A Lesson in Human Interaction (and all the bullshit that comes with it)

by Foilfreak

Summary

In a way, Akashi is almost glad that he lost at the Winter Cup the year before. Not only was
he able to regain his true self, but it also gave him a true appreciation for the amount of work that one has to put in in order to come out on top. It has humbled him. No longer was he the tyrannical emperor who ruled over his teammates; now he was simply Akashi, the captain of Rakuzan, who wishes to play the sport that he loves with like minded people who share his intense passion and devotion to the sport.

Alternatively titled: Akashi makes a genuine effort to get to know his teammates as people and friends and open up to them about himself, learns that asking for help isn't the end of the world, and that being an artist is way harder than most people make it out to be.

Notes

This is an extremely self indulgent fic that more or less groups all of my dumb ass headcanons about Akashi and Rakuzan into one glorious heap. I just feel like after reverting back to his "old self" Akashi would want to make up to his teammates for his pretty shitty personality and attitude from the year before (cuz lets be honest, first year Akashi was a real dick) by befriending his teammates and opening up to them in a way that his other personality wouldn't allow him to. Anyways enough rambling I hope you enjoy reading this as much as I enjoyed binge writing the first four chapters of this dumpster fire of a fic. Not beta read. Be nice.

See the end of the work for more notes
New Year, New Beginnings

Since the day he was born, Akashi Seijuro had known nothing but complete and total victory in everything he did. No matter what is was, there was no task or activity on Earth that Akashi couldn't master.

While this claim still holds true to this present day in many ways, things have been slightly different ever since the Winter Cup of his first year of high school, where he suffered his first true defeat at the hands of his former teammate Kuroko Tetsuya and the Seirin High School basketball club. Coming to terms with this loss was not something that Akashi was able to do right away. The weeks following the Winter Cup had left him feeling empty and lost, unsure of if he was truly as capable and amazing as he had once thought. But with the help of his fellow Rakuzan teammates, who continued to hold just as much faith and trust in his abilities as they did before the defeat, he was able to pull himself out of his depressed state, and return to once again dominate the court.

In a way, Akashi is almost glad that he lost at the Winter Cup the year before. Not only was he able to regain his true self, but it also gave him a true appreciation for the amount of work that one had to put in in order to come out on top. It had humbled him. No longer was he the tyrannical emperor who ruled over his teammates; now he was simply the captain of Rakuzan, who wishes to play the sport that he loves with like minded people who share his intense passion and devotion to the sport.

With his new frame of mind Akashi was more than ready to begin his second year with a fresh start and a drive to pick up his winning streak where it left off.

The beginning of his second year had gone much the same as his first year had, except instead of standing on stage at orientation being welcomed into the school, he was seated in the auditorium along with his fellow second years and the third years, welcoming the incoming first years.

His class schedule was also rather similar to last year’s, however, this year his usual music course was substituted with “An Introduction to Drawing and Painting”. Despite his initial surprise at the sudden change in elective, Akashi couldn't help but feel a little excited about the new class. As a child he was always discouraged from drawing and coloring by his father, who believed that such activities were a waste of time. Despite this, Akashi couldn't help but hold on to some of his childlike curiosity toward the art form and smiled knowing that his father could no longer discourage him from at least trying it out now that is was a mandatory class.

His teacher, Akira Emi, self-dubbed Emi-sensei, is a short and thin young woman with bright blue eyes and dark brown hair styled into a pixie cut. She dresses very casually, usually wearing some variant of the jean and t-shirt style, and uses a more informal and familiar style of speech, conversing with her classes as though they were made up of her peers rather than her students. On the first day of class she began by having everyone in the room introduce themselves so that “we can now properly forget everyone’s name after class lets out”. Afterward she went into explaining a bit more about herself as a means of “showing you all that I am a person with a life outside of the classroom just like the rest of you”.

She first explained how her great grandparents moved to the US from Japan seeking a better life and how they moved around quite a bit at first, working odd jobs as a means of supporting themselves, until they finally settled in the city of Los Angeles California, the city where she was born and raised. Next, Emi-sensei described her time spent at California Institute of the Arts, a prestigious American art school, where she majored in graphic design and illustration. After completing all of her requirements, she graduated top of her class and has since worked as a
freelance studio artist, receiving work from a variety of different companies wanting to hire her for various reasons. Lastly, Emi-sensei explained how, when she was 19, she did a semester abroad in Japan where she studied at the University of Tokyo and worked with many talented Japanese artists and professors. She explained that she ended up loving her time spent in Japan so much that she decided to pack up her stuff and move after she graduated. Once word got out that she had officially moved, she received a request from Rakuzan to come and fill in a newly empty position as an art teacher, which she obviously accepted and has since worked for the past 3 years.

She closed off her story by stating that while she works as a teacher during the day, she is still an active freelance graphic designer and illustrator and works on the various jobs she receives on the side. The bell rang just as she finished her story, signalling the end of class, much to the chagrin of the class who wanted to know more about their interesting new teacher. Before leaving Emi-sensei handed out the class syllabus and expressed how excited she was for the coming year, before finally departing the room to get to her next class.

The class broke out in quiet conversation as they waited for their next teacher to arrive. Akashi simply sat in his desk, thinking over all of the interesting things he learned about his new teacher. Never in his life had Akashi met a teacher quite like Emi-sensei. She was very laid-back and relaxed, spoke and dressed very casually, and gave off a very ‘chill’ attitude. Despite this Akashi could tell by the way she spoke that she is very passionate about what she does and is just as much if not more excited about sharing her artistic knowledge with her students.

Akashi couldn't help but share her excitement for the upcoming year.
Words of Encouragement

Chapter Notes

Hey I'm back. There seemed to be a few people who are actually interested in this story, so I've manage to work up the courage to post chapter 2. So I realized after I posted chapter 1 that I didn't actually include any dialogue for the characters, plz note that from now on there will be dialogue so its not a running theme or anything. Anyways I hope you enjoy chapter 2, and let me know what you thing down in the comments. Not beta read. Be nice.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Basketball practice resumed later that day without so much as a hitch. Winter training camps meant that Akashi saw his teammates regularly throughout the vacation so there was no need for them to reacquaint with one another. Coach Shirogane was absent from practice, off holding tryouts for this years potential new members, so everyone was more or less left to their own devices for the day.

About 10 minutes into practice, however, coach Shirogane entered the room, ordering Akashi, Mibuchi, Nebuya, and Hayama to follow him to the tryout gym. Said members looked at each other in confusion before following their coach as instructed. Once they arrived to the gym where tryouts were scheduled to take place, the four regulars saw why they had been called. The inside of the gym was packed with people, ranging from first years to third years, all of whom were apparently waiting to try out for the team.

Coach Shirogane explained that there were far too many people applying for the team to test all at once, so everyone would be split into five different groups, and arrangements would be made to borrow some of the smaller gyms located around campus for tryouts. The largest group would stay in this gym with him, while the other four sub-groups would be divided among the four regulars, who would proctor their respective group and report back to him their observations.

The four regulars saw no problem with this plan and accepted the task without hesitation. Coach Shirogane walked away without a word and got up on stage, taking the microphone from his assistant.

“Gentlemen” his voiced boomed over the loudspeaker, the room quieting as the applicants turned their attention toward the infamous coach.

“First of all, I would like to thank you all for coming and trying out today; I am very pleased with the amount of potential talent located in this crowd.” Coach Shirogane’s eyes surveyed the room full of boys calculatively. “Second, I would like to apologize for keeping you all waiting for so long. We did not expect such a large turn out, so we did not properly prepare, and currently don’t have enough room in this gym to test you all at once.” The crowd of boys deflated at this, but were cut off before a storm of complaints could arise.

“Despite this, we have come up with a way for all of you to be tested without having to extend tryouts over multiple days.” Coach Shirogane says, motioning for the four regulars to come on stage.

“These young men you see standing here are four of our best players here at Rakuzan. Their
techniques, strengths, speed, and skills have led us to many championships during their time here, and for those of you first and second years, this could one day be you standing here, that is, should you choose to put in the time and effort it takes to reach the level and expectations this team demands.” Coach Shirogane paused for a moment, likely thinking over how he wanted to word his next sentence.

“Unlike in previous years, where an overwhelming majority of our applicants were first and second years, I see a large handful of third years in this crowd, am I wrong?” A large group of boys in the back began cheering, signalling that they were the “large handful of third years” that coach Shirogane was referring to.

“As happy as I am to see you all here today, whether you come with previous experience in basketball or are just getting into the sport, I must say this to you as a disclaimer.” The large crowd of third years quieted down immediately at this.

“While this may not be the case for all of you, I am aware that our previous regular, Mayuzumi Chihiro, who graduated this past year, was likely a large inspiration for you wanting to join the team despite it being so late in your high school careers, as he too did not join until just before his third year, and yet was able to make it onto the list of first string regulars within that short period of time. However, I must admit, that Mayuzumi was a rare exception.” The room grew silent as he continued.

“As a result of your late joining of this team, I regret to inform you that, due to your lack of training and experience working with this team, the likelihood that you will ever set foot on a competitive court as a regular first string, or even second string member, is slim to none” The group of third years grew more noticeably disappointed the more Coach Shirogane spoke, but their attention was grabbed once again by his booming voice over the loudspeaker.

“Despite this, I will not discourage you from trying out or joining the team. The reason being, and this goes for you first and second years as well, that even if you never set foot on a competitive court as a regular member of this team, you will still have an unlimited amount of opportunities to play and train, as a fully fledged member of this team.” The crowd breaks out in an excited hum at this news.

“Should you choose to continue with tryouts, make it onto the team, and train with us for however long you have left here at Rakuzan, then I can assure that your skills and abilities within this sport will improve faster than you could ever imagine. Now, for those of you who wish to stay and prove yourselves to us, are you ready to begin?” The crowd bursts with excited cheers and determined shouts. Coach Shirogane waits a few moments for everyone to settle down before continuing.

“Now that we have that settle, allow me to formally introduce you to the four men who will be assisting us in assessing your skills today.” Coach Shirogane pauses, looking at the four regulars standing behind him.

“First up, we have our shooting guard, Mibuchi Reo.” The crowd applauds as Mibuchi steps forward, bowing politely in greeting and blushing slightly when a few of the boys in the crowd whistle and holler flirtatiously at him.

“Next up, we have our center, Nebuya Eikichi.” Some of the crowd applauds again just like they did for Mibuchi, however this time much of the audience just stars at Nebuya in awe, and probably fear, as the gargantuan man steps forward with his shoulders back and his arms crossed over his chest, the scowl on his face grows as some poor unfortunate fools continue to catcall Mibuchi, making him look all the more menacing.
“Third in line, were have our small forward, Hayama Koutarou.” The crowd laughs and cheers as Hayama runs excitedly and slides on his knees up to the front of the stage, his arms spread wide in a “look at me” manner, before getting up and taking his place next to Eikichi, who had managed to pinpoint one of the catcallers and was now glaring threateningly at the terrified boy, unbeknownst to Mibuchi.

“And last but not least,” The crowd quiets down as coach Shirogane began to introduce the final Rakuzan regular, “we have our point guard and captain of Rakuzan's basketball team, Akashi Seijuro.” The crowd was utterly silent as Akashi stepped forward past his teammates, who were looking at him with a mixture of pride and amusement, to stand at the front of the stage. Akashi takes the microphone that coach Shirogane hands to him, and pauses for a moment, collecting his thoughts before speaking.

“Fellow students of Rakuzan, as captain of this incredible team, I would like to take a moment to personally welcome you to the Rakuzan Basketball Club. I believe that coach Shirogane has said everything that needs to be said regarding the expectations and work ethic this team requires, so I will not bore you with a second of such lecture.” The crowd remains completely silent, and all eyes are still keenly focused on the red head.

“However, as a current member of this team, and a long time devoted player of this sport, I would like to say this. In basketball it does not matter where you came from before Rakuzan, where you plan on going after you graduate, or even where you are now in your current situation, this sport does not care. Basketball doesn’t care if you are rich or poor or middle class; have light skin, dark skin, or something in between; and it doesn’t care if you are not feeling well or aren’t having a good day, those things don’t matter in basketball.” Akashi pays no mind to the confused looks on the audience’s faces, as they will understand him soon enough.

“While this may seem to be a grim reality about basketball, I for one think that’s one of the things that makes it so amazing.” Everyone, including his teammates and Coach Shirogane perk up at this. “Basketball is a sport where you don’t have to pretend to be someone you're not, or fear rejection because of how you look, dress, and act, or limit yourself because people fear and avoid you otherwise. Basketball is a sport where your skills speak for themselves, and more importantly, it is a sport that will offer you a place to belong and will stay with you for the rest of your life. Thank you.” The crowd erupts with monstrous praise and cheers as Akashi returns the microphone and moves to stand next to his teammates.

Mibuchi is grinning widely at him, the smallest sign of tears beginning to collect under his eyes, Hayama is practically jumping up and down in excitement, his eyes lit with stars, Nebuya manages to reach over the bouncing boy, playfully shoving his shoulder with a proud smile on his face, and for the first time in what felt like years, Akashi allows his lips to curl up in a smile that reaches from ear to ear.

After the crowd dies down and coach Shirogane instructs everyone to break into groups based on which positions they would like to play, the four regulars begin leading their groups to the other gyms, where the real test will begin.

Akashi can hardly wait.

Chapter End Notes
Hey look its a chapter about basketball kinda, you know, the actual focus of this manga, don't count on seeing to many more of these tho. I hope you enjoyed chapter 2 of this fic, I plan on writing way more for it in the future, however I do not have any kind of set schedule for writing or posting, I'll just post them as I finish writing them I guess. Anyways thanks for reading, and I hope to see you soon for chapter 3.
Visual Journal

Chapter Notes

Oh look, it's me again, back with more self-indulgent content. This chapter gives you guys a bit more info about Emi-sensei and who she is and how she behaves and stuff. I'm really enjoying writing this so far so I hope you all are enjoying it as well. Plz enjoy chapter 3. Not beta read. Be nice.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

By the beginning of the second week of school, most of Akashi’s classes had begun teaching and assigning homework, much to the dismay of his fellow classmates. He could hear some of their complaints about the amount of work they had to do already despite it only being the second week as he walked through the door on his way to his desk. While he understood that being given work when the school year has just started wasn’t fun, he never saw the point in complaining endlessly about it, after all, they had a set amount of things they had to learn and know by the end of the year, and Akashi would much rather have homework the first week than get to the final without having covered all the required material.

As Akashi sat at his desk, he briefly wondered if there were any students in his class that tried out for the basketball team. Did they see him there and hear his speech, but were simply to intimidated by him to introduce themselves. The thought didn’t surprise him very much, as his father had raised him to be an intimidating person who could make his enemies cower in submission from a single look. While the tactic worked great during competitive settings, it didn’t do him much good when trying to make actual friends.

Several minutes later, just as the bell rang, indicating the start of class, the door opened and a large cart came rolling through the door and into the room, stopping only when it hit the teacher’s desk with a loud banging sound, effectively ending any conversation that had been going on previously.

“Morning guys!” greeted Emi-sensei as she walked into the classroom after her runaway cart. The class greeted their teacher with a collective “Good morning Sensei” as she dumped her bag onto the chair, before moving to sit cross legged on top of the large wooden desk.

“How are we all doing today? Did we have a good weekend?” the woman asked excitedly.

“We got homework” replied a girl sitting two rows away from Akashi.

“Homework? Ugh!” Emi-sensei exclaimed disgustedly, “I had to do that for all of my classes. I remember it really sucked.”

“It still does” someone retorted, causing the class, as well as Emi-sensei to break out laughing. After the class settled down, she spoke up.

“Well, while we are on the subject of homework I suppose I should explain why I brought my friend Frank the Cart with me today”

“You named the cart Frank?” someone asked in amused disbelief.
“Don’t judge me.” She retorted, glaring at the student, shutting him up almost instantly.

“Now as I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted, the only homework you will have in this class throughout the year will be turned in and completed in these.” Emi-sensei said reaching into Frank the Cart and holding up a black hardcover book.

“A sketchbook?” the girl sitting behind Akashi asked.

“Hm yes... but this isn’t just any sketchbook. In my syllabus I gave this book a very specific name, which I will explain in a minute for those of you who haven’t read the syllabus yet (because I know some of you haven't), but for now can anyone tell me what the very specific name for this sketchbook is?” the dark haired woman asked, scanning the room looking for someone who might have the answer, only to meet a sea of clueless and confused expressions. Emi-sensei sighed placing her hands on her hips.

"So I'm guessing by the look on all your faces that no one's ready my syllabus yet huh?" she deadpanned, smacking her forehead in frustration at the unanimous confirmation of her hypothesis.

“Yes Akashi, do you have a question?” she asked, having seen the boy’s raised hand.

“No, but I did read the syllabus and I believe the term you are looking for is 'visual journal' correct?” Akashi answered, having apparently been the only person in the whole class who actually read the syllabus Emi-sensei had handed out the week previous.

“BINGO!” she cried out excitedly, scampering over to Akashi and sticking her hand out right in front of his face. Akashi stared, surprised and confused, at the outstretched hand for a moment, before smiling in understanding and smacking his hand against her own, completing the high-five he had earned. The class giggled and laughed in amusement at their teacher she returned to sitting cross legged on her desk, picking up the black 'visual journal' and holding it for the class to see.

“As Akashi just said, these books are called visual journals. This sketchbook will be your own self-made text book, practice book, and reference guide and will also document your personal journey and growth as beginning artists. You can do sketches, make collages, take notes on different artists and artistic styles, plan pieces, draw figure studies, write reflections, basically, you can do whatever you want in this sketchbook in whatever way or order you want to do it.”

“Emi-sensei?” a boy called.

“Yes, Akita?” Emi-sensei asked, turning her attention toward the boy.

“What if we don’t want to use our visual journal? Is it mandatory that we complete it?” the boy questioned lazily, obviously trying to get out of doing as much work as possible.

“Well, technically speaking no, you don't have to do anything in your visual journal if you don't want to, BUT, if you want to receive any credit in the “Visual Journal” section of your grade (which is worth 25% of your overall final grade) then I suggest you stop being a lazy bum and do your work just like everyone else” she responded bluntly, causing the boy to blush and sink down in his chair embarrassingly as the class giggled and snickered at him.

"You want some ice for that burn Akita?” one of Akita's friends asked tauntingly, causing the already bright blush on the boy's face to deepen to a tomato red color, and him to sink lower in his chair.

"Alright that's enough you guys. It's bad enough that I'm making fun of him, there's no need for all of you to get involved." Emi-sensei said, relieving Akita of whatever remaining taunting he was
about to receive from his classmates.

"Now, as for the second question, I’m not so concerned about you completing your visual journal as I am with the content of the pages that you do complete. Obviously if you sketch and research and reflect a lot, then you are more likely to improve faster as an artist, however if you only have the minimum number of pages done, but they are thoughtful, well planned out, decorated, and just overall good pages, then you will still be able to receive full credit. Now who wants to help me hand these suckers out?” she asked picking up a large pile of visual journals from Frank the Cart and dropping them onto the desk with a loud ‘thunk’.

The rest of class consisted of handing out visual journals, answering any remaining questions students had about them, and going over some examples of what qualified as a “good visual journal page”. While some of his classmates lamented the idea of having to put actual effort into a class like art, Akashi found the system rather fascinating. The visual journal was an intuitive way of combining factual evidence and research with artistic practice, all while forcing the individual to constantly think of new and creative ways to set up and decorate their pages.

When the bell rang signalling the end of class, Emi-sensei made sure to remind everyone that their first 10 pages were due on Friday, giving them the rest of the week to complete them, as she pushed Frank the Cart back out into the hallway and headed to her next class. With his next class starting in the next few minutes, Akashi began pulling out the supplies he would need, making sure to carefully tuck his brand new, pristine visual journal away in his bag, already planning out all the different things he could do to fill it up.

Chapter End Notes

Idk if I've mentioned this before, but I FUCKING LOVE writing Akira Emi. She's so fun and happy and excited, but also really really snarky and sassy when she wants/needs to be. I've seen in some anime before that teachers calling out and making fun of students is something that can happen so I wanted to do something like that, but as I was writing the scene it just seemed kind of mean so I put an end to it by having Emi discourage the other students from making fun of Akita. She's the teacher so she has to be the one to motivate her students to work hard in her class (even if that means calling out their bullshit in front of everyone) but that doesn't mean that she wants to single out a student and potentially make them the target for bullying so thats why that happened. Also the part where she goes up to Akashi and gives him a high-five, that was probably my fav part of this whole chapter. Like always I hope you enjoyed reading this chapter as much as I enjoyed writing it. There is still plenty more of this story to come so stay tuned, and I will see you all for chapter 4.
Once Akashi returned to the dorms after basketball practice later that night, he made a beeline straight for his room, only offering a small hello to the girl sitting behind the reception counter. Since his father granted him permission to live in the campus dorms for his second year of high school, under the excuse that he would be able to devote more time to his studies and basketball should his long commute to and from school be eliminated, Akashi no longer had to deal with sitting through a formal meal with his father every night, listening to him drone on about the same thing over and over again, something Akashi was extremely thankful for.

He sped through his homework as quickly as possible, making sure that it was all correct, but not nitpicking over tiny details like how neat his handwriting was or if his name fit perfectly in the name space at the top of the page.

After Akashi had completed and put away his homework, he reached into his bag and pulled out the black hardcover visual journal he'd received earlier that day. The journal was around the size of a normal piece of printer paper (maybe a little bigger) and, according to the label, contained 250 blank white pages.

Despite these observations, Akashi was actually rather impressed that a class like “Introduction to Drawing and Painting” was able to provide these kinds of books. They may be fairly cheap for companies to make and produce, but they can actually end up being rather expensive depending on where you get them from. For an introductory level art class, they had actually been provided with some fairly good quality supplies, so Akashi supposes that he shouldn't be complaining.

Placing the book on his desk, Akashi began the process of breaking the spine in by flipping a couple of pages at a time and flattening the page out, until he reached the very end. Once that was done he opened the cover to the very first page of his visual journal (making sure to quickly write his name on the cover).

Emi-sensei had been kind enough to bring in one of the many visual journals that she kept throughout college to show as an example. Her journal was filled to the brim with figure studies of humans and animals, life studies of buildings, parks, and various other locations, beautifully decorated research pages on various artists and art styles, well thought out and detailed plans for final pieces that she worked on, and elaborately detailed reflections detailing things she liked about a piece vs. some things she could improve on.

One question a student had asked in class was why they were being given their visual journals and

Here I am, once again (plz dont copyrite) anyways, you asked for more, so I delivered. Chapter 4 is up and ready for criticizing. Not beta read. Be nice.
pages to complete if they hadn’t actually been taught how to draw yet. The question took Akashi by surprise, as even he had not wondered why they were expected to fill pages even though they hadn’t learned anything. Emi-sensei paused for a moment, thinking over her answer. She responded saying that the purpose of the first 10 pages in the visual journal is to show where a student started at the beginning of a class; before they developed their style or discovered the styles of art they like and researched or even learned how to draw a circle.

‘The first 10 pages in this book will be used as a bar that, over time, will show you a progressive timeline documenting the increase in your artistic skills and knowledge, from a time before you knew anything, to a time when you’ve developed and mastered your own unique style of art’ Akashi recalled Emi-sensei saying. Her response seemed to have been rather satisfactory, as there was no more mention or even complaint about their 10 pages due at the end of the week, even after class had let out.

Not wanting to spend too much time reminiscing, Akashi pulled out his laptop from it’s place in his desk, logged on, and began searching the internet for references to draw from. It had come as a bit of a surprise to Akashi to learn that artists did not, in fact, draw from solely their memories.

One student questioned how it was possible to learn how to draw something they had never seen before. Emi-sensei had flippantly replied to “just look up a reference on google”, only to reel back in absolute horror and disgust when said student countered with “but that’s cheating”.

Her unexpected and, frankly, outlandish reaction had caught the entire class off guard, who starred at their teacher as though she had grown a second head.

There were very few things in the world known to upset Akira Emi enough for her to stop everything she was just doing and spend the next 20 minutes of her time ranting about why whatever a person said was very very wrong. Apparently, “using references in art is cheating”, was one of those very few things. Akashi chuckled at the memory of his teacher running back and forth in front of the class, her arms waving around madly, mouth running a mile a minute, and her red checkered flannel flapping to and fro behind her.

While he may not have initially guessed that using references were a vital part of drawing, he could see why Emi-sensei spoke so passionately about their importance. Having a picture to look at while he drew made getting the general shape and detail right much easier than if he were to draw from something he imagined in his head. He also found that sketching was a rather relaxing activity; he didn’t have to think too much about what he was doing, but rather focus on simply transferring to the page what was directly in front of him, a small piece of advice Emi-sensei had thrown in during her 20 minute reference lecture.

Before he even realized it fully, Akashi had managed to fill and finish his 10 pages due for Friday, and looking back on the sketches, he couldn’t help but feel proud of himself. Sure the figure studies he did weren’t nearly as good as the one’s in Emi-sensei’s visual journal (even Akashi had to admit that Emi-sensei’s skills were far superior to his own), but he still felt like he had done a good job, and was pleased with the results despite not having been taught anything yet.

Looking at the clock Akashi was shocked to see that it was already 12:00 am, meaning that he had spent almost 3 and a half hours working on his sketches, without even realizing it. Akashi yawned, the exhaustion of staying up so late finally hitting him like brick over the head. Despite it being way past his usual 10:00 pm, self-imposed bedtime, Akashi took the next few minutes to tidy things up, putting his laptop back in his desk, setting out his uniform for the morning, and making sure he had all this homework and notebooks packed in his bag.

Once he had finished cleaning up and preparing for the morning, Akashi turned his lights off and
climbed into bed, before finally falling into a deep and relaxed slumber.

Chapter End Notes

And so this train wreck of a fanfic continues. I hope you liked this chapter. It was kind of a shorter one compared to some of the other chapters I have written for this fic, but its the first chapter that documents Akashi's first experience with one of trials of teenagedom "staying up way to fucking late and then feeling like shit the next day because you didn't get enough sleep the night before". For someone like Akashi who is known to put his everything into anything he does, I wanted to make working in his visual journal something relaxing for him, something he could just turn his brain off and do without having to worry so much about details or correctness, basically I wanted him to have fun with it and be able to lose himself in the process. Also I wanted this chapter to dispell one of the largest misconceptions in art that artists dont use references ever THAT IS A FUCKING LIE, REFERENCES ARE VITAL AND NECESSARY AND ANYONE WHO TELLS YOU OTHER WISE IS LITERALLY HITLER. Anyways I hope you enjoyed reading this chapter, and I hope to see you for chapter 5!
Hey, I'm back. So this chapter was initially supposed to go up yesterday, but I was studying for my ecology test, so I wasn't able to get it up, so today I've decided that I'm gonna post 2 chapters - the one that was supposed to go up yesterday, and the one that is supposed to go up today. I hope you enjoy this chapter! Not beta read. Be nice.

The weeks following the day the class had received their visual journals had been chock full of notes on various technical terminology, periods and movements of art throughout history, and drawing and painting techniques. Had anyone other than Emi-sensei been teaching the class, even someone like Akashi would have had a hard time paying attention as they went over lines, curves, shading, lighting, color, focus, line of action, etc. Thankfully however, Emi-sensei was the one teaching the class, so even going over something as boring and trivial as ‘the line’ was made interesting, or at the very least entertaining, with Emi-sensei’s usual boisterous attitude, on top of the hefty amount of memes and funny sounds sprinkled throughout the powerpoint she made.

For homework, the class was expected to do anywhere between 10-20 pages, which were always due on Friday and handed back, graded with comments, on Monday. For the majority of the class, 10 pages was a mountain’s worth of work that they could barely complete by the time they were due, any more than that was just overkill. Akashi on the other hand, couldn’t get enough of it. Most days he worked in moderation, completing only a few pages a night so that he wasn’t continuously staying up past his self-imposed bedtime and waking up the next morning feeling like he’d been run over by a truck, a feeling that answered his long standing question of why coffee was so popular amongst the majority of his demographic. Other nights however, Akashi would come back to his dorm room after basketball practice, shower and eat, quickly polish off whatever homework he had that night, and then finally pull out his visual journal and just go to town, spending hours doing page after page of figure studies, research pages on artists he’d found, rough drafts for pieces they were working on, even going as far as to draw whatever random crap happened to be sitting around his room.

On nights like these, Akashi could finish anywhere between 25 to 60 pages done, which was a rather impressive feat. However, the night he did 60 pages, Akashi didn’t get to sleep until 4:00 am and ended up sleeping in until 2:00 pm later that day. Not only was practice an absolute nightmare to experience, but he also had to explain to the headmaster why he had, more or less, ditched all of his classes. Thankfully since he was such an exemplary student (and mentioned that he was feeling so poorly that all he could do was sleep), he was let off the hook with a warning, all his teachers were instructed to catch him up on what he had missed, and (most importantly) his father would not be notified of his unexcused absence. Later that night, Akashi made the vow that he would never ever stay up that late ever again. As much as he enjoyed getting 60 pages done in one sitting, the pain and torture he went through was too much to have to handle more than once.

On one particular Monday about 2 months into class, Akashi and his classmates were preparing for art, as they usually did around this time, when all of a sudden, Emi-sensei came bursting through the door, throwing her bag behind the desk, and then jumping on top of the teacher's desk, a huge
smile plastered on her face.

“OH MY GOD YOU GUYS I AM SO EXCITED FOR TODAY’S CLASS, YOU WANNA KNOW WHY?” she shouted animatedly at her students, who at this point in time were fairly used to their teacher’s excited and overly energetic personality.

“So I was talking with my advanced class earlier today, and I had told them that we were going to start introducing and working on our first finished piece in this class next week, but then, they said that if I waited until next week to start, that we’ll end up being rushed by the time the end of the semester rolls around, but I said that I didn’t want to start you guys off if I didn’t have a plan of how I wanted to schedule when we would work on the piece, but then they said that I literally never have a plan or follow a schedule ever, and I said you’re right, screw planning, and so we’re gonna start our first piece today! Isn’t that exciting?” Emi-sensei asked, addressing the class of students who now looked just as excited as she was to be finally starting their first real art piece.

The focus of the piece would be ‘hands’, meaning that the students were going to have to draw a wide variety of hands in a wide variety of different positions, which would reflect how well they are able to observe an object, and then translate their observations onto their final work using the techniques they have learned in class.

“Now I’m going to warn you guys, the paper that you’ll be doing your final draft for this piece on is not like the paper in your visual journals. This paper is very expensive and very hard to get, so that means you only get ONE PIECE. If you lose, tear, or spill coffee all over the one piece that you get, you will not get another one no matter how much you beg and cry, am I clear?” Emi-sensei asked, her tone unusually stern and serious.

“Yes, Emi-sensei.” the class responded.

“Good, now everyone come up and get a piece of rough draft paper and get to work figuring out how you want to format your piece. The rest of class will be used for studio time or, as my advanced kids like to call it, “target practice” where if they fall asleep or screw around instead of doing their work, I will throw things at them until they wake up or stop messing around, ranging from pens and whiteboard markers to textbooks and other people’s backpacks.” Emi-sensei added, the mischievous grin on her face making the class wonder if she was just messing with them or if she was actually going to start throwing things at them.

In the end, no one was brave enough to test how serious she was, and while most people got together with their friends to talk and hang out, everyone worked hard during the free time that they were given. Akashi was nearly finished with his rough draft when a thought came to him, one that he had been considering and contemplating for quite some time now. Getting up from his desk he approached Emi-sensei, who was currently browsing through twitter on her phone with her feet on the desk.

“Emi-sensei?” Akashi asked, pulling the woman’s attention away from her phone.

“Hey Akashi, what’s up?” She asked, removing her feet from the desk and sitting up to address her student.

“I remember you were saying something about an advanced class earlier, is that right?” Akashi questioned, still unsure of how to breach the topic he wanted to discuss.

“Yup. 'Advanced Studio Art',” she answered nodding her head.

“I see… what’s that class like?”
“Oh boy” she sighed letting her head fall against her hand, “if I had to describe it without writing a
15 page dissertation about all the shenanigans those kids get up to, I’d say it’s something along the
lines of “an organized dumpster fire”.”

“What do you mean by that?” Akashi asked slightly confused.

“Remember when I say that my advanced kids call studio time “target practice” because I throw
things at them if they don’t do their work?”

“Yes...”

“That wasn’t a joke”

“Oh...?” Emi-sensei laughed at his confused expression before continuing.

“Anyways, why the sudden curiosity about the advanced class?” she questioned, her interest
regarding her student’s motive now piqued.

“Well I was actually hoping to talk to you about perhaps joining that class for next year,” Akashi
admitted, slightly nervous about how his teacher might react.

“Really? You want to continue with art after this year?” she asked enthusiastically, speaking
rapidly as she usually did whenever she was excited or happy about something.

“Yes” Akashi paused, “I’ve been considering it for the past few weeks now and I’ve been enjoying
your class greatly as well as working in the visual journal and on these pieces. You’ve mentioned
you’re advanced class a few times in the past so I thought I would ask you about it, seeing as you
would know best what I should do should I wish to continue with the visual arts.

By the time Akashi finished with his explanation, Emi-sensei’s eyes had stars in them, and she was
visibly shaking with happiness; Akashi was afraid she might start crying with how happy she
seemed. But, taking a deep breath, she managed to quell her delight slightly and put on a more
‘professional’ face before she continued.

“Well, if you really are interested in joining the advanced class, then I’d like to go through and
discuss with you in more detail about what the class is all about and the expectations and
requirements you will have to meet and all that good stuff. Are you available to come talk right
after school’s out?” Emi-sensei questioned.

“Of course, that shouldn’t be a problem.” Akashi replied.

At that moment, the bell rang, signalling the end of class. Emi-sensei quickly wrote down the room
number for her studio class on a piece of paper and handed it to Akashi, stating how glad she was
that he wanted to join her advanced class, before collecting her things and bidding the class
farewell.

Akashi placed the piece of paper into his back pocket, and returned to his desk to prepare for the
next class, his teacher’s enthusiasm and support for his decision leaving him in the best mood he’s
been in quite some time.
Yeah, Emi-sensei is so freaking happy that Akashi wants to join the advanced art class, so guys have no idea. Next chapter's gonna be really fun cuz we get to see and learn a little bit more about Emi-sensei and her past so look forward to that. Anyways, as per usual, I hope you guys enjoyed reading this chapter as much as I enjoyed writing it. And I will see you all very shortly for chapter 6.
Chapter Notes

Oh boy this chapter... is very self indulgent. Enjoy! Not beta read. Be nice.

The second the final bell rang that day, Akashi was up and out of his seat, exiting the door of the classroom before most of his classmates had even finished putting their things away. The thought of meeting with Emi-sensei to discuss furthering his artistic education had been sitting in the back of his mind all day, making it slightly more difficult than usual to focus in any of his other classes.

After exiting the front double doors of the school, Akashi made his way down a path leading to the former horticulture building, which had been converted into a full blown art studio not long after Emi-sensei started teaching here. The building itself was rather plain, only a single story with less than 4 classrooms in it, and there wasn’t anything about it that distinguishes it from any other building on campus, that is unless you count the huge, beautifully made mural that spread around all four sides of the building as a notable trait.

Entering the building, Akashi walked to the end of the hall where Emi-sensei said her classroom was located. The door was open, and from what Akashi could see, there were still a few students hanging around working on their pieces or visual journals.

As Akashi slowly made his way to the front of the room, taking in as much of his surroundings as he could, he saw Emi-sensei, sitting cross legged on her desk, a canvas and easel situated in front of her, with a pallet in one hand and a paint brush in the other. She was painting.

“What are you working on?” Akashi asked, breaking the young woman’s concentration. She smiled when she saw it was him.

“Ah Akashi, I was hoping you’d be able to find me, I was just working on a piece of my own. I wasn’t lying when I said that I was still an active artist you know.” she stated, motioning for Akashi to come closer. Doing what he was told, he moved to stand next to Emi-sensei, who turned her painting so he could see what she was working on.

“Fireflies” Akashi commented in realization and awe.

“When I was a little girl my grandparents lived in a house just like this one. Every summer my parents would send me and my little sister to spend the summer with them away from the hustle and bustle of the city. My sister was always more of a city girl so she hated it there, but me…” Emi-sensei paused as she smiled fondly at the painting “I loved every second I spent there, running through the hills and the forest barefoot, chasing after my grandpa’s dog, walking down to the river
and taking a swim or fishing, laying in the grass and watching the clouds go by… it was some of the best moments of my life.”

Akashi remained silent as Emi-sensei pointed to her painting. “But this right here, this is without a doubt the happiest, and most wonderful moment of my life.”

“How so?” Akashi asked, his curiosity beginning to take over as it wished to know more.

“This painting right here depicts a very special ceremony called “The Passing of Souls”. You see my grandparents believe that fireflies were actually the souls of those who have wandered the Earth, previously unable to pass on for some reason. When the soul has been brought to peace, it becomes a firefly, and that tiny little firefly, will travel over vast amounts of land in order to reach what is called a “passing point” or a place where souls can more easily pass from the world of the living to that of the dead.” Emi-sensei explained her hands moving as she spoke.

“But if it is easier for souls to travel to the world of the dead at the passing point, why don’t they just cross over once they get there?” Akashi questioned.

“Well where’s the fun in that? Just leaving is such a boring way to pass on, but that’s where The Passing of Souls comes into play” Emi-sensei remarked.

“You see it’s not just a couple of fireflies that gather for The Passing of Souls, no, I’m talking about millions of fireflies all gathered in one place, waiting for the sun to go down, and once the last stream of sunlight has disappeared behind the horizon,” she stops, looking at her painting, “they all rise up in unison, their lights shining brighter than ever before, flying and dancing all around, filling the darkness of the night sky with neverending light.”

“What was it like?” Akashi urged, barely able to contain his curiosity and enrapturement with his teacher’s tale. Emi-sensei stared at the painting for a moment before answering.

“It was like magic” she finally said, “the way they dance around you, little balls of light rushing past you, rising up toward the heavens, driving the darkness of night away, making the world seem a little less scary. Its moments like these that make you realize that growing up is a choice, and so long as you never let go of what it means to be a kid, then you don’t have to grow up... not fully at least.”

There was a long moment of silence between the two. Emi-sensei seemed lost in thought, and Akashi was too busy trying to wrap his head around what his teacher had just told to him to break her from it.

“Anyways, I’m rambling on about this and I’m sure you have things to get to so why don’t we get started discussing the prerequisites you’ll have to fulfill for the advanced class.” Emi-sensei said, standing up from where she was sitting on the desk and moving to grab a few pieces of paper, which she then handed to Akashi.

It didn’t take very long to go over the general information about the class: prerequisite for getting into the class, purpose and goals of the course, and expectations and grading standards for the work the student turns in, to name a few.

“Anyways that’s all you really need to know so far. It’s still pretty early in the year so you have plenty of time to work on the prerequisite pieces, and with the quality of pages you’ve given me in your visual journal so far, I think the board will have a pretty hard time denying you entry to the class even though you only have a year under your belt.” Emi-sensei assured leaning against her desk.
“Do you have any more questions?”

“No, I think I have everything I need, thank you so much for taking the time to work with me” Akashi thanked, bowing in respect.

“No problem, it’s always nice to see kids like you take an interest and want to continue on with art. I’ll see you tomorrow in class” she assured.

“Yes, see you in class.” Akashi replied, turning to exit the room, but before he could make it out, he turned back to his teacher, who had resumed painting as though nothing had happened.

“Emi-sensei?” Akashi called.

“Ya?”

“Thank you… for letting me look at your piece and telling me about The Passing of Souls. Your painting is very good and… I really enjoyed your story,” Akashi pauses before continuing.

“Perhaps you’d be willing to tell me another one someday?” he inquires, slightly nervous about how his teacher will react to his request. Emi-sensei looked at him for a second, a bit confused and maybe even surprised, before a happy and fond smile spread its way across her lips. She chuckles before speaking.

“I think I’d like that very much. I’m glad you liked it so much. Hell knows I have plenty of them to tell” she said turning back to her painting.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” was all Akashi said before turning and exiting the room. He knew if he didn’t hurry he would be late for basketball practice, but the thought didn’t seem to bother him as much as it usually would have. Right now the only thing on his mind was the image of fireflies, dancing and circling in the sky, sailing toward the heavens, as they lit up the darkness with the light of passing souls.

Chapter End Notes

And there you have, probably the most self indulgent chapter I had written thus far. The story Emi-sensei tells Akashi is actually a story that my grandma used to tell me when I was a wee baby so that’s where the inspiration for it came from, also I feel like the story kind of shows you why Emi-sense acts and behaves the way she does. She believes that the world is full of magic and mystery and so she decided to hold on to a piece of her childlike curiosity and excitement and carry it with her into adulthood. I also think that its good for someone like Akashi to interact with someone like Emi-sensei, because I honestly dont think that Akashi was allowed very much of a childhood in the sense that he was allowed to be creative and make messes and make mistakes, he was always just expected to be perfect, so I think that having him be mentored and taught by someone who fulled believes in, and endorses, making mistakes for the sake of learning and being creative will be really good for his character. Anyways enough rambling. I hope you enjoyed reading this chapter as much as I enjoyed writing it. And I will see you all soon for chapter 7.
Anger

Chapter Notes

Hi, I'm back. Sorry to keep whoever is actually reading this story waiting, but college is really hard, so I don't always have time to write as much as I'd like, but that doesn't matter right how, cuz I'm here with a brand new chapter of this story. Enjoy! Not beta read. Be nice.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

To say that everyone in the gym was surprised when Akashi Seijuro, captain and always present member of the Rakuzan Basketball Club, walked in nearly 45 minutes late to practice was an understatement. He paid their bewildered expressions no mind however, as he headed toward the locker room to change.

Once out of his uniform and into his workout clothes, he exited the locker room, and found a small space near the wall to stretch. About halfway through his stretches, he noticed Coach Shirogane walking toward him, and stood up as the man approached.

"Is there any particular reason for your late arrival today?" the man questioned, though more out of curiosity than distrust.

"Yes, I had a meeting with a teacher to discuss a few things and we ended up talking for longer than I had initially intended. I apologize for not informing you sooner" Akashi confessed, bowing slightly in apology. Coach Shirogane hummed in response, looking back toward the other players.

"There’s no need to apologize to me Akashi. I know how dedicated and driven you are, both to this team, as well as to this sport. I don’t need to babysit you-"

"NO NO NO! I TOLD YOU TO DRIVE THE BALL TO THE HALF COURT LINE AND THEN PASS THE BALL, WHY ARE YOU GIVING IT UP SOONER?" came the sound of angered yelling from the other side of the court, interrupting their conversation. Coach Shirogane sighed in frustration, pinching the bridge of his nose with his fingers.

"The others, on the other hand…” he trailed off looking over to Nebuya, who, Akashi notes, appears to be running drills with some of the newest members of the team that were inducted the month before. Akashi also notes the fact that Nebuya looks like he’s about to have an aneurysm, his mouth is turned down into a scowl, his shoulders were tense, and the veins on his forehead and neck were clearly visible from where he and Coach Shirogane stood nearly 10 meters away.

Most of the members he was working with appeared to be backing away from Nebuya fearfully, likely afraid of being snapped in two by the goliath man, who was currently focusing his rage on one particular boy.

"WHEN I EXPLAINED THIS DRILL I TOLD YOU TO DRIVE THE BALL TO AT LEAST THE HALF COURT LINE, AND THEN IF YOU COULDN’T GET ANY FURTHER BECAUSE YOU WERE BEING GUARDED, YOU COULD PASS THE BALL TO ONE OF YOUR TEAMMATES, SO WHY ARE YOU PASSING IT WHEN YOU’RE BARELY PAST THE THREE POINT LINE?" Nebuya roared at the boy, who only managed to stutter in response, his
knees trembling, and his eyes beginning to fill with tears.

“Should I go tell him to calm down and be more patient?” Akashi asks the coach, unsure of what to do.

“No, his anger is justified.” Coach Shirogane responds, but noticing Akashi’s questioning expression he continues.

“I assigned Nebuya to work with that particular group because those players have difficulty driving the ball from one end of the court to the other. They aren’t forceful enough with their offence and they give up the ball too easily, so naturally I assigned them someone who excels at powerful, forceful attacks.” Akashi nods his head in understanding.

“He’s actually been fairly helpful and patient up until this point, which is rather surprising, but that was probably the 12th time that particular player has passed the ball to one of his teammates far too early, resulting in them being scored against. Nebuya has explained the drill numerous times and has even provided a visual demonstration of what he wants them to do, but for some reason they just aren’t getting it.” Coach Shirogane adds, heaving another sigh as Nebuya has the group run through the drill one more time, only for the same boy to pass it up too easily, resulting in the ball stolen, and the boy’s team being scored against.

Nebuya just stands there for a moment, completely silent as the same thing he’s been telling them about for the past hour continues to happen over and over and over again, and Nebuya steadily becomes more and more frustrated and angry. As he stood there on the sidelines, watching the most pathetic string of baskets to ever be scored in the game of basketball take place, Akashi could feel himself beginning to get annoyed with the players, and he wasn’t even the one who had to deal with them. He glanced over at Nebuya, who now had his head in his hands, his frustration and anger written in the tenseness of his shoulders.

After what was probably the 20th failed attempt at the drill they had been assigned, Nebuya finally breaks, he groans frustratedly into his hands before throwing them up in defeat, walking across the court and exiting the gym all together, closing the door behind him with a loud bang that echoes throughout the gym.

“Normally I wouldn’t condone such childish behavior, but after watching quite possibly the worst basketball I’ve ever seen in my entire career, I honestly can’t even blame him for giving up,” Coach Shirogane comments, turning toward the door Nebuya had just exited.

“Should I go talk to him?” Akashi asks, following his coaches gaze.

“Eventually yes, but for now give him some time to cool off. He’s been able to refrain from physical violence thus far, and while you may be stronger than him in terms of basketball skill, there’s no denying that he possesses far more raw physical strength than you, and if I’m being perfectly honest, I’d hate to think about what a sucker punch to the face from a truly enraged Nebuya would feel like.” Coach Shirogane responded, making his way toward the group Nebuya had just abandoned.

Akashi only took a brief moment to wonder what being punched in the face from a seething Nebuya would actually look and feel like. Based off of the amount of blood and bruised flesh his brain provided him, he gathered it was something that even he should take measures to avoid as much as possible. As a result, Akashi decided to finish stretching and warming up and do a few drills with Mibuchi and Hayama, before finally exiting the gym in search of Nebuya.
Ooooooooh a cliffhanger. I wonder what will happen next. Thanks for reading. I hope you are enjoying this story as much as I enjoy writing it. PS Nebuya is a big fucking guy. He's 6'3", weighs 200+ pounds, and his hobby is wrestling, I don't care how perfect or how great Akashi is, one solid punch from an angry Nebuya and Akashi would be down for the count, no questions asked. But hey, that's just my personal opinion (just like how most of this fic is my personal opinion). Anyways, I hope you enjoyed this chapter. I have much more in the works for this fic so tune in next time for what happens in chapter 8.
Chapter Notes

Hey welcome back... blah blah... not beta read. be nice. GO READ!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Walking along with path that was laid outside the gym, Akashi was eventually lead to an area just outside the gate to the baseball field, a solid 10 minute walk from the basketball gym, where a few trees provided shade to a small area of unkempt grass. Akashi noticed a particularly large lump lying in the unkempt grass, and as he approached, he was correct in the assumption that the lump was Nebuya, who must have run out this way in an attempt to release some of his pent up frustration.

As Akashi stepped closer to Nebuya, he couldn’t help but notice a spot on one of the trees where the bark had been cracked and forced inward by a solid 6 cm. Glancing over at Nebuya, he saw that the man’s right hand, which was thrown over his eyes to block whatever sunlight managed to get past the tree leaves, was bleeding rather heavily. Akashi swallowed as his brain went back to his earlier imagination of what it would look like to take a punch to the face from Nebuya, except this time, instead of where his bloodied face was, now he didn’t even have a head. His brain was obviously insinuating that the force of one punch from an enraged Nebuya would likely be enough to send his head careening off his body, and perhaps into planetary orbit if he put some backbone into it.

Now that’s not to say that Akashi is actually afraid of Nebuya. Sure the man could be intimidating and menacing when he feels so inclined to be, but even now after Akashi has seen the damage that Nebuya has done to that poor tree, he’s not afraid. Perhaps he’s a bit more careful than usual as he approaches the currently still man and sits down next to him eying his still bleeding hand, but even that feeling subsides as he waits in silence, watching the baseball players practice from afar.

It’s probably a good 5 minutes of silent waiting before Nebuya finally heaves a long and tired sigh, wipes his hands over his face, and sits up. His eyes are red and bloodshot and Akashi can still see the veins on his neck still sticking out and pulsing, though not as prominently as before. Overall Nebuya looks very very tired and very very done with today.

“I have never been that mad before, in my entire life” Nebuya finally comments, his voice slightly hoarse, probably from all the yelling he’s done. Akashi remains silent as he continues.

“I have 3 older brothers. 3 older brothers, whose favorite activity consists of beating up, making fun of, teasing, taunting, and picking on their youngest brother, and yet never in the 18 years of my life have I been as angry as I was back there,” Nebuya sighs heavily.

“It was a simple drill. Start with the ball at your side of the court, drive it down to the half court line, if you can make it farther then go, but if you can’t then pass, easy... or at least I thought it was” Akashi honestly can’t tell if Nebuya is talking more to him or to himself, but he sits and listens regardless.

“The first few times I was fine with, they were still getting the hang of it and they were trying really hard and actually doing some good stuff, and everything was fantastic... but then it was
Hayashi’s turn with the ball” Akashi had no idea who the hell Hayashi was, but based on the frustration Nebuya seemed to associate with the name he assumed that it was the lean, brown haired boy that Nebuya had gone off on before leaving the gym.

“I don’t know what’s up with that kid, but it’s like you’ll pull him aside to say something to him about what he did wrong, and then he goes and makes the same mistake again and again and again. I mean, I probably explained what he was doing wrong 7. FUCKING. times, and it just went in one ear and out the other and it’s so frustrating because I’m standing here, spending my own training time, trying to help this kid and he’s just not getting it and it’s like no matter what I do or say it just… ugh” Nebuya sighs and drops his head to lay on his knees.

“It’s almost like he didn’t care or didn’t think what I had to say was actually worth listening to, like I don’t know what the fuck I’m talking about” Nebuya finishes. Akashi has never been very good with things like emotional support or comforting words, so at this point he’s kind of at a loss of what he should say, or if he should say anything at all.

He knew Nebuya had a right to be upset with Hayashi, after all Nebuya had, very graciously, offered up some of his own precious practice time in order to instruct the group, and to feel like his kindness and experience was being wasted on people who didn’t care or didn’t appreciate what they were being given probably didn’t feel to great. On the other hand, despite his frustrations with Hayashi, there had to of been a better way to resolve the situation than to just start yelling at him. After all, in the end it only ended up making Hayashi do worse than previously, and Nebuya even more frustrated.

“Coach is gonna kill me for walking out isn’t he?” Nebuya asked, turning his head to finally look at Akashi for the first time since he arrived. Akashi ponders his answer.

“I doubt it. He actually preferred that you left to blow off steam rather than resort to physical violence” Akashi responded. Nebuya chuckled slightly.

“Physical violence huh?”

“You looked about 2 seconds away from murdering that kid”

“Oh I wanted to strangle him so bad”

“I’m honestly surprised that you didn’t” Nebuya glanced at Akashi out of the corner of his eye for a moment.

“How surprised would you be if I were to tell you that I actually hate fighting and confrontation?” he asked, lifting his head to lean it against his uninjured hand, gauging Akashi’s response. Akashi was caught off guard by the question, taking a moment to think before speaking.

“I suppose it wouldn’t surprise me too much. Sure your high-fives are a bit rough, you squeeze a little too hard during hugs, and you like wrestling but… you’re not a malicious person. You’ve never done or said anything for the sole purpose of harming someone. I’ve never seen or even heard of you getting into a fight with someone on campus, and whenever you come up in a conversation either in class or in the cafeteria or wherever, the first thing anyone ever has to say about you is how nice and friendly you are.” Nebuya just stares at him.

“I also think that walking away was a rather mature decision on your part. You’re bigger and stronger than pretty much all of us on the team, which means that, had you chosen to, you could have easily beaten Hayashi into a bloody pulp and there would have been nothing we could have done to stop you. But you didn’t; you realized that your frustration and anger was becoming too
much for you to handle, so you took a step back and walked away, and I think that shows that you aren’t the violent brute, who solves all his problems with his fists, like everyone seems to think you are, and I honestly think that’s something to be proud of.

After Akashi is finished with his speech, Nebuya turns his gaze out toward the baseball field. It’s quiet for several more minutes before Nebuya turns back to him.

“Do you… do you think I’m stupid?” Again, Akashi is caught off guard by Nebuya’s question and perhaps more so by the fact that there’s no sarcasm or hostility in his tone of voice. Nebuya is actually asking him if he thinks that he’s stupid. Akashi has to think very long and very hard about this question before he can provide an answer.

“I suppose it would depend on what you’re definition of stupid is” Nebuya did not seem satisfied with this answer, his eyes narrow and his lips curl up into a scowl, but before he could say anything, Akashi cuts him off.

“If you are referring to your general behavior around us then, yes, I suppose some people would label that as ‘stupid’. But in reality I think that’s more of a reflection of your comfort and trust in us than anything else. As for your intellect, I don’t have first hand experience with you in the classroom where such things are most prominent, but, once or twice, I have seen you talk very knowledgeably about subjects that you are interested in, like chemistry and psychology, I’ve heard that despite your reputation you actually have very good grades, and I’ve also heard that you received a perfect score on the national Japanese History Exam last year, making you one of only three people in the whole country to have done so for that year. So to revisit your question, no, I don’t think you’re stupid in the slightest, so whoever told you that you are needs to rethink their opinion of you, because as far as I’m concerned, they have you all wrong.

Nebuya remains silent. He stares at Akashi with a look of uncertainty on his face, as though he expects the redhead to take everything he said back and begin insulting him. But Akashi doesn’t do that, he merely sits quietly next to Nebuya, looking calmly at the man next to him as he thinks through his next move. Nebuya’s mouth opens to say something but never gets the chance, as he is interrupted by the sound of someone calling them.

“Over here Mibuchi,” Akashi calls back, standing up and waving to give their location to their worried teammate, who hurries quickly over to them.

“There you two are, I’ve been looking all over for you. You were taking so long to get back that coach sent me after you to make sure that - EI-CHAN WHAT ON EARTH HAPPENED TO YOUR HAND?” Mibuchi squawked, horrified by the sight of Nebuya’s bloodied, bruised, and swollen fist.

“Punching trees sounds like a really good idea when you’re mad,” Nebuya replied exhaustedly, gesturing over to the particularly large dent he had made in said tree earlier. Mibuchi heaved a sigh and grumbled something under his breath, before sitting down and very gingerly taking Nebuya’s injured hand into his own, likely assessing the extent of the damage.

“Well, I suppose it was either this or Hayashi. Probably would have knocked that boy’s head right off his neck with how upset he was making you.”

“That’s what I thought,” Akashi commented inwardly, only to realize that he had accidentally said it out loud. Nebuya was now giving him a strange look, while Mibuchi had fallen back into the grass, clutching his hand over his stomach, laughing.

“OW, shit” Nebuya winced, yanking his hand away from Mibuchi, who looked mildly horrified
for having accidentally harmed his teammate in his carelessness. A few new streams of blood began to flow from his fist again.

“I’m sorry,” Mibuchi apologized, his face contorted with worry.

“It’s fine, don’t worry about it. Just some skin opening back up” Nebuya grimaced down at his hand. The dark skin was torn all across the knuckle, blood scabbed and crusted over in certain areas, wet and runny in others. The area where his fist made contact with the tree had swollen greatly, looking red and angry. Long story short, it looked painful.

“Guess I won’t be playing with this for a few days huh?” Nebuya asks, though probably more to himself than anyone else.

“Well, we’ll have it examined by the nurse when we get back. So long as you didn’t break anything I’m sure you’ll be back to normal in no time” Akashi offers, standing up and beginning to walk toward the gym.

“Ya, we had better start getting back, coach sent me out here to bring you guys back to the gym so we’d better go report to him before he sends Ko-chan out here next,” Mibuchi states, standing up and offering his hand to Nebuya, who takes it and allows himself to be helped up and lead down the path back to the gym.

Akashi doesn’t know what Nebuya wanted to say to him before Mibuchi turned up, and he likely never will, but Nebuya’s eyes weren’t as red or bloodshot anymore, the veins in his neck were no longer visible, and his shoulders were far more relaxed than when he had first arrived. So while Akashi may not have answered all of Nebuya’s questions, he was happy that he was, at the very least, able to help his teammate relax a little bit by giving him someone to talk to.

Listening. Akashi is good that.

Chapter End Notes

Yay insecurities! So this chapter (like all the others) is based off of my extremely some self indulgent head cannons that A) Nebuya is actually very intelligent and does extremely well in school, but just acts like a shithead around his friends and B) due to some events in his past (which will be referenced and explained later on) he isn't actually as confident in himself as he initially seems. So ya, that's where this chapter came from. I hope you enjoyed, and I will see you all for chapter 9!
Coach Shirogane turned his head upon hearing the door to the gym open and close, pleased to see that Mibuchi was successful in bringing Akashi and Nebuya back. Although before he could say anything to the three he noticed Nebuya’s bloodied fist.

“Do I even want to know how you managed to injure your hand so badly?” he asked, addressing Nebuya.

“Punching trees sounds like a really good idea when you’re mad?” Nebuya offers, repeating his earlier statement to Mibuchi. Coach Shirogane sighs pinching the bridge of his nose, before taking Nebuya’s hand to get a closer look at his injury.

“Well I suppose this is better than you sending that Hayashi boy’s head flying across the room in a rage”

“You are literally the third person to say that in the last 20 minutes. Why does everyone suddenly think I’m capable of decapitating someone like the fucking hulk?” Nebuya asks incredulously, turning to glare back at Hayama who’s currently laughing at him.

“Never mind that. There’s no way I’m allowing you to play with your first in this condition. It doesn’t appear to be broken thankfully, but Mibuchi will be taking you to the nurse’s office to inspect how badly you injured it. If you’re lucky you may have been able to get away with surface scratches and perhaps a bit of bone bruising, and you should be back within the next week or so, but if you’re not, then you could end up needing stitches,” Coach Shirogane stated, finally releasing Nebuya’s blood covered hand. Nebuya was looking down at the ground with a look of shame on his face.

“Oh well, what’s done is done, there’s no use worrying about it now. Mibuchi, take him to the nurse’s office and then back to his room,” Coach Shirogane said to Mibuchi before turning back to Nebuya “I want you resting for the next few days. If the nurse says that the damage isn’t too bad then you should be able to come back by the end of the week and resume your training, but I don’t want to see you back in here until you get the ok from her. Understand?”

“Yes sir” Nebuya responds, allowing Mibuchi to lead him out of the gym and toward the nurse’s office without another word.

The rest of practice proceeds as usual, though there’s no sign of Nebuya or Mibuchi for the rest of the day. Once practice ends for the day, Akashi heads for the locker room to take a shower. Upon arriving at the locker room, he notices that both Nebuya and Mibuchi’s belongings and gone, meaning they must not have been planning to come back once they went to the nurse’s office and
received a verdict on Nebuya’s hand.

Speaking of Nebuya, Akashi wondered how he was doing. He hadn’t been able to stop thinking about Nebuya’s strange questions regarding his dislike of confrontation or whether or not Akashi thought he was stupid; they seemed like strange things for him to ask.

Overall, Nebuya seemed like a very confident individual. He was a large, strong, and imposing person who didn’t seem to care what other people thought about him, and while Akashi wasn’t lying when he told Nebuya that a great many people thought about him, and while Akashi wasn’t lying when he told Nebuya that a great many people thought he was a very nice person or that he was intelligent in his own way, it seemed slightly out of character for Nebuya to even care about whether people thought he was nice or mean or smart or stupid or whatever else.

As Akashi was staring off into space, lost in thought, he failed to notice Hayama sneaking up behind him before the boy jumped onto his back, laughing.

“Hahaha, gotcha Akashi” he boy cheered gleefully, still hanging off the red heads back.

“Ah… yes, I suppose you did Hayama” Akashi replied, trying to steady his voice as to not reveal how frightened and surprised he was by the blonde’s surprise attack.

“You seem distracted, what’s on your mind?” the blonde asks, finally removing himself from his captain and moving to stand in front of him. Akashi hesitates, unsure of if he should divulge his earlier experience with Nebuya to his teammate.

“It’s about Nebuya” Akashi admits. Hayama seems surprised by this.

“Ei-chan, what’s wrong with him?”

“Would you describe Nebuya as a confident person?” Akashi asks. Hayama thinks for a moment before answering.

“Hmm… ya I’d say so. After all he never seems to be bothered by Reo-nee telling him he’s gross for burping out loud all the time or really by anything anyone says about him. Why?”

“Well… I was talking to him earlier, and he asked me some strange questions about my opinion of him” Akashi admits.

“You’re opinion of him? What did he ask?” Hayama prods, wanting to know more. Akashi still isn’t sure whether he should be talking about the private conversation he had with Nebuya with someone like Hayama who, despite not meaning any harm by it, is kind of a blabber mouth. But he knows that unless he talks about it with someone, the thought of the conversation will eat at him for the rest of the night, so, against his better judgement, he answers.

“First he asked me if I thought it was strange for someone like him to dislike confrontation, and I responded saying that despite his reputation he wasn’t a mean or malicious person, so it didn’t surprise me too much, and then he went on to ask me if I thought he was stupid.”

“Stupid as in…?”

“Stupid as in ‘incapable of complex intellectual thought’ probably” Akashi offers. Now it was Hayama’s turn to look uncertain, as though he didn’t believe what Akashi was telling him to be truth… or was it that he looked as though he had something to say but wasn’t sure whether he should say it or not.

“What did you say back to him?” Hayama asks, still with a look of uncertainty on his face.
“I told him that his behavior at practice showed his comfort and trust around us more than anything else and despite not having a first hand understanding of the way he thinks and his overall intelligence, that there are plenty of things that he has done in his academic career to prove that he is smart in his own way” Akashi responds truthfully. Hayama bites his lip, prompting Akashi to continue.

“I’m not sure what could have prompted him to ask such questions, but I get the feeling that maybe you do…” Akashi trails off looking up at his senior who nods in affirmation, and looks around the room for people before motioning for Akashi to come closer.

“You didn’t hear this from me but…” he begins “Ei-chan and I went to elementary school together; we didn’t know each other very well or anything but I remember that he was way different back then than he is now.”

“How so?” Akashi questioned.

“Well… he was a lot smaller back then, and I mean really small, like skin and bones small. He also had really long hair, was really quiet most of the time, kept to himself a lot. Most kids thought he was really girly cuz he hung out with girls and seemed to like a lot of the stuff they did, I guess ” Hayama explains. Akashi looks confused at his senior.

“What does that mean?” the redhead asks. Hayama sighs before answering.

“It means he got bullied… like a lot, by the other boys in his class. They’d call him mean names, throw his books and notes around, and beat him up all the time, and he never did anything to defend himself, and even if he did, he was the one who always got in trouble for it” Hayama explains.

“Nebuya got bullied?” Akashi asks, though more to himself than anyone else.

“I know it’s hard to believe looking at him now, but trust me, elementary school was absolute hell for the guy” the blonde admits.

“But what did he do that merited such awful treatment from his classmates?” Akashi asks.

“Remember when I said that he was friends with primarily girls, well a lot of his male classmates were jealous that Ei-chan was so good at talking to girls and getting their attention and stuff, so they started bullying and making fun of him for it, calling him terrible names and stuff.

“Like…?” Akashi urges hesitantly.


“That’s… horrible” Is all Akashi can think to say.

“Ya, thankfully their bullying never went too far but, you can imagine the kind of impact stuff like that has on a 10 year old kid who’s just trying to fit in” Hayama states, turning to lean against the lockers with a sigh. “When we tried out for the basketball team our first year of high school, I didn’t even realize that the huge guy standing in front of me and the tiny, kinda girly lookin’, kid from elementary school were the same person until coach called out his name. It definitely took me by surprise”

Akashi pauses for a moment, thinking over all the information he had received.

“Why do you think he changed so much?” Akashi asks Hayama.
“Well, he spent the majority of his childhood being made fun of for his looks and his personality, maybe he thought that if he became more ‘masculine’ that people would finally respect him, or at the very least, leave him alone” Hayama guessed, shrugging his shoulders.

“I suppose that makes sense, but I’m guessing that despite the change in his appearance, he still held on to much of the trauma and insecurities he received from when he was younger?” Akashi speculates.

“Probably,” Hayama responds “after all I doubt letting go of nearly 3 years worth of harassment and torture isn’t something you can do overnight, no matter how much you change on the outside.”

“So, what do you think prompted him to ask me my opinion on his intelligence?” Akashi questioned, looking back at Hayama.

“It was that Hayashi guy. I’d heard from some other players that he’s pretty full of himself and thinks he’s god’s greatest gift to the world or whatever, even though he isn’t really all that good” Hayama explains.

“He’s also a massive bully, and has started a lot of rumors about the different players on the team. The one’s he’s started on Ei-chan mock his intelligence by saying that ‘the only way he’s managed to pass his classes was by cheating on the final exams’ or that ‘he bribes the teachers into give him good grades because he obviously isn’t smart enough to get them on his own’, and all that lovely bullshit” Hayama spits out in mild anger.

“Is that so?” Akashi asks lowly, making a mental note to speak with the coach, and perhaps the principle, about this the first chance he gets.

‘There won’t be any of that on my team. Not if I have anything to say about it’ Akashi thinks to himself.

“Just remember, you didn’t hear any of this from me” Hayama reiterates. Akashi nods before asking his next question.

“Ok, so I suppose having rumors started about you that mock your intelligence would cause you to question yourself and your intellect, but I still don’t get why he asked me about his dislike of confrontation. Sure he isn’t a malicious person but, why would Nebuya care if I or other people thought he was vicious or violent? Wouldn’t that work more to his favor?” the redhead wondered, looking to Hayama for a possible answer. The blonde pondered for a minute before answering.

“Our first year of highschool, Ei-chan and I were in the same classroom and we were working on a group project. Everything was going great and Ei-chan was kind of doing his own thing with his group… that is until a girl from the group behind him got the bright idea to turn around and dig her fingers and nails into Ei-chan’s ribs, causing him to tense up, and then BAM, ram his elbow right into her face.” Hayama described. Akashi remained silent as his teammate continued.

“Seconds later the girl was on the ground, screaming her lungs out, blood pouring down her face. When the teacher came over and asked what happened the girl said that Ei-chan had punched her for no good reason. Ei-chan and everyone else in the class tried to explain what actually happened, but the teacher wasn’t having any of it, and sent him to the office. The rumors of ‘Nebuya beat up a girl half his size for no reason” went around for weeks, and people started avoiding him ‘cuz they were afraid that he was just gonna go crazy and start attacking everyone. He was miserable for weeks” Hayama finishes with a sad expression on his face.

Akashi remembered back to earlier that day, before Nebuya had left the gym. The players he was
working with were a mixture of first, second, and third years, and while the first and second years looked reasonably afraid of Nebuya while he yelled at Hayashi for his mistakes, Akashi realized that the third years were the one’s backing away from him, almost as though Nebuya were a wild animal that would tear them to pieces if they didn’t get away from him. Those third years must have remembered the rumors that went around about him during their first and believed them enough to think their safety was actually in danger while Nebuya was yelling at that boy. At that moment, everything made a whole lot more sense.

“Care to share your thoughts with the rest of the group?” Hayama asked poking Akashi in the forehead and breaking the boy from his pensive state.

“I was just thinking how, with everything you’ve told me about Nebuya and his past experiences with being bullied, he must have felt very overwhelmed in that moment with Hayashi. There are rumors going around deliberately mocking his intelligence and academic integrity, there were a few third years in his group who obviously remembered the event from your first year and believe Nebuya to be very dangerous and violent, and to top it all off, the very person who started all these horrible rumors is back talking him and messing up again and again and again despite Nebuya trying his best to help him. It must have been very frustrating” Akashi admits, leaning against the lockers next to his teammate and looking down at the floor.

A silence falls between the two players, the sound of distant chattering and boys getting ready to go home for the night filled the emptying locker room.

“I think Ei-chan will be ok” Hayama states, catching Akashi by surprise.

“Well I’m sure he will, but what makes you say that so confidently?” Akashi asks the blonde in confusion.

“Cuz he’s got people like you looking out for him” Hayama answers, winking at the redhead with a smile.

“Of course I’m looking out for him, I’m his captain and he is one of my players, it’s only natural that I would be concerned for him if something in his life were to cause a deterioration in his playing ability” Akashi answers stiffly. Hayama laughs at this.

“Ya know, if the old you had said that, I think I would have believed it, but after getting to know the real you a lot better, I can tell that your concern for him, and the rest of us, runs a lot deeper than you’d like to admit. Anyways, I’ll see you tomorrow” Hayama replies, before grabbing his bag and heading for the door.

