jumped towards him, clenched his wrist gently but firmly and led him into the bedroom.

The brunet urged him to lay on the bed, face up, straddled him and leant forward, burying his face in the crook of his neck, his fingers entangled in his curls, their chests pressed together tightly.

Their hearts started beating in unison, as if they were one.

His mind was completely blank, unable to form a single coherent thought, while his body was melting in that warmth. Once again, everything was different from what it used to be. Once again, his partner wasn’t saying a sole word to explain what was going on.

Lost in that odd intimacy, he raised a hand to brush the brunet’s hair softly and murmured, “Dazai… what’s up?”

Just a muffled hum replied to his question.

He closed his eyes, his fingers still running through Dazai’s locks soothingly and waited, he didn’t know for how long. His partner’s breath was hot and wet on his skin, the beating of his heart a comforting lullaby, the quiet raising and falling of his chest a sweet cradle. He fell asleep, maybe for few minutes, maybe for an hour, maybe for a whole life… but when he reawakened, his partner was keeping him tightly in his arms, his fingertips tracing invisible paths alongside any line, any curve, any inch of his body, as if to map him, as if to commit him to memory.

Dazai… what is this? Another of your foolish game?

He blinked twice, to clear his vision a little and then tried a tentative, “Dazai, please… what’s up?”

Once again, no words of sense replied to his question.

So, he had no choice but to play his last card, something that had never failed him before. This way, he was sure he’d get an answer, probably not the truth, maybe not something to his liking, but an answer anyway.

Inhaling sharply, he braced himself to cope with whatever shitty reply he might get and asked again, in a quiet whisper, “Osamu… what’s the matter?”

The brunet lifted his head just enough to lock their gazes and stared at him with eyes so bright, so
sincere, that his heart clenched painfully and then cracked open, spreading an overflowing warmth throughout all his body.

“Chuuya… can you smile for me?”

He was astounded.

W-what… what’s with this odd request now?

He shook his head, mouth agape, but still… he couldn’t stop a soft smile from curling up his lips, beautifully.

“Dazai, I swear, I don’t understand what you’re up to…”

The brunet’s thumb felt for his lower lip and stroked it gently, almost absent-mindedly, while his voice sounded muffled when he spoke, as if coming from a distant dream.

“Chuuya… I want to make love with you.”

… … …

Ah.

Wait.

No.

… … …

No. He wasn’t ready to hear those words. There was no way for him to be ready to hear those words. Those were the most heart-warming words he had ever heard. Those were the most heart-breaking words he had ever heard.

… … …

No…

… … …

The hair froze into his lungs.

… … … breathe… just breathe… … …

The heart burnt into his chest.

… … … beat… just beat… … …

His sanity dissolved into nothingness.

… … … think… just think… … …

No…

… … …

This is a game… this is nothing more than another game… We have sex… We don’t make love… I…
But he didn’t get to say a word. Because Dazai’s mouth was on his, so soft, so warm and he didn’t want anything else, anything more.

He parted his lips and let him deepen the kiss, stretched his right hand to reach the brunet’s nape and pulled him even closer, pressed his body tightly against his, giving himself completely, yearning for more of him.

He lost himself in Dazai’s eyes, in his touch, in his kisses, in his scent, in his flavour.

He lost himself and wished he might never come back.

And when *his partner* came inside him, possessing him completely, when an overwhelming pleasure crushed their bodies, making their souls, their hearts and their minds melt, for one night, for just one night, two became one.

…

The morning after, when he woke up, he was alone.

The left side of the bed was empty: all that was left of Dazai was his scent, even the warmth of his body had long since faded away.

He tried not to think.

He failed.

*So… after all, that was nothing more than another game, wasn’t it?*

His heart was screaming.

He didn’t listen.

*Shit… I have to admit that you played it well… but I’ll pay you back, rest assured…*

He got ready to go out, grabbed his bag and headed towards the airport.

*Fuck off, asshole…*

*Whatever, I don’t give a shit…*

*I don’t even know what I was thinking…*

That night meant nothing. It had been nothing more than another one of their typical, senseless, fighting. Nothing more…

*Nothing more…*

*I hate you, bastard…*

*I hate you, Dazai.*

He repeated that mantra in his head, trying to convince himself, smothering any feeling in anger, stifling any emotion in hatred. And so he went on, piling lies on top of other lies, denials on top of other denials, until he almost believed them.
So…
… this was the result of the disgraceful plan orchestrated by Mori to obtain the “Ability Business Permit”.
… the plan that had started two years before, when Mori set things in motion in order to bring Mimic to Yokohama.
… the plan that forced the Government to take action and ask for Port Mafia’s intervention to deal with the conflict.
… this was how everything ended.

His friendship with Ango.
The lives of five children.
Oda’s principle of not killing.
Oda’s life.
His Port Mafia’s days.
So now…
… he was there, on his knees, with his sole friend dying in his arms.

«“Nothing is worth prolonging a painful life to pursue …”»
… he was there, his old life fading away alongside Oda’s last breaths.

«“Wake me up from this rotten world of a dream…”»
… he was there, listening to his friend’s final words.

«“Dazai… You once said that “If you immerse yourself in a world of violence and blood, perhaps you would be able to find a reason to live on.””»

A reason… Something worth living for… Something worth dying for…

«“You won’t find it. You must know that already. Whether you’re on the side who kills people or the side who saves people, nothing beyond what you would expect will appear. There is no place in this world that can fill your loneliness. You will linger in the darkness forever.”»

Odasaku… I know that, wherever I go, I’ll bring my loneliness with me… ‘cause it’s inside me… I know that no miracles can save me from the abyss of nothingness that’s lying in the innermost depths of my soul… I know that, no matter how hard I try, I’m not able to hold things close to my heart… And you can see it, ‘cause you’ve reached so close to my heart… So please, please… tell me…
««Odasaku… I… What should I do?»»

««Go to the side that saves people! If both sides are the same, become a good man. Save the weak, and protect the orphans. Neither good nor evil means much to you, I know... but that'd make you at least a little bit better. »»

Leaving everything behind… starting anew… becoming a better man…

Oda’s hand teared off the bandages covering his right eye.

Opening my eyes… my two eyes… letting both Darkness and Light in…

Maybe, finally I’ll be able to see…

Maybe, finally, I’ll be able to live…

Maybe, finally, I'll be able to love…

Looking at Oda’s eyes, he saw nothing but the truth. His friend, his sole friend, was showing him the path he once walked, was holding his hand to lead him into a new life, was giving him a reason…

Odasaku… I trust you… I’ll fulfil your last wish…

The dying sun was bathing the room in the warmth of gold and orange hues while he was beholding the light fading away from Oda’s eyes and a freezing grip was clawing at his heart.

Why this hurts… why this hurts so much…

His heart was bleeding the tears that his eyes weren’t able to shed. His lips moved to form silent words, which accompanied Odasaku on his last journey.

“Farewell, my friend…”

…

The time to leave Yokohama Port Mafia has come.

And now, thanks to Oda, I have a place to go…

The side that saves people… it’s not your side…

But the side that saves people… it’s the side that saves you as well…

Because without me, you won’t be able to unleash Corruption anymore…

You promised…

You’ll better off without me… you don’t need me anymore… you never needed me…

Now, everyone can see what you’re worth…

It’s for the best…

Yes… it’s for the best…

So…
Farewell, partner…

* * * Chuuya * * *

It took him three and a half months to complete his mission in Europe, but he was fairly satisfied with it. He had managed to establish quite a few favourable relationships with powerful organizations based in various countries and he had concluded important negotiations that could undoubtedly benefit Yokohama Port Mafia.

Moreover, he had the occasion to taste plenty of fine wines and he had even bought some bottles for his collection.

Fuck… it was worth it, definitely!

So, he was finally coming back home.

…

No word whatsoever from the bastard in three and a half months, but he expected nothing less.

…

When he landed, a car was waiting for him outside the airport.

Mmnn… this is unexpected…

A curious guy, with spiky hazelnut hair and an odd bandage crossing the bridge of his nose, welcomed him, bowing respectfully while saying, “Nakahara-san, I’m here to escort you. Mori-san asks you to report immediately.”

Mmnn… this is even more unusual… after long-lasting mission, unless it’s urgent, the Boss habitually grants at least 24 hours to rest and have the reports ready… Mpf, whatever…

“Fine then, let’s go.”

