Chronicle
by TheCrowClub

Summary

Far in the future the earth has run out of resources. Soil and water are no longer readily available, and food has become increasingly scarce. Our planet is dying. But those with great power and wealth were able to flee to space where they wait in hopes that a chosen few who have been selected from a young age will come up with a way to save what is left of humanity. Tsukishima Kei is one of the chosen, given an implant which allows the user to play back any memory as if recorded, he and a handful of gifted scientists work to combine past lives on earth with new ideas from space. But as Kei struggles with the memories of friends and family he left back home on a dying planet, he realizes that his memory may hold the clue to a truth he has been seeking, and that love is not so easily forgotten when you retain every instance of joy and pain that occurred within a lifetime.

Notes

This is the first time posting any of my writing. I have this fic fully planned. Most of it is written, there will be eleven full chapters, a prologue, and an epilogue. Now I just have to get through editing hell. I’m really proud of it, and I hope someone can get as much enjoyment out of reading it as I did writing it.
Yamaguchi felt it as if in slow motion when Tsukki’s hand slipped from his own. Where their fingers had been intertwined a moment ago, now his empty palm contained only a sense of finality.

Gunshots rang out all around them, louder even than the screams, and Yamaguchi wished that he could somehow block out the noise. That he could make it stop, that he could make all of it stop.

Through the confusion, Yamaguchi could hear Tsukki screaming his name, panicked and just barely addible over the roar of commotion surrounding them. And for a brief moment, Yamaguchi had the absurd thought that he didn’t know Tsukki could scream that loud, let alone at all…

When Yamaguchi was hit with the full weight of two grown men pulling at his back, he knew he was done for. He knew that he wouldn’t make it on that ship, that he would never get to see the stars from space, or look down on earth like Tsukki had talked about all those times… Even worse, he would never see Tsukki again.

The crowd pulled him farther back into the pounding chaos, away from the waiting ship… away from Tsukki.

Never again would Yamaguchi get to see him frown in concentration when he attempted to solve a problem. He would never again be the recipient of a glare that was always just the slightest bit softer when directed towards him.

He would never get to kiss Tsukki again, would never get to touch him again…

Yamaguchi was going to die now, there was no point denying it. He, better than anyone else, except maybe Tsukki, knew the fate of those left behind on earth. All that was left here was death. He didn’t know why he had ever thought it would be any different.

Tsukki had let him cheat death once a long time ago, but he couldn’t be expected to do it again. Fate, as it were, had caught up to him.

But was it really so wrong to feel the loss, not exactly of what had been, but rather of what still could be? Tsukki would go on without him. Maybe he would save the world, maybe he wouldn’t. But either way, Yamaguchi wouldn’t be there to see it. He had no future beyond this moment, beyond this point…

And that made him sad… Sad because he knew what Tsukki was, knew what he was capable of. The problem was that sometimes he lost sight of that potential himself. Not in the way that people would expect either. Tsukki lost sight on a much larger scale than that. Sometimes, Yamaguchi thought, you could be so caught up in the bigger picture, that you actually forgot to think on an individual level.

For a long time Tsukki had held the weight of the world on his shoulders. But Yamaguchi had liked to think he had lessened some of that burden. Now, Tsukki would have to carry that weight alone.

Yamaguchi felt something hard collide with the back of his head, and the next thing he knew he was laying on the ground. He was face was pressed down into the dirt, but the stampeding horde of people didn’t care, and soon he felt something else strike his head, and then his arm, his legs…

Yamaguchi was being trampled. Blood started to soak his face, his shirt. He wasn’t entirely sure if
it was his blood, or blood from one of the many people closing in on him. He knew that pain was coming, but Yamaguchi didn’t care, couldn’t find it within himself to care anymore. Because Tsukki was safe. Tsukki, unlike Yamaguchi, would get on a ship and leave this suffocating planet. This suffocating beautiful planet.

Tsukki would look down on the earth from a ship that had viable oxygen and no radiation…

Tsukki would see the stars from space.

This is what Yamaguchi was thinking as the last civilian ship launched without him, taking with it any hope that he or the others left behind had for survival.

No, Yamaguchi wouldn’t see the stars, but Tsukki would…

Tsukki would…
Dreams

Chapter Notes

The asterisks indicate we’re going into a memory. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Kei could remember dreaming again last night. He could recall a blurry mess of wind, freckles, and the smell of blood in mass quantities. His mind had supplied him with a strange mixture of fragmented images from his past, alongside anxieties that showed up in his subconscious as distant sensations too abstract to comprehend. Despite all of this, Kei loved dreaming. The ambiguousness of the unconscious state reminded him of how normal memory functions.

Memory’s not like a video recorder or playback device, at least that’s what every old book Kei had ever read on the subject would have him believe. People can’t play back a memory exactly as it happened. We take things in, we process, we encode, and then it’s gone almost as quickly as it arrived. That’s just the way it is. Even long-term memory only works so well. The human mind changes and distorts things over time. Every time.

It's for our own good really. Who would want to remember every moment of their life?

Of course, those books were centuries old, written by people who believed that memory was a process exclusively attributed to the brain. Kei snorted, he was nothing if not a testament to the fact that those books were incredibly dated, written by people who had only ever known an earth of the past.

Earth…

Kei slid from his sleek metal bed, feet meeting the cold floor and sending a chill through his entire body. He was always cold up here. Sometimes, Kei thought it was more of a mental thing than an actual temperature thing. When you were stuck orbiting around earth in a metal box, the lack of any temperature that wasn’t artificially regulated tended to mess with your mind.

Kei pulled on his regulation sweater with its standard H-Corps logo on the front, starting a morning routine that had become second nature to him. Bathroom, food supplements, log entry of hours slept- there isn’t exactly night and day in space, so his superiors wanted to make sure that he and the rest of the Chronicle users were all getting the correct amount of rest. Sleep helps the human body function- It’s all very monotonous. In fact, he’s done the same thing each morning since his departure from earth.

It’s at times like these that he’s thankful he has his music. The sounds spill out of his small cabin from the computer system wired directly to each room on the ship. He plays music every morning, it’s his guilty pleasure. Others aboard the ship don’t understand his obsession with something so trivial, but Kei doesn’t care. He likes the way the notes and melodies ebb and flow in a way that normal conversation never does. He likes the thought of a time when people created music as if it wasn’t a miracle, as if it weren’t something to be cherished.

But that’s stupid and sentimental, he tells himself. Two things he’s not allowed to be. He probably feels this way because of his dream last night. A dream where he could reach out and touch the
face that those freckles belonged to. Unfortunately, that too is stupid and sentimental.

Yamaguchi lives only within Kei’s memories now, a place where he’ll never truly touch him again. And though his memory may be lightyears better than the average person’s, it could never truly compare to reality, to the present, to having someone with you in the flesh.

What Kei is reluctant to admit to himself, is that more than anything he wants to experience, not just to remember.

Kei doesn’t remember much from before Chronicle, he supposes this is how normal people must feel, memory working as mere fragments that can never truly be pieced together or trusted. What he does remember however, is his mother’s excitement and his brother’s concealed jealous glares as the men talked about how Kei had passed the test. How he was special.

At the time, Kei hadn’t really known or cared what Chronicle would entail. They had been living in Dome-3, and like everyone who resided within the lowest dome, they were condemned to a harsh life of poverty and desolation. All Kei could remember caring about at the time was the fact that those men—the ones who had taken him for the test—were saying that they would now be allowed into Dome-1. The most prosperous Dome out of the three.

Once inside, Kei and his family would have access to food, water, they could live without fear. He remembered feeling excited and proud. Proud that he was the reason they were being let into the sanctuary dome, him and not Akiteru.

Besides those feelings, the rest of what had followed was a blur to Kei. He could remember there was a transport vehicle, a sterile room, his mother’s soft voice telling him that everything was going to be okay, and then pain… Pain like he had never felt before, pain he hadn’t felt again until the day he had let go of Yamaguchi’s hand.

And when Kei had awoken from the pain? Well, everything had been different to say the least.

Kei had never forgotten anything again. Every memory, every moment, was his to keep. He couldn’t forget anymore, and he never would again.

The Chronicle implant had been developed by a neuroscientist working for H-Corps. It had always been a sort of last ditch effort to save the human race. It implemented the idea that if we couldn’t fix the planet that we were living on, then maybe we could modify the people who would be spared, in the hopes that someday they could find a way for humanity to live on after their home was no longer survivable.

Kei and his fellow Chronicle users had been destined for space from the moment they had received their implants at a young age. All of them had been relentlessly trained, the end goal being this ship, a floating lab in space where they worked on solving devastating climate issues and the lack of sustainable resources. All while carefully growing and cultivating new food and supplements here in space, later to be shipped to five civilian vessels orbiting earth.

He and his fellow scientists were tasked with keeping what was left of humanity alive and fed.

Looking back, Kei knew that the Chronicle implants had been extremely risky, most likely not fully tested for safety concerns. He was also sure that he could have easily died that day when a group of strangers had cut into his brain. But Kei was similarly sure that they hadn’t cared about the risk. Hell, hundreds of people were dying daily, much slower and more agonizingly than he
would have on that table. He knew his death was a risk that H-Corps had been willing to take, one that he and his family had been willing to take as well. After all, what did the deaths of a few children mean when faced with the future of humanity?

Kei understood that the Chronicle implant was meant to let them utilize the full potential of the human brain. They were after all, better equipped than anyone in the history of the world to solve the issues of climate change and the dying earth.

But though that was the prominent use for Chronicle, the slogan if you will. There was a lesser known reason. Perfect memory had been given to a select few so that our time spent on earth would be remembered, so that we would have proof that we had once lived on such a strange and miraculous planet. Chronicle would insure that humanity wouldn’t lose their history.

As the years passed away from earth, the entire human race would have to rely on Chronicle to remember what they had lost. Kei had only been up here for two and a half years, and already earth felt like a strange and untouchable concept.

Just as untouchable as all the people he had left behind to die.

The dream flooded his mind once more. He thought of reaching out for Yamaguchi’s hand, of wild eyes and desperation that was amplified by the amount of people crowded around them, all with the same goal of survival. Kei had seen that moment so many times, replayed it over and over in his mind, both in his dreams, and through Chronicle-Memory. He was intimately familiar with every agonizing detail.

Sometimes Kei wondered if it’s fair to say that moment defines him. Maybe not, but it was the day he had lost what little he had left of a life he would never be able to get back.

As Kei attempted to rouse himself from the unsettling mood that the dreams always put him in, he looked at the screen on his wall. He didn’t have to be in his lab for another twenty minutes, giving him plenty of time to settle in to a long-term memory. All these thoughts of the past had him itching to delve in.

If music is Kei’s guilty pleasure, then his memories are his obsession. He needs them. He lives for them. He lives through them. Over and over he replays them in his mind. Every second that he’s not working, he’s living in the past, spending time with people who his mind knows are gone, but who live on in his head none the less.

He sits down in his H-Corps regulated chair, practically the only thing in his cabin besides his bed and his wall-screen. He couldn’t give a fuck about the lack of decoration though. It’s not like this place ever had, or could ever for that matter, feel like home. Objects didn’t give you that feeling, people did, and Kei’s people were gone.

So, Kei sat in the unembellished room. In his plain chair, eyes closed, trying to decide what to indulge himself with. And then, because he’s particularly bored, and because he woke up with just that touch of sentimentality, he decides to start from the very beginning.

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Kei opens his eyes to find Akiteru’s form leaning over him, head tilted in concentration. “He doesn’t look any different,” his brother lamented, tilting his head ridiculously.

“Akiteru,” his mother warned. “Leave him alone, he’s in pain.”

Kei took a groggy moment to think about this. Was he in pain? It was hard to tell. It was hard to
think about anything really.

“W-where am I?” he managed to stutter.

His mother was by his side in an instant, holding his hand and whispering calming words into his ear. “Shhh sweetie, it’s okay. We’re in Dome-1, remember? You had surgery, and now you’ve been in and out of consciousness for a week.”

“He doesn’t seem to have very good memory,” Akiteru grumbled irritably.

“They said it could take a while for him to adjust. No don’t try to move,” she said, as Kei attempted to sit up. “You have to rest. You did brilliantly. My brave boy,” she crooned at him. “You have to let your body rest.”

Kei felt more than saw her hand come up to rest ever so gently on his clammy forehead. He closed his eyes, reveling in the touch. So many times before, when Kei had been hungry, or cold, or scared, his mother would make him feel like if he could just hug her… if he could just touch her, then everything would be alright.

“We have a room now, Kei,” she whispered almost reverently. “We get rations… water and food supplements.”

“It looks like puke!” Akiteru interjected happily.

His mother shushed him. “I know it hurts now, Kei, but just think… you’re going to get to learn, you’ll have access to the archives.” He knew that if she could be hugging him she would be. “I’m so proud of you.”

“So… he passed some test.” Akiteru said. Kei could hear the beginnings of anger in his brother’s voice, “doesn’t make him that special.”

With a sigh, Shizuku pulled her older son into her lap. He had recently turned twelve, and Kei thought that he was getting far too old for that type of behavior, but that didn’t stop him from winding his long arms around her small waist and resting his head on her chest contentedly.

“You’re both special,” her voice lost some of the characteristic softness that Kei loved so much, “and you’re both going to live. We all are.”

Kei felt her squeeze his hand in determination, as if by saying it, she could somehow will it to be true. She spoke it as a statement, not the question it really should have been. His mother wanted so badly for everything to be okay. It almost made him hesitant to say what he did next.

“Mom…” he could hear the way his voice cracked at the word.

“Hmm, Sweetie?”

“Mom,” and now panic was leaching into his voice. “Everything is blurry…”

Shapes began to mold into one another, until his mother’s face became an unrecognizable mass of colors and light. And then panic took over. “Mom!” he shrieked. “Mom! I can’t see!”

Kei opened his eyes, sad to see his mother’s face go. He had been six when he had first gotten the implant, small and scared, but also unaware of what it really meant. Of what having a Chronicle
implant would require.

Of course, if someone were to ask Kei now, he wouldn’t go back to Dome-3. Godforsaken place. He’s positive he would be dead right now if those men hadn’t come along. If they hadn’t seen potential in his brain and inserted a man-made device into his fragile six-year-old head.

Kei had ended up losing his eyesight for a short time. A complication had arisen after the surgery, leaving him completely sightless, blind to the new world he inhabited. The men from H-Corps couldn’t have that though. They had spent too much time, too much money on his brain. They couldn’t just let it go to waste.

Kei had undergone two more surgeries to correct his eyesight, and though it was successful in that he was no longer blind, his eyesight had never been the same as before Chronicle. After the surgeries, he’d had to wear glasses if he wanted the world to look like anything more than just a mass of undulating blobs. Which he did…Most days…

Once his implant was fully operational, Kei’s life had consisted of a whirlwind of tests, trials, tutors, and prep work. His brain wasn’t even close to being fully developed, but damned if they weren’t going to try to cram as much as they could into it, as fast as they could.

They didn’t even let him into the Chronicle program for two years. First he had to prove himself. Prove that he could cope with the implant. That he wouldn’t self-destruct, or that it wouldn’t kill him for that matter. He had to show that he could learn, that he could be obedient.

And so, Kei had. What other choice did he have? If he didn’t obey, they were sure to lose their coveted spot in Dome-1. And wasn’t working towards saving the planet a good thing anyway? Kei had thought so, even at such a young age.

On his good days, he still thinks that, even now. Even after everything.

Getting used to having Chronicle in his head had been a taxing process, made even more so by the fact that he was just a child when he had entered the program. But one thing that the intelligence test had gotten right, was that Kei was good at learning. Education was a privilege in the dying world he had grown up in. Only a select few were given the means to seek knowledge.

Not that it mattered to most people. With the amount of famine and starvation, knowledge was no one’s top priority. If you weren’t one of the few elite, rich enough to buy food, then you were out of luck. If you were one of the fortunate, you got to work a labor job inside one of the Domes, but too often even that wasn’t enough. Most had to scrounge for any form of food and water, or risk dyeing.

But not Kei… As Akiteru had put it so eloquently back when they were just children, Kei was special. Kei got to learn. Though he wasn’t even close to rich, at six years old he had catapulted himself and his family into a small percentage of the population who could be sure of their next meal.

Not only that, but Kei’s mind had also bought him a ticket into space when earth had become uninhabitable. Not many were that lucky.

Of course, not everyone had made it to the launch date. Death was the norm in that world, an inescapable certainty that came for you sooner rather than later.

Not even the elite could escape an early death. Privileged didn’t always equal a long life, a fact Kei knew all too well.
When they had entered Dome-1 Kei had thought that their new life would make them invincible…

…He had been wrong.

He sat back, searching for the memory that he had seen too many times to count. It might be painful, but it was all he had left.

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Kei sat in a small classroom with two other students, one a fellow recipient of the Chronicle implant, and the other just some rich snob who was here because of who her father was. Both kids had tried to start a friendship with him. The girl, Ricco, had even gone so far as to ask if he wanted to share a table with her. Kei had declined, not politely either. His mother would have been disappointed in him, but Kei didn’t care. He wasn’t here to make friends, and in general he didn’t like other kids much. They were trivial, and incapable of seeing the bigger picture.

Kei had now been in the Chronicle program for a little over a year, meaning he had been in Dome-1 for the same amount of time. And though he was now surrounded by people who shared the same interests as him, there was still no part of him that wanted to interact with other kids, his age or otherwise.

Kei tapped his fingers against the table. He was impatient to get home, he wanted to see his mother on her break and tell Akiteru about the images of spaceships he had seen earlier. At the moment, they were listening to a lecture about soil and how agriculture had been one of the first resources to fail on earth. The people of the past had overworked soil properties to the point that they became infertile, striped of all healthy minerals and organisms that would let organic plants grow. Kei might me young, but he could already understand that the collapse of agriculture and the ability to produce food had brought about the failure of any well-structured finical system.

He knew that wars had broken out over supplies that were salvageable, and thus the beginning of the end had started. But as his teachers had informed him, things would only get worse from there. Humans had all but destroyed the ozone layers and climate. The oceans had risen and tectonic forces had slowly ceased. Organic plant life had dwindled with the loss of the soil, and the once prosperous nations of old had begun to scramble to survive.

Before they destroyed themselves, countries had waged war to try and claim what they believed belonged to them.

Soon after the land had been stripped bare, the oceanic wars had started. Fights had broken out over who could lay claim to the minerals and resources hidden within the dark depth of the watery expanses. A last ditch effort for material that would only last so long.

Of course, the oceans weren’t viable anymore. Too acidic…

Kei brushed a finger through the sample of barren soil that someone had brought from outside the Dome. Well, you couldn’t really call it soil-soil implied a host of living organisms, gasses, and minerals-this, this was dust really. A sad comparison to the pictures he had seen of the layered, moist and complex sediments of the past.

Kei let out a breath through his nostrils, irritated that his sample was so useless to him and everyone around him. He was about to ask if he could go start up the wall-screen and look at more pictures from the past of what real soil looked like, and maybe sneak in a few more pictures of the shuttle designs, when the door to their small classroom crept open, revealing a tall man in an H-Corps jacket with dark hair and even darker eyes.
“Tsukishima Kei?” he asked, eyes directed towards the far wall instead of at any of the kids seated in the room.

Kei raised his head from his dirt sample. “What?” he asked bluntly.

“Come with me.”

Kei leveled him with a blank stare. “Why?”

“Come quickly,” he replied, “your brother is waiting.”

All the malice drained from Kei’s voice as he spoke. “Akiteru?”

Kei entered their tiny familiar living space, in the back of his mind wondering what trouble Akiteru had gotten into this time. He had a job working security down in the east district. It was a very sought after job, one he was incredibly lucky to have. It was miles better than his mother’s job working in the factory. But because he was Akiteru, stubborn and outspoken, he had been sent home with warnings concerning stupid errors on multiple occasions.

Kei wondered what it was this time. Had he talked down to a superior again? Been caught trying to give rations to the starving? It could be anything really. Kei’s suspicions were quelled however when he saw the look on his brother’s face.

Akiteru stood waiting for him, sly grin in place. “What did you do little brother?” he asked.

“Forget to kiss your teachers asses…?”

His grin twisted in amusement. “Oh wait, that’s right… you never forget.”

Kei rolled his eyes. Akiteru was constantly teasing him about Chronicle and his memory. It got old. Most of the time his brother was the kind of person you simply couldn’t reason with, probably due to the fact that he relied too heavily on emotions, Kei thought. It made him unpredictable, unreliable.

“What did you do?” Kei asked, pointedly ignoring his brother’s stupid remark.

“Nope, thought it had something to do with your deal.”

Kei snorted in irritation at his older brother’s irksome tendencies and oversimplification, but none the less, he made a move to position himself slightly closer to Akiteru. Kei was starting to get a weird feeling… like something was wrong. He had never been pulled from school before. Time was too valuable, and the fact that Akiteru had been pulled from the east sector was similarly concerning. He was beginning to feel the onset of a creeping panic in the back of his mind.

What was going on? Why were they here?

Unexpectedly, Kei had the strange urge to reach out and take Akiteru’s hand, just like he had done when he was very small, hiding and trying to keep quiet in their makeshift shelter made of scraps. Back then the two boys would hunker down, patiently waiting for their mother to return. All the while hoping that when she did get back, she would have some food to show for her pillage, or clean water at least.

Akiteru seemed to sense the shift in Kei’s mood, seeing the tension in his small body. A soft
expression took the place of his classic smirk. “Hey, don’t worry, Kei. I’m sure everything’s fine… We won’t let them hurt you.”

Suddenly Kei wasn’t so worried for himself, or Akiteru for that matter.

“Where’s mom?” The realization was starting to set in. He and Akiteru had both been pulled from their daily tasks, so where was their mother?

“She’s at work,” Akiteru said calmly, seemingly unaware of why Kei was starting to sweat through his standard H-Corps uniform.

Just when Kei was about to tell him that if they were both here then there was no reason she shouldn’t have been pulled from work too, the door opened and both boy’s eyes bugged out of their skulls as The Chancellor of the Domes walked through the door as if it were the most normal thing in the world.

The way he moved was so graceful, Kei couldn’t help noticing. It was as if his body were light as the air that surrounded them.

“Hello, Kei. My name is Chancellor Akaashi.”

Kei was speechless, fear quickly turning to confusion in his addled brain. Why was The Chancellor of the Domes in his living quarters?

“I wanted to come talk to you myself,” the man continued, “because I’ve heard a great deal about how talented and promising you’ve already proven yourself to be.”

Kei looked to Akiteru for help, but his brother merely shrugged as if to say, ‘how should I know what to do. These are your people.’

“Umm… Thanks?” Kei finally settled on.

The Chancellor smiled at him, warm and encouraging in its openness. “No need to thank me. I have a son a little older than you in the Chronicle program, you see. I know all the hard work you children do… You are our future.”

Kei looked at his feet uncomfortably, unsure of what to say to this man who held so much authority.

“Unfortunately,” The Chancellor’s face fell, “I’m here on tragic business today.”

Next to him Kei could feel Akiteru tense.

“This morning at nine fifteen there was a tragic accident in the east sector factory. I’m sad to say that three people lost their lives. I’m so very sorry boys… but one of those people was Shizuku Tsukishima… your mother.”

Kei understood the words, but his brain couldn’t make sense of them.

He felt himself sway. It wasn’t possible… she couldn’t be dead. People couldn’t just be gone that quickly. Kei would have known, right? It had been hours since nine fifteen, practically half a day. Kei would have known if his mother had been dead for hours…

His mother had been dead for six hours four minutes and thirty-six seconds, the logical part of his brain told him. The part of his brain that was grounded in numbers, numbers that he didn’t want to
know, numbers that he shouldn’t have to hear.

The world looked fractured and broken suddenly. Dead… The three of them had always been together; she was everything to them. She had kept them alive for so long. And now…? What were they without her?

He saw tears start to form in Akiteru’s eyes as he lashed out at the stranger standing in their home. “You’re lying,” he spat. “She’s not dead. I saw her this morning… You come in here,” his voice broke, “a-acting like you own the place, j-just to spout this bullshit! You’re lying!” He looked to where Kei was standing. “Kei, he’s lying!”

It was as if he were begging Kei to look at him and tell him that, yes, indeed, there was no way that their mother could be dead. That this man who ran what was left of human civilization had maliciously sought them out just to spread falsities.

Kei couldn’t.

“I’m sorry young man, I’m afraid it’s the truth.”

Akiteru let out a guttural half bellow half whimper of anger, before storming out the door, letting it slam behind him with a note of finality.

Kei watched in a daze as if he were merely an observer though his own body. He had perfect memory, he was smart, he was in a group of people slotted to be the first into space, and he was going to help build a better future. But what did any of that matter if he didn’t have her?

The Chancellor began to speak from his location in the room where Kei had almost forgotten he was there. “I wanted to come tell you myself,” he said sorrowfully, “because I’m hoping that we can form a relationship you and I. I believe that we can do great things together.”

He flashed Kei with another warm smile. “I know it’s hard to think about right now, in the wake of such a tragedy. But all I’m asking is that you continue with your studies, and give what I said some thought. I’d like to get to know you better, Kei.”

Kei watched the world around him swirl and dance. He felt removed from it. No longer a part of the vast web that connected all human beings together.

He was an observer now, no longer a participant.

“Okay?” asked the stranger who had just shattered the foundation of everything Kei knew.