Akashi stands in silence for a moment, a dumbstruck look on his face, thinking about the meaning of his teammates words, before speaking.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” Akashi calls after the blonde. The only response he gets is the echoed sound of laughter that is cut off once the locker room door closes.

Chapter End Notes

All aboard the pain train to insecurity-ville. Before you ask about Nebuya's tragic elementary school life and my description of what he looked like at that age, let me first tell you how much I fucking love characters who start small and kind of girly
looking and then grow into these hulking masses of muscle later on, also being bullied as a child would give him plenty of reason to harbor some insecurities about himself. Like always this is an extremely self indulgent concept but at this point I don't even feel sorry about it. This is my fanfic and DAMMIT I WILL PROJECT MY HEADCANNONS ON THESE CHARACTERS AS MUCH AS I FUCKING WANT. P.S. Hayama sees right past Akashi's hard exterior and can tell that he really does care about all of them now, so ya. Thanks so much for reading, and I will see you all soon for chapter 10!
Shadowing

Chapter Notes

Finally after all this time, Akashi gets to see what the advanced class is all about. Not beta read. Be nice.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The following morning Akashi finds himself wholly distracted by Hayama’s words from the night before.

‘Ya know, if the old you had said that, I think I would have believed it, but after getting to know the real you a lot better, I can tell that your concern for him, and the rest of us, runs a lot deeper than you’d like to admit’

‘What the fuck does that even mean?’ Akashi wonders to himself, his annoyance with the cryptic words of his teammate beginning to grow. Now he understands why Mibuchi gets so frustrated with him sometimes. Regardless of what his teammate meant, he brushed all those thoughts aside and readied himself for art class, but his attention is pulled upward at the sound of oohing and aahing from his classmates.

Walking into the classroom, wearing a black and white striped maxi skirt, navy blue halter top, and black gladiator sandals, was Emi-sensei.

“Emi-sensei, you look so pretty” one girl called out to her teacher.

“Why thank you Mashiba” Emi-sensei responds, doing a little twirl that causes her skirt to spin around her.

“Sensei, why are you dressed up all of a sudden?” a boy from the back of the room asks.

“Well this week the art department is meeting with the board of education from the school to discuss some important matters regarding next year’s roster for my advanced art class” Emi-sensei glances over at Akashi, and smiles.

“I’ll have you guys know that this year I have some really good kids in line hoping to get into that class, and so I figured I’d dress up,” she lowers her voice and leans in, “besides, all I have to do is show a little skin and those board members are like putty in my hand”

The class erupts in boisterous laughter at their teacher’s blunt, and perhaps scandalous, statement, and even Akashi can’t help but chuckle at the thought.

“Remember ladies, a little shoulder goes a long way in dealing with entitled old men who think they know everything” Emi-sensei adds before releasing the class to work on their pieces. Akashi was already finished with his hand piece, so he merely sat quietly, reading a book at his desk while the rest of his classmates worked diligently on their own pieces, still not brave enough to test Emi-sensei’s “target practice” theory.

“Akashi” the boy in question looked up at the mention of his name, and saw Emi-sensei waving him over to her desk. He got up and walked over, grabbing a chair and sitting it next to his teacher
at her request.

“So I was talking with the board yesterday about getting you into the advanced art class, and for the most part they seemed ok with it, however, for some reason, the board is demanding that incoming students “shadow” a day in class, to see and get a feel for how the class works and to have a chance to talk with some of the students currently in the class this year” Emi-sensei explains.

“That sounds interesting” Akashi responds.

“It is, the only problem I’m having right now is that they want all the incoming students to go into the class on the same day, and I’m having issues coming up with a solid day and time” she states.

“I’m assuming you’re wondering what day and time would work best for me then?” Akashi asks.

“You got it” Emi-sensei affirms.

“So far I have Tuesday during 5th period, Thursday during 3rd period, and Friday during last period as potential days, with last period on Friday being the most popular and obvious choice, but I figured I’d still ask just to make sure I wasn’t pulling you from a really important class or anything” the woman finished, looking up from a schedule she had placed on her desk.

“No, Friday would be a perfect day for me” Akashi states. Emi-sensei sighs in visible relief.

“Oh thank god, you just saved me so. much. work.” she finishes with a laugh, reaching over and playfully ruffling his red hair, one of the many gestures of affection Emi-sensei has shown Akashi since the beginning of the year. At first he thought it was strange that a teacher would perform such friendly and familiar acts with students, but over time, Akashi has come to appreciate and even like the high-fives, hair ruffles, shoulder punches, and even occasional hugs that his teacher gives out. Reaching into her desk she writes something on a piece of paper before handing it to Akashi.

“I’m not gonna be here for the rest of the week because of board and teacher meetings so take this pass and give it to your 6th period teacher on Friday and just head on over to my classroom. Ok?”

“Yes, thank you very much” Akashi says, taking the pass and bowing slightly, before returning to his seat.

A few of his classmates give him strange looks as he walks back to his desk, but he pays them no mind. Never before in his life had Akashi been so anxiously excited for Friday to arrive.

After what seemed like eons of waiting, the end of fifth period on Friday finally arrived. Akashi didn’t even wait for his 6th period teacher to arrive, simply placing the pass on the teacher’s desk before sprinting as fast as he could out of the classroom, down the hall, and out the double front doors of the school building, completely ignoring the hall monitor who said something about not running in the halls as Akashi flew past him on his way out the door.

Upon arriving at the art building, Akashi noticed a few other students walking into the building as well. Opening the door to the art building, Akashi saw a large group of about 30 students standing at the end of the hall just outside of Emi-sensei’s classroom, likely the other candidates for the advanced class. A few of the students were chatting amongst themselves, but for the most part everyone kept to themselves, as the group waited for Emi-sensei to address them.

A few minutes after the final bell rang, Emi-sensei opened the door to her classroom and turned to the large group of students in front of her.
“Hey guys thank you so much for coming today. My name is Akira Emi, but you can call me Emi-sensei, and I am the one of the Intro and Advanced art teachers here at Rakuzan as well as the head director of the Art Department” Emi-sensei begins.

“Some of you I already know because you are in one of my intro classes and have expressed an interest in continuing down the path of visual arts, but most of you have probably been recommended to me and this class by a few of the other art teachers here on campus, correct?” a few raised hands and audible hmm’s affirms Emi-sensei’s hypothesis.

“Well either way I want to say thank you so much for showing an interest in this class and being here today, it really means a lot to me to know that you guys are passionate enough about art to want to continue with it into a more professional setting” she says before continuing.

“Now before you guys go into my classroom, I’m going to break you up into groups, a third of you will go down to Kobashi-sensei’s class, a third of you will head down to Kiyoshi-sensei’s class, and the final third will stay with me, sound good?” the group hollers and cheers in affirmation, and then Emi-sensei begins splitting up the large group.

Akashi thankfully ends up staying with Emi-sensei, and as the remaining 20 students filter into their respective classrooms, Emi-sensei finally turns to her remaining 10 students.

“Ok, so this is our final group huh?” she asks excitedly, a few of the other students seem put off or intimidated by Emi-sensei’s energetic and excited personality.

“Before you guys head in, I’m gonna call you up and give you a number, and that number will dictate what group you will be sitting with for the remainder of class ok?” she asks, not waiting for a response as she takes out a piece of paper and begins calling names.

Akashi isn’t surprised when his name is the first to be called, so he walks up to Emi-sensei who tells him his group number is ‘5’, and then opens her arms for a hug, which Akashi happily accepts.

The woman in question barely reaches Akashi’s chin and is rather small in frame, but that doesn't seem to deter her from wrapping her arms around Akashi and squeezing him tightly, though never enough to hurt him, of course. Akashi, although awkward about it at first, simply wrapped his arms around his teachers shoulders, allowing his head to lean against hers for a brief moment, before a soft pat to his back told him it was time to let go. Akashi always felt oddly calm and happy after receiving a hug from Emi-sensei, though he could never figure out why.

The other students seem utterly confused and baffled by the oddly friendly encounter between a teacher and one of their classmates, but Akashi paid them no mind as he headed into the classroom with a smile on his face.

Upon entering Emi-sensei’s classroom, he saw that the round tables that were mostly empty the last time he was here, were filled with students, presumably this year’s advanced studio art class. The majority of the class was made up of girls, but there were a couple of boys sprinkled here and there.

Looking around for some indication of which group he was supposed to sit at, Akashi finally noticed someone sitting down at one of the tables holding up a piece of paper that had a large ‘5’ printed on it. The person holding the piece of paper was one of the few males in the room, large and extremely muscular from what Akashi could see, and was talking animatedly to the five other girls seated at his table. He couldn’t see the boy’s face but as he moved closer to the group he noticed the boy had dark skin and short, buzz cut hair, with two lines shaved into the back… wait a
“Nebuya?” Akashi called.

The boy in question turned at the call of his name, glancing around the room before his eyes landed on Akashi. Nebuya stared at him for a moment in shock and slight disbelief.

“Akashi? What are you doing here?” the older boy asks.

“I’m one of the candidates for next year’s class so I’m here to shadow and this is the group I’ve been assigned to” Akashi responds.

“Hey, Ei, do you know this kid?” a girl with spiked, silver dyed hair asks.

“Ya, this is Akashi, captain of the basketball team” Nebuya responds, prompting the girls seated behind him to turn their attention to Akashi, their eyes scanning him up and down. A moment passes before they finally speak up.

“I expected him to be taller,”

“And more muscular,”

“And handsomer,”

“And have cooler hair,”

Akashi deflate slightly at the stream of criticisms on his appearance, though it’s not like he isn’t used to it, while Nebuya reals back laughing, nearly falling out of his chair in the process. Once he manages to compose himself he speaks.

“Alright alright, be nice. No need to scare him off with insults before the class even starts.”

“Aw, Ei you’re such a buzzkill” a brunet with a half shaven head replies defeatedly.

“Oh please, I am not the buzzkill of this group” Nebuya responds gesturing vaguely between himself and everyone else seated at the table.

“Whatever helps you sleep at night, honey”

“At me hoe” Nebuya deadpans, pushing the girl out of her chair with his foot and sending her to the floor with a crash and a screech.

Akashi watches the exchange between Nebuya and the other girls sitting with him in awe. It was almost like he was a completely different person, the way he interacted with the girls sitting next to him was completely different to the way he interacted with the team at practice. It was then that Akashi remembered what Hayama told him about Nebuya being better at talking to and befriending girls than boys when he was younger. Perhaps that skill remains dominant even today.

“Hey, Aka-chan, are you gonna stand there all day or are you gonna sit down? I promise we don’t bite… hard” a girl with bobbed black and purple hair and asymmetrical bangs says. She winks at him, and the act sends a chilling heat up Akashi’s spine.

He moves closer to the table and takes a seat next to Nebuya, on the opposite end of the table from the winking girl, who is now staring at him through half-lidded eyes that make him painfully aware of every ‘dirty’ thing he’s ever done in his short teenage life. There aren’t many things to speak of, but thinking about them all at once while making continuous direct eye contact with a girl...
he’s just met is beginning to send a deep blush up his neck and onto his face.

Noticing his discomfort, Nebuya reaches over the table and flicks the staring girl in the forehead, steering her attention away from Akashi with a quick, but stern ‘leave him alone’, causing the redhead to breath a sigh of relief.

“Just ignore them, they’re trying to weird you out” Nebuya whispers to Akashi.

“Ya well… I think it might be working” he replied, pushing his collar up in a futile attempt to hide his flushed skin. Nebuya chuckles, leaning his arm on Akashi’s shoulder. It was then that Akashi finally saw Nebuya’s, still bandaged, right hand.

“Oh that’s right, how’s your hand doing? You haven’t been to practice since you injured it so I never found out. Is it bad?” Akashi asks.

“No, it’s actually doing pretty good. I almost had to get stitches for it initially, but I’ve been icing the shit out of it the past few days and keeping it clean and stuff, and the nurse said that it’s healed so much already that the stitches aren’t necessary and I’m clear to come back for a light workout tonight actually” Nebuya answers gleefully.

“Well that’s good, I’m glad it wasn’t anything serious”

“You and me both” Nebuya responds.

“Anyways I guess I should introduce you to everyone while we wait for Emi-sensei to start class” Nebuya begins.

“The silver fox is Endo Hitoka”

“Hey” she smiles and waves.

“2008 Britney Spears if she had brown hair is Amano Madoka”

“Britney wishes she looked as good as I do with this haircut” the girl responds striking a provocative pose.

“Bedroom eyes is Takata Miho”

“I’m single” she winks at Akashi, promoting the boy to sink lower in his chair to avoid her gaze.

“And last but not least, gameboy girl is Tsuji Kaori” a girl that Akashi did not remember seeing peers over the other side of Nebuya, where she must have been sitting the whole time, and waves shyly at Akashi, who returns the gesture, before returning to her game. The girl is fairly small in stature, even smaller than Emi-sensei from the looks of it, her legs are pulled up to her chest with her Nintendo DS sitting on her knees, and her black hair is cropped as short Nebuya’s.

“So anyways, these are my friends outside of basketball” Nebuya states turning his attention back to Akashi.

“Well, it's very nice to meet all of you, and I hope you don’t mind me intruding on your group” Akashi says politely, regarding the four girls sitting around the table.

“No problem, it’s always good to see that Ei-chan has friends other than us. He never talks about basketball very much so we don’t really know too much about what goes on” Endo responds. Before Akashi can say anything in response, Emi-sensei walks into the room and calls for attention
Art class went by rather quickly. Emi-sensei started the day off by giving a short, but detailed, lecture about the requirements for getting into the advanced studio art class, the purpose of the class (to help its students apply and get accepted into art school), and the quality of work required in order to do well in the class (and get accepted into art school).

At first Akashi was slightly discouraged by this information. Yes, he did enjoy art and wish to pursue it further, but he knew that, ultimately, his father would never allow him to continue with it past high school, much less make it the focus of his college studies. Thankfully, his hopes were restored when Emi-sensei explained that if art school was not the ultimate goal, but they wished to still pursue art past high school, that the class would still be useful in building the necessary portfolio to qualify for an art major at any other college or university.

Akashi knew his father wanted him to major in something like business and finances so that he could one day take over the Akashi business, but perhaps he could convince his father to allow him to double major under the guise that the art course would teach him to think more creatively when planning business strategies or give him a better understanding of marketing and advertisement design. It would be a long shot, and he’d have to come up with solid reasoning and evidence before his father even considered the idea, but it wasn’t impossible either.

When the final bell rang, signalling the end of the day, Akashi thanked Emi-sensei for allowing him to shadow in her class for the day, and affirming that he would, in fact, be taking the class next year, before turning to leave.

“Hey Aka-chan” Amano called, stopping the redhead just as he was about to head out the door.

“Yes?”

“On fridays after we finish with after school clubs we usually head over Kaori’s house for pizza and video games. Wanna come?” Akashi was surprised by the question. He’d never been invited over to someone’s house after just meeting them.

“Well, I don’t have anything going on after clubs, but I don’t want to impose on Tsuji like that if she doesn’t feel comfortable with me just yet” he responded, looking over to the small girl, who was carefully putting her DS in her bag.

“You can come” was all Tsuji said before turning her attention back to her things.

“Then it's settled” Madoka stated, “Ei, you’ll make sure he doesn’t get lost right”

“No, I’m gonna leave him here and make him find his own way” Nebuya replied sarcastically, picking up his bag and heading over to Akashi.

“Alright Captain Sassafras, no need to be snippy” Akashi chuckled at the exchange.

“Then I suppose I will see you all later tonight then” he states before turning and exiting the room with Nebuya. They walk in silence for a moment before Nebuya speaks.

“So what did you think?” Nebuya asks curiously.

“About the class or your strange taste in friends?” Nebuya laughs at this.

“Both I guess’
“Well the class is very interesting and I am definitely going to try and fulfill the requirements to get into it, as for your friends…” Akashi pauses for a moment. “I don’t think I have the proper vocabulary necessary for describing them”

“Ya they’re a bunch of weirdos, but they’re my weirdos” Nebuya admits.

“How did you all meet?” Akashi asks.

“Well, we’ve known each other since we were little so we’ve always been friends, but we all opted out of music in our first year and took intro, that’s how we’ve been in the same class together for the past 3 years” Nebuya explains.

“I see. You all seem to get along well” Akashi says.

“Ya, I’ve always gotten along better with girls than boys” Nebuya comments offhandedly.

“Why is that?” Akashi asks, remembering his conversation with Hayama from earlier in the week. Nebuya looks at him out of the corner of his eye for a moment, gauging him.

“I don’t know” is all he says, but Akashi can tell by his body language that he is done talking about it, so Akashi doesn’t press further. The two continue their walk to basketball practice in silence.

Chapter End Notes

Honestly at this point I don't even feel the need to explain myself. I've introduced a few new original characters and their personalities kind of fall in line with the edgy art kid or the nerdy gamer tropes (mostly because 98% of the kids in my advanced art class were like that so of course I had to implement them). To me it didn't make sense to make them be super girly cuz those aren't really the type of people the Nebuya would hang out with in my opinion, so I came up with these four lovely ladies, and I am honestly so excited to write more about them in the future. Also the bit with Akashi and Miho was fucking hilarious and I honestly thought about taking it out but it made me laugh so much that I decided to keep it, sue me. Anyways thank you guys so much for reading, and I will see you all for chapter 11! P.S. Emi-sensei is #1 mom who loves her strange redheaded child pass it on!
Gamer Girls

Chapter Notes

It's a sleep over chapter. Not beta read. Be nice.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Practice proceeds in the same way it usually does, although everyone takes a moment to welcome Nebuya back and ask him how his hand is doing before beginning.

When 8 o’clock rolls around, everyone files into the locker room to shower and change for the night. As Akashi is finishing packing his things to head over to Nebuya, he is interrupted by Mibuchi calling him.

“Sei-chan, Ko-chan and I are headed over to grab some ramen before curfew, would you like to come with us?” the raven haired boy asks.

“Oh, I’m sorry Mibuchi I already have plans for tonight” Akashi responds. Mibuchi looks at him with a mixture of surprise and curiosity.

“Really, what are you doing?”

“You see, I’ve been invited over by one of Nebuya’s friends to - HEY WAIT” Akashi shouts as he is grabbed by the back of the collar, lifted into the air, and hauled out of the locker room. Glancing over his shoulder he can see that the culprit it Nebuya.

“Keep your mouth shut will you, I don’t need The Queen getting involved in this” Nebuya states gruffly, looking over his shoulder.

“Ok ok I get it, I’ll keep quiet, but put me down” Akashi demands, squirming fruitlessly in Nebuya’s iron grasp. Once Nebuya exits the doors to the gym, he finally releases Akashi, who takes a moment to readjust his jersey jacket, glaring at Nebuya who merely shrugs in response.

“I have to go grab some things from my room before we leave so how about we meet in my room at 8:30 and then we’ll head over to Kaori’s place.”

“Alright” Akashi responds, heading over to his room to prepare for the night ahead of him.

About 20 minutes later, Akashi stood in front of Nebuya’s door. He knew that he still had 10 minutes before Nebuya said they had to meet, but there were only a few things he had to pack for this impromptu sleepover (some pajamas, this toothbrush, and his laptop).

Akashi knocked on the door and waited for a response. He heard a bit of rustling inside the room, before the lock clicked and the door opened, revealing Nebuya.

“Oh hey, I wasn’t expecting you for another 10 minutes, just give me a second to finish up and then we can go” Nebuya said, stepping out of the way to allow Akashi to enter his room.

“No rush, I’m a little early.” Looking around the room, Akashi saw that Nebuya’s room was not too different from his in terms of layout, however Nebuya’s walls were covered with posters and
art prints, his desk held a desktop and a large drawing tablet, and there was a small black cat sitting on the end of his bed… wait.

Akashi’s attention snapped toward the cat that was not, in fact, a hallucination, but an actual cat sleeping on Nebuya’s bed. The cat lifted its head up and looked at Akashi before meowing and jumping off the bed, trotting over to sniff at Akashi’s sneaker.

“What is it Midna? You saying hi?” Nebuya said, addressing the cat, Midna, who meowed again before trotting over to Nebuya, who scooped the tiny cat into his arms and planted a soft kiss to the top of its head.

“You have a cat” Akashi said out loud to no one in particular.

“I do” Nebuya responded.

“I didn’t know you were allowed to have pets in the dorms” Akashi commented.

“I’m not” Nebuya responded again, smiling and winking at him.

“Oh” Akashi said, understanding what Nebuya meant as he released Midna to return to her napping spot.

“Alright let’s get outta here. Bye Midna” Nebuya said, giving the cat a final scritch behind the ears before heading out the door.

“She’s very cute” Akashi said as they walked down the stairs of the third year dorms.

“Ya, Midna’s super cute. This is the first year that I was able to get ahold of a single room so I decided to bring her with me. It’s too bad I couldn’t bring Lila with me too”

“Lila?”

“My pitbull” Nebuya said, responding, taking a photo out of his wallet and handing it to Akashi. In the picture was a young Nebuya, smiling at the camera, with a tiny, chubby pitbull puppy cradled in his arms. True to Hayama’s description of him, his hair was long, reaching down to the upper part of his back, and styled into a multitude of small braids, and he was very thin and bony, but looked happy nonetheless. Akashi wouldn’t go as far as to say that he looked like a girl, but this Nebuya definitely didn’t look as big or masculine as he does now.

“I got her when I was 10. She was the runt of the litter so no one wanted to adopt her. The owners were thinking about putting her down because she was so small and weak, so naturally she was the one I chose” he explained.

“She’s very cute” Akashi commented.

“Yes she is. Lila and Midna, my two babies” Nebuya stated proudly, looking down at the picture fondly.

“Anyways we should probably get a move on. It’s about a 25-30 minute drive from here to Kaori’s house so since we are leaving at 8:30 we should get there by 9” Nebuya started, walking toward the parking lot around the back of the campus where a couple of cars were parked.

“Since when do you have a car?” Akashi asked suspiciously. He didn’t think that Nebuya would ever actually steal a car, but at the same time he never heard anything about Nebuya having one of his own, so he didn’t want to get involved if Nebuya was “borrowing” the car from a friend or
family member without their explicit permission.

“It was my 18th birthday present from my mom and dad. I live kinda far away from school and my parents didn’t want me to spend all my money on train tickets going back and forth so they got me this beauty instead” Nebuya explained, gesturing to the black Toyota they were now standing in front of. It wasn’t anything fancy or high quality, but Akashi had to admit that it was a nice looking car, so he opened the passenger side door and got in without another word.

The ride over to Tsuji’s house was pleasantly quiet, save for the music playing on Nebuya’s playlist. As it turns out, Nebuya is, thankfully, a very good and safe driver, which was a concern that Akashi had not considered until the car was already in motion, but so far things seemed to be going very well.

About a half an hour later, the pair rolled into the driveway of, what Akashi could only assume to be, Tsuji’s house, a large two-tiered structure with a beautifully decorated front yard. The house wasn’t nearly as big as the compound that Akashi’s family home was located on, but then again not everyone was nearly as wealthy as Akashi’s family so a house this size and in this area would probably be a lot of people’s idea of luxury living.

Once Nebuya knocked on the door, Akashi waited silently behind him as the door opened to reveal a small middle-aged woman with long black hair and a round face similar to that of Kaori.

“Hi Ma,” Nebuya greeted cheerfully. The woman’s puzzled expression turned to absolute glee at the sight of Nebuya.

“Ei-chan! I was wondering where you were” the woman said, reaching up to hug Nebuya, who returned it happily.

“I had a passenger with me this time so I drove a bit slower than I usually do” Nebuya responded, stepping out of the way and gesturing over to Akashi.

“I see, so you’re the infamous Akahi that I’ve heard so much about” Mrs. Tsuji said, placing her hands on her hips and regarding Akashi with a look of curiosity and amusement.

“Yes. Thank you very much for having me tonight Mrs. Tsuji” Akashi responded, bowing politely to the woman.

“Oh no, there’s no need for such formality, we’re happy to have you. Kaori doesn’t usually invite new people over other than for school related stuff so I’m glad to see that she’s making some new friends. Now come on in, the pizza should be here any minute now” Mrs. Tsuji said, ushering the two boys in.

“I’d give you a tour since you’re new here Akashi, but I have to give the dogs their shots before it gets too late” Mrs. Tsuji said “Ei-chan do you mind showing him around for me real quick?”

“No at all” Nebuya responded toeing his shoes off and waving Akashi over to the hallway just off the living room.

“The only room you’ll really need to know about is this one” Nebuya says to Akashi opening the first door on the left and descending down the flight of stair. At the bottom of the steps was a large, remodeled basement with carpeting, a pool table, a mini kitchen area, a bathroom, and a large couch in front of a tv where everyone was currently sitting playing some kind of video game.

“NO YOU FUCKING BITCH HOW DARE YOU BLUESHELL ME I WHEN WAS SO CLOSE TO WINNING!” Endo screamed in a furious rage as Tsuji passed by her, taking first place in the
Mario Kart race they were playing.

“Ooooh, we’re playing Mario Kart tonight? How many friendships have been destroyed so far?” Nebuya asked leaning over the back of the couch.

“Just mine and Hitoka’s” Tsuji said calmly, handing her controller over to Amano.

“Wow, only one broken friendship. We might actually last the night as friends at this rate” Nebuya said, a hint of condescending sarcasm laced in his voice.

“Shut the fuck up Ei” Endo spat, picking her character for the next race. Akashi chuckled, but was interrupted by the sound of the basement door opening behind him. Looking behind him he saw a small boy, no older than 3 perhaps, standing in the doorway, dressed in sushi pajamas and holding a blue blanket in his left arm.

“Ei-tan?” the small boy called down the stairs, catching the attention of the group.

“Mamoru, go back to bed” Tsuji shouted at the boy, only for the command to fall on deaf ears.

“Ei-tan” the boy, Mamoru, called again as he began to slowly descend down the stairs.

“Somebody stop him before he falls down the stairs again” Tsuji said, making no move to stop the child herself. Climbing back up the stairs, Akashi gently lifts the child into his arms and brings him downstairs.

“Aka” the boy says, reaching a chubby hand toward Akashi’s hair, taking a fairly large chunk, and yanking.

“Ow ow ow ow ow” Akashi says, attempting to gently dislodge the giggling toddler's fingers from his hair.

“Careful, he has no concept of personal space or ‘don’t touch’” Tsuji says, without even looking back at Akashi.

“He’s fine” Akashi assures, moving to sit in the empty space at the end of the long couch, with Mamoru bouncing happily in his lap.

“Race race race race” the toddler babbled excitedly. Akashi smiled down at the boy.

“MADOKA GET OUT OF MY FUCKING ASSHOLE!”

“I CAN’T HELP IS HITOKA, IT’S SO TIGHT” Akashi glanced over at the two girls currently playing, slightly confused by the extreme aggression and vulgarity of their conversation, but brushed it off.

“Is this your younger brother, Tsuji?” Akashi asked.

“Yup” she responded.

“He’s very well behaved, makes me wish I had a little brother” Akashi comments, looking down at the tiny tot sitting calmly in his lap, mesmerized by the plethora of colors dancing across the TV screen, thankfully unaware of the inappropriate language radiating from Amano and Endo on the other side of the couch.

“Sure, for now he is, but you should see him when he misses his afternoon nap, it’s an absolute nightmare” she says throwing an annoyed glare at the young boy.
“Come on Kaori, be nice. We all know you secretly love the little goober” Nebuya scolds, climbing over the back of the couch and slipping between Amano and Takata and placing his feet on the coffee table in front of the couch.

“Being annoyed when your little brother does nothing but scream about how tired he is but refuse to take a nap does not mean I don’t love him, it just means I wish he would shut the hell up when I’m trying to write a paper or do my fucking math homework” Tsuji counters turning her glare to Nebuya, who seems unaffected by her icy gaze.

“NO I FELL OFF FUCK ME” everyone’s attention was drawn to Amano, who had just driven off the side of course and was now scrambling to catch up to her previous place. A few moments of silence pass, only to be interrupted by Endo’s celebratory dance when she crosses the finish line, in first place this time.

“YA! IN YOUR FUCKING FACE BITCH” Endo screams triumphantly, sticking her middle finger in Amano’s face.

“THIS IS BULLSHIT! YOU FUCKING CHEATED! I WANT A REMATCH!” Amano screamed furiously, getting up and tackling Endo to the ground, where the two begin an impromptu wrestling match.

“Does this happen often?” Akashi asks Tsuji, who has picked up the forgotten controllers and handed one to Nebuya, who begins choosing his racer.

“Ya pretty much. This is actually pretty tame compared to how it can get sometimes since we’re just messing around. We’ve held small tournaments before though and those can get pretty violent” she explains.

“Do you wanna play?” she asks, holding the controller out to Akashi.

“Oh, that’s alright, I’m fine just watching. I don’t play video games very often anyways” Akashi adds.

“Really? You’re parents not want to you?” Tsuji asks, turning her attention back to the screen and picking her own racer and kart.

“Yes, actually. My father thinks that video games are a waste of time and would prefer me to spend my time doing things that he thinks are worthy of my time and effort” Akashi admits.

“What does he mean by ‘a waste of time’?” Tsuji asks, looking at Akashi with a face of confusion and mild offence.

“Well… he says that videogames are just corporate company’s ways of draining this generation of its time and pocket money, and ultimately breeding a society of lazy and disillusioned individuals who don’t know how to distinguish between reality and fantasy and will end up running society into the ground” Akashi explains, remembering the particularly long lecture his father gave him when he asked if he could have a Nintendo for this 11th birthday.

Looking back to his right, Akashi noticed that everyone was staring at him with strange and confused expressions, even Endo and Amano were looking at him from their odd, grappled position on the floor.

“What?” Akashi asked but was met with nothing but silence.

“What?” Akashi asked but was met with nothing but silence.

“Do you mean to tell me, that you have never, EVER, played a videogame before, in your entire
“Um… I suppose that is true” Akashi states nervously. The five friends exchange looks between one another, appearing to have some kind of silent conversation between themselves. Akashi wonders if he had said something to accidentally offend the group. After a few moments of silent conversation, they all turn their attention back to Akashi. Endo is the first one to speak.

“Ok look, you seem like a pretty chill guy and we’re more than happy to let you hang out with us, but we aren’t like any of the other friend groups you’ll find on campus”

“We don’t hang out at the mall every weekend, or go to cafes to try the cute pastries and drinks, or go on group dates with our nonexistent boyfriends. We play videogames” Amano explains. Akashi nods in understanding.

“If you wanna keep hanging out with us like this… you’re gonna have to learn how to game” Takata says, leaning over to look at Akashi.

“And when we say game, we mean playing stuff like GTA5, PUBG, Dead by Daylight, H1Z1, hell even Minecraft can be fun if you find the right server to play on” Nebuya said, listing off game titles that Akashi has never even heard of.

“So what do you say?” Tsuji asks, holding the switch remote out to Akashi. “Wanna learn how to be a gamer?”

Akashi stares at the remote for a moment. Sure he never fully believed what his father said about videogames being the bane of modern society, but at the same time he saw how much time they sucked out of his classmates day, causing them to stay up late and show up to class the next day, exhausted and without having completed an ounce of their homework.

Perhaps the universe was testing him, seeing how capable he was of resisting the temptation to give in and be sucked into the addictive world of videogames. On the other hand however, what could the harm be? Should he continue meeting with Nebuya and his friends, he’d only be playing once or twice a week, and so long as he got all of his work done, there wouldn’t be any negative drawbacks to taking Friday nights to unwind and fool around.

After all, he was already going against his father’s ideas and wishes for him by even considering applying for the advanced class, so why not start making a few of his own choices and indulging in some of his “less productive” interests. With a new found resolve, Akashi gently places Mamoru onto the floor and takes the remote from Tsuji’s hands.

“How the fuck do I work this thing?” Akashi asks, smiling at the others, hoping his use of a swear word would convey how serious he was. The others yell and cheer in happiness and excitement for their new group member.

“Pizza’s here” Mrs. Tsuji calls down the stairs, breaking the moment of communal excitement and sending everyone into a frenzy as they scramble up the stairs to get to the food before it’s all gone.

Akashi follows behind them, a feeling of freedom and excitement filling him like never before.

Chapter End Notes
This was a fun chapter to write overall because it allowed me to delve further into my 4 ocs personalities a little bit more. I based the four girls off of me and my three best friends and used actual things we have said as dialogue in this chapter, so that was fun also I really wanted to bring in some gamer geeks so ya. I'm trying to make changes to Akashi's personality and mannerisms to kind of fall more in line with a typical teenager rather than the "emperor" that we are so used to seeing, and I think I'm doing an ok job of doing that by having him maintain a very polite and dignified style of speech most of the time, but then at some points he will try to mimic how the people around him talk and swear or talk more casually than he normally would. Akashi is just trying to make some actual god damn friends ok don't judge. Anyways I hope you enjoyed this chapter, comment down below about what you think about it, and I hope to see you again soon for chapter 12. P.S. I really like the idea of Akashi just being hauled around by the back of his neck by Nebuya I think its so fucking funny anyways I'm done bye.
Crushing

Chapter Notes

For those of you who came here for the gay, this is only the beginning (°_°)
Not beta read. Be nice.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Somebody stop Ei before he eats all the pizza” Endo commands as she jumps over the back of the couch and runs toward the stairs, trampling over Takata in the process.

“Bitch, fuck you” Nebuya yells after her from his position on the floor, where he ate shit trying to avoid tripping over Mamoru, who was now being carried up the stairs by Tsuji.

Once everyone was seated at the large dinner table upstairs, the pizza and soda was distributed, and everyone sat in comfortable silence, enjoying their greasy, cheesy treat.

“Can I ask you all a question?” Akashi asks, breaking the silence.

“Sure, shoot” Endo encourages.

“Do you all spend time with Mibuchi like you do with Nebuya. I’ve noticed that he has a great deal of female friends so I was wondering if perhaps you hang out with him sometimes as well” Akashi explained. The four girls looked between each other for a moment before Takata spoke up.

“Not really. We know Mibuchi from some of our other classes and stuff, but we don’t hang out with him outside of school at all”

“Ya, Ei-chan’s out token boy of the group” Endo chimes in.


“He’s too fussy for us” Tsuji states bluntly.

“Ya, he takes things way too seriously and always has to be the one in control, or else he freaks out and loses it” Takata adds.

“I see” Akashi nods.

“But Ei doesn’t think he’s too fussy” Endo says, a mischievous grin on her face. Nebuya glares at her with a look that screams ‘stop talking’.

“Oh ya, Ei thinks Mibuchi is just the greatest” Amano says, mimicking Endo’s mischievous grin and tone of voice. Nebuya turns his glare to her.

“What do you mean?” Akashi asks in confusion.

“NOTHING! They mean nothing” Nebuya interjects, his voice urgent and anxious.

“You sure about that Ei, you sure had a lot to say about him in class on Tuesday when you told us
how worried he was about your hand” Takata smirks, catching on to what her friends mean.

“Bitch I swear to god if you say another word, I’m going to kill you” Nebuya threatens, causing the others to shy away.

“I don’t understand. What’s the big deal?” Akashi asks, trying to figure out what the cause of Nebuya’s anger was.

“It’s. Nothing.” Nebuya states firmly, ending the conversation, and sending the group into a tense and confused silence.

“EIKICHI’S GAY FOR MIBUCHI” Tsuji suddenly screams out of nowhere.

“You bitch. You whores. You fucking slut. When I get my hands on you, you’re gonna wish you were never born you hear me you backstabbing traitor?” Nebuya spits and curses furiously, chasing a maniacally laughing Tsuji around the house, leaving the remainder of the group behind at the table. Other than the sound of crashing and heavy footsteps coming from upstairs, the group remained silent for a moment before Akashi finally spoke.

“I didn’t know Nebuya had romantic feelings for Mibuchi” he admits to the remaining three girls.

“That’s not surprising. Ei hasn’t told anyone, except us, about his massive crush on Mibuchi. I doubt anyone other than us even knows that he’s gay” Endo says, leaning back in her chair.

“Why not?” Akashi asks.

“Who knows, it’s hard to tell with Eikichi. I think it has to do with being afraid of total and utter rejection at the hands of the person he likes” Endo offers.

“How long has this crush been going on?”

“Since first year” Akashi was slightly taken aback by the answer.

“Wow, that’s... a long time to have feelings for someone and yet not say anything to them”

“That's what we said, but apparently Ei-chan’s not even planning to confess at all” Amano chimes in.

“Not planning to confess? Why?” Akashi asks in confusion.

“Cuz it’s not worth it” Nebuya says, walking back into the room and sitting down at his seat. Tsuji follows closely behind, a particularly large handprint covers the left side of her face, and her arms already show signs of bruising, yet her smile doesn’t seem to have decreased in the slightest.

“Oh Ei, you’re being melodramatic” Takata says.

“Uh, no, I’m not. I know the idea of me confessing and getting together with the guy I’ve had a crush on since first year sounds super great and romantic, but I think you are all forgetting that said guy I have a crush on thinks I am literally the most vile creature to ever walk this planet” Nebuya explains, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Ei, he does not think you are the vilest thing to walk the earth. So you burp and fart occasionally, what’s the big deal, I do that all the time” Endo says.

“Ei you’re not gonna know how he actually feels about you if you don’t ask him” Takata states.
“Ok ok fine. Let say that hypothetically, I did actually work up the balls to ask him out, what do you think is the most likely thing to happen?” Nebuya asks the others.

“He rejects you and you move on with your life” Tsuji states bluntly.

“He politely declines your offer but you remain friends” Amano offers.

“He says yes and you finally start dating” Endo says optimistically.

“He says yes and you kiss him passionately, get married, and have lots and lots of babies together.” Everyone turns to Takata with strange looks on their faces and Nebuya smacks her in the back of the head.

“OW! What it’s possible” she defends, sinking into her seat.

“Look, I get that you guys are only trying to help, but trust me when I say that a relationship between me and Mibuchi just wouldn’t work out, just ask Akashi”

“Ask me what?”

“Ask how much me and Mibuchi wouldn’t make it as a couple”

“I never said that”

“Ok, but I need you to say it now”

“But I think you and Mibuchi would make a great couple,” Akashi states. Nebuya turns to him with a look of horror and betrayal.

“Oh no, not you too…” Nebuya’s head makes a loud banging sound as it collides with the surface of the table.

“I’m surrounded by hopeless romantics trying to live vicariously through my nonexistent love life” Nebuya groans into the table.

“You know it might not be so nonexistent if you’d stop being such a pussy and CONFESS ALREADY” Tsuji yells in Nebuya’s ear.

“You’re all the worst, and I hate each and every one of you assholes” came Nebuya’s muffled voice.

“No you don’t” Endo says standing up from the table. “Come on guys, let's leave the whiny baby to himself. I’ve got some Mario Kart to win.”

“You mean lose horribly after the second lap” Tsuji counters.

“Kaori I suggest you shut your fucking piehole unless you wanna have to sleep with one eye open tonight”

“It wouldn’t take much. The sound of you slipping on a banana peel on the way to my sleeping bag would be plenty to wake me up”

“BITCH YOU ARE DEAD” Endo yells, chasing Tsuji down the stairs, Amano and Takata hot on their heels. Just before Akashi descends down the stairs after them, he turns back to Nebuya, who's still sitting with his face on the table.
‘Perhaps it would be best to leave him alone for a little while before trying to talk about it,’ Akashi thought to himself, closing the basement door behind him and following after the hurricane of girls downstairs.

Chapter End Notes

Can you guess what self indulgent headcannon inspired this chapter? If you guessed "Nebuya having a big fat crush on Mibuchi but thinking that Mibuchi is way out of his league" then you guessed correctly. I can't even begin to explain how much fun I am having with this fic, so thank you all so much for reading, and I will see you all soon for chapter 12.
The Drive Back

Chapter Notes

Oh hey, did you guys miss me? (:3∠)_

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The rest of the night continued without issue. Nebuya eventually joined everyone downstairs, and thankfully, no one else brought up the topic of his romantic situation. Akashi spent the remainder of the evening being yelled at by Tsuji and Endo as they attempted to teach him ‘how to game’ as they put it. It was a little frustrating being shouted at and told he was messing up even though he honestly had no idea what he was doing, but ultimately is was a lot of fun, so much that he didn’t even realize what time it was until he looked up at the clock and saw that it was already 2:30 am.

Memories of the last time he stayed up this late flashed before his eyes and caused a slight chill to run up his spine. Thankfully this time around tomorrow… no, wait... today is a saturday, and not a wednesday, so Akashi was able to relax at that thought.

Later that morning, Akashi woke up to the sound of Mrs Tsuji calling everyone up for breakfast. Lifting his head up, he realized he must have passed out at some point earlier, as he was still in the same spot on the couch that he was earlier. It took a moment for his eyes to adjust, but once they did he saw the hilarious sight of Nebuya curled up in a tight ball on the end of the couch, lying next to Endo (who by the way barely reaches Nebuya’s chest), sprawled out as far and wide as possible next to him, her legs propped up over his lower body and her back and head lying over Amano and Takata’s laps.

Tsuji is lying comfortably next to him. Her head leaning against Takata’s stomach with her legs thrown over Akashi. The redhead shifts from his spot and slowly lifts her legs off of him, setting them back down on the couch before heading to the restroom. Once he’s done in there he heads up the stairs to help Mrs. Tsuji with breakfast.

“Good morning Akashi” the woman calls from her place in front of the stove, where a batch of delicious smelling pancakes are being cooked.

“Good morning ma’am” Akashi responds, barely able to suppress the yawn working its way up his throat. Mrs. Tsuji chuckles at him.

“You guys must have been having fun last night” she comments, flipping a couple of pancakes.

“Yes, everyone was teaching me how to play Mario Kart since I’ve never played before” Akashi explains, moving to lean against the counter next to the woman.

“You’ve never played Mario Kart?” Mrs. Tsuji asks curiously. Akashi rubs the back of his neck.

“Ya, my father was never all that big on video games. Said they were a waste of time and that I should focus on more important things” he explains. Mrs. Tsuji simply hums in response. A comfortable silence sets over the kitchen.

“MOM WHAT’S FOR BREAKFAST?” Tsuji calls loudly from the basement.
“MAYBE IF YOU’D GET YOUR LAZY ASS UP HERE YOU’D SEE FOR YOURSELF” the woman shouts back without missing a beat.

“Akashi could you go into that bottom cabinet over there and grab some plates for me please?” Mrs. Tsuji asks, pointing over to the island.

“Sure” Akashi responds, heading over and grabbing 6 plates, bringing them over to Mrs. Tsuji who begins loading up the plates with delicious looking pancakes.

“The others will be up soon enough, why don’t you go ahead and start eating.” Akashi nods and takes a plate, his mouth beginning to water at the delicious aroma radiating from the pancakes.

‘How long has it been since I’ve had pancakes?’ Akashi wonders to himself as he takes his first bite. The pancakes are warm, moist, fluffy, and topped with the perfect amount of butter and maple syrup, coating his tongue with delicious sugary goodness.

‘Too long obviously’ the tiny voice in the back of his head replies as he wolfs down his first and second pancakes in a matter of seconds.

The rest of the group finally meanders into the kitchen and gets their food just as Akashi is finishing up his second plate of pancakes. Breakfast passes without too much conversation and before he knows it, Akashi is packing his things, preparing to go back to campus.

As he is putting his toothbrush away in his bag, he notices his phone has quite a few notifications on it. Picking it up, Akashi’s heart plummets to his feet as he sees that there are 12 missed calls and 4 voicemails, all of which are from his father. Akashi knew how much his father detested being unable to get ahold of him at a moment's notice, and for him to call 12 times as well as leave 4 different voicemails means that he must have needed him for something. Akashi’s hand shakes just thinking about the massive scolding and lecture he was going to get once his father did finally manage to get ahold of him.

“Hey” Akashi is snapped out of his overthinking by a hand on his shoulder, which, as it turns out, belongs to Nebuya, who's currently looking at him with a mixture of concern and apprehension.

“Are you ok? You look like you’re about to pass out” Nebuya observes, his hand maintaining a gentle but firm presence on Akashi’s shoulder. It takes a moment for Akashi to piece together how to explain how royally fucked he was when he got home, but comes up with nothing, so he simply lifts his phone up for his friend to see.

“12 missed calls from your dad? That’s what’s got you so worked up?” Nebuya asks, clearly confused.

“You don’t know my father like I do. 12 missed calls from him means that the world may as well be ending” Akashi states grimly, shoving his phone into his jacket pocket.

“Wow… he sounds… protective” Nebuya comments hesitantly, obviously trying to avoid insulting his father right in front of him.

“If by protective you mean overbearing, untrusting, and a general control freak who has to have everything his way 100% of the time with no arguments or exceptions then ya, I’d say so too” Akashi spits in frustration, sliding down the wall and into a sitting position.

“I am so screwed” he states to no one in particular.

“Is is really all that big of a deal that he couldn’t get ahold of you for one night?” Nebuya asks,
lazily shoving his feet into his sneakers.

“Ya actually it is. My father has always had this rule that he was to be able to get ahold of me in some fashion at any given moment of the day, regardless of what I’m doing. And if I’m being perfectly honest, he’s only gotten worse about it since I got into high school” Akashi explains, untying his shoes and putting them on.

“Wow that sounds like it really sucks” Nebuya says, standing up and grabbing his bag, offering his hand to Akashi, who takes it and, for once, allows himself to be hauled up off the ground by the large man, before being placed on the ground once again.

“So am I taking you back to your house or are you coming back to the dorms with me?”

“As much as I don’t want to deal with my dad, the only way he’ll ever get over this is if I apologize and promise never to do it again face to face”

“Alrighty then, it’s your funeral kid”

“At this rate that statement might have more truth behind it than I’d like to admit” Akashi mumbles under his breath.

The two bid their farewells to the girls, little Mamoru, and Mrs. Tsuji, who tells Akashi that he is welcome back anytime he likes, before hugging them both and closing the door behind them.

The car ride to Akashi’s house went by much like last night’s car ride, although this time Akashi had a bit more information on his fellow teammate that he would like to address while he had Nebuya’s complete and undivided attention.

Nebuya?” Akashi starts. The boy in question hums in response but does not look away from the road.

“What’s the real reason why you won’t confess to Mibuchi” Nebuya visibly deflates at this.

“I thought I made it very clear last night that I don’t want to talk about this” he responds, his voice was level, but Akashi could make out hints of frustration in his tone.

“I don’t mean to sound inconsiderate or rude by prying into your personal life, but I just don’t understand why someone like you would be so fearful of something so seemingly simple as telling someone how you feel about them” Akashi admits, turning to look at Nebuya, whose gaze is still focused on the road. He sighs deeply before speaking.

“When I was younger, I got made fun of a lot. People mocked me for the way I looked, the way I acted, who I hung out with, how I dressed, and even the fact that my dad is Nigerian and Japanese isn’t his first language so he talks with a funny accent” Nebuya says.

“But the worst thing that ever happened to me, was in my last year of elementary school, when I had a crush on this guy in my class. He was cute, he was funny, and he seemed to genuinely like me. So, one day, I gathered up enough courage to confess and tell him that I liked him.” Akashi remains silent as Nebuya continues with his story.

“At first he kind of looked at me like I was playing some kind of practical joke on him, but once he realized that I was serious… he started laughing at me. He laughed and laughed and laughed and laughed until he fell over into the dirt. Once he finally stopped laughing he got up and said, right to my face, “why the hell would I ever want to go out with a weirdo like you”. And then he just walked away, like he hadn’t just taken my feelings and thrown them back into my face and then
insulted me horribly.” Nebuya grips the steering wheel so sternly that his knuckles begin to turn white.

“That’s why I’m not gonna confess to Mibuchi. Because I am not going to allow myself to be made into a fool and a freak, again, for everyone else’s entertainment. And besides, you’ve seen him, he’s way out of my league. Mibuchi would never go for someone like me” Nebuya admits disheartedly. Akashi takes a moment to digest the story Nebuya just told him, lining up bits and pieces with what he heard from Hayama, before speaking.

“I understand that the thought of something like that happening again is frightening, and I completely understand why you’re so hesitant to confess now…”

“Good so then that means that we can stop talking about-”

“Let me finish” Akashi says sternly, cutting Nebuya off. The boy looks like he wants nothing more for this conversation to end, but he remains silent for now.

“I understand that you’re afraid of being mocked and ridiculed for something you can’t control, like your sexuality, but at the same time I think you’re selling yourself short” Akashi states.

“Mibuchi may dislike some of your habits and behaviors, but that does not mean that he hates you, nor does it mean that you have no chance with him. Yes the two of you may be different in many aspects, but I think that only serves to complement the two of you; one of you makes up for something the other lacks. On top of that, Mibuchi has always taken you seriously and respected you during times when you present yourself as such. Should you present your feelings to him in an earnest and serious manner, then, even if he doesn’t share your feelings, there’s no way he’d ever mock or embarrass you for them. That’s just not the kind of person he is” Akashi says, confidently.

“You really think I should confess to him, don’t you?” Nebuya asks glancing at Akashi out of the corner of his eye.

“I do. Although you may end up being rejected, at least you won’t live the rest of your life wondering what it would have been like if he’d said yes.” Nebuya sighs heavily and sinks into his seat, tapping his fingers against the steering wheel. It’s silent for a long while, save the music playing on Nebuya’s playlist.

“I’ll think about it.” Akashi looks over at Nebuya. He looks uncertain, like he’s going back and forth on what he should do, but at least Akashi was able to move him away from his previous solid answer of “hell the fuck no”.

“That’s all I can ask for” is all Akashi says before finally dropping the subject, as pressing any further would likely have the opposite effect that Akashi was trying to elicit. The rest of the drive remains relatively silent from that point on.

Once Nebuya pulls through the gate of the Akashi compound and parks just in front of the large staircase leading to the front door, Akashi grabs his things and says goodbye, before exiting the car.

“Hey Akashi” Nebuya calls just before he can close the door.

“Yes?” Nebuya remains silent for a moment before speaking.

“Thanks… for the advice. I think I really needed it” Akashi smiles and nods his head.

“You’re welcome. I’m glad I was able to help” is all he says before turning and heading up the
front steps of his home.

Chapter End Notes

I don't even know what to say in these anymore cuz I no longer feel the need to explain myself. Comment something down below and I will probs talk about it. Thanks for reading. See you soon for chapter 14.
Upon entering his house, Akashi was met with a chorus of “Welcome Back Sir” and “Welcome Home Master Akashi”, a stark contrast to the more casual form of greetings he was finally getting used to at school.

“Master Akashi, your father wishes to speak with you in his study as soon as possible, would you like me to take your bag to your room so you may go speak with him?” the head butler asked politely, holding his hands out to take Akashi’s backpack.

“No thank you, I’ll hold on to it for now, besides I’m not planning on staying long” Akashi replied, hurrying up the stairs toward his father’s office, steeling himself for the inevitable.

Once he arrived in front of the large wooden doors that lead to his father’s office, Akashi knocked, entering once he heard a quiet but distinguishable “come in” from the other side. The inside of his father’s office was large and spacious. Bookshelves filled to the brim with fat texts lined the walls closest to the door, stopping just before a large decorative fish tank.

His father currently had his back to him, meaning that he was not quite ready to talk, so Akashi took a seat in one of the black leather chairs situated in front of the large dark wooden desk. Akashi wasn’t sure exactly how much time passed before his father finally cleared his throat and turned to face him, eying him up and down, clearly unhappy with the fact that Akashi was still in his pajamas from the night before.

“Seijuro” his father began.

“Yes father?”

“I’m sure you are already aware of the issue I would like to discuss with you?” the older man asked, lacing his fingers together in his lap.

“Yes father”

“Good. Now I know that you are getting older and growing up, and I have done my best to accommodate for that by giving you more freedom and space to make your own decisions as an adult. However, when I gave you permission to move into the dorms earlier this year, what was the one condition I put in place that I specifically said must be followed in order for you to be allowed to continue living away from home?” Akashi’s father asked sternly, peering at his son through his glasses.

“That you should be able to contact me at any given point in time regardless of what I was doing” Akashi regurgitated without hesitation.

“Hmm… so tell me Seijuro, if you are capable of reciting perfectly the condition which we agreed upon for you to be allowed to move into the dorms, then why from between 8:47 pm last night
until just moments ago when you stepped into my office was I unable to contact you?” For a
moment, Akashi seriously considered lying to his father, telling him that he had a lot of work to do
and had accidentally left his phone off so he didn’t hear it ringing, but the look on his father’s face
told him that only the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth was going to save him from a
world of hurt.

“I spent the night at a friend’s house and I accidentally left my phone in my bag where I couldn’t
hear it” Akashi said, hoping that the short explanation would be enough for his father.

“I see. And who is this friend of yours that you feel so close to that you not only left campus for an
extended period of time without asking me but also spent the night at their house and ignored 12 of
my phone calls?”

‘Shit’

“Her name is Tsuji and she’s an upperclassman who’s good friend with Nebuya, a player on the
basketball team” he explained.

“Her? Seijuro do you mean to tell me that you spent the night, alone and unsupervised, at a girl’s
house?” his father asked, his voice beginning to raise in anger.

“It wasn’t just me and her. She was having a party and invited me to come along with Nebuya.
There were lots of people there” Akashi scrambled to explain before his father could get any more
upset with him.

“Oh Seijuro…” his father trailed off, pinching the bridge of his nose in frustration.

“First you aren’t answering your phone and now I’m hearing that you spent the night at some
random broad’s house doing god knows what,” he sighs, “I knew giving you that much freedom
would be too much for you to handle. I think it’s about time you came home for -”

“NO WAIT, PLEASE” Akashi yelled desperately, cutting his father off, who was now looking at
him with a mixture of surprise and curiosity.

“I promise I’ll answer your calls from now on and I won’t go anywhere off campus without your
permission, I’ll even check in twice a day if it makes you feel better but please let me stay on
campus.” Akashi begged. His father was looking at him suspiciously now. Never before had
Akashi ever challenged his father's decision, as his word was usually law, but in that moment
Akashi would fight tooth and nail if it meant he wouldn’t have to worry about his father breathing
down his neck every second of every day anymore.

“Well… I suppose that at your age a bit of ‘teenage rebellion’ is to be expected, and since this is
the very first time that something like this has happened… then I suppose that I can let you off with
a warning and use this as a learning experience for you.” Akashi releases a breath he didn’t even
know he was holding, thanking whatever gods there are that he was being given a second chance.

“However, keep in mind that you are now on probation for the foreseeable future. Continue to
behave like you did last night and I will have you back in this house so fast that you’re head will
spin. Do you understand?” his father asked sternly.

“Yes father. Thank you very much” Akashi said, standing to leave the room before anything else
could be said.

“Oh and one more thing Seijuro” his father called just before Akashi could leave the room.
“Yes sir?”

“I saw on your class schedule that they stuck you in “Introduction to Drawing and Painting” this year, what’s that class like?” his father asked looking up from his paperwork waiting for Akashi’s answer.

“Um… it's a very interesting class. I enjoy both the curriculum as well as my teacher. She even suggested that I enroll for the advance class next year” Akashi said, hoping to slowly breach the topic of continuing with art through highschool and even college.

“Hmm, I see. Well that’s nice and all but I don’t want you wasting your time in such a mundane and useless class. See what you can do about getting back into the music course next year” his father said, returning his attention back to his paperwork without so much as a goodbye. Akashi could feel every hope and aspiration about taking advanced art bleed from his body, as the disappointing reality of his situation set in.

“Yes father” was all Akashi could manage to say before closing the door to his father’s office, and walking back out the front door, feeling worse than he had in months.

Chapter End Notes

We haven't seen much of Akashi’s dad in the manga or anime, but I imagine that he's a total douche who thinks he's such a great father and knows everything when in reality he's a demon who expects way too much from his 17 year old son, never allows him to do the things he wants to do, makes the smallest amounts of privacy and autonomy as a human being given to Akashi seem like a generous privileged, and overall is a pretty shitty father who sees his son as more of an employee than family. Can you tell that I don't like him. Hope you enjoyed, and I will see you all soon for chapter 15.
Akashi suffers but thankfully #1 mum is really good at offering physical and emotional comfort to her favorite awkward red head. Not beta read. Be nice.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The following week was awful for Akashi.

The little meeting with his father on Saturday left him absolutely drained and exhausted to the point where, once he returned to the Rakuzan dorms, he collapsed on his bed, and did not move from it until Sunday at around noon, and only because he knew he still had homework to finish up. Akashi’s exhaustion carried over into the week as well, and he ended up dragging through the first few days completely on autopilot. Not only did he avoid contact with his classmates as much as humanly possible, but he even rudely brushed off his fellow teammates at practice, leaving them confused and slightly hurt by his harsh and agitated attitude.

The conversation he and his father had over the weekend ate away at Akashi more and more as the week progressed. The complete disregard his father had for his own son’s wishes to continue with something that he was interested in both astonished him and was, frankly, to be expected. His father had always held a firm dislike of art within education, and while he couldn’t do anything to remove it from the education system completely, he could rest assured knowing that it wouldn’t take much to keep his own son from “wasting his time” with it, regardless of what Akashi himself thought about it.

The worst part about this whole thing, was the extreme disappointment that Emi-sensei was bound to have in him once Akashi told her that he wasn’t allowed to take advanced art. While he knew that it wasn’t inherently his fault that he wouldn’t be able to take the class, Akashi still couldn’t help but feel guilty about the whole situation.

Throughout his entire academic career, never before had Akashi sought the approval and recognition from a teacher, or anyone, like he had from Emi-sensei. Her happy-go-lucky and friendly personality made Akashi feel closer to her than any other teacher he’s ever had, while her knowledge and mastery of art as a craft made him respect and admire her greatly. The only other person in his life that Akashi could compare this relationship to would be his late mother, who was endlessly kind and gentle but also wise and knowledgeable, and instilled in him an unending love for basketball, in the same way that Emi-sensei was currently instilling a love of art in him as well.

This close relationship with his teacher caused Akashi to want to befriend Emi-sensei and make her proud with the work he does. The very thought of letting her down by not continuing with art was enough to make his stomach churn.

Come Friday, Akashi was sitting in art class, working passionlessly on his newest art piece as the rest of the class chattered amongst themselves as they usually did on studio days.

“Akashi” the boy in question lifted his head at the sound of Emi-sensei calling his name.

“Can I speak with you in the hallway for a second?” she asks, motioning for the classroom
doorway. Akashi gets up from his seat and walks out into the hallway without a word, doing his best to ignore the whispers and stares from his fellow classmates. He waits silently outside until Emi-sensei joins him, closing the door behind her.

“What’s going on with you?” she asks bluntly.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about Sensei” Akashi replies, doing his best to appear as natural and normal as possible.

“Don’t you give me that. You’ve been spacing out in class this whole week, and you look absolutely miserable” she states firmly. Akashi looked down at the floor, the shame and disappointment he felt with himself beginning to show on his face, and making him unable to look his teacher in the eye.

“Hey” Emi-sensei says, gently placing a hand on Akashi’s arm. Akashi tears his gaze from the floor to look at her.

“Are you ok?” she asks, her firmness quickly shifting to worry and concern.

“Yes… well, no… I mean, I’m fine it’s just… I don’t know” Akashi admits defeatedly, unsure of how to express his feelings.

“Akashi if there’s something going on and it’s bothering you or messing you up, you can tell me” Emi-sensei assures. Akashi remains silent for a long moment, wanting to talk about his problem but fearful of upsetting or disappointing Emi-sensei in some way.

“I… I don’t think I’m going to be able to join the advanced class next year” Akashi finally admits, his voice shaky and uncertain. Emi-sensei’s expression changes to confusion at her students confession.

“Why not?” she asks.

“My father thinks that art is a waste of time, and has expressed an open disapproval of it being part of the educational system, and has done everything in his power to prevent me from taking it. When I brought up the topic of me joining advanced art next year, he shut me down and vetoed the idea almost immediately” Emi-sensei remains silent.

“My father is not the type of man who I can outwardly defy, and if he were to find out that I went behind his back and took the class anyways… let’s just say it wouldn’t end very well for me” Akashi finishes, directing his gaze back toward his teacher. A moment of silence passes and then, to Akashi’s complete and utter surprise, Emi-sensei started laughing.

“That’s what’s got you so worked up? Well why didn’t you just tell me, I could have set up a meeting to talk with him or something” she says.

“Well, I didn’t want to tell you before because… well… I was afraid you’d be disappointed in me” Akashi confesses, his voice trailing off. Emi-sensei looks at him with a blank expression for a moment before is softens into one of understanding and adoration.

“Akashi, you have worked your butt off every single second of my class. You’re an intelligent, greatly skilled, and hardworking young man who’s done nothing but meet and surpass every one of my expectations. There’s no way I could ever be disappointed in you kiddo” she assures, squeezing Akashi’s shoulder. Akashi smiles at the reassuring gesture.

“So for right now, I don’t want you worrying about your dad or the advanced class. There’s still
plenty of time left in the year to convince your him to let you take the class, so for now, keep working on the requirement pieces, and I will deal with your dad. I promise you that by the time I’m done with him, your name will be on that roster, ok?”

“Ok” Akashi responds, relief flooding his body at his teacher’s reassuring words.

“Good. Now com’ere you” she says, pulling the young boy into a tight and reassuring hug. After nearly a week's worth of wallowing in indifferent self-pity, Akashi could finally feel every ounce of anxiety and frustration seep out of his body, leaving him like water leaves a newly opened damn. It was in that moment that Akashi realized that he was crying, tears leaked uncontrollably out of his eyes and down his cheeks, splattering to the floor in salty puddles. Akashi tried to rub them away but they simply kept coming, new tears quickly replacing the old ones.

Akashi tried to turn away and hide them, hide this momentary state of weakness from the world and especially from the person he admired and respected so much, but Emi-sensei held onto him firmly, rubbing gentle, soothing circles into his back, which only seemed to increase the flow of tears.

“Shhhhh, it’s ok. Just let it all out” she stated calmly, doing her best to comfort her student.

Akashi wondered how many years it has been since he felt the firm and tight embrace of someone who truly cared about him, acting like a beacon of light, showing him the way when he was lost. The feeling was both familiar and foreign, all at the same time.

Despite not wanting to burden Emi-sensei with his troubles, a small voice in the back of his head, barely audible, but loud enough to be clearly heard, told him to give in, and allow someone else to be strong for him, even if it were only for a moment, and for the first time in his life, he did.

Leaning into the embrace, Akashi allowed his head to rest against Emi-sensei’s shoulder, the tears now seeping into her checkered flannel as Akashi cried silently into her shoulder, allowing all the anger, pain, and frustration to escape from the deepest regions of his heart in which they were locked and imprisoned. Emi-sensei didn’t seem to mind this in the slightest, as she continued to gently rub Akashi’s back and whisper soft, soothing words to the distressed young boy.

An unknown amount of time passed before Akashi finally gathered his wits and pulled away, his eyes red and bloodshot and his face wet from all the tears. Emi-sensei smiled kindly at him before wiping the remaining tears from his face; Akashi couldn’t help but smile at the very motherly gesture.

“Feel better?” she asks.

“Much” Akashi responds truthfully, his voice shaky and hoarse.

“Good. Now I want you to take a minute to calm down. Go the the bathroom, wash up, take a lap around the building, and then come back. Ok?” she instructs.

“Ok” Akashi agrees, turning to head for the bathrooms.

“Akashi” he turns at the call of his name.

“My classroom door is always open, if you need someone to talk to. Always” she states reassuringly. Akashi smiles.

“Thank you” he says before he turns and makes his way to the bathrooms, and Emi-sensei opens the door and steps back inside the classroom.
Looking into the bathroom mirror, Akashi could finally see just how much of a mess he was. Taking some water into his hands he splashed it onto his face, hoping rid his face of the symptoms of crying as quickly as possible.

Despite how poorly he looked on the outside, Akashi felt calm and relaxed, his anxiety and frustrations from the week were now gone without a trace.

Taking a moment to compose himself, Akashi gave himself one last look over, ensuring that he didn’t look totally disheveled, before returning to class, his hope and determination to get into Advanced Art once again rekindled.

Chapter End Notes

I am definitely not a sadist, but for some reason making Akashi experience anxiety at the idea of disappointing Emi-sensei, space the fuck out of life, and cry and show emotional weakness and vulnerability in front of another human being felt way better than I think it should have... Oh well, it made for a good chapter. If you can't already tell, I am REALLY trying to push the concept of Emi-sensei evolving into sort of a mother-figure for Akashi; some one who he admires and respects and wants to learn from, but can also trust to express his feelings and the things that are troubling him without fearing judgement or mockery from the other side *cough cough* his shitty ass dad *cough cough*. While I don't think anyone could ever truly replace Akashi's mother, I still think that having a motherly figure who genuinely cares about him, his well being, and who he is as a person is definitely something that Akashi needs. While we don't have anything concrete regarding the canon relationship between Akashi and his father, it is very heavily implied that, since the death of his mother, Akashi's father has put a lot of pressure on his son to succeed at everything he does and often forces him to do things for the sole purpose of promoting and advancing the reputation and esteem of the Akashi family, so I think it's pretty reasonable to say that it has been a very long time since Akashi has felt genuinely loved and cared for, rather than a tool for his father's economic success, and damn it if that's not something I will fix if it is the last fucking thing I do on this mortal planet. Anyways I'm done rambling, let me know what you guys think in the comments and we can have a whole discussion about this if you want. Thanks so much for reading, I hope you are enjoying this, and I will see you all soon for chapter 16!
A Trip to the Mall

Chapter Notes

16 chapters in to this story and yet this is the first time I've gotten to actually write about Mibuchi.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Later that day, Akashi sat on the floor of his room, carefully planning out how he wanted to go about doing and finishing the required pieces he had to do to get into advanced art.

The requirements stated that he had to have a total of 10 pieces to submit to the board, who would then grade them and determine whether he is qualified enough to take the class. 5 of the pieces were “concentration” pieces, meaning that they would all revolve around a theme that Akashi would pick, making each piece relate to the other 4 in some way. The other 5 pieces however, were “breadth” pieces, which focused more on showcasing artistic skill and ability with 5 individual pieces rather than one's ability to tell a story with their art.

In the midst of his planning, Akashi was interrupted by the sound of a knock at his door. Getting up and opening the door, Akashi saw that it was Mibuchi.

“Mibuchi, how are you?” Akashi asks, stepping aside to allow the taller boy in.

“I’m fine thanks, and you?” Mibuchi responds.

“I’m doing alright. Is there something the matter? You look worried” Akashi notes.

“Well… I’m actually here to ask you that very same question” the raven haired boy admits “You seemed a bit out of it this week, so I figured I’d come and check up on you. Make sure you were doing alright”

“Oh, yes. I must apologize for my behavior this week. Some events in my home life over the weekend led to some… unresolved frustrations. I’m very sorry if I offended you somehow this week during my foul mood”

“Oh no not at all,” Mibuchi assures, “I’m just wondering what could have happened that got you so worked up is all”

Akashi hesitates for a moment before speaking.

“Well, I got into a bit of an argument with my father over an impromptu sleepover that he apparently didn’t approve of, as well as the classes I want to take next year” Akashi confesses.

“You got into an argument with your dad over next year’s schedule?” Mibuchi asks, confused.

“To put it simply, yes. You see, I want to take Advanced Studio Art next year, but my father doesn’t think that art is a worth subject to devote my time to, so he naturally forbade me from taking the class. I talked with Emi-sensei about it and she reassured me that she would do whatever she could to get me into the class so I’m working on the requirement pieces so that in the event she does somehow manage to convince my father to let me take the class, I will already have
“everything I need” Akashi explains, gesturing over to his, still open, visual journal, where he had previously been working on plans and rough drafts for some potential pieces.

“Advance Art huh? Isn’t Ei-chan in that class” Mibuchi asks.

“Yes he is. I haven’t seen any of his work yet, but I am assuming that he must be quite skillful if he made it into the class in the first place” Akashi states, making a mental note to ask Nebuya if he can see his portfolio sometime.

“Can I see your visual journal thing?” Mibuchi asks excitedly, pulling Akashi from his thoughts.

“Oh, of course” Akashi says, handing the book over to Mibuchi, who sits on the end of his bed and begins to slowly flip through the pages.

“Wow… you know I’ve never actually fully looked inside a visual journal before” Mibuchi admits after a few minutes.

“Really?” Akashi questions, taking a seat on the bed beside his friend.

“Ya, I don’t really know anyone who takes Akira-sensei’s art classes well enough to ask to see their’s and Ei-chan had adamantly refused to show me his ever since I took a small peek inside in it one time without asking one time. I have no idea why though, his book is absolutely gorgeous” Akashi looks at Mibuchi curiously for a moment before he fully realises what he’s said.

“Now that’s not to say that yours isn’t good either I mean, your pages are absolutely beautiful, neat, organized, well planned out, and very nice. But there’s just something about how Ei-chan does his that is so interesting and creative. They’re the complete opposite of yours, messy, unorganized, random paint splatters here, a photo or piece of tape over here, and some text there and that’s his page; yet despite the very messy look the pages have, everything looks deliberate, like no matter how out of place something looks you can’t help but feel like it was put there for a very specific reason that only the artist himself knows” Mibuchi finishes, taking a moment to flip through a few more pages.