The guy opened the back door of the car for him and then sat in the driver’s seat.

Making himself comfortable for the 40 minutes ride, he asked, “So… you’re a new Port Mafia’s member?”

“Yes, Nakahara-san. I joined in only two weeks ago.”

“I see…”

He’s a newbie… so, asking this guy whatever information about the latest it’s useless…

“And what’s your name?”

“I’m Tachihara Michizou.”

“Well. Please to meet you, Tachihara-kun.”

…
Once arrived at the Headquarter, he had instantly the impression that the atmosphere was quite odd. Well, not that usually it was a holiday camp, but still… there was an awkward tension in the air, so he almost rushed to reach the Boss’ office, while a bad feeling was sneaking under his skin.

He knocked on the huge mahogany doors and announced, “Mori-san. It’s Chuuya. I’m coming him…”

When he entered the room, Mori was sitting at his desk, his pale face devoid of any expression, his eyes burning as embers, unfathomable.

But what froze the blood running through his veins, was seeing Kouyou there, as well…

Ane-san… why are you here? What’s happening?

She was seated on the couch in front of Mori’s desk, her composed posture was radiating dignity, as always… but her features… her beautiful features seemed to be crumpled in grief.

He gaped and muttered, hesitant, “Kouyou-ane-san…?”

Mori cleared his throat, calling his attention and then greeted him, “Chuuya-kun, welcome back! I’m really satisfied with the results of your long-lasting mission… you did very well.”

He tried to keep his gaze fixed on his Boss, but he couldn’t avoid to squint concerned at Kouyou while replying, “Thank you, Mori-san, you honour me. Concerning my report, I…”

The Boss cut him off briskly, “It’s not for your report that I called you here.”

Damn… like I thought, something is off… it must be serious, if they summoned me so hastily…

Swallowing nervously, he strived to keep his voice even when asking, “So… what’s the matter, Boss?”

Mori stared at him intently and his red eyes pierced through his skull sharply, but his tone was almost concerned the moment he responded, “Dazai-kun deserted two weeks ago, while he was on a mission with Akutagawa-kun. We’ve heard nothing from him since.”

W-what?

He felt the earth cracking open under his feet and swallowing him entirely. His heart stopped beating, his lungs stopped breathing, his mind started screaming.

D-Dazai…? Why? Fuck! Fuck… damned shitty bastard… why???

His mind was spinning wildly, an unbearable pain was shattering harshly any cell of his body, a violent trembling was rising from the bottom of his guts, tearing apart his whole being.

He left the Port Mafia… he left me behind…

Still… he couldn’t afford to make a scene, not here, not now, nor ever. He wasn’t a snotty brat crying out for his mother… He was Nakahara Chuuya, of Yokohama Port Mafia. This wouldn’t break him, he could deal with it… he could get through it… he had to.

Forcing his devastating anguish deep into the recess of his mind to face it later, he steadied the best he could, took a long breath and declared, coldly, “I see… What a fucking idiot…”

Kouyou’s soft voice came from his back, asking concerned, “Lad… are you fine?”
He turned back to look at her and replied, smiling quietly, “Yes, Ane-san, I’m fine. To be honest, I’m quite surprised, even if I have to admit that guessing what sort of crazy idea was crossing the bastard’s mind has never been my thing.”

Her lips contorted in a sad smile while she whispered, sweetly, “Are you sure?”

Nodding slowly, he answered, reassuringly, “I’m sure, Ane-san. You don’t need to be concerned.”

Then he addressed his Boss once again, “Mori-san, if that’s all, I’m taking my leave. I’ve got some business to attend to before going home, and I have to admit that I’m a little tired…”

Mori’s attentive eyes considered him thoroughly for a few moments more, before dismissing him, “Of course, Chuuya-kun, you’re free to go. Take your time with the report, I’ll see you in two days.”

…

When he left his Boss’ office, he went looking for Hirotsu.

The older man was in the training room, supervising the workout of some recruits.

The moment Hirotsu spotted him, his eyes widened in surprise and a sorrowful glint cut across them fleetingly. But his voice was convivial when he greeted him, “Chuuya, it’s nice to see you back.”

Whit a brief nod, he greeted back, “I’m glad to see you, Hirotsu. You look good.” Then he continued, “How’s the training going?”

“I must say that I’m quite satisfied. The new recruits are very promising, they’re working well.”

“I see… it looks like there are a lot of newbies, huh?”

Hirotsu hesitated for a brief moment before replying, “Well, yes… we had to recruit quite a few new members to replace the men lost against Mimic…” His voice had dropped to a barely audible murmur.

Mimic… undoubtedly, it has to do with Dazai’s defection… right now, it’s better not going into that…

A harsh grip clenched his heart even if he changed topic, briskly, “Mmm, so I guess… that Tachihara guy is one of yours, isn’t he?”

With a small smile, Hirotsu replied, “Yeah, he is… he’s a little cocky, but I’m sure he can become a valuable member, with a thorough training…”

“Well… so, we should discuss about the training schedule…”

…

Once done with Hirotsu, he went looking for Gin.

The tiny girl was a natural born assassin and possessed amazing physical skills: she was sneaky, incredibly agile and stealthy. She was getting stronger with each passing day and he was very proud of her.

“Gin-chan! How’re you doing?” He smiled at her, brightly.

The little girl just nodded: she never spoke that much…
Once he was certain she was fine, he congratulated on her improvements and then asked her if she knew where to find her brother.

*I’m worried that Dazai’s betrayal shocked him deeply… And even if he never admit it, he might need a little support…*

Unfortunately, Akutagawa was nowhere to be found right now. So, he gave up, for the time being and finally made his way home.

…

The moment he entered his apartment, he fell to his knees, bent over, with his arms wrapped tightly around his chest that was exploding, his forehead pressed harshly against the cold floor.

He was gasping sharply, unable to breathe anymore, his head was hurting like crazy as if it were splitting in half, his heart was beating a million miles a minute, shaking his whole body violently.

Alone, in the apartment he wouldn’t have shared with him anymore, he spoke aloud to a partner who wasn’t there, to a partner who would have been by his side never more.

His voice was hoarse and broken when it left his throat, as if coming from a nightmarish hell, “So… you already knew, back then… you had already planned all of this… That night… that last night was a farewell…”

Forcing the air to fill his lungs, he let out a pained wheeze and slurred, “Damn… I’m feeling sick, I wanna puke… This hurts… why this hurts so much… This hurts more than Corruption…”

He bit his lower lips harshly, drawing blood, his fingernails dug deeply into his own flesh, clawing at his skin.

He shouted.

“Fucking bastard! I hate you! I hate you… I… I wanna fall asleep and never wake up again…”

The sharp intake he took burnt his lungs as liquid fire while he was struggling to fight against the overwhelming pain that was devouring his soul and sinking him in a bottomless gorge of despair.

“I’m dead tired of fighting… why… why should I go on? I have no reason… I’m alone, again…”

Nevertheless, he was wrong. He wasn’t alone. He had never been alone, since the day he was born.

*Corruption* growled inside him, spreading its tendrils throughout his wrecked body, enveloping him in a merciful oblivion, lulling him with a soothing chant, beckoning him, luring him with the promise of a forgiving nonexistence.

An insane idea cut its way into his shattered brain, sneaking slyly into the lacerations of his wavering resolve…

“Tell me, Dazai… why… why should I keep my promise, now? Who the hell cares at this point? Does it matter, anyway? If *Corruption* it’s the only being that has always been by my side, this means that *Corruption* will have me, in the end…”

He raised his head. His eyes were combusting with a feverish madness, the blue of his irises was swallowed by an ominous cloud of darkness, his pupils were restricted to infinitesimal pinpricks of absolute naught.
His voice was disturbing when he pronounced, unyielding:

“Oh, Grantors of dark disgrace,

Do not wake me...”

A deafening blast broke through the air, cutting abruptly his cursed chant.

Coming to his senses, he breathed deeply, trying to regain control of his mind.

He was shocked, horrified.

What the fuck I was doing?

What the hell has just happened?

He stood up, staggering, and faltered towards the window. He looked outside, incredulous: down there, on the street, his car was burning, completely destroyed.

He didn’t need to think about it very hard to figure out who was the culprit.

A last hideous prick?

The rage surging from the bottom of his guts wiped out his sorrow for a brief moment.