Kei tilted his head to the side, seeing, but not really seeing the man standing before him.

“We were supposed to live,” was all he said. “All of us…”

Kei sat in his lab, mind still preoccupied by the horrible memory he had just witnessed. Losing his mother had damaged both he and Akiteru in a way Kei sometimes thought he would never fully understand. He knew about physics, chemistry, geology, the history of our dying planet, and yet, all that knowledge hadn’t ever given Kei an upper hand on how to understand people. It hadn’t taught him how to understand grief.

For months, both boys had struggled with the loss of their mother. He and Akiteru had experienced a rift between them that they had never dealt with before. Akiteru had been angry, causing him to
pull away, and if Kei were being honest, he had never quite forgiven his brother for that.

Things had gotten bad; Kei had felt like he had lost his whole family that day, leaving him with nothing but his studies. So, he had done the only thing he could think of at the time, he had accepted The Chancellor’s offer to work with him personally, throwing himself into his work for the Chronicle program.

Kei hated his memories from the next couple of years. Memories of a time that came after his mother’s death but before Yamaguchi. They were the only ones he didn’t watch regularly.

Kei wished he had more memories of his mother, but so much of his time had been spent in a lab, away from her and Akiteru. He often went back and watched every memory he had of her, in the hopes that he could feel some kind of closeness. At least he could be sure that he would never forget her face…

…How it felt when she held him…

He had to stop. It was far too easy to fall down that hole.

Kei fiddled with the settings on the oxygen recycler, he was running multiple experiments in his lab at once, and he looked to them for distractions at times like these. Soil was his baby. He had been able to recreate the correct variables to allow for viable soil, but the problem was that in the grand scale of things, it was still far too little far too late.

He listened to the various humming noises of the different machines in the lab, letting the familiar noise lull him into a quiet content.

Kei should be thinking about how to rid the ocean of its high acidic content, or talking to Kuroo about the ozone layer and radiation. But after seeing the memory of his mother’s death, all he really wanted to do was see the face of the person he loved most.


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Kei stood in a line behind three other kids, waiting to leave Dome-1. One of the kids was The Chancellor’s son… Keiji or something…? Kei didn’t really care. They weren’t friends, and he had only ever seen the quiet dark-haired boy outside of lessons on a few occasions, most often in the compound where he went to meet with Chancellor Akaashi.

Kei hadn’t been outside of the Dome since he had first arrived four years ago, after receiving his implant. He was a bit nervous to leave the safety the Dome offered. Although, he would be lying if he said that he wasn’t also a bit excited. They were going out for real field work, Kei squirmed at the idea.

The trip would be two consecutive days where they would get to see the barren landscapes up close, take samples for themselves, and experience the concepts they had been learning about first hand. Kei was thrilled. They were even meeting a team who were bringing back a sample of oceanic crust from deep sea drilling.

He had been one of only five students from the Chronicle program who had been selected to go on the expedition. Chancellor Akaashi had made sure he had a spot on the list, although Kei liked to think that his hard work had contributed to the honor as well.

He watched silently as the remaining two kids got fitted with their safety gear. Though the
conditions outside of the Dome weren’t lethal yet, the leaders of the Chronicle program weren’t taking any risks with their investments.

That’s what Akiteru called them anyway—Kei and the other Chronicle kids: Investments.

Thinking about Akiteru made Kei’s gut twist uncomfortably. Though things were better between them than they had been right after their mother’s death, Akiteru was still angry and resentful. And lately, he had been disappearing to undisclosed locations for long periods of time.

He didn’t think Kei knew… He was wrong.

The loud cranking noise that resulted as the section of Dome that served as the door began to slide in on itself brought Kei back to the present. He watched calmly as each person in front of him passed through the opening, letting the guard stationed there scan their wrist where a tiny microchip was located.

Everyone inside the Domes had a chip containing all their personal information, it was standard protocol. They contained a number that was unique to the owner, and information such as which sector they were from and whether they had clearance to leave the Dome.

Kei’s chip was an all access pass, second only to the higher-ups in H-Corps and the Chancellor himself. Just one of Chronicle’s many perks.

Once outside the Dome, they were all loaded onto a small vehicle, an oddity in and of itself because there were no longer means to build vehicles, let alone find a source of power to run them off.

This one was an incredibly old solar model, left over from the conscientious boom when the population had realized what their fuel burning rates were doing to the ozone. For a while it had become fashionable to be as energy efficient as possible, just one more fad for humanity to occupy themselves with. Unfortunately, it hadn’t made much of a difference in the long run, too far gone and all that.

Kei listened to his fellow students, unimpressed, as they chatted excitedly about the vehicle and its inner workings.

No one asked Kei to join in… they never did anymore.

His reputation preceded him.

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Kei piled out of the vehicle at the end of the day, tired and covered in dust. Overall, it had been an incredible day. They had seen the sample from the bottom of the ocean, analyzing it and comparing it to data of past records. Kei had collected samples of dust and fragments of particles from ruined cities. He almost couldn’t believe his eyes when they had come across the ruins, desolate and stripped of all valuable metals and building material. But though they were just skeletons now, silent echoes of what they had once been, Kei could almost envision what they had looked like in their peak.

They were like pictures he had seen of carcasses picked clean after death, bare and hardly resembling the grand structures they had once been. Instead, they were reduced to nothing more than a sad imprint for wanderers to pass by on their way to a better place. Those people who were unaware of the great histories that the ruins contained. Like the ghost of an idea that could never quite be realized.
Kei shuddered. Normally he wasn’t one for old horror stories, but the thought of all those people who used to live on earth, billions upon billions of them now reduced to a fraction of that number, well, it gave him the creeps to say the least.

“Kei,” the instructor from H-Corps who was on duty called to him, “don’t fall behind. You would think someone with your height could keep up with the rest of us.”

Kei merely glared at him in response, but he did pick up his pace just a bit. Especially when he noticed that there was a crowd of people gathering by the entrance to the Dome.

“Aww fuck,” the instructor cursed loudly. “Filthy good for nothing scroungers, don’t you people ever give up?”

The group gathered around the Dome were obviously travelers looking for a way to get inside, in search of food and shelter no doubt. Kei cast his eyes away, they had all been taught not to sympathize with these people. There was nothing they could do for them after all.

With how incredibly skinny and gaunt each one of them looked, Kei couldn’t help wondering how they were even still alive.

Though he tried to avert his eyes, Kei couldn’t stop himself from thinking about his family before they had gotten their ticket into Dome-1. Things hadn’t even been as bad for them, because at least they had been *inside* a Dome. These people didn’t even have that.

“They’ll never let them in.”

Kei looked around to find the dark-haired Chancellor’s son standing with a sad look on his face.

“I don’t know why they even try,” he muttered.

Kei thought about what he had been willing to do for his family when they had been starving and on the verge of death.

“What else can they do?” he lamented softly. He didn’t know if he was talking to the other boy, or to himself, but it didn’t matter really. And soon The Chancellor’s son was walking on ahead of him anyway, as if they hadn’t spoken at all.

Kei was about to follow him when he felt something tug at his jacket. That something turned out to be a human being, and that human being was looking at him with large pleading eyes.

“Please” the man begged, “you have food.” It was hard to tell if he was old, or if his skin was just that damaged from the constant exposure to the unrelenting elements outside the Dome. “My family is starving… Can’t you spare anything?”

Seeing the man holding on to Kei, the others started to swarm him. Groups of them, old and young alike, all clawing at his skin and asking if he could give them food.

Kei felt suffocated, the world closing in on him as limbs and hands tore at his clothes, his body…

Kei heard shouting as he tried to peel himself away from the mob, loud and disruptive in an attempt to scare the beggars away. The door to the Dome had opened and swarms of guards were pouring out, all brandishing batons.

“Wait,” Kei cried out, but it was too late. The guards had descended on the crowd of starving people, beating and shoving with a violence that Kei had never been witness to before.
He saw red fly in spurts, a sharp contrast against the dull dusty earth that surrounded them.

He wanted to make some kind of noise, any kind of sound-as he realized that the guards weren’t just beating them back-they were killing them. But in that moment his voice failed him.

Everything was chaos, a blur of blood, sickening cries, and fear. The air was thick with it as Kei tried to make his way back to the Dome, back to safety.

His group was nowhere in sight. For a panicked moment, Kei wondered if they had gone back inside without him, sought safety not caring that Kei was out here drowning amongst the violence. But then, as if by some miracle, he heard someone shout his name above the commotion. Only, he couldn’t tell where it was coming from, and as he took off at a run in the direction he thought the shout had originated from, he was shoved by one of the guards brandishing a baton.

Kei fell to the ground, shoulder hitting the hard earth with a painful thud. He barely had time to register the pain however, as a booted foot nearly collided with his head. He would have gotten hit too, if someone hadn’t quickly jerked him to the side out of harm’s way.

Kei spun around, wincing at the pain in his shoulder that came with the sudden movement. He expected to see a weapon clad guard, but no, the person who had saved him was just a kid, so skinny he looked as if he would break at the slightest touch.

Kei jerked away from the boy, the outsider. He was met with a shocked gaze from a pair of the biggest brown eyes Kei had ever seen…

…And freckles, Kei barely had time to register… He had never seen anyone with freckles before.

Kei thought that like so many of the others, this boy would ask for his help, ask him for food, or beg Kei to let him inside the Dome. All things Kei didn’t have the power to do. The boy didn’t do any of those things though, he merely continued to stare at Kei with those huge disconcerting eyes.

They stayed like that for a few heartbeats, both caught within some invisible snare. Finally, Kei broke the binding gaze, shoving the boy away from him in a mad panic and springing to his feet.

He had to get out of here or he was going to get killed.

Kei only took a few moments to assess his options before running for cover behind the abandoned vehicle which was much closer than the opening to the Dome. His legs were long, and though he wasn’t used to sprinting, Kei was able to make it to cover without attaining anymore injuries.

He crouched behind the car, waiting for the commotion to die down. He hoped that no one would notice him hiding here in the shadows, because if they did, Kei had no idea what he would do. Though he acted tough, in reality he had no idea how to protect himself. He was an academic. He worked in a lab. He didn’t even like to roughhouse with Akiteru, it was troublesome. Kei wasn’t even sure how to throw a punch.

Time passed in an agonizingly slow way.

When at last Kei heard the sound of shouts die down, he deemed it safe to move, stepping out from his hiding place. What faced him upon leaving the safety of the car would have stayed with him forever, even if he didn’t have Chronicle enhanced memory.

The bodies of the beggars lay strewn around the dirty ground in a mess of blood and gore.

Death…
Kei swore he could smell it hanging in the air.

Blood ran in pools, flowing from deformed bodies that shouldn’t have been splayed at such odd angles.

Just like his mother…

Kei gagged, hating the way the thought made him feel weak.

He forced his legs to move, his only thoughts focused on getting to the Dome, not on the now lifeless people laying at his feet.

There were guards mulling about in the aftermath, but none of them payed Kei any attention. He continued his determined trek, golden eyes focused on the large Dome in front of him.

Don’t look down, he repeated the words in his head. Don’t look down…

It’s not like it was his fault, Kei told himself. Those people had known the risks of hanging around the Dome without credentials. They had made a choice…

So why did he feel so guilty?

A whimper from his right drew Kei’s attention to the fact that not all of the beggars had been killed as Kei had originally thought.

Not like it mattered though, there was a tall guard looming over the figure. He would be dead soon anyway.

Kei was about to walk past them when he noticed a pair of big brown eyes and a smattering of freckles. It was the boy… the one who had pulled him out of the way of the stampeding guard.

Kei faltered, almost landing back on the ground in the process. Why him of all people? Why did it have to be him? There was nothing Kei could do. The boy wasn’t his responsibility.

He was about to continue walking, better not to think about what would happen to him. But then the two boys locked eyes for the second time that day, and Kei, who had worked so hard since his mother’s death to pull away from everyone around him, felt a sudden and intense connection. It manifested itself in an overwhelming need to interfere with what he was seeing. Without him, this boy would die…

Kei couldn’t pinpoint why exactly it was he felt that way, all he knew was that he was struck with the sudden crushing notion that if he didn’t do something quickly, he would deeply regret it.

“Hey,” never before had he realized how much his voice still sounded like a child’s. “Let him go.”

The guard sneered at him, unsure of why someone Kei’s age was attempting to give him an order. “Who the fuck are you?”

“Let him go,” Kei repeated, attempting to steady his voice.

“Fuck off, kid. I know who you are, don’t think I don’t.”

Kei leveled him with an unimpressed glare.

“Chronicle brat,” the guard spat the word like a curse when Kei continued to glower. “Waste of space, the lot of you, if you ask me. We’re throwing money and resources at you… and for what?”
he asked. “A pipe dream? The Chancellor should wake up and see that you’re just a bunch of freaks whose brains don’t work right.”

“Let. Him. Go.” It wasn’t hard to sound cold, a part of Kei had been ice ever since his mother’s death.

The man laughed. “Or what, kid? You’ll use your science mumbo-jumbo on me?” He sneered, a twisted grotesque thing. “I’m quaking…” He emphasized this last bit with a hard kick to the freckled boy’s face.

The boy fell to the ground and Kei couldn’t tell if he was even conscious anymore. Part of him wished that he weren’t. At least then he wouldn’t feel the pain.

“No,” Kei deadpanned, “believe me, you’re not worth it. But I will get The Chancellor.”

The man snorted, “you may be Chronicle… but that doesn’t mean you know The Chancellor.”

Kei sighed and thrust his wrist out at the guard.”

“What?” The guard looked perplexed.

“Scan it,” Kei ordered.

“Listen kid-”

“No,” Kei’s patience was wearing thin, “you listen. I’ll bet you like your job, right? At least you have one…You get to parade around pretending that you have some form of authority over people you see as lesser, probably all because deep down you’re scared. But hey, it puts food on the table, right? Even if you are lying to yourself in the process. Well guess what? I can have that job taken away in the blink of an eye.”

Kei held out his wrist, “take your chances if you want… but I would advise you to Scan. My Wrist.”

Kei could see the hesitation on the man’s face, wondering if he should trust what Kei was saying. He was just a kid after all. He could see anger behind the look, but if Kei wasn’t mistaken, there was also the slightest touch of fear… Good, Kei thought.

After a long pause, the guard took Kei’s outstretched hand. He knew what the man would find when he ran the scanner over his pale thin wrist, it wasn’t a surprise, to Kei that is. The guard on the other hand looked like he would pop an artery; Kei might have laughed had he not been so anxious.


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The problem with what he had just done, was that now he had an injured starving boy and no idea what to do with him. Kei knew a bit about medicine, but he had no supplies or tools to work with outside the Dome.

He eyed the unconscious boy. Why did he care anyway? Why had he stopped the man from killing this boy? Was it because he felt like the whole thing had been his fault…? The guards had only attacked when the beggars had started to swarm Kei.
He shook the thought out of his head. What did it matter anyway? What had happened had happened, and now Kei had to deal with the consequences.

None of his group members or instructors could be seen anywhere nearby, all having evidently fled during the chaos. Would they come looking for him? Kei had no idea.

Just then the boy started to stir, body convulsing as he coughed. “W-who are you?” he asked feebly.

Kei hesitated a moment. “My name is Tsukishima… T-Tsukishima, Kei.”

“Tsuki-what?” he asked groggily.

“No, don’t move,” Kei instructed. “I think your arm is broken, and your head is bleeding pretty badly.”

“Hmmf,” the boy mumbled blearily, “don’t… like… blood.”

“Doesn’t mean you want to lose it,” Kei remarked, as he pulled part of the lining of his jacket away to apply pressure to the gushing wound. It could be worse he supposed, head wounds tended to bleed a lot, and the amount of blood was often misleading.

The boy nodded slightly. “I do prefer to keep it inside my body.”

Kei raised his eyebrows, “not doing a very good job are you.” He shouldn’t be joking with this boy, that kind of thing would normally be his last reaction to this type of situation. But he couldn’t help himself, something about the stranger made Kei feel at ease.

The boy let out a sort of choking noise which Kei assumed was supposed to be a laugh, though it was hard to tell.

“You need stitches,” Kei told him, noting the depth of the wound. It wouldn’t heal well without them.

“What for?” the boy asked, “I’m al-ready dying.”

Kei narrowed his eyes at the freckled boy. “It’s not that bad…” the words came out harsher than he had intended. He couldn’t help it though, after all he had gone thorough to keep him safe, was the boy just going to give up? He coughed again, and Kei could already see the beginnings of a nasty bruise forming on his face.

Kei watched brown eyes flutter closed. “We both know I’m not talking about the blood loss, Dome-Boy.”

Kei closed his eyes as well, using Chronicle to look back on his memory of medical textbooks he had studied, biology books. He knew in that moment that he had the ability to save this boy. Not only from blood loss, but also from starvation, the elements, and anything else outside of the Dome that would kill him. It was a powerful feeling, holding a life in his hands, and in that moment Kei began to form a plan. “We have to get you to the car,” he said in a hurried tone, “you’ll be safe there.”

It was a lie, but a small one.

“Never ridden in a car before… s-seems like a good time to start,” the boy stuttered.
Kei ignored what he assumed was sarcasm, “we’re not going for a ride… you’re going to stay there until I get back.”

For the first time since he had knelt down, big brown eyes managed to find his own, focusing in on Kei’s face.

“And then what?”

Kei ran his hand through his hair, leaving a trail of the boy’s crimson blood streaked through pale blond strands.

“And then…” Kei trailed off. “Then I’m going to get you inside the Dome.”

Chapter End Notes

The first full chapter, yay! This one was a lot of setup. Next chapter we get Yama inside. Until then, thanks for reading.
Forgotten

Chapter Notes

Yay! Chapter 3, woot woot! Thanks to the people who read my first chapter, that’s pretty cool. This one was a bit harder to finish, I’m still not sure I’m completely satisfied with it. I can’t look at it anymore though… So, happy reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Have sex with me.”

Kei rolled his eyes at the dark-haired man sitting across from him in the lab. Technically, Kuroo was supposed to be in his own lab at the moment, not distracting Kei with his antics. But it had become a common occurrence for him to sneak away to Kei’s lab when he was bored. Or when he was not so patiently waiting for results from some experiment.

“No.” Kei answered the question matter-of-factly, just like he had every other time Kuroo had asked him.

“Oh, come on Tsukki, we’ve been on this ship for over two years, and you still won’t have sex with me. That’s what I call a waste.” There was a knowing glint in the other man’s eye as he spoke. “And we both know how much you hate waste”

Kei glared at him. Kuroo knew he hated it when he called him Tsukki, that was for Yamaguchi alone. “Did you ever think there might be a good reason for me refusing to have sex with you?” he asked.

Kuroo made a show of pondering that for a few seconds. “Nope,” he said casually, “can’t think of one actually.”

Kei sighed, looking down at the dirt in his hands. His new formula of soil hadn’t shown any signs of being viable yet, causing him to dump the whole thing in the recycling bin. “Fuck,” Kei swore, “Fuck, fuck, fuck.”

Kuroo raised one perfect eyebrow, “you know what would help you take your mind off it?”

“Don’t,” Kei warned him, “say it...”

“Sex… Sex would take your mind off of it.”

Kei threw his dirty gloves at his friend, rolling his eyes as Kuroo dodged the flying mass with his tongue sticking out. “Remind me again why I let you in here?” Kei asked.

Kuroo smirked, “because there are only twenty of us on this ship, eight of whom are assholes, ten of whom can’t stand your charming personality, and one of whom still thinks your name is Kai… your choices of companionship are severely limited, my irritable blond friend.”

Kei scoffed at him. “Are you counting yourself as one of the assholes? Because if not, then nine. And also, let’s be honest… I’m on that list too.”
“Oh, I was already counting you.”

“Of course, you were.” Kei shot him a dirty look. “And Kiyoko doesn’t think my name is Kai anymore.”

Kuroo let out an amused laugh, “well, she definitely doesn’t know it’s Kei.”

“I really don’t give a fuck,” Kei explained patiently, “she can call me, or not call me, whatever the hell she wants. This isn’t some bonding retreat, Kuroo. We’re here for a reason. In fact, sometimes I wish you didn’t know my name.”

Kuroo put his hand over his heart in mock horror. “You wound me, Kei… And here I thought all of this,” he gestured around the lab with excessive enthusiasm, “getting our brains completely altered, flown off to space while the world as we know it disintegrates, leaving everyone we know behind. I thought it was all some vacation.” Kuroo leveled Kei with a cutting glare. “Oh wait, you’re supposed to be able to go home after a vacation.”

Kei noted the darkness that crept into Kuroo’s voice. But the moment of insecurity was fleeting, gone just as suddenly as it had appeared. Replaced instead with his normal bravado.

“Besides,” Kuroo drawled, “we got labs right down the hall from each other… That’s fate if you ask me.”

Kei didn’t take Kuroo seriously; he had acted like this from the moment he had first met the man who had grown up in Dome-2. It had been the day after they had arrived on the ship, and Kuroo had told him so eloquently that he couldn’t decide which he liked better, his legs or his hair… Needless to say, Kei had walked past him, declining to respond to the jeer.

But as he had started to spend more time with the arrogant chemist, Kei soon realized that the way he behaved was all an act. A shield used to deflect the fact that he had lost someone important to him back on earth. A topic Kei was intimately familiar with.

He didn’t know the precise details of what Kuroo had lost, but if you looked close enough you could see it following him around like a dark shadow, always present, always lurking just under the surface.

Kei didn’t like to look.

Something in the other man’s past haunted him like a lingering thought he couldn’t shake. It ate at him from the inside out. Kei knew this because he had the same thing gorging on his insides.

He too was constantly accompanied by the pain of his past… Sometimes he wondered if, when Kuroo was alone—after he had spent a full day in the lab—did he relive his memories the way Kei did? Was he too stuck in a never ending loop of his own life?

Probably not he reasoned… Kei was just a special brand of messed up.

He closed his eyes. “Hey Kuroo, do you ever wish that you hadn’t gotten Chronicle shoved in your brain?”

“Eloquent,” Kuroo teased. And though Kei knew he was joking, he could see the façade beginning to slip.

There was a long pause, and for a time Kei didn’t think Kuroo would answer. He was proven wrong however when Kuroo set down the beaker he had been cleaning. “I don’t regret Chronicle,”
he said thoughtfully. “But sometimes I regret what it entails.” He said it almost nonchalantly, like he was talking about how many hours he had logged in the lab that day.

Kei couldn’t understand this thread of reasoning. Chronicle was the thing that was helping humanity survive. How could Kuroo dislike that part of what they did?

“So,” he attempted to piece together what Kuroo had said in his mind, to make sense of what the other man was thinking. “You wish you had Chronicle, but that you weren’t part of the program?”

Kuroo let out an amused laugh. “We weren’t exactly given a choice, Kei. Or did they really treat you that differently in Dome-1?”

Kei ignored the sarcastic remark about the Domes. “I think we were given choices,” he said.

“What?” Kuroo asked incredulously, “you think I should have deserted like Tooru did? Didn’t exactly work out for him, did it?”

Now it was Kei’s turn to snort in derision. Much like himself, Oikawa Tooru had been found in Dome-3, living in extreme poverty. Kei hadn’t known him personally—he had been older than Kei by a few years—but everyone knew of his story.

Oikawa had supposedly been the smartest person ever to enter the Chronicle program, a prodigy from the day he was born. Kei didn’t think he could be that smart though, because at a young age he had left the Domes and the Chronicle program behind. Their first and last deserter.

They had found him outside the domes weeks later, body dehydrated and lifeless. Shortly after they had found him, the story of his death had spread throughout the Domes so that everyone knew the mistake he had made, knew how dangerous it was outside. After all, if their best and brightest couldn’t make it without the shelter the Domes provided, then who could?

“I know what you’re thinking,” Kuroo picked up the beaker again and resumed what he had been working on, “but I don’t regret Chronicle.” He paused for a moment, seemingly lost in thought. “Sometimes I just regret the people, I guess.”

If Kei were more insecure, he may have taken offense at that.

Instead he chose to ignore it, thinking that would be the end of their conversation. But once again, Kei was proven wrong. “Anyway,” Kuroo continued, “with Chronicle I can be sure I’ll never forget his face…”

Kei didn’t know the exact details of who Kuroo was talking about, but that didn’t stop him from understanding how the other man felt. Kei felt the same way about his mother after all…

He felt that way about Yamaguchi…

He knew that it was about more than just remembering their faces. With Chronicle, Kei would never forget how they smelled, the exact lilt of their voices, how it felt to have them near him… He could even touch them in a way.

It was more than a lot of people had.

Kei was beginning to develop a headache, though whether it was a work-related headache, or a Kuroo induced headache, he couldn’t be sure.

Of course, he thought to himself, it was a sort of half-life that he was living. He had created an
existence where he was constantly caught between the past and the present, hindering him from ever truly experiencing either. Limbo, he noted, thinking about an old word he had learned in one of his textbooks.

Kei was stuck.

He closed his eyes to block out the harsh artificial light that was only making his head hurt worse. He let out a low sigh, head throbbing where he pressed his fingertips to his temple. The faces of the people he loved pass before his eyes. “I could never regret Chronicle,” Kei murmured.