“So they’re a lot like Nebuya himself then?” Akashi asks, shifting his gaze to look at Mibuchi, who seems to be contemplating his words.

“In a way, yes, I suppose his pages are a lot like Nebuya is. Messy and unorganized, but very… unique and explosively colorful at the same time” Mibuchi muses. Silence falls between the two for a few moments as Mibuchi finished leafing through Akashi’s visual journal. Once he’s finished, he closes the hardcover book and hands it back to Akashi, who stands to return it to the floor where he was originally working.

“We should go do something” Mibuchi says out of the blue. Akashi stands back up and shoots a confused look over to Mibuchi.

“What?” he asks, unsure if he heard the raven haired boy correctly.

“Ya. You, me, and a few of my friends should go out and do something. Something fun. Get out of the dorms and go get some fresh air, take a walk somewhere, go shopping- OH WE CAN GO TO THE MALL” Mibuchi begins talking a mile a minute, explaining all the different shops they could visit and all the different things they could go and look at. Before he can get too carried away, Akashi stops him.

“Mibuchi, I don’t know if you remember this from earlier in the conversation, but I’m in serious trouble with my father, and unless I want to end up back home with him breathing over my
shoulder every waking hour of the day, I can’t go anywhere unless he gives me the ok” Akashi explains.

“Well they why don’t you just ask him if you can come with me?” Mibuchi asks, as though it were the easiest thing in the world.

“Well… because he’ll say no”

“How do you know that?”

“Because I do”

“But what if he says yes”

“He isn’t going to”

“But why don’t you ask anyways”

“No”

“Sei-chaaaaaaaaaaaaaan” Mibuchi whines, flopping over onto the bed, and shooting his best puppy dog face at the red head. Akashi sighs in defeat.

“Ok ok I’ll ask” he says, pulling his phone out of his bag and reluctantly dialing the number for his father’s work phone. Mibuchi sits up excitedly as the phone rings, once… then twice… then a third time. The call goes through with a click and Akashi can already hear his father’s voice on the other line, waving off some distant voices.

“Seijuro what is it? I thought I told you not to call me while I’m working unless it was an emergency” his father stated gruffly, clearly annoyed with the unscheduled call.

“I know, but I won’t be long I just want to ask you something” Akashi says. His father sighs.

“Alright, what is it?”

“Can I go to the mall with Mibuchi?” Akashi spits out. A moment of silence passes and Akashi begins to wonder if his father is still there. Before he can repeat the question his father speaks.

“Put him on” his father commands, obviously referring to Mibuchi. Akashi barely has the phone away from his ear before it is snatched away by Mibuchi, who must have heard his father’s command.

“Hello” Mibuchi greets his father on the other line.

“Yes sir, Mibuchi Reo”

“Yes sir, I am friends with your son”

“Well you see, my sister is getting married next month and I still haven’t found the right suit to wear to the wedding. I figured since Sei-chan has such wonderful and sophisticated tastes that he could perhaps help me look for one”

“Yes sir”

“Yes of course”
“Thank you very much sir” Mibuchi says handing the phone back over to Akashi.

“Seijuro” his father calls.

“Yes” Akashi responds.

“Have you finished your school work for the day?” well that’s a weird question.

“Yes”

“Do you have any tests soon?”

“My next one is on Friday...”

“What time is curfew?”

…8?” Akashi says, extremely confused by the sudden barrage of questions. A moment of silence from the other line.

“Very well, you may go” Akashi stands dumbfounded for a moment.

“Really?”

“Yes. I did say that you needed my permission if you wanted to leave campus, and you have followed through. So long as you are keeping up with your school work and not breaking curfew then I see no reason why you can’t assist your friend with his dilemma. Just make sure he gets a good suit. I don’t want anyone blaming us for any malfunctions that may occur since you were the one who helped pick the suit out” his father states.

“Now, I have work to attend to, so I have to go now” and with that his father hangs up without so much as a goodbye. Akashi remains silent with the phone plastered to his ear before addressing Mibuchi.

“I didn’t know you had a sister”

“I don’t” Mibuchi says, winking at him.

Akashi rolls his eyes but smiles at his friend’s clever plan, before shoving his phone and wallet into his pocket, grabbing his jacket and shoes, and heading out the door with Mibuchi for an afternoon out at the mall.

Chapter End Notes

Kind of a boring chapter but don't worry, it's gonna get real good real soon so stay tuned for chapter 17!
The drive over to the super mall was silent save for the never ending stream of words that flowed out of Mibuchi’s mouth as he drove them down the highway, a stark contrast to the quiet, music filled car ride over to Tsuji’s house with Nebuya last week. Mibuchi explained that a few of his closest friends of elementary and middle school had agreed to meet up with them today and spend the afternoon window shopping and whatnot.

Upon arriving at the mall, Akashi was taken aback slightly by the sheer size of the structure. The super mall was absolutely massive, stretching as far outward and upward as the eye can see, though not literally of course.

“It’s pretty cool isn’t it?” Mibuchi asks as they enter the doors of the food court, where they were told to meet with Mibuchi’s friends.

“It’s definitely a lot bigger than I thought it would be” Akashi admits, taking in his surroundings as best he could.

“Mibuchi, over here” a voice called out from somewhere.

“Ah, there they are!” Mibuchi exclaims, before dragging Akashi over to a small table where four very nicely dressed girls sat sipping on, what appeared to be, tea and coffee.

“Hello ladies” Mibuchi greets, taking a seat beside one of the girls on the booth and motioning for Akashi to do the same, who does so, albeit slightly hesitant. Mibuchi and his friends break into a conversation about something that Akashi can’t even begin to understand, so he instead focuses his attention on looking around and taking in as much of the energetic atmosphere as he possibly can.

“Anyways girls, I’d like to take a moment to introduce you all to my friend from basketball, Akashi Seijuro. The boy in question snapped out of his stupor just in time to bow politely toward the girls and offer a small hello before Mibuchi began introducing the girls.

“Now first off, we have Haga Kumi” Mibuchi said, pointing to the girl with shoulder length light brown hair, dressed very modestly in a green jacket, white turtleneck undershirt, and a long tan skirt that went all the way to her ankles.

“Hello” the girl, Haga, greeted politely.

“Next up is Nakamoto Kiyoko”

“Hi there” the girl with long straight black hair dressed in a high neckline, knee length flower printed dress said, waving to Akashi in a very friendly manner.

“This little cutie is Ono Chie” Mibuchi explained as the girl with long black hair styled into pigtails dressed in a bright pink baby doll dress and white stocking and shoes framed her face with her
hands and batted her eyes cutely at Mibuchi, who pinched her cheek in response.

“And last but most certainly not least, our favorite bookworm, Yashino Anzu” Mibuchi said turning his and everyone else's attention to the very plain looking girl sitting at the end of the table with medium length dark brown hair and glasses, dressed in a brown knitted sweater and blue denim knee length skirt, her nose shoved in a thick book sitting on her lap. The girl in question raises her head for a moment, eyes Akashi up and down, and then politely regards him with a nod of her head before plunging back into her book.

“These four lovely ladies are some of my closest friends whom I’ve know for many many years now, isn’t that right girls?” Mibuchi asks his friends.

“Oh yes, Yashino and I have known Mibuchi since our first year of elementary school” Haga chirps excitedly.

“Nakamoto and I joined the group a few years later down the road, but we’re still just as good of friends” Ono adds in.

“Well I am very pleased and honored to meet all of you and I greatly appreciate you taking the time to meet us here today” Akashi says smiling politely at the girls, who all blush in response, save for Yashino, who seems very intently focused on her book.

“Alright, I think that’s enough chatter for right now. How about we take Sei-chan on a tour of the mall and do some shopping” Mibuchi suggests excitedly, eliciting a similar reaction from his friends, who all stand up and grab their belongings before meandering their way out of the food court and into the heart of the super mall.

The next few hours were spent wandering around the mall, going in and out of shops that caught their attention, and overall having a good time. Despite not knowing a solid 75% of the brands or names of the stores, Akashi found himself enjoying the leisurely atmosphere of strolling through the mall a great deal.

As he spoke more and more with Mibuchi’s friends, Akashi couldn’t help but notice how different Mibuchi’s friend group is from Nebuya’s. While Mibuchi and his friends were quiet, polite, neat, modest, and were considered to be very “feminine”, Nebuya and his friends were loud, slightly-rude, messy, attention hogs, and were more or less the complete opposite of the other group. Not that there’s anything wrong or right with how either group acts or behaves, it’s just who they are as people and how they interact as friends, if anything, Akashi likes how different the two friend groups are, almost as though certain aspects of each group and the people in the group appeal to certain aspects of Akashi’s personality… or something like that.

“SEIJUROOOOOOOOOOO” Akashi was then knocked out of his pensive state by the sound of his name and the force of something small but fast speeding toward him and tackling him in an iron gripped bear hug and lifting him off the ground. Looking over his shoulder Akashi was met with the sight of a familiar head of half shaven brown hair.

“Amano” Akashi croaks, happy to see the girl but quickly beginning to run out of air as his lungs are squeezed together within the girl’s surprisingly strong and solid grip. Amano finally let's Akashi down, smiling excitedly before speaking.

“I fucking knew I recognized that red hair from somewhere” she says.

“HEY GUYS LOOK AT WHO I JUST FOUND!” she yells over her shoulder, catching the attention of none other than Takata, Endo, Tsuji, and Nebuya, who walk over to join their friend.
“Well well well, if it isn’t The Queen and his harem of Honey Bees. You girls looking for a good time or are you still as fucking boring as I remember you to be?” Endo asks, her voice laced with sarcasm and disdain. Mibuchi and the others finally manage to snap out of their confused stupor.

“Endo please, must you always swear so much?” Nakamoto asks, glancing over her shoulder as though she were about to get in trouble for something. Endo stares at her for a moment with a deadpan expression.

“Fuck” Endo says, causing Nakamoto to tense up and cover her ears. Endo rolls her eyes at this while Takata laughs.

“So what the hell are you preps doing here?” Amano asks, stepping forward toward Mibuchi and his friends.

“We are here giving Akashi a tour of the mall and the shops. And what, may I ask, are you doing here dressed like that?” Haga asks disgustedly, referring to the spiked black leather jacket, bralette, shorts, fishnet stockings and 12 cm high heeled boots that Amano was currently wearing.

“What you mean this? It’s my summer attire, you know, the clothes I wear when it gets hot outside and I don’t feel like sweating like a fucking pig for the sake of maintaining my nonexistent virginity” Amano says.

“Oh please, the only reason people dress like that is because they’re all looks and no brains. If you had any self respect for yourself as a woman you would cover yourself and let your intellect and personality do the talking for you” Haga states crisply.

“Why the hell would I want to actually work to get a guy to take me home with him when I can just flash him my boobs and seal the deal?” Takata asks, striding up and leaning against Amano, exchanging a high five with her friend.

“Guys that’s like some super inappropriate stuff you’re talking about. You can’t say that kind of stuff in public” Ono says, her face turning red with embarrassment.

“Awwww, is da wittle baby embawased by the thought of getting a big cock getting shoved insider her?” Takata mocks, laughing maniacally when Ono squeals and hides her face in Mibuchi’s side.

“Nebuya, control your friends” Mibuch demands, gently stroking Ono’s hair.

“They don’t listen to me” Nebuya responds, not even looking up from his phone.

“Don’t worry about them Ono, they’re just trying to make themselves feel better by mocking your innocence when in reality they know that they’ll never be as good as us” Haga states, patting Ono on the shoulder.

“Um… I’m sorry did you just say that you’re better than us? Cuz that’s a laughable thought” Takata says.

“Well it’s true and you know it” Haga retorts, sticking her tongue out at the two.

“Listen up you preppy little bitch. If you wanna fight me then just say so, cuz I’d be more than happy to shove my stilettos up that pretentious little asshole of yours… oh wait, I forgot you’re saving that hole for Jesus” Amano spits.

“Madoka that’s enough” Nebuya says, the girls hesitate but they eventually turn and begin making their way back to their group.
“That’s right. Run back to your master like the slutty little dogs you are” Haga mocks, causing Amano’s eyes to widen in shock before quickly shifting to rage.

“What the FUCK DID YOU JUST SAY TO ME” she screams, flying at Haga, who screams and cowers in fear, but is saved by Nebuya who grabs Amano and pulls her away, glaring at Mibuchi.

“Haga stop it, you’re being an instigator” Mibuchi scolds, looking apologetically toward Nebuya, who’s got a seething Amano writhing in his arms.

“I knew we should have just gone back to my place” Tsuji sighs, never looking up from her DS.

“So she does speak” Yashino comments offhandedly, turning the page of her book.

“Beg your pardon?” Tsuji asks, still furiously mashing buttons.

“Oh well, I just figured that since you always have your face shoved in that game of yours you might not be capable of basic conversation” Yashino says looking up from her book. Tsuji has stopped mashing buttons but refuses to look at the girl.

“And what’s so great about that encyclopedia of yours? You play trivia or something?” Tsuji questions.

“No, but I figured with the amount of time you invest in that device of yours your brain must be so melted and useless that all you’re capable of doing is mashing buttons and smashing innocent little boys over the head with baseball bats” Tsuji looks up from her game.

“I wouldn’t have had to do anything if that “innocent little boy” had kept his grimy little hands away from places they shouldn’t be”

“He did nothing wrong!” Yashino argues angrily.

“He assaulted me!” Tsuji bites back. A tense silence descends over the two groups.

“How do we know you didn’t ask for it?” Tsuji’s eyes squint angrily and her mouth forms a deep scowl. She snaps her DS shut.

“Hold my game” she says, handing the console to Endo before walking over to the taller girl and punching her square in the jaw. She falls to the ground with a pained shout, and brings her hands to her face just as Tsuji climbs on top of her begins beating and tearing at her.

Akashi stares at the scene in utter disbelief as the two girls fight, rather one sidedly, on the floor of the mall. How security hasn’t been called yet is beyond him.

“Ya fuck ‘er up Kaori!” Endo cries happily.

“Give that shady little bookworm the beating she deserves” Amano yells encouragingly. Finally snapping out of his shocked states, Akashi rushes forward, peeling Tsuji away from Yashino, who tries her best to wriggle her way back to beating the shit out of the girls bespeckled face.

“THAT’S ENOUGH ALL OF YOU” Akashi yells, his voice echoing loudly in the mall. Everyone stops what they are doing and turns to Akashi.

“You’re all acting extremely childish right now. I don’t know what kind of history you all have with each other and frankly I don’t care. If you’re going to fight then find an alleyway or something but don’t get yourselves arrested because you had a fist fight in a public mall” Everyone
shifts uncomfortably before finally relaxing. Akashi releases Tsuji, who walks back over to Endo and immediately begins playing her game again.

“Now it’s getting late, and I don’t know about the rest of you but I have a curfew. So I say we all call it a night and go home” Akashi suggests, looking between the two groups.

“I’m headed back to campus so you can ride with me, Akashi” Nebuya pipes up, taking his keys out of his back pocket and beginning to walk away.

“Thank you Nebuya, I’ll be there in just a second” Akashi says, turning back to Mibuchi and the girls.

“Everyone I’d like to thank you again for spending the afternoon with me today, and I apologize for the less than desirable ending”

“Don’t worry about it Sei-chan, it wasn’t your fault” Mibuchi assures kindly.

“Ya, we were having a great time with you Akashi, and we’d love to do this again sometime” Ono chirps happily.

“I look forward to that. Goodbye now” Akashi says, bowing politely and walking toward Nebuya. He slows his pace slightly when he overhears Haga begin to say something.

“I can’t believe those girls, they’re so barbaric. Honestly Mibuchi, your crush on Nebuya wouldn’t be so hard to accept if he didn’t hang around such animals” she complains.

“HAGA. Don’t speak so loudly” Mibuchi says nervously, looking around to see if anyone heard “Do you honestly think I’d be wasting my time pining after that barbarian if I had the choice?”

Akashi stops in his tracks as Haga’s words finally process in his brain.

‘Wait… Mibuchi… Nebuya… pining?’ he thinks internally. Before he can dwell on this new information very long he is interrupted by Nebuya speaking.

“Sometime this year, Akashi” he states impatiently, twirling his keys on his finger, the other four girls standing around, looking just as eager to get the fuck out of here. Akashi runs to catch up with the group, and they depart the mall, and head back to campus, Akashi’s mind filled with a whirlwind of thoughts the entire ride back.

Chapter End Notes

Wow this chapter was... something. It was super fun to write because of the arguments between the two friend groups, but at the same time I'm wondering if I maybe rushed Mibuchi and his friends a little bit. I created those 4 characters to act as foils to the gamer girls, but I don't enjoy writing them as much as the gamer girls, so while the girly girls will make appearances later on in the story, I haven't decided if I will delve as far into their characters as I will with the gamer girls. Also yes this is the chapter where Akashi discovers that his two teammates are pining hopelessly after each other and now has to idea what to do. Hope you enjoyed this chapter, let me know what you think in the comments and I will see you all for chapter... *scrolls back up to the top of the page*... 17.
Advice

Chapter Notes

Hey, everybody's favorite cheetah is back in action!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

That night, Akashi could not sleep no matter how hard he tried. His train of thought was less like a train chugging along a straight set of tracks, and more like a tornado whirling around aimlessly in his head, throwing random facts this way and that without any rhyme or reason to them.

Most of the facts, he noted, had to do with the newly acquired information regarding Nebuya and Mibuchi’s relationship… or lack thereof it would seem. Were it any other 2 people in the universe going through this helpless pining adventure, Akashi wouldn’t have given it a second thought, however because it was, not one, but TWO of his teammates going through this experience, apparently his brain felt compelled to think endlessly about the situation, much to the Akashi’s chagrin.

Although the more the boy thought about it, the more he wondered, ‘why weren’t they together yet?’

Did Nebuya lie and say he would consider confessing just to get Akashi to drop the topic? No, that wasn’t it. Nebuya may have been hesitant to confess, and probably would have preferred to keep his crush a secret, but he did seem genuine in saying that he would consider what Akashi said.

Did he decide to confess after talking with Akashi but then chicken out at the last second? Seems like the more likely thing to have happened, especially considering that the first thing out of Mibuchi’s mouth upon seeing Nebuya would have been some kind of passive aggressive insult about his behavior or appearance. Ya, that would definitely cause someone to reconsider their decision to confess if the first thing out of their crushes mouth was some kind of insult.

Akashi groaned in frustration and flopped on to his stomach, burying his head in the pillow. He was never going to get to sleep at this rate if his brain didn’t shut up. Looking over to his desk, he saw his cell phone sitting on the edge of his desk, charging.

Getting up from his bed, he made his way over to his desk and grabbed his phone, unplugged it from the wall, and sat down in his desk chair, scrolling through his contacts until he found the number he was looking for. The call rang once… then twice… than a third time before finally clicking, signalling the call had gone through.

“Yello” the voice on the other line greeted a little too cheerfully considering what time it was.

“Hello, Hayama” Akashi greeted.

“Akashi! How’ya doin?” the blonde asks happily.

“I’m fine thank you, and yourself?”

“Oh not to bad thanks. So, do what do I owe the pleasure of a call from the infamous Akashi Seijuro at such a late hour? Isn’t it past your bedtime?” Hayama asks playfully. Akashi can almost
see the smug look that must be plastered on his face.

“No, Hayama, it is not past my bedtime, and I’m calling because I need to talk to you about something”

“Talk to me about what?” Hayama asks cautiously, likely assuming that he was in some kind of trouble. Akashi hesitates for a moment.

“It’s… complicated” he admits. Hayama hums on the other line.

“Well, why don’t you head on over here and we can talk about it in person ok?” Hayama offers.

“Very well, I will see you soon” Akashi says before handing up, grabbing his jacket and shoes, and heading out the door toward the 3rd year dorms.

The inside of Hayama’s room was… well it was about what Akashi expected it to be. Dirty clothes and food wrappers covered the floor in certain areas, the bed was messy and unmade, the bookshelf and desk were covered in a thin layer of dust, and his backpack had been abandoned by the door, it and the contents it held would likely remain untouched until Sunday night, when Hayama finally remembered that he had homework to do.

Akashi did his best to maneuver around the piles of clothing and plastic wrappers without touching them, breathing a sigh of relief when he finally reached the desk without some unknown substance sticking to him. Hayama on the other hand, carelessly walked over to the bed, kicking things out of his way in the process, before falling into the lump of blankets and facing Akashi.

“So, what was this “complicated thing” you wanted to talk about?” the boy prompts. Akashi sighs.

“Where do I even start?” he asks no one in particular.

“Let's try the beginning” Hayama offers, smiling at Akashi, giving the boy a bit more confidence in what he wants to say.

“Well, a few weeks ago, I learned from a few of Nebuya’s friends that Nebuya has romantic feelings for Mibuchi, but due to some events in his past, which you are likely somewhat familiar with, he is not planning on confessing. I talked with him about this and said that while he had every right to be nervous about Mibuchi’s response to his confession, that there was no reason that he shouldn’t at least try. Fast forward to earlier today, I am spending time with Mibuchi and his friends at the mall, when out of nowhere Nebuya and his friends appear. Apparently Nebuya and Mibuchi’s respective friend groups DO NOT get along with one another, and this big fight broke out that ended with me having to intervene and prevent someone from getting a broken nose. Just as the groups are separating and departing to leave, I overhear one of Mibuchi’s friends say something about Mibuchi’s crush on Nebuya being hard to accept because he hangs out with such vulgar people. If what she said is true then that means that Mibuchi also has romantic feelings for Nebuya which is great, but for some reason he hasn’t and likely won’t confess his own feelings and Nebuya has yet to act on what I told him last week so now I’m sitting here thinking to myself ‘well if he likes him and he likes him then why haven’t they gotten together yet?’ and this all leads back to the idea that for some reason my brain thinks that all this bullshit is significant enough to merit me losing sleep over it all” Akashi finishes his long winded explanation and takes a deep breath, before turning to Hayama who’s looking at him as though he grew a couple of heads in the time it took for him to explain the events of the past few weeks.

“I know it sounds absolutely insane, but trust me when I say that I wouldn’t be sitting wasting your time with this story if I didn’t think that everything in it were actually true” Akashi says.
“No, it’s not that I don’t believe you it's just… well, I guess I kind of don’t believe you I just… Reo-nee and Ei-chan?” Hayama asks in disbelief.

“Yup”

“Wow. Ya know, if anyone else were to have told me that, I’d have probably laughed and told ‘em to fuck off” Hayama admits.

“But I take it because I’m telling you that you aren’t going to do that” Akashi questions.

“Well, no I’m not gonna do that cuz I know you wouldn’t lie or make something like this up but…” he trails off.

“But…?” Akashi prods

“I don’t know, they just seem to fight and insult each other so much that the idea of them liking each other seems kind of weird. I mean, even if they weren’t planning on confessing like you said, you’d think that they’d at least be nice to each other if they really liked the other” Hayama explains.

“Yes, I suppose that would make sense, but I have concrete evidence to support the claims so regardless of how they treat each other, they both have romantic feelings for the other” Akashi states. Hayama hums in response.

“Well now that you’ve told me all of this, what now?” Hayama asks, grabbing a water bottle from somewhere under the bed and taking a long swig from it.

“Well I suppose if they aren’t going to confess on their own that the next course of action would be to figure out how to set them up.” Hayama makes a gurgled choking noise before spitting the contents of his mouth out in a jet of water droplets that cascade onto the floor, before sending him right into a violent coughing fit. Akashi stares in astonishment at his teammate, wondering what could have caused his sudden outburst. Before Akashi can even ask if Hayama is ok, the blonde turns, wide eyed to Akashi.

“You’re telling me that you actually wanna try and HOOK UP Ei-chan and Reo-nee?” Hayama asks in utter shock and disbelief.

“Well… if they aren’t going to get together on their own isn’t that what the people who know about it are supposed to do?” Akashi asks, rather unsure of himself now after witnessing Hayama’s overwhelmingly negative response.

“Ya in like movies and stuff, but do you honestly think playing matchmaker is the best way to go about solving this?”

“I… I don’t know” Akashi admits, “that’s part of the reason why I came to you. I’ve never been in a relationship before and don’t have too much experience with liking people or people liking me, so I don’t really know the best course of action regarding two people with mutual feelings for one another” Hayama sighs.

“Listen Akashi. I think it’s really nice that you want to help Reo-nee and Ei-chan get over their differences so they can be together, I really do. But playing matchmaker in real life, doesn’t always turn out the way you want it to, and there are even cases where you can accidentally turn two potential soul mates into bitter enemies. I think, for now, it's best that we leave the two alone and
let them deal with this. And if nothing ever comes of their feelings, then that’s ultimately their decision, not anyone else’s.’ Akashi nods his head in, disappointed, understanding.

“I see. I suppose that makes sense. Well, thank you for talking about this with me Hayama, it’s really helped me get some things off my mind” Akashi says, standing up and making his way toward the door.

“No problem Akashi. See you later?”

“Yes, goodnight” Akashi says, closing the door behind him, and returning back to his room, where he falls into a light and restless sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Don't ask where this chapter came from cuz honestly I don't even know either at this point.
The next few weeks pass with a blur, between school and basketball and art projects and hanging out with his newly acquired friends. Before Akashi can even fully comprehend what’s happening, he’s packed and in the family limo, being driven back to the Akashi estate, where he will spend the next three weeks during summer vacation, much to the boy’s great displeasure. The plus side however, is that his father will be gone away on business for the grand majority of the vacation, so Akashi will more or less have free range until his father returns the Saturday before school starts back up.

For the most part, Akashi spent his time locked away in his room working on art pieces for his admission portfolio for the advance class, only ever leaving the room for food, bathroom breaks, or to go hang out somewhere with either Nebuya or Mibuchi. Most of the staff were too preoccupied with managing and maintaining the huge estate, and were probably so used to him being away at school, that hardly anyone ever bothered him or requested that he leave his personal sanctuary.

One day, about a week or so into summer break, however, Akashi was sitting in his room, working away diligently as always, when the head butler knocked on the door saying he had a telephone call.

“Tell whoever it is I’m busy” Akashi commands, not wanting to deal with who or whatever the call entailed.

“Yes sir, I have informed this individual several times that you do not wish to be disturbed, however she insisted that she speak with you as soon as possible” the man responded. Akashi groaned, at the female pronouns. Likely one of his father’s associate’s daughters looking “get to know him better” or some other bullshit excuse to get close to him, or rather, his father’s money.

“And who is this woman exactly?”

“A Miss Akira Emi, sir” the head butler answered.

Akashi’s head snaps up at the name. The boy immediately drops what he’s doing and stands up, knocking his chair over as he runs out the door of his room, speeding past the, very surprised and confused, butler and sprinting down the hallway and stairs, two steps at a time, dodging staff member after staff member, and slipping on the smooth marble floors a couple of times before finally reaching the telephone in the library, nearly ripping the receiver from its cable.

“HELLO” Akashi accidentally yells into the speaker.

“Hey kiddo” Akashi smiles at the familiar voice on the other end of the line.

“Hello, Emi-sensei” he greets, sitting on the couch next to the phone.
“How’s your break so far?” the woman asks cheerfully.

“Oh, it’s going alright, a little boring, but I’ve been working on my portfolio a lot. I’m almost finished with my concentration pieces and I’m just about to start planning a few breadth pieces” Akashi reports.

“That’s great! I’m so happy to hear that. Anyways, before I get too sidetracked, I wanted to ask you something” Emi-sensei states.

“What is it?” Akashi asks curiously.

“Well, I have some tickets to the museum tomorrow, and I was supposed to go with a friend from college, but unfortunately she has a family emergency and can’t come, so now I’m sitting here with an extra ticket to this museum but no one else to go with, when I get the idea to ask one of my favorite intro students to come along instead” she explains excitedly.

“Me? You really want me to go to the museum with you?” Akashi asks, his teacher’s excitement beginning to infect him.

“Of course silly, I’d love for you to come with me. They have a brand new fine arts exhibit set up this time, and I figured that, what with your dad not liking art to much, you haven’t been to many art museums have you?”

“No, I’ve never been to one” Akashi confirms.

“Perfect, then this’ll be a brand new experience for you, that is… if you’re available” Emi-sensei says.

“Yes, of course, I’d love to go with you. What time tomorrow were you planning on going?” Akashi asks, grabbing and nearby pen and paper and writing down the time and location of the museum.

“Ok, now that we have that settled, give me your address so I can come pick you up tomorrow” Emi-sensei says, but is interrupted by the sound of something loud and metallic hitting the ground somewhere in the background. Akashi wonders if Em-sensei is cooking something.

“Hey are you okay? Sounds like something fell” Emi-sensei comments. Akashi pauses for a moment in confusion, before realization sets in, and his expression shifts to than of an annoyed frown.

“Don’t worry about it Sensei, it was nothing, here let me give you my address” Akashi says, changing the subject and giving his address, as well as the gate code, to his teacher, before bidding her a good afternoon, and hanging up the phone. Akashi slams the receiver onto the base, before making his was toward the kitchens, with an extremely annoyed expression.

Kicking the door to the kitchen open, Akashi walks in, clearing his throat to make his presence known. The staff present in the room jump and stiffen at his presence, the atmosphere of the room growing more and more tense the closer Akashi gets to the small phone sitting on the back wall of the kitchen. Turning to the staff, who are all staring at him with looks of fear and curiosity, Akashi grabs the power cord and yanks it out of the wall, holding it in front of him for all the staff to see.

“I don’t know what kind of game it is you’re all playing, and to be honest, I don’t give a flying fuck. If anything about the conversation you just overheard, and don’t even try to say you weren’t listening in because I know you were, or my whereabouts tomorrow reach my father in any way, shape or form, not only will each and every one of you be out on the streets without a job, but I will do everything in my power to ensure that you never find work in this city or this province EVER.
AGAIN. Am I clear?” Akashi asks, eying the staff, who all seem to understand the consequences that will come with ratting him out to his father, and agree that no amount of bragging rights is worth getting on Akashi’s bad side.

“Good. Now remember, you stay out of my business, and I in turn, will stay out of yours. So long as you aren’t breaking the law or trying to assassinate my father (not that I can blame you for wanting to try) then you don’t have to worry about me spying on you and reporting to my father. I’m not here to make your lives miserable, but I can and I will if the situation calls and the need arises. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have shit to do” Akashi states bluntly, dropping the electrical cable and walking out of the kitchen and back toward his room, the staff staring at him wide eyed and confused at his use of a curse word, not once, but twice throughout the duration of his threatening speech.

Closing and locking the door behind him, Akashi runs around his rooms, silently jumping and yipping in happiness, barely able to contain his excitement for the next day’s events.

The following morning, Akashi got up and went about his morning routine as he usually did, the excitement of going to the museum for the first time with Emi-sensei buzzing through him and making it all the harder to wait patiently for his teacher to arrive.

At around 10 o’clock am, Akashi was informed that Emi-sensei had arrived and was now waiting for him in the grand hall. Gathering his things, Akashi left his room and rushed down the hall as fast as he could. Peering over the staircase rails, Akashi saw Emi-sensei, clad in her usual checkered flannel, graphic t-shirt, faded jeans, high top sneakers, and black beanie, standing awkwardly in the extravagantly large and elegant grand hall of Akashi’s home, looking around at the decor as though she had just stepped into a fairy tale, which for some people, probably isn’t too far from the truth.

As he descended the stairs and walked toward his teacher, Akashi noticed the various staff members eying and staring at Emi-sensei with confused, curious, and judgemental expressions. One of the maids even had the gaul to bump into Emi-sensei as she passed carrying some linens, giving the young woman a once over before turning her nose up in distaste and walking away.

“Oh ya, how’s that elitism working out for you Cinderella? Bet you’re feeling like such a princess washing someone else’s clothes everyday” Emi-sensei spits, clearly annoyed with the disrespect.

“Sensei” Akashi calls, causing the maid to stiffen and shy away. Emi-sensei turns and her scowl immediately turns to a smile as Akashi approaches.

“Akashi!” the woman greets happily, opening her arms for a hug, which the boy immediately accepts. Akashi can feel the stares of the staff members on him as he embraces his teacher, but he ignores them in favor of resting his cheek against her beanie, a small smile gracing his lips.

“Have you been waiting long?” Akashi asks as they separate.

“No, not at all, I think everybody had a good five minutes to prepare for my arrival before I pulled up to the front. I hadn’t even turned off the ignition before someone was already opening my door for me, which, for a middle class woman such as myself, was pretty weird” Emi-sensei admits.

“Ya it can take a bit of getting used to. After spending so much time away on campus, it took me by surprise a bit when I came home for the first time after a while” Akashi says.

“You’re not kidding” she replies. Akashi chuckles at this.

“Shall we get going, I don’t know if you’ve noticed but we don’t get visitors very often, and when
we do, everyone wants to know who it is, where they’re from, how much they make every year...” Akashi trails off, making sure Emi-sensei is the only one who can hear him. The woman peers around before noticing the copious sets of eyes staring intently at her.

“Ah, I see. Ya let's get out of here, before I end up giving somebody the finger or getting into a fist fight” Emi-sensei comments offhandedly, turning to exit the mansion. Akashi trails behind her, only moderately perturbed by her lack of sarcasm within that last statement.

Parked out in front of the large staircase that leads up to the equally large front door of the Akashi mansion, was a small, white, 4 door Honda.

Getting in the car, Akashi buckles his seat belt as Emi-sensei starts the car, rolls down the windows and sunroof, shifts into gear, and steps on the accelerator, lurching the car forward slightly and digging the tires into the gravel driveway, before smoothing out as they drove further and further away from the mansion, past the front gate, and out onto the open road.

“Hopefully by the time we get there the line won’t be too long so we can just go straight in” Emi-sensei says, doing her best to talk over the loud gusts of wind that enter the car through the open windows.

“So what’s the exhibit like?” Akashi asks curiously.

“This is a brand new exhibit they are holding so I’m not sure what’s going to be showing specifically, but from what I read on the website they’re going to be showing a whole ton of modern/contemporary type works” Emi-sensei responds. Akashi hums in understanding, turning his attention back outside the window.

Several moments of silence pass as the landscape outside the car passes by in a blur of colors. He's not exactly sure the direction this museum is located, but from the looks of it, they must be heading toward the city, as the vast fields of farmland slowly begin turning into neighborhoods and small shopping areas. The more time passes the more Akashi realizes how little time he spends just looking out the window, enjoying the scenery. Usually whenever he is in the car, he's focused on some school assignment or working on planning out new training regimes for the basketball team, or even catching up on some much needed sleep. Now however, Akashi has all the time in the world to just sit back, relax, and watch the world rush past him, the wind whipping through his hair only adds to the free and liberating feeling he gets. Akashi smiles.

“Today’s going to be a good day” he says, turning his gaze to his teacher. Emi-sensei looks at him confused for a moment out of the corner of her eye, before laughing happily.

“Ya! I think so too, kiddo”

Chapter End Notes

Here's some more mama Emi spending time with her favorite red headed son! More to come soon so stay tuned for chapter 20!
The pair arrived at the museum at around 10:30. The parking lot was busy, with numerous people moving in and out of parking spaces rather frequently, but not so busy that finding a spot within reasonable walking distance wasn’t impossible.

Exiting the car, Akashi follows Emi-sensei toward the large metallic-looking architectural anomaly that somehow constitutes as a building. The museum didn’t appear to have any concrete shape like most rectangular-shaped buildings. If Akashi had to compare what the building resembled to something in real life, it would probably be some horrific accident between an urchin and a sea anemone.

Emi-sensei handed the tickets to the man behind the counter, who stamped both her and Akashi’s hands, before returning their stubs and sending them into the museum. Upon entering, Akashi’s mouth dropped open in sheer wonder and amazement, as the pair entered a massive octagonal room, with corridors leading off to different parts of the museum. The ceiling was nothing but dommed windows, allowing sunlight to pour in and illuminate the room.

“Pretty cool huh?” Emi-sensei asks, closing Akashi’s mouth before a fly flew into it or something.

“This is the coolest building I have ever been in ever” Akashi states excitedly, unable to contain his childlike joy and excitement. Emi-sensei laughs.

“Well, we have all access passes, so pick a hallway and let’s get going shall we?” Emi-sensei says, skipping off toward the hallway closest to their left. Akashi smiles and jogs after his teacher toward their adventure.

The first two hallways lead to a large vision gallery filled with modern/midcentury contemporary art pieces. Paintings, sculptures, statues, naked figures, you name it, they had it. This type of art was definitely very different from what Akashi was used to seeing as “art”. These pieces focused more on expressing an emotion or theme in an abstract way, rather than simply depicting a singular moment in time. On the surface, many of these pieces looked very simple, and some of them looked as though they were done by a toddler, but Emi-sensei explained that, while these pieces may look like they were made by a child, they were actually made with just as much care, thought, and skill as those made by classical artists, the only difference being that these modern artists reflect and utilize a more abstract and free style. Akashi made a mental note to perhaps try something like that in one of his own pieces some time.

The third and fourth hallways lead to another vision gallery, this one focusing more on classical pieces and artists, with whom Akashi was more familiar with. Unlike in the first gallery, these paintings depicted elegantly dressed nobles and warriors, in a very hyper realistic style. Everything
from the people’s skin to the hardwood floors they stood on looked so real and lifelike that Akashi wouldn’t be surprised if he could just walk up and touch the beautiful silks and smooth armor plates. Emi-sensei said that this hyper realistic style was influenced by the European renaissance that was happening around the time these paintings were made, and that the extensive and highly-used trade routes likely spread Europe’s newfound love for lifelike portraits to artists all over Europe and Asia, even Japan. Akashi remembered talking about the trade routes in History class earlier in the year, how trade routes between Europe and Asia allowed for both to grow and expand much faster than they could have on their own, and if food, clothing, jewels, and religions were being spread and exchanged, then it made total sense that art and art styles would make their way across the continent as well.

The fifth hallway was smaller room filled with glass display cases that held fragile ceramic pots and sculptures and various types of jewelry, some containing precious stones and metals, others just metal with intricate designs carved into the piece. Akashi looked at the jewelry pieces in awe, as he had never seen such beautifully and elaborately decorated necklaces, bracelets, and earrings. Emi-sensei told him that these pieces are actually from the United States, and were made by various Native American tribes who lived in areas where resources such as turquoise, obsidian, topaz, quartz, and various precious metals were abundant. She explained that the intricate designs on the jewelry often had spiritual or religious significance, some pieces being tokens of luck and fortune, while others were made in honor of a spirit or god that the tribe worshiped. Akashi vaguely remembered the brief discussion of Native American tribes that they had in his history class, though the lesson focused more on Christopher Columbus and his “discovery” of the New World, or rather his violent and forceful conquest, enslavement, and ultimate genocide of the Native people and their land. Needless to say, the class was not a fan of Columbus or of his expansion methods.

The sixth and seventh hallways lead to another large room that was filled with a variety of interactive activities for younger children. Short videos that explained the different art periods and the styles and messages they reflected, blocks where, if you laid a piece of paper on top of it, a design would be transferred onto the page by running a crayon over it, chunks of precious metals that the children could hold and touch, and much more. Emi-sensei and Akashi went through the room and did all of the activities one by one, and were surprised to find that, despite being geared toward young children, the activities were pretty fun to do, and the two each left the activity room with a small banner covered in little crayon designs.

The eighth and final hallway is where things really got interesting. The hallway lead into another large vision gallery, but instead of having paintings, sculptures, or other smaller types of art, this vision gallery was dedicated to a whole different kind of 3-D piece. The very first piece they say as they entered the room, was a series of strings, hanging from the ceiling, each string holding 10-15 pieces of, what appeared to be, burnt wood. The piece looked very strange and it made Akashi wonder how a bunch of burnt chunks of wood constitutes as art. However, as Akashi walked further into the gallery, he took one last look at the hanging wood pieces, and then he understood.

From his initial position upon entering the gallery, the piece looked like a bunch of randomly hanging pieces of wood, but as he moved toward the side of the piece, he saw the image shift and bend, the pieces of wood lining up to form a church. Akashi stared at the piece in confusion for a moment, before looking down at the information panel that gave a small description of the piece. The panel explained that the chunks of burnt wood used in this piece came from a church that the artist and her wife were married in. When the artist learned that the church had burnt down due to some faulty wiring, she used pieces of wood from the wreckage to create a hanging 3-D piece that, unless looked at from a certain angle, looks like nothing more than a bunch of burnt wood, symbolizing how many people view the now burnt down church as nothing more than wasted space, but the artist’s past experiences and perspective give the useless wooden chunks meaning.
“Isn’t it awesome?” Emi-sensei asks. Akashi turns toward her.

“Yes, I must admit I was very surprised by how the wooden pieces line up when you look at it from a certain angle” Akashi admits.

“I met this artist back when I was in college, she came and guest lectured one day. She was a big partitioner of taking old, broken, and discarded items and using them to create these beautiful and intricate pieces. Everybody thought she was crazy and kind of weird for, more or less, dumpster diving in order to get ahold of the materials she needed in order to make her pieces, but I thought she was incredibly interesting” Emi-sensei explained, looking up at the blackened wood fragments.

“Have you done anything like this Sensei?” Akashi asks curiously.

“I’ve done bigger scale 3-D pieces before, but nothing to this magnitude, not to mention something like this would take a lot of math, and, not to beat on the mathematicians, but I became an artist so I wouldn’t have to do math” Emi-sensei states. Akashi laughs at this.

“Not a fan of math huh?” he asks.

“I mean, I did well enough in it when I had to do it during school, but I didn’t enjoy it by any means either” she responds. Akashi laughs at this.

The two spend the next half hour walking around the vision gallery, taking in and appreciating all the beautiful pieces on display. Some were expertly carved marble statues that depicted the human form in its most natural state (i.e. completely naked) to completely abstract figures made completely out of bottle caps or wine bottles. By the time the pair left the vision gallery and started heading toward the food court, Akashi was itching to get back and get to work on his own pieces, using the knowledge and inspiration he got from the day’s adventures… but first food.

The cafeteria was pretty standard as far as public cafeterias go. There were a couple of fast food restaurants lined up on the far wall, with tables and booths laid out in the center of the large room where people could sit and eat, and on the far right wall there looked to be an all you can eat buffet line with various delicious looking foods. A sign above the cash register read, “PRICING IS NOW DETERMINED BY WEIGHT OF THE PLATE RATHER THAN BY NUMBER OF PLATES.”

“Is Nebuya the reason for that sign over there” Akashi asks, pointing to the large sign above the buffet line in a joking manner.

“How did you know?” Emi-sensei asks, looking at him in shock and surprise. Akashi breaks out laughing.

“Just a hunch I guess” he responds.

“I swear, that kid eats like he’s never seen food before, and he’s not even the worst of them” Emi-sensei says, getting into line.

“Really?” Akashi asks curiously.

“Oh ya, that whole group is pretty much the same. They shovel food into their mouths like someone’s about to take it from them, though I suppose I’m not much better” Akashi hums in response.

The two order their food and Akashi is about to pull out his wallet to pay when he notices that Emi-sensei is already handing her credit card over to the employee to pay for both their meals.

“Oh, sensei please let me buy lunch” Akashi insists.
“Nope” Emi-sensei says, cutting him off, “I’m the one who invited you out today, so it’s only fair that I cover lunch”

“But you already payed for the tickets, it’s the least I can do” Akashi argues.

“Tell you what, I’ll make you a deal. Let me buy lunch this time, and next time we go somewhere, you can buy lunch, ok?” Emi-sensei asks, ignoring the glare from the employee who clearly wants her to hurry up. Akashi is silent for a moment, but ultimately nods his head in affirmation. Emi-sensei pays for the food, and the two go and grab a seat to eat their lunches.

After they finish eating, Akashi and Emi-sensei go back to the vision galleries where they take out his visual journals and begin doing short quick sketches of all the different paintings and statues and pottery. By the time they finally leave the museum, it is almost 3 o’clock in the afternoon, and the sun is just beginning to descend from the sky.

The drive back to Akashi’s house is filled with various American punk rock bands that Emi-sensei insisted that Akashi listen to. As he expected, the music was loud, gritty, and filled with copious amounts of English swear words, but surprisingly, Akashi ended up liking a lot of the bands that Emi-sensei recommended to him, and made a quick mental note to do some research on them once he got home.

Akashi couldn’t help the twinge of sadness he felt once they pulled through the large double gate of the Akashi compound, signalling that it was time for their fun, adventure-filled day to end. As much as Akashi wanted to spend more time with Emi-sensei and not in the empty confines of his house, he knew that he was pushing his luck with leaving the house without his father’s permission as it was, so he gathered his things, hugged Emi-sensei goodbye, promising to work hard on his pieces during the break, and trudged up the large staircase to the front door, turning to wave a final goodbye to his teacher, before entering the house, his brain buzzing with all sort of new and creative ideas for pieces.

Chapter End Notes

Just a fun-filled day at the museum for Akashi and Emi-sensei. I based the museum off of one that I went to back in highschool, but only very loosely. I had a lot of fun writing this chapter, I just absolutely adore writing the interactions between Akashi and Emi-sensei you guys have no idea. Anyways I hope you enjoyed this chapter, comment down below and tell me what you think, and I hope to see you all soon for chapter 21!
Ditching Class

Chapter Notes

Hey, I'm back to posting regularly now!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Summer break came and went rather quickly, and to be honest, Akashi was pretty excited to get back into the swing of his normal routine. Between classes, basketball, and art, Akashi was pretty busy, to say the least, but thankfully, a busy schedule meant that his father was more likely to leave him alone and not bother him as much as before, which was a plus.

One Friday, early in October, Akashi was sitting in his usual seat, waiting for 6th period to start. A few moments before the bell was supposed to ring, one of the counselors came into the room and called everyone to attention.

“Pardon me class, I am sorry to interrupt, but I am here to inform you that your 6th period teacher, Kimura-sensei, has injured herself and is unfortunately unable to continue teaching this class for the time being” the class breaks into worried whispers.

“Now I know you all must be worried, but I assure you that the injury is not life threatening and that Kimura-sensei will make a full recovery from it, however her recovery will take time, so a decision has been made to assign you a new teacher until Kimura-sensei is well enough to return” the counselor says, scanning the room. Akashi raises his hand.

“Yes, Akashi, you have a question?” the counselor asks, turning her attention to the red haired boy.

“Do you know when we will be assigned his new teacher?” Akashi asks.

“Well, I admit it may take a few days to get someone in, as this decision was made on very short notice, and we unfortunately don’t have any staff available currently to teach this class, so for the time being this class will be a study hall, where you will receive material that Kimura-sensei has already laid out for you to complete, but you may work on other classes as you see fit” the counselor responds.

“May I go to another class?” Akashi asks, the counselor looks at him in confusion.

“I beg your pardon?” she asks.

“I need to speak with a teacher from another class about something rather important, so I was wondering if, since this class is just a study hall for the time being, I could perhaps go and meet with this teacher” the counselor ponders this for a moment, obviously unsure of how she should answer.

“Well… I suppose if you have all of your work completed and don’t cause any trouble, then I don’t see why not” she says. Akashi smiles, collecting his things.

“Thank you very much, Ma’am” he says, exiting the room. He walks down the hall to the staircase, and throws a glance over his shoulder, before breaking into an excited run, bursting out the front doors of the main building, once again ignoring the hall monitor who tells him to slow down, and
sprinting toward the art building.

The bell, signalling the beginning of class, rings just as Akashi walks into the door of Emi-sensei’s classroom. The woman in question looks up at him in confusion.

“Akashi, what are you doing here?” all eyes turn toward the red head.

“I got out of class so I figured I’d come and hang out in here, get some work done” the boy explains. Emi-sensei eyes him thoughtfully for a moment, before shrugging her shoulders and getting on with her lesson. Akashi takes a seat next to Nebuya.

“Well well well, I never thought I’d live to see the day when the ever-punctual Akashi Seijuro actually ditches class to come hang out with a bunch of art nerds” Nebuya teases lightheartedly.

“Oh shut up, I’m not ditching. I happen to have permission to be here” Akashi counters.

“Really?” Nebuya questions curiously.

“Yup”

“From who?”

“None of your business”

“Then how do I know you aren’t ditching class”

“Why do you fucking care?” Nebuya pauses to think for a moment, before shrugging.

“Touche”

“Excuse me ladies, but why are you talking during my lecture” Emi-sensei asks, cutting off Nebuya and Akashi’s conversation.

“I’m sorry but why are you teaching during my conversation?” Nebuya asks without missing a beat, smiling when Emi-sensei glares at him, the class laughs at the exchange.

Once Emi-sensei has finally finished her lecture, she releases the class for studio time. Everyone heads over to a set of drawers and begins pulling out, canvases, paints, brushes, colored pencils, graphite pencils, chalk, and a wide variety of other materials as well. Akashi looks up from his visual journal when he notices Nebuya walking back over to the table with a large canvas, an easel, and a pallet in his arms. Akashi does his best to make it look like he’s working on his visual journal, when in reality he’s trying to catch a glimpse of what Nebuya is working on, his curiosity regarding the man’s artistic ability beginning to eat away at him.

Alas, Akashi is unsuccessful at keeping his curiosity to himself, as Nebuya catches him leaning over in his chair trying to look at the canvas. Nebuya smiles and chuckles lightly.

“Do you wanna take look?” Nebuya asks, despite already knowing the answer. Akashi sets his visual journal down on the table and gets up, heading over to stand next to Nebuya.

The painting Nebuya is working on depicts a thin, lean boy, with dark skin and long black hair, styled into a multitude of braids that cascade around him. The boy is floating over a pool of liquid, and his skin is covered in dark purple, glowing marks, from the top of his forehead, all the way down to his toes. In his hands, the boy holds a glowing, purple cube, the light from it reflects off the boy’s hands, face, and body, matching the color of the glowing glyphs that cover him. The
boy’s eyes are half-lidded, but his gaze is clearly directed at the audience, a pair of bright blue eyes stare confidently from under his long eyelashes, daring the audience to come and try to take the cube he holds in his hands. The boy looks relaxed, but he also looks powerful.

“What do you think?” Nebuya asks, pulling Akashi from his thoughts. He looks up at the older boy, but can’t seem to find the words to properly reflect his thoughts.

“Nebuya I-I don’t… this…is amazing” Akashi finally manages to say. Nebuya looks down at him in mild surprise.

“You think so?” he asks.

“Ya, this is so good” Akashi says, smiling excitedly at Nebuya, “I mean, don’t get me wrong, I knew you were skillful, you’d have to be if you want to take this class… but I never imagined that you’d be this incredible” 

Nebuya smiles and rubs the back of his head sheepishly.

“Eh, it’s ok I guess. I came up with the idea kind of last minute and didn’t put much forethought or planning into it, but, all things considered, it didn’t come out too bad. I just have to touch up on the background and then I’ll be able to throw it in the pile”

Akashi stares at the painting for another moment before a thought comes to him.

“Nebuya?”

“Ya” the boy looks up from his pallet where he was mixing paints.

“Is that… is that you…when you were younger?” Akashi asks. Nebuya looks at him blankly for a moment before a smile spreads slowly on his lips.

“Ya, it is. How did you know?”

“You once showed me a picture of you after you got your pitbull, Lila, and I just remembered that you looked just like that, so I wondered if perhaps the boy in the painting was actually you” Akashi explains. Nebuya laughs, slapping some paint on his pallet.

“God you don’t miss a fucking thing do you?” Nebuya asks. Akashi shrugs.

“I guess not” he says, returning to his seat to get back to work. Nebuya puts a pair of earbuds in before beginning to work on his painting, his tongue peeking out of the corner of his mouth as he works.

The remainder of class passes in relative silence, and Akashi is very pleased with the amount of work he was able to get done. A few minutes before the final bell rings, everyone begins cleaning up and putting things away. Endo waltzes up to Akashi just as he is finishing putting his things away.

“Hey Sei, how’s it goin’?” she asks.

“Hello Endo, I’m fine thank you, how are you?” Akashi responds.

“I’m great thanks. We’ve missed you at game night”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I’ve been rather busy lately so I haven’t gotten the chance to come over”
“That’s ok don’t worry about it. Anyways I wanted to ask you if you’re free later tonight” Akashi looks as Endo curiously.

“Well, I have basketball practice, but after that I don’t have anything going on. Why?”

“Cuz Kaori’s parent’s are out of town for their anniversary so we’re holding game night in Ei’s room instead, and I was just wondering if you were gonna be there” she asks, leaning over onto the table. Akashi thinks for a moment.

“Well, if Nebuya doesn’t mind me being there then I don’t see why not”

“Great! So we’ll all meet in Ei’s room later tonight then. See you later” she says, walking away as the final bell rings and the class begins to file out of the room. Akashi watches her leave the room with a confused look on his face.

“Ready to go?” Nebuya asks lightly nudging him.

“About as ready as I’m ever gonna be” Akashi responds. Nebuya chuckles before throwing an arm around Akashi, engaging in light conversation as the two make their way toward the basketball gym.

Chapter End Notes

We finally see what kind of artist Nebuya is finally. I hope I did the painting I was thinking of justice in the way I described it. Ei-chan is a really good artist but he's super shy about it spread the word. Anyways, I hope you enjoyed, and I will see you all soon for chapter 22!
Bonding

Chapter Notes

Here have some Akashi and Nebuya interacting and being cool and friendly with each other.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Basketball practice went about as well as it usually does, and the team is even dismissed an hour early to go home and enjoy their weekend. Akashi and Nebuya split up outside the 3rd year’s dormitory, promising to meet up with the others in about an hour and a half or so, and Akashi heads back to his dorm room to prepare for the night ahead. After showering and dressing in a t-shirt and sweatpants, Akashi grabs his bag and throws in his laptop, headphones, wallet, phone, keys, and visual journal, grabbing his pillow from the bed and shoving it under his arm, just in case.

At 8 o’clock, Akashi is walking into the 3rd year’s dorm, and walking up the stairs toward Nebuya’s room. Upon reaching the room, Akashi knocks and waits for a moment, only to be met with silence. Confused, Akashi knocks on the door again, but it met with more silence. After a few more moments, Akashi reaches his hand down toward the handle, and turns it. The knob turns without hesitation, and Akashi opens the door and peeks into the room.

The first thing he sees in Nebuya, sitting cross legged in his desk chair, dressed in a black tanktop and short black spandex underwear, working on some kind of tablet sitting on his desk. Akashi takes note of the large green headphones that cover Nebuya’s ears and the blaring sound of music coming from them, indicating that Nebuya probably couldn’t hear him knocking. Akashi sets his things down by the door, but before he can move to make his presence known, a small meow catches Akashi’s attention, and he sees Midna remove herself from her spot on Nebuya’s lap and dash over to greet him.

Nebuya looks up from his tablet and finally notices Akashi, a guilty expression crosses his face as he removes his headphones.

“Oh shit were you knocking?” he asks as Akashi lifts the small cat into his arms.

“Yes, but I figured you would be in here, so it wasn’t very long before I decided to let myself in” Akashi states, closing the door behind him and moving to sit on the bed, Midna still cradled in his arms.

“Oops, sorry” Nebuya apologizes sheepishly, removing a pair of thick black rimmed glasses from his face and… wait.

“Since when do you wear glasses?” Akashi asks, trying to remember if he has ever seen Nebuya wearing glasses before.

“Since always, but I have contacts so I don’t wear my glasses during the day” Nebuya responds, placing the glasses back on his face.

“You look completely different with them on” Akashi comments.
“So I’ve been told” Nebuya says, chuckling.

“I’d wear them more often, but getting my contacts in is such a pain in the ass that a) it take me like 30 minutes just to get the fuckers in and b) if I wore my glasses I absolutely would not want to put my contacts in, but then they’d be a hassle to deal with during practice, so I’ve just made it a habit to wear my contacts” he explains. Akashi hums in response, turning his attention back to the cat in his arms.

A comfortable silence falls over the two as Akashi plays with Midna and Nebuya returns to whatever it is he’s doing on his tablet. After a while, Akashi looks up curiously at Nebuya, trying to figure out what it is he is doing. The tablet is held up by an arm that attaches to the back of Nebuya’s desk and can swivel behind and in front of the desktop monitor that Nebuya has on his desk. The tablet is turned away from Akashi, but from what he can tell, it looks as though Nebuya is… drawing? He has a pen of some kind in his hand, and he’s making small, short strokes as though he is sketching something, but Akashi has never seen anything like this before.

“I’m assuming by the look on your face that you’ve never seen a drawing tablet before, huh?” Nebuya asks, catching Akashi off guard.

“Um, no I haven't actually” he replies, his face turning a light shade of pink at having been caught peeking for the second time that day. Nebuya smiles, and turns the drawing tablet toward Akashi, giving him a view of the simple, yet fluid gesture drawings he was working on.

“So what is that exactly?” Akashi asks, gesturing toward the tablet.

“This is a huion gt-191 graphics tablet. It’s a screen tablet that allows me to do digital art” Nebuya explains, turning the tablet back toward him.

“I didn’t know you could submit digital pieces in a portfolio” Akashi admits.

“You can’t” Nebuya says sourly. “but a big part of the industry nowadays is digital art, or more specifically working with and knowing the ins and outs of photoshop, so I figured that it would still be something good to learn and practice, that and it’s really fun to do.”

“Wow. How much does something like that cost?”

“This thing? Like 56,000 yen”

“Seriously?” Akashi asks, totally shocked by the extreme amount of money for something as simple as a drawing tablet.

“Oh ya, these things do NOT come cheap, and if I’m being perfectly honest, this is actually considered to be an “off brand” tablet, so it’s a lot cheaper. If I wanted to get a tablet from Wacom, the “main brand” tablet producer, a tablet of this size, would cost me around 230,000 yen” Akashi’s jaw drops at horrendously large price.

“That’s… a lot of money”

“Ya, it is, but thankfully I stumbled across Huion, which is way fucking cheaper than Wacom, just as I was about to drop a shit ton of money on a cintiq. I ended up getting a tablet that was twice the size of the one I would have gotten from wacom, and I still only ended up paying half of what I would have if I bought from wacom” Nebuya explains, leaning back in his chair.

“Long story short, don’t buy from wacom unless you enjoy having an empty bank account” Akashi chuckles at this.
“Have you been doing digital art for very long?” Akashi asks.

“Um… kind of, I’ve been doing it for about 5 years now, but I had a really shitty tablet for the longest time, so I didn’t enjoy doing it as much until I got my screen tablet at the end of last year. Since then I’ve been doing it almost everyday though” Nebuya replies.

“Can I try?” Akashi asks. Nebuya looks at him for a moment before shrugging.

“Sure why not” Nebuya gets up from his seat, pulling down the spandex that had begun to ride up his leg, and hands Akashi the tablet pen, taking Midna from his arms and moving to take Akashi’s former spot on the bed, Midna purring happily in his arms.

“So basically how it works is, the pen is connected to the tablet via bluetooth, so the tablet knows where the pen is and the brush tool will follow the movements of the pen when you place it on the screen. It’s basically a glorified mechanical pencil” Nebuya explains. Akashi nods his head and places the pen against the screen and slowly drags the pen in a straight line, creating one line through the center of the page.

“How do I erase things?” Akashi asks.

“Control z” Nebuya responds, pointing to the keyboard hiding just under the tablet. Pressing the command deletes the line Akashi created, just like Nebuya said. Akashi was absolutely fascinated by this new and exciting piece of technology. Nebuya begins laughing.

“You look so fucking excited right now”

“Hey, I can’t help it, I’ve never seen something like this before” Akashi says defensively.

“Really? You’ve never seen a graphics tablet before?” Nebuya asks incredulously.

“No”

“How come?”

“Oh I guess you don’t know the story of my dad do you?” Akashi says to himself. Nebuya is looking at him strangely.

“Ok so long story short, my dad hates art, he thinks it’s really dumb and a waste of time, he never allowed me to take art classes before, and he honestly thinks it is to useless that it should be removed from the school system” Akashi quickly explains. Nebuya looked personally insulted by the words that just came out of Akashi’s mouth.

“What the fuck?”

“Ya. I’m basically sending him a gigantic ‘fuck you’ by even trying to get into the advanced class, but I kind of stopped caring a while ago” Nebuya laughs at this.

“Hey, where is everybody?” Akashi asks, looking at the time and seeing that it was almost 9 o’clock.

“That’s a good question. Let's find out” Nebuya says, taking his phone out and calling Tsuji, making sure the phone was on speaker. The phone rings only once before the call goes through.

“Hello?” Tsuji answers.

“Bitch, where you at?” Nebuya asks.
“We’re waiting for Madoka, she can’t find her wireless mouse” she responds dryly.

“I know it’s around her somewhere” a distant voice, likely Amano, says.

“Anyways, we’ll be there as soon as we can but I don’t know how long-”

“FOUND IT” Amano screams in triumph.

“Oh nevermind. We’re on our way” is all Tsuji says before hanging up.

“Alrighty then” Nebuya says, placing his phone back on the bedside table.

“That was an interesting conversation” Akashi says.

“Oh trust me they get weirder, don’t they Midna?” Nebuya asks, scratching the tiny cat behind the ears, receiving a meow in response.

“Ya they’re a bunch of weirdos aren’t they? But they’re our weirdos” Nebuya says, lifting the cat above his head playfully.

“You’re adorable” Akashi says before he can stop himself. Nebuya smiles at him.

“Thanks, I try” is all he says.

A calm and comfortable silence falls over the two as they wait for the rest of the group to arrive.

Chapter End Notes

I know I've written a lot of Nebuya in this story but I just love my version of him so much I just have to write him. Don’t worry I will write plenty about other characters as well just give me some time. Anyways I hope you enjoyed this chapter, comment what you thought of it down below, and I will see you all soon for chapter 23!
The gamer girls are back in action and Akashi gets a brand new title.

“BOOM BITCHES HERE I AM” Endo yells as she kicks the door in, scaring the absolute shit out of Akashi, who slams his knee painfully against Nebuya’s desk. Nebuya looks unperturbed by her entrance, leading Akashi to wonder if perhaps that wasn’t the first time she has done that, as he rubs his aching knee.

“It’s about time you guys got here” Nebuya says, freeing Midna to go greet the four girls.

“Sorry, I couldn’t find my mouse, turns out it fell underneath my dresser” Amano apologizes “but now that I have it, I’m ready to kick all of your collective asses”

“I think you mean you’re ready to get your ass kicked by our collective asses” Tsuji corrected with a smirk on her face.

“Fight me Kaori”

“Any day, bitch”

“Guys shut the fuck up I’m trying to order pizza. Ya hi, can I get an extra large with extra cheese and sausage?” Nebuya says, returning to ordering their food.

The group begins settling in, laying out blankets and pillows on the floor as makeshift beds, and then getting out laptops, headphones, controllers, etc. in preparation for the night.

“What are we playing tonight?” Endo asks from her position on the floor.

“GTA 5” Takata replies.

“What’s GTA 5?” Akashi asks, confused. The others stop whatever it was they were doing and were staring at him like he had grown a 3rd head.

“Grand Theft Auto” Tsuji replies, “it’s a single player game on X-box but they came out with an online PC version of it a year or two ago. Come sit by me so we can get you set up with an account”

Doing as he was instructed, Akashi got up and moved over next to Tsuji, who took his laptop and began downloading a variety of different programs onto it.

“What are you doing to my computer?” Akashi asks, slightly nervous.

“Don’t worry about it” Tsuji replies, which only serves to make Akashi worry even more. After a few moments of downloading and waiting, Tsuji pulls up some program name Steam, and tells Akashi to create a new account.
“So… why exactly am I creating an account on Steam? I thought we were playing Grand Theft Auto?” Akashi asks, very confused.

“We are, but in order to play the game you have to create an account with Steam, which is like an online game store. You go in, create an account, and from that point forward any games that you buy are played in your account’s ‘gaming library’. A lot of games that are online don’t have actual physical copies like for consoles, PC games rely on programs like Steam to advertise and sell digital copies of their online games” Tsuji explains.

“So I’m creating an account with Steam so I can gain access to these online games?”

“No, exactly” Akashi nods his head in understanding, and looks down at his laptop.

The information the account requires seems pretty standard for the most part. It asks for his name, date of birth, gender, a gamer tag, and lastly a password. The first three and the password are pretty simple, so Akashi fills enters those first, but is rather stumped about what he should put for his gamer tag.

“Hey, what should I put for my gamer tag?” he asks the group. They all ponder in silence for a moment.

“Oh I know! You could be ‘The Atomic Emperor’” Takata suggests excitedly, “you know, cuz everyone’s always calling you an emperor”

“Ok, the ‘emperor’ part makes sense but why ‘atomic’?” Amano asks.

“I dunno, just sounds cool” Takata replies, shrugging her shoulders.

“Ha, seems more like ‘the atomic loser’ with how badly he sucks at Mario Kart” Endo snorts, causing Tsuji to break out laughing.

“Oh my god that’s fucking amazing” she beams mischievously.

“No it doesn’t, it makes me sound like a moron” Akashi counters, “pick something else.”

“No way! I already submitted it.”

“What?” Akashi squawks indignantly. The group breaks out in boisterous laughter as Akashi snatches his computer back from Tsuji, but he quickly realizes that it’s too late to fix it, as she had already submitted the information, and his account was now complete.

“You are hereby dubbed ‘TheAtomicLoser’. Bear your title with pride young padawan” Tsuji says with, what can only be described as, a shit-eating grin spread across her lips. Akashi glares menacingly at her.

“You fucking suck” he says through gritted teeth, causing the girl to fall back to the floor, no longer able to contain her laughter, as Akashi stares dejectedly at his new ‘title’.

“Oh come on, it’s not so bad is it? I think it’s kind of funny” Nebuya offers.

“Oh sure it’s a really funny name when you aren’t the one stuck with it” Akashi snaps. Nebuya holds his hands up defensively.

“If it makes you feel any better, my gamertag’s ‘ArcaneNova’. Can’t get any lamer than a D&D reference” Akashi stares at Nebuya for a moment.
“THAT’S SUCH A COOL NAME. HOW COME I’M STUCK WITH SUCH A LAME ASS NAME LIKE ‘THE_ATOMIC_LOSER’ THIS IS FUCKING BULLSHIT” Akashi shouts angrily, causing everyone to, once again, begin laughing at him. Akashi glares at Tsuji as she rolls around on the ground clutching her stomach, tears running down her face from laughing so hard. At some point Nebuya gets up from his desk and grabs a pair of sweatpants, putting them on and heading toward the door.

“Ei, where’re you goin’?” Amano asks.

“Pizza’s here, I’m gonna go down and grab it” he replies, opening the door and exiting the room.

“EI, TRY NOT TO EAT IT ALL ON THE WAY BACK UP HERE” Endo yells after him.

“FUCK OFF” he yells back over his shoulder. Tsuji sits up and wipes the tears from her cheek.

“Ok, now that that’s out of the way, let’s actually get you the game, ok?” Tsuji says, looking at Akashi

“I don’t want you touching my computer anymore” Akashi states bluntly, firmly clutching the device in his hands. Tsuji snorts.

“Alright fine sheesh. Hey Miho help Sei get his game setup, will ya?” she instructs, scooting back over to her laptop. Takata does as she’s told and begins helping Akashi gain access to the game. Nebuya reenters the room with their dinner just as the pair finish customizing Akashi’s game character.

“Alright, you’re all set. Now the only thing left to do it wait for one of us to find a server to play on so we can play together” Takata says, smiling at Akashi.

“Thank you very much, you’ve been a great help, unlike some people here” Akashi says, glaring over his shoulder at Tsuji, who meets his glare with another one of her shit-eating grins.

“If you’re all done being petty, the pizza’s getting cold” Nebuya interrupts, pulling 4 pieces out of one of the boxes and placing them on his plate, before returning to his desk. Everyone gets up and helps themselves to the cheesy delicacy, and everyone falls into a calm and peaceful silence as they eat.

Chapter End Notes

Yay, more gamer girls! I decided that I wanted Akashi to get introduced to PC gaming because it's so easy to do because the only thing you need is a good computer (which you know Akashi has cuz he's filthy fucking rich) and a credit card (again which he also has). PC gaming is something that I could actually see him getting into because of how accessible it is to him. His father hates games in general so he would clearly notice and probably confiscate a console or handheld device like an x-box or a nintendo, but he wouldn't know about PC games because he would have to go through Akashi's computer to even know that he had the games, so I think it works. Also I FUCKING LOVE AKASHI'S GAMER TAG IT MADE ME LAUGH SO MUCH IT'S JUST SO FUCKING HILARIOUS THE POOR BAB ISN'T USED TO PEOPLE THINKING THAT HE'S LAME BUT THEY ALL LOVE HIM ANYWAYS (I will reveal the girl's gamer tags later). Anyways I'm done rambling, I hope you enjoyed
this, let me know what you think of this chapter in the comments, and I will see you all soon for chapter 24!
Time for some more video game action!

“Alright assholes, time to play some GTA 5” Endo says, throwing her empty plate into the trashcan and pulling her computer onto her lap. Everyone follows suit, and within no time, they are all logged on and loading into the server. Akashi is the first to load in, and can’t help but be impressed by the hyper realistic graphics of the game. His attention is pulled to the bottom left hand corner of the screen when he sees:

Dark_Void_Beauty has joined the game.

Chaos_Chimera has joined the game.

Sinister has joined the game.