“Damn shitty bastard! You blew up my car! I’ll pay you back, if it’s the last thing I do! You are a disgrace, curse the day I met you, asshole…”

Still…

Somehow, you managed to stop Corruption once again...

Damn controlling, possessive, manipulative bastard... How’s that you’re conditioning my life even now?

I won’t let you hold so much power over me...

Never more...

I hate you… I hate you, bastard...

With slow, tired, steps, he headed towards the wine cabinet, picked up a bottle of Petrus and uncorked it. He drank the wine straight from the bottle, gulping it down angrily. It tasted like ashes, tears and regrets.

“Fine… fine… I’m fine now…”

Liar...

He shook his head, to shoo away the bastard’s voice resonating into his head, in vain. Every memory of him was piercing through his soul like sharp thorns through flimsy paper. He let out a sorrowful sigh and issued his last challenge.

“Okay bastard… I’ll keep my promise, even if I don’t even know why I should… I’m not afraid to die... actually, dying doesn’t even seem such a bad occurrence, you should know this better than anyone else, damn suicidal maniac…” He smiled, sadly, “Still… I won’t unleash Corruption... I’ll
do what I have to do in order to survive… but how to live, it’s my choice…”

He took another sip of wine. It tasted like stolen kisses, sweaty skin, forbidden words.

“Fuck…”

His heart clenched once again: too many memories were storming into his head, bringing up sensations that he wished he could forget as soon as possible, stirring emotions that he tried to smother in hatred, giving voice to feelings that he denied to have ever known.

“Fuck…”

I know… it’s for the best…

You were going mad here… you were slowly but relentlessly sinking into darkness… you were losing yourself… you were dying in front of my eyes…

So… It’s for the best…

I’ll be better off without you… You’ll be better off without me…

Still…

It hurts… it hurts like hell…

Damn… why it’s so hard letting you go…

He squeezed the bottle so tightly in his hands that it broke in million pieces, the glass shards cut open his palms, blood and wine poured on the floor, forming a purple puddle.

“Goddammit…”

Standing once again, he headed towards the bathroom to take a shower. The hot water did nothing to wash away his sorrow, nor his exhaustion. At least, it cleaned off the sweat and the blood.

When he got out, he walked into his bedroom, picked up one of Dazai’s shirt and put it on. He breathed in his scent still lingering on the fabric, and cursed his own foolishness.

I’m a fucking idiot… I can overcome this, I have just to let it go, to let him go… the sooner, the better…

He laid down on the bed, grabbed his pillow and held it close in his arms. It wasn’t nearly as warm as his body, but, even if just a little, it tasted like him.

His voice was harshly broken, almost a sob, when he murmured, “I hate you with all my heart…”

I’ll get through this… I’ll start over new… I’ll do it… Tomorrow…

When he closed his eyes, silent tears run down his face.

He never cried, never… He couldn’t even remember the last time he did it… maybe, it was on the day he was born.

But it didn’t matter, now.

For tonight… just for tonight… let me say farewell to my partner…
He was standing still, pensive, in front of the large glass window that overlooked Yokohama skyline, beholding the breathtaking view of the city he was ruling over.

*Now that everything has gone according to my plans, Yokohama is more and more “Port Mafia’s”…*

Finally, they had managed to obtain the “Ability Business Permit”, with which the Government had, indeed, acknowledged their illegal activities and their right to carry out business as an ability user corporation.

Of course, it hadn’t been free of charge… They had suffered losses, in terms of both men and resources, but the immediate and future benefits vastly offset the damages.

*I did what was best for the whole Organization… I did what I had to do for Port Mafia’s sake…*

Even if it had meant losing his Demon Prodigy.

But that, as well, had long been predicted.

*Moreover… that’s not the only thing I predicted back then…*

A sharp smile cut his face in half, while he took his eyes off the view of the city and went sit at his desk: the peculiar drawing made by Elise a few months before, framed and in plain sight, was placed on top of it.

*Double Black... Right... I lost it as well...*

*Still...*

*His smile widened, confidently.*

*Still... As long as Nakahara Chuuya is here, Dazai Osamu will never really leave Yokohama Port Mafia...*

Chapter End Notes

Well... December is going to be a mess, but I hope I’ll managed to write somehow.

I would like to write one more chapter set “in the past”, ‘cause there are few more things happened in the months following Dazai’s desertion that I would like to “disclose”…

Then, the following chapters will be set “in the present”.
Ecoute, ce qu'il reste de nous, Immobile et debout, Une minute de silence.

Chapter Summary

To a new beginning.

Chapter Notes

The title of this chapter is from the song “La minute de Silence” by Michel Berger (I love very much the cover by Vanessa Paradis).
I couldn’t find any “official translation” of the lyrics, so that’s my try:
Listen, what remains of us,
Still and standing,
A minute’s silence.

I’m sorry for the late update, but I really needed to take my time to write this. Maybe, this chapter is a little bit odd… or, I’d better say, it’s a mess… but there were few things I wanted to get through… So, please, bear with me.
That’s the last chapter set “in the past”: the next chapters will be set “in the present”. I still have to write them, so I guess I’ll update next year.
Thank you for reading so far!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The day after

*** Chuuya ***

That night was endless. He felt like the darkness outside should last forever, while he tossed and turned in a bed of nails, drenched to the bone with his own sweat, so unbearably cold that even his tears seemed to freeze in touch with his skin. He muffled his sobs burying his face in the cushion, his body writhed agonizingly until he had no more strength left, he shouted his pain till his voice was nothing more than a feeble rasp.

Eventually, the sun rose, as it always did in a million years, as it would do again for another million more. When warm slivers of light brushed gently his cheeks, his hair, his neck, he gathered the scattered fragment of his will and opened his eyes, hoping to be able to wake up from that nightmare that was lacerating his whole being unmercifully.

But there was nothing from which he could awaken, because nightmare and reality were one and the same.

Right… I can’t wake up… ‘cause I wasn’t sleeping at all…
Hence, he could do nothing but face the truth. So, he saw it, once again, clearer than ever: the darkness from which he had tried to run away all night long wasn’t outside.

The darkness that would last forever was inside him, deeply rooted into the innermost part of himself. And, as of now, it was a deeper shade: obscurity and void had melted together, carving a black hole where once there was his heart.

He embraced that darkness.

*I am Corruption.*

Seven years spent as a Port Mafia’s member replayed in his mind: here, he had found a home, a family, a place to belong. *His place.* Here, he had grown up, he had got stronger, he had learnt how to use his ability in fighting. *His life.* Here, he had found something else, something that had affected his existence deeply, something he had never been able to figure out… *His partner?*

*Tsk… whatever it was… whatever he was… it’s over now.*

He still had a place; he still had a life. He hadn’t a partner anymore and he would have never had another partner again. He didn’t need it. He didn’t want it. He wasn’t alone, he had never been, because *Corruption* had claimed him since his first breath. *Corruption* was always inside him and so no one else could be at his side.

*No one but him.*

So, probably, that was why this was so painful. Whether he liked it or not, *Dazai* was the only one that could be with him without risking to be blown away by the unrestrained and cursed force that lied inside him. A force that he couldn’t even control… back then, he had already killed his birth parents, he didn’t intend to let this happen again.

*No one close to me will ever be harmed because of me. And if this means that I have to fight alone, well… I’ll do that.*

Sure… that was the reason… the only reason… why he regretted Dazai’s desertion… because with the bastard by his side, at least he didn’t risk to hurt his own family.

*So, now… I’ll fight without Corruption, and not because it can kill me, I’m not afraid to die… but I’m exceedingly dangerous for everyone else.*

*I’ll fight without you… it doesn’t matter. I’ll get stronger, I’ll find another way to protect what I treasure most!*

There wasn’t any more reason… any ulterior motive for his deep suffering… no… there wasn’t… Everything he should do now, was leaving everything else behind and start anew, as he had already done so many times in his too brief life.

*I can do that. I’ll earn my name, I’ll prove my worth… I’ll be Double Black never again… from this moment on, I’ll be only Chuuya Nakahara… that’s the name I chose to claim seven years ago and it’s more than enough. That’s the name by which I’m gonna take my place in this world.*

He stood, resolute, and moved his first step into a new day. The first day of a new phase of his life.