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Much later—what Kei’s biorhythms told him would be the equivalent of evening—he sat alone in his lab. Kuroo had left a long time ago, and now Kei was just biding his time. That was the thing about science, it was a slow process, even more so when you were dealing with earth cycles and climate issues. Though it was true that there were profound moments of discovery, more often than not, Kei’s work consisted of sitting patiently in a lab waiting for results.

It could get tedious.

His head still ached from earlier, and the boredom wasn’t helping the situation any.

When this happened, and it was often, Kei had two go to pastimes. One was reading anything he could get his hands on, and the other, the other was slipping into his memories and reliving a past he had experienced countless times.

He chose the latter now, picking up from where he had left off the night before. Yamaguchi had looked so frail, bloodied and starving… Kei hated to think about the fact that he had almost left him to die that day, had almost walked away and let that guard kill him.

Kei shuddered at the disturbing thought. Life without Yamaguchi wasn’t something he liked to think about, even if it would spare him some of the pain he felt now.

But thankfully he had made the right decision back then, one of the rare occasions in his life.

Kei leaned back in his chair, staring at the cold gray ceiling. For once he wished that he had a better view. Something that could take his mind off the fact that he was here, orbiting earth. Meanwhile, somewhere below him Yamaguchi’s body, like the hundreds of others who had been left behind, would be decaying on a planet that was nothing more than a mass grave.

Despite that, though, Kei had meant what he had said to Kuroo. He wouldn’t get rid of Chronicle if given the choice. After all, Chronicle was the only link he had left to the people he loved.

Because the only place they could live now was within Kei’s memories.

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Kei looked down at his wrist, silver scalpel in hand. He knew what he had to do, but that didn’t mean he liked it. Despite his unease, it was the only way he could think of to get the boy inside the Dome, and he needed to be inside. Kei was sure he would die if he left him out there alone.

He took a deep breath, readying the bandages he had laid out beside him. He could do this, he told himself. He wasn’t afraid of pain. At least not the physical kind… and the cut wouldn’t have to be that deep.
It was late, and Kei had snuck into the abandoned laboratory that served as a classroom in search of the supplies he would need. He was trying to focus, but his mind kept wandering to the injured boy he had left hidden in the vehicle. Kei wasn’t used to being distracted like this, he was normally so logical. He was beginning to think something was wrong with him.

He probably shouldn’t be cutting into his own wrist in such a state, but Kei didn’t have a choice. It’s not like there was anyone he could go to for help. Well… maybe Akiteru, but he tended never to trust his brother with anything sharp, especially when it involved cutting into the human body. No, it was better to leave Akiteru out of this, for the time being at least.

Kei knew what to do, where to cut so that he wouldn’t nick the wrong vein… He knew what he was doing, he assured himself. He had a plan.

He drew in a deep breath, forcing oxygen into his lungs. Then, before he could think about it any further, he cut into his wrist, watching as warm crimson blood began to pool on pale skin.

It hurt…

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Kei clutched his bandaged wrist as he walked through The Chancellor’s building. It was part of a bigger complex where the higher ups in H-Corps worked. It was also where The Chancellor had his private office. Onlookers may have been wondering why a tall kid with a bleeding wrist was walking to The Chancellor’s quarters like he owned the place, but if they were at all suspicious, no one said anything.

Kei was glad. He didn’t want to have to explain himself to a bunch of strangers. He didn’t have the time.

He turned a corner, just congratulating himself on slipping through the building without getting stopped, when he ran into The Chancellor’s son and fellow Chronicle member, Akaashi Keiji.

A bolt of fear ran through him. Keiji was smart, and though it was true that was to be expected of any Chronicle recipient, Kei knew for a fact that the other boy often downplayed his talents, to the point where people often underestimated him.

Kei knew better though, he had seen the other boy solve incredibly advanced mathematical equations after everyone else had left the classroom. He did it when he thought he was alone, only to erase them before anyone else could see.

Kei wasn’t sure why he didn’t want people to know just how smart he was, but he did know that he wouldn’t make the grave mistake of underestimating the boy like so many of his teachers did.

If he showed any signs of suspicion, Kei wasn’t sure what he would do.

Both boys locked eyes for a moment before Keiji’s slate-gray ones slid slowly down to Kei’s bandaged wrist. Something about the boy’s expression gave Kei the unnerving feeling that he could see right through him, straight down to the deception he was trying to hide.

Kei ever so slowly moved his hand so that his wrist was behind his back.

“Akaashi,” he said in acknowledgment, hoping the boy’s blasé attitude wouldn’t be uncharacteristically missing today of all days.

His eyes slowly traveled back up to meet Kei’s. The calculating look he saw reminded Kei of the
expression he got when he was about to solve a particularly difficult equation. Kei’s stomach flipped. He knew something… if only Kei had something to hold over the other boy’s head…

“My father is that way,” was all he said however, pointing one graceful finger down the hall, and then almost mockingly, “good thing you didn’t hit a vain.”

With that, he turned and walked in the opposite direction, leaving Kei stunned and a little uneasy, though he couldn’t exactly explain why.

Maybe it had to do with the fact that Kei felt like Keiji could see straight through his pitiful disguise. He only hoped that his father wasn’t half as perceptive.

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“Kei,” The Chancellor said warmly as he entered his office. Followed shortly by, “oh my god… what have you done?” upon seeing his bandaged wrist.

“I need your help,” he said, ignoring the shocked look on the man’s face.

“Yes, umm, of course… but I think perhaps you should go to medical, I’m not really-”

“Not for this,” Kei held up his wrist. “It’s fine really, I did it myself.”

The Chancellor frowned. “Whatever for?”

Now the hard part. Kei had to convince The Chancellor if his plan was going to work.

“We talk so much about the chip technology in class.” Kei had decided to go with dumb curiosity as his excuse, hopefully it was believable. “I really wanted to see it for myself… to experiment with the tech.”

The Chancellor looked a bit stunned. “Kei, you know you could have just asked.”

Kei nodded. If he had just asked outright, The Chancellor would have given him an inactive chip, something that would have been virtually useless to Kei. And he couldn’t ask for an activated one without arousing a great amount of suspicion. Access chips were a highly guarded resource within the Dome system.

“I know… I should have… It’s just that,” he made a show of looking embarrassed. Like a cocky kid who had thought he knew what he was doing. “Well, I didn’t think you would let me. I know how tightly regulated the chips are. We wouldn’t want any getting into the wrong hands.”

“Oh, but you’re not the wrong hands, Kei.” The Chancellor smiled at him. “You really should have asked. Besides, it’s all in the name of science, right?”

“Right,” he replied with as much genuineness as he could muster.

This is how it had been for the last few years. After taking him under his wing, it seemed there was nothing The Chancellor wouldn’t grant Kei if it was in the name of his studies. It’s how he knew his plan would work.

“Now should we get you to medical?”

“Actually,” Kei dared to venture, “it’s fine really, that’s not why I’m here.” Make him believe, Kei told himself.
“I came because I accidentally broke my chip when I was examining it, and as you know… that pretty much means I can’t do anything in the city. I can’t even get into the east sector.” Kei attempted to look as uncomfortable as possible, “I can’t get home…”

The Chancellor balked. “Why didn’t you say so before?” Kei shrugged in response, attempting to look chastised, it wasn’t hard. “Come with me, I’ll have you fitted for a new one right now. It won’t have the same level of clearance as your old one. That will take a few days to arrange, I’m afraid. It will do the trick, though,” he said cheerily. “You’ll be able to get home at least… scan for food.

“Go in and out of the Dome?” he inquired. The Chancellor gave him a questioning look. Kei quickly backtracked, hastening to add, “it’s just, my group is doing field work outside the Dome for a few days, and I would really hate to miss it.”

The Chancellor softened, just like Kei knew he would. “We can’t have you missing out. No, this chip will let you go in and out, don’t you worry.”

“Thank you, sir,” he replied. “And I’m sorry… I don’t know what I was thinking. I was careless.” And then, because he knew how to work The Chancellor he added, “I was just so interested in how it works. I wanted to know if it would help me with later experiments.”

The Chancellor smiled at him. “Don’t worry Kei, no harm done, and it’s not like anyone got a hold of your chip.”

No, Kei thought to himself… not yet anyway.

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Kei watched very carefully as an H-Corps worker used a small gun-like machine to insert a brand-new chip into his arm. The chip went into his left arm this time, so as not to injure his right any further. Kei watched carefully, knowing that he would have to perform the procedure himself soon. He needed to pay attention if he wanted this to work.

“This is going to hurt a bit,” the man informed him.

“What does it do?” Kei asked curiously.

The man sounded bored as he spoke. “It will simultaneously insert the chip while activating it within our system.”

Kei drew in a breath, but not from the pain. He would need that machine if he wanted the chip he had taken out of his own wrist to be reactivated.

The Chancellor stood over them, watching as the chip was implanted just underneath Kei’s skin.

“Well done, Kei.” He nodded, though it wasn’t like he had done anything really. Perhaps The Chancellor was encouraging him for not crying out in pain, a feeble achievement when you think about it. Really, the scalpel to his right wrist had been much worse than this pin prick. Not that he said that of course.

As Kei rubbed at his tender wrist, The Chancellor kept talking enthusiastically, but Kei wasn’t really listing anymore. Instead, he was focused on the worker who was setting the device he had just used to insert Kei’s new chip on the shelf. Kei had to get that device. He would need it if he wanted to insert his old chip into the boy from outside the Dome. But how? How could he get it without raising anymore suspicion?
As the other two men moved to leave the room, Kei hung back as long as he could. Maybe he could slip the device into his pack…?

“Kei,” The Chancellor’s voice was no longer warm and friendly; now it held a note of authority. “Are you coming?” he motioned for Kei to follow.

It wasn’t a question, and the look on The Chancellor’s face said that this was no time to test him.

“Of course,” Kei said smoothly, abandoning any attempts of making a grab for the device.

They left the room, and Kei felt his chances of getting the boy to safety slipping away the farther they walked down the long hallway.

What was he supposed to do now? What were the odds that Kei could sneak in at a later time and try to grab the device? He knew they weren’t good.

“Sir?” all three of them turned to see a short blond woman walking after them hurriedly. Kei had no idea who she was, but the other two men seemed to recognize her. “Sir,” she repeated, slightly out of breath. “I’m sorry, but your son is out front,” she glanced away nervously, as if looking towards where the boy was waiting. “He says it’s urgent.”

Kei saw the briefest flash of anger followed by annoyance cross The Chancellor’s face, but it was quickly replaced with a pleasant smile. “Alright, Shin, you come with me. Kei, I take it you can see yourself out?” Kei nodded, not believing his luck.

Air in… He watched as the three of them rounded the corner, holding his breath and waiting until he was sure they were really gone. He wanted to be sure he was truly safe.

Air out… and then he was practically running down the hall, back to the room they had just vacated. He was actually going to do it. Kei almost couldn’t believe it.

“Fuck,” he cursed when he came to a stop. The door was locked, of course the door was locked… how could he have been so stupid? Every door in this place had an automatic locking system, the moment that door had slid shut it had taken with it all of Kei’s hopes for success.

“Looking for this?”

Kei jumped and spun around, knowing he had been caught. What he saw when he turned wasn’t the guard or H-Corps employee he had been expecting however. Instead, Akaashi Keiji of all people stood in front of him, holding the exact device Kei was trying so hard to get his hands on.

“He says it’s urgent.”

“Here,” he said, when Kei merely continued to glare at him with distrust. “I know it’s what you’re looking for… Take it.”

Kei had no idea what was happening, but that didn’t stop him from reaching out and gingerly taking the device from the other boy’s outstretched hands.

“My mother didn’t have a chip either.” Keiji wore his perpetual bored looking expression, but this time Kei thought he could hear a note of vulnerability layered somewhere in the other boy’s voice.

“I hope whoever you’re trying to help makes it.”

Kei didn’t know what to say to that, so he didn’t. Instead he turned and left The Chancellor’s son standing there, a mystery to Kei he wasn’t sure he would ever be able to solve.
Walking down the gray hallway-

Kei jolted out of the memory with a start, eyes flying open in a panic. What had just happened? It was as if he had been kicked out of the memory involuntarily, forcefully jerked out of his own mind in a daze of confusion.

Kei cried out as a sudden twinge of pain shot through his temple, white hot pain blinding him and causing him to double over. He pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes in an attempt to block out what felt like hundreds of small knives slicing into his brain at once. What was wrong with him? Nothing like this had ever happened before.

Was it because of the dreams, Kei wondered? Did he need more sleep? He hoped so, because the alternative was far too unsettling to think about…

Was it a possibility that his Chronicle implant was failing?

Kei took a moment to compose himself, to make sure he could think rationally before he began to panic. It wasn’t like anyone had any long-term data on what the implant did to a person’s brain; he and the other recipients had basically been lab rats. For all he knew, his implant could be killing him even as he sat here.

Chronicle could be killing all twenty people on this ship.

Kei gritted his teeth through another wave of nausea inducing pain. He wasn’t sure what to think.

Chronicle had been a part of him for so long he didn’t know how to function without it. And if it was really failing, did that mean so was Kei’s mind? Because the two were so intertwined now they were practically one and the same.

Losing his mind scared Kei above all else. It was his worst fear. Kei was his mind. Most days, it seemed like all he had left was his sanity. Without it, without Chronicle, what was he?

He shook off the thought, telling himself to stop being so dramatic. Chronicle wasn’t failing… Kei just wasn’t feeling well.

So why didn’t he believe that?

With this thought, Kei felt the overwhelming need to prove to himself that he was okay… that his memory was still working, still intact.

He closed his eyes, ignoring the tension that was building up in his head and making his brain hurt worse for every second that passed. It only took him a moment of searching through his memory to find the one he was looking for, where he had left off before the pain had ripped at Kei’s insides and pulled him from his past.

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Once Kei got back from The Chancellor’s residence, once he was safely inside his and Akiteru’s quarters, he quickly grabbed everything he needed for the night. He shoved all three pairs of clothes that he owned into his pack, along with the stolen medical supplies and the insertion device.

Kei palmed his old chip, taking a moment to whisper a plea that this would work.
It was late, which meant it would be dark outside. Kei rummaged in their trunk until he pulled out an old lantern. They weren’t strictly supposed to have the lantern; his mother had found it in Dome-3 and kept it hidden away. She had always said that they would keep it for a time when they really needed it… an emergency.

Well, right now was an emergency.

“Going somewhere?”

Kei straightened up, spinning around to face his older brother. He was starting to catch up to Akiteru in the height department, and Kei couldn’t wait until the day he would be the one looking down on his brother instead of the other way around. “I’m just going to the lab for some late-night work;” he lied.

Akiteru raised his eyebrows, “and you’re taking Mom’s lantern? Don’t they have fancy lighting in the lab? Only the best for you Chronicle kids.”

“I’m not going to the lab, Akiteru.”

His brother looked at him like Kei wasn’t the one with the superior intellect. “I know, Kei. You gonna tell me where you are going?”

Kei leveled him with a defiant glare. “Are you going to tell me where you’ve been going the last couple of months?”

His brother sighed, “Kei-”

“No,” Kei said matter-of-factly, effectively cutting Akiteru off before he could continue with the protective older brother spiel.

Kei could see the sadness on Akiteru’s face, and for a brief second he felt guilty for what he had said. But then he remembered what would happen if he got caught tonight, what would happen if Akiteru was found out to be helping him in any way.

“Fine…” Akiteru said exasperatedly, and Kei wished he wouldn’t look so much like a wounded animal when he spoke. “But just know that I’m here if you need me, no matter what you’ve gotten yourself into.”

“Sure,” Kei agreed. But at the same time he knew that he would never risk bringing Akiteru in on what he was about to do, good intentions or not.

As he turned to leave he couldn’t help looking back at his brother. “Hey, Akiteru?”

“Hmm?”

“Thanks,” Kei said, and then for the second time that day, he walked away from someone who had only been trying to help him.

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“Let me get this straight… you want to go outside?” Kei watched the man’s face turn from disbelief to suspicion, “at this time of day?” Kei couldn’t deny him his doubts, it wasn’t the norm for people to request to be let outside the Dome at any time of day, let alone after dark.

The man was middle aged, with wiry brown hair that was in desperate need of a cut. He was
wearing a standard issue guard’s uniform and holding an electronic scanner. He was also the last obstacle standing between Kei and his goal.

Kei ignored the obviously dense guard, “yes, that’s what I said. I’m glad to know your hearing, at least, is still intact.”

“Yeah, I don’t know if I should let you out, kid. It just doesn’t seem right. Don’t you know it’s not safe out there?” The man hesitated for a moment, “where are your parents?”

“Dead,” Kei shot back quickly and without much emotion. He had half a mind to ask the man where his parents were, idiot, but he managed to restrain himself, instead holding out his left wrist. “I’m Chronicle. I have a chip, now scan it and let me through.”

The man let out an exasperated noise, “if you say so… It’s your life, son. Just…be careful s’all I’m saying.”

Kei ignored the man’s warning as he stepped through the exit, “sure.”

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As Kei walked quickly through the now settling darkness, he couldn’t help letting some of the nagging thoughts he had been trying to ignore into his mind. What if the boy was no longer there? Or worse, what if he was there but no longer alive?

Kei picked up his pace a bit, trying to push the thoughts of dead bodies that were all too familiar out of his mind. The boy would be fine, Kei assured himself, and if not, then there was nothing Kei could do about it. He didn’t even know the kid…

So why did his heart start to noticeably race at the idea of finding the boy dead?

Kei put it down to the fact that everything had felt so out of control lately. He needed to do this because he needed to prove to himself that he was still in control, still capable of solving the problems in his life.

He shook his head in an attempt to clear his mind. Why was he being so emotional? Everyone died… It was a simple fact of life, especially the lives they lived now. Kei had accepted that reality after his mother had made it to Dome-1, made it to safety, only to be violently ripped away within two years.

No one could stop death. So why did Kei pick up his pace in the warm evening air in order to get to the car that much faster?

The car was easy to spot in the flat barren landscape. Kei was surprised to see that there was no evidence of the massacre that had gone on only hours before. He knew that they would have taken the bodies to be burnt, but he still felt like there should have been some kind of indication of the horror that had taken place right where he was standing. The fact that it looked as if nothing had happened made Kei even more uneasy.

He swung open the car door, mentally preparing himself for the worst. He expected to be met with blood and death, a body that was once a container, now as empty as the desolate land that surrounded them. Just like his mother… Just like all those people from earlier.

But when Kei peeked inside, he was relieved to find that not only was the boy still alive, but he was sitting up with his back propped against the opposite wall.
“Tsukki, is that you?”

It took Kei a few moments to work through his relief and realize that the boy was talking about him. “Yeah...” he said, suddenly awkward, “it’s me. You really shouldn’t be sitting up.”

“Yeah... can’t say it feels the greatest,” he replied.

Kei ignored that, choosing instead to climb into the car and begin to remove the makeshift bandages he had placed on the boy’s head. He pulled his supplies from his bag and set to work cleaning the wound so he could begin to stitch it.

“This is going to hurt,” Kei said, not one for pretty falsehoods. He could see fear in the boy’s eyes, fear he was obviously trying to hide. But despite all that, he just gritted his teeth and nodded.

“I didn’t think you would actually come back,” the boy said.

Kei stopped where he had been cleaning and prepping the wound. “What... Why?”

He looked away from Kei, gaze flitting around the car like a panicked bird’s. “Sneaking someone into the Dome...?” The boy began to ramble, “I thought you were probably crazy, and then I thought, why would a crazy person come back to save me? And then I realized that maybe I didn’t want a crazy person coming to stitch me up. You know, can’t be too careful with needles... Especially when they’re by my head...”

His focus landed on Kei once more. “Besides...” he trailed off, “why would you?”

Kei wasn’t sure he had an answer for that. Instead he said, “hold still, it will be more painful if you move.”

“Okay, Tsukki.”

“My name’s not Tsukk-” he started, but was cut off when the boy cried out in pain.

“Sorry, Tsukki,” he mumbled, gripping at the seat of the car until his knuckles turned white.

Kei sighed, “what are you sorry for? You’re the one in pain.”

The boy shrugged, or winced maybe, Kei couldn’t tell.

“What’s your name?” Kei asked the boy, more to keep him talking than anything else, and to keep his mind off of the needle being threaded through his tan skin.

“Yamaguchi,” the boy answered.

“It’s nice to meet you, Yamaguchi.”

“I would say the same, but you’re sticking me with a needle,” the boy said, grimacing at the pain.

“I said hold still,” Kei commanded.

Yamaguchi laughed. “Bossy. Hey, what’s on your face?”

*Your blood*, Kei wanted to say, but then realized what Yamaguchi was referring to. “Those are my glasses,” he said, confused.

“Glasses?”
“Yeah…” Kei told him. “They help me see.” He saw the confusion in the other boy’s eyes, and realized that no one outside of the Dome would have access to glasses; hell, almost no one inside the Dome had access to glasses.

“Can I try them on?”

Kei stopped what he was doing. “Do you want me to sew my hand to your face?” he shot back.

“Nope,” he said, far too upbeat for someone who was getting a gaping wound sewn shut without any form of painkiller, “not particularly.”

Yamaguchi’s whole body seemed to sway. “I feel weird,” he noted, as Kei carefully pulled thread through flesh to tie it back together.

“That’s probably because of all the adrenalin flooding through you right now. Be thankful. Your body is trying to protect you from the trauma you’re experiencing.”

“Thanks, body,” he said, head lolling a bit, and for a brief moment Kei feared he might pass out.

Kei finished what he was doing, concluding the stitches and moving on to bandaging the wound. As he worked, he couldn’t help noticing the smattering of freckles that dusted the boy’s cheeks and nose. They contrasted so drastically against tan skin. They drew his eyes to them as if magnetically charged, and Kei had the strange impulse to reach out and brush his fingers across the cluster of marks.

Except that was ridiculous, Kei told himself. After all, they were just spots on the skin caused by too much exposure to the sun. They weren’t beautiful or something to be sought-after… They were just spots…

What was wrong with him?

Kei did all that he could for Yamaguchi’s arm, but it was only a makeshift solution. He would have to work on getting him a cast once they made it inside the Dome.

Finishing, Kei put his supplies back in his pack, pulling out the small bag containing his old chip and the device that Keiji had given him. “What’s that?” Yamaguchi asked, eyeing the gun warily.

“This?” Kei said, “this is what’s going to get you inside the Dome.”

“Okay,” Yamaguchi said contentedly, and Kei thought perhaps the boy was starting to feel a little woozy. “I mean, I was picturing something more along the lines of an underground tunnel, or a secrete passage. You know, something fancy like that… But this is good too…”

“Sorry it’s not an underground tunnel,” Kei remarked. “But trust me, this will work better, and be a lot less conspicuous.”

“Give me your wrist,” he ordered. Yamaguchi did as he was told, and Kei very gingerly grasped it in his hands. It was so frail, so fragile, Kei was afraid of breaking it as he prepared to insert the chip. He closed his eyes, relying on Chronicle to see the exact angle and technique used by the man who had inserted the chip into his own arm.

He positioned the gun above Yamaguchi’s wrist exactly as he had seen in the memory. He needed this to work, and he needed it to work on the first try.

Kei’s hand was shaking. He realized it a moment before the other boy’s hand came up to steady
his own.

“Just do it,” Yamaguchi said calmly, and his steadiness must have seeped into Kei, because his hands stopped shaking and he was able to focus once more.

His finger pressed the trigger before Kei could take any more time to think about it. Yamaguchi winced, and just like that it was over... the chip was in, and Kei hoped to god that it would work.

“That wasn’t so bad,” Yamaguchi said, “I mean, compared to the needle and the broken arm that is.” Kei just glared at him, “the bad part comes when we find out whether or not they take us into custody at the door.”

He looked at the disheveled state of the injured boy. “Do you think you can walk” he asked. Kei hurriedly wiped the blood from Yamaguchi’s face, making him look as presentable as possible.

Yamaguchi nodded, shifting his weight from where it had been resting almost completely on the car door. The two boys did some maneuvering until they had made their way outside of the vehicle, Yamaguchi leaning the majority of his weight against Kei.

“You have to put these on,” Kei said, pulling the extra pair of clothes out of his pack.

“Why?” he asked.

“It will bulk you up... We can’t let them see how thin you are. It would make them suspicious. When we walk in there, we can’t have you looking like you’re a starved outsider, the more you look like one of us the better.”

He helped Yamaguchi pull the clothes on without hurting him any further. And once he looked somewhat presentable, Kei helped him up again.

“I’ll help you walk until we get to the door, but then you’ll have to manage on your own. The less of a reason we give them to suspect anything, the better,” Kei told him “Once we get there just hold out your wrist and let me do the talking. If this worked that chip should get you more than through those doors.”

Yamaguchi nodded, determination written all over his face. “I can do it,” he said resolutely, and though Kei wasn’t sure about that, one thing was for certain, and that was that there was no turning back now.

Kei always thought that walking into Suga’s lab was like stepping into the past. A fantastical past where agriculture dominated and living things could, not only grow, but thrive.

Kei loved it. It reminded him of a life that could have been. If he had been born in a different time…

Inside the sterile laboratory all kinds of plants in various stages of development could be found, each slightly different and more exotic than the last. All of them were beautiful though, Kei thought, made even more so by the fact that he and his fellow Chronicle recipients had created this isolated wonderland. They had allowed for the impossible to become possible as plants grew in a ship orbiting their native planet, all with the result of producing some form of food that they could package and send to the fleet of civilian ships orbiting nearby.