Nightmare_Assassin has joined the game.

Arcane_Nova has joined the game.

Akashi immediately recognized Arcane_Nova as Nebuya, but even without knowing he probably would have been able to figure it out just from looking at his avatar. Tall, dark skin, muscular, dressed in jeans and a short-sleeved star patterned button up shirt, with long dreadlocks pulled up into a messy bun and glasses. Based off of the appearance of the other game avatars, Akashi had a pretty good idea of who was who. Dark_Void_Beauty was tall, thin, shapely, and had purple hair, so probably Takata. Chaos_Chimera was average height, slightly muscular, and dressed in typical grunge fashion with a blonde pixie cut, likely Endo. Sinister was incredibly short so that was definitely Tsuji. Lastly, Nightmare_Assassin had bob cut brown hair, and despite not having half her hair shaved off, the revealing outfit of the avatar gave Akashi a pretty good feeling that she was Amano.

“Ok so now that we’re all logged on, do we want to jump right into some heists or do we wanna
fuck around for a little while?” Amano asks.

“I think we should maybe teach Sei how to play the game before we get into anything too complicated” Endo says “not to mention that having a level one noob on a heist mission is a recipe for complete and utter failure”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence” Akashi mutters sarcastically.

“How about we do some races. They’re a quick and easy way to rank up” Nebuya suggests.

“Yay racing” Amano cheers happily. Everyone loads into a random race and are lined up at the starting line, waiting for the race to begin.

“I hope you guys are ready for the ass kicking of your lives, ‘cuz I am NOT losing this race” Endo says confidently.

“That’s what you said the last time we raced, but then you ended up coming in last, if I remember correctly” Tsuji points out.

“Nobody asked you Kaori” Endo bites back, turning her attention back to the screen.

The countdown commences, and the race begins.

“Hey no fair how did you guys go fast at the beginning but I’m all slow?” Akashi asks indignantly, from dead last.

“Oh ya if you press the accelerator a second or two before the countdown ends you get a boost at the beginning of the- EI GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY WAY” Amano explains, cutting herself off to yell at Nebuya.

“And you couldn’t have mentioned that BEFORE the race started?” Akashi asks sourly, but his question falls on deaf ears.
“Kaori don’t you fucking dare. Don’t you fucking dare. Don’t you fucking—

**Chaos_Chimera blew up**

YOU BITCH YOU KNOCKED ME OFF THE FUCKING COURSE” Endo screams angrily at Tsuji as she goes flying off the side of the course, allowing Akashi to enter 5th place.

“Yay I’m not last anymore” Akashi cheers happily.

“The hell are you celebrating about over there for, it’s only the first lap” Endo chides.

“If I learned anything from Mario Kart, it’s that I have to take the victories as they come, ‘cuz I don’t foresee too many in my near future” Akashi replies.

**Arcane_Nova went up in flames.**

“No MIHO, WHY HAVE YOU BETRAYED ME IN THIS WAY?” Nebuya laments as he goes flying off the side of the course and blows up.

“HAHA EAT A DICK, BITCH!” Takata yells aggressively, entering her second lap.

“Sei you better watch out, cuz I’m comin for your ass” Endo threatens.

“Oh joy” Akashi says sarcastically, pressing down harder on the acceleration key in the hopes that it will somehow make him go faster, and allow him to hold on to his meager fourth place.

“Madoka, I don’t know what you’re trying to do here, but I need you to stop, and maybe drive off the side of the course while you’re at it” Takata says, fighting to maintain her position as Amano slowly inches in front of her. The two of them aren’t too far ahead of Akashi, so if he plays his cards right, he might be able to sneak past them and get second

**Chaos_Chimera blew up**
“EI YOU ARE SUCH A FUCKING JACKASS” Endo screams.

“DON’T HATE THE PLAYER, HATE THE GAME” Nebuya yells back, laughing maniacally at his latest kill.

“Does anyone know where Kaori is?” Amano asks, still neck and neck with Takata.

Sinister finished in first place

Sinister is now spectating

“Oh, well I guess that answers my question”

“You guys are so slow, what’s taking you so long?” Tsuji asks, leaning back against the wall and watching the rest of the race unfold.

“Fuck you Kaori” Nebuya spits. The more time passes, the closer and closer Akashi gets to Amano and Takata, who are still very distracted by one another, and taking up only half of the road, leaving the other half wide open.

“Madoka I swear to god if you don’t get out of my fucking way, I’m going to stab you in your sleep” Takata threatens as she attempts to throw Amano off the map, giving Akashi the perfect opportunity to sneak past the two.

“Give it your best shot bit-OH MY GOD SEI’S PASSING US, STOP HIM” she screams in alarm as she notices Akashi’s car pull ahead of the two of them.

“Oh no” Akashi says, as the two girls go from fighting one another, to working together to try and derail him

“SEI GET THE FUCK BACK HERE” Takata yells.
“GO LITTLE CAR, GO” Akashi screams at the screen as the finish line gets closer and closer with every passing second.

“Oh my god, he’s actually gonna get second” Endo says, laughing in disbelief.

“Oh MY GOD I’M ACTUALLY GONNA DO IT I’M—”

The_Atom_Loser was shot by Dark_Void_Beauty

Dark_Void_Beauty finishes second

Nightmare_Assassin finishes third

Dark_Void_Beauty is now spectating

Nightmare_Assassin is now spectating

The room goes completely quiet as Akashi stares in horror and disbelief at his computer screen.

“Did you just fucking drive by him?” Nebuya asks in amused shock.

“Sorry Sei, but it had to be done” Takata apologizes half-heartedly, not actually guilty about what she did. After being mere seconds from coming in second place, Akashi ended up getting drive byed, and was now stuck right back where he started, in last place.

The_Atom_Loser has left the game

“OH MY FUCKING GOD HE RAGE QUIT” Everyone breaks out into loud and obnoxious laughter as Akashi glares down at the DNF he received as a result of quitting the race.
“I THINK WE FUCKING BROKE HIM” Endo chokes in between laughing spells.

“You’re all a bunch of dicks” Akashi states angrily, prompting another wave of laughter from the others.

“Alright come on, log back in so we can start the next race” Nebuya says, loading up the next race.

“UUUUUUUUGGGHHHH YOU ALL SUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCK” Akashi whined loudly, as he logged back into the next race anyways. The next race continued in a fairly similar manner that the first one had, and even though it absolutely sucked to come in dead last every single fucking race, Akashi couldn’t deny that this was probably the most fun he had in a very very long time.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was fun to write. I really enjoy wrriting Akashi as the noob who has no idea how to video game and kind of gets teased a lot by the others, I think its fucking hilarious. Anyways thank you all so much for reading, and I will see you all soon for chapter 25.
A sharp pain rudely jerked Akashi awake from the depths of slumber. Lifting his head groggily, Akashi scanned the blurry room to see what could have woken him. The first thing Akashi saw was Tsuji, or rather her feet, which were currently laying on his stomach, and likely the cause of the sharp pain he felt earlier. The lower half of her body was lying pretty much on top of Akashi while her upper body was hanging awkwardly off the side of the bed (but not enough to let her fall).

The next thing he saw was Nebuya, who was laying on his side next to Akashi with his arms wrapped around him like he were some kind of body pillow, something that would have bothered the redhead greatly had the man not been so warm and his biceps not made such comfortable pillows. The rhythmic up and down motion of his chest with every breath he took was both relaxing and comforting.

The third thing he saw was Endo who had somehow managed to throw her, comparatively, short arm and leg over the side of the sleeping Nebuya, in what Akashi could only guess was part of an attempt to spoon the larger male from behind. Akashi couldn’t see her face, as it was blocked by Nebuya’s large frame, but based off of the quiet snoring sounds, which Akashi only just realized weren’t coming from Nebuya, he figured that she must be pretty comfortable.

The last thing Akashi saw in his initial scan around the room was Takata and Amano who were, more-or-less, lying on top of one another. Amano was on the bottom, her head was pressed against the wall, her arms were wrapped around Takata, and her legs occupied as much space out in front of her as possible without forcing Tsuji off the bed. Takata was on top with her head rested on Amano’s chest and her legs straddling her stomach, a small stream of drool escaped her open mouth and was soaking into Amano's shirt.

After taking a solid few moments to assess his surroundings, Akashi turned his head as much as he could with Nebuya latched onto him, and saw that, despite what the darkness of the room would imply, it was already 9:45 in the morning, meaning that Akashi had gotten a solid 4 hours of sleep last night.

‘Oh well, at least it’s a Saturday’ Akashi thought to himself as he allowed his head to fall back
down onto his makeshift bicep pillow and his eyes to close once again. The sound of voices whispering softly from somewhere near him pulled Akashi back into consciousness. The voices were loud enough that Akashi knew that they belonged to Endo and Tsuji, but quiet enough that he couldn’t make out what is was they were saying. Lifting his head from his new position on Nebuya’s chest, Akashi turned and peered at the two girls who were whispering quietly on the floor. Endo caught sight of Akashi and stopped whatever it was she was saying, a look of guilt crossed her face.

“Sorry, did we wake you?” she apologizes quietly. Akashi yawns and rubs his tired eyes.

“No it’s fine, I should probably get up anyways” he says as he gets up from Nebuya’s bed, doing his best not to wake the still sleeping boy. He takes a moment to find his center of gravity, a task that was easier said than done apparently, before exiting the room and heading toward the bathroom. He joins Tsuji and Endo on the floor when he returns from the bathroom a few moments later, feeling slightly more awake than he did before.

“So what were you guys talking about?” Akashi whispers as he takes a seat next to Endo.

“We were talking about where we could go to get some breakfast once everyone finally wakes up” Endo responds quietly, turning her laptop to show Akashi a map of the vicinity, with a variety of different restaurants marked on it.

“Hitoka it’s 12:30 in the afternoon, so we’d technically be getting lunch” Tsuji comments, ignoring the glare that Endo sends her.

“Breakfast, lunch, whatever the fuck you call it doesn’t matter, the only thing I’m concerned with is how soon I can start stuffing myself with all-you-can-eat pancakes and sausages”

“Pancakes...?” a voice asks groggily from behind the three. Turning back, Akashi saw that Nebuya was finally awake, likely aroused by the mention of food.

“Yes Ei, we’re gonna go get food, so get up so we can leave” Tsuji calls over to him. Nebuya nods his head in understanding and yawns while reaching over to the bedside table and retrieving his glasses before hauling himself out of the bed and exiting the room. By the time Nebuya has returned from the bathroom, Amano and Takata are also awake, though it takes them a bit longer to pry themselves from the comfort of Nebuya’s mattress.
“Remin’ me again whose bright fuckin’ idea it was to pile everybody into Ei’s tiny ass bed” Amano slurs, throwing her hair into a messy side ponytail.

“It was yours dumbass” Takata snaps tiredly, shoving Amano off the side of the bed with her foot.

“OW, the fuck was that for you bitch” Amano complains from her new position on the floor.

“Madoka, Miho, hurry up and get your shoes on we don’t have all day” Endo says, throwing on her lace up combat boots. Akashi noticed that no one seemed to be bothering with changing out of their pajamas. Although there wasn’t anything wrong with the white t-shirt and black sweatpants he currently had on, he’d be lying if he said that the thought of going to a restaurant in his pjs wasn’t just a tad bit weird, but he pushed the thought aside and threw on his sneakers, grabbed his wallet and phone, and headed out the door after Nebuya.

“Sleep ok?” Nebuya asks as they trudge their way down the stairs and out the door toward the parking lot.

“Ya I did actually, although I did wake up at one point to find you holding me like a body pillow” Akashi comments teasingly. Nebuya chuckles.

“Oops, I guess I should have mentioned that I have a bit of a habit doing that”

“I don’t mind, although I can’t help but wonder how you managed to sleep so soundly with Endo lying on top of you all night” Akashi wonders.

“Oh god she’s always done that. I guess it’s happened so many times that it just doesn’t bother me anymore. Actually, I don’t think it ever really bothered me, but it pisses Kaori right the fuck off”

“Not much of a cuddler?”

“She HATES being touched while she sleeps. I remember one time we were all sleeping over somewhere, and I must have rolled over and my arm fell on her or something, and she totally freaked the fuck out and started screaming and squirming and shit. Anyways, long story short, I ended up losing a tooth” Nebuya explains.
“She knocked your tooth out?” Akashi asks, shocked.

“Well, technically yes, but to be fair it was only a loose baby tooth, so she actually did me a favor”

“Oh ya I’m sure it definitely seemed that way as you bled out from your freshly opened gum cavity” Akashi comments sarcastically. Nebuya throws his head back and laughs loudly at the remark, Akashi smiles.

“You know, you have a really nice laugh” Nebuya looks at Akashi in shock for a moment.

“Do I? I think it sounds kind of dumb” Nebuya responds, turning away from Akashi.

“How so?” he asks.

“Egh, it’s too… happy” Nebuya responds. Akashi looks at him puzzled.

“But isn’t that the point of a laugh, to make you sound happy?”

“Ya but mine is too happy, like it starts out ok, and then for some reason I just keep laughing way even after everyone else has stopped laughing, and the more I laugh the louder it gets, and the louder it gets the more I laugh and it's just a vicious cycle that keeps going until I’m on the floor coughing a lung up with tears running down my face. It’s the weirdest thing in the entire goddamn universe and I hate it” Nebuya states. Akashi pauses for a moment, thinking over what Nebuya just said before speaking.

“I think that’s a good thing” Nebuya raises an eyebrow questioningly, but does not speak.

“I’ve spent the majority of my life around a lot of fake people. People who act one way when you’re around and then completely different when you aren’t. It didn’t take me very long to get used to the fake smiles, the fake conversations, and the fake personalities, but the one thing I could never get over was the fake laughs” Nebuya remains silent as Akashi continues.

“People would tell stories and jokes in order to impress one another and the people listening would smile and laugh, but you could tell that they were only doing it to keep up appearances and that
they weren’t actually happy or enjoying themselves, and they just sounded so… dry and restrained, as though laughing were a form of social etiquette rather than an indication of happiness” Akashi pauses for a moment before continuing.

“Whenever I hear you laugh, and I mean you’re real laugh not that bullshit one you do at practice in front of the others, I can tell how genuinely happy and excited you are about something, and the more you laugh the more the people around you want to laugh and before you know it everyone in the room is laughing and sharing the same happiness that you feel. I don’t see anything wrong with that” Akashi finishes. Nebuya hums but doesn’t say anything in response, though the smile on his lips betrays his happiness.

The two continue their walk toward the parking lot in silence. Nebuya unlocks the door to his car and Akashi slides into the front seat, closing the door behind him. To Akashi’s surprise, Nebuya starts his car and begins backing out of the parking space.

“Aren’t we going to wait for everyone else?” Akashi questions as Nebuya throws the car in drive.

“I’m just pulling out front of the dorms so that they can get right in once they finally get their asses out here” he responds. Akashi nods his head in understanding and digs his phone out of his pocket, turning it on.

No New Messages

Akashi breathes a sigh of relief. Ever since the encounter he had with his father a few months ago, Akashi has been hyper-paranoid about checking his phone and making sure to not miss any of his father's calls or text messages. The tactic seems to have worked thus far, as his father has relaxed considerably regarding the frequency of his calls throughout the week as well as the things Akashi has to call to ask permission to do.

The back door of the car opens suddenly, allowing Endo, Amano, and Takata to pile into the three seats.

“Hey no fair how come I’m always the one who’s gotta sit on somebody’s lap?” Tsuji complains from outside the car.

“Cuz you’re the smallest and lightest one here so it’s just easier on both you and the person who has to be sat on” Takata explains, causing Kaori to groan in response.
“But it’s so cramped back here, I never have any fucking room to move”

“Tsuji, you can sit up here with me if you want” Akashi offers, turning to look at Tsuji who looks at him with a pondering expression.

“Aw, but don’t you wanna sit with me Kaori?” Endo asks, patting her lap with a mischievous expression that counters the innocent tone of her question. Tsuji doesn’t even bother answering her question as she opens the front passenger door and slides onto Akashi’s lap. It’s a little awkward at first, a) because the limited amount of space the front seat allows makes finding a comfortable position slightly difficult and b) because Akashi realizes that offering to let a girl sit on his lap may not have been the smartest decision he’s ever made. Thankfully, the awkwardness of the situation passes quickly once Tsuji finally settles and turns to him with a small, but thankful smile on her face.

Once everyone is settled and buckled, Nebuya plugs his music into the stereo system of his car, throws the car into drive, and steps on the accelerator, speeding the car down the road, away from campus, and toward their destination.

Chapter End Notes

I am so sorry for the very long, long, long, long, long wait. I've been super busy with school and work and life so this story kind of took a backseat for a bit, but I am here now with the newest installment in the most self-indulgent fanfic ever written. For those of you who came here for the NebuyaxMibuchi, next chapter is the point where that begins to really develop so stay tuned for that. Thank you all so much for sticking with me throughout this trainwreck of a story and dealing with my self-indulgent headcannons. You guys have no idea how much it means to me that people are actually enjoying my story, so I hope you all enjoyed this chapter, and I will see you all soon (hopefully sooner rather than later) for chapter 26.
Temporary Alliance

Chapter Notes

In which Akashi has either the greatest idea in the history of ever, or is setting himself up for total failure.

The drive to the restaurant was… interesting, to say the least. Not even 10 minutes into the drive they were already lost because Takata had accidentally typed the wrong address into Google Maps, sending them all to a printing company rather than the restaurant they wanted to go to. This error forced the group to backtrack back to the main road and start over, but for some reason they kept taking wrong turn after wrong turn after wrong turn.

Usually something like this would have been a great nuisance in Akashi’s eyes, but for some reason he couldn’t help but feel happy, sitting in the front seat of Nebuya’s car with Tsuji seated on his lap; the windows were all down, allowing the wind to blow through the car, Nebuya was blasting “The Pretty Reckless”, “Halestorm”, and “Gorillaz” on his stereo, three American rock bands Akashi became very familiar with when he went to the museum with Emi-sensei (authors note: no, seriously they are great, you should check them out), and they were all singing along to each of the songs that played, just having a good time and enjoying each other’s company. The feeling of just dancing around and singing at the top of his lungs with his friends as though he hadn’t a care in the world was one of the strangest yet most liberating feelings Akashi has ever felt in his entire life, and he couldn’t get enough of it.

After a while of riding around the countryside, the group finally managed to arrive at the small, quaint little diner that they had been trying to find for the past 45, or so, minutes. Once Nebuya parked the car and unlocked the doors, everyone scrambled out and took a moment to stretch out their stiff limbs. It took Akashi a moment to find his balance when he initially got out of the car, as his legs had long gone numb from Tsuji sitting on them, not that he would ever mention it to the girl out of fear of offending her.

Just as everyone was about to head into the diner and grab a table, Endo stopped and let out a long and annoyed groan.

“Oh no” she lamented.

“What is it?” Amano asked with a slightly worried look on her face.
“Take a look” she pointed over to the other side of the parking lot where another group of young kids who were stepping out of a car.

“Oh you’ve gotta be fucking kidding me” Nebuya mutters under his breath. Out of the other car stepped, none other, than Mibuchi, Haga, Nakamoto, Ono, and Yashino, who were all dressed in very nice, going-out clothes.

“And just when I thought today was actually gonna be a good day” Endo complains.

“Hey come on, don’t be such a downer. Look the restaurant is huge, and there will be plenty of tables. Even if we have to be in the same building doesn’t mean we have to talk to them. Let’s just go in and get a seat before they notice us ok?” Takata reassures, leading everyone into the restaurant.

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“What do you mean you don’t have any extra tables?” Takata snips at the young hostess sitting behind a counter in the waiting room. The girl is average in height, with shoulder length black hair tied back into a loose ponytail, and a thin build, probably a first year in university. She wears a simple uniform consisting of a white button-up, long sleeved shirt, tucked into a black, mid-thigh length skirt, with black lights and white flats. The girl is only a little bit shorter than Takata, but she looks tiny with the way she cowers in fear at the purple haired girl looming over her.

“Um...well… you see it’s just that…” the hostess stamers.

“Takata please, stop that. You’re scaring her” Ono says, attempting to defend the young hostess.

“Can it, bambi” Takata snaps, causing Ono to flinch and hide behind Yashino, who looks as disinterested with everything going on as ever.

“Please ma’am, I’m very sorry, but as you can see we are very full right now and we unfortunately most of the tables have been reserved for the rest of the day” the hostess finally manages to say, and she’s not lying either. Behind her everyone can see that almost each and every table is occupied with guests.

“Ugh, great, looks like we’re gonna have to find somewhere else to eat” Amano says, turning and
heading for the door.

“Or you could just be patient and wait for a table” Haga says pointedly.

“Are you blind? Look at all those people in there. Why the hell would I sit here and wait for a table when I could just leave and find another god damn restaurant?” Amano snaps, turning to Haga.

“It’s just common courtesy. Sometimes you have to wait before you can get something. Didn’t your parents ever teach you that patience is a virtue?”

“No, unfortunately my parents value working hard and going after the things that you want rather than sitting on your ass and waiting for life to hand you shit like your parents” Amano deadpans.

“What did you just say?” Haga asks angrily.

“Um… excuse me” everyone stops and turns toward the hostess as she speaks up again.

“What is it?” Amano snaps at her.

“Well… you see… we do have one table that’s available. It’s one of our bigger tables that we rent out for parties and such, and it isn’t booked until later this evening. You all seem to know each other so… if you wanted… I could seat you all there?” the hostess looks nervously at the group as she finishes her suggestion. Everyone exchanges glances for a moment.

“Well, it would save us the trouble of having to find someplace else to eat” Nebuya offers.

“Ya but then we’d be stuck sitting with Bitch White and her 5 hoes” Endo comments.

“Oh like you have any right calling us hoes when you have the audacity to go out in public wearing that ” Nakamoto pipes up, pointing at Endo’s, incredibly short, pacman boyshorts.

“HEY! Pacman’s cool” Endo says defensively prompting everyone to enter a flurried and jumbled
argument over god-knows-what. Akashi just stands there watching the spectacle. His attention
shifts over to Nebuya and Mibuchi, the only two other than himself who have’t entered the verbal
quarrel. They both appeared to be engrossed in whatever was on their phones, but every few
seconds Akashi would see one of them peek over at the other for only a moment before quickly
averting their eyes back to their phone. This pattern continued for several minutes before something
finally came back to Akashi. Nebuya and Mibuchi’s mutual affections for one another.

With everything that had been going on recently he had completely forgotten about it, but now, as
he stood in the waiting room of the restaurant watching the two not-so-discretely oogle each other,
Akashi could see it plain as day. In that moment, a revelation hit Akashi in the head like a ton of
bricks; the full restaurant, the single available table, and the incredibly coincidental arrival of both
groups were all just too convenient, too perfect to be on accident. Akashi wasn’t one to believe very
much in things like an unchangeable destiny or an unavoidable fate, but his mother had always said
that sometimes things happen because it was simply the right time and the right conditions, though
whether or not those things produce the desired results depends entirely on how the person goes
about using the tools and conditions they were presented with. Akashi briefly thinks back to his
conversation with Hayama regarding his desire to try and set Mibuchi and Nebuya up.

‘Playing matchmaker in real life, doesn’t always turn out the way you want it to, and there are even
cases where you can accidentally turn two potential soul mates into bitter enemies’

Akashi bites his lip nervously as he recalls the advice his senior gave him. While Hayama may not
be the best person to go to regarding things like school work or basketball strategy, there was no
denying that Hayama had a vastly superior amount of street smarts than Akashi, not to mention that
Hayama has been in a committed, long-term relationship with someone he went to middle school
with for nearly 4 years now, meanwhile Akashi hasn’t even had his first kiss yet. He knew that
Hayama was right, and that, ultimately, he had no right to meddle with Nebuya and Mibuchi’s
relationship, but at the same time it didn’t seem right to just let them bury their feelings for one
another because they were afraid of what other people thought. Steeling himself, Akashi turns
away from the two pining idiots and walks toward Haga and Amano, grabbing them by the arms
and forcefully pulling them away from everyone toward the bathrooms.

“What the… Sei?” Amano asks, confused and still pissed.

“Akashi, what are you doing?” Haga asks, equally as confused as Amano. Akashi ignores them in
favor of kicking open the, thankfully empty, women’s bathroom door and throwing the girls inside.

“Ok, I know you guys don’t get along for some reason and that’s fine, I don’t really care. But I for
one am sick and tired of seeing Mibuchi and Nebuya make gaga eyes at each other and yet not say
anything, so I have a plan to change that. Now I’m not asking you to pretend like nothing has ever
happened between you and be the best of friends, or anything like that…” Akashi pauses for a
moment and the two girls exchange a confused glance but do not interrupt.
“I am, however, asking you to put aside your differences for a little while, and help me try to set them up”

“What?” the two girls yell in unison.

“Akashi, you can’t be serious right?” Haga asks, incredulously.

“You actually want me to believe that you are gonna try and hook up Captain Anxiety and OCD Man” Amano questions in disbelief.

“Well they aren’t going to confess by themselves, and neither of you guys have been very helpful in the endeavour, so it looks like it’s up to me to figure out how to get them together” Akashi counters, crossing his arms over his chest in slight annoyance.

“Ok, look, I know you guys really don’t like each other, but Amano, you love Nebuya right?”

“Of course I do” Amano states without hesitation.

“And Haga, you love Mibuchi right?”

“Absolutely” Haga answers immediately.

“And you both would do anything if it meant that Nebuya and Mibuchi could be happy, right?” the two girls don’t respond, but they nod their heads in affirmation.

“So, even if it meant you would have to see each other more often, if being together made Nebuya and Mibuchi truly happy, would you approve of them being together?” there’s a long silence, as the two girls stare at the floor, they look conflicted. Amano is the first to speak up as she turns to Haga.

“Let’s just get one thing straight here, I don’t like you. I never have and I probably never will…” Haga scrunches her nose and looks like she’s about to say something, but Amano cuts her off before she can start.
“But Ei is like the older brother I never had growing up. He’s been there for me when I thought no one else cared, and he’s done more for me than anyone else in my life. I love him more than anything else in the entire world and I want nothing more than for him to be happy. While Mibuchi can be a bit of a control freak sometimes, I do think that they would be good for each other, and I can understand why Ei has such strong feelings for him. So even if it means I have to stare at your ugly mug more often than I’d like to, I’d be willing to set aside my dislikes for the time being and… oh god I can’t believe I’m about to say this… work together with you to help set them up” Amano finishes. Haga looks at Amano cautiously, likely trying to find the deceit within Amano’s words, though after a few moments, it becomes clear that she find none.

“As much as I dislike some of his… more inappropriate behaviors, I can’t deny that Nebuya is a… very kind and interesting individual, in his own way. While Mibuchi has complained about Nebuya like he’s never complained about someone before… Nebuya is also the person who Mibuchi goes on and on and on about, listing off all the different reasons why he’s so smart and charming and witty and funny and attractive and… honestly the list of things Mibuchi thinks are wonderful about him goes on for an eternity. I must admit that Mibuchi and I share a very similar relationship to the one you have with Nebuya, so I understand your feelings of wanting to work together to help them realize their feelings for one another and finally begin their relationship. As much as I hate to admit it, those feelings are mutual on both parts, so if you are willing to set aside any grievances we have for the sake of working together to set Nebuya and Mibuchi up… then so am I” Haga finishes her speech and the two girls make eye contact with one another for the first time since they arrived in the bathroom.

“So… truce?” Amano asks, offering her hand out to Haga.

“Truce” Haga affirms, reaching out and taking Amano’s hand firmly. The two shake hands, sealing the deal, before letting go and turning to Akashi.

“Ok, now that that’s settled, here’s what we’re going to do...”

Chapter End Notes

And the meddling begins. I thought it would be really interesting if I had the gamer girls and the preps team up in order to get their dumb, pining friends together after years of burying their feelings. I have a few pretty good ideas of where I want to take this, and while it may not be resolved in the next few chapters, there will definitely be a larger focus on just how gay Nebuya and Mibuchi are for each other. I think its absolutely hilarious that Akashi, a kid who has never had any experience with romance or relationships, is actually going to try and set two of this teammates up. Will he succeed in his endeavors, or will his meddling only drive the two further apart, I don't know I haven't decided how much angst I want to write yet, but we'll find out soon
enough. Anyways, let me know what you thought of this chapter down in the comments, I love reading them, and often leave back paragraph long responses about the stuff you point out. Thanks so much for reading, and I will see you all soon for chapter 27! P.S. Hayama's significant other will be introduced later in the story, so look forward to that!
“God what is taking them so long?” Tsuji complains. While Akashi was dealing with Amano and Haga, the remainder of the two groups were stuck waiting in the lobby of the restaurant with a new hostess, who had arrived some time after Akashi left with Haga and Amano, and was looking rather unimpressed as the group of teenagers loitering in her waiting room.

“Do you think Haga’s ok? I’m afraid something might happen to her if she’s alone with Amano” Ono asks, worried about her friend.

“Don’t worry Ono, remember that Akashi is also with them, so if she tries anything funny, he’ll be there to stop her” Mibuchi says reassuringly.

“You know we can hear you right?” Endo asks, glaring at Mibuchi. At that moment the door to the women’s bathroom opens and Amano, Haga, and Akashi step out and rejoin their group. Before anyone can get a word into either of the three, Haga walks up to the hostess with the biggest smile on her face and says,

“We’ll take the big table, please”

“What?” everyone else yells in surprise.

“Ok, right this way then” the hostess responds emotionlessly, grabbing a handful of menus and beginning to walk toward their table.

“Let’s go” Amano chirps happily. As she begins following the hostess, she is roughly yanked back by Takata and Endo.

“Dude, what the fuck, we are not sitting with those losers” Endo states in a hushed voice, glancing back at Ono, Nakamoto, and Yashino, who look just as confused as to what is going on as they do.
“Ya no kidding, and when did you all of a sudden get so buddy-buddy with Pammy Prude over there?” Takata asks, nodding toward Haga who was attempting to convince everyone to follow the hostess.

“Look, I know this is super weird, but trust me when I say that we’ve got a plan to set up Ei and Mibuchi. I don’t know what the whole plan is yet, but I need you to play along and whatever you do, make sure Ei and Mibuchi sit next to each other” Amano murmurs under her breath, making sure that Nebuya can’t hear her. Takata and Endo exchange confused looks for a moment, but then nod their heads in affirmation, and cautiously begin making their way after the, very annoyed looking, hostess.

Slowly but surely, everyone else begins making their way toward the back of the restaurant as well, and before too long, all 11 teens are seated at the long table. To the far left of the table sat Tsuji, Endo, Takata, and Amano, to the far right of the table sat Ono, Haga, Nakamoto, and Yashino, and in the center of the table sat Nebuya, Mibuchi, who the group had successfully managed to force them next to one another, and Akashi, who sat across from the two. The waitress arrived not long after they sat down and took everyone’s orders before disappearing somewhere into the restaurant.

An awkward silence descended over the large group as they all shifted uncomfortably in their seats, unsure of what to say or if they should say anything at all. Shifting his eyes over to the pair in front of him, Akashi saw that Nebuya had taken his phone out and was now browsing through something indifferently, although the fact that he was subconsciously picking at his nails with his free hand was a tell-tale sign of how anxious he was. Mibuchi on the other hand seemed endlessly interested in the cheap silverware they had been given as he twirled the fork between his fingers, though he continued to glance in Nebuya’s direction every few seconds.

After what felt like an eternity of silence, Haga finally worked up the courage to speak up.

“I didn’t know you wore glasses, Nebuya” she comments, leaning over to look at the dark-skinned male. Nebuya stops scrolling on his phone and looks up at Haga slowly and emotionlessly.

“Is there a problem with my glasses?” Nebuya asks in response, his voice even and calm, but carrying a menacing undertone that dares Haga to see what happens if she tries to say anything about them. Haga gulps and looks around nervously.

“No, no of course not, I just… I’ve never seen you wear them before so I was a little surprised is all… I think they look just fine, right Mibuchi?” Haga responds, turning everyone’s attention onto Mibuchi as they await his response. Mibuchi glares angrily at Haga before turning his gaze to Nebuya. There’s a slight pause as Mibuchi and Nebuya make eye-contact for the first time that
morning. Mibuchi’s face is unreadable as he examines Nebuya’s face, and although Nebuya has remained calm thus far, Akashi can’t help but notice how the boy has gone from nervously picking at his cuticles, to digging his nails, almost painfully, into the side of his thumb, in an attempt to hide the fact that his hands were shaking.

“They look good” Mibuchi says after the long moment of silence.

“They look good?” Nebuya asks, unsure if Mibuchi is actually being serious.

“Ya, I mean… they look really nice on you. They make you look sophisticated” Mibuchi says, averting his eyes from Nebuya, who hums and turns back to his phone.

“Thanks” he says, smiling at Mibuchi, who blushes and turns the other direction, but is rather unsuccessful at hiding his own smile. Akashi releases a breath he didn’t know he had been holding in, thankful that his plan didn’t blow up before it even started.

The waitress arrived with everyone’s food a few minutes later, and they wasted no time in digging into their meals. As per his usual style, Nebuya began shoveling forkful after forkful of pancakes into his mouth, only stopping when he realized that the Mibuchi was staring at him with a look of mild annoyance.

“Wan’ som’?” Nebuya asks, pushing his plate toward Mibuchi. The raven haired boy rolls his eyes in response, but takes one of the untouched pancakes with a ‘thank you’ before continuing on with their respective meals. Surprisingly, everyone ended up engaging in friendly, light-hearted conversation as they ate, talking about school, sports, clubs, and a variety of other different topics as well, especially Nebuya and Mibuchi, who were getting along better than Akashi had ever seen them. Despite this, Akashi could still sense a hint of tension between everyone, especially the girls, who were likely only going along with this for the sake of Nebuya and Mibuchi, but even then Akashi wasn’t complaining.

Once everyone had finished their meals, they paid, and departed from the restaurant on fairly good terms with Mibuchi’s group, again likely only for the sake of Nebuya and Mibuchi but, whatever.

Nebuya, Akashi, and the rest of the group pile back into Nebuya’s car, and they begin their long, but enjoyable ride back to campus, where Akashi, unfortunately, has a paper that he needs to finish.

Chapter End Notes
This was kind of a super lazy chapter cuz I was experiencing a bit of writers block, but I wanted to get something up for you guys. Anyways let me know what you think of this chapter, and I hope to see you all soon for chapter 28!
The following weeks were rather uneventful as far as things go. A constant cycle of wake up, go to class, go to practice, go home, study, work on his portfolio, eat, shower, bed, repeat day in and day out. Having lived in a household where every day was planned out to the second, to allow him the most time to complete his daily tasks, Akashi was someone who had only known a life dictated by a set and unmoving schedule. But since the beginning of this year however, when his usually scheduled lifestyle got turned on its head, Akashi now found himself completely and utterly bored by the unchanging flow of events from the past few weeks.

Akashi sighed, leaning his head against his hand, allowing his attention to be drawn to the leaf covered courtyard out the window, completely disinterested in the history lecture their new substitute teacher was giving. Although Akashi never found history to be a particularly riveting subject, he always made a point to pay attention to the lectures, as he still had to pass the class regardless of whether or not he was interested in the material, but every since Kimura-sensei’s accident and the arrival of their new substitute, even Akashi couldn’t bring himself to engage with the droning, monotone voice of their new teacher.

A buzzing from his back pocket pulled Akashi from his thoughts. Akashi glanced around the room to make sure that no one was looking at him, before pulling his phone out and hiding it behind his textbook. Upon opening his phone he finds that he has received a text message from Nebuya in the group chat.

**Arcane_Nova:** having fun in history? ;-)  

Akashi rolls his eyes at the sarcastic message. Nebuya knows full well how little Akashi is enjoying his new history teacher, as he went on a rant about it during game night the week before. Since then he and the rest of the group have been sending him a plethora of teasing texts regarding his disdain for the class (on top of how much he sucks at whatever game they played that week).

**The_Atomic_Loser:** Oh ya, I’m having so much fun that I think I might shoot myself.

**Sinister:** Dibs on ur laptop
Dark_Void_Beauty: Can I have ur college fund…?

Chaos_Chimera: Lol, sucks to suck

Akashi chuckles inwardly as the response, looking around the room to make sure that he hasn’t drawn any attention to himself before diving back into the group chat.

The_Atomic_Loser: You guys are the worst.

Chaos_Chimera: We luv u 2 <3

“Akashi” Akashi jumps at the sound of his name, and looks up to see the substitute teacher with the intercom phone to his ear.

“Um… yes sir?” Akashi asks, pushing his phone onto his lap, away from the gaze of his teacher.

“It would appear as though you are being called out for the day. You may collect your things and make your way to the front office” the substitute states in his usual dry, and monotonous tone.

“Oh, ok. Thank you” Akashi says, gathering his things into his bag and heading out the door. As he slowly made his way toward the front office, Akashi wondered what could have happened that merited him being called out of class. Did something happen to his father? Was he being punished for something? Did he forget about a doctor’s appointment he had scheduled? The list goes on.

Akashi opens the door to the front office and walks toward the woman sitting behind the counter, who smiles kindly at him and asks him to sign a piece of paper confirming that he leaving campus. Afterwards he followed the driver that had been sent to get him, out to the car and climbed into the backseat, pulling his phone out.

The_Atomic_Loser: Nebuya, I have been called out for the day. Can you let coach know that I won’t be at practice, please?
Arcane_Nova: Sure, how come u got called out?

Sinister: Lucky bastard, my parents never call me out

The_Atominc_Loser: I actually don’t know why I’ve been called out. To be perfectly honest I’d rather sit through the rest of my history lesson than have to deal with my dad.

Nightmare_Assassin: No shit, isn’t ur dad kind of a slave driver?

The_Atominc_Loser: Ya, a little bit. He has really high expectations and little patience for people who can’t meet those expectations. It can be difficult to deal with him at times.

Dark_Void_Beauty: Dude I do not envy u right now

The_Atominc_Loser: I don’t envy me either. We’ve arrived at the estate. Talk to you guys later.

Sinister: If you die I still get ur laptop right?

The_Atominc_Loser: Fuck off Tsuji

Chaos_Chimera: ASDFSDKJGWESDFKJW

Arcane_Nova: Good luck kid

The_Atominc_Loser: Thanks, I think I’m going to need it.

With that Akashi pockets his phone and exits the car, thanking the driver and walking inside. To his surprise, his father is standing in the grand entrance talking to a short, stout man in a black suit, a boy around his age standing next to him with a stoic expression. His father notices him a moment after he enters.
“Ah Seijuro, there you are” his father says before turning back to the stout man and the boy, “Mr. Takahashi, this is my son Seijuro. Seijuro this is Takahashi Genta, he’s an associate of mine and the CEO of the Japanese Electric Power Corporation”

“So this is the fabled Akashi Seijuro. I’ve heard many things about you, my boy” Mr. Takahashi booms with a wide smile.

“Only good things I hope, sir” Akashi responds, taking the man’s outstretched hand.

“Oh don’t you worry, I and everyone else are in awe of everything you have managed to accomplish in your short life, though I’d be lying if I said my Hideki couldn’t give you a run for your money”

“Father please, now is not the time for comparing accomplishments” the young boy, Hideki, interjects.

“Well, it’s a pleasure to meet you both. I don’t mean to sound rude when I say this but… is there a reason why I was called out of class today?” Akashi asks, turning his gaze toward his father.

“The Takahashi’s are here visiting upon my request to assist in finishing some business we are conducting with another company. Young Hideki expressed a desire to meet you at least once during his time here, so I figured that you could give Hideki a tour of the estate and perhaps tonight, after Mr. Takahashi and I are finished with our business, we could all go out to dinner” Akashi’s father explained.

“Oh, I see” Akashi responds, slightly jaded that his father didn’t even bother to ask if he was available to entertain this Hideki kid.

“I-I apologize if I called you away from something important” Hideki stammers nervously, “If you are busy, I don’t mind finding something else to entertain myself with while you do your work”

Akashi regards Hideki fully for the first time since he arrived. The boy is around his age, is short like his father, but very thin, with almost gangly limbs. His hair is black and is a little bit longer than a buzzcut. His dark, onyx eyes contrast the almost paperwhite color of his skin, and the boy seems to regard Akashi with an expression of fearful awe.
“No no, that’s alright, I’ve already completed all of my homework, so I’m free for the rest of the evening” Akashi assures, causing Hideki to sigh in relief. Mr. Takahashi chuckles.

“Well then, in that case why don’t you take Hideki up to your room for a little while and then show him around the estate. Mr. Takahashi and I have business to conduct, so try not to interrupt us unless it’s something important” Akashi’s father states, exiting the grand hall and making his way toward his office with Mr. Takahashi, leaving Akashi and Hideki alone in an extremely awkward silence.

“So…” Akashi begins, “shall we”

“Oh, um… yes. Lead the way” Hideki responds, avoiding eye contact with the red head. Akashi groans inwardly as he turns and heads toward the staircase.

The rest of this day is gonna fucking suck.

Chapter End Notes

So as the heir to an extremely large corporation, Akashi probably gets called out of class every once in a while to make appearances with his dads associates or whatever. Some of those associates or whatever may have kids, kids who Akashi is expected to befriend because he is expected to take over one day or some shit. That's how this chapter was born. Trust me when I say that I have some longterm ideas for this story that will branch off of this new Hideki. I am very sorry it has been so long since I have updated. After finishing with finals I was so burnt out and exhausted that I just had to take a break from, well, EVERYTHING. I don't know how often I'll be updating this story, but I promise you that I will try and update at least once a week. I really do love this story, and have so many ideas for it that there's no way I could ever fully abandon it. For all of you who have been with me since the beginning, thank you so much for supporting me. And as always, I will see you all soon for chapter 29!
It hadn’t even been a full hour since Akashi led Hideki to his room to entertain the boy while their Father’s worked on whatever world domination plan they had this week, and yet Akashi was already losing his mind.

Having accompanied his father to many a company dinner, suare, get together, or whatever else they were called, Akashi learned pretty early on that the world had some really dull people in it. However, never before in his life had Akashi met someone so bland and unremarkable as Takahashi Hideki.

The boy was polite and seemed nice enough, but his skittishness around Akashi bordered the realm of paranoia, and he seemed incapable of doing ANYTHING without asking the redhead for permission, which was starting to get on his nerves a little bit. After about 15 minutes of complete and utter silence between the two, Akashi sighs, having given up on engaging in conversation with the boy long ago, before digging through his bag and pulling out his visual journal, his sketching pencils, and his watercolors.

‘Might as well work on planning the last few pieces of my portfolio if I’m going to be stuck here’ Akashi thinks to himself as he throws the book onto his desk with a loud ‘THUNK’, and opens it up nearly to the back of the book. At the rate he was going, he’d likely have to ask Emi-sensei to give him another book by the end of next week. After setting out his materials, Akashi gets to work, sketching out the various ideas he has for his final pieces.

Once he finally gets into the rhythm of sketching and coloring, Akashi loses track of time, more focused on getting his ideas onto paper, and then fleshing out and adding more detail to the ideas that he thinks will make interesting, but technical pieces. After a while however, Akashi notices that there is an unwelcome presence leaning over his shoulder. Turning slightly, Akashi is met with the sight of Hideki standing behind him, attempting to peer over his shoulder and see what he’s working on.

“Can I help you?” Akashi questions not even trying to hide his annoyed tone of voice. Hideki visibly flinches.
“Oh, uh, I’m sorry, I was just curious as to what you were doing, is all” Hideki stammers nervously.

‘Clearly’ Akashi thinks to himself before turning the book so the younger boy can see it.

“Well, if you must know, I’m working on some pages for my art class that I’m taking at school. I’m attempting to plan out some pieces for a portfolio” Akashi explains, and once he finishes he notices that Hideki’s eyes now have a curious shine to them.

“An art class? What kind?” the boy asks excitedly.

“Uh… it’s an introduction course that my school offers. It focuses on drawing and painting” Akashi says, slightly puzzled by Hideki’s excited response.

“Oh that sounds amazing” Hideki exclaims, before noticing Akashi’s perplexed expression.

“Oh uh, I’ve always been very interested in the arts, drawing and painting, and such”

“Really?” Akashi asks, turning to face the boy.

“Yes, it’s been a long time interest of mine actually, but one that I’ve never had much of an opportunity to delve much time or effort into… not with the expectations my father has for me to take over the family business once he has retired, that is” Hideki trails off, his excited expression sinking to one of guilt and sadness.

Akashi flinches slightly, knowing all too well what it feels like to garner an interest or passion for something, only to be told that it was pointless and a waste of time, and to not focus his time on something so meaningless. For the first time since meeting the raven haired boy, Akashi feels a sort of… connection form between the two. They both know what it’s like to be born into a life where every second of everyday has been planned so that they can be groomed into the perfect successors for their fathers. Akashi sighs.

“Well, if you’d like, I can tell you about my art class and my mentor?” the redhead offers. Hideki immediately perks up at this.
“Oh yes, please! What is your mentor like? Is he kind? What kind of art does he do? Does he have a portfolio?” the boy breaks out in an excited flurry of questions, causing Akashi to chuckle.

“Well, she is a very talented artist, in my opinion. Emi-sensei is very kind and liberal person, but she will run her class with an iron fist if and when she sees fit. Her style of teaching is rather unorthodox compared to what I am normally used to, but I have found her class to be both informative as well as very interesting and even fun. To say that there’s never a dull moment in her class is nothing short of an understatement” Akashi describes.

“Emi-sensei? Wait, you don’t mean Akira Emi, do you?” Hideki asks with a sudden burst of realization. Akashi looks at him, perplexed for a moment.

“Why, yes, I do actually. How did you know?”

“Akira Emi is one of my all time favorite artists! Her unique style and form of storytelling in her pieces along with her mixed integration of both American and Japanese forms of traditional and popular culture has made her world famous, and you mean to tell me that she’s your teacher?” Hideki exclaims in disbelief. Akashi can’t help the swell of pride that fills his chest at the mention of his mentor’s accomplishments. It was one thing to hear about Emi-sensei from Emi-sensei, who had a habit of making even her greatest accomplishments seem like no big deal, but a completely different story hearing about how renowned she was from an outside source.

“Yes, she accepted a teaching position at Rakuzan just this year. I am currently in her introduction class but once I finish my portfolio, I hope to move on to take her advanced class next year” Akashi states proudly.

“Wow, that’s incredible! May I see some of your work?” Hideki asks. Akashi remains silent for a moment, contemplating what he should answer.

‘He doesn’t seem so bad, I guess. A little awkward, but he does seem to be genuinely interested. Eh, why not’ Akashi thinks to himself, standing up to grab another chair for Hideki to sit in so that he can look through the almost finished visual journal.

“Wow, this is amazing” Hideki comments quietly, completely enraptured by the contents of each page of the journal, “I wish I could do something like this.”

“Why don’t you then?” Akashi asks curiously. Hideki pauses for a moment before answering.
“Because my father would never approve of me wasting my time on something like this. I don’t know if you know this, but my father isn’t exactly the biggest fan of the traditional educational system. He thinks that students are wasting their time on useless activities when they could be devoting more of their time and efforts to studying more worthwhile subjects. Art might be something I am interested in but it’s not something my father would approve of me doing in my spare time.”

“So what? My dad’s opinion hasn’t stopped me yet.” Hideki looks up at Akashi with a puzzled expression.

“What do you mean?”

“My father thinks much the same way about art as yours does, but just because he doesn’t like it doesn’t mean I’m going to allow his opinion to stop me from doing something I enjoy. To be perfectly honest with you, he doesn’t even know I’m trying to get into the advanced art class, he thinks I’ve signed myself up for music classes” Akashi explains. Hideki’s expression has shifted from puzzlement to bewilderment.

“Wait, so you mean to tell me that you’re going behind your father’s back...”

“Yes”

“Trying to get into a class he doesn’t want you to take...”

“Yup”

“Risking getting into a massive amount of trouble...”

“Ya”

“All so you can take art?”
“Pretty much” Akashi says with a nod and a smile. Hideki stares at him in complete disbelief.

“Wow…” the boy mutters under his breath, turning his attention back to the journal in his lap.

“You know when my father first told me that we were going to Tokyo to conduct business with the Akashi business, I was pretty freaked out. I’d heard a lot of rumors about you, saying that you were like an almighty emperor who reigned over his subjects with an iron fist, and was able to force all his enemies into submission with just a glance…” he trails off for a moment. Akashi remains silent.

“But you’re nothing like what I’ve heard” Hideki states, turning to look at the redhead sitting next to him.

“Really?” Akashi prods, curious about what Hideki has to say.

“Ya, you’re a lot nicer and friendlier than I expected, and you don’t seem to care about what others around you think you should do or be, you have the confidence to do whatever you think is best for you and when you set your mind to something, you go for it with everything you’ve got” the boy states excitedly, before averting his gaze and quietly muttering, “I wish I could be more like you” Akashi sits silently for a moment, taking in everything Hideki said about him being different than what people have told him. It was always a surprise to hear how much he had changed in the past year, from Akashi, the tyrannical emperor who needed no allies and defeated all those who stood in his way, to just Seijuro, a regular highschool boy who loved basketball, art, and hanging around with his nerdy ass friends doing teenager stuff.

For those who didn’t know Akashi prior to his personality change at the end of his first year, they would see him as nothing but a scary rich kid, who thought he was better than everyone else, and to an extent, there was some truth to that. But deep down underneath that hard, overconfident, royal persona, was a very sad, very lonely little boy, who wanted nothing more to have friends and enjoy his childhood like one should. Unfortunately, the life that Akashi was born into did not allow him such a luxury, as his father demanded that he not waste his time with such trivial things and focus on his future as the heir to the Akashi business. From the time he was born Akashi had been granted every luxury life had to offer, and yet, for as long as the redhead can remember, he never once felt truly happy.

“I wasn’t always like this you know” Akashi speaks up after a long and contemplative silence. Hideki glances at him curiously.
“A year or so ago I was exactly like how those people described me, maybe even worse. Looking back on those days, I have found that my personality and behavior was a direct reflection of how my father raised me, constantly telling me that I have no friends, that everyone is my enemy, and I must defeat my enemies and be the best at everything no matter what, and if I am not the absolute best at everything I do... then I am worthless” Akashi pauses for a moment before continuing.

“All my life my father led to believe that my achievements and status were the sole determinants of my self-worth, that my interests were nothing more than a waste of time because they did not directly benefit my education or business practice, that maintaining the Akashi status and honor is my destiny because I am his son and he is my father and he brought me into this world and it is my duty as his son to take over for him once he retires, and who I am and what I want in life doesn’t matter because the end of the day I don’t really matter to him” Akashi trails off for a moment, a sudden wave of sadness washes over him as the words he had kept under lock and key for many years came bursting out of him like a volcanic eruption.

Hideki remains silent, simply staring at Akashi with a saddened expression, before leaning over to wrap his arms gingerly around the redhead. Akashi is jerks slightly, surprised by the sudden motion of affection, but quickly relaxes.

“I guess we aren’t so different after all” Hideki says. Akashi smiles, ruffling the younger boys hair. The two finally part after a long moment.

“Things have changed since then though” Akashi states.

“How so?” Hideki questions. Akashi does not respond right away, instead turning his gaze out the window in front of them. He smiles after a moment.

“There are others now. Others who believe me. Others who looked past who I was before and accept me for who I am now. Others who love me and care about my interests and wellbeing. Others who push and encourage me to follow my dreams. It may seem silly to think that other people could have such a large influence on me, but it's true. After I stopped trying to maintain the image my father had created for me, and started being who I really am, people stopped being afraid of me, and wanted to be around me, and after a while, I found that I had friends I could love and trust” Akashi chuckles slightly.

“I'm happy now” he says, smiling at Hideki, who smiles back happily.
“Wow, that’s amazing” the raven haired boy praises.

“You could do it too”

“Oh, I don’t know about that” Hideki deflates.

“Don’t be so hard on yourself. I know its sounds easier said than done, but if you want to make real, long lasting friends, then your best bet is to just put yourself out there and be yourself” Akashi encourages.

“Well, I suppose I can give it a try” Hideki says.

“That’s all you can do”

“Ya, I guess so” Hideki says happily.

“Oh, and as for your dad not liking art, I say fuck him and just do it” Akashi comments out of nowhere, causing Hideki to break out laughing. Afterwards the two spend the next while working together on Akashi’s portfolio.

Unfortunately their fun is short lived, as the butler knocks on Akashi’s door, stating that it was time for Hideki to leave. The two exchange numbers and promise to keep in touch, before bidding their final goodbyes as two of the most unlikely friends you could ever hope to find.

Chapter End Notes

Holy shit this chapter took a long time to write. I thought it would be interesting to write Akashi interacting with a character that grew up in a similar environment that he did, and finally have someone who understands what its like to be the heir to a multimillion dollar company. If you liked Hideki then fear not, this is not the last time you will see him, as I have a very important plotpoint coming at some point that he is involved in. As for Akashi's little rant on how his father treats him, I actually cried while writing that. It was just so emotional and passionate that I couldn't help but feel so bad for my baby. Anyways let me know what you thought of this chapter, I will do my best to be a bit more frequent and consistent with my posts in the future cuz I am nowhere near done with this story, so keep your eyes peeled. Thank you all so much
for reading and supporting, and as always, I was see you all for chapter 30!
Early December meant two things for Akashi. 1) the winter cup was in full throttle, and he and the rest of Rakuzan Basketball Club were pulling double duty on their training to make sure they redeem themselves from last years upset. 2) the sweet release of winter vacation was just around the corner, and to the extremely overworked and exhausted Akashi Seijuro, two weeks of doing absolutely nothing sounded like heaven at this point in time.

Despite never being one to complain about his workload, Akashi was definitely beginning to feel the stress of everything piling on top of him as he trudged tiredly through the door to the locker room and smacked directly into someone, knocking both him and the other person to the floor.

“Oh goodness, I’m sorry Mibuchi” Akashi apologized, scrambling up and offering a hand to the older boy

“Don’t worry about it Sei-chan, I wasn't exactly watching where I was going either” Mibuchi admits sheepishly. All of a sudden, the door opens, and the two have to quickly dodge out of the way before they are hit but the incoming Nebuya, who immediately notices them.

“Reo, what the hell are you doing on the floor?” He asks, slightly puzzled.

“Sei-chan and I had a little accident and bumped into each other. Nothing major” Mibuchi explains briefly, taking Akashi’s outstretched hand and finally standing up.

“What about you? You look like you haven’t slept in a few days” Mibuchi comments pointing out the dark circles under Nebuya’s eyes and his overall sunken expression.

“That’s cuz I havent” Nebuya responds, moving past the two and toward his locker.

“Why not?” Akashi asks.
“Cuz insomnia’s a bitch, and it doesn't exactly help that I’ve got so much fucking work to do that by the time I finally go to bed, I’m not tired anymore so I end up staring at the ceiling until dawn” Nebuya responds dryly.

“You have insomnia?” Mibuchi asks, surprised.

“Ya, its a pretty mild case so I can usually work around it with some low dose sleeping pills, but I ran out last week so I need to get a new prescription over the weekend” he explains casually.

“You’re talking about this very casually for someone who never spoke of it before” Akashi comments. Nebuya shrugs.

“I mean it's not something I go out of my way to talk about but its not like I’m ashamed of it or anything. Besides I’ve had it for so long that I’m pretty good at dealing with it”

Akashi is about to comment on what Nebuya said, but before he can, the locker room door swings open, revealing Coach Shirogane. Everyone quiets.

“Gentlemen, it has been recently brought to my attention that, with the increase in our training regimen for the Winter Cup, as well as your increased workload from your regular classes, that the overall performance and health of our players has begun to decrease as a result of overwork and fatigue. Would you all agree with that statement?” Everyone in the locker room exchanges glances with one another before nodding in affirmation.

“Then in that case, I propose that, starting today, we shall cancel regular practices until further notice, and your practice time may be used instead as either an individual training session, or a study hall”

“OH BLESS” Nebuya cries out in relieved excitement, throwing his arms into the air and sliding down the lockers, collapsing face first into a heap on the ground. Coach Shirogane casts a mildly concerned expression in Nebuya’s direction, but says nothing about it.

“Right, well, the workout room is available if you wish to use it, and the gymnasium will remain open if you wish to work in there. I trust that you will use this opportunity responsibly. You are dismissed” Coach Shirogane states before exiting the room.
Once the door shuts behind him, the room breaks out into a flurry of discussions. With practiced canceled, everyone begins talking about what they want to do with their new free time. Some continue getting changed and head to the workout room for some light weight lifting, others pack up their bags and leave, and some brag their bookbags and make their way into the gym, where they can spread themselves out to do their work.

“Hey guys!” the excited voice of Hayama greets from around the corner of some lockers.

“There you are Ko-chan. I thought you weren't here” Mibuchi says to the blonde.

“I was in the back getting a splinter out of my foot” the boy explains.

“So what are you guys doing? I was thinking about heading into the gym so I can write my English paper”

“Well I have some work that I need to get done so I might do that too” Akashi comments.

“Awesome! What about you Reo-ne?”

“Sure, that sounds like fun” Mibuchi chirps.

“Ei-chan?”

“You’re not gonna make me help you with your math homework again are you?” Nebuya asks, sitting up to look at his teammate.

“Probably” Hayama responds. Nebuya sighs tiredly.

“Ya, fine”

“Yay!” Hayama cheers, grabbing his things and flying out the room toward the gym, leaving the
other three behind to wonder how he has so much energy.

Five minutes later, the four boys gather in a little group along the bottom two steps of the bleachers, Hayama grabs his laptop and leans back comfortably on the second step and begins typing away, Mibuchi sits cross legged on the first step and pulls out a notebook and a textbook before beginning to take notes, Akashi sits on the floor and leans against the bottom bleacher step and continues working on his history homework from earlier that day, and last but not least Nebuya flops down onto his stomach on the floor before pulling out a large piece of paper rolled up with a rubber band and a set of charcoal pencils.

“Oooooh, Ei-chan are you working on another one of your art thingies?” Hayama asks, noticing the art supplies Nebuya has.

“Ya…” Nebuya answers cautiously, moving his shoulder forward to hide the piece from Hayama’s prying gaze.

“Let me see let me see let me see let me see let me see” the blonde chants repeatedly, abandoning his English paper in favor of moving to get a closer look at Nebuya’s piece.

“What? NO! It’s not done yet” Nebuya states defensively, rolling the paper back up and holding it away from Hayama.

“But why not?” Hayama whines.

“Because the last time I let you look at one of my pieces, you told me it looked like a naked sumo wrestler, and then you ended up ripping it” Nebuya answers in a harsh tone that makes Hayama flinch.

“Ei-chan I said I was sorry didn’t I? I’m not an artist so I don’t know that stuff is supposed to look like, and I really didn’t mean to rip your drawing, honest” Hayama says with an apologetic and slightly guilty expression. Nebuya narrows his eyes at Hayama but makes no move to show the drawing.

“Oh come on Ei-chan, don’t be so stingy” Mibuchi scolds lightly.

“I know he ripped your drawing, but he also went to your teacher, explained what happened to her, and got you an extension on that piece too isn’t that right?” Nebuya grumbles but does not disagree with Mibuchi’s statement.

“I don’t understand you sometimes, you’re such a talented artist and you make so many wonderful art pieces and yet you refuse to show us any of your pretty drawings” Mibuchi complains with pouty lips.

“Ei-chan if I promise I won’t touch it, then can I see your piece? Please please please pretty please!” Hayama begs. Nebuya looks at both Hayama and Mibuchi for a moment, before shifting his gaze to Akashi in a silent call for help.

“I’d also like to see your piece” is all Akashi says. Nebuya groans, smacking his palm against his forehead and running it down his face, before taking the large piece of paper in his hands and unrolling it so the other three can gather around and look at its contents.

On the paper was a very elaborate and very detailed charcoal drawing of what appeared to be a table with a cloth on it, folded and bundled over in a variety of places, a wooden box with a couple of wine bottles set on top of it, some ceramic vases, a trumpet, a horse riding saddle, and a bull’s skull hung up on the wall behind everything. Everything was perfectly outlined and shaded in to the point that it looked almost too realistic to have been hand drawn. Needless to say the three boys were very impressed.

“Ooooooooooh, so pretty” Hayama coos, reaching a hand out to touch the piece.

“HEY” Nebuya yells, yanking the paper away from the blonde’s wandering fingers.

“Right, right, sorry” Hayama apologizes, crossing his hands behind his back.

“Ei-chan did you actually draw all this?” Mibuchi asks in awe.

“Ya, I did, although I’m beginning to wish that I hadn’t”

“What do you mean?” Akashi asks, slightly confused.
“It’s charcoal” Nebuya deadpans.

“...Ok?”

“I hate working with charcoal” Nebuya whines, tossing the piece next to him and shooting it an intense glare.

“Well, if you hate it so much then why are you working with it?” Mibuchi questions. Nebuya pauses for a moment, wondering how best to explain his thoughts.

“You know how when you do something, and it’s absolutely terrible and you hated every second of doing it, but after a while of not doing it, you forget how terrible it is, and so you do it again and then you remember ‘oh ya, this is absolutely agonizing, why did I ever think this was a good idea?’ type of thing?”

“Ya?”

“Well, it's like that for me with charcoals. I hated working with them when I was younger, so I never used them, and then when I was coming up with ideas for pieces I could do I thought I could do a charcoal one ‘cuz maybe I would like them now. Nope, still hate them, and now I’m stuck working on this stupid ass still life that I’ll probably end up burning before I’m even done with it”

“Hey, if you’re not going to use it in your portfolio, then can I have it?” Mibuchi asks eagerly. For a moment Nebuya freezes, staring wide eyed at Mibuchi with a bewildered expression, as though he had grown a third head.

“What?” the raven-haired boy asks nervously, causing Nebuya to snap out of his stupor.

“No, no… I mean no, it’s nothing… I just… I didn’t think you’d…uh” Nebuya stumbles over his words for a moment before sighing.

“Ya sure, you can have it if you want. I’m pretty much over working on it, so you can take it now if you want”
“Really! Oh, thank you thank you thank you!” Mibuchi exclaimed happily, throwing his arms around Nebuya’s neck in a tight embrace. Nebuya abruptly tenses up again and nearly chokes on his own spit at the sudden contact, but slowly relaxes and even wraps an arm around the boys waist, a small smile tugging at his laps.

“Ya, uh, no problem. It’s uh… I’m glad you like it” he says quietly. The two separate after a moment, and break off into a quiet discussion of some of Nebuya’s other works he’d done throughout the year.

Just behind them, Akashi and Hayama stare, absolutely flabbergasted, at the oddly intimate moment their two teammate just shared.

“Hey, Akashi”

“Ya?”

“Did we just see what I think we just saw?” Hayama asks with a very confused expression.

“I’m… not sure? What did you see?”

“Well I think I just saw Reo-nee and Ei-chan, body to body, coping feels at each other. What did you see?”

“Much the same… I think” Akashi responds. The two boys exchange bewildered looks, before casting their attention back to their teammates, who were now sitting next to each other, Nebuya has his visual journal on his lap and is leafing through the pages, showing Mibuchi its contents, while Mibuchi leans over to look at the book, his head rested on comfortably Nebuya’s shoulder.

“You wouldn’t happen to have anything to do with that, would you?” Hayama asks after a moment of silence. Akashi thinks for a moment before answering.

“Well… I suppose I have gone against your advice to leave the two alone to work things out themselves a little bit… but I have no idea where the fuck that came from” the redhead responds, trying to figure out if he actually saw what he thinks he just saw, or if he’s finally lost his goddamn
mind due to stress and lack of sleep.

“Huh, maybe they’re finally starting to get along better ‘cuz you gave them a little push in the right direction?” Hayama suggests, “although I guess it doesn’t matter how it happens, so long as they end up happy, isn’t that right?”

Akashi looks back at Nebuya and Mibuchi. A couple of months ago, the two were constantly at each other’s throats over one thing or another. Other than during basketball practice the two never worked together, and even then Akashi wouldn’t go as far as to say they got along. Yet despite all that, here they were, sitting together and having a conversation, joking, touching, and casting fond glances when they think the other isn’t looking. Perhaps the thought of setting them up wasn’t so outrageous after all.

“Hayama, I think that’s the wisest thing you’ve ever said” Akashi says, smiling happily at his friends and ignoring the indignant scoff from Hayama, as he got up and packed his things.

“Ramen’s on me tonight if anyone wants to join me” Akashi says, sending the three boys into a frenzy as they quickly pack their bags and try to catch up with their captain, who’s already making his way toward the door. Just as he reached the bottom of the stairs, Akashi was suddenly picked up and roughly spun in the air.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

” Akashi screams, grabbing onto the body currently spinning him in the air, fearing for his life. Akashi groans, annoyed once he hears the laughter of none other than Nebuya, whose currently holding him upside down by his ankles, and staring at him with a shit eating grin.

“Hey now, don’t go leaving without us” Nebuya says before throwing Akashi in the air, prompting another high pitched scream from the redhead, catching him, and then finally lifting him up so that Akashi was sitting on his shoulders.

“Ei-chan don’t be so rough with people” Mibuchi scolds, having finally caught up with the two, Hayama not far behind.

“What, I’m just makin’ sure he doesn’t skip out on us after he so graciously offered to pay for our dinner is all” Nebuya defends haphazardly. “Besides it’ll give him a chance to learn what it’s like to break 6 ft. tall”
“Well, fuck you too Ei” Akashi spits causing Nebuya to break out laughing. Were it not for the solid grip Nebuya had on Akashi’s legs, the redhead might have feared that Nebuya might drop him with how hard he was laughing. Mibuchi rolls his eyes but the smile on his face betrays his enjoyment.

“Alright! Well enough wasting time, let’s go EAT!” Hayama announced, prompting the others to follow him. Akashi smiles. His wallet will probably be very upset with him by the time the night is finished, but Akashi has no doubt that it’ll be totally worth it... maybe.

Chapter End Notes

Some nice Rakuzan friend group fluff with some very heavily implied NebuMibu relationship development (° ˘ ³ ˘) (We see you Reo-ne) I had a lot of fun writing this chapter. Although I reference the winter cup in this chapter don't expect any detail about what actually happens in any of the matches, after all I'm not here to write about basketball I'm here to write about Akashi's journey of self discovery and making friends, art, Hayama being a good senpai to his idiot kohai, and two morons who are hopelessly in love with each other but are too dumb to see it. I'm trying to come up with some semblance of a timeline for this story and trying to decide what I should include in the coming chapters or what I should leave to be touched upon in another story (*cough cough* yes I'm planning on writing more than one story dedicated to all of my stupid ass headcannons and ocs *cough cough*) and while it's still a work in progress I think I more or less know where the "plot" for this story is going and where I want to leave it off at. I have absolutely no idea how many more chapters it will be until I reach that point, but I guess I won't know until I've finally written it. Anyways thank you all so much for reading and supporting my story, I can't even begin to explain how happy I am that so many of you enjoy my shitty writing. Hopefully the next chapter will be up very soon so as always I will see you all soon for chapter 31!
Later that week, Akashi managed to talk his way out of 6th period, telling his teacher that he would like to go speak with another teacher about something (which wasn’t a total lie), and was now hightailing it as fast as he could out of the main building. The hall monitor didn’t even look up from his phone as Akashi zoomed passed him on his way out the door and toward the art building.

When Akashi entered Emi-sensei’s art room, everyone was scattered around, working on their individual pieces; the paid him no mind as he made his way through the maze of tables. Emi-sensei sat at her desk in the back of the room, grading papers, she looked up once she noticed him and smiled.

“Hey kiddo, what’re you doin’ here? Not skipping class are we?” Emi-sensei jokes, standing up to give the boy her signature bear hug, which Akashi happily reciprocated.

“No, I finished the work we were doing in class, so I asked if I could leave” Akashi responded. Emi-sensei laughed.

“I see. Hey, can I ask you about something?” Emi-sensei asks. Akashi blinks.

“Uh, sure, what is it?” Emi-sensei motions for Akashi to follow him, and the two walk into the currently empty storage room just behind her desk.

“Well, it’s just that I’ve heard this rumor about Eikichi and a… “friend”, of his, and since you two are on the same team together I figured maybe you’d know something” she says quietly.

“A friend?” Akashi repeats, slightly confused about what his teacher means.

“Ya, you know him, tall, dark hair, pretty face…”
“Mibuchi?”

“Ya, him. I’ve heard the two of them have been getting pretty close lately” she added with a smirk.

“Oh, uh, have you heard that… I’m not really very caught up with the latest gossip so I wouldn’t know myself” Akashi defends, weakly.

“Oh come on, don’t be like that. I already know about his long time crush on the guy but I figured he’d never actually go for it. When I heard from some of the other students saying they saw Eikichi with that Mibuchi kid hanging out around town together over the weekend I almost couldn’t believe what I heard. I already tried asking the girls if they knew anything about it but when I told them what I heard they seemed just as surprised as I did, so I figure you must know something right?” Emi-sensei explains.

“Well, I am aware that the two have been getting along a lot better than they used to as of recent, but I had no idea that they were spending time together outside of school” Akashi admits.

“So you’re just as in the dark about this as I am, huh?”

“It would seem so.” Emi-sensei sighs.