As he didn’t feel like eating, he just made some coffee and started unpacking. He placed the precious new bottles he had bought during his mission abroad into his wine cabinet with the utmost care, while listening some pieces played by Rondò Veneziano: he had discovered their music when he
was in Venice and he had been enamoured of it since then.

After that, he headed unhurriedly towards what once was Dazai’s bedroom – very long ago… ‘cause during the last two years, the bastard hasn’t used it at all… – and opened the door. Inside it, there wasn’t so much left of him: it almost looked like Dazai had been preparing for leaving at any moment, maybe since the very first day the two of them had moved together. He smirked, sarcastically.

So… living with me was really so unbearable? If you’d said that before, I would have put an end to your troubles at once… You know… we’re on the 4th floor… I could have just thrown you and all your trash out of the window…

He wandered the apartment picking up Dazai’s scarce belongings scattered almost everywhere – his stupid books… his silly videogames… his ridiculous clothes… his annoying bandages that pop up wherever I turn… the bastard’s so slobby… fuck, I’m lucky he doesn’t have a lot of stuff, or I’m never gonna finish this! – and stored them tidily in his ex-partner’s bedroom.

Every single thing he was putting away, was a memory set aside.

This disgusting shirt… it’s the one I couldn’t help but borrow from him the first night we spent in that sleazy hotel in Krakow during our mission in Poland, ‘cause my luggage had gone missing at the airport… Asshole… he hadn’t stop making fun of me for hours, ‘cause obviously this was fucking too big on me… the lanky bastard… he never shuts the fuck up…

He should have thrown it all away, but every single thing was a memory he couldn’t erase.

Mpf… “The Metamorphosis” by Kafka… we bought it together in that dusty bookshop in Tokio… and then we went drinking a hot chocolate in a small cafeteria, ‘cause it was snowing and I was freezing to death! When we got out, we had a hell of a snowball fight… well, maybe I cheated a little with my ability, ‘cause at the end Dazai looked like an idiotic snowman… yeah… it was funny back then…

A lonely tear dropped on a picture he was holding with slightly trembling fingers. It was a rare picture of him and Dazai, taken in a bar where the two of them were celebrating after a spectacularly successful mission. That one time, they were both crazy-drunk, dishevelled and flushed and Dazai’s right arm was around his shoulders while they were raising their glasses in the umpteenth toast. They were both smiling brightly.

Was I… happy?

Were you happy all those years?

No… you weren’t… you have never been happy here… a bottomless abyss of sorrow was slowly but relentlessly swallowing you whole… you were agonizingly and inexorably consuming your life before my eyes… and there was nothing, absolutely nothing, I could do for you…

Tsk… I’ve never been able to understand you, to pierce through the countless layers that hide your true self and I don’t even know if I want to… I don’t even know how to begin… All I know is that we are no good for each other, we can never be partners… and more, if you’d stayed any longer, living in such a way would have killed you, so…

So, you did well to leave. Maybe, somewhere else, you’ll be better… I hope you can find happiness, wherever you are.

As for myself, I’ll always, always, hate you, Osamu…
Once done putting away all Dazai’s things, he took one last look at his ex-partner’s bedroom, walked slowly outside it and closed the door firmly behind him, to open it nevermore. At the same time, he took all the memories of their constant bickering, their crazy battles, their mischievous teasing, their passionate kisses, their intimate touches, their foolish words, every moment they’d shared and locked them behind another door, deep inside him, to remember them never again.

He wasn’t so naïve to think that he could avoid to deal with Dazai’s ghost completely: the bastard had been a Port Mafia’s Executive for two years and one of his most valuable members for even longer. So, his name and the remnants of his doing would have echoed throughout Yokohama underworld for a long time to come. Not to mention that he had to take care of the bastard’s loose ends…

_Fuck! He’s a damn pain in my ass even if he’s no more here…_

He coated his heart in hatred, burying in the depths any other emotion he might or might not have felt and the surge of rage that flared up his soul gave him the strength to face the impending issues.

_First of all, I’m gonna buy a new car to replace the one the bastard blew up… and a new bottle of Petrus, in case I got an occasion to celebrate… I can’t celebrate without Petrus, damn!_

So, he started getting ready to go out, repeating the same routine of every day but, abruptly, he came to a halt. Without event thinking about it, his fingers were fastening the choker around his neck. The same choker Dazai gave him about two years before. He remembered that night, quite well... that was the first time the two of them… had sex. And he remembered as well the words Dazai said to him on that occasion…

_“You are mine”… tsk… what a fucking nonsense… How do you think you own me, now?_

However… his fingertips brushed absentmindedly the smooth leather surface of the choker and fiddled with its clasp for some moments. Then, his hands dropped limply by his sides: he knew he should toss that away, but he couldn’t bring himself to take it off… because, well…

_Fuck, I like this thing, I’m gonna keep it!_

Yes, he liked it. That was the sole reason.

Staring at his reflection in the mirror, he stood dead still, for a minute’s silence.

*** Mori ***

_“Kouyou, please, enter and take a seat.”_

The young woman walked towards him with her usual peerless grace, the only sound accompanying her light step was those of silk rustling. Still… if anyone had to mistake her elegance for weakness, well… they would be dead helplessly in the blink of an eye.

Once seated, Kouyou raised her head to look at him, quietly but firmly, and asked, “Boss… why have you called me here?”

Smiling sharply, he replied, “I guess… you already know the reason.”
She grimaced slightly and retorted, “If you were worried that Chuuya might run after Dazai and betray the Mafia in turn, you were wrong… Chuuya’s better than that.”

“No, I never doubted that. I know well that Chuuya-kun is loyal. True Port Mafia’s blood runs through his veins.” He made a purposive pause before adding, “I’m just concerned… How he’s doing?”

Kouyou looked at him with vaguely suspicious eyes and answered, cautiously, “He’s fine… Sure, Dazai’s sudden desertion took him aback and he may need some time to work things out… Nor is this any surprise, everyone here was shocked by Dazai’s betrayal, so…” her violet eyes narrowed indefinitely when she added, “Everyone but you, I suppose…”

Obviously, he didn’t reply to her implied question. Indeed, he asked bluntly, “Do you think Chuuya can do well even without having the possibility to use his ability to its full extent?”

Her gaze darkened dangerously and her words spilled venom when she murmured, lowly, “So… is this your true concern? That you can’t make him unleash Corruption on your own whims anymore?”

Shaking his head slightly, with a cold smile painted onto his thin lips, he teased, “My, my, Kouyou… there’s no need to get defensive… By now, you should know that whatever I do is for Port Mafia’s sake. I’m just trying to evaluate what could be a suitable role for Chuuya-kun, now that not only he hasn’t a partner anymore, but he can’t even count on the overwhelming power of his true ability. Surely, he’s still a valuable asset, however… about his future, a lot depends on how he’s gonna recover from his losses. Actually, it was a severe blow…”

Kouyou’s voice was freezing and irrefutable when she replied, “Before Corruption, before Double Black, Chuuya was already strong and even now, his skills are going on growing more and more with each passing day. His worth is not up for discussion: he’ll get through this and he’ll emerge from all this mess even stronger.”

For some moments, he considered pensive the woman seated in front of him, without saying a word. As expected, she has an unshakable faith in him… still, to be honest, she’s not the only one to take this line: all the relevant Port Mafia’s members I spoke with feel the same way. Mmm… that’s very good… indeed, everyone can appreciate Chuuya-kun’s worth whether or not Dazai’s by his side, everyone gives him the respect he deserves unconditionally… Excellent, I was counting on this…”

Nodding in acknowledgement, he stated, quietly, “If you say so, well… I guess we can do nothing but wait and see. As of now, Port Mafia really needs Chuuya-kun’s strength, I hope he won’t fail to live up to these expectations.”

“I’m sure he won’t fail. However, if you’re so worried about the Port Mafia’s wellbeing now that Dazai’s no longer here, why don’t you convene the executive meeting to appoint someone else to take over the position vacated by him? A new Executive taking care of Dazai’s unfinished business would help a lot in strengthen us.”

“Of course, I’ll have to appoint a new Executive… and indeed, there’s not even need to call a meeting, I already made my choice. However, it’s not the right time yet: for the moment, as I said, I prefer to just wait and see…”

“You’re right, but I’m not going to do that yet: for now, I’ll just keep Dazai’s spot empty. I’m confident there’ll be no problem in dealing with Dazai’s uncompleted tasks.” He paused, staring at Kouyou with unyielding red eyes before adding, in a sickeningly sweet tone, “Considering what you stated before with so much conviction, I have no doubt I’ve not to be concerned about all of this,
otherwise… Am I to assume that, perhaps, you were wrong?”