He and the other Chronicle members were keeping what was left of humanity alive.
Kei liked this room, it was his favorite on the ship. Aside from his own lab of course, which was one of the only things that kept him sane at times. But this room was like stepping into a different world, one Kei had only ever seen in old photos and books. The colors were astonishing, even after all this time, leaving behind the bare hallways and stepping into the plethora of colors never ceased to take his breath away.

He loved the way the leaves where all slightly different shades of green, and how on some plants, the food they produced contrasted so brilliantly with the green that surrounded them.

Kei didn’t think he would ever get tired of seeing a ripe tomato.

He was delivering a load of soil today—that’s where Kei came in—he supplied the water and soil that would nourish Suga’s plants, allowing for them to grow. Kei stood in the entrance of the lab, carrying his box of dirt and watching Suga from the corner of his eye.

“Hello Tsukishima,” Suga said in his calming voice, finally seeming to notice Kei’s presence. He was seated cross-legged on a countertop, idly staring at a vine-like plant that Kei didn’t recognize. “Did you get enough sleep last night?”

Suga was off in his own world, eyes half lidded, looking almost as if he were meditating.

Kei grimaced at his words. Suga had the tendency to baby people. The habit seemed to apply to him in particular because he was one of the youngest on the ship and, Kei had noted, Suga seemed to see through the cold mask that Kei donned.

Suga also happened to know that Kei got nightmares, though, just how he had gotten that information Kei didn’t know, and probably didn’t want to know.

Thankfully his headache had lessened significantly at this point or he might not have been able to face the silver-haired scientist.

“I’m fine, Suga,” he said dismissively. “Here’s your dirt.”

Suga’s mouth twitched into the outline of a smile. “Put it over there,” he pointed. Kei unloaded the soil into an empty table in the lab, taking a moment to marvel at his own work. This batch had a good composition, Kei was sure Suga’s future plants would flourish with it.

“So, what was the dream about?” Suga asked distractedly, still in his weird staring contest with the vegetation. Inwardly Kei groaned, but on the surface, he acted as though he had no idea what Suga was talking about.

“Didn’t say I had one.”

“Let’s not be disingenuous, Kei. And yes, you did.”

“Let me guess,” Kei replied, “by not saying anything I tipped you off?”

Suga simply shrugged at his plant. “No, not really… It’s more about your body language, I know you think that you’ve created this barrier between you and the rest of the world, but you’re actually much more expressive than you think.”

God forbid.

You weren’t even paying attention to me, Kei thought bitterly, but he didn’t say that. He knew Suga meant well, no matter how overbearing he may act at times.
“Come here, I want to show you something.”

Kei didn’t know what he was talking about, but he followed Suga through his lab nonetheless.

“What are we looking for?” Kei asked, as they made their way to the very back of the room.
“You’re not going to murder me with a potato, are you? because if you are, I’d at least like to punch Kuroo in the nose before I die.”

“Wouldn’t we all? And no, I’m not going to murder you with a potato… They’re too small and inefficient. I have been growing some really big squash though, they may be blunt, but I think they would get the job done.”

“Funny,” Kei griped.

“Need I remind you that you were the one who started it?”

“You know what, just do it,” Kei groaned. “It would spare me the lecture. Besides, death by squash doesn’t sound like such a bad way to go.”

Kei could think of a lot worse ways…

“That’s what you think,” Suga said disturbingly.

“Here,” they had stopped at a small box shoved under artificial sunlight “This is what I wanted you to see. I named her Gaia”

Kei’s mouth fell open, “Suga… that’s a flower… How did you do it? We didn’t have any seeds!”

“Synthesized one, technically it’s a crossbreed between a few different fruit flowers. And you want to know the best part? It doesn’t have a purpose! We can’t eat it or use it to make anything; its sole purpose is to look aesthetically pleasing!” his face light up. He looked like a proud parent. “It’s just pretty!”

Kei bent down and very cautiously placed a finger on a single delicate pink petal, careful not to harm the soft flower. “It smells nice!” he marveled. “Suga, it’s amazing.”

Suga nodded, “you know, Kei, sometimes it’s okay not to produce fruit. This little flower doesn’t have to worry about feeding anyone, or taking care of people… it can just be.”

Kei started to get the uncomfortable feeling that Suga was no longer talking about the flower. The suspicion was confirmed when Suga said, “and the flower doesn’t have bad dreams.”

“It’s a flower,” he said irritably.

“Please Kei, call her Gaia.”

Kei felt anger flair up within him. He didn’t have the luxury that flower did. People needed him, and as long as there was something left of the human race, supporting them would be his top priority.

“First of all, Suga, it’s a flower. Just because you named it doesn’t make it some kind of pet. And secondly, are you calling me nothing but aesthetically pleasing in this analogy?”

Suga laughed, effectively defusing the tension that had built up between the two. “I wouldn’t go that far,” he sighed. “But in all seriousness, Kei, you shouldn’t put so much pressure on yourself, it’s not good for you. Now more than ever we have to take special care of our mental states.”
“The plant may be pretty Suga, but we need the fruits and vegetables,” Kei countered.

Suga sighed again and bent down to stroke the flower. “Just be careful, Kei, it can be arrogant to decide what is and isn’t important. This little flower may be more significant than you think.”

Kei wanted to tell him that wasn’t true. That humanity was at a point where every essential resource was something that they couldn’t waste. Anything that didn’t contribute to the larger goal was worthless. But he didn’t want to argue, and Suga seemed so content, so happy with the fact that he had created a flower in the cold uninhabitable void of space.

What did one little flower matter in the grand scheme of things really?

“I should get back,” he said instead of arguing further. With Suga, he had learned, there was really no point anyway.

Suga nodded, and both men stood simultaneously, making their way back to the entrance of the lab. As Kei turned to leave, Suga stopped him with a hand on his shoulder. “Think about what I said, okay?”

He nodded, watching as Suga swiped the passcode to open the door, Kei could give him that at least.

Suga stepped aside to let Kei pass. “Oh, and by the way, if I wanted to kill you with food, I could always use the seeds of a bunch of apples to poison you.”

“How very Snow White of you,” Kei deadpanned.

“What?” Suga frowned, confusion evident on his face.

“Nothing…” he mumbled. “…s’ a really old earth fairytale.”

“Oh,” Suga smiled brightly, “well, you’ll have to tell it to me sometime.”

“Sure,” Kei droned, “and I guess it’s lucky for me you don’t have any apple trees.”

Suga raised his eyebrows. “Not just you.”

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Kei watched as Yamaguchi attempted to stand upright on his own. Part of him wanted to reach out and support the frail boy, like he’d been doing up to this point, but he knew that he needed to let Yamaguchi do it himself if they had any chance of getting inside the Dome.

“You again?” the guard at the entrance asked suspiciously. “Who’s he? He wasn’t with you before.”

“He was out doing field work,” Kei lied smoothly. “He’s one of the Chronicle kids.”

“That’s me,” Yamaguchi piped up helpfully. Kei wished he could tell him to shut up.

“You don’t say?” Kei noted the suspicion in the guard’s tone. “What are you studying?”

Kei opened his mouth to respond, but before he could say anything Yamaguchi spoke up. “Astronomy, we were looking at earth’s orbit and some of the constellations. There was a break in the noxious gases in the atmosphere, it was an anomaly we couldn’t miss.” Kei was surprised to hear him speak as if he knew what he was talking about. “You can’t really see the constellations
from inside the Dome, but they’re worth looking at if you ever go outside at night.”

The man shuddered as he took Yamaguchi wrist to scan it. “Can’t say I’d want to go wondering around out there at night.”

Yamaguchi flashed him a wide smile, and Kei silently gaped at the easy conversation the two were having. “I can’t say I blame you. It’s a dangerous place out there.”

“I know,” the man agreed readily, “I had a brother-in-law who died out on a supply run between the Domes… Much better to stay inside where it’s safe, if you ask me… you can go by the way,” he said, ushering Yamaguchi inside. “Wait till I tell my daughter that I met a Chronicle user… I bet she won’t believe me.”

Kei wasn’t sure why their easy conversation was so disconcerting, but he felt strangely annoyed by the whole thing. Stupid. It was stupid.

Kei was scanned next, and with one more smile and wave on Yamaguchi’s part, the two boys were walking into the relative safety of the Dome.

“We did it!” Yamaguchi exclaimed when they were far enough away from the checkpoint.

“Yes,” Kei said unenthusiastically, still a bit angry despite himself.

“How did you know what to say to that guard?” he asked.

Yamaguchi flashed that damned smile at him now. “What? Feeling a bit threatened that you’re not the only smart person here?” When Kei didn’t say anything, Yamaguchi laughed and shrugged, “I pick up anything I can from anyone I can.”

It was a shoddy explanation, but Kei didn’t feel like pressing the issue.

“I can’t believe I’m inside a real Dome!” he exclaimed. “The temperature is amazing. Look at all the buildings. Are there people inside all of them?”

The excited babbling was almost enduring. Almost. But then Kei stopped short, realizing something about what Yamaguchi had said. “You’ve never been inside a Dome…?” he asked incredulously. “At all?”

“Nope… Not once.” Kei couldn’t read the expression on his face as he went on. “My father was from a Dome, Dome-2, but my mother wasn’t so lucky.” All traces of excitement from earlier slipped from his face, replaced instead with a look of sad acceptance. “He used to give her food in exchange for sex. That’s…” Yamaguchi trailed off. “…that’s why I’m here.”

Kei nodded, he had heard of things like that happening before, he was pretty sure it occurred here in Dome-1 more often than he would like to admit. The helpless were often the most easily taken advantage of, and no one was more helpless than those living outside the Domes.

“So… Where is she now?” he asked.

“She’s dead,” Yamaguchi said without any pause, “…since I was little.”

Kei knew the polite thing to do was to tell the boy that he was sorry. But he also knew from experience that whether or not someone said they were sorry, whether they knew what you were going through or not, it didn’t actually affect the way you felt about the situation. So he didn’t say anything. Instead, he just waited for Yamaguchi to tell him more… or not tell him more, it was his
“My uncle on my father’s side knew about what had happened… knew about me. I guess he must have felt guilty or something, because he would bring me food.”

Yamaguchi cast his gaze downward. “I’m not sure he liked me… But he never let me starve.” He paused, “not until four months ago, when he stopped coming altogether… I-I have no idea what happened to him.”

He trailed off, and Kei could tell that he was lost in thought about the man who had kept him alive most his life.

“Guess you can never truly rely on anyone, huh?” Kei said pointedly, but Yamaguchi shook his head at the remark. “I don’t think so… I think that if he could have come, he would have. People are surprising that way.” He gave Kei a piercing look, “sometimes you can even rely on strangers.”

Kei didn’t like being used as an example, especially when he still wasn’t sure why he had gone to so much trouble for the injured boy. But one thing he was sure of was that Yamaguchi was wrong… you couldn’t rely on people, not if you didn’t want to get burned.

Kei didn’t see how Yamaguchi could hold such optimistic views in a world where everyone had to fight tooth and nail for what little scrapes they had. Individuals were out for themselves, that was just the way it was, and in Kei’s opinion, it was something that was unlikely to change.

“So how did you end up here?” He didn’t want to say, ‘how did you end up with the group that was brutally murdered by the people who run the Dome we just walked into?’

“I found some people like me who were just trying to survive. I didn’t know what else to do, so I joined them. They said they could find food, but basically we scavenged around the Domes and waited for people like you to show up, or to die…”

There was no sadness in how he said it, just a resigned acceptance.

Kei nodded, he knew there was almost nothing to support people outside of the Domes. The fact that Yamaguchi was alive at all was beyond surprising.

“Can I ask you something now, Tsukki?”

Kei ground his teeth together at the name. “Fine, but my name is Tsukishima.”

The other boy was walking ahead of him, but Kei thought he saw a teasing smile spread covertly across his lips. “Oh, I know.”

Kei stopped in his tracks once more, shook his head incredulously, and then continued walking with a resigned sigh. “What?”

“Where are we going? I mean, don’t get me wrong, I’m eternally grateful for what you did. Actually, probably more than that. But… what do I do now? Like, where do I go?”

Kei realized that Yamaguchi thought he was going to abandon him now that he had gotten him inside the Dome. Kei took a moment to think, he hadn’t even considered the idea.

Was he…? Was he going to leave Yamaguchi now that he was safe?

It only took him a moment to shove that idea far away. No, Yamaguchi wasn’t safe. Without Kei,
he would still die. The only refugee in the whole Dome? H-corps would find him and kill him in a heartbeat. How could someone who had never even been inside a Dome before hide from everyone around him? Besides, he had Kei’s chip in his wrist; if nothing else, Kei had to protect him if he didn’t want the guards banging on his door asking why some outsider was walking around with Kei’s identity.

“You’re coming back to my place,” Kei informed him. “We have to make sure they don’t find you.”

Yamaguchi spun around, and Kei could practically see the joy and surprise radiating off him. “Really, Tsukki?”

Kei nodded, but then felt the need to add, “but don’t think this is going to be easy. And just because you’re in the Dome doesn’t mean all your problems go away. Trust me, just because they call it utopia doesn’t mean it’s some paradise. There’s no such thing as paradise anymore.”

“I won’t be any problem for you,” Yamaguchi insisted. “I promise. And don’t worry about me… I’m tougher than I look.”

Kei shook his head at the boy’s naiveté. “If I’m guessing right, you haven’t had a meal in weeks. You have a deep head wound, a broken arm, and despite all that, you still have a stupid smile on your face… I’m not worried about you being tough.”

That strange smile returned to his face, the one that touched his eyes and made his freckles shift from where Kei was used to seeing them. He didn’t like it, it made him feel like Yamaguchi knew something he didn’t, a feeling Kei wasn’t used to.

“What’s wrong?” asked Yamaguchi, watching as Kei’s expression soured.

Kei shook his head, thinking of what was to come. “Nothing, it’s just… now we have to tell my brother about you.”

“Is it going to be a problem? He’s going to be upset?” He could see anxiety blossoming across Yamaguchi’s face.

“Worse…” Kei scoffed, “he’s going to love you.”

Yamaguchi let out a happy laugh, breaking through the silence of the curfewed streets, “don’t worry, Tsukki. I’m tough remember, I can take it.”

Kei lay on his bed thinking about the night he had brought Yamaguchi into the Dome. For weeks afterwards he had been sure that everyone who looked at him knew his secret. That anyone who so much as passed by their door would find the boy who, by regulation, shouldn’t be there.

Kei had never broken the law before Yamaguchi, and hiding an illegal outsider was a pretty big place to start.

But days had passed, subsequently turning into weeks, and soon Kei realized that no one was looking for them. That it was dangerously easy to get away with a crime when you were one of the elite. When no one had any reason to suspect you. No, when they didn’t want to suspect you.

Kei had been right about what he had said to Yamaguchi back then. Akiteru had been disturbingly fine with housing a fugitive from the moment Kei had brought Yamaguchi home. In fact, he was
pretty sure Akiteru had been a little proud of him for going against the rules.

That was Akiteru though, he liked to push back just to push back. There didn’t need to be sound reasoning behind it for his brother to jump on board.

Kei was about to get up and enter his daily log, when he was struck by the same blinding pain in his head he had experienced earlier. He clutched at his temple, but the pain only got worse as he lay there in silent agony.

“Fuck,” he cursed.

Memories started to flash before his eyes suddenly, fast and too distorted to really make much sense of. He recognized them, but at the same time Kei couldn’t concentrate on any of them. Images didn’t stay in focus for more than a few seconds each, before swiftly being replaced by the next.

Kei felt himself being jerked in and out of memories in a disorienting way. He saw his mother, Akiteru, and Yamaguchi all flash before his eyes in a blinding whirlwind of images. Faster and faster they came, until Kei felt like he might hurl from sensory overload.

And then, just as suddenly as the flashes had started, they stopped. Kei was hit with a wave of relief as the pain ceased and his normal cognition returned. At last he could think again, no longer crippled by his own temporarily hostile brain.

Kei shut his eyes tentatively, but what flashed before his eyelids chilled him more than all the pain he had felt combined. He could see a memory that hadn’t been there before… only, that wasn’t quite right…

No, this was more like a lack of memory, a hole in his mind that he hadn’t known was there until this precise moment.

He tried to recall it, but it danced away from him, blurry and intangible.

It felt like a memory, Kei could probe at it and comprehend it, Chronicle gave him that much. And yet, the thing was blank, a fuzzy void or gap that he couldn’t access or get rid of, as hard as he tried.

Cold fear ran through his body for the first time in a long time. What did this mean? Was it just a glitch? Or was something truly wrong with his Chronicle implant? Or…

Kei knew what it was the second he thought of it. A memory… It had to be. But not just any memory, a forgotten memory.

But what was it? And what did it mean that Kei, someone who by definition couldn’t forget anything, had a memory as inaccessible to him as a normal person’s faulty process of encoding and forgetting.

Kei had more questions than he did answers. But he did know that this should be imposable for him. He felt vulnerable and violated by the thought that there was a piece of his life that he couldn’t fit into the bigger puzzle, a memory he couldn’t recall.

Sitting there alone, Kei was hit by the sheer knowledge that it could be anything…

Knowing there was something from his past he couldn’t see felt like a betrayal of the worst kind. Stinging and raw, it burned him. It didn’t matter how big or small the memory was, Kei couldn’t
access it.

As unlikely as it was...he had forgotten, and that, more than anything else, was greatly unsettling.

Chapter End Notes

And the plot thickens ;-) Also, more Yama in this chapter, which is always a plus. I swear he’ll be in it more. Next time, Tsukki tries to figure out what’s happening to his brain and the boys (fall in love) bond. Thanks for reading.
Past

Chapter Notes

This is the chapter where the major character death tag applies. I really like this chapter, but I’m also worried about sending it out into the void. Happy reading! Enjoy the angst.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The communal area on the ship was never very crowded. At least, not that Kei had ever seen. When you put together a handful of scientists, all with their own labs and agendas, generally you didn’t get a lot of recreational lounging. That was added to the fact that, if it wasn’t to get a second opinion on something work-related, most of the people on the ship preferred to keep to themselves anyway.

Kei wasn’t even sure why this room had been added during the design process. What kind of picture had the architects had in their minds when they envisioned this room full of segregates scientists? Had they thought it would ring with laughter, a warm and inviting escape from long days spent in the lab?

It was a ridiculous concept. And that’s all it was really, an idea that someone had come up with to convince themselves that this place could ever feel like home. Reality looked nothing like that picture, and Kei couldn’t remember the last time he had heard someone laugh warmly.

He hadn’t come to this part of the ship because he wanted to socialize. The thought made him snort in derision. No, he was looking for someone in particular.

Various seating was scattered around the open space, and there was even a small treadmill in the corner so they could keep their physical strength up whilst in space. Kei had never used it. This room was sad really, and he chose to avoid it whenever possible. But right now, more than anything, he needed answers.

Thankfully, his head hadn’t hurt like the night before. But the strange blank memory was still there, just under the surface, and just as inaccessible as it had been the day before. It was a constant reminder of what he was missing.

As he entered the room, Kei saw Yachi sitting at a table alone. She was sketching something with a piece of charcoal, coal Kei had given her from his lab. Technically, it was against the rules to give out any of the supplies they produced to anyone other than The Chancellor, but Yachi was a good person. Kei liked her. She reminded him of Yamaguchi in a way, and when he had found out she liked to draw, he had left a small sample of coal at the foot of her door, as a sort of offering.

She knew it was from him, where else would it have come from? And though she still wouldn’t talk to him, at least now she didn’t stammer and leave the room any time Kei entered. He supposed it was progress.

Yachi wasn’t the only one in the common room however. On the far side, sitting in the seat by the full window that looked down on the dead earth, was a lithe black-haired man.
Kei crossed the room until he was standing next to the person he had grown up alongside. “Keiji,” he said in greeting, “I need to talk to you.”

The Chancellor’s son could often be found in the common area. Not because he liked to socialize, far from it. In fact, he might actually hate this room and all it symbolized more than Kei did. But unluckily for Kei, it was the only room on the ship with a wall-screen that could connect to the civilian ships in the fleet. And Keiji, being The Chancellor’s son, had been able to pull enough strings that his boyfriend from before the departure had gotten a ticket onto one of the five civilian ships.

Keiji barely acknowledged Kei as he loomed over the other man, not even looking at him as he spoke. “Beautiful, isn’t it?”

He followed Keiji’s steely gaze, out the window to where the now uninhabitable earth was glowing just the same as it had for billions of years. Kei supposed he was right, and that the earth did look beautiful from their vantage point up here. But despite that, all Kei could see when he looked at it was the people who had been ripped away from him… Kei saw his brother… He saw Yamaguchi dying, alone and in pain.

He wasn’t a fool after all, he knew what dehydration and exposure to the elements would do to the human body. It wasn’t pretty.

Yamaguchi had died without Kei there to comfort him, something he would, no, could never forgive himself for.

To Kei, the earth didn’t look beautiful. To him it just looked like a giant grave, the place where the bones of everyone he loved resided.

“What do you want, Tsukishima?” he finally asked, still not looking up to where Kei towered over him.

Kei hesitated; he wasn’t sure how much to tell the other man. Not because he didn’t trust Keiji, but because he didn’t want anyone to know he wasn’t functioning at his full capacity.

“I’ve just… well, I’ve been having some headaches lately,” he admitted. “I just wanted to know if there could be any correlation.”

Keiji shrugged. “Not that I’ve heard of. At least, not since the first couple prototypes that killed the user... I could ask my father if you want…” Keiji finally looked up to him to meet his gaze, and Kei could see a glimmer of something cold behind the normally calm exterior. “Actually, why don’t you ask him… he likes you a lot better than he likes me.”

Kei shifted uncomfortably, unsure how to respond to that. Fortunately, or unfortunately maybe, he didn’t have to. Because at that precise moment, Kuroo showed up, slinging one arm around Kei’s shoulders. “How’s my favorite blond doing? Sorry Yachi,” he called to her across the room with a wink, “don’t mean to make you jealous.”

The girl looked up, obviously startled at being called out. A strange squeaking noise came out of her mouth, before she gathered her things and quickly fled from the room.
“Nice kid,” Kuroo said endearingly.

“She literally just ran away from you,” Kei pointed out. “And I wouldn’t flirt with her if I were you… Kiyoko will cut your balls off when she hears about it.”

Kuroo laughed at that. “You can never trust a mechanical engineer.” He raised his eyebrows like he was waiting for Kei to agree.

“Hey, Keiji,” Kuroo said, finally acknowledging the other man’s presence. “How’s Bokuto? Still enamored with the sunroof dome on the civilian ship?”

Keiji shook his head and sighed. “No… he got in trouble for opening and closing it too many times. His button privileges have been revoked. His new thing is watching the recycler break down waist… he can’t stop talking about it.”

“Well, it is fascinating stuff,” Kuroo agreed happily, smiling at the way Keiji’s expression remained completely neutral. “Say hi to him for me next time you talk. Oh, and tell him that the score is now 23 to 19”

“What does that mean?” Kei interjected warily.

“Oh, Tsukki, don’t you worry your pretty little head about it.”

“Don’t call me that. And fuck you Kuroo.”

“You offering?”

“Yes…” Kei said sarcastically, “this is me asking you to have sex with me, why don’t we just do it on the treadmill over there in the corner.”

“You two are morons,” Keiji said blandly.

“Don’t worry,” said Kuroo, “you’re invited too. Although, with three of us that treadmill might not be big enough, though if we jus-”

Kei cut him off by smacking him upside the head. “Kuroo, what did you actually want?”

“I don’t know, the treadmill sex sounds pretty good to me…”

Kei glared at him until he relented. “Fine,” he said. “I want you to come take a look at something in my lab.”

“Nothing here.” Kei remarked, looking at the empty counters in Kuroo’s lab. “I don’t know what you want me to look at?”

“Exactly,” Kuroo responded. “There’s nothing here, Kei… That’s just it. Believe it or not, I don’t actually know how to save the world.”

He was joking, but Kei could hear a certain vulnerability that Kuroo always tried to hide behind sly smirks and badly timed jokes.

“I heard The Chancellor is coming for supplies and a mandatory check soon,” he explained. “Kei, I don’t have anything to show him.”
“I don’t understand,” Kei frowned, “you’re incredibly smart. Wha-”

“It has nothing to do with how smart I am,” Kuroo snapped, causing Kei to take a step back. “You don’t understand…” he threw up his hands in exasperation. “I don’t believe in what we’re doing anymore… I’m not sure I ever really have,” he admitted.

Kei waited for him to say more, unsure where Kuroo was going with this.

“I mean what’s the point anyway?” Somewhere in the distance the sound of a beeping timer could be heard, one of the others hard at work no doubt. “Say by some miracle we do find a way to make earth habitable again, then what, huh? Everyone’s already dead, Kei. What good will it do them? And the rest of us…?” he sneered, “maybe we should have just died with them.”

Kei wasn’t good at this; he didn’t know how to comfort people. That had always been Yamaguchi’s job, not his. But he could tell that Kuroo was looking for something, some reassurance, and as much as Kei loathed the idea of giving a pep talk, he knew he had to say something.

“We can’t let them die, Kuroo…” His voice was barely a whisper, but he knew the other man had heard by the way his posture stiffened. “There are still hundreds of people on the civilian ships who depend on us every day. I know that’s not what you want to hear, and I know they may not be the ones we want…” he cut himself off. “Believe me, I know. But they’re still people, and we can’t just let them die.”