“Oh well, I guess all we can do is wait until Eikichi spills the details himself. Anyways I’m sure you have work you want to do so I won’t keep you here, just promise you’ll let me know if you find out anything ok?” she asks with a wink. Akashi chuckles.

“You’ll be the first to know” the redhead promises, exiting the supply closet and making his way toward the table Tsuji, Takata, Amano and Endo were currently seated at. Upon noticing his presence, the four girls immediately stop what they are doing and yank Akashi down so no one can hear what they have to say.

“Holy shit, there you are, we’ve been looking everywhere for you. Did you hear about what happened between Eikichi and Mibuchi over the weekend?” Endo whispers.

“Yes, I did, did any of you know anything about that?” Akashi asks.
“No, we were hoping that maybe you did” Amano says.

“We’ve tried grilling Ei about it, but he wouldn’t tell us anything” Takata explains.

“I see, so I guess we’re all in the dark about what’s going on between those two at the moment” Akashi concludes.

“What about Haga?” Tsuji proposes. Akashi pauses, thinking for a moment before pulling his phone out and pulling up Haga’s contact number.

“I haven’t heard from her since our encounter at the restaurant, but I have her number”

“Well then don’t just stand there, send her a text. Ask her how things are going with Mibuchi” Endo commands. Akashi nods and begins typing out a short but clear message.

The_Atomic_Loser: How are things going on your end?

Akashi hits the send button on the text and sets his phone down on the table. Now they wait.

*BUZZ  BUZZ BUZZ*

The sound of Akashi’s phone vibrating against the table sends the five friends into a frenzy as they gather around to try and see what Haga had responded.

Haga.Kumi: Look outside the art building

“Look outside the art building? What the fuck is that supposed to mean?” Amano asks, confused.

“I think it means exactly what it says” Akashi says, getting up from the table and exiting the art room, the others not far behind him. As they approach the exit to the building, Akashi slows down
and motions for the four girls to not move. Very slowly, Akashi opens the door to the art building and peeks his head around the corner before noticing Nebuya and Mibuchi, standing together, talking.

For a moment Akashi was slightly confused. What does Nebuya and Mibuchi talking have to do with their plan to set the two up. It isn’t until after a moment of watching the two that the finally notices what Haga was talking about.

“Hey Sei, you see anything?” Takata asks, trying and failing to lean over him and get a look at what’s going on.

“You guys are never going to believe this” Akashi says, moving out of the way to let the others get a look.

“Oh my fucking god” Endo exclaimed.

“I can’t believe this” said Takata.

“There’s no way this is actually happening” Amano declared.

“Are those two fucking flirting?” Tsuji asks in utter disbelief. Akashi makes his way back to the door and peeks around once again. There standing under a tree growing between the art building and the track field, were Nebuya and Mibuchi. Judging from the gym outfit, Mibuchi must be in the middle of gym class, while Nebuya was obviously on his way to art class. To any bystander the two were having nothing more than a friendly conversation, but Akashi and the others knew better. The close proximity, the carefree expressions, the jokes and laughter exchanged, the looks they were giving each other. Akashi may not be an expert on romance but if he were to give an example of what flirting might look like to someone who had no idea what the hell flirting was, he’d show them the exchange occurring between his two friends.

“Oh MY GOD” Endo shrieks excitedly, jumping up and down in glee.

“Holy shit. Sei I don’t know what the fuck you and the honey bees are doing, but whatever it is, it’s fucking working” Tsuji praises. Akashi smiles proudly and pulls out his phone.

_TheAtomicLoser:_ How did you manage this?
Haha.Kumi: Let's just say that Mibuchi is just as flirtatious as he is motherly. I didn’t say anything direct, but I’ve been dropping hints that it’s always easier to win someone over with honey than it is lemon juice.

The_Atomic_Loser: You’re a genius Haga

Haga.Kumi: I know, aren’t you so lucky to have me helping you?

The_Atomic_Loser: Very!

Haga.Kumi: What about Nebuya? How’s he holding up?

The_Atomic_Loser: From what I can tell it looks like he’s doing really well. I think it helps that Mibuchi was the one to initiate.

Haga.Kumi: Good. I’ll keep you posted if anything major happens.

The_Atomic_Loser: Sounds good. Talk soon.

Akashi pockets his phone and is about to take another peak when Amano reals back.

“Oh fuck he’s coming this way” she yells, scrambling up and booking it down the hallway, with the rest of the group hot on her heels. It feels like an eternity passes between when the five friends finally sit back down at the large round table in the art room and when Nebuya finally walks into the room, hands Emi-sensei his late pass, and sits down in his seat.

“Hey!” he greets happily.

“You’re in a good mood today, any reason for that?” Takata begins, trying to indirectly corner Nebuya into telling them about his “talk” with Mibuchi.
“It’s just been a good day, I guess” Nebuya says, shrugging his shoulders casually, beginning to take out his supplies for the day. There’s a moment of silence as everyone thinks about the best way to go about doing this.

“How was your date with Mibuchi last weekend?” Akashi asks bluntly, causing the entire table to tense up and direct their gaze toward Nebuya, who’s eyeing Akashi out the corner of his eye.

“It was fine, although it wasn’t really much of a date to be perfectly honest” he answers honestly.

“Why’s that?” Amano asks. Nebuya just shrugs his shoulders.

“I was supposed to go see a movie with my mom over the weekend but something came up at work so she couldn’t go. I had the extra ticket so I asked if Reo would go with me so it didn’t go to waste and he said yes, nothing special.”

“I call bullshit.” Nebuya jumps, slamming his knee against the desk with a yelp as Emi-sensei speaks up from behind him, a knowing smirk on her face. Nebuya turns and faces his teacher with a nervous expression.

“How long have you been there?” he asks cautiously. Emi-sensei chuckles before wrapping an arm around his shoulder.

“Long enough” she says, her smirk slowly shifting into a shit eating grin.

“So Ei-chan, when do I get to meet your new boyfriend?” Emi-sensei says, adding extra emphasis on the word ‘boyfriend’.

“He’s not my boyfriend” Nebuya argued, his face turning a noticeable red color even with his dark skin.

“OH, but you admit that he’s something?” Emi-sensei gasped, pulling Nebuya close, eliminating any miniscule chance of escape he still had.

“Uh, well…” Nebuya stammered, rubbing his arm nervously and avoiding eye contact with his
teacher as much as possible.

“I think he’s gonna crack” Endo whispers to Akashi, who, despite feeling slightly bad for Nebuya being put on the spot like this, can’t help but chuckle under his breath at how someone his size can be so intimidated by someone like Emi-sensei, whose barely a three quarters his height and weighs about a third as much as Nebuya does, at best.

“Come on Ei, you know you can’t keep secrets from me, besides, think of this as payment for all the complaining you’ve done about your sexual frustration regarding your new little boy toy.” Nebuya looks like he wants to die.

“If I tell you about what happened on Saturday, is the entire school going to know by the end of today?” Nebuya asks anxiously.

“If you don’t want anyone knowing about this, then I promise I won’t tell a soul” Emi-sensei promises, as does everyone else at the table. Nebuya heaves a long and exasperated sigh.

“Alright, so I had an extra ticket to some horror flick my mom wanted to go see with me, but she couldn’t go so I had an extra ticket. I never really had any excuse to ask Reo to go with me on the weekends so… I used having an extra movie ticket as a reason to ask him” Nebuya begins.

“Anyways, he actually said yes which I honestly couldn’t believe but he did so we met up on Saturday morning we went and we saw the movie and then…” he pauses for a moment.

“And then…?” Tsuji prods.

“And then… we went out and got a bite to eat.” There’s a collective moment of excited arm flailing from Akashi, Emi-sensei, and the girls at the mention of the two going out to eat after the movie.

“So then it was a date!” Endo exclaims excitedly.

“Well, no, not really, I mean… we just went out for food, that doesn’t make it a date” Nebuya argues.
“Oh quit lying to yourself, that was definitely a date” Emi-sensei scoffs. Nebuya sighs again, covering his face with his hands.

“Ok, so I went on a date with Reo, great, now what?” Nebuya asks, tossing his hands into the air.

“Ask him on another one you dumbass” Takata deadpanned, as though it were the most obvious solution.

“What do you mean ‘ask him on another date’, I still don’t know if he even likes me yet” Nebuya asserted.

“Are you blind? Of course he likes you, he wouldn’t have said yes to go out with you if he didn’t” Tsuji argued.

“Well what if he said yes because he thought it was just a friend thing?”

“Nebuya” Akashi interrupts, grabbing everyone’s attention.

“I think you’re overthinking things too much. If he said yes the first time you asked him, then I’m sure he will say yes the second time” Akashi says calmly. Nebuya ponders this for a moment.

“I mean... I guess it couldn’t hurt to ask again” he says aloud to himself.

“Ooooooooh I’m so excited for you” Emi-sensei beamed, shaking Nebuya with a surprising amount of force for someone her size.

“Ya ya alright now leave me alone will ya, I got work to do” Nebuya says brushing her and everyone else off. Akashi kicks him lightly under the table and Nebuya looks at him slightly confused.

“Good job” he says. Nebuya just rolls his eyes and shakes his head before returning to his visual journal, the smile he had when he first arrived in class still plastered on his face.
After the bell rang, signalling that school was over for the day, Akashi walked back to his room and began packing his bags. Since it was a Friday, game night would resume like it would any other week, however this time around everyone would be heading to Nebuya’s house in Osaka for the weekend. Why they decided to go to Nebuya’s house when it was so far away, Akashi was unsure, but he’d be lying if he said he wasn’t excited to finally meet Nebuya’s family for the first time.

Just as Akashi was zipping his duffle bag up, there was a knock at his door. It was Mibuchi.

“Hello Mibuchi, how are you?” Akashi greets.

“Hey Sei-chan, I’m fine how are you?”

“I’m fine thank you, is there something I can help you with?”

“Oh, well… I did come here to talk, but it can wait if your busy” Mibuchi stammered nervously.

“Is there something the matter?” Akashi asked, worried.

“No… well yes… well… it’s nothing bad, I just need some advice is all” he explains.

“Well I have a little while before I have to leave, so come on in” Akashi stands out of the way to let Mibuchi into the room. The raven haired boy sits on the bed.

“What is it that you wanted to talk about?” Mibuchi takes a deep breath before speaking.

“Well, uh, it’s about Ei-chan.”

‘Oh no, did their date not go as well as Nebuya thought it did?’ Akashi thinks to himself.

“What about him?”
“Well, you see he and I… we went out together over the weekend and… it was… he… I…” Akashi braced himself for the worst, for Mibuchi going off and complaining about how terrible it was and how insufferable Nebuya was, effectively bringing them all the way back to square one and ruining any hope he had of setting them up.

“I have the biggest fattest crush on him and I have no idea what to do about it anymore” Mibuchi blurts out all at once before burying his head in his hands. Akashi stands theirs, astounded by Mibuchi’s extremely unexpected confession. After a few moments of silence, Mibuchi peeks out from behind his hands, waiting for some kind of reaction.

“You like Nebuya?” Akashi asks, deciding that it would be best to play dumb and pretend like he doesn’t know anything, at least for the time being. Mibuchi sighs tiredly.

“Ya, I know, its a big shock, but I do… have for a while actually” he admits quietly.

“Well, I suppose that it is rather surprising that you’re interested in him, especially considering your attitude towards him in the past” Akashi says.

“I know I know it’s bad that I nag at him all the time, but I don’t know what else to do. Everytime I see him it’s like I forget how to talk, and then he looks at me and it’s like time just stops, and I have no control over any of my emotions, they’re just running around doing whatever the fuck they want, and then, and then he has the audacity to smile at me with that perfect little smirk of his that shows the dimples that I never knew he had, and then there’s this little laugh that he does where it starts off as a giggle and then if like grows until he’s leaning back and like closing his eyes because he’s laughing so hard, and there’s his art I mean what’s there to say he’s incredible and amazing and fantastic and sometimes I lay awake at night and wonder what else those perfect hands could be capable of and he’s just so perfect and wonderful and great and funny and nice and amazing and… forget being out of my league, we’re not even playing the same goddamn sport” Mibuchi finally ends his rant with a long winded sigh before flopping down onto Akashi’s bed. There is a long moment of silence

“Wow” Akashi says, “that’s… a lot”

“I’m sorry you had to hear all that”

“Don’t apologize, there’s nothing wrong with what you are feeling… although you could have left out a few of those details.” Mibuchi laughs at this.
“Sorry.” Akashi just shrugs his shoulders before sitting down next to him.

“So you said the two of you went out over the weekend. How did it go?”

“Ugh, it was everything I could have ever dreamed of. He took me to a movie because he had an extra ticket, and at first I thought he meant just as friends or whatever, but then he like, paid for all the snack and drinks, and he help open doors for me, and then he took me out to lunch, and then after all that, we went to a park that was nearby and we just sat on a bench and talked for like, an hour, maybe longer” Mibuchi explained.

‘Hmmmm, funny how I don’t remember hearing that from Nebuya’s story’ Akashi thought.

“Well it sounds like you had a great time, so what’s the problem?” Akashi asks.

“It’s not Ei-chan that’s the problem, it’s me. Why would he ever want to go out with me, I’m horrible, I’ve done nothing but nag at him since the day we met because I don’t know how to handle my emotions and so I express myself with passive aggressive insults and constant bickering because I’m afraid if I try being nice or complimenting him I’m going to say something stupid” Mibuchi laments.

“But you’ve been getting along so well the past few days” Akashi offers.

“Ya, I guess, and that’s great and all, but even if he didn’t care about me nagging at him all the time the likelihood that he’s actually gay is slim to none know my luck”

‘Oh, if only you knew just how gay that man was for you’ deadpans to himself.

“I don’t even know why I bother trying. Ei-chan doesn’t want someone like me he wants a nice, pretty little girl who doesn’t nag at him 24/7, cooks him delicious meals, and can pop out a kid over two years or so. There’s no way he’d go for someone like me”

“I don’t know about that” Akashi begins. Mibuchi looks at him with a puzzled expression.

“What do you mean?”
“I think you two would be great together.” Mibuchi smiles, sitting up.

“Thank you Sei-chan, but you don’t have to say that just to make me feel better”

“But I mean it. I think you two would make a great couple. Sure you started off a little shaky, but when the two of you are on the same page, you’re a force to be reckoned with” Akashi states.

“You think so?”

“I do, after all I had to give Nebuya a very similar pep talk a few months ago, and what I’m telling you is exactly what I’m telling him” Akashi says. It takes Mibuchi a moment to understand what Akashi was saying, but when the words finally registered he leapt off the bed and starting jumping around the room.

“YOU MEAN EI-CHAN LIKES ME?!?!?!?!” he cried out excitedly.

Oops, did I say that?” Akashi wonders aloud, smiling unregretfully at Mibuchi, who tackles him in a tight and overjoyed embrace before kissing him on the cheek.

“I knew it was a good idea to come and see you” he laughed happily.

“Oh my god, I can’t believe this, you’re not joking with me are you, of course you’re not joking, you’re not the kind of person to joke about this kind of thing, Ei-chan likes me!” the raven haired boy rambles on to the point where Akashi wonders if he is about to burst. After a moment, Mibuchi finally calms himself down.

“OK… so he likes me. What now?” Mibuchi asks, turning to Akashi, who shrugs his shoulders in response.

“I think that’s up to the two of you, don’t you think?” Before Mibuchi can answer, there’s another knock at his door. This time, it’s Nebuya standing with a squirming Midna in his arms.
“Hey you ready to go it’s about an hours-” he stops once he notices Mibuchi sitting on the bed.

“Uh, should I come back?” he asks.

“No you’re fine, we were almost done, right Mibuchi?”

“Oh, uh, yes I was actually just about to leave… whose cat is that?” Mibuchi questions, pointing at the black ball of fur curling against Nebuya.

“Oh, this is Midna she’s mine. I keep her in my dorm room… don’t tell administration” Mibuchi laughs, approaching Nebuya.

“Don’t worry, your secret is safe with me” he says, reaching out and scratching Midna behind the ears, who purrs happily at the attention.

“Well, you two clearly have plans, so I’ll be on my way. I’ll see you around” Mibuchi says, making direct eye contact with Nebuya.

“Ya. I’ll see you.”

And with that, Mibuchi walks out of the room and down the hall. Nebuya peeks around the door just in time to see Mibuchi send him a playful wink, before he descends down the stairs, and out of sight. Nebuya looks back at Akashi.

“What did you say to him?” Nebuya asks curiously.

“Don’t worry about it” Akashi teases, grabbing his bags and exiting the room leaving behind a very confused Nebuya. Akashi smiles, and readies himself for a long overdue weekend away from school and campus.

Chapter End Notes

While this may be an Akashi-centric story, do not be fooled into thinking that I an
above writing multiple chapters IN A ROW dedicated to Nebuya and Mibuchi being hopelessly in love with each other (and Akashi and co. being meddling little shits trying to get them together), because I'm not. This chapter was originally two different chapters merged into one. I decided to merge them because they were both too short to be on their own, so I just stuck them together to make one long chapter. Next time though, we get to meet Nebuya's family, which I am so excited about because I am having SO MUCH FUN writing his mom, dad, and three older brothers. Just as a preface and some background info for the next chapter because I've hinted at it slightly but haven't gone into much detail about it, in this story Nebuya is biracial, he is Japanese on his mother's side and Nigerian on his father's. Nebuya's eldest brother is technically only his half-brother, but his mom gained full custody over him when she divorced her previous husband, so they grew up together and are really close. Nebuya's father immigrated to Japan in his early twenty's to go to college and find work, and he met Nebuya's mother (now divorced with an infant child) through some mutual friends, they fell in love and got married a few years later (Nebuya's father adopting Nebuya's eldest brother as his son in the process). Brothers 2 and 3 are Nebuya's full biological older brothers, they are twins, and their favorite activity is driving their other brothers bat shit crazy (I may or may not have based them off of my younger brother). Last but not least there are a shit ton of pets in that house, I will introduce them later on maybe. So ya that's a vague description of my headcannons for Nebuya's family. Definitely not your traditional Japanese family, but I think they have a great dynamic, also I know in the series Nebuya is probably not biracial (he just has tanned skin like Aomine) but its my headcannon and this is my story so whatever i say goes, so if you have a problem with that then TOO BAD! Anyways thank you all so much for reading and supporting my story, if at any point in time you would like to talk to me about this story, what you think about it, or share some headcannons of your own, then please by all means leave comment down below, I absolutely love talking with you guys and I leave very long and detailed responses so if you want to know something about my story, I am an open book and will reveal all. So as always, I will see you all soon for chapter 32.
The Nebuyas

Chapter Notes

Hmm it's been a while since I've introduced a new oc. Time for some Nebuya family ocs!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The drive to Nebuya’s house was much the same as any other drive with Nebuya, except this time Midna was with them because they would be gone for longer than one night. It took about an hour or so along the highway, but by 6:30, Nebuya had gotten off the highway, driven through a few lights, and was now pulling into the driveway of a large two story house.

“Alright here we are” Nebuya said, shutting off the engine and getting out of the car, grabbing his and Akashi’s bags so the redhead could carry Midna. When he finally opened the door and turned on the lights, Akashi stepped in and took his shoes off before letting Midna down. To the right off the entry way was a living room, with a large couch, coffee table, and a TV. Past that was a large dining table with 6 chairs in total and a fully renovated kitchen in the back. To the left of the kitchen was another opened room with three large floor to ceiling bookshelves filled to the brim with books of all different kinds. Across from the dining room was a set of stairs that led up to a row of doors which Akashi assumed to be bedrooms. As he explored his surroundings, Akashi bumped into Nebuya, who was standing very still.

“What’s wrong?” Akashi asked.

“Just stay still for a sec” he says. Another moment of silence passes.

“LILA!” he yells loudly, and not a second passes before Akashi hears a set of loud and flurried noises from upstairs, getting louder and louder and before he knows it the biggest pitbull he has ever seen in his entire life is barrelling down the stairs, barking loudly, and rams straight into Nebuya, knocking him to the floor.

“Nebuya” Akashi cried, worried for the safety of his friend, but his worry subsides when he realizes that Nebuya is laughing.

“There’s my baby girl” Nebuya coos to the massive behemoth of a dog sitting on his chest, barking happily and licking all over his entire face.
“Oh, I missed you so much” he says, rubbing the dog’s belly and kissing the top of her head. The dog is practically shaking with excitement, whining, jumping up and down, and spinning in circles as Nebuya pets and rubs her.

“So, this is Lila, I take it” Akashi says, cautiously.

“Yup, this is my puppy” Nebuya responds happily wrapping his arms around the dog in a tight hug and kissing her.

“That’s a big puppy”

“Ya, she’s a big girl. Lila say hi” Nebuya points to Akashi who pales when the dog jumps off her master’s lap and trots over to sit in front of Akashi, her tongue hanging out of her mouth and her tail wagging a mile a minute.

“Uh, hi there” Akashi greets nervously, reaching his hand out slowly toward the white pitbull. Akashi scratches her behind the ear for a few seconds, but quickly retracts his hand with a yelp when she licks it. Nebuya laughs.

“Not much experience with dogs huh?”

“Not ones that are this big, no” he admits.

“Ya well don’t worry about Lila, she’s nothing like what most people think about pitbulls. She’s the sweetest thing to ever walk this earth, aren’t you baby girl. Oh you’re such a good girl, yes you are!” Nebuya returns to cooing at the dog, who jumps happily back into his arms and is lifted into the air when Nebuya stands up, holding her like one would a small child.

“The girl’s will probably get here around 8-ish but my parents and brothers will be coming home pretty soon I think” Nebuya says, grabbing his bag with the hand not currently holding Lila.

“Do your parents know that we’re all coming?” Akashi asks, having only just considered if he had any permission to be here for the weekend or if he was unintentionally intruding in Nebuya’s house.
“No I didn’t mention it to them, but my parents won’t care. My parents have actually been dying to meet you” Nebuya says heading toward the stairs.

“Really?” the redheads responds, surprised, following Nebuya up the staircase.

“Ya. I talk about you and the stuff we do at game nights sometimes and my mom basically adopts anyone who sets foot into this house, so when I started mentioning you more often she practically begged me to bring you over.”

“I see.”

Once the two reach the top of the stairs, Akashi looks between 3 white doors, wondering which one might be Nebuya’s.

“Hey, this way” Nebuya calls from down the hall to Akashi’s left, standing in front of what he can only imagine to be some kind of closet door.

“But, isn’t one of these rooms yours?” Akashi asks.

“Nope, com’ere I’ll show you” Nebuya responds with a smile, opening the door and climbing up a small set of stairs. Once they reach the top Nebuya opens another door revealing a large spacious room, with slanted ceilings, dark wood floors, and four massive windows lining each side of the ceiling. The room was decorated with a variety of different posters and art prints, similarly to how Nebuya’s dorm room was decorated, a large bed tucked away in the back corner, a desk covered in a variety of different pens, paint brushes, and paints, bookshelves stuffed with magazines and art books, a dresser with a cage of some kind sat on top of it, and a large circular dog bed thrown in the center of the room.

“This is my bedroom” Nebuya says, entering the room and plopping Lila down on her bed.

“Wow” Is all Akashi can manage to say.

“Pretty cool huh?”
“Ya it is but, isn’t this an attic?”

“At one point it was, but when we moved in when I was a little kid my older brothers took the bedrooms down stairs so ‘cuz they get “older sibling priority” or some dumb shit, so I got the attic” he explains, “although I think in the end I’m the one who ended up with the better end of the bargain”

“No kidding” Akashi responds, taking in the calm and warm feeling the room gave off. The sound of the front door opening and closing catches the boys attentions.

“I’m home” a woman’s voice calls from down the stairs.

“Oh cool, mom’s home” Nebuya says exiting the room, Akashi just behind him. The two make their way down the first and then the second flight of stairs, when Akashi notices a small woman with shoulder length black hair, jeans, and a purple polka dotted shirt standing in front of the refrigerator, pulling things out and placing them on the countertop.

“Hi mom” Nebuya greets. The woman, Nebuya’s mother apparently, turns around with a look of surprise before it turns into one of absolute glee.

“Eikichi!” she cries happily, throwing her arms open and abandoning the fridge to hug Nebuya, who happily returns the embrace.

“Oh it’s so good to see you sweetheart, I didn’t know you were coming home” Mrs. Nebuya chattered, returning to the fridge and beginning to pull things out of it.

“Ya the girls are coming over later, we’re gonna have game night here, and I’ve brought a guest with me this time” Nebuya explains, nodding his head in Akashi’s direction.

“Uh, hello ma’am” Akashi greets with a small bow. Mrs. Nebuya smiles at Akashi, with a smile that is almost identical to the one her son has.

“Hello Akashi. My name is Kyoka. How are you today?”
I’m fine thank you, and yourself?”

“Oh I’m doing alright thanks. I hope you’ll excuse the mess that is my living room. Unfortunately my other three boys aren’t nearly as tidy and well organized as this one” she says, motioning to Nebuya, who smiles smugly.

“One of the many reasons why I’m the favorite” Nebuya says with a shrug of his shoulders.

“I’d deny that statement but after dealing with the three stooges seven days a week, I think I’m going to have to agree” his mother replies returning to continue preparing dinner.

“What are your older brothers like Nebuya?” Akashi asks curiously.

“They’re pains in my ass is what they’re like” Mrs. Nebuya calls from the stove.

“Always making a mess, never cleaning up after themselves, constantly fighting and antagonizing each other, you’d think I raised a bunch of animals”

“Ya, but the fighting’s mostly Genji and Hayato, the only reason Masaru gets involved with them is because they annoy the shit out of him until he retaliates” Nebuya points out.

“I suppose that’s true, but Masaru’s a complete slob, have you seen his room recently?”

“No, but I can smell it from here.” The two laugh at Nebuya’s joke as Akashi watches the interaction silently. Suddenly the front door opens, and a young man with black hair and pale skin, dressed in a button up and slacks, steps inside, toeing his shoes off.

“Hey, I’m back” he calls out.

“Hey, welcome home” Nebuya greets from his seat at the breakfast bar. The young man looks up and smiles once he notices Nebuya.
“Well well well, if it isn’t little Ei, finally back at home. How’s it goin’ squirt?” the young man asks, walking up and ruffling Nebuya’s short hair, much to the annoyance of the younger boy.

“I’m doing fine Masaru, but I wish you’d quit calling me squirt, especially since I’m twice your size now”

“Eh, it doesn’t matter how big you get, you’re always gonna be a squirt to me. Remember all those nights when we were kids, and you used to crawl into my bed and sleep with me ‘cuz you were scared of the dark”

“I wasn’t scared of the dark, Genji and Hayato used to tell me those crazy ghost stories before bed and they gave me nightmares” Nebuya squawks indignantly.

“Alright alright everybody calm down” Mrs. Nebuya scolds lightly. “Masaru, since we have more guests coming over why don’t you head upstairs and clean your room”

“I was unaware that we were having dinner in my bedroom” Masaru retorts prompting Mrs. Nebuya to glare angrily at her son.

“You have ten seconds to get your skinny ass up those stairs before I beat you into next week” she threatens.

“Yes ma’am” Masaru responds fearfully, running up the stairs and ducking into his room before any serious damage could befall him. Mrs. Nebuya sighs.

“Ok, now I just need to prepare myself for when the twins come back-” In that moment the front door slams open revealing two tall, skinny, slightly dark skinned young men, with short, and very curly hair, dressed in matching basketball short and t-shirts.

“WE’RE BACK! ” the two boys yell, throwing their sneakers off before running into the house and making all sorts of noise.

“Speak of the devils and they shall appear” Nebuya says to his mother, who’s pinching the bridge of her nose in frustration. The two boys pause for a moment, their gaze falling upon Nebuya as they finally notice his presence.
“**Ei**” the two boys shout in unison, running over and tackling their younger brother, knocking him off his chair and onto the floor in a glorious heap.

“**OW, get off of me you idiots**” Nebuya demands, attempting to wriggle his way out of the death grip his older brothers have locked him in.

“We were hoping you’d come home soon” twin one says

“It’s been so boring around here with only Masaru to mess with” adds twin two.

“**And now our favorite little brother is finally back**” they say in unison. Although their words seem innocent enough, even Akashi can pick up on the mischievous intent hidden behind them.

“**MOM**” Nebuya yells.

“**GENJI, HAYATO STOP PICKING ON YOUR BROTHER AND GO CLEAN YOUR ROOM**” Mrs. Nebuya yells from the stove.

“Aw man”

“You guys are no fun.” The twins release Nebuya, who gets up and dusts himself off, glaring at the twins all the while. Finally one of the brothers notices Akashi, who had been sitting in the corner behind the breakfast bar.

“Hey, who’s the redhead?”

“That’s Akashi, he’s a friends from school” Nebuya responds, sitting back down in his seat.

“Hello” Akashi greets with a wave.

“**Hi**” the twins greet in unison.
“Do they always talk like that?” Akashi whispers to Nebuya.

“Yup, they’ve been doing it for years”

“And we don’t plan on stopping anytime soon” the two voices respond from behind Akashi, causing the redhead to jump in surprise.

“Oh come on now you two, leave the poor boy alone” Mrs. Nebuya scolds.

“What? We’re just saying hi” twin one says.

“Ya mom, it’s not like we’d ever dream of doing anything to him” adds twin two.

“You two are a couple of lying sacks of shit you know that?” their mother deadpans.

“Mother! How could you possibly think such a terrible thing about your two perfect little boys?” twin two asks with a tone of mock indignation.

“I gave birth to you. I know you two better than you know yourselves” she responds, turning back to the stove to continue cooking.

“Ya ok mom, whatever you say” twin one say sarcastically, as the two boys walk away.

“So how did that math test of yours from last week go?” Mrs. Nebuya asks, causing the twins to stop dead in their tracks. They exchange nervous glances for a moment.

“Oh boy”

“Would you look at the time”
“Gotta blast.” The two boys hightail it up the stairs, running into their shared room and slamming the door behind them.

“Ya you better run you annoying little shits” Mrs Nebuya mutters under her breath. Akashi laughs at this.

“I think I see why you’re the favorite, Nebuya” Akashi says after a moment of silence.

“Oh, you haven’t seen anything yet, trust me, they can be worse” Nebuya grimaced.

“Is that so?” Akashi asks.

“I can confirm that notion” a deep voice from behind Akashi says. Turning around, Akashi is met with the sight of a tall man with dark brown skin, hazel eyes, and long coily hair tied tightly back into a puffy ponytail, dressed in jeans and a polo shirt, a kind smile on his face.

“Hey dad, when did you get home?” Nebuya asks, getting up from his seat to hug his father, who happily returns the embrace.

“Just now, I pulled in after the twins. How ya doin’ kiddo?” he asks once they finally part.

“Not bad, figured I’d come home for a weekend. The girl’s are coming later, but I’ve brought a stray with me” Nebuya says, pointing at Akashi, who stands.

“Hello sir, my name is-”

“I know who you are” Nebuya’s father cuts him off, smiling at him. “You must be the infamous Akashi Seijuro I’ve heard so much about”

“That I am” Akashi confirms.

“My name is Akin, it’s a pleasure to finally meet you Akashi” Akin says, extending his hand toward Akashi.
“Please sir, the pleasure is mine” Akashi responds, taking the man’s hand and shaking it.

“I was beginning to wonder when Ei would finally manage to bring you over. He’s been talking about you so much recently that I feel like I already know you”

I don’t talk about him that much do I?” Nebuya questions. His father shrugs, leaning against the counter.

“You’re like your aunt, once you start talking it’s hard for you to stop”

“Hey! You’re the one who calls me, so if you have something to complain about, then don’t call” Nebuya defends. Akashi chuckles, and continues to observe the interactions between Nebuya and his parents, chiming into the conversation occasionally.

A little while later, Endo, Takata, Tsuji, and Amano finally arrive, and immediately make themselves at home. Once Mrs. Nebuya is finished cooking dinner, which consisted of a massive feast with enough food to feed a small army, everyone sits down wherever they can find room, be it at the table or in the living room, and eats their fill. While it was certainly different and far more chaotic than any meal he’s ever had before, being surrounded by so many people, conversations, jokes, laughs, stories, and delicious food, Akashi decides that this has to be the best meal he’s ever had in his entire life.

Chapter End Notes

Like I said in the last chapter, I had so much fun writing Nebuya's family. The older brothers are fucking hilarious (especially the twins in my opinion) Kyoya is tired of her 3 eldest sons bullshit, but it's ok because her baby came home, and Akin is like the kindest and most loving father on the face of the fucking planet (you haven't seen very much of him but don't worry there will be more of all the Nebuya fam soon). Also, remember how I wrote that Nebuya had a pitbull, WELL WE FINALLY GET TO MEET THE BABY LILA! I don't care what you think about pitbulls, they are the kindest, most loving, sweetest, and most adorable breed of dog, they are not mean and aggressive monsters. To be honest the reason why I gave Nebuya a pitbull for a dog instead of a lab or shiba inu, is because I feel like pitbulls and Nebuya have a lot in common in that people think they are big and mean and scary, when in reality they are gigantic dorks who are really sweet and nice and just want to shower their loved ones with unconditional love and support. So ya, that's all for this chapter, I hope you guys enjoyed it, let me know what you think of my Nebuya fam ocs in the comments, and as always I will see you all soon for chapter 33. (PS. the reason why the Nebuya's have
their japanese surname Nebuya (instead of a more Nigerian sounding one) is because when Akin and Kyoka got married, Akin changed his last name to Nebuya, because why the fuck not, it's 2018 and there's nothing wrong with a man taking his wife's surname.)
I’M BAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAACK!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“MOTHERFUCKER” Akashi yells angrily, as he is knocked downed by an opponent for the third time in this one match of Fortnite. The group had only just begun playing Fortnite about an hour ago, after they all helped clean up after dinner, and yet despite playing Fortnite on a semi-regular basis for a few weeks now, Akashi, like with every other video game he’s ever played, was still really bad at it.

“Sei’s down again” Tsuji says in a monotonous voice, killing the opponent who downed Akashi before moving on to go after the rest of his team.

Sinister knocked out Lordfuckwad with a pistol

Sinister knocked out Cabagepatch_bitch with a pistol

“I’ve got him” Takata says, dropping down next to Akashi and quickly putting up a four walled structure as protection before beginning to resurrect Akashi from his prone, nearly-dead state.

Sinister knocked out URMUM with a shotgun

Sinister shotgunned URMUM

Sinister eliminated Lordfuckwad with a pistol

“Wow, downed a third time in 5 minutes, one more time and you’ll break your own record Sei” Endo teases from her position on Nebuya’s bed.

Sinister finally eliminated Cabagepatch_bitch

“Like the dead girl has any room to talk” Akashi spits angrily, taking the bandages Takata threw down for him and healing himself to full health before exiting the safety of Takata’s structure, the border not far behind.
“Hey man I got headshot for 180 hp from 250 meters, there was nothing I could do about that” Endo shrugs her shoulders.

“And even though she might be dead, she’s still got 3 times as many kills as you do” Tsuji adds. Akashi deflates slightly, remembering his current score of a measly two kills, both of which he got because he technically stole them from Takata while assisting her in taking out a previous team.

“INCOMING ROCKET” Takata yells, diving out of the way just in time for the flying projectile to hit the wooden platform she just built, completely destroying it, and dealing Akashi, who hadn’t managed to dive out of the way in time, 95 hp of damage.

“Oh fuck me” Akashi laments, building up more wooden barriers and jumping frantically back and forth in a futile attempt to preserve his last 5 points of health while the enemy bombards him with a seemingly never ending stream of rockets.

“That team is eliminated. Border’s coming fast. Moving forward” Tsuji says, jumping out from behind her brick platform and running toward the direction of the safezone, Takata right on her heels.
“Hey Sei”

“What do you want Nebuya?” Akashi asks, trying and failing to snipe another opponent currently running away from the inward moving border of death.

“Might I recommend that you ‘git gud’?” the dark skinned boy says teasingly from his spot next to Endo on the bed, a playful smirk on his face.

“Fuck you Ei, you don’t know shit about my Fortnite skills!” Akashi fumed, firing off a round of bullets at the unsuspecting player.

TheAtomicLoser eliminated DeezNutz with a rifle

“I GOT A KILL! HA! IN YOUR FUCKING FACES” Akashi shouted excitedly.

“Hey Sei, I hate to interrupt your celebration… but the border’s right behind you, and you only have like 5 hp left” Tsuji comments as she shotguns another player to death.

“FUCK!” Akashi begins running as fast as his character will allow him, but the border is closing in fast, and he still has another 100 meters until he reaches the safe zone.

“Oh boy, I think he’s gonna die to the border” Amano pipes up from behind Akashi, watching his screen.

“No I’m not” Akashi argued, although he’s slowly but surely losing confidence in himself as the border draws closer and closer to his nearly dead character.

“6 players left” Tsuji announces.

“Come on you stupid piece of shit” Akashi hissed, all but mashing the run button on his laptop, silently begging his character to run faster.

“He’s not gonna make it” Amano says, getting up to go and sit behind Tsuji.
“No he might. He’s only got 20 meters left” Nebuya comments, watching Akashi’s perspective from Endo’s laptop.

“Come on come on come on come on, almost there.” Just as Akashi sees the light at the end of the tunnel, or the safe zone at the tunnel in this case, the dark and foreboding image of the border catches up to Akashi’s character, throwing him into the fatal danger of the storm.

“Oh no he’s in the storm” Nebuya says, trying to control his urge to burst out laughing.

“Is he gonna make it in time?” Endo wonders.

As Akashi runs through the storm, he can see his health begin to deplete.

5 hp…
4 hp…
3 hp…
2 hp…
1 hp…

The_Atomic_Loser was taken by the storm

And with that, the last of Akashi’s health, as well as his will to live, was completely eradicated.

“Sucks” Tsuji says flatly, while the rest of the group breaks out into a loud and boisterous laughter, as Akashi sits with his head in his hands, unsure of whether to be angry or in disbelief, that after nearly dying to three different people throughout the match, his demise was brought about by his own hubris, and that stupid purple border.

When Akashi finally lifts his head back up, a large sign saying #1 Victory Royale, fills his screen, indicating that Tsuji and Takata had won the squad match for them, as usual. Akashi groans in frustration.
“Next match, ready up” Tsuji commands, already back in the game lobby and readied for another match. Just as Akashi is about to exit back to the lobby and ready up for another painful match, a loud barking starts from the backyard. This confused Akashi, as Lila was already lying down on Nebuya’s lap, so if it wasn’t her then whose dog was barking?

“Oh shit, Dori wants to be let in” Nebuya says, attempting unsuccessfully to remove Lila from his lap.

“I’ll go do it. Someone take over for me” Akashi says, getting up from his spot on the floor and exiting the room before someone could stop him. As Akashi descends down the stairs to the first floor he sees a blurry figure zoom past the glass door outside and then zoom back a second later. The redhead cautiously opens the back door, keeping an eye out for something that might ram into him.

Peering out into the backyard, and with the help of the small lamp illuminating the porch, Akashi can mostly make out everything in the large grassy field. Toward the back left corner of the fenced in yard was a small play area, consisting of a sandbox with a lofted wooden “house” built above it, ladders to climb up and a slide to go down on, and a set of two swings, swaying calmly in the chilly breeze. The right corner of the yard appears to have been converted into a small garden, with a variety of different fruits and vegetables, fit to withstand the colder weather, growing within the protection of a wooden fence lined with metal wire, likely to keep any critters from getting at the produce. The rest of the yard was pretty much empty, leaving plenty of room to run around and play, or do whatever you wanted really.

The barking from Dori, one of the many animals in the Nebuya house that Akashi has yet to meet since coming here only a few hours previously, has stopped at the moment, and as far as Akashi can tell it doesn’t look like she’s even out here anymore.

“Dori” Akashi calls, his voice echoing into the night sky.

“No need to worry about her” the deep voice of Akin responds. Looking to his left along the porch, Akashi sees Akin sitting in a large swinging couch, a beer in one hand and a tennis ball in the other, an old greyhound sits patiently at his feet, her tail wagging.

“We were just playing” he says, holding up the tennis ball, before chucking it across the yard. Dori runs excitedly after it with incredible speed for a dog her age, catching the ball in her mouth, midair, and before Akashi can even process what has happened, Dori is already sat back down at Akin’s feet, depositing the ball into his open hand.
“Wow” Akashi manages after a moment. Akin chuckles.

“She’s a fast one, my girl is”

“I can see that” Akashi responds, closing the backdoor behind him and moving to get a closer look at the dog. Like the name ‘greyhound’ would suggest, Dori was a dark grey color, although she had white patches of fur along her stomach, chest, and neck, as well as one on the tip of her tail. Dori was a lot taller than Lila, her head reaching about the lower middle section of Akashi’s stomach while seated, while Lila barely reached his hip. On the other hand however, it was very clear that Dori was nowhere near as built as Lila, her long and slender frame, although the reason for her lightning fast speed, amounted to almost nothing strength wise, especially when compared to Lila’s broad shoulders and muscular legs.

As Akashi stands a few feet away from where Akin is sitting, he watches as the man continues to throw the ball across the yard, and Dori continues to chase after it, catching it flawlessly every time. After about the 5th throw however, instead of returning to Akin, Dori instead trots on over and plops herself in front of Akashi, spitting the ball at his feet, and looking at him expectantly. Akashi stares at the ball rolling at his feet for a moment, before casting a confused glance at Akin, who chuckles amused.

“I think she wants you to throw it this time” Akin offers, taking a swig from his beer. Akashi glances back down at the spit soaked ball in slight disgust, but bends down to pick it up anyways. Dori immediately perks up, and while she does not move from her seated position, her tail begins to thump loudly against the wood of the porch. Akashi chucks the tennis ball as hard as he can, sending it flying into the darkness of the night. Dori speeds after it, once again catching it in her mouth, and returning to Akashi for another throw.

“Dori” Akin calls, causing the greyhound to pick up her ball from the ground, and trop back over to her master. Akashi remains silent as Akin continues their game of fetch as though nothing had happened.

“Take a seat, kiddo” Akin instructs, motioning to the empty spot on the swinging couch next to him. Akashi does as he is told, and sits down, taking a moment to adjust to the unsteady sway of the metal couch. Akin turns to him, smiling.

“So, how’s life?” the man asks, surprising Akashi.

“Um… it’s fine, sir” Akashi responds politely, slightly confused.
“Oh come now, don’t be so formal, I’m hardly worth the effort” Akin chuckles, taking another swig from his beer bottle.

“Come on, tell me about yourself. I’ve only ever heard about you through word of mouth, and while I trust my son’s intuition I always like to hear what people have to say about themselves, especially from people as interesting as you.” Akashi is unsure of how to process the information Akin just told him. Never before had Akashi met an adult that wanted to get to know him on a more personal and even friendly level. Most adults were content with keeping their distance and making small talk, but he supposed that Akin wasn’t like most adults he was used to dealing with.

“Um, well, I’m 17 years old, I’m on the basketball team with your son, and I am also in Emi-sensei’s Intro art class” Akashi begins.

“Really? Are you enjoying art?” Akin asks, throwing the ball for Dori.

“Yes, very much so. Emi-sensei is an amazing teacher, and I’ve learned so much from her in such a short amount of time”

“I see. You know I’ve only met Miss Emi once before, at the beginning of the year, but everyone who’s ever had her sings nothing but high praises about her, and I can see why. She’s an incredible artist, and a very intelligent woman, you’d do well to have her as a reference for your future endeavors” Akin states. Akashi laughs halfheartedly.

“Yes, it would be helpful indeed, but unfortunately my future career does not hold much in the way of art” Akashi admits with a hint of disappointment that does not go unnoticed by the older man.

“Why not?” Akin asks, curiously.

“Oh well, it’s just that I’m going to be going to school for business so that I can take over my father’s position as the head of the family business when I am old enough”

“I see, and is that what you want to do?”

“Well, it will likely be very difficult to learn all of the skills necessary to run such a large
corporation like the one my father has but so long as I work hard I think I should-”

“That’s not what I asked you” Akin states, cutting Akashi off mid sentence. The red head turns and looks at Akin in confusion.

“I’m not concerned with whether or not you think you can do it, I’m asking you if it’s what you want to do” the man clarifies, his voice level and calm. Akashi simply stares at Akin, his mouth hangs open in confusion and disbelief as he tries to come up with an answer, the seemingly simple answer sending his mind reeling in a million different directions, producing more questions than answers.

“Well… I mean I guess but… you see it’s just… I don’t…I” Akashi stammered helplessly over his words. Did he want to take over his father’s position as head of the business when he was older? Did he have any other choice? There had never been any mention of a career outside of business so Akashi never really considered whether or not he wanted to do something else with his life other than continue the Akashi legacy. It would be nice if he could continue with art and perhaps make some kind of a career out of it, but would it actually work out? He already more or less had a very successful and lucrative job waiting for him once he got out of college, should he really jeopardize his chance at financial stability for the sake of taking a risk on art?

The questions that flew through Akashi’s mind left him speechless and confused, unsure of which thoughts were his or which one’s were the harsh and cutting words his father had ingrained in his brain since he was a young boy, telling him that this was the only thing he was good for, and anything less than this would mean complete and absolute failure.

“I… I don’t know” Akashi admits after a long moment of silence, his voice low and quiet, carrying a hint of shame. After a moment of awkward silence, Akashi jumps in surprise as a hand rests itself on the top of his head, ruffling gently through the strands of red hair.

“I wouldn’t worry so much about it if I were you” Akin begins, his hand maintaining a gentle, reassuring presence on his head. “You’re still very young and have your entire life ahead of you. No need to get worked up over something you can change later on, if you really want to”

Akashi stares, perplexed as to why a man he only met hours before was suddenly giving him life advice, but in a way, it was nice. When she was still alive, Akashi’s mother taught him that he should always be open to learning new things from different kinds of people, and Akin seemed like the kind of person who had many life experiences and teachings to share. Akashi couldn’t help but look forward to that.
“There you are” the distant sound of Nebuya’s voice calls, catching Akashi and Akin’s attention. “You’ve been gone for a while, I thought maybe you got lost. You’re not boring him to death with stories of your childhood are you dad?”

“No Ei I haven’t, but you know, as crazy as it sounds, there may be some people who find my stories interesting, rather than annoying like you and your brothers” Akin responds, setting his now empty beer bottle down on the table next to him.

“Hey I think your stories are cool, they just get a little old after the 20th time hearing them, and I can’t help but notice that “award winning” fish you caught with grandpa when you were 12 keeps getting bigger and bigger each time you tell the story” Nebuya smirked.

“Alright alright, that’s enough out of you. I won’t keep you here much longer Akashi, though I must thank you for indulging my inner psychologist” Akin thanks, and chuckles upon noticing Akashi’s confused expression.

“He’s a behavioral and analytical psychologist” Nebuya explains. “He’s been asking me and my bros cryptic questions and doing these weird exercises with us, in an attempt to “hack our brains” since before I could even talk.”

“And as a result I have forged a very strong and unbreakable bond of love and trust with my four beloved sons using tactical communication, I don’t see any problem with that.”

“You know, most parents can achieve a very similar result over a game of monopoly” Nebuya chides, but Akin merely shrugs.

“Eh, my way was more fun.” Nebuya smiles, rolling his eyes as his father opens up another bottle of beer and continues to throw the tennis ball for Dori.

“Well anyways, we’re still playing upstairs if you wanna come back up and watch” Nebuya says to Akashi, turning back toward the back door. Akashi gets up and follows the older boy, but before he enters the house he turns back to Akin.

“Um… Akin?” Akashi calls.

“Yes?” The redhead pauses for a moment, wondering what to say.
“Thank you for talking with me… it was really helpful and I really appreciate it.” Akin smiles, warm and bright as ever.

“It was my pleasure Akashi, and if you ever find that your dad is being an old cow, as we parents can sometimes be, my front door is always open”

“Thank you sir, I'll remember that.” And with that Akashi heads back inside to join his friends, with a warm and soft feeling in his chest.

Chapter End Notes

Can you tell that one of my favorite things is giving Akashi positive and loving adult figures to confide in and learn from? Because giving Akashi positive and loving adult figures to confide in and learn from is one of my favorite things about this story. Also AKIN IS A GOOD PAPA AND HE LOVES ALL HIS BOYS INCLUDING THIS STRANGE RED HAIRDED ONE (Kyoka is a good and loving mum too but she is just ever so slightly more sick of her son's bullshit than Akin is). I've been having some writers block lately, so chapters have been coming a lot slower than before. I know how I want the story to go and the timeline of events and such, it's just writing out dialogue and describing events and places has gotten a little bit harder as of recent, but I'm working through it and doing my best and also, I'm gonna try and make the chapters a lot longer and have more content in them so that this story won't end with 100+ chapters. Anyways thank you all so much for reading, comment down below and let me know what you think of the story so far, and as always, I will see you all soon for chapter 34!
The loud and obnoxious sound of pots banging together startled Akashi from his restful sleep, causing him to shoot up in a slight panic, before catching sight of two tall young men standing at the doorway to Nebuya’s room, smug grins plastered on their faces as they begin their wakeup call.

“Rise and shine kiddies” “It’s time to wake up” the twin brothers sing to the room of sleeping teenagers.

“Fuck off clones” Endo spits, rolling onto her stomach and covering her head with a pillow.

“Aww, come on Hitoka, the early bird catches the worm” Hayato purred, before yanking the blanket off of her.

“HEY GIVE THAT BACK YOU PIECE OF SHIT” she demanded, attempting to grab the blanket from the other boy, only for it to be swiped away and help above her head.

Akashi watches in confusion from his spot on Nebuya’s bed as the two twins continue to terrorise the other girls, before turning their attention to the still sleeping Nebuya next to Akashi. The two approach with mischievous grins on their face, causing Akashi to press himself as close to the wall as possible, not wanting to get pulled in to whatever they had in store for their younger brother. Genji moves forward, leering over Nebuya, who is completely submerged under the blankets save for the top of his head.

“Eeeeeikichiiii, it’s time to wake- EUGH ” the boy’s taunting is cut off by a choked sob and a pained expression as Nebuya’s fist shoots out from from underneath the blankets and makes direct and forceful contact with the center of Genji’s crotch. The boy falls to the floor flailing in pain as his twin stands their staring, and the rest of the girls break out in an amused laughter.

“Ooooooooooh fuck… that was a cheap shot you little shit” he groans in pain.
“Ya well you deserved it” Nebuya grumbles tiredly, peeking his head out from under the covers just enough to glare at his older brother before flopping it back down onto the pillow.

“That’s it, COME HERE” Genji yells, getting up from the floor and running to jump on top of Nebuya, Hayato right behind him, and Akashi barely manages to jump out of the way before a three-way wrestling match breaks out on Nebuya’s bed.

“Ow, stop it, get off me you fuckers” Nebuya demands as he thrashes wildly, trying to dislodge the two boys trying to pin him to the bed.

“Hey knock it off you jackasses” Tsuji snarls.

“Buzz off Kaori” “Ya we ain’t gonna stop until our lovely little brother learns how to respect his elders” “**Even if that means we gotta beat it into him**” the two boys spat simultaneously.

“**Moooooooooooom**” Nebuya’s loud scream echoes throughout the large room causing everyone to freeze. A moment of silence passes before the sound of light but fast footsteps shoots up the stairs leading to Nebuya’s room, and in that moment Nebuya Kyoka enters the room, her hands on her hips, and a harsh glare aimed at her three sons.

“How many times do I have to tell you two to stop picking on your brother and his friends and go **clean your room**?” Kyoka fumes, clearly displeased with the scene before her.

“But Mom, we were just helping wake Ei and his friends up for breakfast” Hayato defends.

“Ya, we were just trying to help” Genji adds. Mrs. Nebuya’s glare only intensifies as her expression turns from a frown to a scowl, and the twins glance at each other nervously.

“You have until the count of 5, to get down to your room, and start cleaning it up for tonight” she states firmly.

“Oh Mom, why do we gotta clean our room?”
“Ya it’s not like anybody’s gonna see it”

“We don’t wanna clean it’’

“Mooooooom”

“Alright we’re going” the twins finally relent, climbing off of Nebuya’s bed and turning toward the door. They attempt to go around their mother the best they can, and just barely manage to dodge out of the way when the woman takes a swipe at the two, sending them running down the stair with a couple yelps. Mrs. Nebuya let’s out a frustrated sigh as she turns to the rest of the group.

“Sorry about that, I’ve had them on cleaning duty since they woke up and they must have slipped away when I wasn’t looking” she apologizes.

“Why, are we having people over?” Nebuya asks, sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

“As a matter of fact we are” Mrs. Nebuya beams “that lovely art teacher of yours is coming over for dinner and some drinks later tonight, and so I figured with all the people already here we’d just make a party out of it”

Everyone murmurs in agreement and begins picking up the extra pillows and blankets Mrs. Nebuya gave them the night before as she walks away.
“Oh and Ei, while you’re at it, you could invite that Mibuchi boy over too.” Nebuya freezes and pales as she casts a knowing smile at her son before descending down the stairs. Nebuya’s face darkens with embarrassment as everyone else left in the room turns to him with mischievous grins on their faces.

“Hey Ei” Amano begins.

“I’m gonna stop you right there” Nebuya interjects.

“Come on, this is the perfect opportunity for you to get closer to Mibuchi” Endo pleads.

“Oh no, not here it isn’t. If you honestly think that I’m going to bring the guy I like anywhere near my family, you’ve got another think coming” Nebuya argues.

“Oh stop being over dramatic, your parents are super cool so what could go wrong?”

“What could go wrong? Oh I’ll give you a hint. It involves the three jackasses that I call brothers making a complete fool out of me in front of the guy I’ve been pining over since first year. Now I’ve only just managed to get on Mibuchi’s good side, and for as much as I still think this is a bad idea, I’m not about to let all the effort I’ve put into this so far come crashing down because I have assholes for brothers.”

“Well fuck you too, little brother” Masaru deadpans from the entrance to Nebuya’s room, dressed in a pair of loose sweatpants and a t-shirt.

“What do you want?” Nebuya grumbled.

“Oh nothing in particular. I couldn’t help but overhear that your little uh… friend, might be coming over” Masaru smirks.

“Ya right, in your dreams maybe. It would just be so perfect for you and the two idiots to terrorize me by making a complete ass out of me in front of the guy I like now wouldn’t it” Nebuya snipped angrily. Masaru blinks in surprise.
“Hey come on bro, I’m just teasin’. You know I wouldn’t actually let those two do anything bad around your crush, right?” Nebuya grumbles something under his breath, but otherwise makes no response. Everyone else turns to Masaru in confusion, but the man simply nods his head toward the door, indicating that he would like to speak with his brother in private. Everyone complies and exits the room.

“What was that all about?” Akashi asks as they reach the ground floor of the Nebuya house.

“Um, it’s kind of hard to explain, especially since you don’t know the Nebuya’s like we do, but basically, as a result of being the youngest brother, Ei kind of takes the brunt of the teasing and other forms of “brotherly love” from his older brothers a lot” Amano begins.

“Ya, I kind of figured that out by now” Akashi responds.

“Well a lot of the time it seems like it’s always Genji, Hayato, and Masaru ganging up and picking on Ei, but Ei and Masaru are actually really close, and get along a lot better with each other than they do with the twins. If anything, Masaru’s the one who defends Ei when the twins go too far, and has always been there when Ei needs someone to calm him down or talk some sense into him” Amano continues.

“Ok, so what does that mean in this situation? I mean I know Masaru was only teasing, but it seemed like it really upset Nebuya” Akashi says.

“That’s just how he is. When Ei feels threatened he either shuts down completely and let things happen or lashes out” Tsuji chimes in.

“Ya he’s been like that for as long as we’ve known him, so the best thing to do is to just let Masaru talk to him” Takata states. Akashi hums in understanding as they approach the kitchen for some breakfast.

A few moments later, the two brothers finally descend the stairs, Nebuya appears to have calmed down significantly, and Masaru has a very proud expression on his face. No one says anything as they grab their own food and head to the table to join the others. A few moments of silence pass before Nebuya sighs and finally speaks.

“Reo and his friends are coming at 7.” The group breaks out in excited cheers as let's them in on the exciting news.
“You’re all welcome” Masaru says, grinning proudly despite the glare his younger brother shot him.

“Why do I bother with any of you?” Nebuya asks to no one in particular.

“Because you love us and you’re not getting rid of us anytime soon, and you know it” Amano stated bluntly. Nebuya didn’t bother with a response, shoving a heaping spoonful of food into his mouth, but not disagreeing either. Masaru smiled fondly at his younger brother before wrapping an arm around his shoulder and kissing the top of his head, ruffling the short hairs. From their the group broke out into cheerful laughter and conversation as they finished their food, and once everyone finished, they set out helping clean the house for the incoming party.

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At 6:30 that night, a loud knock on the door signals the arrival of Emi-sensei, dressed in her usual jeans, t-shirt, flannel, and hat, with a large, oversized sweatshirt thrown over it to combat the cold.

“Hello my little chicklets” the young woman greets excitedly as she enters the living room, a bright and warm smile on her face as always. Before he can properly greet their teacher however, Akashi’s attention is pulled to another woman he’s never seen before, who is toeing her shoes off at the door.

“Sensei, who is that” Akashi asks, pointing to the tall woman with hazel eyes, dark brown shoulder length hair, and warm nutmeg colored skin. Emi-sensei looks at Akashi in confusion before a huge smile lights up her face, and she scurries over to the woman, grabbing her by the arm and pulling her over to Akashi, her eyes lit up like stars.

“Akashi, I’d like to introduce you to my girlfriend Bhatt Navya, Navya this is Akashi Seijuro, the boy in my intro class I was telling you about.”

“Hello Ms. Bhatt” Akashi says, bowing politely.

“Oh please no need for last names, Navya is fine. It’s a pleasure to finally meet you Akashi. Emi has told me so much about you, I can’t believe I finally get to put a face to all the wonderful things I’ve heard” the tall woman says, smiling kindly at Akashi.
“Thank you, I’m glad I was able to make a good impression.” Akashi responds.

“Emi, did you bring the good stuff with you?” Endo calls from the kitchen, cutting the conversation off.

“Oh you know I did” Emi-sensei says mischievously, opening her backpack and pulling a large bottle of vodka from it.

“Yeeeeeees, I call first dibs” Amano cheers, pushing and shoving as the others try to get their hands on the bottle of alcohol.

“Excuse me, but as far as I’m aware you are all underage and as an adult allowing a group of minors to take “first dibs” at anything would be seriously inappropriate” Kyoya says sternly, her hands on her hips. Everyone else exchanges disappointed looks.

“You have to let the adults drink first so we can be sure it’s of good quality” she chirps, plucking the now opened bottle from Emi-sensei’s hands and pouring a healthy glass for herself before handing it to Akashi, who stares unsure of what he should do. It wasn’t like Akashi had never had alcohol before. At parties or events his father would often allow him to have a small glass of wine along with the other children his age as a way to expose him to alcohol in short controlled bursts, but he’d never had or even thought of having anything as strong as vodka.

“Come on Sei, either pour yourself a shot or pass it along” Tsuji nags, her shot glass ready.

Akashi casts a glance at Kyoka and Akin, looking for some sign of approval that he was, in fact, allowed to have some.

“I won’t tell if you won’t” Akin says, shrugging his shoulders and taking a swig from a bottle of beer, which didn’t make him feel any better about the whole situation.

“You can have some if you want to give it a try, but don’t feel pressured to if you don’t want to” Emi-sensei says from her spot behind Akashi. The boy thinks for a moment, before finally relenting and pouring the liquid into the shot glass he’d been handed, filling it up only halfway before handing it off to someone else.
Looking down at his drink Akashi swirled the clear liquid, trying to discern whether he should actually drink the glasses contents. It didn’t look too bad, in fact one could probably mistake it for water if they weren’t paying attention, but upon raising the glass to his nose he was met with the sudden reminder that, with a distinct aroma of rubbing alcohol and artificial strawberry flavoring emanating from the liquid, this was definitely NOT water.

“Here, take this.” Akashi was pulled from his pensive state by Nebuya, who was handing him a can of soda.

“What’s this for?” the boy asked.

“It’s something to wash the alcohol down with. The flavor and burn of the alcohol can be kind of intense if you’re not used to it, so having a drink to help it go down makes it a little more bearable” Nebuya explains. Akashi nods in understanding before taking the soda and opening it, placing it on the counter next to him for safe keeping.

“Alright guys, who wants to countdown the round?” Emi-sensei asks, standing next to Tsuji with a full shot glass in her hand.

“Wait, what do you mean by ‘counting down the round’?” Akashi asks in confusion.

“It just means that someone is gonna count down from 3 and we’re all gonna shoot our drinks when the person counting says ‘drink’;” Takata explains.

“Oh ok, well in that case, can I try?” Akashi asks.

“Go for it kiddo” Emi-sensei encourages. Everyone readies their drinks and looks expectantly at Akashi.

“Um, ok… 3… 2… 1… Drink.” At ‘drink’ everyone tilts their heads back and empties their glasses. Akashi follows suit, and once the pungent liquid touches his tongue, he has to resist the urge to spit it back out as the alcohol burns the back of his throat and the smell fills his sinuses, almost overwhelming him completely. Once the drink has successfully been swallowed Akashi reaches for the soda can next to him, desperate to get the overwhelming taste out of his mouth before he chokes on it. Nebuya laughs at him.
“How’d it go Sei? Did you like it?” the boy asks, seemingly unaffected by the drink. Damn him.

“It wasn’t terrible, but it definitely was… a lot” Akashi manages. Nebuya chuckles.

“Ya that’s how it is when you try most alcohols. It starts out being really overwhelming, but the more you drink the more used to it you get, and the next thing you know it’s your favorite drink”

“Do you speak from experience?” Akashi questions curiously.

“Maaaaaaybe” Nebuya hints, pouring himself another shot before throwing it back with ease. “If you can’t already tell my parents are very liberal when it comes to alcohol”

“I draw the line at getting drunk though, I will not be dealing with a bunch of drunk teenagers, so if you feel like you’re getting tipsy, stop” Kyoka interjects from the couch next to Akin.

“Don’t worry Mom, we’re not planning on getting hammered, we’re just having some fun with Ei and his little friends” Masaru defends, snatching the bottle from his brother and pouring himself a shot.

A few moments later, the doorbell rings.

“I’ll get it” Nebuya says, putting his glass down and trotting over to the door, opening it to reveal Mibuchi, Haga, Nakamoto, Yashino, and Ono. Nebuya stands in silence, staring at Mibuchi.

“Hi, um… I hope we’re not late” Mibuchi begins, smiling at Nebuya, who finally returns to reality.

“No no, uh, you’re actually right on time, we were just about to start eating soon so… come on in” he says, stepping out of the way and allowing the five teens to enter and toe their shoes off.

“Hello everyone, I’m so glad you could make it. My name is Nebuya Kyoka, I’m Eikichi’s mom” Kyoka says, getting up from the couch to greet the new arrivals.

“Thank you for inviting us, I was a little worried when Nebuya said we could all come over for
dinner that we’d be intruding, but I really appreciate it. Oh, and I’m Mibuchi Reo by the way, Ei-chan and I are on the basketball team together” Mibuchi says.

“We know who you are” Akin comments out loud, casting a shit eating grin at Nebuya, who glares threateningly back at his father. Mibuchi and the four girls stiffen slightly at the sight of Akin, who stands and smiles at them.

“Oh that’s just my husband Akin. He’s quite the jokester so don’t you pay any attention to him” Kyoka says. Mibuchi is the first to speak.

“Well, it’s a pleasure to meet you sir.” Mibuchi extends a hand and Akin takes it, shaking it lightly.

“Feeling’s mutual. Would you like a drink?” Akin asks, pointing to where Akashi, Amano, Endo, Takata, and Tsuji were standing.

“Oh um, perhaps a bit later” Nakamoto says, glancing at the nearly empty bottle of vodka on the kitchen counter.

“Well, no need to be so stiff, please come in, make yourselves at home” Kyoka says kindly, returning to her spot on the couch next to Akin. An awkward silence falls on the group as mingle. Nebuya and Mibuchi break off and are having their own little conversation in the kitchen, allowing the rest of the teens to congregate by the living room, out of their earshot.

“Anybody got any ideas on how we can take advantage of this wonderful opportunity?” Amano asks.

“Nothing specific, did you guys think of anything?” asks Ono.

“No, nothing substantial” Endo sighs.

“Ideally we’d want to get them alone together, but I’m not sure how we would pull something like that off without them getting suspicious, not to mention that Mibuchi brought us for the express purpose of not having to be by himself” Haga says.
“What are we talking about?” The group jumps at Emi-sensei, who had snuck up behind them.

“For fucks sake Emi, you scared the shit out of us” Endo scolds, causing the young woman to laugh.

“Sorry sorry, I just couldn’t help but notice you guys whispering with each other while tweedle dee and tweedle dumb are over there. Figured you guys might be planning something” she explains.

“Well, you aren’t wrong but we can’t think of anything good” Takata murmured.

“Do you have any ideas Sensei?” Ono asks curiously. Emi-sensei thinks for a moment.

“Well, you could go for something like 7 minutes in heaven or spin the bottle, or…”

“Absolutely not” the group states in unison.

“Well then I don’t think I’m going to be of much help, ‘cuz that’s all I got” Emi-sensei shrugs, walking back to sit with the adults.

“Back to square one it is then” Tsuji grunts. The group falls into a contemplative silence, but it is soon broken by the sound of a high pitched shriek.

“Oh my gosh, you’re so CUTE” Mibuchi squeals at a photo in his hands, Nebuya stands behind him, his cheeks darkened in embarrassment but a big goofy smile spread across his lips.

“Cute? What’s cute Mibuchi?” Ono asks curiously, skipping over to her friend, the rest of the group follows. Mibuchi turns the picture frame in his hands to show the other teens, and in the frame is an image of a tiny baby, sound asleep, swaddled in a white blanket with a little hat on their head, a tube runs up their face and enters their nose, likely supplying oxygen to the child.

“Nebuya is that you? You’re so itty bitty” Ono coes excited.

“Yes but that’s a little small even for a baby. Were you prematurely born, Nebuya” Haga asks.
“Ya, by 7 weeks I think. It wasn’t that big of a deal, I made it out alright obviously, but being born that small can cause some lasting health issues”

“Like what?” Mibuchi asks, his voice laced with concern.

“For me it was mostly cardiovascular stuff. I spent the first five years of my life in and out of hospitals because my lungs and throat would close at random times and my heart wasn’t pumping enough blood throughout my body” he explains. “Mom tells me that things got pretty bad before they got better, so I guess I should be pretty glad that I was such a stubborn little shit, or else I might not be here”

Nebuya laughs, obviously making a joke of the situation, but upon noticing the concerned glances between Akashi, Mibuchi, and the girls, he stiffens and clears his throat.

“Well, I don’t have any of those issues anymore because of all the treatment I went through when I was really little, so everything’s fine now” he says, trying to unsuccessfully remedy the situation.

“Food’s ready” Kyoka calls from the kitchen, sending everyone into a flurry as they try to get some food.

The rest of the evening is spent mingling, eating Kyoka’s delicious cooking, and indulging in the remainder of the alcohol that Emi-sensei brought with her. By the time 11 o’clock rolled around, everyone was full, tired, and ready to call it a night, and since Mibuchi, Haga, Ono, Tashino, and Nakano had taken a hard pass on the alcohol, they were safe to drive back to campus.

“Thank you all so much for coming” Kyoka says as Mibuchi and his friends head out the door.

“Thank you for having us Mrs. Nebuya, it was a lot of fun” Mibuchi thanks, waving the remainder of the party goodbye as they exit the house, Nebuya walking them out to their car. As soon as the front door closes, everyone save for Kyoka, Akin, and Navya sprints up the stairs to Nebuya’s room as fast as they can, to the window that looks out on the driveway where Nebuya and Mibuchi are standing.

“OW, Kaori, you stepped on my foot”
“Sei duck down I can’t see past your fat head”

“Masaru quit breathing down my neck”

“Who let the twins in here?”

“All of you shut the fuck up” Emi-sensei demanded, silencing the group. They all turn their
attention back to the window, as they watch the conversation down below unfold. Haga,
Nakamoto, Ono, and Yashino were nowhere in sight, likely sitting in the car, so the only people
visible from their vantage point were Nebuya and Mibuchi, having a conversation none of them
could here.

“What do you think they’re saying?” Takata asked, peering over Akashi’s shoulder.

“Who knows, they’re too far away to hear anything even if we opened the window and it’s so dark
outside that we can’t see their faces” Emi-sensei replies.

“You think they’ll start making out?” the twins ask, earning a pointed glare and a sharp smack
to the back of the head from Masaru.

“OW, what?” they whine.

“Just shut up you two, before we beat the shit out of you” Tsuji snapped. The two boys scowled at
the threat, but made no further attempts to speak.

Several moments pass as the group continues to silently observe the two boys converse in the
driveway, hoping something will happen. Akashi sighs in mild discouragement as the conversation
seems to wrap up and Nebuya waves to Mibuchi before beginning to walk back toward the house.
Before he can get very far however, Mibuchi takes the opportunity to grab the larger man by the
wrist and plant a kiss to his cheek. Everyone who had been watching the exchange from Nebuya’s
window freezes in utter shock and disbelief as they watch Mibuchi pull away before skittering back
to his car, sending a little smile and a wave to Nebuya before getting into the car, pulling out of the
driveway, and disappearing down the road.