A burning glint crossed Kouyou’s gaze when she replied, through gritted teeth, “Boss, I assure you that everything will be managed flawlessly.” Then, she stood up firmly and took her leave bowing slightly.

Kouyou, Kouyou… I really need you to bring out the best in Chuuya-kun… and, undoubtedly, if you think that he’s under discussion, you won’t fail in helping him to overcome his losses and making him even stronger, to the advantage of the whole Port Mafia…

**One week after**

*** Chuuya ***

On his way home after a hard day’s work, he was walking in a hurry, deeply lost in thoughts, his mind racing a mile a minute.

Damn, it’s fucking late… and I still have to complete those reports concerning the new group that’s asking to affiliate with the Port Mafia… Umpf… they might have the numbers, but they’re careless and inexperienced… it’s a long shot, we need to assess their trustworthiness carefully…

In the last week, he had done nothing but throw himself into work, so that physical exhaustion - *and a generous amount of alcohol* - could help him to keep his demons at bay.

Seemingly out of nowhere, a familiar voice caught his attention.

“Chuuya-kun! Ohi lad, just stop a minute!”

“Ah… sorry Ane-san… I didn’t see you…”

“Mmm, no wonder, you were rushing around like mad… Lad, come closer, please.”

He took some steps towards his mentor, stopped a few feet away from her and then asked, with a slightly puzzled tone, “What’s the matter? Something’s wrong?”

She closed the remaining distance between the two of them and raised a delicate hand to brush his cheek gently, while murmuring, “Here… you’re so pale. You’ve bags under your eyes… Are you fine?”

He smiled softly, and replied, “You don’t need to worry, I’m fine, I swear.”

“Mnnn… do you even sleep sometimes?”

“To be honest, Ane-san… with all the matters that require my attention right now, it’s not that I have so much time left to rest…”

“I see… still, you need to slow it down, or else you’re gonna collapse sooner or later.”

Violet eyes scanned him thoroughly before she continued speaking, “It also seems you’re losing weight. Do you eat properly?”
Laughing amused, he muttered, “Ane-san, I’m no more a child, I can take care of myself, seriously…”

Snorting unconvinced, she retorted, “It doesn’t really sound like it, though…”

“I promise I’m gonna take some rest as soon as possible… You know, I’ve still got a lot of things to settle: sorting out all the bastard’s loose ends is not that easy, considering that he’s a fucking cryptic genius and going through his work is more difficult than to solve the riddle of the Sphinx…”

Sighing deeply, she replied, “I know, still… unfortunately, you’re the one who knew him better so, if anybody can, you can.”

He couldn’t help a thin veil of sadness covering his eyes when he rejoined, “All things considered, I guess I didn’t know him that well, as I’ve never seen this coming…”

“Chuuya…” Kouyou pulled him in a gentle embrace and trailed her fingers through his red curls soothingly while whispering, “I guess it’s hard… If there’s anything I can do for you, just ask, please.”

For some moments, he did nothing but bask in the warmth of that tender hold: he needed it, more than he wanted to admit. Finally, freeing himself quite reluctantly, he gazed hesitant at his mentor and muttered, “Actually, there’s something I would like to ask you…”

Kouyou looked right back at him and prompted, “Go ahead.”

Without further ado, he inquired, “Ane-san… what happened exactly back then? What is *Mimic*?”

Taking a deep breath, she answered, desolated, “You know well I can’t disclose such information… not even to you…”

He nodded consciously and stated, “And you’re well aware that if anyone has the right to know, it’s me…”

“I agree, but unfortunately even if I wanted to, there’s not so much I can tell you. It was all Mori’s plan and no one else knows the whole truth.”

Averting his gaze to conceal the pain that pronouncing *that name* out loud still caused him, he replied, under his breath, “No one but Dazai, I guess…”

“You’re probably right, indeed the only two people who can answer you are Mori and Dazai… and the former is not so inclined to disclose his plans, to say the least, while the latter is missing…”

Fixing his gaze on his mentor once again, he continued, resolute, “Fine then… but I have no intention to give up until I find the truth. I’ll get to the bottom of it, in a way or another.”

Kouyou sighed deeply once again and murmured, resigned, “I expect no less from you. So, I guess I better give you a hint, before you get into trouble. Still…” Her violet eyes narrowed dangerously when she went on speaking, her voice freezing and inflexible, “Promise me you’ll be careful.”

Nodding solemnly, he asserted, “I promise.”

“Mimic was a gifted criminal organization based in Europe. I don’t know why they came to Yokohama, still, once here, they started stirring up troubles and brought devastation to the whole City. Thus the Government, running out of options about how to stop them, could do nothing but ask the Port Mafia to exterminate them. In return for our help, the Government granted us the Ability
Business Permit, which enables the Port Mafia to operate officially as an ability user corporation.”

He mumbled, pensive, “I see… It’s a big hit, no doubt. However… what it took to obtain it?”

Kouyou shook her head and replied, “I’ve no idea about the body count, but undoubtedly a lot, in terms of both resources and men.”

“Damn… was it worth it? Fuck… I guess I can do nothing but trust Mori’s judgment!”

“Yes… none of us has another choice… so, what are you going to do now?”

A creeping sensation was sneaking under his skin, making his guts twist while he replied, “Mmnn… I wanna assess the damage we suffered, so I suppose I better start finding out how many men lost their lives in the conflict and who those men were. If I recall correctly, there’s a Port Mafia’s member who keeps tracks of the lives of the deceased, I’m gonna speak with him.”

Yeah… and he’s even one of the bastard’s friend so… maybe he knows something… maybe the bastard told him something before leaving…

To be honest, few days before he already tried to contact Dazai’s friends, but they were nowhere to be found and so he supposed they were out on a mission.

“You’re talking about Ango Sakaguchi?”

“Yeah, it’s him.”

“I’m sorry lad… I don’t think you’ll manage to speak with him…”

Looking at her with wide eyes, he asked, concerned, “Don’t tell me he’s dead…?”

Kouyou shook her head slightly and replied, “No, he isn’t. Still… he turned out being a spy for the Special Ability Department.”

He swallowed, dryly, “Fuck…”

So, that’s why I couldn’t get in touch with him… Goddammit… One is gone… where’s the other one? Hell… I doubt Ane-san knows something about him, indeed he’s a low ranking member… but at this point might as well give it a try…

The sense of uneasiness oppressing his entrails grew stronger and his voice trembled too much for his liking when he asked, “W-what about Oda Sakunosuke?”

Kouyou casted at him a quizzical look before responding, “Oda Sakunosuke? Mmm, I’m sorry lad, but I don’t remember the name… He’s someone important?”

He addressed her a tentative smile and shrugged, “No, no, don’t bother, Ane-san, I don’t want to get you involved further. I’ll do my own research.” Then bowing respectfully, he added, “Thank you for everything, I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

She smiled back and placed a soft kiss on his forehead, murmuring quietly, “Don’t mention it”, but her voice was utterly serious when she continued, “Don’t do anything foolish: you know well that Mori is keeping an eye on you and I have no intention to lose you.”

He took her delicate hand in his own and promised, once again “I’ll be careful, Ane-san, you don’t have to worry about me.” Then, brushing her knuckles with a gentle kiss, he whispered, “I’m not going anywhere.”
He did his own research.

In a dusty archive located in one of the most remote building owned by the Port Mafia, he finally found an unidentified list of names. The moment he set his eyes upon it, he recognized beyond any doubt what he was watching. Sadly, the list was fairly long. Tragically, that name was in it.

It was why he was there, in a small cemetery situated on one of the hills overlooking Yokohama’s streets, surrounded by greenery and with a pleasant ocean view, with a bouquet of white chrysanthemums in his hands.

I know I have no right to be here, but still…

There were several graves with no name carved on the white epitaphs; however, it didn’t take long for him to find what he was looking for. He knelt beside one of the graves and placed the bouquet next to a photo of three men smiling serenely while drinking together in a bar.

Maybe, he was happy with you…

At the thought that that blissful moment was forever gone, a deep sorrow clenched his heart.