Kuroo’s nod was just barely perceptible, but it was there, and it made Kei feel a bit better.

“And about The Chancellor’s visit,” Kei shrugged, mulling it over in his mind. “Don’t worry, I’ll cover for you.” And then, because he thought it was something Yamaguchi would have done. “Everything will be fine,” Kei said awkwardly. “And if not, then we’ll find a way to deal with it.”

“Wow, Kei,” Kuroo mumbled. “I’ve never heard you be so optimistic before. It’s kind of nice actually… if a bit stiff.”

Kei rolled his eyes. “Yeah, well, don’t get used to it.”

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“Hey, Tsukki?”

Kei groaned. It was only the second night that Yamaguchi had spent inside the Dome, and already the weirdly cheerful boy was starting to get on his nerves. Akiteru was mysteriously missing once again. Off being Akiteru, Kei supposed, which left him alone with the new resident.

The lights had shut off automatically like they did every night at eight, and the two of them were laying in the dark.

Kei had made a pile of blankets for Yamaguchi on the floor, one from Akiteru’s bed and one from his own. That left Kei with only a raggedy, worn old thing. But he didn’t care.

He had assured Yamaguchi that he could take Akiteru’s bed while he was gone, but the boy had merely looked at the cot suspiciously, shook his head, and crawled onto the blankets on the floor. Kei absently wondered if it had anything to do with the fact that he had never slept in a bed before.

“What?” he asked the boy irritably.
“Are you sure your brother is okay with me staying here?”

Kei rolled over so that he was facing the gray wall of their single room quarters. “Does it really matter?” he asked.

The other boy contemplated this, silent for a moment while he thought it over. “Yes,” he finally decided, “I want him to like me, and it is his place after all.”

“You’re not from H-Corps, and by being here we’re breaking pretty much every rule… Trust me, Akiteru likes you. The only way he could like you more is if you were also blond and had breasts.”

“Okay,” came the replay, and Kei thought that was the end of it, but after a few more minutes of silence Yamaguchi spoke up again. “Hey, Tsukki?”

“What?” Kei snapped. But if the boy noticed the irritation in his voice, he didn’t seem to care.

“It’s just… I don’t want you to get in trouble. That is… I don’t want you to risk your life for me… especially… well, especially with what you are.”

“What I am?” he inquired.

“Yeah, you know…” Yamaguchi gestured vaguely with his hands. “…the hope for the future and all that.”

Kei wasn’t sure he liked the sound of that. It was too much pressure, too much to think about, and besides, it wasn’t like that. Kei was just one of many, a gear to a machine that would only work if all the other pieces fell into place. He wasn’t some great hope. He was just a child playing scientist, a kid who was a part of something much bigger than himself.

“Don’t worry about it,” he told Yamaguchi.

“Hey, Tsukki?”

It took all Kei had to restrain himself from groaning aloud again. “What?”

“What’s it like for you? You know… with that thing in your head?”

Kei wasn’t sure why, but the question took him by surprise. Maybe it was because no one had ever asked him what it felt like to have Chronicle before. Akiteru had always just teased him about it, and Keiji, the closest thing Kei had to a friend, already had an implant of his own. His mother hadn’t even asked him what it felt like when he had first gotten Chronicle.

Kei couldn’t recall having ever talked about what it was like having ‘this thing in his head’ to anyone.

“Sometimes it’s amazing,” he ventured tentatively. He was unaccustomed to sharing his feelings, but when talking about Chronicle, Kei couldn’t help the reverie that slipped into his voice. “We get to read every kind of book you can imagine. They want us to know as much as we can about earth, and I don’t forget any of it.”

“Did you know that people used to swim in the ocean? Like they just went in for fun. Or that there used to be things called mountains that were tall landmasses that went thousands of meters high. They were formed when the earth’s crust used to shift… actually move!” Kei couldn’t help his excitement as he spoke about what Chronicle let him experience. “Plants used to grow and civilizations were huge, and I’ve seen it all.”
Yamaguchi had fallen silent in awe. Kei could barely even make out the sound of his breathing anymore, still he continued.

“I can go back and relive anything I’ve seen, like I’m watching it happen all over again. Any book I read, any information I obtain, it’s all mine to keep”

“And, do you…? Relive it?”

Again, the question gave him pause. “What do you mean?”

“Well,” he ventured. “I guess it’s good for your lessons, but if I were you, I wouldn’t want to see my past like that. It sounds weird… and sometimes I don’t mind forgetting.”

Kei thought about how many times he had sat in the dark, immersed in a memory of his mother smiling, or talking, or hugging him. Maybe sometimes it was hard to remember, but Yamaguchi didn’t understand… Chronicle wasn’t about him being able to remember his past; Chronicle was about remembering humanities’ past, and making sure that history was never forgotten. They needed that knowledge in order to push forward into the future.

“It’s not like that,” he replied.

“No, Tsukki?” He sounded thoughtful rather than questioning.

Kei wondered if he was being mocked. He couldn’t really tell, but he knew he didn’t like it.

“No,” he reaffirmed “They didn’t give us Chronicle so that we could use it for ourselves. They gave it to us so that we could use it for everyone else.”

“Okay, Tsukki,” Yamaguchi said in a calming voice that set Kei’s teeth on edge. It was like he was somehow trying to placate Kei. Him, someone who, up until this point, hadn’t even stepped one foot inside a Dome.

He wanted to tell Yamaguchi to quit it with the Tsukki thing already, it was starting to get ridiculous. But at the last minute he thought better of it. “Go to sleep, Yamaguchi” he said instead, frustration evident in tone.

“Sure, Tsukki.”

Kei groaned.

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Kei stood taller as he walked, not wanting to draw the attention of any of the people around him as he made his way back to their building. It had been a long day of classes, and Kei was exhausted. He just wanted to get home to his brother and Yamaguchi.

The streets were busy, and Kei’s eyes flitted from person to person. His bag was double the weight it should be, and he didn’t want anyone thinking that he was acting shifty or at all strange.

Why had he done it? Stealing a book from the archives was a punishable offence—although, he’s not sure it had ever actually happened before, seeing as the only people let into the archives were Chronicle members and the instructors who taught them. But Yamaguchi had just seemed so excited whenever Kei talked about his work. He always wanted to know more, and Kei wanted to see his eyes bug out of his skull when he presented Yamaguchi with an actual book.
It had been around two weeks since Kei had snuck the boy in to live with him and Akiteru, and if Kei was being honest with himself, he was actually starting to grow quite fond of Yamaguchi. He was always so happy to see Kei when he got back from time spent in the classroom. It was weird, unlike any relationship Kei had ever experienced in his life. Kind of disconcerting… kind of… nice?

Kei shook away the thought, he was only doing this because Yamaguchi had saved him first, in a way. And without the medical attention they had gotten once inside the Dome, he probably would have died. It’s not like he was starting to think of the boy as family or anything. Although, things had been a bit better between Akiteru and himself lately, something Kei credited to Yamaguchi. It was like the extra presence in the house took some of the stress off of the two of them. Maybe they were just the kind of people who needed a mediator in between to get along.

Kei’s mind wandered once more to the lesson from earlier that day. They had been talking about astronomy, and someone had asked if it wasn’t better to just abandon earth altogether and look for a new habitable planet. Kei knew the answer of course. They barely had enough funding and resources to survive here on earth. How were they supposed to gather enough supplies to sustain that kind of long term mission?

At least they had gotten to see real life images of the ship that would one day be Kei’s home and lab. It was under construction now, and Kei loved any and all information that came his way about the project.

The ship seemed like a dream. A place where Kei could focus solely on his work without any distractions. He couldn’t wait until the day construction of the ship was completed.

He was still lost in thought as he scanned his wrist to get inside the building. He was so used to this that he hardly even noticed as the automatic scanner blinked green and the doors slide open.

When he entered the single room living space, he was greeted by the sound of happy laughter. That in and of itself was a rarity, and definitely something that wouldn’t have happened before Yamaguchi had arrived.

Yamaguchi and Akiteru were sitting together on the floor, looking as comfortable together as if they had known each other for years instead of weeks. When the door opened however, Yamaguchi sprung up from his sitting position and ran to great him.

“Tsukki!”

Akiteru laughed. “Wow, I don’t think anyone has ever been that excited to see my brother before. Except maybe The Chancellor, but he has more than a few screws loose.”

Kei glared at his brother, they would probably never agree on the matter of The Chancellor. Akiteru thought that he wasn’t doing enough to protect the people of the Domes. What his brother couldn’t seem to understand, was that there was more to it than that. Someone had to look at the bigger picture. The situation here in the Domes wouldn’t last much longer at the rate they were using resources. Not to mention the worsening conditions of the climate outside.

Humanity was on a ticking clock. They were hanging by a precarious thread, and once that thread snapped, and it would snap eventually, someone had to have a backup plan or they would all end up falling.

He and his fellow Chronicle recipients were that backup plan. They were going to make sure there was a future to push forwards towards.
“Don’t listen to him,” Yamaguchi hummed, “he’s just as happy to see you as I am.”

Both brothers looked at each other, and Akiteru raised his eyebrows, tilting his head comically. “You’re right, Yamaguchi. Every second without him is one second too many.” Kei knew what was coming, but unfortunately, he wasn’t fast enough to escape the clutches of his brother. He threw his arms around Kei in a grand gesture. “What can I say, I love my little brother.”

“Get off,” Kei shoved Akiteru away from him. “I shouldn’t leave you two alone. You’re bad influences on each other.”

Yamaguchi gave him an innocent smile. Akiteru on the other hand gave him a smug, self-satisfied smile.

“Hopeless,” Kei said, as he moved to put his stuff away.

As he set his bag down and began to rummage through one of the drawers for a change of clothes—he was in his lab attire he wore for school—he couldn’t help noticing that the other two were being suspiciously quiet all of a sudden. When he turned around, clean clothes in hand, Kei realized that Yamaguchi was shifting from foot to foot anxiously, eyes wide as he nervously watched Kei.

“What?” he asked bluntly, noticing that Akiteru was acting strange as well.

“I wanted to talk to you about something.” Yamaguchi looked nervous.

Kei watched the boy skeptically. “Okay…” He was met with a disconcerting silence, making him wonder what the hell it was that Yamaguchi wanted to ask him. Kei was about to tell him to just spit it out already, when Akiteru spoke up before he had the chance.

“We’ve been talking, and I’m going to help Yamaguchi get a job. He doesn’t want to spend every day hiding out in here anymore.”

Kei’s head snapped up in surprise. “What? Is that really a good idea?” he blurted. He hated the sudden panic that flared up in the pit of his stomach. But the thought of Yamaguchi out there… by himself. It made Kei feel weird in a way he wished he could ignore. “What if someone finds out who he is?”

“Oh, come on, Kei…” Akiteru said exasperatedly. “No one is looking for him. He’ll be fine.”

“Yeah, and I’d like to keep it that way,” he shot back.

“They don’t even know he exists.”

Kei scoffed at his brother, always so reckless, always so eager to jump into danger. It wasn’t just that Kei was worried someone would find out that Yamaguchi didn’t belong, though that thought was terrifying, but there was something else too. Something that slithered up the back of Kei’s spine and ran its cold hands around his neck.

All he could see when he tried to picture what they were suggesting was Yamaguchi working in a factory… just like his mother had.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea,” Kei said again.

“Kei,” his brother sounded irritated. “We can’t just keep him in a bubble forever. You’re not thinking about this-”
“I’m the only one thinking about this,” he snapped. “If he were to be found…”

“It’s okay,” Yamaguchi cut him off by placing a gentle hand on Kei’s forearm. “We don’t have to rush into anything. If Tsukki’s not comfortable with the idea… then I can wait.”

“You don’t have to do that,” Akiteru said animatedly. “You shouldn’t have to.”

Kei watched the other two, unsure of why he felt like the ceiling was crumbling in on him. Why did Yamaguchi want to work anyway? Wasn’t it enough that he was inside the Dome now? Did he have to keep risking his life? Poking fate with a stick as it were?

Or was it something else altogether that was making Kei feel this way? Was he really worried about Yamaguchi’s life, or was he more bothered by the fact that it meant that Yamaguchi might not be there whenever he came home? If Yamaguchi got a job, then he would no longer be waiting for Kei to get back, ready with a smile and a dozen ridiculous questions.

Kei didn’t like that he was feeling this way, and he couldn’t even really tell what was causing it. But he didn’t know how to deal with it, and he didn’t particularly want to.

“Can we talk about this later?” he said irritably.

Kei noticed the other two share a brief glance out of the corner of his eye, and for a second he felt that thing twist in his gut again… That thing that had always been present whenever Akiteru and his mother would say something at the same time, laughing at how alike they were. Laughing at how different they were from Kei. Kei who never thought like anyone else, who never fit together perfectly the way those two did.

Jealousy, his mind supplied. But Kei shoved the ugly thought away. What did he have to be jealous of?

“Sure, Tsukki,” Yamaguchi said soothingly. “Don’t worry about it, I can wait.”

Kei felt the slightest bit guilty, but he shoved it deep down. Yamaguchi was right, they could talk about it later, once he’d had some time to think about it. It wasn’t like they didn’t have time after all.

“So how was your day?” Yamaguchi asked.

From the corner of his eye, Kei saw Akiteru scowl and turn away, and again, he felt a twinge of guilt.

“Did you learn anything interesting today?” Yamaguchi asked, banishing the awkward mood that hung in the air like it meant nothing to him. For the last two weeks this had been their routine, Kei would come home, and Yamaguchi would be eagerly awaiting any information Kei was able to pass on to him.

“Actually, I brought something to show you,” Kei said, remembering the book that he had been so eager to show off only moments before.

Yamaguchi’s face lit up. “Really, Tsukki?”

Kei pulled out the book and he swore that Yamaguchi’s eyes grew to twice their size.

Akiteru’s attention was piqued now, “You stole that?” he asked.

“Yes,” Kei said, resenting his brother’s incredulous tone.

“You…” Akiteru said again, this time pointing a finger at Kei, “…Stole… That?”

“Yes,” Kei repeated somewhat forcefully. “From the archives.”

“Can I touch it?” Yamaguchi breathed, interrupting the two brother’s standoff.

Kei wanted to ask sarcastically what else he thought it was for, but he was still feeling a bit bad about the whole job thing, so instead he just nodded. “Of course.”

Yamaguchi gingerly touched the textbook, handling it like it was made of the most delicate material in the world. It took him a full two minutes of running his fingers over the cover before he even attempted to open the volume to the worn pages within. “Oh,” he inhaled, taking his time on each individual page. “What are they?” he asked.

“They’re called dinosaurs,” Kei answered. “They lived millions of years ago, here on earth. Scientists were able to put together fossil remains to classify lots of different types, and you used to be able to visit buildings where you could see full skeletons on display.”

“Wow,” breathed Yamaguchi, at the same time that Akiteru said “creepy.”

Kei watched as the two of them flipped through the book, pointing out things they found interesting or exciting. “I still can’t believe you took this…” Akiteru mused. “My brother the rebel. Book thief extraordinaire.”

“Phantom of the night,” Yamaguchi added reverently, “always on the lookout for the written word.”

“Well, at least if he gets caught and killed Yamaguchi and I will know about these giant lizards that used to live on earth.”

“They’re not lizards,” Kei griped.

“We’ll always have the lizards,” Yamaguchi sang happily. “They’ll never be able to take that away, even when I give myself up in his place, in the hopes that they spare Tsukki, telling them that I’ve stolen hundreds of giant lizard books… The dinosaurs will be the last thing I think of before they kill me too.”

Yamaguchi looked to Akiteru expectantly.

“Don’t look at me,” Akiteru said with a laugh. “I’m not part of this hypothetical noble sacrifice… The giant lizards just aren’t worth it.”

Kei listened to their teasing, beginning to tune out after ‘giant lizard books.’ He wasn’t worried about getting caught, not really. There were so many books cataloged in the archives, no one would notice one measly volume going missing. Besides, if they really did discover the theft, and were somehow able to trace it back to him, he would just talk to the Chancellor. He was sure that Akaashi could get him off the hook.

“But we could be the three lizard bandits,” Kei heard from where he had been lost in thought.

“What do you think, Tsukki?” Yamaguchi asked, bringing him back to the real world. “Should we
start a life of crime and intrigue?”

Kei merely scoffed. “You’re both ridiculous, is what I think…”

Yamaguchi put his hands on his hips, disapproving that Kei wasn’t joining in on their scenario. Kei’s lips twitched at the ridiculous stance. What was it about Yamaguchi that made him want to join in on their dumb banter?

Kei rolled his eyes at them, making a show of just how ridiculous he thought they were being. “Akiteru is much too showy to be anything close to resembling stealthy,” he said. “We’d be caught before we even started.”

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It was late in the evening, and Kei and Yamaguchi were laying on the floor of their room, absently paging through the dinosaur book. Akiteru was absent once again, and somehow the two boys had ended up so that Kei’s long legs were tangled with Yamaguchi’s shorter ones.

At first, Kei had felt weird about the whole thing. He wasn’t used to any form of physical closeness, and a part of him had wanted to pull away when they first sat down. But it hadn’t been long before he found himself glad for the oddly reassuring contact, even as Yamaguchi lightly tapped his foot against Kei’s calf.

Yamaguchi had been inside the Dome for over three months now, and Kei had found himself growing closer and closer to the boy with every month that passed.

They were sprawled out on top of the few blankets that served as Yamaguchi’s bed. Technically, they did have two cots, but Yamaguchi had spent his whole life sleeping on the ground, and he still insisted that he couldn’t sleep if he didn’t have the hard ground so familiar and reassuring against his back.

It wasn’t so bad, Kei had to admit. At least not like this. Not with Yamaguchi’s legs pressed tight against his, and the familiar feel of blankets beneath them. Yamaguchi had set up his nest between Kei’s bed and the wall of their room, making it feel secluded and cozy.

He wasn’t sure how many times they had read through the book-too many to keep track of by now—but somehow it still hadn’t gotten old. He thought that for sure Yamaguchi wouldn’t be able to maintain the same sparkle in his eyes after so many readthroughs, but so far, Kei had been proven wrong. He still loved it just as much as that first day. So much so, that Kei was even considering steeling a different book for him.

He felt their shoulders press together as Yamaguchi leaned farther forward to get a better look at one of the pictures. “Which one is your favorite?” he asked quietly.

Kei pondered the question. He wanted to say ankylosaurs because of the way that Yamaguchi’s eyes light up whenever they turned to that page. He knew that Yamaguchi thought it was cute, and that he always smiled just a bit brighter when they got to that page. Kei felt the same way, but only because of Yamaguchi’s feelings for the dinosaur.

He didn’t say this though, it sounded wrong even in his head. It wasn’t a valid reason to like something, Kei knew. “I don’t have a favorite,” he said instead.

He thought that Yamaguchi would press the matter further, but he didn’t. Instead, he repositioned himself so that he was laying on his back, gaze facing the ceiling.
“Hey, Tsukki?”

“Hmm?” Kei flipped the page to the one about raptors that he knew was coming.

“What will happen to me and Akiteru when you go to space?”

Kei paused what he was doing, confused as to why Yamaguchi was asking about space now of all times.

“You’ll come with me,” he answered plainly.

Yamaguchi shook his head slowly. “No,” he said thoughtfully, “you know we can’t do that.”

Kei looked at Yamaguchi, trying to read any signs of what the other boy was thinking. It was usually so easy for Kei to tell. But right then he just looked blank, a rare occurrence for the cheerful boy.

“Well, no,” he amended, “you won’t be able to come on my ship… but you’ll be on a civilian one.”

“But we won’t be able to see each other, right?”

Kei shook his head. Whenever he thought about space, it was always a positive thing in his mind… He didn’t like to taint that image in any way. But as he sat with Yamaguchi, legs pressed together, realizing how close he had grown to the boy in just these few mounts, he knew that everything had become infinitely more complicated. Not having Yamaguchi to talk to everyday?

It made Kei feel strange.

Yamaguchi, who for some reason put up with Kei and his moods, and not only that, but acted as if he genuinely liked to spend time with Kei. They were, dare Kei say it… friends? It was something he had never thought he would need. But now that he had it, the thought of giving it up made Kei feel physically ill. So, he did the only thing he could in this situation. He pushed the thought far away.

“We’ll be able to communicate when we’re up in space,” Kei told him. “And you’ll have Akiteru, so you’ll be fine. Well, as fine as anyone can be with Akiteru around.”

Yamaguchi nodded. “Yeah… sure.” He didn’t sound at all convinced though, and the note of sadness in his voice made Kei squirm.

It wasn’t the answer Yamaguchi had been looking for, hell, it wasn’t the answer he had wanted to give. But Kei had no choice really, the mission came before anything else, even if Yamaguchi was starting to feel like he could mean more than Kei’s studies.

But what Kei had to remember was that it wasn’t just about him and Yamaguchi, or him and Akiteru even. No, Kei had to think about the hundreds of others, people who were relying on him to figure out a way to create enough food and water to keep them alive…

The bigger picture.

So why was it that the picture was getting harder and harder to see?

No, that wasn’t quite right. It was like the more time he spent with Yamaguchi, the more the picture began to shift and change, until the whole canvas was taken up by freckles and brown eyes… A picture that was starting to look disturbingly like Yamaguchi himself.
“What if I don’t like space?” he asked, bumping his shoulder lightly against Kei’s for reassurance.

“You’ll like it.”

“How do you know?” he asked, sounding skeptical at Kei’s words. “You can’t possibly know that.”

“I know because I’m smart.”

“Tsukki,” Yamaguchi squealed in annoyance. “I’m being serious.”

“So was I,” he replied, even though it wasn’t exactly the truth. More than anything, Kei wanted to make Yamaguchi laugh... to make him forget his fears, if only for a minute. When was the last time it had seemed this important to make someone else happy? When had his own wellbeing begun to depend so heavily on the wellbeing of the other boy?

“Look,” he told Yamaguchi, “there’s no way to know if you’ll love it or hate it, so don’t worry about it right now. It will only make it worse, I promise.”

Kei nudged him back reassuringly. “And if you really end up hating it that much, I’ll just have to work that much faster to fix the earth.”

Yamaguchi finally let out a little laugh. “I don’t think even you can do that in your lifetime, Tsukki. Even if you are smart,” he teased.

“Nope, probably not... but hey, we could always jump ship if it’s that bad. Think about the statement that would make.”

“It would be very dramatic,” Yamaguchi agreed. “Akiteru would love it.”

“On second thought,” Kei said. “We could just throw Akiteru out. That would be dramatic.”

“Tsukki!”

“What?” Kei said slyly. “He’s all about making a statement.”

Kei watched helplessly as Yamaguchi was pulled back by two faceless men. “Tsukki!” his screams ripped through the night, and his hand was pulled farther and farther away from Kei’s own. Kei wanted to scream too, but his voice was suddenly gone, as silent as the expanse that awaited them in space.

He looked down at his own pale hand, now horribly empty. Why was his hand so pale?

He heard a cacophony of loud noises that he assumed must be gunshots, still so foreign to his ears. In his delirious state, he tried to recall what he knew about the concept of guns. The force of a bullet as it traveled through the air, the violence as it ripped through flesh. Yamaguchi’s flesh...

And all Kei could do was stand there, watching as the crowd swirled and convulsed around him, whispering that he had let Yamaguchi go... let him die.

The swirling intensified until the scene had changed around him, and now he was sitting in his lab on the ship. Yamaguchi was perched on the edge of the counter, a sweet smile on his face.

“Tsukki,” he said, “you really made it.” He looked around curiously. “It’s so very... utilitarian.”
“Yamaguchi,” Kei’s head felt foggy. “How are you here?” He wanted to reach out to him, to hold him and rest his head against Yamaguchi’s shoulder, but Kei was frozen in place.

“What do you mean, Tsukki?” and suddenly he was pressed up against Kei’s front, lips ghosting across his neck. “Don’t you want me here?”

The cold glint in his eyes when he looked up to meet Kei’s own was unsettling on a face that normally looked so kind.

Kei shoved him away, scared by the face that was and wasn’t Yamaguchi’s at the same time.

“So, you don’t,” he smirked. “That’s why you left me to die... Maybe you never wanted me in the first place. It’s not like you ever showed it.”

“Shut up!” Kei yelled.

“Oh, come on, Tsukki, you pushed everyone away because you were afraid that they would die just like your mother ... Well, guess what, you pushing us away caused us to die.”

“No,” Kei muttered to himself. “It wasn’t supposed to be like this.”

“Yes,” a familiar voice said from behind him. Akiteru. “You left us to die, little brother.”

“No,” Kei said again, his voice was a whisper now. “Akiteru” he begged, “please...”

“Look at him plea,” crooned Yamaguchi. “I pleaded for death to spare me before I bleed out on the barren soil.

A hole opened up in Yamaguchi’s chest right before Kei’s eyes, crimson blood spilling out over his shirt. His skin began to boil and bubble, welts marring his freckled face. A face which began to morph into a younger version of himself, until he looked out at Kei as a child, gruesome skin twisting his innocent features and making him almost unrecognizable.


No. Kei put his hands over his ears.

“And now...” his brother smirked at him, “...you’re all alone.”

No...

“Face it, Kei... You’re nothing anymore. Not without him...”