“Did you guys see what I just saw?” Amano asks in disbelief, grinning from ear to ear, as Takata
and Endo run around the room squealing in delight.
“**This is boring, we’re out of here**” Hayato and Genji state, leaving the room. Still looking out the window, Akashi can see that Nebuya is still standing in the driveway, frozen in the spot where Mibuchi kissed him. A few moments later he finally moves and begins to stiffly make his way back toward the house.

“He’s coming back” the redhead announces, and everyone scrambles to look natural as Nebuya’s footsteps can be heard climbing the stairs to his bedroom. The boy enters the room with a stunned and bewildered expression, as though he still can’t believe what just happened, before throwing himself dramatically to the floor with a loud thud, causing everyone else in the room to begin laughing.

“How’d it go Ei” Endo prompts.

“Guys! That’s it. I’m done. I can’t do this. I’m not worthy. **He’s too perfect for me**” Nebuya burst out, an act that only prompted more laughter from the others.

“Aw, don’t worry Ei-chan, I thought Navya was way out of my league before we started dating, but it turns out that I was exactly her type. Just remember that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder” Emi-sensei says, patting her student on the head before heading downstairs to rejoin the adults, with Masaru right behind her.

The next few hours were spent talking and teasing Nebuya about what he should do next to finally “make his move” on Mibuchi, which resulted in Nebuya tackling everyone in an attempt to get them all to shut up. Despite how crazy it was here at the Nebuya household, Kyoka and Akin were such kind and lovely people, Masaru was a cool guy to be around, and while the twins were still an enigma to Akashi, they were pretty hilarious, especially when they were getting on their mother’s nerves. All in all, Akashi was glad that he agreed to come and have such a good time with all of his friends, and hoped that he would be able to come back again soon. Now all that remained was to make sure his father didn’t find out about any of this.

Chapter End Notes

So this chapter is a lot longer than a lot of my previous chapters, and that's because I really want to try and shove as much content into each chapter as possible so this story doesn't end up being like 200 chapters by the time I finish it, but at the same time I'm slightly worried that, as a result of trying to pack a lot of content into one chapter, they don't flow as nicely as they used to. So I'm kind of stuck between have lots of shorter chapters, or fewer longer chapters. IDK I'll figure some thing out. Anyways, I hope you all enjoyed everything this chapter had to offer, especially the little kiss I threw in
their °¬°  I really am trying to milk this as much as possible. Originally I just had it where mibuchi left and they hugged or something, but I figured since Mibuchi already knows that Nebuya likes him he'd be a bit more forward and take charge and stuff so ya, I had him give Ei-chan a little peck on the cheek, which may not seem like a lot but hey, it's progress. Anyways thank you all so much for reading and staying with me despite the long waits between uploads. The school year is beginning to wind down so I have a bit more time to write and I think writing this chapter got me out of my writers block a little bit, so I'll try to get a new chapter out within the next week or so. Thank so much for all your support, leave a comment and let me know what you thought of this chapter, and I'll see you all soon for chapter 35!!!
Chapter Notes

I LIVE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They did it.

One year after the Rakuzan Basketball Club faced their first defeat at the hands of Seirin Basketball Club, they returned, stronger and more unified than ever before, and reclaimed their title as the strongest team in all of Japan, against the very team who took it away from them the year before. The battle had not been an easy one, in fact it was an even more difficult and hardfought one than last year’s, with both Rakuzan and Seirin having grown and improved themselves in various ways, each team having new tricks and skills at their disposal.

In the end however, it was Akashi and his fellow team members who reigned victorious, and as the basketball made its final descent into the opposing teams net and the final timer rings throughout the stadium. Everything goes silent for Akashi and even time seems to slow as Akashi stands, rooted in the exact spot where he shot the final basket, unsure if everything around him is reality, or part of some twisted dream his mind is torturing him with.

In that moment, a great weight seems to have lifted itself off of Akashi’s chest, and the room begins to spin as he staggers back a few steps, trying to gather his wits. Just as Akashi begins to turn to face his teammates, a flash of yellow passes before his eyes, before he is roughly tacked to the ground by Hayama, landing in a heap as more of his teammates begin to thrown themselves on top of the now massive dog pile. Time and space to resume their normal functions, and Akashi finds himself nearly overwhelmed as the noise and flurry of movement and colors fills his senses, dulled only slightly by the massive weight and intense heat radiating off the pile of bodies that’s currently sitting on his chest.

Akashi feels a few streak of tears fall down his face, one then two, then five, then ten, and then before he can even stop himself, Akashi is crying, tears of joy or sadness or pain or maybe all three drench his face as he lies on the hardwood floor of the stadium. If anyone noticed Akashi’s moment of emotional vulnerability no one brings attention to it, especially since they wouldn’t have much room to talk themselves. Hayama’s face had gone completely red and his voice nearly hoarse from screaming so loud, Mibuchi was trying, and failing, to hide his own tears behind his hands, Nebuya was laughing so hard that he looked like he might be sick, and the rest of the Rakuzan team, in a rare moment of childish joy and glee, were running around with their hands in the air, stupidly large grins on their faces.
A few moments later, everyone manages to compose themselves enough to line up at center court, thanking the other team for a good match, before turning to thank the audience for watching. Akashi turns back toward the Seirin basketball team, searching the small crowd of faces, some new, some familiar, before his eyes settle on a certain blue haired young man. Kuroko Tetsuya, the very boy who had turned his world upside down the moment they met, and again last year when he handed Akashi his first true defeat. The boy’s face held disappointment, that much was to be expected, but it also held determination, an unyielding strength that Akashi had failed to notice during their middle school years, which was likely the catalyst for his downfall. The boy in question turned toward Akashi, and the two held eye contact for a moment, before Kuroko smiled at him, a knowing smile that told Akashi that he had best stay on his toes if he wanted to keep his victory streak, and Akashi couldn’t help but smile back at him.

The two exchanged no words. They didn’t have to. Each knew of the promise they had made, of the challenge they had set, and they would fight to the bitter end everytime to ensure that they were the ones who stood on top at the very end. As Akashi turned and walked away from his former teammate, he looked forward onto the faces of his current teammates, beckoning him to join them, and for the first time in his whole life, Akashi ran to catch up with them, and bask in the glory of their victory.

“HAYAMA KOUTARO, YOU ARE TO CHANGE YOUR DIRTY UNDERWEAR THIS INSTANT, DO YOU HEAR ME? THAT IS ABSOLUTELY DISGUSTING” Mibuchi squawks angrily at his teammate, who is very discreetly trying to put back on the underwear he was wearing during the match.

“Eh, but Reo-nee this is the only pair of underwear I have. I forgot my other clean pair at home” the blonde boy complained.

“I don’t care, go without if you have to but do NOT put your dirty, sweaty, and disgusting underwear back on. Or do you want a UTI?”

“UUUUUUGH! Fine.” Akashi chuckled at his teammate’s banter as he searched through his bag for a spare change of clothes and a towel so he could go shower and change out of his uncomfortably sweaty uniform. Walking across the locker room toward the showers, Akashi couldn’t help but notice an uncomfortable, borderline painful, tightness in his right ankle. As he walked into the shower and closed the curtain behind him, Akashi put down his clean clothes, towel, and his toiletries, and began to carefully take off his right shoe. Everything seemed fine as he untied his laces, but the second he attempted to wiggle his foot out of the shoe, a sharp, painful sensation shot up his leg, causing Akashi to curse and fall backward, landing flat on his ass.

For a moment, Akashi simply sat on the ground, contemplating what he should do, the painful
throbbing sensation that emanated from his ankle made him hesitant to touch it any more. Despite that, Akashi reaches forward and carefully peels the shoe and sock off his foot, trying his hardest not to jostle his tender ankle. The usually pale flesh is colored a unsettlingly deep purple with splotches of yellow and green along the edges and the muscles underneath have also swollen considerably on either side, long story short, Akashi is definitely not walking out of here.

Standing up as best he can without putting any pressure on his swollen ankle, Akashi somehow manages to undress, shower, and then redress himself, though now he has to figure out how he’s going to make his way back toward his bag without agitating his ankle further, the adrenaline from the match that was masking the pain from his injured foot having long worn off. After a few moment of deliberating with himself, Akashi sighs, seeing no other option before him than to ask for some help.

“Mibuchi” Akashi calls toward the main locker area. A few seconds later Mibuchi peeks his head into the shower area.

“Yes?” he calls back.

“Can you come here for a moment?” Akashi asks. He can hear the pitter patter of feet against the tile floor as Mibuchi walks closer.

“What is it?” the raven-haired boy asks.

“Do you remember during the third quarter when I slipped and fell into that row of chairs?”

“Yes?”

“Well…” Akashi hesitates for a moment before finally speaking “I think I might have twisted my ankle because of that.”

An audible gasp can be heard before Mibuchi all but rips the shower curtain open, making Akashi thankful that he dressed himself before calling Mibuchi over.

“Oh goodness, that looks terrible” Mibuchi says, bending down to further inspect the swollen ankle. Akashi winces as he gently prods at the tender, bruised flesh.
“Well it’s definitely sprained but with the amount of swelling and bruising it’s possible that the ankle bone suffered damage as well” Mibuchi states, standing up. Akashi groans.

“I was afraid of that” he admits solemnly. Mibuchi looks at him nervously for a moment before casting a gaze back toward the locker room, the sound of players packing up and heading toward the bus could be heard from where the two were standing.

“Wait right here, I’m going to go get Ei-chan. He’ll probably do a better job of helping you get around until we get you to the nurses station” Mibuchi says, before hurrying back toward the locker room. True to his word, Mibuchi returns with Nebuya, who looks at Akashi sympathetically, as the red-head stands, slumped over against the shower wall, visibly in pain.

“Hey, how’s it going?” Nebuya greets.

“My ankle hurts” Akashi responds, glancing down at his injured foot. Nebuya chuckles.

“I figure it must. What do you say about getting out of the shower and heading over to the nurse’s station before something happens to make it worse?”

“I suppose I’m not in much of a position to argue given my current situation now am I?” Akashi shrugs.

“No, I was just gauging how difficult you were gonna try and make this, but you seem like you’re in the cooperative mood right now so I’ll take what I can get” Nebuya says.

“Thanks…?” Akashi responds, unsure of how to interpret Nebuya’s words.

“Don’t think too hard on it. Arms up” Nebuya commands. Akashi does as he is told and lifts his arms into the air, allowing Nebuya to wrap his arms around Akashi’s back and legs and lift him up, carrying him toward the locker room. Thankfully most of the team had filed out of the locker room by the time Nebuya walks out of the showers, Akashi in arms, and gently places the injured boy on the benches, before heading over to his locker to gather his own things.

“I’m going to go tell coach about the situation, I’ll be back in a minute” Mibuchi says, throwing his
jacket on as he exits the room. Akashi sighs, looking dejectedly down at his still throbbing ankle. In a way, it seemed like an appropriate form of karma that his first big victory after last year’s crushing defeat would be made bittersweet by way of self-injury, although if Akashi had the power to choose how he received such an injury, he would have at least liked to have been able to walk out of the situation on his own, but alas, karma’s a bitch.

“Woah Akashi, what happened to your foot? Man that looks like a real nasty injury” Hayama states loudly, moving forward with his hand reaching out to touch the bruised flesh of his captain’s ankle.

“Please don’t touch it” Akashi panics, flinching away from Hayama’s sticky fingers. The blonde looks at his captain with a mixture of confusion and worry, having never seen him in such a panicked and desperate state.

“It’s uh… still a little tender at the moment, and I would just prefer not to do anything to agitate it” Akashi explains, more calmly this time, and while Hayama continues his curious inspection of Akashi’s ankle, he does retract his hands and fold his arms over his chest in a silent promise to keep his hands to himself, which Akashi is very thankful for.

A few moments later, Mibuchi returns to the locker room with both coach Shirogane as well as one of the medical staff, who immediately begins inspecting and treating Akashi’s ankle. Once the medic is finished examining and then binding the injury, he stands and turns his attention back to coach Shirogane.

“Well, I can say with absolute certainty that the bone isn’t broken” everyone breathes a sigh of relief at the spot of good news, “however the amount of bruising and swelling is a cause for concern, and while I am not at liberty to mandate this, I will say that I highly recommend that you see a doctor and get an exam of your leg as quickly as possible, as there could be some pretty significant ligament damage which, if left untreated, could lead to some serious chronic issues in the future.”

And with that, the medic packs up his bag of supplies and exits the locker room, leaving Akashi and his teammates in a tense silence.

Akashi’s heart drops at the medic’s prognosis. Chronic issues? Just from one little sprain? He had never injured himself like this before, could one sprained ankle really put his career as a basketball player in jeopardy. The mere thought of Akashi having to retire from basketball for the rest of his life after he just redeemed himself from his previous failure made him sick to his stomach.

“So what now?” Mibuchi asks, his voice laced with concern.
“Well, obviously the best course of action would be to get Akashi to a hospital so he can get his ankle examined, but unfortunately with lack of transportation and a bus full of players that need to be brought back to campus before curfew I’m not sure how that’s going to be possible tonight” Coach Shirogane says, rubbing a hand along his face, unsure of what to do.

“What if we just drive him there ourselves?” Hayama asks, as though it were the most obvious solution in the world.

“With what vehicle?” Mibuchi asks sarcastically.

“Ya Ko, my car is all the way back at campus, and we don’t know anyone else who’d be available to take us to the hospital this late at night” Nebuya chimes in.

“Well what about my boyfriend?”

“Ko-chan we can’t just go and ask your- wait what?” Mibuchi cuts himself off, turning to Hayama in confusion.

“My boyfriend came to watch the game and support us. I was planning on inviting him to come to dinner with us after the match but since Akashi is injured he could just drive us to the hospital”

“Hold on a second” Akashi interjects, causing everyone to turn to him.

“As much as I appreciate everyone trying to help me, I assure you that I don’t need to go to the hospital”

“Uh, yes. You do, Sei-chan” Mibuchi says.

“Mibuchi it’s just a sprain, it’s nothing to get worked up about”

“Oh cut the shit Akashi, just look at your ankle, it keeps turning a darker shade of purple with every minute that passes. You’re going to the hospital” Nebuya states firmly, glaring at Akashi
with a look that screamed ‘shut the hell up and do as you’re told before I knock you out of
equilibrium’.

“But-“

“NO” Nebuya and Mibuchi snap, and Akashi sighs and rolls his eyes but remains silent, simply
accepting that the situation was now far out of his control.

After agreeing that taking Akashi to the hospital was the best course of action, Coach Shirogane
departs from the venue, still responsible for taking the rest of the basketball team home for the
evening, leaving Nebuya, Mibuchi, and Hayama behind to look after Akashi. Hayama is sent to get
his boyfriend so that they can begin making their way toward the closest hospital before it gets too
late, and after a few moments Hayama finally returns along with a tall and gangly individual, with
dark brown hair and green eyes who Akashi assumes must be Hayama’s boyfriend. He is dressed
rather androgynously, wearing a red beanie cap, a black sweatshirt, grey jeans, and black high top
sneakers, and if it weren’t for the fact that Hayama had told him that he were a man, he might have
had a difficult time discerning whether the individual was male or female

“Hello” the young man greets shyly from behind Hayama.

“Everyone, this is Miyazaki Maki, the love of my life, my one true love, my shining star whom I
would die-“

“Ok we get it, you’re in love, don’t need to go spelling it out for us” Nebuya complains. Akashi
raises an eyebrow at the larger male.

‘Like you have any room to judge’ he thinks to himself.

“Well it’s a pleasure to finally meet you Miyazaki. Ko-chan has told us so much about you”
Mibuchi says. Miyazaki deflates slightly.

“Oh dear”

“What do you mean ‘oh dear’” Hayama squawks at Miyazaki “I’ve said nothing but lovely things
about you how dare you have such little faith in me.”
Miyazaki laughs as Hayama yells indignantly at him, and Akashi can’t help but chuckle at the display. He had heard about Hayama’s boyfriend before, in fact there were times in which Hayama refused to shut up about how amazing and wonderful he thought the other was. While it was no secret that Hayama was a raging pansexual who seemed to have the hots out for a new person every single week, he was surprisingly loyal to his partner, making Akashi wonder if perhaps his constant swooning over other people was done for the sake of humor rather than actual attraction.

Akashi is pulled from his thoughts by Nebuya, who places a hand on his shoulder to indicate that it’s time to go.

“Is it absolutely necessary for you to carry me like this?” Akashi asks, as Nebuya carries him bridal style up a set of stairs and out the door of the venue.

“You want to walk yourself?” Nebuya asks. Akashi takes a nervous glance down at his bound ankle, which still throbs painfully at the slightest jostle.

“Well there you go. There’s your answer” he responds with a smile.

The group made their way over to Miyazaki’s car, and somehow manage to cram themselves, somewhat comfortably, into the front and back seats of the four sour sedan. Once everyone is situated, Miyazaki turns on the ignition of the car, sets it into drive, and the five teens begin the drive to the nearest hospital.

Chapter End Notes

Ok... so... wow... it’s been a hot minute since I’ve updated this story, and I honestly don’t even have that good of an excuse as to why I haven’t uploaded, other than that writers block is a FUCKING BITCH. Anyways I apologize for being away for so long, but I really do intend on finishing this story, I’m just not sure how long that is going to take at the moment. I’m going to try and get back into some kind of groove where I write chapters throughout the week and then hopefully put out at least one every 1-2 weeks, just so that the story keeps progressing, because I feel like the story is finally starting to wind down a little bit. I still have a lot of content that I would like to fit in before I officially end the story, but as of right now I’d say that this fic is probably 70 - 75% finished as of this chapter coming out. There are still a few major plot points I would like to touch upon but I do realize that I can’t fit everything into this story, and so if something has to go so that I can keep writing and keep updating for you guys then so be it. Anyways thank you guys so much for being so patient with me, I know it was probably a pain to have to wait so long for this chapter but I really
hope that you guys enjoyed it. Let me know what you think in the comments below and as always I will see you all soon for chapter 36. Bye!
The drive to Tokyo Metropolitan Children’s Hospital was rather awkward, if only because the only conversing that took place was between Miyazaki and Hayama, who seemed to be incapable of agreeing on the best way to go in order to get to the hospital.

Once the group finally managed to get to the hospital, Hayama and Miyazaki dropped Akashi, Nebuya, and Mibuchi off at the emergency room, and went off to find parking. As the three walked through the automatic doors of the hospital, Akashi can’t help but to shield his eyes from the bright, almost blinding lights that lit up the large room. The inside of the emergency room was rather spacious, with a few rows of soft chairs lined in the center of the waiting room, a small area filled with children’s books and toys sat off to the back right corner, and a receptionist's desk lined the left wall, acting as a barrier between the waiting room and the rest of the hospital. As far as Akashi could tell, the emergency room seemed to be empty, lucky for them.

Behind the receptionist's desk sat a small young woman in her early to mid 20s with light brown hair, wearing a pair of sky blue scrubs. The woman looked up from whatever she was working on as the three teens walked in, and upon noticing Akashi being carried by Nebuya, she jumped up raced to the door behind her, disappearing for a moment before emerging through a large set of double doors with a wheelchair.

“You can go ahead and set him right here for right now” the young woman says to Nebuya, who follows her directions and carefully sets Akashi down in the chair. The woman disappears for another moment before reemerging behind the receptionists counter once again.

“So how can I help you boys this evening?” The woman asks politely.

“Our friend here injured himself during the final match of the winter cup, and we were recommended by the medical staff on sight to take him to the nearest hospital for an exam, just to make sure there wasn’t any serious damage” Mibuchi explains. The woman nods in response and begins typing something out on the computer in front of her, before pulling a clip board with a pen and some paperwork on it out and handing it to Akashi.
“I see, what sport do you kids play?” The woman asks curiously.

“Basketball” Nebuya responds. “We play for Rakuzan High School.”

“Rakuzan huh? I’ve heard a lot of really good things about them. You guys are the best team in the whole country aren’t you?”

“As of today we are” Mibuchi responds happily. Akashi smiles lightly to himself as he fills out the personal information the paperwork asks for. After a few moments, Akashi finally finished the documents and signs his name at the bottom, before handing the clipboard back to the receptionist.

“Very good, thank you so much. Now that all the paperwork is filled out would you mind providing me a phone number for a parent or guardian that we can contact so we can get permission for any exams we may need to perform” The receptionist says. Akashi pales slightly.

“Sei-chan is something wrong?” Mibuchi asks, noticing the younger boy’s discomfort.

“No, it’s nothing, it’s just that…” everyone casts confused looks at Akashi as he ponders how to best respond.

“You see my father is away on business at the moment, and this particular business trip required him to go out of country. This wouldn’t be such a big deal if he weren’t nearly impossible to get ahold of when he’s abroad.”

“What about a god parent? Would that work too?” Nebuya asks.

“God parents do have legal jurisdiction in the event of an absent parent. The only reason we really need the signature is because you’re underage, so if you have a guardian or god parent who has some legal connection to you, and can provide proof of insurance or other form of payment then that should be fine. Do you have anyone like that who we could contact?”

Akashi remains silent as he thinks of someone he could call. For a moment he can’t think of any adult figure, other than his father, who he would be close enough with to provide such important documentation… until he does.
“Mrs. Takeshi!” Akashi states out loud.

“Your god parent?”

“Technically speaking she was my caretaker when I was a child, but I believe my medical records still have her down as a primary contact in the event something were to happen to me and an adult figure were to have to be contacted. Is she still in my file?” Akashi asks. The receptionist turns back to the computer and begins typing away for a moment.

“System has a Takeshi Satsuki down as a primary contact. This her?”

“Yes, that’s her.”

“Alright, in that case I’ll go ahead and give her a call and as soon as I have both a signature granting permission for treatment and proof of some kind of insurance on top of the one you provided, you can go on back. If you want to just take a seat in the waiting room I will-”

“Actually, would it be possible for me to tell her? I haven’t spoken with her in quite a while and I wouldn’t want to worry her unnecessarily. I can pass it over to you for the insurance part, but I’d just like to let her know that I’m alright” Akashi explains. The receptionist shrugs her shoulders and hands the phone over to Akashi, who dials the number and waits. A few rings later, the call clicks through.

“Hello! Takeshi residence” the familiar and comforting sound of Mrs. Takeshi’s voice rang on the other end of the line.

“Hello Mrs. Takeshi. It’s me Akashi. You remember me, right?” The line remains silent for a moment and Akashi deflates slightly, obviously having been forgotten by the old woman.

“Seijuro? Well the only Seijuro I know is a lovely little boy I used to take care of, with bright red hair and eyes, who loved playing the violin, horseback riding, and, more than anything else, playing basketball. It’s been a few years since I last saw him but I think he’s got to be all grown up by… oh goodness” Mrs. Takeshi stops herself mid sentence, leaving Akashi confused as to what she just thought of.

“Seijuro? Is that you, darling?” Akashi chuckles happily to himself, grateful that his former
caretaker still remembers him fondly.

“Yes Granny, it’s me.”

“Oh Seijuro, it’s so wonderful to hear from you, child. You sound so grown up, I didn’t even recognize your voice over the phone”

“Yes, a lot has changed since you left the estate, I doubt you’d be able to recognize me if you saw me either” Akashi says. The old woman laughs.

“I’m sure I wouldn’t. So how are you doing dear? Is everything going well for you?”

“Well Granny, on any other occasion I’d say yes, but unfortunately at the moment I have a bit of a problem that I need your help with.”

“Oh goodness, what is it?”

“You see I was competing in the final of the winter cup for basketball earlier today, and while my team did manage to win, I had an unfortunate accident during the third quarter resulting in an injured ankle.” Mrs. Takeshi gasps.

“Oh you poor dear, that sounds awful. Are you alright? Do you need me to take you to the hospital?” The woman questioned, her voice laced with worry.

“No, no, that’s alright. I am fortunately being very well taken care by my close friends, and I’m actually already at the hospital, it’s just that because I am under age I need a parent or guardian to provide the hospital with permission to perform any exams they need to do as well as provide some proof of insurance. I wouldn’t have bothered you with such a task if I could have gotten ahold of father, but…”

“Let me guess, the pathetic whelp is off somewhere and has cut all contact?” Akashi winces slightly at Mrs. Takeshi’s harsh tone, having forgotten how much the woman disliked the elder Akashi.
“That’s correct” Akashi replies. Mrs. Takeshi sighs in frustration.

“Well don’t you worry for even a moment, child. I know for a fact that your mother made sure that I would remain a primary contact in the event your so called ‘father’ was unavailable. Let me handle the adult business and you just focus on getting better.”

“Thank you Granny, I always knew I could count on you” Akashi thanks.

“So long as this old heart of mine keeps beating, you’ll always be able to, dear.” Mrs. Takeshi responds warmly.

“I’ll call later tomorrow to check in on you, but for now get some rest.”

“I will, thank you so much, Granny.”

“Seijuro” Mrs. Takeshi says just as Akashi is about to pass the phone along.

“Yes?”

“Congratulations on winning the Winter Cup, dear. I’ve always been so proud of you and everything you’ve managed to accomplish. And I know she’s been gone for quite some time now, but I’m sure your mother feels the exact same way, and loves you and is watching over you as we speak, just like she did when she was alive.”

“I think you might be right” Akashi responds, doing his best to hold back the tears that were prickling at the corner of his eyes.

“I love you Seijuro, and I always will” Mrs. Takeshi says, her voice filled with love and affection.

“I love you too Granny, I’ll talk to you soon”

“I know you will, child. So long.” Akashi smiles before handing the phone back to the receptionist, who makes quick work of getting both the insurance and seal of approval from Mrs.Takeshi.
everything is signed and ready, Akashi, Nebuya, and Mibuchi are lead through the large double
doors, down several hallways and corridors, before finally reaching the examination room.

“The doctor should be with you shortly, but for right now go ahead and take a seat in the
examination chair, Akashi. The two of you can drag those folding chairs over if you’d like” the
nurse who guided them through the hospital states, before exiting the room and closing the door
behind her.

“Well that went surprisingly well” Nebuya comments.

“Ya, I expected us to be out there waiting in line for a while, but the waiting room was practically
empty” Mibuchi agreed.

“Well it is pretty late at night, so I guess the amount of incoming patients they have must go down
later in the evening. Speaking of later, what time is it?” Akashi asks.

“Uuuuh… looks like its 9:30. Wow, it got late fast” Nebuya said, checking his phone.

“Ya, hopefully we won’t have to wait for too long before the doctor gets here” Mibuchi says. As
soon as Mibuchi says that, there’s a knock at the door, and a tall man with short, slicked back black
hair, dark brown eyes, and fair skin, wearing a dress shirt, dress pants, and tie, and a pristine white
lab coat walks into the room.

“Good evening everyone, my name is Dr. Suzuki and I’ll be looking after you today” the man
greets.

“Hello Doctor, my name is Akashi Seijuro, and these are my friends Mibuchi and Nebuya” Akashi
says in response, pointing to the other two teens sitting in the corner.

“Good evening doctor” Mibuchi greets politely.

“Sup Doc” Nebuya says with a wide grin on his face.

“Eli-chan, don’t be so informal” Mibuchi scolds.
Doctor Suzuki stares at Nebuya for a moment with a look of confusion but it quickly turns to one of recognition.

“Nebuya Eikichi, is that you?” Dr. Suzuki says brightly.

“The one and only” Nebuya responds, standing up and giving the doctor a firm handshake.

“Systems indicate we’re not supposed to see you until mid-March. Why the early visit?”

“Lucky for you, you’re not looking after me today. You’re going to be looking at my good friend Akashi here, he injured his ankle during our basketball game earlier today and we need to get it looked at to make sure the damage isn’t serious.”

“Nebuya do you know this man?” Akashi asks curiously. Dr. Suzuki laughs.

“The medical staff here at Tokyo Metropolitan Hospital have been looking after Nebuya and his condition since the day he was born. And to this day he is still the tiniest little baby I have ever seen.”

“Oh come on, quit exaggerating. I wasn’t that small” Nebuya complains

“You were 2 kilograms sopping wet. The apple I had for lunch that day weighed more than you did” Doctor Suzuki said.

“So? Plenty of babies are born that small, its not that big of a deal.”

“You had severe weight and respiratory issues that caused you to be in and out of this hospital for the first five years of your life, you experienced severe muscle and joint pain once you started growing because your premature birth stunted your physical development, and I’m still absolutely convinced that the ‘accident’ you had when you were 12 that caused both your lungs to collapse, and almost killed you, was a directly related incident as well. Sounds like a pretty big deal to me” Dr. Suzuki states harshly. At this point both Akashi and Mibuchi were staring intensely at Nebuya, expecting some kind of confirmation on whether or not everything Dr. Suzuki said was true.
“Whatever” Nebuya huffs, rolling his eyes, indicating that he no longer wished to continue the topic of conversation. Doctor Suzuki laughs, before turning his attention to Akashi.

“Anyways all that aside, you said that you injured your ankle during the game, right? Can you tell me a little bit about how you got the injury?”

The next hour or so consisted of a basic examination of Akashi’s ankle, including an x-ray and a physical exam by Dr. Suzuki. The results of the exam revealed that there was no serious damage done to Akashi’s ankle, much to everyone’s relief, and the immense swelling of his ankle was merely due to the stress of continuing to play after it was acquired.

“Well Akashi, you are one lucky man. Looks like your ankle will be back to normal in just a few short days, so long as you spend them resting and keeping your weight off it as much as possible” Dr. Suzuki announces happily.

“Well that’s a relief” Akashi says, though more to himself than anyone else.

“Alright, you guys are good to go. A technician will be in shortly to check you guys out, but as of right now, my work here is done.”

“Thank you so much for all your help Dr. Suzuki, we really appreciate you taking such good care of us despite how late it is” Mibuchi says.

“No problem, things get a lot slower at night so at best I’d probably have spent the time doing paperwork, which isn’t nearly as much fun as being with the patient. Anyways, I wish you all the best, and I will see you” he says pointing at Nebuya “in a few months. Stay out of trouble kids.”

And with that, Dr. Suzuki exits the room, closing the door behind him, leaving the three teens alone for the time being. A few moments later, the door opens and, instead of the technician that Dr. Suzuki had spoken about, in walk Hayama and Miyazaki, both carrying plastic bags of something.

“Hey guys, how’d it go?” Hayama asks, walking toward his friends.
“Where the fuck have you two been?” Nebuya asks accusingly from his spot next to Akashi on the examination chair.

“Getting food” Miyazaki responds, holding up the plastic bag. “You guys didn’t get to really celebrate your win since Akashi got injured, so Ko and I went out and got you all some ramen. My treat”

“You don’t have to do that for us Miyazaki” Akashi protests.

“Nonsense, I did it because I wanted to. Besides you all need to eat, and with how late we’re gonna get out of here I doubt you’ll have the energy to eat later. So just take it” Miyazaki insists, holding out the plastic to-go container with a smile.

“Well… if you’re certain.”

“Sei, just shut up and eat” Nebuya says, already tearing hungrily into his own bowl. Akashi rolls his eyes but does as he is told, opening the container and taking a bite. The warm, savory taste of the broth and noodles feels magical as it goes down his throat, filling his empty stomach, and causing a pleasant warmth to spread throughout his tired, aching body. The technician arrived a little while after everyone had finished their food, and thankfully, the process of checking out of the hospital was rather speedy, all things considered although it was still 11 o’clock by the time the 5 teens walked out of the hospital entrance.

“So what’s the plan now? Are we driving back to campus or are we finding a hotel nearby?” Hayama asks as everyone is getting into Miyazaki's car.

“Getting a hotel room would be the best decision considering how late it is, but I’d rather not have to worry about driving all the way back to Kyoto come morning” Mibuchi says.

“Well if none of you mind being cramped in the car for a few hours, I don’t mind driving us all back. I’m a late owl by nature so I don’t get tired until 3 am anyways” Miyazaki suggests. A moment of silent deliberation passes between the teens.

“If you don’t mind making the drive tonight, then I’m all for it” Nebuya says, and everyone else agrees. And with that, Miyazaki once again starts up the engine, and begins the long drive back to Kyoto.
For those of you who may be wondering, no I will NOT stop giving Akashi parental figures who love and support him and want the best for him and actually care about his mental and emotional wellbeing. This chapter was written in a 3 am inspirational blur, I honestly wasn’t sure where this chapter was gonna go but I’m actually really happy with how it turned out. I wanted to do a sort of ‘sick-fic’ in this story for quite some time now, where Akashi had to rely on his friends to help him and take care of him and stuff, but giving him a cold or other kind of actual sickness just didn’t seem to fit into the story very well, so I thought working it in with the ankle injury would be a good way to incorporate that ‘sick fic’ trope without actually making Akashi get sick (which I think would kind of interrupt the story a little bit). Anyways most of the taking care of stuff will come next chapter but for right now enjoy this. As for my newest OC Granny Takeshi, she is a character who will become a lot more plot relevant in another story I have planned for this series (yes there will be a sequel at some point after I finish this story) but for right now all you need to know is that she was Akashi’s primary caretaker when he was an infant and small child as well as his mother’s caretaker when she was a child. Alongside his mother, Granny Takeshi was one of the only people in Akashi’s life to show him any sort of love and support growing up, and so as a result Akashi was very close to her, however after Akashi’s mother died, she was let go because Akashi’s father saw no further use for her. Despite this Akashi’s mother did everything in her power to make sure that Granny Takeshi would still have some connection to Akashi even if she no longer looked after him full time (hence her being one of Akashi’s primary medical contacts). As a result of the harsh treatment Akashi’s father put both his son and his wife through, Granny Takeshi is not the biggest fan of Akashi senior, in fact I’d go as far as to say that she downright hates him, and blames him for both Akashi’s mother’s death as well as Akashi’s lack of social life and overall emotional instability. Anyways I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter, let me know what you think of it down in the comments below, and as always I hope to see you all soon for chapter 37. Bye!
Panic

Chapter Notes

Boy are you guys in for a wild ride today! Ok, so... I might have gotten a bit carried away with this chapter, when I initially wrote it the chapter was over 5000 words long so I ended up cutting it into two chapters to help with the pacing and stuff. So unfortunately for you guys this chapter will end with a bit of a cliffhanger, but don’t worry because I will likely have the second part up tomorrow if not even sooner than that depending on how self restrained I’m feeling. I should also warn you that these two chapter get pretty... heavy. There’s a lot of self-hatred, self-blaming, mental and emotional trauma, elements of ptsd, and all that good stuff, oh and Akashi may or may not have a panic attack and black out for a bit. But don’t worry because Ei-chan will be there to makes things all better... sort of. So... ya, read at your own risk.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was 2:30 in the morning by the time Miyazaki’s car pulled in to the back parking lot of Rakuzan High School. Akashi had fallen asleep almost immediately after the car pulled out of the hospital parking lot, and was only woken when Nebuya started shaking him.

“I love how our relationship has gone from me using you as a body pillow, to you just flat out lying on top of me” Nebuya comments as he looks down at Akashi who, at some point during the long journey, managed to situate himself so that his head was lying comfortably on Nebuya’s lap, and his injured foot elevated on Mibuchi’s.

“It’s not my fault you make a good pillow” Akashi responds, sitting himself up and blinking tiredly around him. Miyazaki was currently in the process of waking Hayama up. Having given up on the gentle shaking and jostling when those proved to have no effect on the sleeping boy, Miyazaki eventually got out of his side of the car, walked around to the other side, and opened the car door, causing Hayama to fall, tired and confused, out onto the pavement. The sound of Hayama’s squawking upon making contact with parking lot tar was enough to wake Mibuchi, who had fallen asleep with his head resting against the side of the back seat door.

Once everyone managed to get themselves out of Miyazaki’s car and gather their things, Akashi began making his way toward the second year dorms, having been given an ankle brace by Dr. Suzuki, which granted him a limited, but altogether painless, ability to walk if it was absolutely necessary.

“Sei-chan! Where are you going?” Mibuchi calls after the red-haired boy. Akashi turns around in confusion.
“The second year dorms are this way, and I’d like to get back to bed as quickly as possible so that—”

“No no no no, I don’t trust you not to try and move around despite what the Doc said about resting your ankle, you’re coming to the third year dorms with us for the night” Nebuya states, cutting Akashi off.

“I appreciate your concern, but I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself” Akashi defends.

“And that is exactly where the problem lies. You’re so independent that you’d try and do stuff while your injured, which will only lengthen the amount of time it takes your ankle to heal, or worse, cause it to heal incorrectly or not at all” Mibuchi explains. Akashi does not argue but also makes no move to comply with his teammates.

“Look, we know you can take care of yourself, we’re just worried about you. So just humor us and come stay in our dorm for a day or two so we can keep an eye on you” Nebuya pleads. Akashi heaves a heavy sigh, frustrated with how his friends think he’s incapable of looking after himself because of a minor injury, but nonetheless understanding their concerns and appreciating the fact that they care enough to want to look after him despite only having a minor injury.

“Alright, fine” Akashi agrees. “But you’re carrying me up the stairs.”

Nebuya laughs heartily.

“Whatever, it’s not like it’s very difficult.”

The group arrives at the third year dorms a few moments later, all of them sufficiently tired and ready to crawl under the covers and go back to sleep.

“Thank you so much for taking me to the hospital Miyazaki, I really appreciate all your patience with us” Akashi thanks as Hayama and Miyazaki are about to break away from the group to go to Hayama’s room for the night.

“No problem. I just feel bad you got injured and had to spend your celebration time in the hospital” Miyazaki replies.
“Well, we could always go out and celebrate properly in a few days once Sei-Chan’s leg heals up” Mibuchi suggests.

“I like the sound of that” Hayama agrees excitedly.

“Sounds good to me. Anyways have to good night you three” Miyazaki says with a small bow, before following Hayama up the next flight of stairs toward his room.

“Those two are adorable together” Mibuchi comments as soon as the couple are out of earshot.

“Ya, they really get along well” Akashi agrees, beginning to head toward Nebuya’s room.

“Wait, so is Sei-chan staying in my room or yours?” Mibuchi asks Nebuya quickly.

“I figured he’d stay in my room if only because my bed is bigger than yours” Nebuya responds.

“Well, maybe so, but it’s not that much bigger, you don’t honestly think that the two of you can fit in one bed together, do you?” Nebuya and Akashi exchange knowing glances before turning back to Mibuchi.

“Nebuya’s bed fits a lot more than you might think Mibuchi. Besides I wouldn’t want to disturb your well earned rest by tossing and turning all night, I won’t feel as bad if I do it to Nebuya” Akashi says teasingly. Nebuya glares at Akashi and smacks him in the back of the head.

“OW!” The redhead cries out in pain.

“That’s what you get you little shit” Nebuya mutters as he begins making his way down the hall toward his room.

“Are you sure you don’t want to stay in my room? I won’t mind” Mibuchi asks once again.
“Yes I’m sure. Thank you for the offer, and thank you for staying with me at the hospital today. I feel a little bad about making you and the others miss out on celebrating our victory, but it really means a lot that you came with me anyways” Akashi says. Mibuchi smiles warmly at the boy.

“You are absolutely welcome Sei-chan, after all, what are friends for right?”

“Absolutely” Akashi agrees.

“Well then, I guess I’ll see you both in the morning. Goodnight Sei-chan” Mibuchi says before walking down the other end of the hall, unlocking his door, and disappearing inside for the night.

“Akashi, you coming or what?” Nebuya asks, poking his head out from his room.

“Yes I’m coming” Akashi responds, turning around and making his way toward Nebuya’s room.

Once the door is closed and locked, Midna, who had been sleeping on top of Nebuya’s bed, meows loudly and then launches herself at Akashi, attaches herself to Akashi’s pant leg and begins rapidly clawing her tiny, black furry body all the way up Akashi’s leg.

“Hey! Midna no! Stop that!” Nebuya scolds, grabbing the kitten from behind the neck and peeling her off of Akashi. The red-head chuckles as Nebuya practically throws her back into the bed, causing the cat to mewl loudly in protest.

“Stop it, you’re gonna wake everybody up if you keep making all this noise” Nebuya commands, hoisting the kitten up onto his shoulder, which does the trick of getting her to stop making noise.

As soon as Akashi takes the prescription painkillers he was given at the hospital to help dull the aching in his ankle, changes into a spare pair of clothes that Nebuya leant him, which are a few sizes too big at best, and plugs his phone into the wall socket, Akashi crawls into the bed, making sure not to agitate his ankle, before flopping tiredly onto the mattress. Despite how tired he is though, Akashi can’t help but notice how, instead of getting into bed and going to sleep, Nebuya has sat down at his computer and begun drawing on his screen tablet.

“Aren’t you coming to bed too?” Akashi asks, his voice slightly slurred from the drugs coursing rapidly through his bloodstream.
“Eh, not really. I fell asleep not long after you did so I’m not all that tired anymore… well I guess that’s not true, I am tired but I’ve reached a point where even though I feel tired I wouldn’t be able to fall asleep even if I tried, so I might as well do something until I can actually fall asleep. You know the feeling right?”

“No. In fact I am so fucking tired right now that the sound of your voice alone would be enough to put me to sleep if I weren’t actively trying to stay awake to continue this conversation” Akashi responds. Nebuya laughs lightly.

“Then go to sleep you weirdo, I’m not making you stay up” Nebuya says, flipping the overhead lights off so the room is plunged into darkness, save for the soft, illuminating glow of Nebuya’s desktop screen.

A long period of silence passes as Akashi lays comfortably under the covers of Nebuya’s bed, emotionally and physically exhausted from the day’s events, as well as the ever increasing haze from those painkillers, but for some reason unable to fall into the deep and comforting depths of slumber. Akashi cracks an eye open, focusing his gaze on Nebuya, a concentrated and diligent expression set on his bespeckled face, as he continues working whatever it is he is drawing.

As Akashi watches the man work, his mind wanders involuntarily back to this time last year, just after he had received his very first defeat at the hands of Seirin High School. It was a difficult time for him, one that was filled with confusion, anger, anguish, self-doubt, and most prominently, fear. The days following Akashi’s first true defeat were filled with nothing but complete and unbridled fear, fear of his future, fear of his past, fear of the person he allowed his anger and greed to make him, fear of all the terrible things he had done to those around him, fear of being worthless. Fear of being alone.

All those past feelings and emotions felt like nothing more than a bad dream right now, as Akashi floated on a euphoric cloud of happiness and glee and whatever was in those painkillers the nurse at the hospital gave him. But before he could allow himself to drift away, Akashi had a question nagging at him in the back of his head that he needed an answer to.

“Hey Nebuya” Akashi begins, pulling the older boy from his concentrated state.

“What’s up?” He asks. Akashi pauses for a moment as he thinks.

“Why are you and the others so nice to me?” Nebuya stops what he is doing and looks over at
Akashi in confusion.

“What’s with this all of a sudden?” Nebuya questions. Akashi shrugs his shoulders.

“After everything that happened last year I expected to be all alone. I expected everyone to hate me and avoid me because of how poorly I treated… well, everyone. But even after how awful I acted you, Mibuchi, Hayama, hell everyone I have encountered this year, you’ve all been so kind and inclusive, and I can’t even imagine why because I was so horrible to you all and I just… don’t… understand…” by the time Akashi notices the string of tears that now flow heavily down his cheeks, there’s little he can do to stop them or the wretched sob that tears its way from his throat as the compounded effects of his exhaustion, his throbbing ankle, and, you guessed it, those god damn painkillers, crash down on him, leaving Akashi a sobbing, shaking, drugged up mess in Nebuya’s bed.

The elder boy stares, dumbfoundead as Akashi continues to have an emotional breakdown only a few feet away from him. It only takes a moment for Nebuya to come to his senses before he ditches the tablet and rushes over to the sobbing boy.

“Hey hey hey, come on now, no need for that” Nebuya says as calmly and reassuringly as possible, peeling back the covers and hoisting the boy into his arms, cradling him softly as he sits down in the spot where Akashi was laying down just a second ago and begins rubbing firm but soft circles onto his back in an attempt to calm him down.

“I’m sorry” Akashi croaks, pressing his fingers into his eyes in an attempt to get the tears to stop forming, but to no avail, as the tears continue to fall without any sign of stopping.

“It’s alright. You don’t have to be sorry. Just calm down and breath, can you do that for me?” Nebuya asks, his voice calm with hints of worry and confusion.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry” Akashi repeats, over and over again, unsure of who he’s apologizing to or what he’s apologizing for at this point, just hoping that saying it again and again will somehow make things better.

“Akashi its ok, you don’t have to apologize, but you need to calm down before you start hyperventilating.” Akashi doesn’t appear to hear him however, as his breathing gets quicker and more erratic, his words become nothing more than a jumbled mess, and the world around him goes dark, as he falls into the deafening abyss of his own mind.
This chapter was a real dumpster fire. I wrote it at 3 am while heavily drugged on cold medication, so I'm not sure if anything in this chapter or the next one make any sense, however, I couldn't be asked to beta read it so up it goes I guess. I don't really want to say too much about my reasoning behind the chapter until the next chapter (which is essentially the second part to this one) goes up, and then I can fully explain why I have decided to torture my son in such a cruel and sadistic way. Anyways thank you guys so much for reading, let me now what you think of this chapter in the comments down below and I will see you guys tomorrow for the second installment of ‘why the hell did I write this’! Bye!
Big Brother Knows Best

Chapter Notes

A little later than I intended, but as promised, here is what will quite possibly be the most angst-filled chapter in this entire goddamn story. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Akashi stands, rooted to his spot, unsure of where he is. In the distance he can hear the sound of Nebuya’s voice, calling out to him.

"Come on Akashi look at me."

Despite how far away he sounds, Akashi can sense the panic in his voice.

“Do you remember everything you did?” A voice asks, and as if out of nowhere, another person appears before Akashi, one that he is very familiar with, and one he had hoped he’d never have to confront ever again.

“I remember them” his other half says. “I remember them all well. Each one from the day I took control of this body, to the day you allowed yourself to be defeated at the hands of those miserable peasants.”

“I didn’t allow them to defeat me, they bested me fair and square, and you know it” Akashi spits back. His reflection huffs.

“Perhaps, but what do you think would happen if they had defeated you again?” Akashi glares at him.

“What do you mean?” The reflection laughs, though his voice holds only malice.

“I mean, what do you think would have happened to all those little ‘friends’ you made? You don’t honestly think they would have stuck around if you lost a second time do you?”
“Of course they would have, they’re my friends, not that you’d know anything about what that means” Akashi retorts.

“You really are clueless aren’t you?” Akashi falters for a moment, and the reflection continues.

“You don’t honestly believe that those pathetic fools actually care about you, do you? Do you have any idea why I even exist?” Akashi does not, answer.

*Come on man look at me.*

“You’ve gone around this past year pretending like you’re a different person, like whatever force was controlling you suddenly went away and you saw the error of your ways and became ‘good’, but that’s not really what happened is it?” Akashi stares in disbelief as his other half continues to taunt him.

“You didn’t suddenly create an alter ego that took control of your body and forced you to do everything that you did against your will. No, no I’ve been here all along, watching, waiting, and when the time came for us to switch places, you didn’t even put up a fight, you gladly allowed yourself to succumb to the fear and the hate and the greed that you’ve kept hidden deep within yourself.

*Akashi you’ve got to calm down.*

“So then why? Why did you feel the need to create a separate entity, someone who was fundamentally the same as you, but not entirely? So that once you took back control you could pass all those awful things you did and words you said off on someone else?”

*Hey knock it off, you’re starting to scare me.*

“So that you could feel less guilty about the damage you did?

*Akashi please snap out of it.*

“About the people you hurt?”
“Or was it so that you could hide the fact that you’re nothing but a greedy, selfish, uncaring, unloving, worthless, pathetic, insignificant, heartless little mons.”

“SEIJURO!” The booming sound of his name yanked Seijuro from his inner mind, and upon coming to his full senses he noticed that he was no longer lying on the bed, but on the floor, and instead of holding him in his lap like he was previously, Eikichi was holding him up by the arms, his grip painfully tight on his shoulders as though he had just been shaking him and upon looking at his face Seijuro couldn’t believe what he saw. Eikichi, looked terrified as he kneeled over Seijuro’s still trembling body, his eyes wide with panic and fear, his own hands shaking as well. The redhead blinked in confusion a few times, still heavily under the effect of the painkillers from earlier.

“What the fuck was in those things?” Seijuro wonders to himself before gathering just enough strength to sit up on his own, Eikichi keeps a supporting hand on him all the while.

“W-w-what… haa-appended?” He stammered, his voice weak and shaky.

“Oh, thank god” Eikichi sighed before grabbing Seijuro and pulling him into a tight, almost painful embrace. The boy remained silent as Eikichi breathed a sigh of relief.

“You scared the fucking shit out of me” the elder boy spat, though his voice held no anger, only fear and relief.

“I’m sorry” Seijuro apologizes, guilt filling his chest at having worried his friend so much. After a moment of silence, Eikichi finally releases Seijuro, wiping away tears of his own as he sits down next to the red-head.

“I thought you were having a fucking seizure. You just started shaking and choking and I couldn’t get you to calm down no matter how hard I tried.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to—”
“Stop it! Stop apologizing” Eikichi snaps, cutting Seijuro off. The boy looks down at the floor, shamefully. Eikichi sighs in frustration as he looks at the boy sitting next to him.

“Why are you apologizing? You don’t have anything to be sorry for.” Seijuro balls his still shaking hands into fists.

“Yes, I do. I’ve done so many things, so many terrible things that I regret doing. After last year I thought I had regained control of myself, that I had defeated the great ‘evil’ that was controlling me, when in reality all I was doing was making excuses for myself, trying to find a way to blame someone else when in reality it was me, it was all me behind it. Everything I did, I did of my own accord, and I have no one else to blame but myself” Seijuro can feel the tears beginning to return.

“And yet after all that, after everything, you all still accept me, you still call me your friend, you let me into your friend group, and encourage me to do my best and do what makes me happy, and you care, you all seem to care so much about me even though I never gave you any reason to and all this time I’ve been happy, happier than I’ve ever been in my entire life, but I shouldn’t be, I know I shouldn’t be happy because I don’t deserve it, I don’t deserve all these wonderful friends, memories, and feelings because I’m nothing but a greedy, selfish, uncaring, unloving, worthless, pathetic, insignificant, heartless little... monster.” As Seijuro finished, he could feel the presence of his other half laughing somewhere in the back of his mind, and this time, the boy could not bring himself to fight back.

Seijuro can only imagine the disgust Eikichi must feel toward him now, after having learned what a horrendous and hideous monster Seijuro really was. He would never want anything to do with him ever again, no one would once they all learned the truth, and finally saw him for what he really is, rather than for the lie he had created for himself.

A dark-skinned hand reaches out and gently lifts Seijuro’s chin, raising his gaze until he has nowhere else to look but at the man sitting opposite him, and Seijuro is once again surprised by what he sees. Eikichi’s face holds no malice, no hate, no disgust, and not even the slightest hint of betrayal. Instead, Eikichi looks at Seijuro with an expression of kindness, worry, concern, and most surprising of all, empathy.

A moment of silence passes before Eikichi finally speaks.

“I didn't accept that I was gay until I was 12 years old” Eikichi begins.

“I always knew that I liked boys and I thought some of them were cute and that I wanted to hold their hand and all that shit, but I never actually thought about it in a way that related to my
sexuality. I just thought that all boys felt the same way I did.” Seijuro remains silent as Nebuya continues.

“One day my dad confronted me, he asked if I ever had feelings for other boys around me, if I liked them more than just friends. I said yes. He then went on to tell me that he thinks I might be gay, because I said I like boys and I’d never been interested in girls like I was with boys. I remember it almost like it happened yesterday. I stood in my spot, not moving, not even breathing, for a long time, and then I just started… yelling. I yelled and screamed and spat at him, utterly offended that my own dad would ever think I was gay. I can’t even remember how long I was yelling at him for but when I finally stopped I turned around and bolted it right out the front door, and I just started running. I ran. And I ran. And I ran. And I didn’t stop until something inside me burst and my chest felt like it was on fire and a strong overwhelming pain spread throughout my entire body and my legs gave out on me sending me crashing to the ground as the world around me went dark… my lungs had collapsed.”

“The accident Dr. Suzuki talked about” Seijuro says aloud, in realization. Eikichi nods his head in affirmation.

“I woke up in the hospital three days later, attached to a million different IVs, breathing monitors, heart rate monitors, breathing tubes, breathing masks, you name it. And I felt disgusted with myself. All the anger I shot at my dad was gone because deep down I knew he was right, and my reaction to him confronting me about it was just my last ditch effort at trying to convince myself that I wasn’t some kind of sick, disgusting freak of nature. And I was scared, scared that once everyone found out that I was this sick and twisted pervert that everyone in my life would just… throw me away, and that I’d be left all alone and it would all be my fault because I chose to be this was, I chose to not try and ‘fix’ myself and instead kept having fantasies about being with other boys my age and marrying boys and loving boys and just, not being the way I was supposed to be. But then I realized something, and I might have had my dad’s help in realizing this but that’s besides the point. I realized that my sexuality is something I don’t have any control over, I can’t change the fact that I am attracted to boys, no matter how hard I try, I can’t change the fact that I am attracted to boys, no matter how hard I try, so why bother worrying about it? If I don’t have any control over the situation, and nothing I do will change this aspect of my identity, why worry about what other people will think about it? Because the way people react to finding out I’m gay is way more of a reflection on who they are, than it is on who I am” Eikichi finished, giving Akashi a pensive glance.

“Ok? But what does this have to do with me. I mean yes it’s true you can’t control your sexuality so accepting it would be natural but that’s not the same case for me. I have full control over my actions and my words and yet for years I allowed myself to be such a cold and heartless person, only ever thinking of myself and what I want and never once considering how my actions might affect those around me, so what’s my excuse? What reason do I have to allow myself to forgive what I’ve done and accept that I am still that same person who once viewed everyone around as nothing more than tools for my own success?” Seijuro asks, distraught. Eikichi thinks to himself for a moment.
“Do you regret the things you did back then?” Seijuro is caught off guard by Eikichi’s question.

“Yes, I wish for nothing more than to go back and undo everything I did during that time.”

“Do you still believe the things you said back then?” Again another strange question.

“Of course I don’t. I’ve destroyed meaningful relationships because of all the rude and insensitive things I’ve said.”

“Can you change the past?” Seijuro freezes for a moment, finally understand what Eikichi is getting at.

“It doesn’t matter if the past can’t be changed it doesn’t excuse me from-”

“Answer the question” Eikichi demands. “Can you. Change. The past?”

Seijuro remains silent.

“No” he responds.

“Can you do anything to change the way you acted in the past?”

“No.”

“Can you do something to control the way you act now so that you never do anything you regret in the future?”

“...Yes.”

“Can you do anything to change the things you said in the past?”
“No.”

“Can you do something to control the things you say so that you never ruin another friendship because of that?”

“...Yes”

“Have you made steps to change the way you behave so that you never repeat what happened in the past again?”

Seijuro cannot bring himself to answer this question, because he already knows the answer, and it is not the one he wants to admit. Eikichi sighs and places his arm around Seijuro’s shoulders.

“My dad played a very similar game with me the day I woke up in the hospital, and believe it or not, I couldn’t answer that last question either, because my perspective alone didn’t tell me what other people saw. So like he answered the last question for me, I’m going to answer the last question for you, as well as the question you asked me earlier” Eikichi explains, his voice low and soft. Seijuro cannot bring himself to speak, the lump that formed in his throat preventing him from opening his mouth without bursting into tears.

“To answer your question from earlier, about why I’m so nice to you, the reason behind that is because, in a way… you remind of a lot of myself.” Seijuro’s eyes widen at Eikichi’s confession, unsure of what he could possibly mean.

“When I look at you right now, I don’t see the captain of the basketball team, or the head of the student body council, or even the adorable goofball who can’t play video games to save his life. I see a younger version of myself, a young kid who’s just trying to figure out who he is and where he belongs in this crazy, big, wide world… but I don’t see a monster.” Seijuro averts his gaze from the older boy.

“Maybe you should try looking harder next time” he says. Eikichi places his hand on the back of Akashi’s head, moving it until their foreheads are touching.

“You, Akashi Seijuro, are not a monster. You are a 16 year old kid, who grew up without anyone around to tell you that you are more than what you can accomplish. You’ve made mistakes, done things you regret, said things you wish you hadn’t, and hid yourself behind a wall of excuses so
that you wouldn’t have to deal with the emotional trauma that came with realizing what you did and the people you hurt along the way… but that doesn’t make you a monster, it makes you human, and at the end of the day that’s all any of us are. Human. I let go of all the crazy shit you did last year because you’ve shown me that you want to change, you’ve shown me that you want to get to know me for who I am as a person rather than who I pretend to be a lot of the time at practice, and you’ve shown me that you care about me. I’m not wrong about that, am I?” Seijuro shakes his head in response, sniffling a bit.

“I know from personal experience how easy it is to get caught up in your own head and to let all your inner demons convince you that you’re a terrible person who doesn’t deserve any of the things you have, I know how easy it is to look at yourself and feel nothing but shame and disgust because of things that are far out of your control, I know what it feels like to hate yourself. You and I are not as different from one another as you might think, that’s why I forgave you for last year, that’s why I let you in… because you and I understand each other in ways that Mibuchi and Hayama and Emi-sensei and Hitoka and Tsuji and anyone else can’t. We both want to be love and accepted for who we are, but have a hard time believing that we deserve to be, and that’s why we get along so well, because we make all the demons and their nasty words that are swimming around in our heads seem a lot less important than we think they are.” Eikichi explains.

“You’re not obligated to though” Seijuro counters solemnly, pulling away.

“No, you’re right, I’m not. But you weren’t obligated to try and set me and Mibuchi up and yet you’ve gone through a hell of a lot of trouble to get that done.” Eikichi laughs as Seijuro tenses up.

“When did you-”

“I’ve known for a while, I’ll say that much. But the point I’m trying to get across to you is that I’m not doing this because I feel like I need to, or that I’m going to get anything out of it, I’m doing this because… well…” Eikichi stutters off, a look of uncertainty spreads across his face.

“Because ‘what’?” Seijuro questions curiously. Eikichi sighs and huffs out a laugh before turning back to Akashi.

“Because you’re the little brother I never got” he says, a soft smile present on his face. Seijuro snaps his gaze back up to Eikichi, utterly disbelieving what he just heard.

“What do you mean?” Eikichi laughs again, louder this time.
“I mean exactly what I said. Over this past year you and I have grown a lot as people, but we’ve also grown a lot as a pair. You may not see it the same way but, I think of you as the little brother my parents never gave me, and I guess I didn’t realize how much you meant to me until you keeled over and started writhing in agony. I don’t mean to beat a dead horse or anything but for a second there… I thought you were gonna die in my arms. There was a split second where you just, stopped moving, and everything in the room went quiet. One minute. Then two minutes. Then three. Then your lips started turning blue and I practically threw myself to the floor and started shaking you, calling your name, anything to get you to wake up. Lucky for me it actually worked.”

“I suppose we’re both lucky in that respect” Seijuro comments, not entirely sure if that was an appropriate thing to say after being told that he might have almost died.

“In a way I guess I finally understand how my mom felt when she found me passed out on the side of the road, barely moving, barely breathing, barely even alive. I thought it was so stupid of her to run up to me and hug me and bawl her eyes out when I finally woke up, but now I think I finally get it. I was so stupidly happy and relieved when you opened your eyes that, I just couldn’t help but grab you and never let go, because if I did there might have been a slight chance that you’d just… disappear. Oh god, that sounds so stupid, I’m so sorry for even saying that” Eikichi says, rubbing his fingers over his eyes. Seijuro laughs for the first time since this whole ordeal started.

“Ya, it kind of does… but I like it” the redhead admits. Eikichi looks back over at Seijuro.

“It feels nice… knowing that people care about you. You weren’t wrong earlier when you said that I didn’t really have anyone to support me and love me in the same way you or anyone else did. In fact now that I think about it the more I remember how isolated and alone I felt, never able to rely on or connect with anyone because my entire existence revolved around being the best. Even now I still can’t fully get away from the person my father tried to force me to be. That cold, uncaring, lifeless person who never needed or wanted anyone” Akashi admits.

“But things are different now. I’m not the same person I used to be anymore, and while I still have things to work on and figure out, I know that I’m improving little by little each and every day. I have people I care about and people who care about me and it’s a good feeling to have but a part of me just can’t shake the awful nagging sensation in the back of my head telling me that everything is a lie, that no one really cares about me, and that I’m alone, and… I just...” the tears have once again returned, and Eikichi reaches a hand over onto Seijuro’s shoulder, giving the boy a chance to just let it all out.

“What is it?” The older boy coaxes. Akashi picks his head back up and rubs away at the tears that refuse to stop falling.

“...I don’t even know how to be a little brother” the red head sobs.
“Oh for fucks sake. Come here you little shit” Eikichi huffs, lifting Seijuro up from under the arms, and pulling the younger boy into a crushing bear hug. Seijuro latches on almost immediately, his nails digging into the soft fabric of the t-shirt Eikichi was wearing, as his mind tried to organize all the different thoughts and emotions that were swirling around in his head, leaving him so confused and disorientated that all he could do to deal with everything was bury his face into Eikichi’s shoulder and cry. Cry, cry, cry, and cry some more, until all that was left in him was a deep numbing sensation that spread itself throughout Seijuro’s entire body and the dull throbbing of a stress migraine.

Eikichi wasn’t bothered by the length of time it took for the younger boy to finally calm down enough for his body to stop shaking and for his breathing to change from deep, ragged inhales of air between long bouts of drug induced sobbing, to shorter, calmer breathes. The sun was already beginning to rise over the horizon by the time Eikichi managed to peel the red-head from his, now soaking wet, shoulder, and to his surprise, the boy was already fast asleep, the events of the day proving too much for even him to handle. Getting up from his spot on the floor, leaning against the bed, Eikichi carefully and gently deposits the sleeping Seijuro back into his bed, tucking the blankets snugly around him.

Eikichi smiles as he looks down at Seijuro, feeling a small sense of pride knowing that the younger boy trusted him enough to be, at least somewhat, willing to share the demons that haunt him from his past. And while having one heart to heart will not solve all of Seijuro’s problems, nor will it relieve him of the guilt, fear, and anxiety that remembering his past brings him, at least the boy now knows that he has someone to turn to for comfort and reassurance if he needs it.

Reaching down, Eikichi brushes away at a few strands of red hair that had gotten stuck to Seijuro’s forehead during his breakdown, before finally returning to his desk and continuing the drawing he had been working on earlier that night… er, morning. He didn’t mind staying up all night with Seijuro, after all, one night’s worth of sleep was easily made up by going to bed early the next day, and as the sun continued to rise into the heavens, Eikichi made sure to keep a watchful eye on the sleeping boy, ready to be there for him in case his demons tried anything funny, just like the boy had done for him so many times throughout the year.

“Sleep tight little brother. You’ve earned it.”

Chapter End Notes

Boy was that chapter… something. I’m not really sure what inspired me to even write this chapter, I never really enjoyed reading angst in fanfic very much and I enjoy writing it even less, but for some reason as I was writing this chapter, I felt the need to add something a bit heavier than what I had been writing recently, and thus this chapter was born I guess. As you all know I absolutely LOVE Nebuya and will do
everything in my power to give him the characterization (I think) he deserved. I’ve
talked about this in previous chapters, but I was always put off by the fact that he was
little more than the pig-headed jock of the group, and was never really developed
much past that (not that I can really blame the writers for doing so seeing as how
Rakuzan wasn’t introduced until late in the series). In my story I really like the idea of
Nebuya and Akashi being something like brothers to each other. Nebuya who had
always wanted a little brother but never got one, gets to dote on and tease his new
‘little brother’ while Akashi is given an older, brotherly figure that he never had
growing up, someone around his age he can talk to and confide things that he might
not feel comfortable confiding to anyone else. They both care a great deal about each
other and just want the best for each other and overall I just love the relationship I’ve
built for them, and this chapter onward is where I can finally start implementing and
expanding upon their brotherly relationship, as well as the family-like relationships
Akashi will eventually build with the entire Nebuya family, who have practically
adopted the strange and awkward redhead into their happy little, functionally
dysfunctional family. Anyways I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter, I wrote it at 3
am and did NOT beta read it, so be nice. Let me know what you think down in the
comments below. And as always, I will see you all very soon for chapter 39. Bye!
Birthday Boy

Chapter Notes

Oh look, the asshole has returned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Almost a full week has passed since the end of the Winter Cup and Rakuzan’s rightful victory of said tournament took place, and Akashi’s ankle has thankfully made a full recovery, no longer the purple, swollen mass that it was on the night of his injury.

It has also been almost a full week since Akashi’s emotional break down with Nebuya, and while the redhead still feels slightly guilty about both bothering the older boy with his emotional baggage as well as kicking him out of his own bed, Akashi can’t help but feel so much closer with him, as though sharing their past experiences and relating to one another had eliminated a barrier between them that Akashi hadn’t even known was there. In the end though, he was glad for it. Even though he had never considered Nebuya to be anything more than a good friend, the other boy’s confession about seeing him as a younger brother as well as everything else that happened that night made Akashi realize that they were, in a way, a lot like brothers, and realizing this gave Seijuro an unexpected sense of comfort and support, one that he was very thankful for.

“Good Morning my lovelies, how are we all doing today?” Emi-sensei chirps happily upon striding into the classroom, ready to begin the day’s lecture.

“We’re excited for the year to almost be over” someone yells from the back of the room, causing the rest of the class to buzz in agreement. To be honest, Akashi was pretty excited about vacation as well. This past year had been so chaotic and hectic that nothing sounded nicer than a well deserved break from school.

“Yes, yes I know we’re all very excited for the school year to be ending, but the year isn’t over just yet and so for right now, I still own all of you” Emi-sensei says in a cartoonishly evil voice, rubbing her hands together like an evil villain would. The class laughs at their teacher’s antics.

“Alright now, settle down everyone. So, before we can begin today’s lecture, it has come to my attention that today is a certain someone’s special day, and as we all know, in my class we must all take a moment to celebrate the ‘coming into being’ of this wonderful person…” Akashi sinks into his desk as Emi-sensei turns toward him with a shit-eating grin on her face.
“Akashi” she says sweetly.

“Yes?” The redhead responds sheepishly.

“Would you be so kind as to come up to the front of the room so that your classmates and I can sing you a little song?”

“Um… can I take a pass on this one? It’s not really necessary for you all to sing for me I mean-”

“Get your skinny butt up here, kid” Emi-sensei demands, waving the boy up. Akashi slumps against his desk for a moment before he finally relents, gets up from his seat, and walks dejectedly to the front of the room to receive his fate. In hindsight, sitting at the front of the room while the class sings you happy birthday isn’t the worst way to start class, but there’s no denying how embarrassed Akashi felt throughout the entire ordeal and how happy he felt once he was allowed to scamper on back to his desk.

The rest of the day went by relatively quickly, with none of his other classes taking note of his ‘special day’, much to Akashi’s relief. By the time the bell signaling the end of 5th period had rang, Akashi had already packed his bag and was heading out of the classroom to make his way over to the art building.

“Hey, Akashi” a voice called just ask Akashi was about to exit out the door of the classroom.

“Yes? What is it?” The redheads asks, turning to face his classmates, who were all huddled together as though they all had the same question on their minds.

“When you leave class for sixth period, where do you like… go?” A short girl with light brown hair who Seijuro believes is named Kotetsu, asks.

“Ya, you’re always leaving class and I’ve seen you walk out the front door and head toward the green houses.” Another girl pipes in. Akashi remains silent for a moment as he thinks about how to answer.

“Well whenever I leave class early I only ever go to the art building so that I can hang out with Emi-sensei and her advanced class while I work on my portfolio to get me into next years advanced class.”
“Wait, you go hang out with Emi-sensei’s advanced class? That sounds awesome” a tall boy with dark black hair and brown eyes says. Seijuro shrugs his shoulders.

“I think so. Anyways I’ll see you all later” Akashi says before exiting the class and beginning his walk to the art building, greeting the hall monitor, who doesn’t even bother looking up from his phone, as he makes his way out the door.

Once in the art building, Seijuro makes his way into Emi-sensei’s classroom, making a beeline for the back table where the familiar faces of Nebuya, Tsuji, Endo, Amano, and Takata all sat.

“Hey guys” Akashi greeted as he sat down in his usual spot between Nebuya and Tsuji.

“Hey Sei, how's it going?” Endo asks, ditching her current project in favor of conversing with the redhead.

“I’m doing all right. How are you all getting along?” He asks.

“Stressed. As usual” Nebuya responds, currently working on some touch ups to his latest still life.

“How’s your portfolio coming along Sei?” Takata asks, leaning over Kaori to get a closer look at the painting he had brought over.

“It’s coming along nicely. I only have one more piece left and then I’ll be ready to submit” Akashi responds, beginning to work on his own piece.

“Well that’s great to hear, but I can’t help but notice how you’ve been doing a lot of work in here, but not a lot of work in your actual 6th period class” says Emi-sensei, who had snuck up behind Akashi and the others when they weren’t looking.

“I’m not here all that often now am I?” Seijuro asks his teacher.