So… he lost them both…

One of the men had round glasses, another one had bandages wrapped around almost any visible part of his body, the last one, well… the last one was the man resting in peace in that grave, Oda Sakunosuke.

So… that’s why he left…

He never wanted to intrude on Dazai’s personal life, so he never had the occasion to know Oda very well and he regretted it deeply. He must’ve been really a great man, considerate, strong, perceptive.

Oda, I’m sorry… I’m truly sorry… you definitely didn’t deserve to die.

He must’ve been a special person, if he had been so important to Dazai.

I understand why, now that you’re no longer here, he had no more reason to stay.

He must’ve been an amazing friend, if Dazai hold him so dear.

Oda, thank you. Thank you very much for all you’ve done for him in all those years…

He rose, hat in hand, for a minute’s silence.

One month after

*** Chuuya ***

The moment he picked up his phone, a frantic voice started speaking at once, “Nakahara-san, we
“need back up immediately!”

“Tachihara? What’s goin…”

“It’s a fucking hell here! They’re shooting at us from all directions! Gin is down and Akutagawa’s facing them alone!”

His blood run cold: the guys were out on a recon mission, they weren’t supposed to engage any enemy. Still, they sounded like being in bad trouble…

_Goddammit… don’t let it be too late…_

Nevertheless, without further information, he couldn’t even move a step.

“All right Tachihara, get a grip. First of all: where are you?”

“A wrecked warehouse near Mitsubishi Industries! Shit, we’ve been ambushed and I’m out of bullets and…”

The commotion on the background was deafening. Thank God, he knew exactly where to go and he wasn’t even that far from them.

_That’s a fucking bloody mess… but to get them out alive, I need him to stay focused…_

“Okay, I’m on my way, I’ll be there in no time, hang on. How’s Gin? She’s alive?”

“Yeah… she’s passed out when a beam fell from the ceiling and hit her on the head… I guess she has a concussion, but she’s still breathing…”

He was driving at an insane speed. Luckily, it was late-night and there weren’t many cars around the streets.

_Fuck… Three minutes to go…_

“Good. Have you taken cover?”

“Yes, we’re crouched down behind some crates on the back of the warehouse, while Akutagawa… well, he’s standing in the open, shielding us with Rashoumon…”

_Akutagawa damn, don’t be reckless!_


“I guess about thirty still standing… Akutagawa took out another fifteen already, but… he got hit and he’s bleeding too much… he’s running out of stamina quickly… I don’t know how long he can go on like that…”

_Shit! So many enemies? They were ready for a massacre… I’ve no time to play nice, I’m gonna bury them underneath the rubble of that damned warehouse!_

“Tachihara, listen: I’m bursting in through the rear wall, on the left side. Watch out and get ready to escape at once.”

_Almost there… I’m almost there… hang on…_

“Roger that.”
When he got the warehouse in line of sight, he activated his ability, pushed on the gas and, without a moment’s hesitation, he drove his red-glowing car straight into the rear wall, jumping out of it one second before impact.

*Goodbye, my beautiful brand-new car…*

The car crashed into the wall like a cannonball and opened a wide breach, ending its mad race in the middle of the battlefield. For few seconds, everything remained still and silent: their enemies were caught completely off guard by the unexpected intrusion.

Taking advantage of the standstill, he broke in through the breach, pinpointed Tachihara and Gin and signalled to the guy to get out of that hell immediately. Tachihara just nodded in response, took the unconscious girl in his arms and rushed towards their salvation.

Then, he turned his attention to Akutagawa, who was still standing in the middle of the warehouse, Rashoumon floating angrily all around him, ready to snap. He shouted, “Akutagawa, go!”

The black-haired guy didn’t retreat so much as millimetre. He cursed under his breath, running hastily towards the rabid dog.

*Fucking idiot! It’s no time to act all high and mighty!*

Their enemies quickly recovered from the sudden shock and started immediately to shot at them a hail of bullets. Akutagawa launched Rashoumon forward, cutting the space in front of him, aiming at the throat of the nearest enemy. He kept on running, a hand stretched forward to halt the bullets mid-air and reverse their trajectory against their opponents. Once reached the shattered car, he stopped and shouted again, “Akutagawa damn! Go!”

In response, the stubborn guy shaped his black coat into the form of a jaw and crushed it onto the first line of attack.

*Fuck! You’re a massive idiot!*

He placed a glowing hand onto the car, altering its gravity once again and then he threw it towards their enemies while lighting up his lighter to ignite the fuel that was spilling from the car’s broken tank. He didn’t wait for the blow: grabbing tightly Akutagawa’s collar, he dragged away the knucklehead and rushed towards the safety on the other side of the breach.

The car exploded with a deafening boom and the wrecked warehouse collapsed in on itself in a matter of seconds, burying their powerless enemies under a rain of debris.

Without a second to lose, he leaded the guys safely behind the wall of a nearby building, taking cover just in case some enemy made it out alive.

“Back-up’s on the way. Just hold here, okay?”

Then he knelt briskly beside Gin to check her condition: on her left temple, there was a wide abrasion, that was quickly swelling into a nasty lump, but apart from that, she seemed to be fine. Her pulse was steady and her breathing even.

He gazed at Tachihara and said, in a quiet yet firm tone, “Keep her in the recovery position until medical support arrives. She’s in a stable condition, nothing life’s threatening, but better safe than sorry.”

Tachihara nodded in the affirmative and started speaking hastily, “Nakahara-san, thank you so much
for your help, you really saved our asses…”

Waving dismissingly, he stood and replied, “Yeah, yeah, that’s fine like that…” before turning his attention to Akutagawa. The boy was standing with his back leaning on the wall, struggling to catch up his breath and recover from the harsh fight. Still, his eyes were gleaming with feverish anger.

*Tsk… he’s even more ferocious than before you left…*

He moved a few steps towards the guy and once he was an inch from him, he murmured, coldly, “Akutagawa, when I say “go”, *you go*.”

The black-haired boy averted his gaze and mumbled, “I didn’t need any help, I could handle it on my own…”

Stretching a hand forward, he clutched the guy’s chin and forced him to make eye contact once again, while demanding, “Understood?”

Akutagawa grimaced and barked back, “You can’t order me around!”

*More stubborn and rebellious than before you left…*

He didn’t move an inch and repeated, in a low and threatening tone, “Understood?”

The boy exploded. Writhing frantically to break free from his grip, Akutagawa yelled at him, “I don’t answer to you, you’re not my mentor!”

*Bastard… you left quite a mess behind…*

Taking a step back, he sighed deeply and stated, “No, I’m not your mentor. I’m not *him*, I don’t wanna be *him*. Still…” His gaze pierced through Akutagawa’s skull, unyielding, while he explained, patiently, “… if I say “go”, *you go*. Because I needed you to be out of that damned warehouse before I brought it down on our enemies’ heads. And I really needed you to do that quickly, before some of our enemies decided to walk out the front door, go around outside and chase down Tachihara and Gin, who were defenceless. Understood?”

Calming down a little, the pale guy retorted, “I didn’t need you. I could have beaten them, I’m strong enough.”

He replied, bluntly, “No, you’re not. At least, not yet.”

Akutagawa’s eyes went impossibly wide when he growled, enraged, “I’ll show you. I’ll show everybody! And when that day comes, *he’ll* have no choice but to acknowledge me!”

For some moments, he stared at the guy without saying a word, lost in his thoughts.

*So… that’s what’s the matter? Do you really think that he left without recognizing your potential? Damnit, Akutagawa… if he’d thought that you weren’t ready yet, he’d have never left… Actually, he already acknowledged you, long ago… but I guess there’s no point in telling you, you’ve to figure it out yourself…*

Finally, he just replied, “Waiting for this day to come, I got a couple ideas to make you even stronger…”

…

And he did it.
Back then, Dazai had given Akutagawa the idea of using Rashoumon to cut space and shield himself.

Later, Chuuya used *For the Tainted Sorrow*, keeping on altering Rashoumon’s gravity until Akutagawa learnt how to make his ability stronger, more resistant and more ductile.

**Three months after**

***** Mori *****

That afternoon was too gloomy for him to be in a good mood: he should have studied the profit reports of the last month laying scattered on the top of his desk, but he didn’t feel like it.