Kei woke with a start, his whole body shaking from what his subconscious had just thrown at him. He hadn’t had such a vivid dream since his first few nights up in space, what felt like ages ago. He quickly threw on a shirt and stormed out of his room. He didn’t know where he was going, all he knew was that he had to get out of there… had to leave, to move.

Again, and again, he kept seeing the hole opening in Yamaguchi’s chest, kept hearing Akiteru’s voice as he told Kei that he was the reason they were both dead. He kept feeling Yamaguchi’s lips on his throat, all at once pleasant, and equally terrifying.
Tears began to prickle at the corners of Kei’s eyes, a weakness he hated and resented. He just missed them so much. He didn’t like seeing them as the twisted creations his subconscious provided.

Turning down passage after passage, Kei barely saw the halls he was fleeing down. He was unsure of where his feet were taking him, but he didn’t really care at this point. The bad part about being on a spaceship was that there was only so far you could go before you hit a dead-end. Kei couldn’t run forever.

He ended up at the entrance to the common room, anger flaring up when the scanner to the door blinked red, telling him that he couldn’t pass. Kei tried again, met with the same results as last time. “Fuck!” he shouted, unable to contain it anymore.

“Don’t take it out on the door,” a voice said from behind him. “I know it may look tough, but it really can’t take that kind of abuse.”

Kei spun around to face Kuroo, anger and despair flaring up inside of him. “Let’s do it,” he said loudly. “Let’s have sex.”

“Okay…Unexpected…” A beat, and then, “What’s wrong Kei?”

“What? Don’t tell me you were all talk this whole time?” Kei half yelled at him. He knew he was being irrational, and that he didn’t really want to have sex with Kuroo. But Kei just wanted to feel something…something other than guilt, and hurt, and confusion, and loss.

“Kei,” Kuroo said calmly, “You don’t mean that. Come on, let’s get you back to bed.”

“You don’t know me,” he snapped. “You don’t know what it’s like. Everyone who does know me… everyone I care about, they’re all dead!”

Kuroo scanned his wrist and the doors slid open, it almost made Kei laugh at the absurdity of it all, of his breakdown. He felt childish as he followed Kuroo silently into the empty room.

They slipped past the door, ignoring the seating and various rec-equipment until they were both situated in front of the large window looking down on their old home. They just stood there for a few moments, Kuroo staring out at the planet, and Kei feeling guilty about the way he had acted.

Finally, Kuroo broke the silence, sounding more serious than Kei had ever heard in the two years that they had known each other. “I do know what it’s like.”

“I know,” Kei said softly. “I shouldn’t have said that.” Kuroo had lost people too after all. Kei was just being irrational. He was just hurting. But didn’t one stem from the other?

Silence fell once more. Kei was about to break it when Kuroo spoke up, his words taking Kei by surprise. “Kenma and I grew up in Dome-2 together.” The words bounced off the walls before Kei could truly comprehend what they meant, the weight of them. “We were best friends since we were little. Practically since we were babies, actually.” Kuroo hummed, a soft smile spreading over his lips at something only he could see. “He was a part of who I was. Sort of like a limb you don’t fully appreciate until it’s gone. But once it is, you can never truly function the same way again, you know?”

His eyes flitted down past the window to the planet that they had both lived on not so long ago. “He meant everything to me…”

Kuroo continued, and Kei watched as the glow of the planet reflected a sadness that Kei wished he could erase.
He wished he could purge the sadness from both of them, pulling at the strings of despair until the last thread came lose. Until they were either whole, or completely unraveled.

“Neither of our families were well-off. Dome-2 is overpopulated, and our families and one other shared a room together. That’s how I met him.”

Kei had never really thought about what life was like in Dome-2, all he really knew was that there was a smaller group of Chronicle users who had grown up doing the same work he had, learning the same things he had. “When I got admitted into the Chronicle program,” Kuroo continued, “all I could think about at first was the fact that I would be separated from him.”

“I’ve loved him pretty much as long as I can remember,” Kuroo’s gaze was turned away from Kei, still focused on the planet below. “Of course, it took him a lot longer… he was stubborn like that.” A smile ghosted across his face. “And brilliant,” he amended. “And I could tell what he was thinking just by looking at him.”

“What happened?” Kei asked, because for the first time since he had met Kuroo, Kei felt like he wanted to speak the truth. Like he wanted Kei to ask so that he could unload the burden of a past he had kept close to his chest.

“He got taken to a forced labor camp.”

Kei drew in a breath, he had known it would be bad, but he hadn’t thought it would be that bad.

There were two major camps where someone was taken after committing a crime, at least that’s what people were told. It was sanctioned as a judicious way to keep order within the Domes. But Kei knew what it really was. It was a place where people were sent when the Domes got over crowded, they were used to purge the population when there wasn’t enough food or space for everyone.

People would work in horrible conditions for a few years at most, in factories that were a hundred times worse than the one Kei’s mother had worked in. And after they served their time, pushed to the human limit, they would be killed. Kei wasn’t exactly sure how, but he could guess that it wouldn’t be anything close to humane.

He had heard whispers about where they dumped the bodies, crammed together and stacked as high as a building. The fresh dumped unceremoniously on top of the rotting. The Death-Strip, people called it, because of the way it disrupted the otherwise barren horizon line.

Of course, those were just whispers. Kei had never seen such sights for himself. But that didn’t stop his stomach rolling in disgust at what Kuroo was telling him.

“Every time I thought about him dying in there I got so angry,” Kuroo whispered. “I stopped going to my lessons. That was my first big mistake. Once they put these things in your head,” Kei knew he was talking about Chronicle now, “they don’t take kindly to you wasting it.”

As he listened, Kei couldn’t help balling his hands into fists, nails digging into flesh so that pain shot up his arms. He understood how Kuroo felt. He understood more than Kuroo could imagine.

“They forced me to come back to work for them,” he wouldn’t look at Kei as he spoke, and he was glad for it, Kei didn’t think he could meet the other man’s gaze if he wanted to. “But all I did was demand that they take me to see Kenma. One day, out of nowhere, they grabbed me and brought me to the lab, and there he was… Skinny and a bit bruised, but alive… I was so relieved. He had come back from my nightmares alive… at least for the time being.”
Kei didn’t want to hear this anymore, didn’t want to hear what he knew was coming. “They held
me down…” Kuroo spoke softly, lost in his past. “I didn’t even get to touch him before they pulled
out a gun and shot him in the head.” He said it so matter-of-factly. Kei held back a shudder. “Right
in front of me.” Kuroo reached up to touch his cheek, “His blood hit my face…I… I remember
how warm it was. Just like how his hand had always felt in mine…” he trailed off, flexing his
fingers and reaching out to where the hand he was looking for would never reach back.

Kei didn’t know what to say. You couldn’t comfort someone after something like that, and he
didn’t think Kuroo was looking for that kind of reassurance anyway. “I’ve never watched that
memory back,” he continued, his voice hardening. “I won’t give them the satisfaction.”

Kei watched as Kuroo’s features turned from empty and closed-off to cold and resigned.

He thought about all the times he had watched Yamaguchi’s hand slip from his own. He didn’t
know how Kuroo did it.

“In that moment, with his blood still running down my face, I realized that we mean nothing to
them. And that they really had owned me from the moment they put their tech in my head…”

He paused, a weighted pause. “Sometimes I wonder if I’m really my own person anymore, or if
I’m just some new hybrid that they turned me into. Is this my brain, or theirs?”

Kei watched him as he slid down to sit on the floor in front of the window, the large expanse
outside not even close to the emptiness that Kei saw mirrored in Kuroo’s expression.

“They took Kenma from me twice…” he whispered. “All because I was arrogant enough to believe
that I had a choice.”

Kei sat down so that his shoulder was touching Kuroo’s. Yamaguchi had done this to Kei
sometimes when one of them was upset. He had always found it weirdly reassuring, the solid
contact that let Kei know Yamaguchi was there. He didn’t say anything though. What could he?
But he wanted Kuroo to know that he was here at least… that he had heard him.

“He didn’t even do anything,” Kuroo said sadly. “Our living space was overpopulated, and I had
Chronicle, so…”

They sat in silence for a long time, the whirring of the constant mechanisms on the ship the only
noise that Kei could detect. He wondered absently if Kuroo felt as lonely up here as he did.

Kei sat back in his bed, exhausted after all that had happened that night. As he absentmindedly
typed the code into his wall-screen that would let him override the error massage telling him he
should be sleeping, his mind wandered to Kuroo. Kei had always been so angry that he hadn’t been
there when Yamaguchi had died, but thinking about what Kuroo had said, a tiny cowardly part of
Kei was glad that he hadn’t seen it. He couldn’t imagine watching the life leave Yamaguchi’s big
brown eyes, couldn’t imagine having that memory burned into his head for the rest of his life.

Would he be like Kuroo and refuse to ever watch it? Or would he obsess over it like every other
memory that Kei had of Yamaguchi. He guessed it would be the latter.

And what about what Kuroo had said about not having any choices? Kei had never felt that way in
all his years in the Chronicle program. In fact, if it weren’t for Chronicle, Kei would be dead right
now. Chronicle had always given him opportunities, not taken them away.

Was Kuroo’s experience different because he came from Dome-2? Could Kei really blame it on that, or was Kuroo right that they were being used in a deeper way than he could ever imagine?

Kei’s head was starting to hurt again. He wasn’t even entirely sure if it was just an accumulation of everything that had happened combined with all the stress, or if it was still his implant malfunctioning in his brain. The hole in his memory was still there. Just as worrisome and infuriating as ever.

Kei let out a sigh. He felt so helpless… All these problems were surrounding him and suffocating him, but he couldn’t do anything about them, couldn’t even look at them in a logical way.

All he wanted was to forget. Unfortunately, that was a luxury Kei didn’t have. What he did have however, was his memories. If he couldn’t forget, at least he could numb the pain. He wanted something happy, something that made him forget the ache he was feeling.

He closed his eyes, searching for something that would help him feel better. He knew it when he found it, letting his current surroundings fade away as he slipped into his past.

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Yamaguchi and Kei sat facing each other in the small living space. Kei had been giving him mini lessons on nights when Akiteru was gone. Yamaguchi liked to learn, and Kei had been pleasantly surprised by how quickly the other boy had picked up even abstract concepts. He was smart, and Kei was glad that he was getting the opportunity to learn.

And much to Kei’s surprise, when it came to Yamaguchi, he didn’t mind teaching. He even kind of liked it.

Yamaguchi always had a million questions, and though Kei himself wasn’t good at showing any form of enthusiasm, he was actually getting to like Yamaguchi’s excitement when Kei brought up a new idea or theory.

“Tsukki?”

“Yamaguchi,” Kei parroted, mocking the way he said Kei’s name.

“Tsukki!” This time it was a reprimand.

“Let’s not start this again,” Kei responded.

“Yeah, that would probably be for the best,” he nodded, hair falling into his eyes a bit so that Kei couldn’t see what was hidden there. “Do you think you would miss it if you couldn’t go to your lessons anymore?”

“Obviously,” he responded. “Why do you ask?”

Yamaguchi scooted down so that his head was now positioned on Kei thigh as he looked up at him. “It’s just… well. I know you don’t want to hear this, Tsukki. But I hate being here all day when you two are gone. I want to work. I want to contribute like you and Teru.”

Kei’s first reaction was anger. Wasn’t this enough for him? In the last few weeks, Kei had been doing all he could to make sure that Yamaguchi was keeping busy, making sure that he was happy. Or, at least, he had thought so.
Kei had hoped that Yamaguchi would have forgotten about the whole job idea. Apparently, he had been wrong.

“Yamaguchi…”

“No, Tsukki… let me speak.”

Kei felt the weight of the other boy’s head on his leg, wondering why he was being so affectionate when he sounded so mad.

“I need this. I know it’s hard for you to understand, and that you don’t like things that you can’t understand”

Kei scoffed. “Let me finish,” Yamaguchi insisted.

“I think you’re scared,” he offered quietly. “No, don’t say anything. I think that you have a hard time admitting it, but you’re scared that something will happen if I get a job. And that’s sweet, Tsukki, it really is. But you can’t keep me here forever.”

“I’m not keeping you here.”

“No,” he amended, “but you are scared.”

“So what? I don’t want you to get killed. Is that so wrong?” Kei could feel his face begin to flush with emotions he didn’t want to be feeling. Why didn’t Yamaguchi understand?

“No. It’s good. Don’t ever let anyone tell you that you don’t care about things, Tsukki. Because you do, you just show it differently than most people.”

Kei continued to glare, still angry at both Yamaguchi and himself.

“I love that you care about me so much…” Yamaguchi said. “No one ever has before. You and Akiteru are my family now… and you don’t know how happy that makes me.”

He shifted so that he was looking up at Kei. “But Tsukki, all those years I lived outside the Dome I let my father define who I was. I became timid and dependent. And I don’t want- No, I can’t let that happen again.”

Kei could understand that. He knew what it was like to feel helpless and alone. Yet one part of what Yamaguchi had said was standing out above all else. “We’re family?” he felt a warm hopeful feeling wash over him at the words.

Yamaguchi nodded against Kei leg. “Why else would we put up with Akiteru?” he asked teasingly.

Kei’s lips twitched into a smile, “There really is no other reason.”

“Like it or not, we’re stuck with each other now.”

“Not in a factory”

“What?” Yamaguchi asked.

“Your job… it can’t be in a factory. Anything but that…”

The smile that lit up Yamaguchi’s face was something to behold. Kei was caught thinking that he was glad that Chronicle would capture and preserve it for the span of his lifetime, never to be
forgotten.

When Yamaguchi reached up and wound his tan fingers through Kei’s long pale ones, he didn’t protest. His heart did a weird little flippy thing at the contact which Kei attempted to ignore. For the first time in a long time, he felt content. As if everything was right in the world. His future may be as uncertain as the ocean that they were studying, but his present? His present was finally starting to make sense again after so long spent in the dark.

Because Yamaguchi was a light. A light that he and Akiteru had been missing for a long time.

They continued to sit like that, neither moving as the night wore on. Kei hadn’t felt this physically close to anyone since his mother’s death, but he realized that he kind of liked it, had missed it even. Feeling another human’s warmth pressed against your own had a strange way of grounding a person. Maybe it was just the fact that it proved that you weren’t alone. Or maybe it was about having that reassurance, the knowledge that someone cared enough to close the space that was an unspoken barrier keeping people at arm’s length. But whatever it was, Kei was glad that for once he could experience it without fear.

For a while, Kei had wondered if Yamaguchi was a distraction that would keep him from his studies. But looking down at him now, eyes growing heavy with sleep, Kei realized that it was the opposite. Yamaguchi had done something that Kei had thought impossible. He had made Kei care, and that was something he thought might be worth fighting for.

Because now, more than ever, Kei couldn’t let the world burn.

Chapter End Notes

Writing this chapter made me really sad. I’m a huge KuroKen shipper. That being said, Kenma, unlike many of the other characters up to this point, will not miraculously come back from the dead. I’ll miss you Kitten. In the meantime, you can find me in the corner crying.
I didn’t get this chapter out as fast as I wanted because things were crazy this week. I’m hoping I’ll be able to find more time to edit soon. *Crosses fingers* In the meantime, slightly longer than average chapter. Enjoy!

Kei had seen the end of the world described over and over again in old media from the archives. Usually, some great weapon or catastrophe had occurred, sending humanity careening into chaos and destruction. What those people had gotten wrong all those times, what made for a less entertaining read, was that the human race was the great catastrophe, and in time, had proven to be the ultimate weapon of destruction.

When Kei had read those books about the end of the world, it had always been some big event that brought about an end to civilization. Weapons of mass destruction, meteors showering into the earth, wars that raged across the continents. There was always a precise moment. A defining point in time where our destruction started and came to a catastrophic end.

Reality reflected something much slower however, and maybe we had been on this path since humans first cultivated the earth. Humanity’s arrogance hadn’t been in building great cities or harnessing technology, it had been in believing that earth would sustain us as long as there were humans to cultivate the lands.

In the end, the world’s downfall had been much less dramatic than those stories would have us believe. There were no raging fires or blaze of glory, just a slow decline of food and then the collapse of all financial systems.

What were the people of the past supposed to do once everything they had relied on to survive had slowly started to run out? When climate and weather patterns had turned against them. When they could no longer grow food or drink water.

Apparently, the answer had been to retreat behind a Dome where they could assess the damage and grow what they could in small isolated areas. True, it had meant giving up a lot. Not everyone could fit inside this new civilization. But that was seen as temporary. Their leaders had promised they were doing everything they could to fix the earth that had rejected them. And how were they going about this? Well, they were creating an elite team of scientists and academics whose sole purpose would be to tackle the issues that were keeping them locked up inside a Dome.

That same group would eventually evolve into the Chronicle program.

Of course, even scientists with the help of Chronicle couldn’t solve everything, and it was soon realized that this would take more than just a few generations. Thus, the space program had been implemented, with the hopes that if we had to one day leave the earth, we could rest easy knowing that our work would continue in space. And that one day, far in the future, humans would be able to return and cultivate something that had once been the lifeblood for a whole host of organisms.

This was what Kei thought about as he worked in his lab the next morning, waiting for The
Chancellor to arrive. After getting word of the visit, everyone on the ship had been gathering supplies that they would be sending back to the civilian fleet.

It was a bit early for a supply run, but maybe the others had run out of something. Or maybe it was for some other, unforeseen reason.

Kei didn’t know, and to be honest, he didn’t really care. His mind was still focused on what had taken place the night before. The dream, and the revelation about Kuroo. Kuroo, whom Kei hadn’t seen since they had parted last night.

He was worried about the other man, but he also knew that Kuroo could take care of himself. If he tried to interfere, Kei was afraid he would only end up making things worse. He knew that if their roles were reversed, he would want his space right now.

The Chancellor wasn’t scheduled to arrive for a few hours, so Kei had some time to spare. To take his mind off his current situation, he plunged himself into a memory of Yamaguchi.

He searched through his memories, looking for one that would distract him. Except now he can’t help but think of Kuroo, the dark-haired man helpless as the blood of his childhood friend splattered across his face. Kei will be forever grateful that he will never have to see Yamaguchi’s blood spilled across the dirt, that he will never have to wash that crimson off his pale hands. Even if his subconscious has plagued him with what that image would look like more times than he can count, at least he doesn’t have the tangible memory to torture himself with. At least he’s spared that much.

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Kei walked through the streets at a brisk pace. Technically, he had snuck out from lab work for the day, but they had all been doing independent studies anyway, so it’s not like anyone would notice.

Today was the day that Yamaguchi would be starting his new job, and Kei wanted to be there to see him off. Akiteru had used the connections he had developed working as a guard, pulling strings until he had gotten Yamaguchi work helping out in a childcare building. It was a small place, located in the south sector. All the people who worked long hours in the factories left their children there, sometimes for days on end. And though Yamaguchi was young, they had been willing to let him take the position on a trial bases.

Kei thought the job sounded like a nightmare, but Yamaguchi was ridiculously excited. Though why anyone would be excited to spend time with children was beyond Kei.

Yamaguchi sprang up from his seated position in front of Akiteru when Kei entered the room. “Tsukki!” he exclaimed. “Why are you here?”

“I live here,” Kei replied without batting an eye. “Unless something has changed that I don’t know about.”

Akiteru sidled up next to Kei. “That will be the day…” he said dreamily, “Kei not knowing something.”

“Did they let you off early?” Yamaguchi asked curiously.

Kei shook his head, “No, I just left.”

Akiteru gasped in mock horror. “Kei deliberately leaving a lesson? What has the world come to? Harboring a fugitive, stealing books, sneaking out of class,” he turned to address Yamaguchi. “You
know, I’m beginning to think that you’re a bad influence on my perfect little brother.”

Kei scoffed. “You’re worse than he’s ever been.”

“Oh yeah,” Akiteru smiled smugly, “there is that.”

Next to him, Yamaguchi was practically bouncing with excitement. “You came back for me?”

“Of course,” Kei answered, unsure why this was so surprising. “I wanted to see you off.”

“Thanks, Tsukki! But you didn’t have to do that.”

“I know.” Kei knew how blunt he sounded, but despite that, Yamaguchi’s smile grew even bigger. If that were even possible.

“Ah, a rare and allusive show of affection by Tsukishima Kei. Be careful, Yamaguchi, or he might smile at you next, and then we’re all doomed.”

Yamaguchi laughed. “Screw the declining resources and the acidic rain…that would be the real end of the world.”

“Don’t worry,” Kei jibed, “it will never happen in Akiteru’s presence.”

“It’s true,” his brother said happily. “In all my eighteen years, I’ve never seen it once. Now we really should get going, Yamaguchi. We wouldn’t want you to be late for your first day.” He wiggled his eyebrows at Kei, “Even if it is because of a small miracle.”

Yamaguchi nodded. “Okay. Hey, Akiteru? Do you think you could give us a minute?”

His brother’s teasing smile slid from his face, to be replaced instead with a more somber one. “Sure… I’ll be just outside.”

Kei wasn’t sure what this was about, but he felt anxiety wash over him as he noted the change in Yamaguchi’s expression.

He took a step closer to Kei and reached out to softly tug on the sleeve of his sweater. “I’m nervous,” Yamaguchi admitted.

This had not been what Kei was expecting at all. “There’s no reason for you to be nervous. You’re going to be great.”

“What if you’re wrong?”

“I’m never wrong. Just ask Akiteru.”

Yamaguchi closed his eyes, resting his forehead against Kei’s shoulder in a strangely intimate gesture. “It shouldn’t, but that actually makes me feel a bit better.”

Kei nodded, although, he still wasn’t sure what Yamaguchi was so nervous about. He was incredibly smart, and kind, and more than qualified to take care of a bunch of tiny humans for a few hours without letting them kill each other or something.

When he told Yamaguchi as much he just grimaced. “Tsukki, what do you think kids get up to in a day?”

Kei shrugged. “How should I know? They’re practically a different species. Just make sure you
don’t accidently bring any home with you.”

Yamaguchi laughed. “Don’t worry, I’m pretty sure that’s frowned upon… Besides, we all know you’re the one who brings home the strays.”

“Careful,” Kei grimaced, leveling him with a look that told him he was unamused. “I have a reputation to uphold here.”

“Sure Tsukki… but I know that deep down you’re just a big softy.”

Kei liked the way that Yamaguchi’s eyes sparkled as if holding a truth only the two of them knew. No matter how ridiculous they were being, somehow, with Yamaguchi, Kei didn’t seem to care.

“Don’t tell Akiteru… he’ll start asking me to smile more.”

A sly grin spread across Yamaguchi’s face as he looked up at Kei conspiratorially. “We can’t have that now, can we?”

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When Kei got home that night the apartment was empty. He sat in the dark by himself staring at the blank wall. How had he gotten to this point? How had he gotten to the point where the empty room felt suffocating and oddly hostile, when it should feel relaxing and peaceful? It always had before.

He didn’t like noise, Kei told himself. He didn’t like the sounds of Akiteru and Yamaguchi joking as he tried to think, or the constant chatter that filled the room whenever Yamaguchi was in his presence.

Except, that was a lie. And Kei knew it. It had been for quite a while.

He missed them… he missed both of them, along with the reassurance their presence brought.

Sitting alone in the dark, he couldn’t for the life of him remember why he had wished so badly for peace and quiet before. How had he not known that he was lucky to have the two of them around, always blabbering on about some nonsense in the background?

Kei wasn’t sure how long he sat like that, but eventually the front door opened and Akiteru came to stand behind him. At first, he didn’t say anything, just stood there ominously hovering over Kei’s head.

When he finally spoke, it was in a quiet reserved tone. “You did the right thing, you know… Letting him go… It made him really happy,” his brother said. “And it made him even happier to know that he had your support. You have a lot of sway over him, Kei, he sees you as his savior.”

His voice changed then, to the tone he usually used when he spoke about Kei. His protective older brother voice. “That’s incredibly powerful… Don’t use it against him.”

Kei’s stomach sank, because in that moment he knew that Akiteru was right, as much as he hated to admit it. Kei did hold a certain sway over Yamaguchi, and he now realized that he never wanted Yamaguchi to feel like he was trying to use that against him, or to manipulate him in any way. Yamaguchi was his own person. He didn’t owe Kei anything.

“I’m not going to hurt him.” Kei wasn’t sure if he was trying harder to convince Akiteru or himself.
Akiteru didn’t answer, just offered Kei a hand to help him up “Come on. He’ll be a while still… let’s get you into bed.”

Kei took a moment to wonder when it was that he had become this pathetic. But then he realized that it didn’t really matter, and let his brother hoist him up from his position on the floor.

The least he could do was try and get some sleep.

Kei watched with the rest of the crew as The Chancellor’s pod docked with their ship, the graceful man stepping through the airlock to greet the crowd that had gathered to await his arrival. He looked so much like Keiji it was a bit disorientating. Same dark hair, same steel gray eyes, same graceful figure that almost danced as it moved. It was as if someone had cloned the two of them, though the real difference could be seen in the fatigue etched on the older man’s face. Kei supposed that leading what was left of humanity could do that to a person.

The Chancellor’s eyes immediately searched for Kei’s amongst the crowd, skipping right past where his son was standing. Keiji didn’t seem at all surprised by this though, even though he hadn’t seen his father in close to a month.