“You’re here an average of 4 out of the 5 total school days a week” the woman responds.
“I went to class on Tuesday.”

“You had an exam that day. I’d certainly hope you’d attend class on the day you have a test.” Akashi shrugs his shoulders.

“Eh, I have a 97% in that class. I’m the least of her concerns” he counters, uncaring of what his 6th period teacher thought of his frequent absences. After all, so long as he kept his grades up and his father didn’t find out what he was up to, who cared if he ditched class to go spent time in the art room? Certainly not anyone at his school that’s for sure.

The rest of class passed by uneventfully, but as Akashi was coming back from the bathroom, he was stopped in the hall by Tsuji, who must have followed him out.

“Hey” the shorter girl greets.

“Oh, hello Kaori” Akashi greets back. “Is there something the matter? You look like you want to talk about something.”

Tsuji remained silent for a moment as her eyes scanned Akashi.

“Ei told me about your little, you know… episode, last week” she began. Akashi deflated at the mention of the total emotional breakdown he had the previous week as well as a slight hint of betrayal that Nebuya had gone out and told people about it.

“You don’t have to worry about Ei being a blabbermouth. The only reason I know is because something had been bothering him all week and I somehow managed to drag it out of him and even then he only told me the bear minimum. As far as I’m aware, the only other person who knows is Mibuchi, and Ei made both of us swear on our lives that we wouldn’t go around spreading anything” Tsuji explained, allowing Akashi to breath easy knowing that the entire school wasn’t privy to his deepest darkest insecurities.

“Well, in case you were wondering, whatever it is Eikichi told you, it’s probably true” Akashi admits, looking awkwardly down at the floor.
“I don’t care about whether or not any of it is true, I’m here because I want to know if you’re ok” Tsuji says rather sharply. This catches Seijuro by surprise.

“Um… well, yes, I’d say I’m alright” the redhead responds, although Tsuji doesn’t look very convinced.

“You sure? From what little Ei told me, he did a pretty good job of making it sound bad. You even blacked out for a bit and had some kind of seizure, didn’t you?”

“It wasn’t a seizure but it was definitely… something” Akashi explains. “And yes, I did black out for a bit, but I think the main culprit was just the amount of stress I was under because of the Winter Cup and then injuring my ankle and then whatever the hell was in those painkillers the hospital gave me. Anyways, I know it sounds really bad but I assure you that I’m doing alright now, in fact I feel better than I have in quite a long time actually. So there’s no reason for you to worry” Akashi says genuinely. Tsuji narrows her eyes for a moment, unsure of whether he was telling the truth or not, but ultimately decides to trust him.

“Alright, if you say so. I just figured I’d check in with you, make sure you were doing all right. Ei said he was a little worried that because of what happened you might be a bit hesitant to open up and tell him is something was wrong because you felt embarrassed or afraid or something. But you seem to be doing alright so, I’ll leave it at that.”

“Thank you for your concern, it really means a lot” Akashi admits. Tsuji allows a small smile to spread on her usually stoic face, before turning and heading back toward the classroom without another word.

Once 6th period ends, Nebuya and Akashi head toward the gym to ready themselves for the last day of basketball practice before the third years leave to begin taking entrance exams for college. As the two boys are entering the locker room to get changed, a flash of blonde passes in front of Akashi’s eyes, and before he can even react a strong and heavy force knocks Akashi backwards, clinging to him like some kind of oversized monkey.

“AKASHI!!!!” Hayama yells excitedly as he hangs from the younger boy’s shoulders, his legs wrapped around his waist.

“How are you doing?” The redhead huffs, having a hard time keeping the two of them up off the ground.
“I’m doing great thanks. Happy Birthday!” The blonde shouts with a happy grin on his face.

“Thank you, I really appreciate that, but I’d also appreciate it if you could get off of me, since I’m having a bit of trouble breathing when your thighs are crushing my rib cage.” Hayama thankfully releases him after that, and Seijuro breathes deeply now that there’s nothing constricting his diaphragm from expanding.

“So-chan!” Akashi turns and sees Mibuchi trotting on over to them.

“Hello, Reo” Akashi greets.

“Happy Birthday” the raven haired boy says, smiling warmly.

“Thank you, I really appreciate it” Akashi replies. He is caught off guard however when he notices his three teammates have broken off and started their own conversation.

“Should we do it now?”

“No, we should wait and do it later”

“But what if he finds one of them by accident?”

Seijuro stands awkwardly to the side as he watches this side conversation, which he is fairly certain is about him, unfolds.

“Um, am I missing something?” Akashi interjects, interrupting his older teammates. They exchange glances for a moment.

“Don’t worry about it right now” Nebuya says. “We’ll tell you about it after practice.”

And with that the three teens turn and walk away, heading over to their respective lockers, leaving behind a very confused Akashi. To their credit though, as soon as practice ends, and the gym has been cleaned and vacated, the older boys pull Akashi to the side just as he is about to exit the gym
to go back to the dorms, all of them exchanging excited glances. Mibuchi clears his throat before speaking.

“Now Sei-chan, something about the history of Rakuzan high school’s basketball team that you might not know about, mostly because they stopped this tradition during our first year, is the rule that states that whenever a member of the team, regular or not, has a birthday, it is the responsibility of the other regulars on the team, to get that member a gift, or in this case, gifts” the raven haired boy explains.

“Oh Reo that’s not necessary, none of you need to get me gifts, the well birthday wishes is enough I assure you” Akashi says, holding his hands up.

“Too late, the gifts have already been bought, and the only thing left to do is to give them to their new owner. Besides, we all set a price limit. Nothing over 2500 yen.” Akashi sighs in resignation, allowing his teammates to lead him back into the main gym, where they all take a seat. Mibuchi is the first to approach with his gift, a small, brightly color bag with equally bright colored tissue paper sticking out the top. Akashi takes the bag and holds it for a moment, unsure of what to do with it.

“Well, go on, open it!” Mibuchi insists, clasping his hands together excitedly. Doing as he’s told, Akashi begins removing the brightly colored tissue paper, before reaching into the bag and pulling out a tin of professional grade graphic drawing pencils. Akashi stares on the beautifully made graphic pencils for a moment before turning to the raven haired boy.

“Reo… these are lovely, thank you” Akashi says, observing the high quality supplies.

“You like them? Oh that makes me so glad. I was afraid you’d think that getting a bunch of pencils was stupid, but I know you’ve been enjoying your art class a lot so I figured a new set of sketching pencils might be a good gift” Mibuchi explains.

“They’re perfect, thank you so much!” Mibuchi smiles and steps out of the way as Hayama jumps in front of Akashi, shoving a poorly wrapped package into the redhead’s face.

“Here you go!” The blonde says happily. Despite the clear lack of effort put into wrapping the gift, Akashi takes the newspaper wrapped heap and unwraps it, causing two smaller parcels to fall into his lap, one long and thin, the other more square shaped. Picking up the longer parcel, Akashi unwraps it to reveal a long red metal tube with a closed bottom on one and a lip on the other that appears to be something you put your mouth on, a button sits just below the lip.
“Uuuum, I appreciate the gift but… what is this exactly?” Akashi asks, clearly confused as to what exactly Hayama had given him.

“AAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHH” Mibuchi screams, snatching the tube from Akashi’s hand and chucking it across the room. Akashi stares, dumbfoundead at the hand that once held Hayama’s birthday gift to him, but before he can even begin to question Mibuchi’s unpredictable antics, the raven haired male turns to the blonde and begins screaming at him.

“HAYAMA KOTARŌ HOW DARE YOU GIVE A 17 YEAR OLD BOY POT FOR HIS BIRTHDAY DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MUCH TROUBLE WE COULD GET INTO IF WE WERE FOUND WITH THIS ON CAMPUS” Hayama looks entirely too pleased with himself as Mibuchi continued with his enraged rant, while Nebuya has broken out into uncontrollable laughter, nearly falling off the bleachers all the while. Akashi continued to sit, absolutely dumbfounded and clueless as to what was going on.

“Do you have any idea what that little device that Ko gave you was?” Nebuya leaned over and whispered in Akashi’s ear once he had finally managed to stop laughing.

“No, I haven’t the slightest idea of what it was. And why is Reo getting so worked up over it?” Akashi asks, still very confused.

“It was a juul” the older boy says. Seijuro continues to look at Eikichi with a dumbfounded expression.

“Beg your pardon?” The redhead asks.

“You know, a juul, a vape, an e-cig. Pot” Nebuya explains. A moment of silence passes between the two boys.

“Why is Kotarō giving me pot?” Akashi asks, though more to himself than anyone else.

“Who cares, what’s in the second one?” Nebuya asks, pointing down at the smaller, square package still sitting in Akashi’s lap. Picking up the package, Akashi opens it only to find a small plastic bag full of gummies, an equally as confusing gift as the juul. Nebuya however, finds the gift to be even more hilarious than the juul, as he once again breaks out in uncontrollable laughter.
“Ko, are you trying to get him high or what?” Nebuya yells over to the blonde, who is still being chewed out by Mibuchi.

“I’m just giving him the opportunity to experience the wonder that comes when your mind is freed from all mortal struggles and worries and is allowed to drift aimlessly into the ethereal realm” Hayama explains.

“Ya right, for a newbie like him, one of those edibles would be a one way ticket to the shadow realm. Besides I think you’ve been on enough drugs lately. I’m confiscating these” Nebuya announces, swiping the gummies from Akashi’s hand and shoving them into his own bag. Akashi sighs and let's his head fall against his hand as he accepts that this situation, like many others recently, is far out of his control.

“Anyways, now that we’ve dealt with that debacle, Ei-chan it’s time for your gift” Mibuchi announces, straightening himself out before looking over at the darker skinned male.

“Right, my gift, ya, hmmm... about that” Nebuya begins. Mibuchi sighs.

“Let me guess, you forgot to get him a gift?”

“No! I got him one, in fact I got him a really good one, it’s just that the one I got might be… a bit over budget” Nebuya explains.

“Define ‘over budget’” Hayama says. Nebuya remains silent as he thinks.

“Ok, so technically I only actually paid 2500 yen for the gift, but when my parents heard that I was getting Sei a gift for his birthday, they wanted to pitch in to get him something too, so I suggested that instead of getting two gifts, that we just get him a more expensive one, and have my parents cover what the 2500 yen couldn’t. So, technically speaking, I didn’t go over budget but… you know what, just take it” Nebuya says, lifting up a large blue bag and handing it to Akashi. The bag itself is rather unassuming, but the object inside it is a lot heavier than Akashi initially expected. Reaching into the bag, Akashi it met with a large box that has been wrapped in colorfully decorated wrapping paper that reads ‘Happy Birthday’ in obnoxiously large letters all across the front of the box. Akashi laughs.

“Ya, my mom insisted on actually wrapping it. Apparently just sticking it in the bag would have
been lazy” Nebuya explains, his voice raising a few octaves to mimic the sound of his mother’s voice. As Akashi begins unwrapping the large gift, he wonders what it could possibly be. He had never spoken to Nebuya about things that he wanted for himself, and truth be told even if he did he would have likely bought it for himself by now. Pulling the box from the wrapping, Seijuro notices the brand name of the product HUION written in big bold letters at the top of the box. Strange, Akashi feels like he’s seen this brand before, but what on earth did they sell.

“Wait a minute” Akashi says aloud, as realization dawns on him. Nebuya is practically grinning from ear to ear as Akashi’s eyes go wide and he rips the rest of the wrapping paper off the box, revealing a brand new HUION Kamvas GT-221 Pro Screen Drawing Tablet, an item that Akashi knows retails for almost $900 US dollars, and if Nebuya paid for the first $25, that means that his parents had paid the other $875.

“EIKICHI” Akashi yells, causing everyone to jump in surprise.

“Happy Birthday!” Nebuya responds sheepishly, shrugging his shoulders at the boy’s reaction.

“EI THESE ARE SO EXPENSIVE WHAT THE FUCK?” The older boy puts his hands up defensively.

“Don’t yell at me, my mom was the one who wanted to get you the newer version, so if you want to take it up with someone talk to her.” Akashi sighs heavily, pinching the bridge of his nose. Setting the tablet to the side Akashi gets up and walks over to Nebuya.

“Come here you asshole” Akashi snaps, but Nebuya does not seem put off by it as he opens his arms and allows the smaller boy to hug him tightly.

“Happy Birthday, you little shit” Nebuya says fondly before releasing the redhead. Akashi turns to Mibuchi and Hayama and repeats the act.

“Thank you all so much for this” Akashi says gratefully. “You didn’t have to get me anything and yet you all went out and got be such wonderful gifts. I don’t know if I have the words to even properly thank you…”

“Ah, don’t worry about it” Hayama dismissed with a wave of his hand.
“Ya we were more than happy to do it” Mibuchi says happily. Akashi turns to face Nebuya who continues to look at his with a knowing gaze.

“I will be having words with your mother” the redhead warns, pointing at the older boy. Nebuya shrugs his shoulders uncaring.

“Good fucking luck. She’s going to tell you exactly what I just told you so don’t even bother.”

As the four teens finally exit the gym, Akashi carrying all of his birthday gift, even the one Hayama gave him, the redhead looks on toward the front road, noticing a familiar looking limousine parked right outside the front gate.

“Sei-chan, what is it?” Mibuchi asks, noticing that the boy had stopped. The others slow their pace and glance back at their younger teammate with curious expressions.

“Uh, you guys go on ahead without me” Akashi says. “I think there’s someone else who’d like to wish me a Happy Birthday.”

Pointing to the car parked out front, the three boys nod in understanding before continuing to make their way back toward the third year dorms, leaving their captain behind. Hayama says something that annoys Nebuya causing the larger man to shove him to the ground. Mibuchi scolds him but is quickly silenced when Nebuya kissed him on the cheek, and wraps his arm around the other man’s shoulders. Akashi stands still for a moment, watching the figures of his three friends disappear into the darkness, before turning toward the front gate and beginning to walk. Upon arriving at the car, his father’s chauffeur is already waiting patiently at the back door.

“Good evening Master Akashi” the older man greets with a polite bow before opening the door, allowing Akashi to slip into the back of the car next to his father. The elder Akashi makes no move to greet his son as he settles into the back of the limo and the chauffeur begins to drive them away from campus toward some unknown destination. To be perfectly honest, Akashi hadn’t expected his father to actually come all the way out to Kyoto just for his birthday, but then again the man was full of many surprises, so even this was to be expected.

The elder Akashi is silent all throughout the drive to the restaurant that they were apparently going to be eating at. The young boy can’t help but feel a bit trashy as the waiter leads them through the extravagantly decorated restaurant filled with elegantly dressed people, but with no time to change in between, he was just going to have to live with it.
“Seijuro” the elder man began, catching his son off guard.

“Yes, Father?”

“I’m aware of how last minute this get together is, but I am nonetheless glad that you were able to make time in your schedule to meet with me, especially for such a special occasion” his father says.

“It’s no trouble at all” Akashi states. “I’m just glad we’re able to celebrate my birthday on my birthday this year. I know how busy this time of year can be for you, but it’s still nice, regardless.”

His father nods, picking up his cup of tea and takes a sip. Akashi sits across from his father, not entirely wanting to be there, but not even the least bit willing to voice his desires to just go back to his dorm and go to bed. The two make light conversation until their food arrives, the conversation takes a dip as they eat, all the while Akashi can sense that there is something his father wants to ask him, but can’t quite figure out what.

“So have you figured out your schedule for next year?”

‘There it is’ Akashi thinks to himself, rolling his eyes at the golden question his father has likely been waiting all night to ask.

“For the most part, I just have one or two slots left to fill before I’m done” Akashi responds, though honestly the only open slot on his schedule was 6th period, the space he is hoping that Advanced Studio Art will go into.

“I see. And what are your options for the slots you still need to fill?” Akashi narrows his eyes at his father’s oddly specific questions.

‘He’s testing me’ the redhead thinks ‘trying to figure out if I’ve given up on getting into the advanced class or if he’s going to have to give me another lecture about why it’s a waste of time.’

A moment of silence passes as the younger boy thinks about how to respond.

“I have a number of different options ranging from core classes and other various elective types
classes. As of right now I have not decided which ones would best fit into my schedule” Akashi responds. A rather safe answer admittedly, but one that his father accepts well enough.

“Very well. It seems as though you have everything under control. I trust that you will make the correct decision” Akashi’s father states bluntly, fixing his son with an expectant glare. Akashi balls his hands into tight fists underneath the table, becoming more and more agitated the longer his father continues to speak.

“I suppose that would depend on what you consider to be the ‘correct decision’” Akashi responds, his voice laced with sarcasm. His father’s eyes widen in shock before narrowing once more.

“What do you mean?” He asks, displeased with the tone of his son’s voice.

“Father I have a request to ask of you” Akashi says, disregarding his father’s previous statement. The elder man remains silent.

“Throughout this last year I have learned so much from my art class, things that I never expected to learn from an entry level course” the boy begins. “The wisdom and guidance that I have gained from his year alone is—”

“Now Seijuro, listen. You are already very aware that I—”

“No, you listen” Akashi snaps, cutting his father off. The elder Akashi looks at his son with an expression of bewilderment.

“You’re right. I’m very well aware of how much you dislike the fine arts in the educational system and how you view them as nothing more than a waste of time. But what I don’t understand is how you can come to that conclusion if you yourself have never engaged in such a course throughout your entire life.”

For a moment, Akashi’s father stares at him, his expression changing from shock, to anger, to curiosity, to questioning, and then to amusement. Leaning back in his seat, the elder man folds his arms over his chest, expectantly.

“Very well then. I’m listening” the elder Akashi states.
“My teacher is a very bright, very talented, and very knowledgeable individual, both in and out of her field. She has worked with major corporations in both Japan as well as abroad in the United States. Her body of work alone is enough to back up her skill as an artist but her background in working with major businesses, marketing teams, charity organizations, and other such projects is a testament to her experience and connections within the business world as well. I believe that by taking her Advanced class next year that I will be able to expose myself to even more opportunities and connections that will undoubtedly help me when I take over the Akashi business in the future, all while learning from a magnificent teacher as well” Akashi explains. There is a long moment of silence as his father considers his son’s words.

“You seem to think very highly of this teacher of yours. Who is she?” Akashi’s father asks.

“Akira Emi” the younger responds.

“Akira Emi… I do believe I’ve heard that name before.”

“She’s very well known all around Japan for her artistic skill and marketing expertise. Rumor has it that major corporations fight over her constantly to get her working on projects for them” Akashi says.

“I see” Akashi’s father nods. Another moment of silence passes.

“Tell you what” Akashi’s father begins. “I’ll make you a deal, Seijuro.”

The younger boy straightens in anticipation.

“While I’m still not entirely convinced that this ‘Advanced Studio Art Class’ is something that I can allow you to waste an entire year of your time on, I am willing to give you the chance to prove me wrong.”

“How will I do that?” Akashi asks hesitantly.

“As you know, the day after tomorrow is the company’s annual Winter Ball, where I invite a wide array of other company CEOs and their families to a night of dancing, food, and good company.”
Akashi remains silent as his father continues.

“Invite your teacher to the ball. How she presents herself and interacts with the other guests should give me plenty of insight into her professional character. And, if she is truly as remarkable and talented as you make her out to be, then I will allow you to enroll for her class without any further arguments. So what do you say Seijuro, do we have a deal?”

Akashi stared at his father, silently contemplating what to do. On the one hand this whole ‘deal’ could actually be one massive one-sided scam that will both humiliate him and deny him the opportunity to take Emi-Sensei’s Advanced class without his father having to lift a finger. On the other hand however, this could be the opportunity to get himself into that Advanced class that Akashi has been looking all year for. On top of being able to show off that he was one of Emi-sensei’s students, Akashi would also be able to shove his father’s pretentious opinion right back into his face, and finally get into the Advanced class. Although the odds were stacked heavily against him, Akashi knew that this was the only chance he was going to get to prove to his father that he belonged in that class.

“Very well. I accept your deal. But you will not base your decision upon any preconceived notions you have about the subject or about Emi-sensei. Your final decision will be based upon what you see and observe throughout the night, and it will be made fairly and truthfully as well. No lying that you hated her when you actually didn’t” Akashi adds. His father sighs heavily.

“Alright, I suppose I can’t begrudge you that. So the terms of this arrangement are as follows. You will bring your art teacher to the Sunday ball and allow her to mingle and interact with the other guests, not explicitly monitoring what she does and says. Disregarding all my previous opinions and biases against the subject, I will observe your teacher’s actions and conversations and base my decision around what I see and only what I see. My final decision will be completely truthful, made fairly, and only at the end of the night after I have had plenty of time to form my opinion. The winner of this arrangement will receive what they desire without any further complaints or arguments from the other side. Does this sound fair to you?”

“Yes” Akashi responds. With an uncharacteristic smile, Akashi’s father extends his hand across the table. The redhead reaches his hand out and takes his father’s, their deal officially sealed.

“Now may the best man win.”

The pair eventually finish their meal and depart from the restaurant, the limo making its way back toward Rakuzan campus. Upon arrival at the school Akashi thanks his father for the birthday meal before exiting the vehicle and beginning the walk back to the dorms.
The second Akashi is certain that the limo is out of sight, the redhead breaks into a sprint, arriving back at his dorm a few moments later, throwing his birthday gifts and his bag onto the ground before pulling his cell phone out and dialing a number.

“Come on come on come on come on come on” Akashi murmurs into the receiver, hoping and praying that someone will pick up. As soon as the receiver on the other end clicks, Akashi stiffens.

“Hello, this is Akira Emi speaking how may I-”

“SENSEI” Akashi accidentally screams into the phone, scaring the shit out of his teacher.

“Jesus Christ Akashi, there’s no need to yell, I’m right here kiddo” she scolds lightly.

“Sorry Emi-sensei. I don’t mean to bother you on a Friday night, but I have some really important news regarding my father’s decision on the Advanced class” Akashi explains. Emi-sensei hums in response.

“Really? Well go on then, do tell.”

The next several minutes were spent filling Emi-sensei in on the events of dinner earlier that night, as well as the ‘deal’ that Akashi made with his father.

“Wow that’s… quite the arrangement you two have” the young woman states, astonished.

“I know. I’m sorry to have to drag you into all this, but this is the only opportunity my father will give me to show him that I need to be in your class. Anything else and he won’t budge.” Emi-sensei sighs heavily on the other line. Akashi bites his lip, waiting anxiously for the crushing moment when she tells him she can’t do it, and that Akashi will have to go crawling back to his father, and admit defeat.

“Well, I suppose if this is the only way to get you into the Advanced class then I guess we have no other choice. What time do I need to be ready by?” Akashi releases the breath he was holding in, relief spreading throughout his body.
“The ball begins at around 6 pm, so to account for the time it will take to get there I’d say be ready to go at around 1 pm. It will give us plenty of time to get to Tokyo by train and be ready by 6” Akashi says.

“Alrighty then. 1 o’clock on Sunday afternoon it is then.”

“Thank you so much for doing this for me Sensei, it really means a lot” Akashi says graciously.

“No problem kiddo. I promised you earlier this year that we’d get you into that Advanced class, and I meant what I said. We’ll figure all this out together, don’t you worry. Talk soon kiddo.” And with that the call ends, and Akashi is left alone in his dorm room, accompanied only by the silence of the night. As he readies himself for bed, the redhead goes over everything that happened earlier that night in his head, over and over again, trying to come up with some kind of plan as to how they can best convince his father to let him join the advanced class, but the only thing Akashi can come up with as he crawls into bed that night is-

‘What the fuck have I gotten myself into?’

Chapter End Notes

I know the beginning of this chapter seemed really random and pointless but I promise there is some plot in there somewhere. Just when you thought you were rid of the shittiest dad in all of Kuroko no Basket, I went ahead and brought him right back. Of course the slimy fucker is always up to something, but will Akashi’s father’s plan get him what he wants, or are Seijuro and Emi-sensei going to shove his stupid ass opinions right back up his ass? You’ll find out next chapter. Anyways thank you guys so much for reading and keeping up with my story, I hope you enjoyed this chapter, and I will see you all soon for chapter 40. Bye!
Sunday afternoon arrives far sooner than Akashi would have preferred, however as he hops into the backseat of Emi-sensei’s car, her girlfriend Navya having agreed to drive the two of them to the train station, the redhead can’t help but feel a bit optimistic about the situation, after all his father had actually given him the opportunity to change his mind regarding the advanced class, something he never would have allowed in years past.

The train ride to Tokyo was fairly uninteresting, and the drive to the Akashi manor once they had arrived was even less so. The servants of the Akashi estate seemed just as displeased with Emi-sensei and her overall appearance as they did the first time she visited, but they did a much better job of keeping their opinions to themselves.

“Well here it is” Akashi says, opening the door to one of the many spare bedrooms the manor had to offer. “You can use this room to get ready in. My room is just down the hall on the left, so if you need anything, please don’t hesitate to ask.”

“Sounds like a plan. See you when I’m ready” Emi-sensei says before disappearing into the room, closing the door behind her. Akashi takes a deep breath before heading to his own room to prepare. It only took him about an hour to shower, groom, and dress himself fully, but by the time Akashi stepped out of his room there was already talk among the servants about guests arriving at the front gates. Casting a glance back at the room Emi-sensei was in, Akashi swiftly walks down the hall toward the main staircase. Peeking over the railway Akashi is met with the sight of a dozen or so men and women entering through the large front doors, greeting each other and handing their coats over to the waiting staff members.

Hurrying back, Akashi makes his way to the room Emi-sensei had been given and, taking a moment to compose himself, knocks firmly on the wood of the door. A moment passes before the door handle turns and the heavy wooden door opens to reveal Emi-sensei, dressed in an long, elegant strapless dark blue gown that tapered at the waist but flared out toward the ankle. Her usually spiky short hair had been parted at the side and slicked down neatly against her head, giving her face a more rounded appearance. Her makeup, although simple and not too colorful, had been neatly applied and added that extra touch of elegance to her whole appearance.
As Akashi stood silently in front of his teacher, he couldn’t help but remember back to a time many years previous. He had only been 6 or 7 at the time, but Akashi could distinctly remember running down these very halls, dressed in his very best and groomed to absolute perfection. He remembered knocking on the door to his parents room, his tiny fist barely making a sound against the solid wooden door. Regardless the door opened a moment later, revealing a tall woman with light auburn hair, dressed in a long elegant strapless dark blue gown that tapered at the waist but flared out toward the ankle. As soon as his mother laid eyes on him she gasped, scooping the small boy into her arms and twirling him around the room.

“Oh my darling baby boy look at how grown up you are, oh where has the time gone” she cooed, placing a gentle kiss at the young boy’s forehead before placing him back down.

“Come now, stand up straight and let mother take good look at you.” The boy did as he was told, and stood absolutely straight, his arms glued to his side, just like he had learned in etiquette class.

“My goodness, you look so handsome”

“-Akashi” the sound of Emi-sensei’s voice broke Akashi from his trance, and he became keenly aware of the fact that he had been staring.

“Um, I’m sorry what was that?” Akashi asked, embarrassed for not paying attention.

“I said you look very handsome” the young woman said with a kind smile. Akashi could not help but smile back.

“Thank you. You look beautiful as well” the redhead replied. Emi-sensei laughed.

“Well aren’t you the little charmer. So how exactly is this whole thing going to work? I take it I’m not going to be meeting with your father right away am I?”

“No, you likely won’t meet with my father directly until the ball is over. But just because you won’t be speaking with him until later doesn’t mean he isn’t going to be evaluating you, and by extension me” Akashi explains.

“I see, so this is like an observational test. You’re dad is trying to figure out if I’m even worth his time.”
“Exactly” Akashi affirms. A moment of silence passes between the two.

“Well, I guess the only choice we have is to show him just how amazing I am” Emi-sensei says jokingly. Akashi laughs in response.

“Well aren’t you the little gentleman” she teases, taking his arm. The two then proceed to make their way down the hall and down the flights of stairs until they finally reach the main entrance.

Akashi can already hear various whispers and gasps from some of the other guests as he leads Emi-sensei down the stairs and into the main foyer of the Akashi manor. The one thing that never failed to make these types of events absolutely unbearable, was the presence of the young daughters and granddaughters of the other CEOs, who consistently tried to get close to Akashi for various reasons that the redhead didn’t care to think about at the present moment.

“Looks like somebody’s popular” Emi-sensei teases as the pair passes a group of young girls no older than 13 or 14, standing together, pointing and whispering in their direction.

“It’s time like these were I often wish I were literally anywhere else” Akashi responds bitterly.

“Akashi” a voice calls from behind. Akashi stiffens immediately.

“Oh no” the redhead grunts, as a young girl with long, straight black hair and brown eyes, dressed in a very plain looking pink dress and matching ballet flats rushes up to him.

“Akashi, it’s s good to see you again. It’s been so long since we’ve last seen each other, I was really hoping that you were-” the girl stops upon noticing Emi-sensei, her arm still hooked loosely with Akashi’s.

“Who… is this?” The girl asks, slightly taken aback.

“Ah, hello Mitsui. It’s very good to see you as well. This here is-”
“Akira Emi” the woman answers for herself, extending her hand out. The young girl composes herself and takes Emi-sensei’s hand, shaking it.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you Miss Akira. My name is Mitsui Yuri, and I’m a very good friend of Akashi’s” Mitsui introduces herself politely. Despite the polite tone of her voice, the young girl is obviously very displeased with Emi-sensei’s presence. Emi-sensei casts Akashi a teasing look before letting go of him to wrap her arms around Mitsui’s shoulders.

“Is that so” Emi-sensei asks. “It’s nice to finally meet one of Akashi’s friends from home. As his teacher I only ever see who his friends are on campus, but it’s nice to know that he has such lovely and elegant female friends his age” Emi-sensei says, her voice smooth and warm. Akashi watches dumbfounded as a bright red blush spreads across Mitsui’s face, and the young girl averts her gaze to the floor, unsure of where to look. Any and all animosity she showed earlier disappeared as Emi-sensei continued to shower the young girl with compliments about her dress, her hair, her shoes, and whatever else the woman noticed.

“Oh, uh, w-well it was very nice seeing you again Akashi. A-a-and… um… itwasverynicemeetingyouaswellMissAkira” the girl sputters out, before turning and disappearing into the crowd of people, her face as red as a tomato. Emi-sensei struts back up to Akashi, clearly pleased with her handiwork.

“What the hell did you just do to her?” Akashi asks, turning to look at his teacher.

“According to recent studies, only about 35% of the world’s population is actually heterosexual, and let me tell you, that girl right there, is not a member of that 35%” Emi-sensei states confidently.

“But she’s had a crush on me for as long as I can remember” Akashi whispers. “She used to follow me around for hours and refused to leave me alone until it was time for her to leave, and you made her run away with her face glowing red in less than 2 minutes.”

Emi-sensei shrugs her shoulders.

“What can I say. I have a way with women.” And with that the young woman begins making her way toward the appetizer table, leaving Akashi behind to contemplate what just happened.
‘Maybe I should start taking notes’ the redhead thinks to himself as he follows his teacher, determined not to lose her in the sea of corporate executives.

“I say, is that a Miss Akira Emi I see?” A short, middle aged man with a receding hairline asks as he makes his way toward Akashi and Emi-sensei.

“Well it if it isn’t Mr. Oshima Hitoshi. It’s so nice to see you” Emi-sensei greets, shaking the man’s extended hand.

“Likewise. I had heard rumors from some of the other guests that you were here, but I never thought it would be in the company of the young Akashi Seijuro” the man says.

“Yes, well young Akashi here is my student, he’s currently enrolled in my Intro class at Rakuzan High School. I agreed to attend this stunning event with the hopes that we could convince his father to allow him into my Advanced class as well” the young woman explains. Mr. Oshima laughs heartily.

“Well in that case I must wish you good luck. No offense to you Akashi, but your old man is about as stubborn as they come, but luckily for him he has the power and the smarts to back up his stubbornness.”

“We’ll see about that.” Akashi turns to his teacher as the man walks away.

“How do you know the CEO of one of the largest radio stations in all of Japan?” Akashi asks the woman curiously.

“I did a collaborative project with him back when I was in college. They hired me to do some marketing work for them, and I did such a good job that I ended up doing several more jobs for them when I first moved to Japan” Emi-sensei explains.

“In fact I know quite a few big names in here. Most of them are the heads of fashion and design companies, but others have hired me to do marketing work for them, designing advertisements and packaging for their products.” Akashi nods in understanding.

“Akashi” a male voice from far away calls. Turning around, Akashi is met with the familiar face of Takahashi Hideki.
“Takahashi!” Akashi greets happily as they boy stops in front of him.

“I was wondering if you were going to be here. I figured since you lived at the dorms of your school that you’d try to skip out on this whole thing. Not that I’d blame you for it.” Akashi laughs.

“No, not this time. Although I thankfully didn’t have to come by myself this time around” Akashi says, motioning to Emi-sensei.

“Emi-sensei, I’d like to introduce you to Takahashi Hideki. He’s the son of a colleague of my father’s as well as a good friend of mine. Takahashi, this is Akira Emi.” Takahashi’s face practically lights up when Emi-sensei smiles at him.

“Miss Akira, it is such an honor to be able to meet you. I have been a big fan of you and your artwork for as long as I can remember” the boy states excitedly. Emi-sensei laughs.

“Well it’s a pleasure meeting you too Takahashi. Why don’t you tell me a little bit about yourself?”

The night progresses smoothly from there, Emi-sensei and Akashi continue to socialize Takahashi and with just about anyone who comes up to them, and while Akashi is certainly having a lot more fun than he expected, he can’t help the lingering nagging sensation at the back of his mind, constantly questioning where his father was, and more importantly, what the older man was thinking. Finally after what felt like an eternity, the elder Akashi makes his appearance, gathering everyone’s attention before speaking.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, boys and girls. I am so honored that you could all make it to this year’s annual Akashi Winter Ball and celebrate such a wonderful time of year with us.” The crowd applauds for a moment before quieting down again.

“Now, I know you must all be hungry, so I am pleased to announce that the estates magnificent chefs have prepared you all a lovely and fresh cooked meal. If you would all kindly make your way to the dining area, so that the feast may begin.” And with that, Akashi’s father signals for the dining room’s doors to be opened, allowing all the guests to begin filling into the large and spacious room.

“Wow” Emi-sensei says in awe. “You could fit an entire neighborhood in this one room.”
“Ya, I guess it is pretty big isn’t it?” Akashi admits, as he leads his teacher toward the rows of buffet tables lined with delicious looking delicacies. As soon as the two of them have their plates of food, they make their way toward the largest table in the center of the room, which has been reserved for the most important party guests.

“Seijuro” Akashi’s father greets as the pair arrive at the table.

“Good evening father” the younger replies politely. Putting his plates down on the table, Akashi pulls Emi-sensei’s seat out for her, allowing the young woman to sit down in her seat, before sitting down himself.

“So this must be the teacher that I’ve heard so much about recently” Akashi’s father states emotionlessly, staring Emi-sensei down with an intense glare. The young woman does not seem fazed in the least bit as she returns the elder Akashi’s glare with a warm smile.

“The one and only” Emi-sensei replies sweetly. “I must thank you for inviting me to such a lovely event. It took a bit of work to shuffle my schedule around but it would seem that it was all worth it.”

Akashi’s father eyes Emi-sensei with a stern look.

“Well, it looks like you were able to attend without too much issue. I apologize for the short notice, but Seijuro has talked so much about you that I just had to meet you” the man said, his voice remaining even and emotionless.

“That’s alright. I’m just glad I was finally able to meet the man behind the prodigy.” Akashi pauses at Emi-sensei’s last comment. Emi-sensei is looking at the elder Akashi with nothing but confidence and amusement in her gaze as the older man contemplates how to respond.

“And? Are you satisfied with what you see?” Emi-sensei’s smile widens in response, and she laughs.

“You’re exactly as I imagined... sir.” A moment of tense silence passes between the two, before Akashi’s father finally breaks eye contact to take a sip from his wine glass.
“Well, I’m glad I lived up to your expectations. But enough conversation, please eat your food.” And with that the table digs in to their plates of warm and delicious food. Akashi shifts his gaze to Emi-sensei questioningly, wondering if taunting his father was the way to win him over. As though his teacher had read his mind, Emi-sensei smiled and winked at him, silently reassuring him that she knew what she was doing.

“Miss Akira, is it true that young Akashi here is your pupil?” an older woman with grey hair, wearing a green dress and cream colored shawl asks from across the table.

“Why yes Mrs. Togoshi, Akashi is currently one of my students, and a rather fine one at that” Emi-sensei replies.

“I’ve heard from former Rakuzan students who now work for my husband’s company that your classes are some of the best and most influential art classes that they’ve ever taken. Even some of the students who went on to study art in college with some of the most world renowned artists and professors still say that they learned the most from your classes” Another woman sitting next to Mrs. Togoshi states.

“Is that so? Well I’m glad I was able to make a lasting impression on some of my former students” Emi-sensei says cheerfully.

“Are you enjoying Miss Akira’s class so far Akashi?” The woman next to Mrs. Togoshi, Mrs. Naru is Akashi remembers correctly, asks.

“Yes, I am greatly enjoying Emi-Sensei’s class. Everything I have learned throughout the year has helped me grow and develop as an artist, and the more projects we worked on, the more I started to notice how the way that I draw, paint, and do art in general has changed significantly the more I was exposed to different techniques and eras and styles of art. Admittedly, Emi-Sensei’s style of teaching is far more casual and laid back than what I am used to, but it is very easy to see based on her lectures how knowledgeable she is in the subject of art history, and her portfolio of both past and present works she has shown us only serve to further prove just how skillful and talented of an artist she is” Akashi explains.

“Oh stop it you, you’re completely over exaggerating” Emi-sensei says, lightly pushing Akashi’s shoulder. Everyone around them laughs at the lighthearted exchange.

“That’s all well and good, but is art really something that is going to be useful to you in the business world?” A tall man with slightly graying black hair, a strong jaw, and pronounced wrinkles under his eyes, wearing a plain black suit asks.
“Oh, Kanko please. Must you make everything about business?” Mrs. Togoshi scolds her husband.

“This has nothing to do with making everything about business” the older man states firmly.

“As much as I can appreciate and applaud Miss Akira for her artistic skills and talents, she is an artist, and so obviously she utilizes the artistic skills she has so she can do her job. However young Akashi here is not going to be an artist, he is the heir to one of the most powerful and influential corporations in all of Japan, and so the way I see things, the skills that are essential for Miss Akira to have in order to do her job are completely useless to a soon-to-be business man.”

Akashi can practically feel his father grinning from the head of the table, knowing that not a single word can be said to disprove Mr. Togoshi’ s words.

“Are you absolutely certain about that Mr. Togoshi?” All eyes snap to Emi-sensei, who sits calm and composed in her seat, eyeing the older gentleman with a confident expression. Mr. Togoshi huffs.

“Do you think I am wrong, Miss Akira? Do you believe that studying art is really going to help Akashi run the family business once it is finally his turn to take over, is that what you think?” Akashi feels a shiver run down his spine as Emi-Sensei’ s smile slowly widens into, what can only be described as a devilish smirk.

“Why yes I do, Mr. Togoshi, and allow me to **educate** you as to why I think that” the woman states, placing extra emphasis on the word ‘educate’.

The entire table remains silent as Emi-sensei continues. Akashi swallows nervously.

“While it is true that, as a businessman, knowing how to draw and paint pretty pictures wont be of much use to Akashi if and when he takes over the family business, however being knowledgeable in subjects such as color theory, composition, form, values, expression through visual media, and such, are crucial things to know if you want to market your company to your audience” Emi-sensei begins.

“Of course a company as large and powerful as the Akashi Corporation will obviously have an entire team of dedicated and talented individuals working to market and promote the products and services the company is trying to sell. However I can attest from my own personal experiences
working with big name corporations, is that the ones whose executive officials are actively involved in the marketing process and are constantly working with the marketing team, working and reworking ad campaigns, designing interesting packaging for products, developing new and interesting ways to reaching larger and more diverse audiences, are the ones who garner the most amount of success, as well as the most amount of revenue from customers.” From his peripheral vision, Akashi sees his father lean forward in his seat, his, and everyone else’s, attention completely focused on Emi-sensei.

“Now regarding Akashi and his future position as CEO of the corporation, the knowledge and skills he gains through taking various types of art classes will allow him to be able to work and collaborate with various members of his staff, as well as outside contractors, regarding the vision and image he would like for the company to project. Something he would not be able to do effectively if he did not have the teaching or the vocabulary to communicate exactly what he is looking for, and make educated, helpful comments and critiques on the work that is being done.”

“But wouldn’t he still be able to communicate what he is looking for even without that knowledge. After all many CEOs who haven’t studied art can still approve and reject ideas just based on whether they like it or not right?” Takahashi asks, sending a knowing gaze toward Akashi.

“Why yes Takahashi, it is true that without having artistic knowledge, CEOs and other management officials can approve or reject the work the marketing teams and other independent contractors have done using only what they see and observe, however whether or not you like how a piece looks does not necessarily determine whether or not the ad or design presented will do the job it is intended to do” Emi-sensei explains.

“What do you mean by that?” Everyone’s gaze turns to the head of the table, as Akashi’s father finally breaks his silence.

“Well Mr. Akashi, let's say you have commissioned me to design an advertisement promoting a product your company is going to be releasing. In the project brief you say that the ad must be colorful but minimal, be geared towards kids, and have some kind of ‘element’ to it that hypes the product up, so that once it is released, it goes flying off the shelves. Does that sound like the kind of brief you would give your marketing team or independent graphic designer, Mr Akashi?” The older man narrows his eyes slightly.

“Yes that sounds about right. Is there something wrong with that?” Emi-Sensei pauses for a moment to think.

“Well, no, there isn’t anything ‘wrong’ with that brief necessarily. It’s just that it’s too… vague. You want the ad to be colorful so that would lead me to think of a color scheme with anywhere between, say, 5 to 12 different colors. The minimal part is a bit tricky because you could mean
minimal in terms of color palette, which completely contradicts the ‘colorful’ aspect you wanted earlier, or you could mean minimal in terms of the amount of text on the ad, meaning that everything that we want to tell the audience must be told visually in picture or illustration form. Demographic wise, not only have you not specified a gender that this product is geared towards, which, believe it or not, would greatly influence how I designed the overall composition of the ad, but the age range is to nonspecific as well; by ‘kids’ do you mean younger ones between the ages of 4 and 12, do you really mean teenagers 13+, or are you using ‘kids’ as an umbrella term for anyone under the age of 18 years old. Last but not least of course is that ‘element’ you wanted that will have your product flying off the shelves, I mean… I don’t even know where to begin with that one, is the ‘element’ the composition, the layout, the use of what little text I may be put onto the ad? Even as a professional graphic designer I honestly wouldn’t even know where to begin with that one.” Akashi’s father nods slowly as he assesses Emi-Sensei’s words.

“Well then, if that brief wasn’t specific enough for your tastes, what would you consider to be a… more appropriate example?” Emi-Sensei leans against the table, smirking confidently.

“Hmmm, well off the top of my head I can think of several things that would make this prompt a bit more workable, but… what do you think Seijuro?” Akashi jumps at the use of his given name, and turns to Emi-sensei with a look of confusion. She smiles warmly at him, and gives him a look that says, ‘I’m confident that you already know the answer to this question. All you have to do is prove it to all these idiots’. Nodding, Akashi takes a deep breath before speaking.

“Well, the term ‘colorful’ can mean a wide variety of things, but I believe that having a cohesive color pallet made up of complementary colors and hues would allow for the image to stand out to the viewer without being too overpowering to the eye. In terms of ‘minimal’ I believe it would refer to the amount of text present on the advertisement, which leads to two scenarios: One, we could forgo the use of text in favor of exclusively showcasing the product, but this could potentially lead to viewers misunderstanding what the product is or its functions. Two, we could allow text, but limit it to simply the name of the product and perhaps some key features or functions, which I believe would be the wisest decision. The demographics are a bit confusion, but assuming that no specific gender was given the best course of action would be to assume that the product is not make with a specific gender in mind, therefore the advertisement should be designed with both men and women in mind. As for the age, I believe this product is targeting older children and teenagers, as we have studied in class that advertisements geared toward ‘kids’ ages 8 to 16 are often colorful and catch the eye, but lack large amounts of text that would bore people of that age. As for the ‘element’ we were talking about, I too am a bit confused as to what that could mean, however I think that the term ‘element’ and other similar such words are often misused by people who don’t truly understand the vocabulary and want to seem like they know what they are talking about. Based on this I believe what the brief is trying to say it that on top of having an eye catching color pallet and limited amount of text, the advertisement should, overall, be interesting to look at, provide enough information about the product to make the target demographic want to buy it, and lastly be relevant to the time the advertisement is being made, basing the design and the style around what is currently popular and most effective at selling products to customers. Based on the information that was provided I think this would be the best course of action to take if I were going to design an advertisement using this brief” Akashi finally finished his long wined explanation. Looking up, the redhead notices that everyone around the table is staring at him with looks of awe and dumbfoundedness, even his father.
“I couldn’t agree more with that assessment Seijuro’” Emi-sensei says proudly, turning back to the rest of the table members.

“So do you see why having artistic knowledge is important. If young Akashi here wasn’t familiar with the terminology or the concepts I talked about, he wouldn’t have been able to analyze and broaden upon the very vague and confusion brief I initially gave, and turn it into a specific, workable prompt that would give the person working on this project a much better idea as to what their client is looking for in the final product. Likewise, with that knowledge, Akashi can now better communicate the ideas and visions he has to the team or individual working on the projects he assigns them to” Emi-sensei finished. The moment of silence once again passes over the table.

“Well, that was certainly… enlightening, Miss Akira” Akashi’s father states. “I must admit that even I learned something valuable today.”

Emi-Sensei smiles.

“I’m glad I was able to clear up any misconceptions you had. I know it's not always very well known, but having an art background can actually be very useful in a wide variety of fields, and in more ways than you might think.” Akashi’s father nods again before returning his attention to his food, a pensive look on his face. The rest of the guests finish their meals in relative silence, only breaking it to engage in bouts of small talk.

Eventually, the party comes to an end, and all the guests begin filing back into the main entrance of the Akashi manor, gathering their coats from the servants and exchanging last minute goodbyes.

“Thank you so much for speaking with me today Miss Akira. I greatly appreciate all the wonderful advice you gave me” Takahashi thanks as he is about to leave with the rest of his family.

“It was no problem at all kiddo, and please, call me Emi-sensei.” The raven haired boy practically beamed in response.

“Hideki! Come on it's time to go” Takahashi’s father calls from the doorway.

“I have to go. Thank you both for the wonderful evening. And good luck on getting into the Advanced class Akashi” Takahashi says before turning and making his way toward his family.
“He was nice” Emi-sensei comments.

“Ya, he’s pretty cool. I like him a lot too” Akashi responds.

The pair spend the next while speaking with and exchanging parting words with the people they spoke with throughout the party. Just as the last few guests are beginning to trickle out the door, the head butler approaches Akashi.

“Master Akashi. Your father has requested both yours and Miss Akira’s presence in his personal study. Something about bringing a close to the arrangement you two have, I believe.” And with that the old man bows politely and walks away to carry out his other duties. Akashi and Emi-sensei exchange looks before heading up the large staircase toward his father’s study. Upon reaching the large dark wooden doors, Akashi stops, taking a moment to compose himself.

“Here goes nothing I guess” he says before knocking on the heavy oak door and entering the room.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter has a lot going on in it, but I think I did a pretty good job all things considered. Let me know what you guys think of it in the comments below! As always I will see you guys soon for chapter 41. Bye!
Akashi’s father is stood behind his desk, facing the large glass windows that look out onto the large, front lawn of the Akashi manor. The man remains silent as the Akashi and Emi-sensei approach.

“Sit down, both of you” the elder Akashi orders after a long pause. Doing as they are told, Emi-sensei and Akashi both take a seat in one of the two padded chairs that sit in front of the dark desk. After another moment of silence Akashi’s father sighs, turning away from the window and taking a seat himself. He studies the two individuals sitting across from him before speaking.

“I believe you and I have an arrangement to settle, don’t we?” The man says to his son.

“We do” Akashi affirms. “So what did you think?”

Akashi’s father leans forward in his seat, placing his chin on his folded hands.

“I think I’ve been beaten at my own game.” Both Akashi and Emi-sensei are shocked by his responds.

“Miss Akira, I don’t mean to offend you when I say this, however at the beginning of this night, I expected to be wholly underwhelmed by you.” Emi-sensei laughs.

“None taken. I’m used to old, entitled men looking at me and thinking that I’m nothing more than a pretty face. It makes putting them in their place that much more enjoyable” the young woman says with a sly grin.

“Clearly” Akashi’s father responds, turning his attention to his son.

“Seijuro you know better than anyone else how much I loathe loosing.”

“I am. And I’m also aware of the lengths you are willing to go to in order to assure your victory. I hope you aren’t planning on pulling anything unsavory that might tip the table in your favor” Akashi warns, narrowing his eyes accusatory at his father. The older man sighs in frustration.

“You and I made a deal, the terms of which require me to express my full and true opinion regarding your teacher, and while it pains me to have to admit this… I was very impressed. Clearly, Miss Akira, you are very knowledgeable in your field, you have a great deal of experience that has given you practical knowledge and expertise on how your work is used by businesses and marketing teams, and, most surprisingly of all, was how much you knew Seijuro.”

“Yes well, you know the saying, the student is only ever as good as the teacher” Akashi responds dryly. His father hums in response.

“Right, well, I think it’s been made clear enough who is the winner of this agreement, and as per the terms of said agreement… I will allow you to enroll for the advanced art class, Seijuro.”

“Thank you, Father” Akashi says gratefully. Externally, Akashi’s expression was calm and collected, showing only the faintest hint of pleasure over his victory. Internally, however, the red head was jumping and spinning for joy, running around screaming at the top of his lungs in total
and absolute glee, petty, petty glee. Once the conversation had ended, Akashi and Emi-sensei excuse themselves from the large office, and are only barely able to contain themselves as they walk through the large mansion corridors toward their rooms.

Victory was theirs.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is pathetically short but it didn’t flow well into the next chapter so I decided to just cut it short instead of having this really awkward transition so ya that’s pretty much all I have to say for myself, the next chapter will be better I promise. Thanks so much for reading and as always I will see you all very soon for chapter 42. Bye!
Entertaining Family

Chapter Notes

New chapter, yay!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Akashi and Emi-sensei depart for Kyoto not long after their meeting with Akashi’s father, both needing to be present for school the next morning. Navya was waiting patiently in the parking lot as the two exited the train station, both tired from the evening’s events, but still thrilled over having managed to convince Akashi’s father to let his son continue his art career.

With only two weeks left of school, everyone was practically scrambling to get everything they needed to do done, what with finals and dorm move outs being the first week and student-advisor meetings for the soon-to-be first, second, and third years being held that second week. The Graduation Ceremony ending the year on that last Friday night of the second week.

The first three days of that first week were spent on final exams, all of which Akashi is certain he aced. Thursday and Friday were spent packing up his room and moving his belongings, the ones he wasn’t taking with him, into on-campus storage where they would remain until he was ready to move in to his new dorm next year. Grabbing his backpack and his suitcase, Akashi takes one last look around the room that served as his home for the past year, before closing the door, returning his key to the front desk, and exiting the second year dorms.

As he approaches the back parking lot by the third year dorms, Akashi can make out the sight of Nebuya, who was forcefully trying to cram boxes and bags into the back of his car.

“Need a hand?” The redhead asks as he approaches the older male. Nebuya sighs and stands up, using the bottom of his shirt to wipe the sweat off his forehead.

“No, I think I’m ok. I still have a lot of shit to fit in here even after making the round trip home yesterday, but I think I’ve made enough room for your stuff too” Nebuya responds, reaching down and grabbing Akashi’s suitcase and placing it in the open space of the trunk.

“Are you sure it’s alright for me to spend the entire week at your house? I appreciate your parents inviting me to stay with you so that I can attend the graduation ceremony, but I wouldn’t want to intrude or be a bother, especially since you have family in town” Akashi says.
“All the more reason for you to come stay” Nebuya replies, slamming the door of his trunk shut. Akashi raises an eyebrow questioningly as he moves the carrier bag holding a sleeping Midna and gets into the passenger seat of the car, gently placing the bag into his lap.

“What do you mean?”

“What I mean is that having almost the entirety of my dad’s side of the family in my house for several weeks is going to be a fucking nightmare, so having you around will help me hold on to what little of my sanity I have left” Nebuya says, getting into the driver’s seat of his car and turning on the ignition.

“I see. And how many of them are there again?” Akashi asks as they exit Rakuzan campus and head toward the highway.

“Hmmm, let’s see. There’s my grandparents, my three aunts and two uncles, their spouses, all of my cousins, and then a couple of family friends, so in total I think there are about… 21 people coming, I think.”

“21 people?” Akashi asks incredulously.

“I told you there were a lot of us. Besides flying between Japan and Nigeria isn’t cheap, so whenever anyone has an excuse to head out one way or the other, the rest of the family usually comes with them” Nebuya defends. Akashi chuckles lightly.

“No, I didn’t mean it as a bad thing, I just have never even heard of people having that many immediate family members, is all” Akashi explains. Nebuya shrugs his shoulders.

“I guess that makes sense. Big families aren’t really much of a thing in Japan anymore are they?”

“No, not really” Akashi affirms. “So when are your family arriving?”

Nebuya pauses to think for a moment.
“I know grandma and grandpa already flew in yesterday. Aunty Ejaita is coming in tonight. Aunty Orisa, her wife Kesandu, and their three kids are flying in tomorrow morning. Aunty Ileara, her husband Kwento, and their three kids fly in tomorrow night. Uncle Azi, his wife Nneka, their four kids get here tomorrow around midday. And last but not least Uncle Bako and his boyfriend Tayo fly in sometime on Sunday” Nebuya finished explaining.

“Wow, there are a lot of you” Akashi says. Nebuya laughs.

“I told you. Good luck remembering all their names.”

“Oh come on, it won't be that hard.”

“You say that now, but you'd be surprised how hard it is to remember a bunch of names that aren’t Japanese is.”

“Oh yee of little faith” Akashi counters. The two boys fall into a comfortable silence for the remainder of the drive. Akashi spends most of it wondering what the rest of Nebuya’s family is going to be like. Being an only child, and having come from a long line of only children, Akashi never had any siblings, aunts, uncles, or cousins around when he was growing up, in fact the closest blood relatives Akashi has excluding his mother and father would be his paternal grandparents, and his relationship with them was distant, at best.

Before long, the two boys arrived at the Nebuya household. Even from the outside, Akashi could hear the sound of people talking, laughing, and moving about. Upon entering the house, Akashi opens the zipper of the travel bag, allowing Midna to finally escape from its confines and scamper up the staircase. Standing up and taking a look around, Akashi is met with the sight of Masaru, relaxing on the couch watching TV, the twins engaging in a wrestling match on the floor in front of the couch, Kyoka and Akin setting plates, glasses, and silverware on the table, and lastly an elderly couple, a man seated comfortably at the breakfast bar, and a woman diligently chopping vegetables.

They both appeared to be in their early to mid 70s. The man had short almost white hair, brown eyes, dark but warm umber toned skin, and heavy wrinkles on his forehead, under his eyes, and around his mouth. He wore a blue long-sleeve shirt that was decorated with intricate and colorful threaded designs around the neckline and sleeves and a pair of plain brown paints. The woman had long grey hair that was style into dreadlocks and tied up in a messy bun on the top of her head, amber eyes, darker cooler toned skin, similar to the appearance of dark chocolate, and deep wrinkles around her mouth and cheeks. She wore a black halter top underneath a brightly colored woven shawl, sap green loose fitting sari pants, and a large amount of beaded jewelry including, but not limited to, earrings, nose rings, necklaces, chokers, bracelets, rings, and ankle bracelets.
“Oh, well it's about time you boys showed up.” The sounds of Kyoka’s voice breaks Akashi from his observations, and all eyes turn to the two boys standing in the entryway. Upon seeing the youngest Nebuya, the elderly woman yells excitedly, dropping the knife she was using and practically running to greet the large boy. The woman spoke rapidly, in a language that Akashi could not understand nor had he ever heard before, hugging and kissing the darker male and speaking to him in what Akashi could only assume was some kind of baby talk, something Nebuya clearly did not enjoy.

Apparently, whatever language it was the woman spoke, Nebuya could speak it as well, as the boy began conversing with her as though he had spoken it his whole life. At one point Nebuya turned and pointed directly at Akashi, saying a few words. Akashi stood very still as her amber eyes studied him harshly, her closer proximity making it painfully obvious of the fact that she was several inches taller than him. Her stern expression quickly melted into one of excitement and curiosity, as the elderly woman shot forward, trapping Akashi in a deathly tight hug that nearly lifted him off the ground, and then kissed him once on both cheeks.

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“Nitorina eyi ni Ọmọkunrin ti mo ti gbọ pupọ nipas? [So this is the boy I’ve heard so much about?]” The woman spoke, directing her attention back to Nebuya who nodded.

“Mo ti gbọ pupọ nipas, o dara ki o pade nyin [I’ve heard so much about you, it is so good to finally meet you]” she said to Akashi, who remained silent for a moment before smiling and nodding awkwardly, not having the slightest clue what this woman was saying to him.

“Iya-ma [grandma], he doesn’t speak Yoruba, he has no idea what you’re saying” Nebuya says in Japanese. The woman pauses for a moment before laughing.

“Ah yes, of course, my apologies. I have bad habit of going back to my native tongue when I get excited” the woman says in heavily accented Japanese, much to Akashi’s surprise.

“Something like that, yes” Akashi replies.
“I knew it. I could always tell by way he talks that he cares a lot about you, even if he tries to deny.”

“Emi ko gbiyanju lati kọ, o ko mọ igba ti o dawọ lati beere awọn ibere ti ara ọni [I never tried denying it, you just don’t know when to stop asking overly personal questions]” Nebuya snaps.

“Sọrọ si mi bi pe lẹkansi ati pe emi yoo ṣiṣe ahọn re ni ipẹtẹ oni yi [Talk to me like that again and I’ll be serving your tongue in tonight’s stew]” the woman says in a threatening voice, causing Nebuya to deflate slightly, a pout on his face.

“Never mind him” Lebechi says “come in come in, you must be starved, we have dinner cooking.”

“Oh, uh, thank you” Akashi says, shooting Nebuya a glace. The older boy merely shrugs in response before heading toward the elderly man still seated at the breakfast bar.

“Hi Baba [grandpa], how are you doing?” Nebuya asks, leaning down to gently wrap his arms around the elder man, who happily reciprocates.

“Hello Eikichi, I am well, thank you” His grandfather responds, also in heavily accented Japanese. Akashi moves to stand next to Nebuya as the two finish their embrace, the elder man’s attention shifting to the redhead. He smiles warmly at Akashi.

“Hello. I do not believe we have met” the man says in a deep and calming voice.

“No we haven’t. My name is Akashi Seijuro and it is a pleasure to meet you, sir” Akashi greets, bowing politely to the older man, who laughs heartily in response.

“It is very nice to meet you too. My name is Chimezie Adetunji. As my wife said we have heard many things about you from our grandson.”

“Only good things I hope, sir.” Chimezie laughs once again.
“There is no need for such formality my boy, we are all family here. Please, call me Baba-agba [grandpa], everyone does” Chimezie says with a smile. Akashi nods in response, taking a glance at Nebuya, who winks at him before making his was back toward the entrance to begin taking his things up to his room. Akashi follows him out to the car and begins unloading his own things, bringing them up to Nebuya’s room, moving on to help Nebuya move his things.

“Ok, that’s the last of it” Nebuya says, dropping the last box onto the floor with a huff, wiping his hands on his jeans. The large room was an absolute disaster compared to how tidy it was the last time Akashi was in it. Boxes and bags filled with Nebuya’s belongings were piled in the corner, the floor was covered in dirty clothes and various things that the older boy had yet to put away like notebooks, sketchbooks, pens and pencils, and a wide variety of different paints, palettes, and brushes.

Looking down at the floor, Akashi saw a small black spiral bound sketchbook that had been forgotten amongst the mess. Akashi leans down and picks the book up turning it over in his hands for a moment before opening the first page and beginning to leaf through it. The old, wrinkled pages were filled to the brim with scribbles, sketches, and random drawings that lacked the fluency and dynamic of Nebuya’s usual drawing style.

“Hey Ei” Akashi prompts, pulling the other boy from his concentrated state.

“Ya?” Nebuya responds.

“How old is this sketchbook?” Akashi asks, holding out the black book for Nebuya to inspect. The older boy cringes upon flipping open the cover.

“Oh Jesus this is a really old one” Nebuya states, flipping to the back cover.

“This one is from 2010, so I was 11 years old when I finished it.”

“Wow, that is pretty old” Akashi says, impressed.

“Well, I’ve been drawing for a long time. I didn’t get as good as I am over night. In fact I sucked for a long time before I got even remotely good” Nebuya admits, placing the sketchbook on his bookshelf.
“I find that rather hard to believe” Akashi says, sitting down next to the older boy. Nebuya laughs.

“Well it’s true. I was never one of those kids who was naturally gifted when it came to drawing. I got better because I liked doing it and I kept on doing it even if I wasn’t good at it at first.”

“I don’t see anything wrong with that” Akashi says. “That just goes to show that so long as you keep practicing something you will ultimately get better at it.”

“I couldn’t agree more. Although that probably doesn’t apply very much to you, seeing as how your perfect at everything you do” Nebuya says teasingly. Akashi deflates slightly.

“While I admit that I have a tendency to be a bit of a perfectionist, I don’t think that applies as much to my artistic abilities.” Nebuya raises an eyebrow at him.

“What do you mean?” Akashi pauses for a moment to think.

“When I first started out in Emi-sensei’s class, my work was very hyper-realistic to the point where they looked more life photographs than drawings. While there’s nothing wrong with hyper-realism or the work I did at the beginning of the year, I realized after seeing the kind of work that you and everyone else in the advanced class did that there was much more to art than just copying what you see onto a piece of paper. The different styles that everyone has makes everything you do and make unique because no one can replicate the unique style that only you have. Even though I’m really good at hyperrealism, I’ve actually been doing a lot of experimenting the past few months, trying to find a unique style of my own, so that the work that I do going forward can something unique to me.” A moment of silence passes between the two boys after Akashi finished his explanation. Nebuya nods his head in understanding.

“I never really looked at it like that but I guess that makes sense” the boy says, turning his attention back to organizing his room. The next few hours are spent in relative silence as Nebuya continues to clean his room and Akashi occupies his time with looking through some of Nebuya’s older sketchbooks. By the time the two are called down for dinner, it is already dark outside and Nebuya’s Aunt Ejaita, a tall thin woman with dark skin, brown eyes, and chin length black coily hair, has been picked up from the airport and is seated at the kitchen table, speaking animatedly with Akin.

Chapter End Notes

Transitioning from the last chapter to this chapter was awkward as hell in my opinion,
and I swear to god I wrote and rewrote this fucking chapter over and over again but it never came out exactly the way I wanted it to, so instead of wasting even more time rewriting this chapter, I’m just gonna post it. This is the chapter that introduces Nebuya’s grandparents, as well as the rest of his large family later on, who are all from Nigeria, which is a country in Africa if you weren’t already aware. I’ve mentioned in bits and pieces earlier on that Nebuya is biracial, half Japanese, half Nigerian, but I never thought I’d end up actually delving into the culture or language of Nigeria for this story, however as I continued writing I realized that if I was going to make Nebuya half Nigerian, I should, at the very least, try to incorporate some elements of the culture and language that make up half his identity, in the most appropriate and respectful way possible. A few things I would like to point out before you hop into the comments is that 1) I am not Nigerian, so anything I say regarding the culture, lifestyle, or the language come entirely from the research that I did, and while I think google and Wikipedia are great ways to learn about anything and everything, they are not the final word on how things are, so some of the info that I have may be wrong, and I apologize in advance for anything I write that may seem misinformed to someone more familiar with the culture. 2) I used google translate in order to translate dialogue into Yoruba, the language that most of the Adetunji family speak, and while google translate has gotten me through many years of Spanish and is a good source for people looking up a word or two, I am fully aware that google translate is a poor resource to use if you want to translate long lines of dialogue... but I did it anyways, so please forgive any gross grammar errors. Anyways thank you guys so much for reading, I hope you enjoy, and I will see you all soon for chapter 43. Bye!
Reassurance

Chapter Notes

*Checks in on AO3 after months of not writing anything* Holy shit, are people still actually reading this thing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The rest of the weekend passes relatively uneventfully as the remainder of the Adetunji family slowly but surely make their way to the Nebuya household, and by the time Nebuya’s uncle Bako and his boyfriend Tayo show up Sunday afternoon, the Nebuya household is filled to the brim with people. Adults were talking animatedly to each other, exchanging greetings and stories as they catch up. A seemingly never ending stream of children were running up and down the stairs, in and out of rooms, and pushing past the adults as they explored their surroundings. Truthfully, Akashi felt a bit overwhelmed by the chaos that had enveloped the Nebuya household, a feeling that was only heightened by the fact that Nebuya practically dragged the redhead around the house with him as he was forced to greet each and every family member who came.

Despite the slight language barrier between Akashi and the member’s of Nebuya’s family who were not as well versed in Japanese as his grandparents were, Akashi had managed to introduce himself to just about every member of the Adetunji family, and thankfully, they all seemed to like him well enough, although he couldn’t help but notice how some of the children would often whisper amongst themselves while pointing directly at him, only to break out in boisterous laughter. Despite that, things had calmed down considerably since Bako and Tayo arrived, and as Sunday evening is coming to a close, the house is the most quiet it’s been since Nebuya and Akashi first entered it Friday afternoon. Or at least it was until it was time for everyone to go to bed.

“But Mom, why do they have to stay in my room?” Nebuya complains to his mother as she helps Akin and Orisa finish cleaning the dishes from that evening’s dinner.

“Because your room is the biggest and it's easier to fit all of the kids in one room than to try and separate them throughout your brothers’ rooms” Kyoka responds without looking up from the sink.

“But keeping them all together is too distracting for them, they can’t calm down and won’t go to sleep.”

“Why is this such a big deal to you? They’re your cousins, you should be more kind to them.”
“Because they’re annoying the shit out of me, that’s why. They won’t be quiet, they won’t stop touching my shit, and they refuse to leave me alone” Nebuya snaps. Akin sighs from behind Kyoka.

“Eikichi, I know it isn’t easy dealing with younger kids, but your mother is right. You need to be more patient with them. Going on a big trip like this to a far away country so that they can attend their cousin’s high school graduation is exciting for them, so of course they are going to have a hard time being calm. As for them touching your things, either move them somewhere they can’t get at or accept the fact that they’re going to be messed with” Akin says firmly, ignoring his son’s frustrated groan.

“You people are awful. Come on Sei, let's go” the older boy huffs, motioning for the redhead to follow. Akashi bids Kyoka and Akin a good night before heading up the stairs as he was told.

“I don’t mean to take sides in this but, are you sure you aren’t over reacting just a little bit?” Akashi asks.

“Oh not you too” Nebuya groans. Akashi raises his hands defensively.

“Listen, I’m not trying to lecture you or anything, but how can you honestly be sick of your cousins after only 48 hours?” Akashi asks, following Nebuya up the stairs to his bedroom. Upon opening the door to his room, both boys are greeted to the sight of approximately 10 children of varying ages, running around the room, jumping on the bed, yelling, screaming, going through both Nebuya and Akashi’s things, and overall causing a chaotic scene.

“You were saying?” Nebuya deadpanned, casting Akashi a sideways glance. The redhead stares at the chaotic mess in mild shock, unsure of what to think or how to feel regarding the swarm of children currently rifling through his bags. Nebuya sighs heavily in frustration but ventures forth into the fray nonetheless.

After a moment of watching Nebuya try, but ultimately fail to corral his younger cousins and get them away from their things, Akashi steps forward to offer some sort of assistance to the older boy, but is stopped by a slight tug at his pant leg. Looking down, Akashi is met with the sight of Okoro, Nebuya’s youngest cousin. Akashi smiles down at the infant girl.

“Hello Okoro. How are you doing?” The little girl blinks up at Akashi and tilts her head to the side, but otherwise shows no further signs of understanding what he just said.
“Ya, me too” Akashi continues, as though the infant had provided him a response. Okoro begins tugging on the fabric of Akashi’s pants, releasing a stream of unintelligible noises.

“That’s very interesting” Akashi responds, bending down and lifting the babbling infant into the safety of his arms just as a pair of young boys are flung in their general direction. The pair land unceremoniously on the wooden floor with a loud thud, but are quick to get up and continue running around the room as though nothing had happened. Casting a glance over at Nebuya, the redhead can’t help but laugh slightly at the sight of the larger male being used as a human jungle gym as he attempted to pick up the mess left behind by his 9 other cousins.

A couple hours pass and the two boys are finally able to convince the kids to settle down enough to get ready for bed. By the time midnight rolls around, all 10 of the Adetunji children are fast asleep, spread out across the floor of Nebuya’s bedroom, bundled up in futons and heavy blankets, worn out from the excitement of the days events. Nebuya has taken the opportunity to reorganize his room, making sure to place his more valuable belongings in places far out of reach of any sticky fingers. Akashi is sat on the bed, Okoro cradled in his arms and Midna curled up on his lap, both sleeping soundly.