“Hmm… that’s so boring…”

As per usual, he already knew what was written on them, with no need to read them out: things were going not bad at all and Port Mafia’s profits were quite high, even if… not as much as they were when Dazai was still there.

Yawning loudly, he flipped through the reports disinterestedly and picked up a spreadsheet: that wasn’t something financial related, indeed it was an account of the Port Mafia’s men killed in action during the last three months. He stared at it thoughtfully for quite some time.

*Interesting… that’s really interesting…*

The account stated that in the latest missions carried out by Nakahara’s squads, Chuuya had managed not to lose a single man. Quite amazing, if he considered that Nakahara’s squads were usually deployed on the front lines.

*Sighing deeply, he muttered under his breath, “Heck… the two of them were really a perfect match. Together, they could handle impeccably both men and resources… However, I guess it’s no use thinking about it now.”*

He couldn’t deny that in the last three months, Chuuya had proved his worth even further. Not only he didn’t crack because of Dazai’s deception – *even if he knew, beyond any doubt, that the redhead was anything but unaffected by the loss of his former partner* – but he had greatly helped to strengthen the Port Mafia.

In addition to the several operations successfully completed with no loss of men, Chuuya was fully committed to the training of the new recruits and, under his leadership, Tachihara and Gin had grown so much to deserve a promotion as Commanders of Black Lizard.

*Hmm… and he’s even found a way to keep Akutagawa-kun at bay: the idea of hanging that Higuchi on his heels has been quite effective in taming the boy’s wild behavior…*

On top of everything, not just his subordinates, but also any Port Mafia’s member held him in high
And finally, most importantly, Chuuya was **fiercely loyal**.

A smug smile curled up his lips, while he talked to himself, utterly satisfied, “It really looks like you’ve finally reached your true potential, neh Chuuya-kun? Fine then… I guess it’s time to convene the Executive meeting…”

*** Chuuya ***

Mori’s unexpected summons took him slightly by surprise: they had already a meeting scheduled for the following day and so he was wondering what kind of urgent matter his Boss had to see him about so suddenly.

When he knocked on the heavy mahogany door, the voice that invited him in was almost cheerful, “Chuuya-kun, I was waiting for you! Come in, come in and take a seat!”

At this point, he was utterly puzzled.

*I was worried that something bad has happened, but the Boss’s too relaxed… I can’t imagine what he wants…*

Once sat down on the chair in front of Mori’s desk, he asked tentatively, “Boss, do you have a new mission for me?”

Mori chuckled and answered, lightly, “No, nothing like that, I just want to talk to you a minute. I know you’re quite busy, you’ve an important role within the Organization, after all… still, I hope you have some time for your Boss…”

That behaviour was completely out of character and he could do nothing but gulp utterly embarrassed and reply, stuttering slightly, “W-well, sure Boss… I’m not that important, indeed…”

Waving unconcernedly, Mori rejoined, “Chuuya-kun, there’s no need for false modesty. Recently, your value to the Organization has increased a lot and you’re undeniably doing really well.”

*Uhm… What’s with all these compliments? Nothing from him is ever free, but I have no idea where he’s going with this…*

“Thank you very much, Mori-san. I don’t deserve your praise.”

Mori rested his head lazily on his palms and stared at him. His red eyes were shining intensely when he spoke, with a quiet yet deep voice, “Oh, no… you’re wrong… you deserve it fully…”

The air in the room had frozen suddenly. He truly hated being under Mori’s gaze… he felt naked, exposed, he felt like his Boss could clearly read any of his most intimate thoughts and dissect his mind with frightening ease. Until not long before, someone else used to look at him in a similar way and he had never gotten used to that.

*Fuck… no doubt he was your disciple… and indeed, you taught him remarkably well…*

A cold shiver run down his spine, alerting him to get ready to deal with something utterly troublesome.
“Tell me, Chuuya-kun… have you ever considered to choose a new partner?”

Fuck… here we go…

Keeping his tone even, he replied dryly, “No, Boss.”

“Hmm… you can choose whoever you want, you do know that?”

“That’s very generous of you, still I’d prefer to work alone. I don’t want anyone by my side.” Concerning this, he had no intention to budge.

Mori tilted his head slightly, scanning thoroughly every micro expression on his face and demanded, “May I ask you why not?”

He steadied his gaze, so that only his resolve could be read in his eyes and answered, firmly, “Boss, you know well that the true nature of my ability is exceedingly dangerous. I could end up harming, or worst, killing, everyone standing by my side: that’s why I’d rather not have a partner.”

A nagging voice resonating somewhere deep inside his conscience suggested unsolicited, (No one but him…) but he shut it down vehemently.

“I see… that’s the sole reason?”

“Yes, Boss.”

(Liar…)

“Chuuya-kun… can you satisfy my curiosity?”

In response, he just nodded, cautiously.

“Why didn’t you follow Dazai when he left?”

“Why would I?”

Not that he bothered to ask me if I wanted to, in any case…

“Because he was your partner.” Mori’s eyes shone a darker shade of red, almost bloodily, when he continued speaking, a sarcastic note seeping into his voice, “And I got the impression that the bond between the two of you was really… tight.”

Tsk… I don’t even know what the hell of a bond brought us together… all I know is that, whatever it was, it’s over now…

(Liar…)

“Right Boss, the bastard was my partner. But Port Mafia’s my family.”

“Mmmn… good answer… so… what would you do if you had to meet Dazai once again?”

“Damn, I’d make him pay for everything he’d put me through!”

The bastard left without as much as a word… I really hate him!

(Liar…)

Mori’s voice was sickeningly sweet when he asked, “And so, tell me Chuuya-kun… what if I
ordered you to kill him?”

He froze.

K-kill... him?

For endless moments, his mind refused to acknowledge those words, unable to focus on their meaning.

Kill... Dazai?

To be honest, that request wasn’t completely unexpected: indeed, he didn’t even know how many nights he’d laid perfectly awake, fearing that such an order could come at any moment. And in the instant Mori pronounced those words aloud, his worst nightmare materialized in front of his eyes, terrifying.

Dazai...

Dazai’s a traitor... and the Port Mafia can’t forgive him...

So... what would I do if the Boss ordered me to execute him?

Can I bring myself to kill him?

Can I comply?

In his rage, in his desperation, in his longing, in his sorrow, he’d asked himself that question a million times, unable to come up with a definitive answer.

(Liar... you know the answer...)

However, he could no longer afford to postpone the decision: right then and there, he had to give his Boss a response.

Long ago, I chose to be Port Mafia... and Dazai’s not Port Mafia anymore of his own accord... so, I guess... I can’t help it...

He closed his eyes, took a shaking intake and answered, slowly, painfully, “If you order me to kill him, I’ll kill him.”

Or I’ll die trying...

(Or I’ll die succeeding...)

A mischievous grin spread widely on his Boss’ face and his voice reverberated ominous when he declared, “Very well, Nakahara-san. I would expect no less from you. Therefore...” Mori’s eyes burnt a huge hole into his soul, tying him indissolubly to the cursed words he’d just pronounced, “... when his time comes, I’ll summon you.”

Not today... so, thank God, it’s not today...

(I hope that day will never come...)

A temporary relief and a deep exhaustion washed over him: he’d had enough of that senseless psychological torture, he just wanted to get out of that room as soon as possible. So, forcing his voice to get out of his mouth, he asked, huskily “Boss, if you don’t need me for anything else, I’ll...”
But Mori cut him off briskly and exclaimed, “Oww, I haven’t told you yet why I called you in!” He sounded playful and light once again and a jovial smile returned all of a sudden onto his face.

Completely taken aback by this awkward change in mood, he stammered out something unintelligible, “Ahh… y-yeah, w-well…”

His Boss’s smile just widened when he stated, briefly, “This morning we held the Executive meeting.”

_Ohh, I see… so you found someone to take over…_

_(… no one can replace him…)_

Given that Mori was just staring at him wordlessly, he felt like he had to say something, “Oh, great. So, I guess you appointed a new Executive…”

His Boss just nodded, keeping on smiling.

Without further clue, he went on guessing, “Do you want me to report to the new Executive at once?”

This once, Mori shook his head in denial, still smiling, still not saying a word.

Running out of options, he tried with a direct question, “May I ask who’s them, so I can congratulate?”

His inquiry solicited and amused reply, “Well, to be honest, they don’t know yet…”

At this point, he was _absolutely_ puzzled.