Kei absently searched the crowd himself, noticing the way Yachi looked as if she were about to pass out from fear. She wasn’t alone either, not many of the residence of the ship actually enjoyed when The Chancellor came to visit. Kei was an exception. What he didn’t see as he scanned the faces lined up however, was Kuroo. Kei wasn’t sure where he could be, but he guessed that wherever it was, it probably wasn’t good.

“Hello everyone,” The Chancellor said in his booming voice. That was one thing that he and Keiji didn’t have in common. Whereas The Chancellor’s voice was loud and commanding, Kei didn’t think he had ever heard Keiji raise his voice the entire time they had known each other.

“We’ve been monitoring your log entries, and it’s clear to me that each and every one of you has been doing an excellent job this last month. As you can probably guess,” The Chancellor eyes scanned the crowed, “I’m here for a routine checkup and to pick up supplies to take back to the civilian ships. I’m sure some of you are wondering why I’m here ahead of schedule. But I assure you, you have nothing to worry about. As I said, it’s just procedure.”

The crowd shifted uncomfortably, and Kei got the feeling that The Chancellor had done nothing to quell their fears.

“We’ll start how we always do,” he said. “With inspections.” He beckoned to one of the people jumbled in with the group. Kei sighed. Inspections usually took a long time, and Kei was late in the rotation. He was especially anxious today because he wanted to ask The Chancellor about the hole in his memory and the likelihood of a glitch in his implant.

If anyone could tell Kei what was going on, it was The Chancellor. He was after all, the head of the entire program.

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When Kei walked into their tiny apartment, he expected to be met with an empty room. To his surprise, both Akiteru and Yamaguchi where waiting for him inside. He set his bag down on the table, slightly suspicious. “What are you doing here?” he asked
“Wow, what a greeting,” said Akiteru. “Did that perfect memory fail you and you forgot it’s your birthday?”

Kei just glared at his brother. It didn’t deserve a response really.

“Don’t be grumpy, Tsukki. We’re here to celebrate. It’s not every day you turn sixteen.”

“That is a true statement,” Kei said blandly. He didn’t want to be unhappy. It was nice to see the two of them, really it was. They hadn’t been seeing much of each other lately, what with all the conflicting schedules and changing shifts. It was nice to have them all in the same place at the same time. And yet, Kei found that he still felt anxious. He had been skulking around lately in a sort of depressed state, and he was sure that was what had spurred this impromptu birthday celebration. Kei had no doubt they were trying to cheer him up.

What he hadn’t told them, either of them, was the fact that there was a real reason for his sour mood. Climate conditions were escalating much faster than anyone had predicted, and though it wasn’t common knowledge, the plan to evacuate earth had been sped up greatly.

What scared Kei most was the fact that the early departure meant there wouldn’t be as many ships leaving for space, and fewer ships meant that not as many people would get onboard. Already there were whispers amongst the higher ups about who would be allowed into space, and how they would decide who amongst them would get that metaphorical golden ticket.

Because of his brain and what he was, Kei was going to be on one of those ship. It was a given. The same couldn’t be said for Yamaguchi and Akiteru however. Would he be able to get them onboard? Kei had no idea, and he was starting to feel like something bad was coming, something that was following him around waiting for the chance to strike.

Kei could barely stand to think about what would happen when the departure date arrived. What if he had to leave them? What if he could only get one ticket? As an illegal citizen, the odds were already stacked against Yamaguchi. What would Kei do when the time came? The thought made him feel physically ill.

“Wow, you really do hate your birthday,” Akiteru said, rousing him from his brooding thoughts.

Yamaguchi seemed to sense that he wasn’t in a joking mood. He stepped closer to Kei, surreptitiously brushing their hands together.

The touch meant more to Kei than he’d like to admit. His heart sped up at the contact, so casual, yet so intimate at the same time. He tried to ignore the thoughts swirling in his head and making the world appear foggy, but it was hard to do when Yamaguchi was standing this close, his tan skin a haven that Kei couldn’t let himself get lost in.

Yamaguchi touched him all the time, he told himself, casual hand brushes and bumps were just a part of life. What was the big deal? Why did it matter if their fingers brushed, or if they sat pressed against one another?

“How about we just forget the celebration for now and have some food?” Yamaguchi suggested. He had an understanding look in his eyes, like he knew exactly what Kei was thinking, even though there was no possible way he could. Or at least, Kei hoped not.

He nodded, grateful for the suggestion and to take his mind off whatever it was he was feeling.

They ended up sitting on the floor eating their food supplements. Akiteru made a joke about how it wasn’t celebration food-the same joke he made every year-and Yamaguchi elbowed him in the
stomach, telling him that at least it was food and that they were very lucky—just like he did every year.

Kei supposed it was nice, the familiarity of it all, the warmth that came with having his family all together. But all he could see as he watched them talk animatedly was the picture beginning to blur and slip away before his eyes. As the launch date grew closer and closer with every year that passed, how many more days would they have like this? Would they get years, or would their time together on earth bleed into mere mounts?

When had everything shifted for him? When had everything Kei had on earth: his family, his home, his present, become more important than venturing off into space to work on his mission? When had it become more important than his future?

He knew the answer of course, and it was smiling at him conspiratorially as he rolled his eyes at some bad joke Akiteru had made. A joke that Kei hadn’t even remotely heard.

They had gotten good at carrying on a conversation without him, and both seemed perfectly content as they ate their food, unaware that Kei was sitting right next to them having a mild panic attack.

“Kei?”

He looked up, realizing that both Yamaguchi and Akiteru were staring at him expectantly. “Huh?”

Yamaguchi blinked at him owlishly, “How are things going in the lab?”

“Yeah,” Akiteru scoffed, “how’s The Chancellor doing? He having fun playing with his pretty little toys?”

“Sure,” Kei said distractedly, “he’s fine, the lab’s fine.”

They both stared at him suspiciously. They knew it wasn’t like him not to take the bait about remarks concerning The Chancellor.

“Maybe we should talk about something else,” Yamaguchi said uncertainly. He looked worried, like he wished he could ask Kei outright what was wrong, while at the same time scared that he would only anger him further.

“Sure,” Akiteru said cheerily. “Hey, how’s the space program coming along?”

Kei shot to his feet, almost causing Yamaguchi to fall over from the sudden movement.

“I need a minute,” he said, not looking back as he fled from the room. He escaped into the dark hallway of their building, attempting to circulate air in and out of his lungs which seemed to be strangely lacking oxygen at the moment.

Breathe he told himself. The logical part of him said that he was being ridiculous. It’s not like anything was set in stone yet, he didn’t even know how people were going to be assigned to the ships.

There was no need to panic, not yet anyway. And surly being related to Kei would help their chances of getting onboard. And if worst came to worst, couldn’t he go straight to The Chancellor? Kei thought that he held enough sway to convince The Chancellor to let them aboard. After all he had done for the program, was two seats really so much to ask?
But then he was brought back to the fact that Yamaguchi wasn’t supposed to be here in the first place. There was no way they would let someone in his position aboard the ships. And if Kei brought up the subject, that was one surefire way to bring attention to the fact that an illegal citizen was living inside the Dome. Not to mention he would be criminalizing himself in the process.

“Tsukki?”

Kei jumped at the intrusion into his thoughts. He recognized the shape of Yamaguchi’s thin frame making its way towards him in the dark. Who else?

“I’m okay,” he assured Yamaguchi, “really, you can go back inside. I just needed some air.”

Yamaguchi nodded, “Sure, Tsukki.” But he made no move to leave Kei’s side, just stood silently next to him in the dark.

“I made you something,” he finally broke the silence that had settled around them. “For your birthday… Well, sort of. You probably won’t like it.” He started to ramble, “I…I don’t even know why I made it… It’s dumb really…” How could nervous babbling be so enduring on one person, but so revolting on everyone else?

“It seemed like a good idea at the time… Now…?” He let out a nervous little chuckle, “Not so much—”

“Yamaguchi,” Kei cut off his mumbling, “just show it to me.”

He nodded once more, pulling some kind of string thing out from his pocket. “What is it?” Kei asked, not meaning to be rude, but also not having any idea what the long ropelike object was.

“It’s a bracelet,” he said timidly. “We had a bunch of old scrap material that was going to be recycled delivered to the daycare zone today. All the children were making them. It’s stupid, I know… You don’t have to wear it.”

Kei looked down at the strange twine that had probably come from some broken crate, along with some kind of different colored mesh that was woven into the pattern. Somehow, the scrappy but beautiful design reminded him of Yamaguchi.

“No, I want it… I love it.” It was the truth.

Yamaguchi hid his face in his hands. “You don’t have to say that, Tsukki…” He groaned into his palms, “Like I said… it’s stupid.”

Before he could stop himself, Kei reached out and pulled Yamaguchi’s chin up so that they were looking each other in the eye. Kei could tell him. In this moment, while they were alone in the comfort the dark provided, he could tell Yamaguchi how very terrified he was that he was going to lose him… That there was nothing he could do to stop it.

And then another thought crossed his mind. A new, terrifying, blindsiding thought that popped into the forefront of Kei’s mind. That frightening, and wholly inviting thought that was becoming increasingly harder to ignore the more time that passed. Standing like this, so close in the dark, Yamaguchi’s chin in his hand, his eyes large and trusting as they looked at Kei expectantly, he could kiss him. More importantly, he might want to kiss him…

Kei pulled away, scared by the sudden influx of emotions and the pounding that had started in his head. He thought he might have caught the briefest glimpse of disappointment in Yamaguchi’s eyes, but he was probably just imagining things.
“Really, Yamaguchi… I love it,” he assured, averting his gaze now out of awkwardness. Kei felt ashamed, Yamaguchi meant so much to him, he didn’t want to create any sort of awkwardness between them. Couldn’t afford to ostracize the only person who put up with him, who made Kei feel less alone.

And nothing could ever happen between them. Because Akiteru had been right all those months ago, Kei would be taking advantage of him, and that was something he wouldn’t allow himself to do. He wouldn’t risk their friendship, wouldn’t risk the fact that he could be manipulating Yamaguchi in any way.

“We should get back inside,” Kei said. “Akiteru will start to think we ditched him.”

“Oh…” This time Kei could hear the obvious disappointment in Yamaguchi’s voice. “Sure, Tsukki.”

He was about to head inside, but before he could turn to leave, Yamaguchi reached out and grabbed his wrist, stopping him in his tracks.

Yamaguchi took the bracelet from his other hand and wound it around Kei’s wrist, tying it off in a slow and deliberate motion. Kei’s heart stuttered at the contact, made worse by the fact that Yamaguchi was staring at him with a look he only ever directed at Kei.

“It suits you,” he said, patting Kei’s wrist.

“Yeah,” Kei said, not really talking about the bracelet anymore, “it does.”

Kei listened to The Chancellor’s delighted voice as he spoke about all the accomplishments they had made thus far. He accepted his praise when the man began to speak about all Kei was contributing to the program. But deep down, Kei knew that all the progress they had made was merely on a surface level.

True, they were managing to cultivate enough supplies to feed the civilian ships, but in the almost two and a half years they had been up here in space, Kei wasn’t sure they had made any strides towards their larger goal of rehabilitating earth. They were getting by… that was it…no more no less.

“Kei?” The Chancellor sounded concerned. “Is something wrong?”

He looked up from where he had been staring at his written logs. Kei knew he was being even less talkative than usual, and that The Chancellor was beginning to get suspicious, but he couldn’t help it. His mind was a million miles away from supplies and inventory.

“Actually, yes,” he responded to The Chancellor’s question. “I wanted to ask you something.”

“Of course, Kei, you know you don’t have to ask.”

For just a second, Kei saw The Chancellor the way Keiji saw his father, as someone who continually overlooked him in favor of a kid who was as related to him as Kei was to the dirt in his lab.

His whole life Kei had never questioned the way The Chancellor treated him. It had always just been his norm. Sure, Akiteru had teased him about the way The Chancellor favored him, but he had just shrugged it off. He was special after all. Kei had thought he had deserved the attention…
But now he wasn’t so sure.

Had he unknowingly been taking something away from Keiji?

“I wanted to talk about Chronicle.”

“Chronicle?” The Chancellor questioned, sounding confused.

“Yeah, I don’t know if Keiji told you or not, but I’ve been having some problems with my implant.”

The Chancellor put down the soil sample he had been inspecting. He could see a mixture of worry and confusion lingering in the slate gray eyes that were so like his son’s. “What’s wrong? Do I need to bring a medical officer?”

Again, Kei was faced with the decision of how much information he wanted to offer up. He trusted The Chancellor, but Kei could also see him overreacting and calling for all sorts of tests. And what if there really was something wrong with his implant? Would they remove it? Give him a new one? Kei shuddered at the thought. Losing Chronicle would mean losing his past, losing Yamaguchi, Akiteru, the only memories he had of his mother…

Kei couldn’t let that happen. He had to go about this carefully, or risk losing everything that made-up his entire world.

“I’ve been having some headaches,” he ventured. “It’s nothing serious, but I was wondering if there have been any reports of similar things happening with other Chronicle users?”

“No,” The Chancellor pondered the question slowly. “I don’t believe there have been. Well, there was one girl who had intense migraines, to the point that she couldn’t function normally. But that was in the very early stages of the experiment, and we later found out that her brain chemistry wasn’t compatible with that of the Chronicle implant.”

“What happened to her?” Kei asked.

The Chancellor shrugged, “Chronicle was removed and she was expelled from the program. There was nothing else we could do.”

Kei’s stomach sank, that was not exactly what he’d been hoping to hear.

The Chancellor must have noticed his expression, because he placed a comforting hand on Kei’s shoulder. “Don’t worry, Kei, that can’t happen to you. I think we can all agree that you’ve flourished under the influence of Chronicle. Those types of issues only occurred in early stage patients anyway.”

“Yeah,” Kei countered, “but we don’t know that for sure, do we? There haven’t been any long-term studies… No one has lived that long.” He couldn’t help the fear he felt as he spoke. “We’re all there is.”

“I can assure you, Kei… Chronicle is safe. And if you must know, and this is highly classified, but I trust you not to spread the information around…”

He spoke with intent, letting Kei know that he was not to repeat this information. “There was one generation of Chronicle users before all of you received the implant.”

This was news to Kei; he hadn’t known they had even had Chronicle before they started placing it
in his and his peers' heads. He wondered what this meant for the program, and why the information had been so tightly guarded.

“Who was it?” he asked.

“The man who invented it.” Kei watched as The Chancellor moved on to examine the next sample. “Brilliant man, upon completion he put one device in his head, and one in his young son’s head. Both lived out their days in the Dome until dying of old age. So, you see, Kei, Chronicle has been thoroughly tested, and you’ll be just fine. There is no evidence to suggest that it causes the mind to deteriorate in any way.”

Kei filed this information away to go over on a later date. He didn’t know much about the person who had created Chronicle, but he supposed it wasn’t that strange that he had put the device in his own head. As for his young son, Kei wasn’t quite sure what that meant. Possibly this had led to the discovery that Chronicle worked better the younger the recipient was. Kei knew the young age allowed the changing brain to better adapt to the foreign object. But placing it in your own son’s head when you had no idea what the outcome would be? Even Kei thought that sounded a bit cold, and he was apt at putting aside his feeling in the name of science.

He wondered who they had been. This father and son who had paved the way for Kei and his companions.

“Well,” Kei ventured, still unsure of how this all fit in with his missing memory. “Can we ever repress a memory? Like what all those books we read said about how normal memory functions.”

The Chancellor looked confused once more, possibly even irritated at the question. “Kei, you better than anyone should know what Chronicle does.”

“I know,” he corrected. “But, just… theoretically? Could we do it, could we repress a memory?”

The Chancellor shook his head dismissively. “It’s not possible. That’s not how Chronicle works. The whole point is that you don’t forget.”

Kei deflated, he didn’t understand what was going on in his head, and the answers The Chancellor was giving didn’t help him any.

“I’m worried about you, Kei.” The Chancellor was giving him a strange look that Kei couldn’t decipher. “I want you to start recording extra logs, and if anything abnormal happens, anything at all, you get a direct line to me. You hear me, nothing is too small.”

Kei nodded, but something told him not to mention the missing memory. He wasn’t sure why, but his instincts were telling him it wasn’t a good idea.

“Sure,” he lied. “You’ll be the first to know.”

But as The Chancellor left Kei’s lab, he couldn’t help but wonder what he thought the headaches would progress to, and if it truly was nothing to be concerned about, then why did he look so worried?

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Kei had worked an extra-long shift in the lab today. It was far later than the normal time he would have gotten home, and he was just realizing how exhausted he truly was. All he wanted to do was sleep, preferably with the comfort of Yamaguchi’s gentle breathing at the foot of his bed. Although, he wasn’t even sure if Yamaguchi would be there when he got home. They had been
giving him more and more hours at the childcare center, and his schedule was now even more erratic than Akiteru’s, if that were possible.

Kei entered their building and was about to turn the corner to the hallway that lead to their room, when he heard two familiar hushed voices. He halted in his tracks, surprised by what he heard.

“Is he inside?” Yamaguchi asked in a whisper.

“I think so,” Akiteru answered just as quietly.

It was obvious that they were talking about him.

Kei wasn’t sure why they were being so secretive, but he didn’t like it. It set every nerve in his body on edge. He had known those two were close, but he hadn’t known they would go so far as to keep secrets from him. Kei felt a weird flare of jealousy that he wasn’t proud of.

“What did you find out from Saeko?” It was hard to hear, but he was almost positive that was Yamaguchi’s voice, he had no idea who Saeko was though.

“She got a message from the Little Giant,” his brother replied. “We were successful in making a contact within Dome-2. He’s trust worthy apparently. Tanaka is over the moon… Keeps trying to come up with excuses to get in touch. Saeko’s actually getting pretty mad… says were going to blow his cover before we get anything good from him.”

Kei was confused. He had no idea who they were talking about, or why they were mentioning Dome-2. It almost sounded like they were in on some infiltration plan. But what would be the point? What could anyone possibly gain from that?

It was hard to make out their voices, but he thought he heard something else about the so called Little Giant they had mentioned, followed by a string of words he couldn’t hear. He distinctly caught the word Rebels though, causing his blood to run cold. Kei strained to catch what they were saying.

“When are you going to meet her again?” Yamaguchi this time.

“Three days,” Akiteru replied.

This was about a girl, Kei realized. That was so like Akiteru. He wondered absently if that was where his brother had been disappearing to all those times. It would confirm his suspicions.

There was more whispering that Kei couldn’t quite hear, and he thought about trying to get a bit closer without alerting the other two of his presence, but something kept his feet glued to the floor. Some unknown force that told him to wait, to be patient.

“So, you think we should tell him?” Kei assumed that Yamaguchi was talking about him again. He got his suspicions confirmed a moment later when Akiteru responded.

“Are you kidding? You know Kei, he’s so well programed he’d probably go running to tell The Chancellor the moment his freak brain comprehended what was going on. He’d flip his shit.”

Kei didn’t like the sound of that. What the hell was going on? What were those two caught up in?

“I could talk to him,” Yamaguchi offered tentatively.

“No,” Akiteru cut him off. “There are some things that Kei is much better left out of. Promise me,
Yamaguchi. Promise me you won’t tell him. We can’t risk it.”

There was a long silence, and then much to Kei’s dismay, Yamaguchi’s whisper could be heard from where he was standing around the corner.

“I won’t tell, I promise.”

Kei felt his heart break a little; shattered by the wedge he hadn’t even known had been between him and Yamaguchi until that moment.

With everything that Yamaguchi meant to him, with everything they supposedly felt for each other, he still chose Akiteru over Kei. Yamaguchi was supposed to be his friend, Kei was the one that had brought him home, he was the one that had patched him up and had given him somewhere to stay. Not Akiteru. So why was Yamaguchi taking Akiteru’s side now?

He couldn’t take it anymore. He couldn’t listen to one more word that felt like betrayal wrapped up in lies. And the worst part was that he didn’t even know how they were betraying him.

Kei was supposed to be the rational one. He was calm and logical where the other two were emotional and unpredictable, but right now? Right now he couldn’t take it. He just needed to get out.

So that’s what he did. Kei turned and ran back the way he had come, far into the starless night that had settled over the Dome.

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When Kei finally felt ready to return home, he thought he could sneak in without either of the other two noticing. He could hear Akiteru’s soft snoring, and he thought he was in the clear, that is, until he was met with the outline of a figure sitting on his bed. It was hard to see in the dark, but Kei knew it was Yamaguchi.

“Fuck,” he breathed, startled by the ominous figure.

Yamaguchi didn’t say anything; he just raised one hand and pointed at the door, gesturing for Kei to follow.

Kei was still angry, and a part of him wanted to ignore Yamaguchi. But there was another part, a much bigger part, that could never ignore Yamaguchi, so he followed wordlessly as they crept out of the room, careful not to wake Akiteru as they did so.

When they were out in the hallway, in the same spot where Yamaguchi and Akiteru had been standing only hours before, Kei and Yamaguchi stared at each other. Kei had to look down on him due to his superior height.

He was glad that it was dark enough that he couldn’t see the telltale freckles or how deeply brown the other boy’s eyes were. It made it much easier to be mad… furious even. It seemed like he could never look at those freckles and stay mad. Every time he saw them they always seemed to wash away any lingering uneasiness Kei felt.

“What do you want?” he asked coldly, his tone of voice not betraying the thoughts running rampant in his head.

He saw Yamaguchi visibly stiffen at the tone, one he used often, but never directed at Yamaguchi.
“How much did you hear?” There was no pretense, no sickly sweet ‘Tsukkis,’ or soft touches passed off as accidents. He knew Kei had heard them, and he wasn’t going to pretend otherwise.

“Enough,” Kei said vaguely. He knew he was being childish, but he didn’t want to make it easier on Yamaguchi whose betrayal had hurt so badly. Plus, a small part of him liked being mad at Yamaguchi. When he was mad, it was easier to forget about the other confusing feelings that had been plaguing his brain lately whenever he thought of his friend.

“You don’t understand—”

“You right, I don’t,” he cut Yamaguchi off angrily. “I don’t understand what you and Akiteru are mixed up in, or why you’re being so idiotic and secretive!”

“Tsukki,” he could hear the pleading in Yamaguchi’s voice, a call for him to understand, to think rationally. But for once Kei didn’t want to be sensible. Instead, he wanted Yamaguchi to know how badly he hurt.

“Do you think you’re part of some stupid society fighting authority? Because that’s moronic, Yamaguchi. There are no conspiracies or evil plots… just rules, and you two are breaking them. You’re both going to get yourselves fucking killed,” he spat. “And I won’t be able to do anything to stop them this time.”

“It’s not like that,” Yamaguchi said, more strength coming into his voice now.

“Oh,” Kei challenged, “then by all means, Yamaguchi. Enlighten me, … what was it about?”

“I… I…can’t tell you,” he stammered.

Kei let out an exasperated sigh. “Of course you fucking can’t…Because apparently we keep secrets from each other now.”

“No…” he sounded so small, hurt. For a moment Kei wished he could take it back, but then he remembered that the two of them were in on some kind of coup against the Domes, and he got angry all over again.

“I’m leaving,” Kei spat heatedly, beginning to turn away from the boy who looked like he was about to cry. But before he could get very far, Yamaguchi reached out and grabbed Kei’s wrist.

“No,” he heard the hitch in his voice, and again he felt the briefest twinge of guilt. Kei might be angry, but he never wanted to make Yamaguchi cry, never wanted to be the reason that Yamaguchi hurt.

“I can’t tell you because you’re too close to them… It would only make things worse… c-can’t you see that, Tsukki?”

Kei could hear that he was pleading again, pleading for Kei to understand, for Kei to trust him and let it go. Standing there he felt trapped, not just between the wall and Yamaguchi’s wiry frame, but between his instincts and his intellect, his loyalty to The Chancellor and his family… His love for his work and his love for Yamaguchi…

When had things gotten so complicated? And why did he suddenly feel like he had to choose between his home life and his lab-life? When had there become a clear us and them, with Kei standing on the side opposite his family?

He didn’t know what to do. He just stood there dumbly, waiting. For what, Kei wasn’t sure.
“I don’t want it to be like this,” Yamaguchi finally broke the silence. “You’re the best thing that ever happened to me, Tsukki, and I don’t want us to avoid each other or feel like we have to skirt around one another.”

Kei didn’t say anything; he just continued to stand there like a statue, a statue that was worn and crumbling from exposure to time and the elements. He could see that Yamaguchi was watching him intently, looking for any sign that Kei was either about to give in, or leave him standing there alone in the dark. He didn’t do either, he just stood there.

Suddenly, and without any warning, Yamaguchi leaned forward, resting his forehead on Kei’s chest. He felt his pulse jump at the contact that somehow seemed so different from their normal physical closeness.

Very slowly Yamaguchi’s arms moved to wind their way around Kei’s waist, until they were standing in a strange sort of hug. He buried his face in Kei’s cream-colored shirt.

Almost as tentatively as he had moved, as if he were testing the waters, Yamaguchi began to speak softly. “Do you trust me, Tsukki? You once asked me that same question… and if you feel anywhere close to how I feel, you’ll understand… This is how it has to be. I don’t like it, but I’m doing the best I can.”

Kei still didn’t answer.

“Please...” he whispered into Kei’s chest, “…just trust me.”