“Now do you understand how I can be sick of my cousins after only 48 hours of them being here?” Nebuya begins, keeping his voice low as to not disturb any of his cousins. Akashi chuckles.

“I suppose I can understand your frustrations to a certain extent, but as someone who grew up as an only child with no extended family to speak of, I think the idea of having lots of aunts, uncles, and cousins sounds amazing.” Nebuya nods silently in understanding before shrugging his shoulders.

“I guess that makes sense, after all, grass is always greener on the other side, right? Lila baby, come to Daddy.” Akashi chuckles to himself as Nebuya reaches under the bed, pulling the snow colored pitbull out from where she had, very wisely, taken refuge from the earlier chaos. The two boys spend the rest of early morning in a comfortable silence, simply enjoying the precious moments of calm and silence that could only be found in the dead of night.

The next morning, Akashi is rudely awoken by a rough jab to the ribs, courtesy of Ifechi, Nebuya’s 8-year-old cousin. Now normally, Nebuya’s larger-than-average sized bed is more than spacious enough to accommodate both him and Akashi rather comfortably, and even the addition of little Okoro still left plenty of stretching room for the two teens. Things started to get a bit cramped however, when the rest of the kids all slowly but surely migrated from their futons on the floor and into Nebuya’s bed sometime during the night.

Currently, Akashi found himself buried under a mountain of bodies and limbs, elbows were pressed into just about every one of his sensitive spots, his legs and arms crushed and contorted at strange angles, and his head was jammed uncomfortably against the hard wood of the headboard. Nebuya
didn’t seem to be in any better of a position, squished against the wall with Okoro sleeping comfortably on his chest. The only positive part of being dog piled by a bunch of small children was the fact the copious amounts of body heat they let off kept the sharp chill of the morning air at bay despite the covers having been tossed to the floor sometime during the night.

As carefully as he dared, Akashi somehow managed to disentangle himself from the mountain of small children sleeping on top of him and tiptoed his way down the stairs and into the kitchen. It was still fairly early in the morning, around 8 am, so only a few people were actually awake, one of them being Granny Lebechi, who was cooking some sort of delicious smelling food for breakfast.

“Good morning” Akashi greets, taking a seat at the breakfast bar. The old woman turned to see who had spoken to her, smiling when she realized who it was.

“Ah, good morning to you as well. You are up early. Sleep well?”

“Eh, mostly. There wasn’t very much room in the bed after everyone piled in but we made do.” Granny Lebechi laughs.

“Ah I see, so everyone decided they no longer wanted to sleep on the floor then?”

“I guess so.” Akashi says, shrugging his shoulders. “Is there anything I can help you with?”

“You are more than welcome to peel and cut those vegetables on the counter if you’d like. I’m almost finished with the eggs so I’ll be able to help you in just a minute” Granny Lebechi says, quickly glances over her shoulder before returning her attention back to the stove. Getting up from the stool, Akashi makes his way into the kitchen, washing his hands before grabbing a peeler and getting to work on peeling the very large pile of vegetables laid out on the counter.

Despite how efficiently Akashi was making his way through the large pile, it became clear very quickly that it was going to take him a while to get through the whole thing by himself. Things started going a little faster once Granny Lebechi finished cooking the eggs and started chopping up the vegetables that Akashi had already peeled. A long period of silence passes between the two as they work on their respective tasks.

“You know, I really must thank you” Granny Lebechi says out of the blue, catching Akashi off guard.
“Thank me? For what?” He asks, slightly confused.

“My grandson has always been a bit shy and timid around people he is not, how do you say… familiar with. When Eikichi was young he was mocked and ridiculed because he did not look like everyone else did, and so he came to fear what others thought of him, and as he got older, he started hiding behind a false personality that helped him blend in better with those around him. I think you know what I’m referring to, yes?” Akashi nods in response.

“But, things started to change after you came along. He became more outgoing, more confident in himself, he stopped being ashamed of who he was and and stopped trying to hide behind a mask and pretend to be someone he wasn’t.” Granny Lebechi casts a knowing glance toward the redhead out of the corner of her eye.

“And something tells me that you might have played a pretty big part in getting that to happen, am I wrong?” Akashi remains silent for a moment, contemplating the elder woman’s words, before his gaze drops back down to the half peeled potato in his hand, a somber look across his face.

“I appreciate the kind words ma’am, Eikichi’s growth and confidence comes entirely from his own hard work and effort. While I may have provided him with a advice or a word of encouragement here and there, I assure you that I had very little to do with it. Not to mention that I was of absolutely no help to him when we first met.”

“Oh? And what makes you say that?” Granny Lebechi asks curiously. Another moment of silence passes before Akashi finally speaks.

“I’ve done a lot of… questionable things in the past. I… wasn’t a very good person. I hurt a lot of people with the things I said and did, I felt no shame or guilt for the damage that I caused, and for a time it felt as though I was under the control of… someone else” Akashi begins.

“Of course this is by no means an excuse for my behavior, I’m perfectly aware of how awful I was and I’ve been doing my best recently to try and make up for the mistakes I made in the past. I’ve had a similar conversation as this one with Eikichi, earlier this year, and he told me that the mistakes I’ve made in the past are what make me human and that I should focus on becoming a better person now and for the future rather than worry about things I can’t do anything about, but despite his kind words I still struggle a lot with it, and there are still times when I wonder if everything I’m doing is pointless. Don’t get me wrong I’m incredibly happy and thankful for all the wonderful people I’ve connected with and the amazing things I’ve done this year and I wouldn’t give them up for the world but… if I was capable of being such a terrible person before, what’s to stop me from becoming one again, or worse…” Akashi trails off, knowing exactly what he wants to say but unable to find the words to express it.
“What is it?” Granny Lebechi asks softly. Akashi remains silent, his head lowered in shame.

“What if I still am one?” The gravity of the confession carries a great deal more weight now than it did when he spoke to Eikichi. That time he had been suffering from the effects of exhaustion, fatigue, an injury, and a slight overdose of painkillers that made his brain run wild and his emotions burst out uncontrollably from the realization of just how cruel a person he had been to everyone around him. This time however, things were different, this time he was in full control of himself, both mentally and physically, and fully aware of the lasting effect he had on those around him. But this time, the pain, the guilt, the shame, and all the other negative emotions that weighed heavily in his chest, came not from realization, but acceptance. Acceptance that the voice of his other half was right all along. Acceptance that that everyone he cared about would soon leave him once they saw who he really was. Acceptance that did not deserve the kindness and love from those who had come to mean so much to him. And worst of all, acceptance that he was a terrible person before, and despite all his best efforts to grow and change… he’s still a terrible person now.

Akashi’s vision begins to blur slightly as tears begin to fill his eyes, the redhead grinds his teeth and keeps his gaze lowered, ashamed of how pitiful and childish he must have looked. The triumphant laughter of his other self echoes throughout his mind, clearly pleased with the redheads admittance that he was right along. A hand reaches over and touches Akashi’s chin, gently lifting his gaze back toward the woman it belonged to. The elder woman smiles kindly at him.

“My mother always had a saying when I was growing up, and she would tell it to us whenever we did something wrong or something we couldn’t forgive ourselves for. She said that “he who wears the darkness in their heart upon their sleeve will always triumph over he who hides their darkness deep within them. The darkness grows stronger the longer we refuse to acknowledge it, and only by bringing it out into the light for all others to see, can we truly say we’ve defeated it”.” Akashi remains silent as Granny Lebechi continues.

“I know all too well the feelings of regret and shame we feel over the actions of our past selves. They weigh heavily on our minds and hearts, causing us to question and doubt the progress we’ve made. Even after we are told that we are forgiven by the people we’ve harmed, we still cannot completely forgive ourselves because, at our core, we believe we are unworthy of forgiveness, and that despite the great lengths we have gone to grow and change as people, nothing is actually different because we are still the same person, and therefore are still capable of the same atrocities we once committed. But my mother’s saying always made me think to myself “even though I am still the same person, the fact that I was able to face my darkness and overcome it, making right the wrongs that I did, means that I am very different from the person I was before, the person who ran away from her problems and kept her darkness locked deep inside of her. Even though we are both the same person, the version of myself that was willing to bring my darkness out into the light will always be better than the version of myself that was not” and the same thing applies to you.” Akashi stares at the elderly woman for a moment before his gaze drops back down to his hands, uncertainty written across his face. Granny Lebechi chuckles.
“I know it may not seem like it at times when the voice in the back of your head screams louder than the voice of reason, but from what I have learned of you over the past few days, I can tell that you are a good and kind boy. A bit troubled perhaps but, in this day and age who isn’t. The point I am trying to make is that regardless of what you think of yourself and your past, you are trying. Trying to fix your mistakes, trying to right your wrongs, trying to become a better person. You are trying, and the very act of doing so automatically makes you a better person than the one you were before. So like my grandson already told you, stop worrying about things you can’t control, and focus on the things you can control and the ways you can continue to better yourself. Do you think you can manage that?” Akashi glances back up at the older woman, unsure of what to say or even how to respond.

Despite the uncertainties he felt, Akashi couldn’t help but agree with what Granny Lebechi had told him. Even though he wasn’t where he wanted to be or hadn’t fixed every problem he had caused… he was still trying. And despite the damage he caused, his efforts to reevaluate both himself and the relationships he has with those around him have not gone unrewarded, although Akashi can’t help but notice how often life has been enjoying royally kicking his ass recently. Then again he probably deserves it.

A small smile spreads across Akashi’s lips. Although his fears and doubts aren’t completely gone, he takes comfort in the knowledge that he’s come a long way, and although he has a great deal more work to do before he can truly say that he’s changed, Akashi supposes that he can’t be all that bad if he’s gone to all the trouble of fixing the errors of his past. Akashi pushes the foreboding presence of his other self to the back of his mind, where the bastard belongs, and takes a deep breath before speaking.

“Ya… I think I’ll be able to manage that” the redhead responds softly, smiling up at Granny Lebechi. The elder woman returns the gesture before reaching over to ruffle the top of Akashi’s hair affectionately. The two return to their work, a comfortable silence falling back over the kitchen. The silence doesn’t last long however, as a wave of children come running full force down the stairs, making all sorts of noise as they rush out into the backyard. Nebuya trudges down the stairs a minute later, carrying Okoro in his arms.

“I see you’ve already been put to work” the older boy comments, handing Okoro over to Granny Lebechi. Akashi shrugs his shoulders.

“I was up early so I offered to help, that’s all.” Nebuya nods his head in understanding, yawning tiredly.

The redhead chuckles. “Sleep well?”

Nebuya glares at him, clearly displeased with his sarcasm.
“I think you already know the answer to that question” he deadpans as the horde of children responsible for his less-than-great night sleep come rushing back into the house.

Akashi laughs, somehow beginning to enjoy the madness that filled the Nebuya household, which was a stark contrast from his own estate. The near constant silence and emptiness made his house feel more like a prison than a home, his father rarely showed him the love and affection that he received in abundance from the Nebuya family, and despite how odd it was for him at first, the redhead realized that, even though this wasn’t his house or his family, Akashi felt more at home here with the Nebuyas than he ever did with his father at their estate.

Akashi tried his best not to think about why this bothered him so much.

Chapter End Notes

Hello my beautiful readers, it is I, Foilfreak, back from the grave with another installment in “How to torture your favorite character in the name of character development and also because cannon sucks”. It’s been a while since I’ve updated this story and I know that it sucks having to wait to long for chapters to come out and I apologize profusely for being such a horrible fic writer. I’ve been battling with writers block for the past few months now and like with any period of time where I can’t think of what to write, I stopped writing all together in the hopes that my motivation would one day return. It seems to have worked out alright in the end as I finally managed to finish this chapter. Like with most of what I write for this story it didn’t come out exactly the way I wanted it to but I’m not all that mad about it. Despite how much of a pain in the ass it was to write, this chapter did accomplish the one thing I wanted it to focus on, which was Akashi’s ongoing struggles regarding his past and his general sense of self which, if you haven’t caught on by now, isn’t all that great. Earlier in the story Akashi had a wonderful heart to heart with Nebuya who helped Akashi realize that he’s not a monster, he’s a human who made mistakes and is trying his best to fix them, but despite the kind words he recieves, Akashi is not totally convinced, which leads to the conversation he has with Granny Lebechi, who offers him similar words of encouragement but in a slightly different way than her grandson did. Obviously Nebuya has gotten to know Akashi pretty well and was familiar with him during his “emperor” phase, so the advice he give him come from a perspective of familiarity, Nebuya basically says “I know who you were before and I can see that you’ve changed over time so that means you’re a better person and I care about who you are now” but Granny Lebechi on the other hand, does not have that same perspective, she doesn’t know Akashi as well as Nebuya or some of the other characters do, she has an outside perspective. The reason why Akashi doesn’t completely believe Nebuya’s words is because Nebuya knows him TOO well, so its hard for Akashi to accept Nebuya’s encouragement because he’s biased toward Akashi, he cares about him, they’re basically brothers at this point, so of course Eikichi is going to say things that will make him feel better. Granny Lebechi however, doesn’t have this bias, and she knows only what little she has heard and observed about Akashi over the past couple
days, so when she tells him that he seems like a good person it hits Akashi a lot harder because its her honest opinion of him. Granny Lebechi basically says “I don’t know who you were before but I can see that you’re a good person now, and the fact that you are willing to admit the errors of your past only proves how far you’ve come and how much better you are now than you were before”. I know I don’t really emphasize it all that much except in chapters like this but I think it’s pretty clear from how I write that Akashi... doesn’t really like himself all that much. So much of his original cannon personality felt manufactured and robotic that even when his other half wasn’t in control I don’t think he ever actually had the chance to be himself, and so he’s basically grown up hating himself because he was always told he wasn’t good enough and he never would be. He has an extreme fear of disappointing the people he looks up to, being abandoned by everyone around him, and being seen as a bad person. He wants to change who he is so badly because of how ashamed he is of who he was and how he acted, but at the same time he’s incapable of recognising how much he’s changed and how far he’s come because he literally doesn’t know how to be nice to himself, he doesn’t know what it’s like to not hate himself, and as a result of that he’s incapable of seeing in himself what everyone else sees in him. This is something I definitely plan on addressing later on, even more so in my next story. At this point in the story, Akashi is in a period of transition, he doesn’t know who he is or what he wants, but he’s trying his absolute best and he’s doing a great job. As I continue to write this story Akashi will grow and change even more, and I am so incredibly excited to be able to share the rest of what I have planned with you all sometime soon. I’m sorry for rambling for so long but I had a lot to say and catch up on but I’m back into writing mode so hopefully I can finish this story up so I can get to writing the next one. Thanks so much for reading and I hope to see you all soon for chapter 44. Bye!
“Would somebody like to explain to me what the actual hell is going on here?” Akashi asks from the passenger seat of Nebuya’s car, as he drives the two of them, along with Tsuji, Amano, Endo, and Takata, to an undisclosed location.

“Sei, I swear to god, if you ask us where we’re going one more time, I’m gonna knock your front teeth out” Endo threatens from the backseat.

“I just don’t see why you can’t tell me where you’re taking me. It obviously has something to do with me, so why can’t you just tell me?” Akashi argues, feeling slightly frustrated by his lack of control in this situation, not that he ever had very much control to begin with.

“Just relax will you. We’ll be there in a few minutes and we’ll fill you in on everything once we get there” Tsuji says from her spot on Akashi’s lap, her gaze never leaving the screen of her Nintendo DS. Akashi groans in annoyance, but remains silent for the rest of the drive.

Soon enough, the group arrives at their destination, which Akashi quickly realizes is a shopping mall, the same shopping mall that he first met Mibuchi’s friends at. Everyone gets out of the car, but before Akashi could begin walking toward the shopping mall, the others surround him with somber looks on their faces.

“Uh… is this the part where you tell me what’s going on?” Akashi questions, slightly confused. Takata steps forward.

“Akashi Seijuro. It has been an honor and a pleasure getting to know you this past year, and while I and the rest of my friends here have come to accept you and consider you a part of our group, I’m afraid that there’s something about you that we all noticed very early on in our friendship, something that we’ve tried our best to overlook, but have found to be so incredibly unbearable, that we’ve decided it must be addressed.” Akashi stiffens, a sickening feeling spreading through out his chest. What on earth were they talking about? Something about him they couldn’t stand? Was it really all that bad that they felt the need to confront him like this?
“Um, ok… and what exactly is this thing you’re talking about?” Akashi asks nervously, fear and anxiety beginning to take over. Takata takes a deep breath and steels herself.

“You have terrible fashion sense.”

“Oh my god” Akashi says in utter disbelief, releasing the breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding and allowing himself to lean against the side of Nebuya’s car, as the rest of his so-called “friends” burst out laughing at him.

“You should have seen the look on your face, man. You looked like you were gonna shit yourself” Endo says between fits of laughter.

“I think he almost started crying” Amano comments, wiping tears of her own from her eyes. Takata staggers toward Akashi, wrapping her arms around the redhead.

“I’m sorry… they made me do it… I’m so sorry…” she apologizes, not quite laughing but still unable to contain her own giggles as she buries her face in his shoulder.

“Holy shit that was too funny” Nebuya breathes, trying to even out his breathing before he ends up choking on his own spit.

“I wanna go home” Akashi mutters weakly, unsure if he wants to deal with the rest of today if this was how it was going to start.

“No, none of that. Come on now we promise we’re done” Takata says, grabbing Akashi by the arm and pulling him away from the car, toward the mall.

“Ok, so now that you’re all done toying with my emotions, care to explain why you actually brought me here?” Akashi asks as he’s reluctantly dragged into the semi-busy shopping mall along with everyone else.

“Oh that part was actually true” Amano says.
“What?” Akashi asks, confused.

“Ya, we weren’t joking about your shitty fashion sense” Endo confirms.

“What do you mean?” Akashi asks, still confused.

“What do you mean ‘what do we mean’? Just look at yourself” Takata responds, letting go of Akashi’s arm so she can face him, gesturing vaguely at him. Akashi looks down at himself but fails to see anything out of the ordinary with his sweater, button up shirt, and khaki pants.

“I’m afraid I don’t follow” the redhead admits, still incredibly confused.

“Oh for crying out loud. Your clothes. We’re talking about your clothes” Amano huffs in annoyance. Akashi looks back down at his clothes.

“What’s wrong with my clothes?” Everyone exchanges glances for a moment.

“There’s nothing wrong with them necessarily, it’s just that…” Takata trails off.

“They make you look like a 40 year old man” Nebuya says, picking up where Takata left off.

“What? No they don’t” Akashi snaps.

“Ok fine. You might not look like a 40 year old man, but you sure as hell dress like one. And we’ve come here to rectify that” Endo says grabbing Akashi’s other arm and dragging him further into the mall.

“But I don’t need new clothes” Akashi argues for what feels like the millionth time since they’ve stepped into Zara store, the girls fanning out across the store looking for clothes while Nebuya follows Akashi around to make sure he doesn’t try to make a run for it.

“Sei, we aren’t doing this because you need clothes, we’re doing this because you need to stop dressing like a middle aged businessman” Takata says as she riffles through a rack of t-shirts.
Akashi heaves a sigh, casting a helpless glance up at Nebuya, who simply shrugs his shoulders.

“Don’t look at me, I got the exact same treatment first year of high school because they thought I dressed too much like a straight guy.”

“You didn’t dress like a straight guy Ei, you dressed like a gay guy who was doing a really bad job of pretending to be straight” Takata calls over her shoulder.

“Ya, I know. It’s this thing called ‘being in the closet’. Ever heard of it?” Nebuya bites back with a scowl. The two break out into an argument that, frankly, Akashi has no interest in listening to, so he excuses himself quietly and begins wandering aimlessly around the store, a bit overwhelmed by the sheer amount of styles of clothing the store had to offer.

“Find anything you like?” Tsuji’s voice asks from behind a rack of clothes, catching Akashi off guard.

“Uh… not really” Akashi admits, moving to stand next to the shorter girl, who was sifting lazily through a rack of graphic t-shirts. “To be perfectly honest, I’m not really sure what I like to wear, mostly because I’ve never really had very much of a choice in the matter, so coming here and being told to pick out clothes is a bit hard for me because I don’t even know where to start.”

“Ya, that makes sense” Tsuji shrugs. After a moment of silence, the shorter girl turns to Akashi, looking him up and down before moving over to another rack of clothes just a few isles away, motioning for the redhead to follow.

“What do you think about something like this?” Tsuji asks, holding up a short-sleeved button up shirt that displayed a very colorful, but not overwhelming, floral pattern.

“It’s… alright” Akashi responds grimacing at the shirt, not sure why Tsuji would ever suggest something like this. Despite his initial reaction though, the more he looked at the shirt, the more Akashi started to actually like it. Sure the pattern was a bit unusual, but not jarring or unpleasant to look at, and the cut and fit of the shirt looked very similar to the style of button-up that Akashi was used to wearing everyday, save for the short sleeves.

“Want to try it on?” Tsuji asks, noticing Akashi’s pensive expression.
“Sure” the redhead shrugs, taking the shirt and following Tsuji toward a wrack of pants.

“What’s your opinion on jeans?” Akashi frowns slightly.

“Jeans can look very good on certain people, I just happen to not be one of those people” he responds. Tsuji chuckles lightly.

“All that means is that you haven’t found the right pair yet. What about these?” Akashi regards the pair of black jeans in much the same way he did the floral shirt, but once again, slowly but surely, as he continued looking at them, he started liking them a bit more.

“I don’t know about the color, but it looks like they’ll fit well.”

“Just think of them like a pair of dress pants. The color might be a little off-putting now, but when you pair it with the rest of your outfit, it’ll all come together really nicely.”

“I wasn’t aware of how knowledgeable you were about fashion Kaori” Akashi comments, slightly surprised by Tsuji’s fashion knowledge.

“I’m more interested in fashion when it pertains to other people” Tsuji shrugs. “I don’t really care all too much about how I look or the clothes I wear but I like fashion design and the idea of using clothing as a way to outwardly express someone’s personality.”

“Is that what you want to study in University?”

“Nah, I’m gonna be a concept artist and game design major, but I plan on taking a few fashion related courses that’ll help me get a better idea of how I can better implement clothing, accessories, and all that good shit into stuff like character designs and environments” Tsuji explains, grabbing a few more clothes off the racks before directing Akashi to the dressing room.

“Do you have any idea what you might wanna study?” The shorter girl asks curiously. Akashi sighs to himself.

“Well, my father wants me to be a business major and go on to take over the family business. But
lately I’ve been wondering if that’s actually what I want to do. Emi-sensei has already convinced him to allow me to be in her Advanced Studio Art Class next year, which is great, but when it come to University and determining what my career path will be, there’s absolutely no way he’ll ever allow me to do anything art related. So right now I’m not really sure what will happen…” Akashi trails off, lost in thought.

“Eh, I wouldn’t worry about it too much” Tsuji comments, catching Akashi off guard. “You’re a smart kid, and if you want something you’ll put your mind to it and work until you get it.”

“Well… that may be true, but whether or not I can do it doesn’t really mean much if my father won’t allow me to do it” Akashi counters, but Tsuji merely shrugs in response.

“Hey man, it’s your life. The way I see it, you can do whatever the hell you want with it, and no one should be able to force you to do anything you don’t want to” Tsuji casts a pointed look at Akashi. “Question is… what are you willing to give up in order to do that?”

Akashi’s eyes widen in surprise. Tsuji continues walking as though nothing out of the ordinary had just happened, but the redhead pauses for a moment, asking himself the same question. What was he willing to give up in order to gain the freedom to choose his own life’s path? He’d never really had much of an option to choose what he wanted to do so he’d never thought much of it, much less what he would have to do to get it. Tsuji was right, this was his life and he should have a say in what he does with it, but like she also said, his fight to claim ownership over his future will most certainly come with some sort of backlash, mainly from his father. If Akashi were to try and rebel against his father and abandon the plan that had been laid out for him since birth, what would happen?

“SEI!” Akashi it abruptly pulled from this thoughts when Endo crashes into his, latching onto the boy with a surprising amount of strength for someone her size.

“Find anything you like?” The silver-haired girl asks, smiling widely.

“Um yes, I have actually… well Tsuji actually found them for me, but I was just on my way to try some of them on” Akashi explains.

“Ooooooh, well go on then, let’s see” Endo says excitedly, pushing Akashi into one of the changing rooms. Tsuji hands him the shirt and pants she originally picked out, along with a jacket and a pair of boots she had picked out. Akashi stared at the articles of clothing apprehensively, unsure whether or not this was actually going to look good on him or if he was going to look like a complete idiot. Regardless, the redhead takes the clothes and begins changing into them.
Once all the clothes are on, Akashi finally forces himself to look in the mirror and, to be honest, he kind of likes what he sees. The black denim jeans, although very… dark, on the hanger, weren’t nearly as jarring now that he had them on, and they were surprisingly comfortable fit as well, not too tight, but not too baggy either. The leather jacket was a dark forest green color, a strange choice, but one that Akashi found to be kind of cool looking, similar in style to the one Eikichi had, although his was a bright, fire truck red that looked a lot better on the older male than it ever would on Akashi. The colorful floral shirt paired very nicely with both the leather jacket and the black jeans, and added a much needed contrast of color to the overall darker tones of the outfit. Lastly, the ankle-high lace-up boots he had been given were a beautiful dark brown color that, unlike the rest of the items he had been given, Akashi was immediately in love with, despite being a size or two too big.

Overall, Akashi found himself to be pleasantly surprised with the things Tsuji had found for him. In terms of style and appearance they were miles away from what he was currently used to wearing, but in terms of fit and overall wearability the outfit actually came pretty close to how his other clothes felt. Despite the differences, the more Akashi looked at himself in the mirror, the more he understood what everyone had been talking about when they said he dressed like a middle-aged man. Solid colored button ups, ties, dress pants, nice shoes, and a sports jacket if the weather called for it, all things that he had been forced to wear by his father for as long as he can remember. Come to think of it, Akashi can’t even remember the last time he went clothes shopping for himself and actually bought something that he wanted, always picking out things that he knew his father would approve of, but never taking the time to figure out what he wanted to wear.

Tearing his gaze away from the mirror, Akashi unlatches the lock on the dressing room door and opens it, heading out to show everyone else.

“Oh my GOD!!” Amano shouts excitedly once she spots Akashi in his new outfit. The redhead smiles bashfully as the others begin cheering and complimenting how the clothes looked. Tsuji merely watches with a triumphant smile, clearly pleased with how she did.

“Holy fuck Sei, that looks awesome on you” Endo compliments, running her fingers along the material of his leather jacket.

“Ya no shit. Nice work Kaori” Nebuya agrees, turning to the shorter girl, who merely shrugs in response.

“I figured if we forced him into a bunch of stuff he wasn’t comfortable with then he wouldn’t wear it, so I just picked out a few things that looked kind of similar to what he already wears, but with a little twist” Tsuji explains.
“So what do you think? You like it?” Takata asks, peering up at Akashi. The boy takes a moment to look down at his clothes before answering.

“You know what… I really do like this and I think I will buy it. I could use a smaller size on the boots though, I don’t have giant feet like Ei does.”

“Hey!” Nebuya shouts indignantly, and the group breaks out laughing for a moment before Akashi turns to change back into his original clothes.

By the time Akashi reaches the cash register to pay, the redhead has 3 pairs of jeans, two black and one grey, 5 short-sleeves button-up shirt, all with varying, patterns, colors, and designs, 2 leather jackets, the dark forest green one and a bright yellow colored one that Endo begged him not to buy (so of course he had to have it), a black bomber jacket that he grabbed on the way up to the register, because at this point why the fuck not, and lastly two pairs of lace up combat boots, one dark brown, the other a crisp, clean white color. A massive argument had broken out over who was going to pay for the haul. Initially Tsuji insisted that she would pay because she was the one who found the clothes for him, only for Akashi to argue otherwise since they were his clothes. Ultimately an agreement was made and each person bought two items, making Akashi feel a bit guilty over having his friends buy his clothes for him, but willing to get over it since he was allowed to at least pay for something.

Once the clothes were paid for, Akashi was promptly shoved back into the dressing room and instructed to change his clothes back into what he had on before. Obviously none of them felt like waiting until the next time they met up to hang out for Akashi to start wearing his new ‘cool’ clothes. It was a bit annoying, but the redhead complied nonetheless, changing back into the outfit he tried on initially, before finally rejoining the rest of the group and heading out of the store, ready to explore the rest of the mall.

Chapter End Notes

Not really much to say for this chapter, just Akashi getting a new wardrobe. Next chapter tho, things will get interesting because a certain light and shadow duo are about to make their first official appearance. What’s gonna happen? How’s it gonna go? Who know? I sure as hell don’t. Thanks for reading and I’ll see you all soon for chapter 45. Bye!
“Hey, is anybody else hungry?” Amano asks as the group aimlessly wanders around the mall, occasionally heading into a shop if something interests them.

“Now that you mention it, ya I actually am” Endo agrees.

“Do we want to go somewhere else or is everybody ok with mall food?” Nebuya asks, stopping to gauge everyone’s opinion.

“Sounds good to me” Takata says.

“I don’t really mind either way, but it’ll be easier if we stay here since the mall offers a variety of choices rather than having to all decide on just one place” Akashi offers. Everyone seems to be more or less in agreement, so the group starts walking again and begins making their way toward the food court. When the group arrives at the food court, they all grab a table and place their things down before splitting up to get their food. As Akashi is heading over to a sandwich shop, he stops dead in his tracks and his eyes widen with shock, as a familiar head of light blue hair catches his eye.

“Kuroko” Akashi calls. The boy in question pauses, looking around in confusion before his gaze finally settles on Akashi, his look shifting from his normal emotionless deadpan to an equally shocked and surprised expression.

“Kuroko-kun” Kuroko says, though more to himself rather than as a form of greeting. A long moment of tense silence passes between the two former teammates.

“Oi, Tetsuya, I’ve got your food and milkshake, where do you wanna sit?” A loud voice booms, and Akashi’s eyes widen in surprise again as Kagami Taiga comes into view, heading toward Kuroko. The other redhead stops and stiffens when he notices Akashi’s presence.
“You…” he says, staring directly at Akashi with a mixture of annoyance and fear.

“What the hell are you doing here?”

“Taiga please, don’t be so rude” Kuroko scolds lightly, casting a disapproving look up at the taller male.

“What do you mean ‘don’t be so rude’?” Kagami whispers harshly. “Don’t you remember anything that happened at last year’s Winter Cup? All the crazy shit he did?”

“That’s all in the past now. You shouldn’t be so willing to hold grudges against people. It only leads to bigger problems.” Akashi stares at the bickering duo with a mixture of confusion and shock.

Taiga? Tetsuya? Since when were these two on a first name basis? And why were they bickering like an old married couple?

Kagami huffs and turns on his heel. “Whatever. You’ve said your ‘hellos’ so let's go and eat.”

“Hold on” Akashi says, taking a step forward. Kagami and Kuroko turn to him with questioning gazes.

“Uh, I was actually wondering if I could speak with you for a moment Kuroko.”

“With me?” Kuroko asks. Kagami leans down to Kuroko’s level.

“Don’t do it” he whispers. “Who knows what he’ll try and do once he gets to alone.”

“Taiga, be quiet” Kuroko says harshly, well about as harshly as someone like Kuroko can sound, glaring up at the taller man who, despite his intimidating nature, obediently shuts his mouth.
“Of course we can talk” Kuroko says. Kuroko turns and nods reassuringly at Kagami, who sends one last glare Akashi’s way, before turning on his heel and walking toward the seating area of the food court, leaving the two former teammates alone. Kuroko moves to sit down on a nearby bench, and Akashi follows him silently.

“It’s… good to see you” Akashi says dumbly after the two take a seat, not really sure what to say now that he has Kuroko’s undivided attention.

“It’s good to see you as well. I meant to speak with you after the Winter Cup ceremonies ended, but your coach informed me that you had an injury and were taken to the hospital. Are you doing alright?”

“Wait, wha- OH right, that. Uh yes, it’s doing better. I mean it’s perfectly healed and everything but, um… it was just a sprain really, nothing too serious.” Akashi mentally facepalms, absolutely mortified by how awkward he was being.

“Well that’s good. I’m glad it wasn’t anything serious” Kuroko responds, a ghost of a smile crossing his face. Whether Kuroko noticed how badly Akashi was fumbling, the redhead couldn’t tell. Then again it might be that he just doesn’t care. Another moment of silence passes.

“So, you and Kagami are… together, I assume?” Kuroko’s gaze snaps onto Akashi, his eyes even wider with shock than when they first laid eyes on his former captain. Akashi wonders for a brief moment if he’s said the wrong thing, or perhaps incorrectly read the interaction between Kuroko and Kagami, but Kuroko’s expression quickly shifts back to it’s neutral expression, albeit with a slightly red tint to his cheeks.

“Is it that obvious?” Kuroko asks, not meeting Akashi’s gaze.

“Well, from what I could tell, you two were clearly very close, maybe as close as you and Aomine were back in middle school. But that wasn’t what told me you might be together.” Kuroko looks at Akashi with a curious expression.

“Then what was it?”

“I have never in all the years of knowing you, heard you call someone by their first name, much less without some kind of honorific” Akashi says simply, chuckling to himself as a look of realization crosses the smaller boy’s face, his blush deepening.
“Ah, I see… I suppose that is a pretty dead giveaway isn’t it” Kuroko comments, averting his gaze once again. Another moment of silence passes before Akashi leans over to bump his shoulder against Kuroko’s.

“What’s with all the seriousness? Congratulations! I honestly never thought you were one for relationships, especially considering how you avoided Momoi’s advances like the Bubonic Plague.” Kuroko chuckles lightly.

“Well, to be honest, I never really considered myself to be much for relationships either. As nice as Momoi was, I never really had very much interest in her romantically.”

“And Aomine?” Akashi questions. Kuroko turns to meet Akashi’s eyes for a moment before he sighs, a melancholy expression falling into his face.

“You knew about that?”

“I did” Akashi admits.

“Aomine-kun and I… would never have worked out in the long run. We were too young, too impulsive, and as things got worse on the basketball team, they only caused even more problems between us. Problems that neither of us were equipped to handle appropriately.”

“Was it ever anything official?” Kuroko shrugs his shoulders.

“I liked to think it was. But I don’t think Aomine was very comfortable with the idea of dating a boy at the time, so we kept it secret as best we could, and we never had a real discussion about the state of our relationship either, so it’s hard for me to say if we were ever really in a relationship or not.” Akashi nods his head in understanding, beginning to regret bringing up a topic that brought up so many bad memories for the other boy.

“But Taiga is different” Kuroko says, catching Akashi off guard. “I mean, I suppose the two are very similar in many ways, but unlike Aomine-kun, Taiga is a lot more attentive and respectful. He has a bit more experience than me when it comes to dating and everything that comes with it, but he never makes me feel uncomfortable, or like we’re going to quickly. Despite his intimidating appearance, Taiga is very loving and sensitive person, and he makes me very happy.”
Akashi stares at Kuroko for a moment, taking in everything he just said, before a kind smile spreads across his lips.

“That’s good, I’m so glad you two are doing well.” Akashi says, genuinely. “I don’t suppose you could spare any details as to how it happened could you?”

Kuroko giggles to himself.

“It happened after the finals of last year’s Winter Cup. Taiga came up to me and confessed his feelings as we were walking home from the bus. It wasn’t the most romantic confession ever, but it was heartfelt and genuine, and I had developed somewhat of a crush on him as well, so the feelings were mutual. After what happened with Aomine-kun however, I was hesitant to do anything with my feelings, but Taiga insisted that we at least try so… we did, and we’ve been together ever since” Kuroko explains. Akashi rolls his eyes incredulously.

“Like out of a goddamn fairytale” the redhead says, though mostly to himself than Kuroko. The blue haired boy chuckles, and Akashi can’t help but join him, smiling fondly as a sense of nostalgia begins to wash over him.

“It’s strange” Kuroko begins.

“What’s strange?” Akashi asks curiously, turning to look at Kuroko.

“Everything is so different now, and yet for some reason, it feels the same way it did back in middle school… sitting here and talking with you that is” the boy explains.

“Ya, I guess you’re right. Everyone has changed so much. You, Aomine, Kise, Midorima, Murasakibara, even Haizaki. You’ve all grown and changed so much over the years that it’s kind of weird to look back and remember how you all used to be.”

“Well, you’ve done a fair bit of changing yourself Akashi-kun” Kuroko points out, causing the redhead to look at him in confusion.

“I guess that’s true” Akashi says. “Though not all of it was for the best”
“Perhaps, but I can tell just from speaking with you that you’re doing a lot better than you ever were before” Kuroko states, Akashi remains silent as Kuroko continues.

“Back at Teiko, even before your drastic change, you were always so… distant, from everybody else. I don’t think it was anything intentional, but it was strange. You looked like you wanted to join in with everyone else and have a good time, but for some reason you just couldn’t. I always wondered if you were lonely, and that loneliness is what drove you to abandon teamwork and friendship in favor of victory above all else. I wondered if maybe we had done a better job to include you, and had been there for you like we were supposed to, then maybe you wouldn’t have felt the need to abandon everything in order to-”

“Enough” Akashi says, cutting Kuroko off suddenly.

“Kuroko” Akashi begins, placing his hand on the other boy’s shoulder. “I appreciate what you’re trying to do, I really do. But my actions and behavior were mine alone, and nothing you could have said or done would have prevented what happened. If anything, I’m the one who should be apologizing to you, after everything I put you and all the others through. If it hadn’t been for my actions and my selfishness, the maybe some of the problems we had would never have happened.”

Kuroko remains quiet, his mouth drawn in a thin line.

“I know it’s too late for me to undo all the wrong I’ve done, and I understand completely if you’re unable to forgive me. But I want you to know that I really am sorry… for everything.”

Another moment of silence passes over the boys. Akashi takes his hand off Kuroko’s shoulder and turns his gaze toward the floor.

“You really have changed, haven’t you?” Akashi’s eyes widen in surprise, and he turns to look at Kuroko, who’s smiling warmly at him.

“Earlier today, I saw you with a bunch of other people. You were smiling and laughing, and you looked like you were having a good time. I don’t really know how to explain it any other way, but I think that was the most happy I’ve ever seen you, and that makes me glad, knowing that you’re in a much better place than you were back in middle school.”

“Kuroko…”
“I forgive you Akashi-kun.” Akashi stares at the boy with a mixture of awe and confusion, unsure of what to say in response to that.

“SEI” A voice shouts somewhere back in the food court, catching both boy’s attention.

“I uh… should probably get going” Akashi says, getting up from the bench. Kuroko does the same and for a moment the two former-teammates stand in silence.

“It was nice talking with you Akashi-kun. I hope we can do this again someday” Kuroko says, smiling kindly at him again. Akashi returns his smile.

“Ya, me too. Thank you Kuroko… for everything.”

“I don’t know if I did anything worth thanking but, you’re welcome.”

“I’ll see you around then?” Akashi asks, extending his arm out, his fist closed tightly. Kuroko stares at it for a moment before realization flashes across his face, and a smile spreads across his lips.

“Absolutely!” Their fists meet and for the first time in what feels like an eternity, Akashi feels an immense sense of calm and tranquility fall over him, like a great weight had just been lifted from his shoulders. The two boys say their goodbyes and Akashi begins walking back toward the food court, where Nebuya and the others were currently looking all over for him.

“There he is” Endo says, pointing at the redhead currently walking toward him.

“Sei, where the hell have you been. We’ve been looking for you for the past 10 minutes” Nebuya questions, his expression a mix between annoyed and worried.

“Sorry about that, I was talking with someone” Akashi explains as he catches up with his friends, who regard him with curious looks.
“Who was it?” Amano asks, voicing what everyone else had on their minds. Akashi looks back over his shoulder at the place where he and Kuroko were just speaking. A smile spreads across his face and the redhead takes a few steps forward, wrapping his arms around both Endo and Amano, catching them, and everybody else, off guard.

“Oh you know, just an old friend. Come on let's go find a place to sit and eat.” And with that, Akashi leads his incredibly confused group of friends further into the food court, looking to take advantage of his high spirits while he has the chance.

Chapter End Notes

I’ve been planning this specific interaction between Kuroko and Akashi for well over a year now, and while it didn’t turn out exactly how I initially imagined it, I’m really pleased with how it went. My reason for writing this chapter was because I felt like we never really got any kind of resolution to the problems and issues that were a crucial part to all the shit that went down at Teiko, and so I wanted to dedicate a chapter to Akashi finally apologizing for all the bullshit he caused and finally moving past the guilt he feels regarding his actions. Kuroko strikes me as the kind of character who rarely holds grudges against people, especially if he knows that that they really are sorry for what they did and acknowledge that what they did was wrong and wish to correct their mistakes, which Akashi has shown time and time again that he does, so Kuroko accepting Akashi’s apology doesn’t seem hugely out of the question in my opinion. Also I greatly enjoyed Akashi awkwardly trying to start a conversation only to trip over his words because he wants to be casual but also wants to get to the point and just apologize, I love writing this social awkward idiot. Anyways thank you guys so much for reading, let me know what you think of this chapter in the comments below, and I will see you all very soon for the final chapter. Bye!
Graduation

Chapter Notes

I was contemplating putting off posting this chapter, but I decided I didn’t want to make you all wait, so here it is. Why is posting this so bitter sweet?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Today was finally the day. The Third Year Graduation Ceremony was scheduled to take place later this evening, and everyone was currently in the process of getting ready.

“MOM, WHERE’D YOU PUT MY TIE?” Nebuya yells from the top of the stairs, currently in the middle of a mild panic as he tries to get himself ready in time to make it to his own graduation ceremony.

“I don’t know sweetheart, where’d you leave it?” Kyoka yells from her bedroom. Nebuya groans in frustration, turning and heading back up the stairs to his room. Akashi eyes Nebuya out the corner of his eye as he finishes dressing, noting.

“What does your tie look like?” Akashi asks, moving to help the older man search for his missing tie.

“It’s just a plain black tie that came with the suit Mom bought me, but I put it down somewhere earlier and now I can’t fucking find it” Nebuya says, kicking a pile of clothes in frustration, his patience clearly beginning to wear thin.

“Well how about this, you go downstairs and make sure you didn’t leave it down there by accident, and I’ll stay up here and double check to make sure it isn’t hiding somewhere” Akashi offers, to which Nebuya agrees to with a nod of his head.

“And get something to eat while you’re at it” Akashi calls after the taller male as he exits the room.

“Ah, fuck off” he bites back, but the redhead simply rolls his eyes. Taking a moment to glance around the room, Akashi begins moving things around, checking under blankets, discarded clothes, piles of papers and books, and just about every surface in the room. After a solid 15 minutes of
searching, Akashi had still yet to find the missing tie. The buzzing of his phone catches his attention. It was a text from Tsuji

**Kaori:** how r things?

**Sei:** Things… could be better.

**Kaori:** on a scale of 1-10 how close is Ei to losing his mind?

**Sei:** I’d say he’s at a 6 or 7. He’s clearly nervous and frustrated, but he’s holding himself together.

The sound of loud yelling in a language Akashi couldn’t understand followed by screaming children can be heard from somewhere downstairs.

**Sei:** Better make that an 8

**Kaori:** thats what I figured

**Sei:** Why is he so nervous about this? It’s not like he’s never stood in front of an audience before.

**Kaori:** Ei’s always been weird when it comes to crowds, he’s been like this for as long as I can remember. Stick him on a stage and tell him to make people laugh and he’ll come up a 15 minute comedy act off the top of his head. Stick him on stage and tell him to accept an award or have a conversation with someone and he falls apart at the seams

**Sei:** So he’s fine if he gets to put on an act, but not so much if it’s just him on a stage with hundreds of people staring at him?

**Kaori:** yup, pretty much

**Sei:** I see. So how are things going for you and the others?
**Kaori:** Miho, Madoka, and Hitoka are all getting ready and should be there on time. It won’t take me all that long to get ready either but I’ve been fighting with my mom over what I’m wearing to the ceremony.

**Sei:** Really? How come?

**Kaori:** Ugh, Mom wants me to wear this stupid frilly dress she bought me.

**Sei:** What’s wrong with it?

**Kaori:** It’s too hot and itchy and it makes me look like an old maid.

**Sei:** Do you have anything else you could wear?

**Kaori:** I have this black bodysuit I like to wear occasionally but Mom says it’s too inappropriate for high school graduation.

**Sei:** Is it?

**Kaori:** I don’t think so, but you know moms, always policing what their daughters wear.

**Sei:** I don’t have enough knowledge to confirm or deny that statement.

**Kaori:** Oh ya that’s right, ur an only child.

**Sei:** Yup.

**Kaori:** Lucky bastard.
Sei: Grass is always greener on the other side

Kaori: true

“FOUND IT” Nebuya yells from downstairs, indicating that his missing tie had been recovered.

Sei: Ei found his tie, so we’ll be heading out in a little bit

Kaori: K. See you there

Akashi puts his phone in his back pocket and grabs his suit jacket from the bed, taking one last look around the messy room, making sure he has everything he needs, before heading downstairs, where the Nebuya and Adetunji family had congregated, everyone getting ready to leave for the graduation ceremony.

“Seijuro, are you ready to go, honey?” Kyoka asks while she helps the twins tie their ties.

“Yes, I’m ready” Akashi responds heading over to Nebuya, who was currently munching on a granola bar.


“Not really, but the granola bar’s helping at least.”

“Have you ever considered being tested for hypoglycemia?” The older male raises a questioning eyebrow at him.

“Uh… no. Why?”

“Let’s just say if I were to make a graph showing your mood corresponding to the last time you ate, the graph peaks just after you’ve eaten, hangs out for a little bit, and then plummets exponentially the longer you go without food.” Nebuya shrugs his shoulders.
“Ya well, my medical record is big enough as it is, I don’t need another diagnosis to add on top of everything else.” Akashi chuckles.

A few moments later, Akin calls for everyone’s attention and begins breaking people into groups based on the car they will be riding to the Graduation Ceremony in. Akashi, unsurprisingly, ends up riding in Nebuya’s car, along with three of Nebuya’s cousins, much to the older boy’s annoyance. Thankfully the drive back to Rakuzan High School is relatively calm and uneventful, save for the occasional kick to the back of Akashi’s seat, which would generally be followed by a chorus of laughter from the younger kids.

It’s 6:30 in the evening by the time Nebuya pulls into the parking lot, and even from here Akashi can already hear the sound of music playing in the distance, courtesy of the school’s band.

“Hey, I’ve got to run to the gym to check in before I get in trouble. Can you take them and go find my mom?” Nebuya asks as he’s getting out of the car, pointing to the three kids wrestling their way out of the back seat.

“Hold on. You’re leaving me with them?” Akashi asks, his voice laced with concern.

“I have to. I’m already late as it is.”

“But I don’t know how to talk to them. What if they don’t listen to me?”

“They’re gonna listen to you or else I’m gonna break their goddamn necks” Nebuya states, turning to his cousins.

“Oi” he yells, and the three kids immediately stop dead in their tracks. Nebuya proceeds to say something Akashi can’t even begin to understand and the three kids exchange questioning glances, muttering something in return, but based upon Nebuya’s pleased expression, it must have been some sort of affirmation that they’d listen to what Akashi said.

“Alright, I’m gonna go. Just have them follow you, you’ll be fine” Nebuya instructs before trotting off toward the gym, where Akashi could see a line of 3rd years lining up outside to be checked in and prepped for the ceremony. The redhead stands frozen for a moment, unsure of what to do with the three young children staring at him like he had any idea what the hell was going on.
“Uh… hi” Akashi says with a little wave. The three siblings exchange confused expressions before resorting back to their original rough housing, content with completely ignoring their older cousin’s orders to listen to him. The language barrier was going to be a bit of an issue, so Akashi was going to have to think fast if he was going to communicate effectively enough to coral the rambunctious siblings.

Placing his fingers to his lips, Akashi lets loose a loud and shrill whistle, which does the trick of capturing the younger kids’ attention. They stop and stare at the redhead with looks of apprehension and surprise. Akashi motions for the kids to come to him, which they do, albeit reluctantly. Once the three siblings are lined up in front of Akashi, exchanging questioning glances, the redhead points to the oldest and tallest of the trifecta.

“Kambili… right?” Akashi asks, knowing that the boy doesn’t speak Japanese, but hoping he can, at the very least, provide some sort of confirmation as to what his name it. The boy tilts his head in confusion before a look of realization flashes across his face. The boy points to himself.

“I’m… Kambili” he says with a nod of his head. Akashi breathes a sigh of relief, glad that he got his point across. He turns to the second child, pointing at her now.

“You’re Sade?” He asks her. The little girl tilts her head in confusion, much like her older brother had. Kambili leans down and whispers something into her ear. The girl nods her head, now understanding.

“Yes. Sade” the girl says, repeating her name for good measure. Akashi nods his head before turning to the last boy, whose stares up at Akashi with wide, almost fearful eyes. Akashi turns to Kambili and Sade, pointing at their youngest brother and shrugging his shoulders, trying to say that he doesn’t remember his name. Kambili taps the smaller boy on the shoulder and says something to him, pointing at Akashi. The little boy picks at the buttons on his jacket nervously for a moment, avoiding the redheads gaze.

“Nasha” he eventually replies with barely a whisper as tears begin to fill the small boy’s eyes.

Akashi raises an eyebrow at the boy, wondering why Nasha was being so closed off.

“He can talk in Japanese” Kambili pipes up, catching Akashi’s attention.
“He can speak Japanese?” Akashi asks, pointing at Nasha.

“Yes. Granny teach him. He’s a lot better than us.” Akashi turns back to the little boy, whose staring shyly at the ground. Getting down on one knee, Akashi gently places a hand on the boy’s shoulder.

“Nasha, are you ok? Why are you crying?” There is silence for a moment before the boy finally answers.

“Wanna go home…”

“You want to go home?”

“Ya…”

“But we can’t go home yet, we just got here. We have to go watch Eikichi and cheer for him when he graduates.” Akashi’s words seem to accomplish very little, as Nasha’s lip begins to tremble and fat, watery tears begin to fall down his face. Kambili rolls his eyes and groans and Sade begins scolding the boy, which only serves to worsen the boy’s already fragile state. The sound of music and cheering coming from the gymnasium alerts Akashi to the fact that the graduation ceremony is about to start. If they were going to make it on time, Akashi was going to have to diffuse this situation, and fast.

“Nasha we can’t go home right now, but I can carry you if you don’t feel like walking. How does that sound?” Nasha sniffs, rubbing his eyes against the sleeve of his jacket.

“Ok…”

“Ok? You want me to carry you?”

“Ya…”

“Ok, come here.” Nasha lifts his arms up, allowing Akashi to wrap his hands around the boy’s torso and lift him into his arms. The small boy immediately buries his face in Akashi’s shoulder,
latching on to the fabric of his suit coat with tiny fists.

“Sade. Kambili. Let’s go” he instructs, beginning to walk toward the gymnasium. Sade trots over to his other side and takes hold of his free hand, swinging it lazily while they walk and Kambili follows just behind Akashi.

The group of four arrive at the entrance to the gymnasium just as the staff are about to close the doors to begin the ceremony.

“Oh perfect, you’re just in time. Can I get a last name for the graduate you’re here to see?” The woman behind the fold out table asks politely.

“Nebuya” Akashi responds. The woman flips through a list of names before she finds the one she’s looking for.

“Ah yes, I remember now, you must be part of that big group that came through earlier. They said you should be coming so I went ahead and reserved some seats for you. Just head through the door on the right and find section M” the woman instructs. Akashi thanks her for the help and heads into the gym, doing a quick headcount to make sure he didn’t accidentally lose someone. They arrive at their seats just as the band begins playing, signaling the start of the graduation ceremony.

“There you are” Kyoka says as Akashi slides into the seat next to her. “I saw Ei standing in line to check in around back but we had no idea where you were. I was beginning to wonder if something happened.”

“No, nothing bad happened. It just took me a minute to get everyone over here is all.”

“Was there a temper tantrum?” Akin asks, leaning over his wife and pointing at the small boy still cradled in Akashi’s arms.

“Just a small one. Nothing I couldn’t handle” Akashi assures, turning his attention toward the Principal, who has gotten up before the crowd to give a speech.

The ceremony lasts for about 2 hours. In that time, speeches were made, awards for exceptional academic and athletic accomplishment were given, diplomas were handed out, and Akashi’s hands had gone completely numb from all the clapping he had to do. At the very end of the ceremony, all
the seniors tossed their graduation caps into the air, and massive cries and cheers broke out as they celebrated the end of their high school careers. Not long after that, people began fanning out, looking for friends and family, bidding tearful final goodbyes, and overall just enjoying the fact that school was finally over for the year.

Akashi hands Nasha, who had long since fallen asleep in his arms, back to his mother, and heads out onto the floor of the gymnasium in search of Nebuya. He finds the older male, along with Tsuji, Amano, Endo, and Takata as well as Mibuchi and Hayama and the rest of Mibuchi’s friend group, sitting down on the floor, looking absolutely exhausted.

“How’d it go guys?” Akashi asks as he approaches the group of tired looking teens.

“That was awful, I never want to do that ever again” Nebuya replies.

“It wasn’t all that bad was it?” Takata asks, sitting up.

“Ya, I didn’t think it was all that bad. It was actually kind of fun, sitting with all out classmates one last time before we leave” Hayama says enthusiastically.

“Maybe for you it wasn’t, but you didn’t almost fall off the stairs heading up to the stage and make a gigantic idiot of yourself at your high school graduation” the darker male snips back.

“Oh for goodness sakes” Mibuchi shakes his head, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“You almost fell off the stage? When did that happen?” Akashi asks curiously.

“Ei’s over-exaggerating, his knees gave out on him a little bit and he just lost his footing. He was nowhere near falling off though” Tsuji states.

“Ya ok whatever Kaori” Nebuya says with a roll of his eyes.

“Oh boy here we go” Akashi mutters.
“What?” Nebuya asks with raised eyebrows.

“You’re doing that thing again?”

“What thing?”

“The thing where you get all grumpy because you haven’t eaten in a while and so now you’re in a bad mood and are going to be a pain in the ass to deal with on the way home” Akashi explains. A short moment of silence is all Akashi has to collect himself before Nebuya swings angrily at his younger brother, before getting up and beginning to chase him around the gymnasium, the rest of the group bursts out laughing.

“YOU WANNA SAY THAT AGAIN YOU LITTLE SHIT?” Nebuya yells after the running boy.

“AAAAAAAAHHH, I’M SORRY” he yells at no one in particular as he darts and dashes through the crowds of people, avoiding Nebuya, and the knuckle sandwich he has ready for him, as best as humanly possible. After sprinting across the entire gym, Akashi comes to a stop just in front of the side exit doors, taking a moment to catch his breath and see if he finally lost the older boy.

“You know he stopped chasing you after like 10 seconds right?” A monotone, voice calls from Akashi’s left. Turning toward the source of the voice, Akashi’s eyes widen in shock when he sees Mayuzumi leaning against the wall next to the door, looking as uninterested as he always did.

“Mayuzumi? What are you doing here?” Akashi questions, not wanting to sound rude, but also not expecting to see his former Rakuzan teammate here at the ceremony. The silver haired boy sighs.

“A friend of mine from last year is graduating today, and I promised her that I’d come to the ceremony and celebrate.” Akashi nods his head in response.

“Ah, I see… well it’s good to see you.” Mayuzumi stares at him blankly for a moment.

“You lot seem a lot closer this year. Has that much happened while I was gone?” Akashi looks at the boy with a confused expression.
“What do you mean?”

“I saw you talking with Nebuya earlier. You came with him to the graduation ceremony along with a couple of kids I’m assuming must be related to him in some way. I also saw him talking with Mibuchi and Hayama too. You guys seem to be a lot closer this year than you were last year.”

“Oh, uh… ya I guess you could say that.” Akashi responds, not really sure what else to say.

“Have the two idiots finally tied the knot yet?” Mayuzumi asks.

“What do you me- Oh you mean Mibuchi and Nebuya?”

“Ya. You seem like you’d be pretty savvy as to what’s going on in your teammates personal lives. So have they finally ditched the side glances and sexually charged flirting yet?” Akashi chuckles at Mayuzumi’s description of Mibuchi and Nebuya’s terrible way of dancing around their feelings for one another, amused by how accurate his comment on it was.

“You know, as a matter of fact…” he trails off, turning around and fishing out where he had left his group of friends. Even from here Akashi could clearly see everyone, laughing and cheering as Nebuya lifts Mibuchi into his arms, bridal style, and begins spinning around the room with him, Mibuchi’s arms wrapped around his neck and he head thrown back in joyous laughter. “I do believe they did.”

Mayuzumi breathes a small laugh as Mibuchi’s shrieks of joy echo throughout the gymnasium.

“Well it’s about damn time” he says. A moment of silence passes between the two.

“So how have you been lately?” Akashi asks, curious as to what his upperclassman had been up to since he left Rakuzan a year earlier.

“I’ve been alright. I’m going to college for creative writing. It’s been a pain in the ass, but I’m enjoying it nonetheless.”

“Are you going to be a professional writer?” Mayuzumi shrugs his shoulders.
“I don’t know. Right now I’m thinking about being an editor for a publishing company, but I’ve never ruled out the idea of writing my own book. I guess I’ll just have to wait and see what happens and I’ll do whatever works the best for me.’’

“That sounds like a good plan’’ Akashi says, trailing off as he runs out of things to say. By this point, people have begun exiting the gym, bidding final goodbyes and preparing to finally go home for the night.

“Well, I should probably get going” Mayuzumi says finally, pushing himself off the wall and standing to face Akashi.

“Oh ya, I should probably be on my way too. It was good seeing you” the redhead offers with a small smile. Mayuzumi nods his head, a ghost of a smile spreading across his usually expressionless features.

“Ya, it was good to see you too… the real you that is.” Akashi’s eyes widen in shock at the boy’s words.

“You know, I never got the chance to say this last year, mostly because I didn’t really care, but I think I speak for most people when I say that I prefer this you to that other guy.’’ Akashi laughs despite his best efforts not to.

“Ya, I think I agree with you on that one. That other guy was a fucking asshole.” This time it’s Mayuzumi turn to laugh, a short, breathy chuckle that most might mistake for a cough, but the smile on his face, albeit slightly annoyed, was good enough proof of the former.

“Maybe just a little bit” Mayuzumi says, though to no one in particular.

“SEIJURO! WE’RE GETTING READY TO LEAVE SO HURRY UP AND GET BACK HERE” Endo’s voice calls through the dispersing crowd of people.

“I should go” Akashi says, taking a few steps back. “Goodbye Mayuzumi.’’

“Ya. Goodbye Akashi. Say hi to the other idiots for me will you?” And with that, the phantom man
disappears through the side doors, and out into the dark of the night, and if it weren’t for the fact that Akashi had just had an entire conversation with him, the redhead would have wondered if the silver haired boy had actually been there.

Turning away from where Mayuzumi had practically disappeared, Akashi begins making his way back toward his friends, getting a running start before jumping and latching onto Nebuya’s back, who yells in surprise and spins around to see who it is.

“Hi” Akashi greets with a devilish smile on his face. Nebuya sighs, relaxing.

“Guys, I found Sei” the older male says.

“Where the hell did you go dude? We couldn’t find you anywhere” Amano says with mild annoyance.

“I was running away from my impending doom” Akashi responds, poking Nebuya on the top of his head.

“Sei, I chased you for all of 10 seconds, got tired, and turned around to go sit down” Nebuya says explains as he begins walking out of the gym with the redhead still on his back.

“Well I didn’t know that” Akashi says defensively, and everyone laughs, causing his face to turn a slight shade of red.

“Alright, well it was good talking with you all, but I have to go home. My parents are waiting for me” Mibuchi says, stopping and turning toward his now-former teammates.

“What? Reo-née you’re leaving us” Hayama says sadly, now only just understanding that this may be their final goodbye.

“Oh, Kou-chan don’t be sad. I’m never too far away. Just remember that if you need anything, my phone’s always on.”

“Promise?”
“I promise.” Hayama steps forward to hug the taller male, which Mibuchi gladly returns. Akashi takes this moment to hop off Mibuchi’s back, heading over to his older friends.

“AKASHI” Hayama cries, pulling the redhead into their hug. It’s a little hard to breathe, what with Hayama’s surprisingly strong grip around his and Mibuchi’s bodies, but he let's it go for once, allowing the hyperactive boy to get out his energy. Nebuya walks up behind them and wraps his arms around his friends, completing the group hug.

“I’m gonna miss you guys” Hayama says somberly as he finally let's go of Akashi and Mibuchi.

“I wouldn’t worry about it too much, Hayama” Akashi says reassuringly. “After all, this doesn’t have to be goodbye forever. I’m sure we’ll see each other again soon.”

“Ya, you’re right” the blonde responds excitedly, tears beginning to collect underneath his eyes. Someone calls Hayama’s name from somewhere in the distance.

“I gotta get going. We’ll see each other again soon, right?”

“Of course we will. There’s not a doubt in my mind” Akashi says. Hayama nods before turning around and running off into the distance, turning around one last time.

“THANKS FOR THE AMAZING THREE YEARS YOU GUYS! YOU’RE THE BEST FRIENDS I’VE EVER HAD! I’LL SEE YOU ALL SOON!” And with that, the head of blonde hair turns and disappears into the distance. Mibuchi sighs.

“You know, I never thought I’d say this, but I’m really going to miss having him around.”

“Ya, me to. I guess you never really know what you have until it’s gone” Nebuya responds, wiping a small tear from his cheek.

“Well it’s a good thing I nabbed you before I had to watch you walk away into the distance, now isn’t it?” Mibuchi says with a sly grin on his face.
“Ya, I would say so” Nebuya chuckles as the raven haired boy moves to wrap his arms around his neck, placing a kiss to his lips.

“Ewww gross” Takata groans along with everyone else as Nebuya and Mibuchi engage in a disgustingly sweet amount of PDA.

“Get a room you two” Haga shouts in agreement.

“Ah young love” Akashi coos as Nebuya raises his middle finger in response to the other’s groans.

“Ya, and it only took them 3 years to get to this point” Tsuji comments with a roll of her eyes.

“Ya, but all that matters is that they’re finally together, right?” Ono chimes in happily.

“I guess there's some truth to that” Endo says.

Akashi takes a moment to let his gaze wander out toward the rest of Rakuzan campus, now empty due to everyone being on vacation. In a little over a year from now, this would be him. Standing around and being congratulated on making it through all 3 years of high school in one piece. It seemed unreal, how fast the time was passing, but at the same time it feels like this was a long time coming. Next year would be his final year of highschool, and in that year he was going to have to make some very tough decisions regarding his future and the life’s path he will take. A part of him was scared, but another part of him was excited.

Today was the day that his friends would be saying goodbye, to school, to basketball, to the life they had known up until this point, but they would not be saying goodbye to Akashi, not completely. Even though they wouldn’t be going to the same school anymore, Akashi knows that he won’t have to worry about losing touch with his friends. Regardless of how far away they might go, they’ll always stay in close contact, a reflection of how close they had all grown to be. So despite the melancholy, bittersweet feeling that comes with saying goodbye, Akashi knows that this goodbye will only be temporary, as he still has a little bit more time left before his life changes in the way that all the others have.

The past year has been one full of ups and downs, loops and turns, victories and defeats, and making more happy memories than Akashi ever thought was possible. He’d made so many wonderful friends, learned so many amazing things, and has changed so much from who he once was, and for that, Akashi is both happy and grateful, for everything that he had been given.
“SEI! HURRY UP, WE’RE LEAVING” Nebuya calls from the parking lot, everyone else having bid their goodbyes and gone their separate ways.

“I’M COMING” Akashi calls as he begins running to catch up with his older brother, and not get left behind at school. As he gets into the car, waving goodbye at his other friends, Akashi can’t help the smile that spreads across his lips, the windows of the car down, the music from Nebuya’s phone blaring loudly, and for once, everything in the world seems to be going his way.

“AKASHI!” Sticking his head out the window, Akashi notices Emi-sensei waving at him from her own car.

“I’D BETTER SEE YOU STANDING OUTSIDE MY DOOR ON THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL THIS SPRING. YOU WON’T HEAR THE END OF IT IF YOU AREN’T!” Akashi bursts out laughing at his teacher’s playful threat, knowing that she was only joking with him.

“YOU’RE NOT GETTING RID OF ME THAT EASILY! I’LL SEE YOU NEXT YEAR, SENSEI!” Akashi yells back, waving madly as Nebuya pulls out of the parking lot of Rakuzan High School and begins driving down the road toward home, his hope for the future higher than it’s ever been.

Next year’s going to be a fucking blast.

The End

Chapter End Notes

This is it you guys. The final chapter of A Lesson in Human Interaction (and all the bullshit that comes with it). I have a little something special written out for you guys in the next chapter (no it’s not another update), so head on over there to read it.
Dear Reader,

I’m writing you this letter so that I can thank you, formally, for reading, enjoying, and staying with this story for as long as you have.

On September 13, 2017, I posted the first chapter to what I thought, at the time, was going to be short, 7-10 chapter fic on Akashi learning how to be an artist. As you can clearly tell, this fic is not what I had originally in mind when I posted that first chapter. This story has spiraled completely out of control, growing into an entire world of its own, fit with it’s own unique characters, plot, and direction.

Despite this fic not even remotely resembling the story I originally had in mind, I’ve come to realize that I don’t really care for the plot I originally came up with anymore, it’s was too boring, too unoriginal, and didn’t allow me to take as many liberties with the characters and how they are portrayed as the later chapters did. What started out at a short, canon compliant little fic that would allow me to rave about art and how cool it is, turned into an alternate universe of it’s own that I have so much more planned for that I can’t even fit it into one story.

For those of you who are curious, while this may be the end of ‘A Lesson in Human Interaction (and all the bullshit that comes with it)’, this is NOT the end of my journey with Akashi. As a matter of fact, I currently have 2 more fics lined up after this one, which will be written in much the same way as the first one, but delve even deeper into Akashi as the character I am trying to shape him into being. I won’t ramble on too much about this but I have mentioned before that I have a very different style of writing the characters of KNB, that tends to differ greatly from their canon personalities. Some of you really enjoy how I write the characters, others may not, but the point is, I have a direction I am going with these characters, Akashi specifically, and while a lot of what I write might seem like a lot of random garbage that doesn’t mean anything, I promise you that I have a destination and goal in mind for when I write, the garbage in the middle just helps me get their somehow.

Now I need to be perfectly honest with you for just a second. When I started this fic, I did NOT intend it to be nearly as Akashi-centric as it turned out. To be honest, Akashi isn’t even my favorite character in KNB, but the idea I had starting out was interesting enough from Akashi’s perspective that, despite my issues with his canon persona, I decided to start writing for him, and since then my views of Akashi as a person and a character have changed so much. At the end of the day, a lot of things I thought I wanted to focus on ended up getting pushed back, reworked, or scrapped completely. A lot of stuff was mentioned once and then never saw the light of day again because ultimately I decided that I wanted to devote more time to Akashi’s story, and his role as a part of other people lives, rather than Akashi as the driving force of every action that affects those around him, like Nebuya and Mibuchi’s relationship for example, a part of the story that was supposed to be a major plot-point, that ended up being more of a side plot that came up every once in a while, and the same can be said for certain characters, like Mibuchi’s friend group who I hardly wrote anything for because I favored the gamer girls so much. I am so incredibly invested in Akashi’s journey toward self-discovery and self-healing, and despite not wanting to write about him initially, I have become 100% invested in him, and if I have to write 2 more novel length fics in order to give my idiotic red headed son the happy ending that he deserves, then goddammit that’s exactly what I’m gonna fucking do.

For those of you who’ve been here since the beginning, I want to thank you again for giving me
the wonderful words of encouragement that helped motivate me to keep writing even if I didn’t feel very confident in the work I was putting out. It was your initial support that really drove this story in the direction it ended up going toward and I can’t even begin to explain how heartwarming all your kind words and encouragement were to me. This story did not turn out the way I initially wanted it to, but your kindness has given me the confidence to accept the changes and the mixups and the flaws and love my story more than I could have ever have hoped to.

Now I know I’m famous for taking way too much in the end notes of things so I’m just going to end this letter here and let you all get on with the rest of your day.

So now, after 46 chapters, over 100,000 words, and endless moments of stupidity, rage, and shameless, shameless self-indulgence, I would like to take one last time to thank you all so much for reading and enjoying A Lesson in Human Interaction (and all the bullshit that comes with it). Make sure you let me know what your thoughts are down in the comments below and as always, I will see you all VERY SOON, for the first chapter of “A Lesson In Teenage Rebellion (or whatever the fuck society calls it).

Goodbye… for now!

Love,

Foilfreak

End Notes

I hope you enjoyed the first chapter in my new story. If you thought this chapter was self indulgent then you better buckle up buttercup cuz it only gets worse from here. I think this might end up being a pretty long story since I already have 4 LONG chapters written and have barely scratched the surface of where I want to take this, but for right now enjoy the first chapter and I hope to see you soon for chapter 2.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!