Fuck… having to deal with Mori-san is just as troublesome as it was with the bastard…

A defeated sigh escaped his mouth while he muttered, “So, what do you want me to do?”

Grinning triumphant, Mori replied, “Accept the appointment.”

He gaped, incredulous, and mumbled, “What…?”

“Yes, Nakahara-san. We want you to be a Port Mafia Executive. What do you think about it?”

A distant memory came to his mind and remote words echoed in his skull, bringing with them an inextinguishable anguish.

“…you could just take my place, then.”

“The mere thought makes me sick.”

_Me? Replace him? I don’t wanna this… I’m not him, I don’t wanna be him…_

_Still… Port Mafia is my family… and I’d do anything for my family…_

_So… I guess I can do this on my own terms, for Port Mafia’s sake…_

He stood resolute, bowed respectfully and, solemnly, declared, “Boss, I’m deeply honoured to accept. I hope I can prove worthy of your trust.”

Mori stood up in turn, shook his hand firmly and declared, “Honestly, I can’t think of a better man
for the job. Congrats on the promotion, Executive Nakahara Chuuya.” Then, smiling mischievously, he added, “And my first order is… to go celebrate!”

…

When he took his leave, he was dumbstruck. But the moment he stepped out from his Boss’ office, he was immediately greeted by a chorus of voices congratulating him and gentle arms embracing him fondly.

With a wide grin gracing his lips, he protested, playfully, “Ane-san… I guess you leaked the news…”

She smiled gracefully and replied, “Yes, I did… but I couldn’t help it, I’m so proud of you!”

*** Mori ***

Chuuya-kun… To be honest, I’m not sure you can ever bring yourself to kill Dazai… But hearing you say that, it’s further proof that your commitment to Yokohama Port Mafia is undoubtedly strong… I’d be curious to know what would happen if the two of you were to fight… However, I guess that if I ever want him dead, I’d better do it otherwise…

Can you imagine why I’ve never ordered Dazai’s execution even if, as a rule, betrayal is punished by death? Can you guess why I haven’t even ordered to chase him down?

Indeed, the answer’s very simple: for the Organization, Dazai can still be much more useful alive than dead… his mind is too bright, his skills are too valuable, he was born to lead the Port Mafia towards greatness… and he’s also the key to make full use of Corruption.

How could I give up on him so easily? Port Mafia would have no benefit in getting rid of him, especially considering that, now more than ever, the key to have him back is safely in my possession…

*** Dazai ***

Remaining there any longer, hidden in the shadows of a secluded alleyway in the heart of Port Mafia’s territory, was absolutely foolish. To be fair, even just going there had been an awful idea, but still… he couldn’t help it.

The door of the pub situated few meters away opened again – someone was coming out – and so he managed to hear their voices, his voice, one more time.

They were shouting and laughing out loud, undoubtedly they were drinking themselves into a stupor. And the reason was that they were celebrating.

A soft yet sad smile curled up his lips.

Congratulations Chuuya, you finally made it… At last, they realised your true worth and gave you the place you deserve…
All those years, I’ve been blessed to be by your side, I can imagine nothing more perfect than you are…

You’re a gorgeous creature… and I… I really want you to be safe and happy… and loved…

I… you can’t even know how much I’d like to be with you, now… but I can’t… I can’t, really… you’re better off without me…

I wish you every success…

I wish you the best…

I’ll always miss you…

The deep pain tearing apart his heart each time he thought of him was the only thing making him feel still alive… The unbearable longing devastating his mind each time he remembered of him was the only thing making him feel still human…

I guess I’d better go now… ‘cause if I see him, I’m not sure I’ll able to go then…

The moment he straightened, he froze on the spot, suddenly unable to make another single move… ‘cause sharp metal was biting his neck, scratching his skin just above his bandages. A crooked smirk curled his lips up and, without even looking back, he greeted, sarcastically, “Mori-san, what a pleasure…”

Damn sneaking bastard… I was so lost in my thoughts that I haven’t heard him approaching…

A cold breath messed up his hair when his former Boss spoke, teasingly, “Nice to meet you too, Dazai-kun, let me say that you’re looking good. Still…” his tone dropped dangerously, “…I’m not sure you’re gonna look so good any longer, if you keep on staying here…”

Laughing unamused, he retorted, “Indeed, I was taking my leave…”

“Oh my… without even drop by and say hello? That’s rude!”

“Mpf… I’d love it, but unfortunately I don’t think I’m welcome…”

The scalpel pressed further against his flesh, opening a shallow cut that started immediately to bleed faintly. Mori’s glacial tone was purposefully in stark contrast to the kindness of his words when he replied, “You really shouldn’t worry about that… you’ll always be welcome to join us… Especially when we’re celebrating Chuuya-kun’s achievement. Don’t you want to congratulate him?”

“Boss”… I guess you know well that, if I could, I would. So, what are you playing at, now? Are you trying to use him to have me back? It’s the same old trick, you should know better than to think it’s going to work…

He snorted scornfully and countered, “Why should I? He just took my place, nothing to be excited about…”

Mori let out an exaggerated sigh and scolded, “Oh boy, how can you even say that? Chuuya didn’t take your place… ‘cause that wasn’t your rightful place, to begin with… it has never been…”

What the hell are you talking about? Cunning bastard… it was you who put me in that role!

He had no choice but to play into his hands, if he wanted to get to the root of the matter. So he asked, through gritted teeth, “What do you mean?”
With a swift motion, his former Boss loosened his grip, got in front of him and, piercing through his skull with burning red eyes, stated, “Dazai-san… you weren’t born to be a Port Mafia’s Executive… you were born to lead the Port Mafia.”

Mori left without adding anything else. He gazed at his former Boss until he disappeared behind the pub’s door. Then, walking slowly as if he was carrying the world on his shoulders, he started down the road that led to an achingly familiar place.

* * * Chuuya * * *

When he entered his apartment, it was late at night.

Well… maybe, rather than say “entered”, it’d be better to say “staggered”. And maybe, rather than say “late at night”, it’d be better to say “almost dawn”.

The only certainty was that he was blackout drunk, as he had spent the last twelve hours – *his first hours as a Port Mafia’s Executive* – partying with *his family*.

Fuck… it was great…

Everybody was there: Ane-san, that wouldn’t stop saying how proud she was of him… Hirotsu and Tachihara, who had raised their glasses to him at least a dozen times… Gin and Higuchi, who had smiled at him all night long, genuinely pleased… Akutagawa, who incredibly had managed to be less gloomy than usual… All his subordinates, the members of Black Lizard, the new recruits he was training… Even the Boss had dropped by to celebrate him…

Everybody was there…

*Everybody but him…*

He shook his head trying to shoo away a little bit of dizziness, but that was a huge mistake, ‘cause his head started spinning wildly and the room seemed to wobble unsteadily.

*God… I feel sick… Better do something, or I’ll be out all day…*

Dragging his feet towards the kitchen to take a pill and some water, he stopped midway, slightly puzzled, when he noticed a bottle and two glasses placed on the counter.

*When the fuck did I…?*

He moved few steps towards the counter and stretched a hand to pick up the bottle.

*What the fuck is this?*

He stared at the thing in his hand indefinitely, trembling slightly.

It wasn’t one of his bottle of wine… no…
It was a bottle of whisky…

*Peat’s Beast…*

He stopped breathing.

The bottle was open.

One of the glasses was clean.

The other one had evidently been used.

His head was spinning even more.

Next to the used glass, on the counter, there was a tiny drop, gleaming brightly in the lamplight.

Without even knowing why, inexplicably drawn by that glint, he carefully picked up the tiny drop with one of his fingertips and brought it to his lips.

It didn’t taste like whisky. Not at all. It was slightly salted and, actually…

*It tastes like a tear…*

His heart stopped beating.

*Dazai…*

*Why?*

He stood still, his eyes closed, his whole being drown in memories, for a minute’s silence.

Then he opened the bottle, poured some whisky into the clean glass and raised it.

“To a new beginning.”

*To a new beginning without you, Dazai…*

Chapter End Notes

*Rondò Veneziano* is an Italian chamber orchestra, specializing in Baroque music, playing original instruments, but incorporating a rock-style rhythm section of synthesizer, bass guitar and drums. (Source: Wikipedia)

I really love their music, especially “Odissea Veneziana”.

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