All of the fight drained from Kei’s body. How could he be mad at Yamaguchi when he said things like that? Yamaguchi was probably the person Kei trusted most in the world, how could Kei deny him when he was asking something so small?

Of course I can trust you, is what he wanted to say. I love you in a strange, complex way that makes my head hurt, but that might just be the best thing that has ever happened to me? How could I not trust you?

He didn’t say any of those things though, how could he? He didn’t even understand them himself. Besides, his and Yamaguchi’s relationship had to stay the way it was. If Kei lost him in any way, shape, or form, he was sure he would crumble.

For just a brief moment, Kei gave in to his desires, letting himself rest his chin lightly on the top of Yamaguchi’s head. “I do trust you,” he whispered so quietly that he was afraid Yamaguchi wouldn’t hear. Yamaguchi nodded, causing the long strands of brown hair to tickle Kei’s chin.

Standing this way, Kei could almost forget all that was happening around him. He could forget that, for the first time ever, he and Yamaguchi weren’t on the same page. And that as hard as he was trying to fight it, everything about their relationship seemed to be changing.

He wasn’t sure how he felt about the fact that his eyes sought out Yamaguchi every time Kei entered a room, even if there was no possible way he could be there. Sometimes he thought he wanted more than their friendly touches and glances. He was becoming hyperaware of the other boy in a way that made Kei uncomfortable. The way muscle moved under soft tan skin, the shape of his body… His lips…

But for now, maybe he could just stand here on some sort of precipice between an adult relationship and a childhood one, waiting to see what would happen next.

A part of Kei wanted to go back to a time before all of this, back to when things were easy. But
there was another part of him that couldn’t picture going back, and a newer part, a stronger part, that didn’t want to.

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A hush had settled over the ship, the kind of quiet that only ever occurred directly after a supply run. The Chancellor had left hours ago, taking with him all the provisions they had produced since last visit, and now everyone had drawn into their own corners, taking inventory and recuperating after the evaluations.

Kuroo was still uncharacteristically missing. Kei had covered for him with The Chancellor, but as far as he knew, the other man had barely come out of his room since the night before. He made a mental note to go cheek on him if it got to be more than a few days of silence.

Thinking about the memory he had just watched still made Kei the tiniest bit uncomfortable, especially after everything that had happened with Akiteru and the Rebel group. He hadn’t known it back then, but Akiteru had already been in deep with those people.

Kei still thought that the Rebels’ idea of ‘freedom’ had been a stupid uninformed dream. The Little Giant was a fallacy, nothing more than an idealized figure created to give hope to those unlucky enough to reside outside the Domes. The idea had brought nothing but death to those who were stupid enough to believe in the story.

Kei didn’t blame Akiteru and Yamaguchi for wanting to trust in the idea of someone who was fighting for those in poverty. But what they hadn’t understood was that the Little Giant was just a lie, a falsehood used to lure people to the Rebel’s ridiculous cause.

Thinking about the Rebels was pointless now though. The Little Giant, if he ever had truly existed, was gone, and so was everyone who had believed in him.

The problem was that Akiteru had never trusted The Chancellor. But Kei did. He knew that if Akiteru were here, he would ask Kei why he hadn’t been completely honest with The Chancellor he trusted so much.

Kei didn’t have an answer for that.

If he was being honest with the part of his brain that still heard his brother’s jesting voice, he would admit that The Chancellor’s reaction when Kei had asked him about Chronicle had been a bit strange. It had made Kei wary to talk about the subject further, or to mention the missing memory.

He wasn’t exactly sure why, but he wasn’t ready to divulge that information just yet.

It hadn’t been a total waste though, he had gotten some interesting info out of The Chancellor about the creator of Chronicle.

Kei attempted to touch the missing memory once more. But like always, he knew it was there, knew it was his memory, but as hard as he tried to grasp it, it was just as unreachable as the earth that he was orbiting around.

Kei sighed, the need to find out what the memory was overwhelmed him. It felt foreign in his head, like it didn’t belong. It made him feel like he wasn’t in control, a feeling Kei didn’t like to associate with his own mind. After all, if he didn’t have that, then what did he have?

Not his home, not his family, and not Yamaguchi...
Nothing. That’s what Kei had… nothing but a freak mind and an obsession with a past he could never change.

****

When Kei was let out from his lessons for the day, he was surprised to find Yamaguchi standing outside the lab building waiting for him.

Things had been a bit rocky ever since the night that Kei had overheard him and Akiteru talking about the Rebels. They hadn’t been avoiding each other by any means, it wasn’t as palpable as that, it was more of an unspoken thing. Like they could both feel a change lurking under the surface of their skin, and as hard as they tried to pretend that nothing was wrong, the only one who was at all fooled was Akiteru.

“Hey,” Kei greeted him awkwardly. Yamaguchi had never shown up at the labs before, and Kei wasn’t exactly sure what to make of it. He might have been worried, except that everything about Yamaguchi’s body language was nonchalant, relaxed even.

“Hey,” Yamaguchi answered brightly, if a little lack luster. “Mind if I walk you home?”

“Only if you walk three steps behind me the whole way.” It was a joke, and Kei was rewarded when Yamaguchi cracked a small smile.

“Your steps, or my steps?” Yamaguchi bargained, “Because those are two very different things.”

Kei shrugged, “I’ll take really small ones and you take really long ones.”

“Sounds like a deal,” Yamaguchi said happily.

They fell into step easily as they began to walk home, shoulders occasionally bumping each other as they moved.

He snuck a glance at Yamaguchi when he thought the other boy wasn’t looking. Again, he was struck with that weird feeling that made his pulse quicken. Next to Yamaguchi, all other thoughts running through his head that had seemed so prevalent before, so important, faded into the background.

Kei had never been attracted to anyone in his entire life, male or female. He didn’t understand the process, had never had the time, had never really cared. He had always thought he wasn’t built for it. Whatever it was.

There was a part of him that had always thought he didn’t have that thing that made people flock to each other and act stupidly. Like Akiteru after a night spent out with some girl, his mind supplied.

Maybe it had to do with the fact that when Kei thought of romance, all he could picture was the mass of hormones that drove people to search for a mate. All of it was instinct, installed within us as a biological need to carry on the species. Love was just a series of well-timed chemical reactions.

That thought had never really bothered Kei before, but it had never really affected him either. He was above it all, or, he was supposed to be. So why was it that when he looked at Yamaguchi lately his stomach did this sinking thing that he wasn’t sure he altogether minded? Why did he find it harder to think rationally about earth cycles and oceanic acidity when he could see the curve of Yamaguchi’s shoulder blades through his thin shirt? Why were freckles and eyes such a deep shade of brown that Kei had only ever seen their equal in glimpses of past landscapes so distracting?
Yamaguchi’s hand was so close to him as they walked home. Kei became hyper aware of the fact that it would be incredibly easy to reach out and take it.

Did he want to? Kei wasn’t sure…

“Tsukki?” he was startled by the question after being in his head for so long.

“Hmm?”

“Follow me.”

“Wha...” Before he knew what was happening, Yamaguchi had grabbed him with that same hand Kei had just been fantasizing about intertwining with his own, and was pulling him god knows where.

“Yamaguchi,” he asked blandly, “where are we going?”

“Tsukki,” Yamaguchi shushed him, “for once in your life don’t over think things. Let me lead.”

Kei wanted to say something to that, but thought better of it, figuring that would only prove Yamaguchi’s point. That is, until Yamaguchi led him to the childcare building, and Kei felt his hopes begin to plummet straight off the face of a rocky cliff.

“Yamaguchi... I hate children.”

Yamaguchi laughed. “Wow, Tsukki, tell me how you really feel.”

When Kei just glared, Yamaguchi gave him one of his telltale grins. The one that he only ever directed at Kei, usually when he thought Kei was being ridiculous. “Don’t worry, Tsukki, you’re not going to have to interact with any tiny humans.”

“Large humans aren’t my favorite either,” he mumbled.

“Well, hopefully there won’t be any of those either.”

Kei looked at him skeptically, wanting to turn and leave the moment he had seen where Yamaguchi was taking him. But another part of him, a bigger part, was willing to follow Yamaguchi even if it meant having to brave the place where they kept the children.

As it turned out, they didn’t actually end up seeing any other people, children or otherwise. Instead, Yamaguchi had led them around the back of the building and through a very sketchy looking back entrance. From there, he guided Kei up a set of stairs and onto a dirty roof that looked out over the south sector of the city.

“Are we allowed to be up here?” Kei asked skeptically.

“Nope,” Yamaguchi said happily.

He held out his hand, and Kei only hesitated a moment before taking it and letting Yamaguchi drag him over to the edge of the roof. He supposed it wasn’t a bad view, nothing like the things he had seen in his books, but certainly not horrible. It couldn’t compare to trees and grassy fields that were only an abstract image in Kei’s mind. But standing there, one story up, looking out over the expanse of brown composite buildings cramped together sustaining life under the Dome, Kei thought that maybe it was beautiful in its own way. Especially, he thought, when Yamaguchi was standing right next to him looking at the view as if it were one of those dazzling landscapes of the
past.

“This is where I come for my breaks… It’s nice to be away from everyone.”

“The kids?” Kei questioned crudely.

Yamaguchi laughed and nodded. “Sure, they can get to be a bit much… But it’s not just them, its other people too.”

Kei had a brief moment where he wondered if everyone included him, and then he thought about the other part of what Yamaguchi had said. He had never thought Yamaguchi had a problem interacting with other people, not like he did. Kei couldn’t be bothered, but it had always seemed to him like Yamaguchi was the opposite, thriving on interaction where he loathed it.

“Do you want to sit?” Yamaguchi gestured to the floor. Kei looked at the dirt that was inches thick. “Not really,” he answered.

“Get down here.” Yamaguchi pulled Kei to the floor where he landed with a less than graceful thud.

“Looks the same from down here.”

The look Yamaguchi gave Kei was worth the comment. It was a sort of half scowl half snicker thing, that scrunched up his face in a way that Kei thought looked enduring. For a face …

He watched Yamaguchi as he fiddled with a loose thread on the hem of his shirt. He knew he wanted to talk about something, but he was clearly too nervous to bring it up.

“So, what was all this about?” Kei gestured around him to the roof setting. “Why are we here?”

“I just wanted to spend some time with you,” Yamaguchi said quietly, sounding more serious than he had all day.

Kei softened a bit, thinking of all the times that they had sat side by side just like this. How easy it had always been, and despite everything, how easy it still was. Because when it came to Yamaguchi, that’s how it had always been. Easy.

“You know, you shouldn’t have shown me this place,” Kei teased him, “I might steal it from you… You’ll never get it to yourself now.”

“Please, Tsukki,” he let out a laugh. “You wouldn’t risk running into a child. Plus, if you ever wanted a place to be alone, you would just go to the archives.”

It was true. The building that housed all the books and records of the past was where Kei liked to spend his free time. It was like a second home, and had been ever since the moment he had gotten clearance to go inside. All those books and histories from millions of lifetimes ago that were only accessible to a select few. Kei was pretty sure that was his favorite part about all of Chronicle put together. All that knowledge at his fingertips, and he could access it any time he wanted.

They looked up at the very top of the Dome that was made of a transparent material, allowing them to catch a glimpse of the sky outside. They were lucky, today wasn’t that cloudy.

“You’re not in the archives,” Kei noted frankly, watching the way the particles in the atmosphere scattered the blue light so that all the traveling red lights cast the horizon into a colorful sunset.
At least that hadn’t changed, Kei thought, as he looked out at an earth that appeared nothing like the images of the past he had seen in his books. At least he could still see the sunset. 

Yamaguchi looked up at him through long dark lashes, trying to mask the surprise that was evident on his face from the unguarded comment.

“Tsukki?”

“What?” he challenged.

Kei was sure they were both holding their breaths, and for a split second, he thought that perhaps they were standing on some sort of cliff, and that they were about to jump off. Maybe he had been hoping for it. Would it really be so bad to fall if they were falling together?

But jumping wasn’t as easy as he had thought, because in the next moment, Yamaguchi had laid down, seemingly unconcerned with the dirt that Kei was trying so hard to ignore.

“Lay back with me.” The whisper seemed loud when spoken into the quiet of the deserted rooftop. Kei gave him a skeptical look. If Yamaguchi thought that he was going to lay in that stuff, he was sorely mistaken. He opened his mouth to tell him as much, but Yamaguchi must have seen, because he cut Kei off abruptly.

“Tsukishima Kei, lay down.” It was a demand, not a request, made more obvious by the use of his full name. Kei was taken aback by the authority in his voice, authority he hadn’t known Yamaguchi possessed. He was so surprised by it his body moved independently of his germaphobia, shifting until he was laying down side by side next to Yamaguchi.

Kei felt suddenly self-conscious with his overly long body draped next to Yamaguchi’s. Yamaguchi, who looked like he was laying on a bed of silk he was so comfortable, ease and contentment written all over his face.

Both sets of eyes focused above them where they could see the gashouse sky through the transparent Dome.

“Did you know that people used to be able to see the stars in the night sky all the time,” Kei said, reverting to facts when he felt uncomfortable. “You could actually get a glimpse of what space looked like every night.”

“I think it’s pretty,” Yamaguchi said, referring to the pinkish tinged vapor swirling around in the atmosphere. “It’s sort of soft looking, you know? Like it’s from a dream. Or like when you close your eyes, but enough light is hitting your lids that you see dancing shapes.”

Kei scowled. “It’s slowly turning acidic, not to mentions choking every lifeform that inhabits the earth.”

“I didn’t say it was good, I said it was beautiful… there’s a difference.”

He didn’t know how Yamaguchi could think that something that had a hand in killing them was at all beautiful.

“It’s deadly…”

Yamaguchi gave a quiet laugh, one that said Kei was set in his ways, and always would be. “Sometimes deadly things are the most beautiful, Tsukki.”
“You know who thinks that?” Kei inquired. “People who die shortly after.”

“Tsukki,” Yamaguchi said exasperatedly, nose scrunching up in distaste. “The atmosphere isn’t good or bad… it just is. It’s not trying to kill us or save us. I know sometimes you feel like you’ve been personally wronged by it, but that’s not true, and it is beautiful. In its own way.”

Yamaguchi closed his eyes for a moment, and Kei imagined that he was comparing the sky to the swirling colors behind his lids.

“This planet kept humans alive for millions of years,” he hummed thoughtfully. “Earth didn’t let us down, Tsukki, we let earth down. And it is beautiful… Even in its end.”

“Maybe,” he agreed, but he still didn’t see how the mixture of gases that were turning toxic and slowly suffocating everything on earth could be seen as anything other than a deadly hemorrhaging wound in need of fixing.

“Don’t you think anything is beautiful, Tsukki?”

Kei thought about the question for a moment. “Not,” Yamaguchi cut him off before he could start, “anything from the past. I’m talking about something from the present, something real…something tangible?”

Kei didn’t understand why it mattered whether he thought about something from the past or the present. But for the time being, he decided it wouldn’t kill him to humor Yamaguchi.

“I think lots of things are beautiful,” he said. “Perfectly solved equations, the possibilities that my lab equipment holds before I’ve even touched it, rich damp soil that I know can sustain life, the plans for the spaceships…” he trailed off. “…freckles on tan skin.”

From out of the corner of his eye, Kei saw a blush begin to creep its way up Yamaguchi’s neck.

Brown eyes rimmed by ridiculously long lashes, he continued in his head. Hair messily pulled up into a half ponytail. Smiles that were somehow different for every person they were directed towards… Smiles that were meant just for Kei.

Yamaguchi, he amended. All of him. Every detail, every inch, every part that made up the greater whole. All of it infinitely better than all the equations and spaceships put together, better even than all the books in the archives.

Yamaguchi…

The touch of a cool hand against his own made Kei jump, but he relaxed when long sure fingers came to intertwine with his nervous ones.

Neither of them spoke, and Kei didn’t really think the contact meant anything apart from the fact that they were together now, linked in a way that they had been since the day they had first met. And though Kei was scared, though he didn’t want to force anything upon Yamaguchi, he also didn’t force himself to pull away.

For this moment, Kei just wanted to be together. He just wanted to lay under a debatably beautiful mass of swirling gasses that may or may not want to kill them. Together, linked unbreakably by intertwined fingers.

…and for now, that was enough.
Kei obsessively prodded the hole in his mind. It was still strange to him, knowing something was there, but being unable to recall what it was. Not for the first time, he felt pity for those who lived like this normally, never sure they could keep their memories; always unsure they could trust the ones they had.

He was starting to become obsessed with it. Like a scab that you just couldn’t leave alone, Kei couldn’t stop picking in the hopes that, if he prodded enough, something would eventually change.

He was pretty sure it was starting to get unhealthy. But he couldn’t leave it be. Not when he thought about the challenge it posed, the door that it would open, the mystery it held. If only Kei could figure out how to unlock it.

Lost in thought, he hadn’t noticed that his feet were taking him down the familiar route to Kuroo’s lab until he was more than halfway there. As he walked, he realized how badly he wanted to tell someone about the uncertainty he was grappling with. Kei had always been good at keeping things to himself, but this time he realized it was starting to drive him crazy. The promise of what the memory held had been taking up all his spare thoughts, taunting him.

Kei had to tell someone, and he realized that he didn’t have many options. Except for Kuroo.

So, that’s where he had ended up. Standing outside of Kuroo’s lab preparing himself to either feel better, or to make things a whole lot worse. When it came to Kuroo, you could never tell which direction it was going to go.

“Hey,” he said. Kuroo jumped up from where he had been sitting at the counter going over some notes. “Kei!” he said excitedly. “Just who I wanted to see… Well, not really. But I’ll take it.”

“You’re in a weird mood” he noted, expecting Kuroo to be unhappy after the other day. But Kuroo, being Kuroo, had seemed to bounce back quickly enough.

“I need to tell you something,” Kei said, taking a seat opposite him.

“I hope it’s good… Ohh,” he purred, “are we finally going to get some solid food? It never really seemed fair that we work so hard to grow all that beautiful produce and then don’t get to eat a bite of it.”

“This has nothing to do with food,” Kei scoffed. “And please, don’t say produce like that, it makes it sound like you want to do filthy things to it.”

“Well, the news can’t be that good then, can it?” he responded.

Kei had a brief moment where he thought that telling Kuroo might be a mistake. But then he reminded himself that underneath Kuroo’s antics and boredom, there was actually a half decent human being whom Kei knew could keep his secrets.

“My Chronicle implant has been malfunctioning,” he said bluntly, not seeing any reason to sugar coat the situation.

“What?” The look on the other man’s face might have been comical if they hadn’t been talking about Kei’s faulty brain. “What do you mean?”

Kei sighed, feeling like he had explained this all too many times recently. But this time was
different, this time he wanted to tell the entire story, missing memory and all.

“It happened recently… I started off getting headaches, and then I found a memory that I can’t access.”

“What?” Kuroo repeated, only this time he sounded incredulous more than curious. Kei didn’t blame him. If the situation had been reversed, he probably wouldn’t have believed Kuroo either.

“It’s strange,” he said. “It’s like, it’s there, but at the same time it’s not.”

He watched as Kuroo’s genius mind tried to process this impossibility. “Do you think it’s really a malfunction?”

Kei shrugged, “The Chancellor doesn’t think so… he thinks it’s just stress or something.”

“You told him?” Kuroo asked disbelievingly.

“Not all of it, just that I was having headaches… not about the memory.” Kei paused, trying to get his thoughts together. “It’s driving me crazy, Kuroo. I have to know what it is.”

“Maybe we could use some kind of recall therapy,” Kuroo suggested. “You know… like they used to use in the olden days.”

Kei wasn’t very optimistic, but at this point, he was willing to try anything that might open the door that had been barricaded within his head.

He was thinking about this when Kuroo said something that surprised him, “Kei… are you sure it’s your memory?”

Kei gave him a blank stare, unsure of what he was trying to get at.

“Well,” he continued, “It’s just … Chronicle doesn’t malfunction as far as we know… what if… well… what if someone planted the memory?”

Kei frowned, “Is that even possible?”

Kuroo shrugged, “As far as I know it shouldn’t be possible for you to have some strange malfunctioning memory at all. Who’s to say someone didn’t put it there.”

Kei shrugged this off, Kuroo had a tendency to believe that everything was a conspiracy. It was due to his past no doubt, which Kei couldn’t exactly blame him for, but Kuroo was also too close to realize that not everything was a scheme plotted against them.

Kei shook his head. He didn’t hesitate. “No. It’s my memory.”

Kuroo looked at him skeptically, but Kei just shook his head. It was his memory… He didn’t know how to explain it to Kuroo, but somehow Kei just knew. The same way you knew all your memories belonged to you. It wasn’t something that was easily put into words, it was just fact… unchallengeable.

“You know,” Kuroo said in a voice that Kei never wanted to hear, “I could always take a look at it.”

That sounded like the worst idea Kei had ever heard. Everyone on this ship had basic medical training, but despite that, letting Kuroo anywhere near his head sounded like a mistake.
“I don’t know how to put this politely,” Kei said. “But no fucking way.”

Kuroo snorted. “Hint taken.”

He rolled his eyes at the other man who was so obviously making fun of him. “You know,” Kuroo said thoughtfully, dropping the fake teasing tone, “if you’re really that worried about it, you could always ask Keiji to take a look… He has access to all those fun machines and computers in his lab.”

Kei was about to rebut anything Kuroo said, but stopped himself. That actually wasn’t a horrible idea.

“Those ‘fun machines’ are state of the art,” Kei scowled, “and you’re an idiot.”

“Some call it idiocy; others call it genius… More call it genius though. I have the implant to prove it.”

“I’m done talking to you.”

“Oh, but we were just getting down to the heart of your problems.”

Kei scoffed, “We were so far from that.”

He shrugged, “You can’t expect me to solve everything, Kei…” He quipped as Kei turned to leave. “I might be brilliant, but I wasn’t trained as a therapist in the Chronicle program.”

“Keep it up and you’ll be the reason I need a therapist.”

“We could always find another way to take your mind off of it,” he said suggestively.

“Well, it would be enough of a train wreck,” Kei shot back hotly, although a part of him was glad that Kuroo was acting like his old self again. He found it strangely comforting.

Kuroo actually winked at him. Kei just turned and left.

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Kei practically bolted out of his seat when they were dismissed for the day. He wanted to get home, and he was planning on swinging by the childcare center on his way to see if he could walk with Yamaguchi.

Over the last few weeks, Kei had been working to put all that he had overheard about the Rebels behind him. And though things were still confusing with Yamaguchi, in the way that they always seemed to be when Kei thought of him these days, they had also gone back to normal. Like they had been before Kei had started to doubt everything he knew about the people he loved most.

He strode down the streets, pace quicker than was strictly necessary. “Watch it,” someone yelled at him as he practically collided with some stranger in his rush to get to Yamaguchi. He didn’t bother with an apology, couldn’t be bothered.

He wondered why he was feeling this way. It was a strange mix of happiness and anticipation, almost like excitement. It was a feeling that was usually very foreign to Kei.

His anticipation faded however when he made it to the childcare center. He may have been a bit premature in his happiness he realized, because as he stood in front of the building, he found that he had idea what to do now. Should he go in? Look for Yamaguchi? Just wait until he came out?
He was supposed to have a short shift today, but his hours were always so erratic. What if he was stuck there for the rest of the day… Should Kei just leave?

He stood awkwardly for a few moments while he tried to decide what the best course of action was. Then he realized that he probably looked like someone who was waiting for the opportune moment to kidnap some poor unsuspecting child.

Move, he told himself. He was being ridiculous.

With a sigh, he walked into the building, letting the scanner run over his wrist as he waited for the doors to open. There was a lone worker taking a break by the edge of the room. Kei walked up to her, unsure of where else to go.

“Excuse me,” he tried to sound polite as he spoke. “I’m looking for Yamaguchi, he’s one of the people who works here. Have you seen him?”

The woman looked up at him, her forehead pinched into a frown. “He left hours ago.” She looked annoyed at being bothered on her break. “Don’t know where he went.”

Kei raised an eyebrow, unimpressed with the woman. “Thanks,” he said, not meaning it in the slightest.

Once outside, Kei let his disappointment show in the small frown that played across his features. Well, there went his plans of surprising Yamaguchi. When the freckled teen had mentioned that he was going to have a short shift today, Kei hadn’t thought it would be that short.

He began to make his way home, good mood thwarted by his ruined plans. He was being ridiculous, he told himself. Yamaguchi would still be there when he got home. They would still be able to spend the evening together. That was what really mattered.

So why did he feel so very disappointed? It wasn’t Yamaguchi’s fault that their schedules didn’t match up. It was just the way things were, and neither Kei nor Yamaguchi could change that, as badly as Kei might want to sometimes.

He opened the door to their room, calling out to Yamaguchi as he did so. Kei was met with a resounding silence. “Yamaguchi,” he called again, annoyed that the other boy didn’t answer him. Kei pulled aside the curtain they used to partition off the sleeping side of the room from where they ate and worked. “Yamaguchi,” he said again, angry this time.

Kei pulled back in shock as he realized that the room was empty except for himself. He narrowed his eyes, where was Yamaguchi? He should be here. Unless that woman had been lying, the untrusting part of his brain supplied. But that was stupid, wasn’t it? What reason would she have to lie about something like that? Kei couldn’t think of a single valid reason. So then, where was Yamaguchi? He never went anywhere besides work and home; it wasn’t like there were very many options.

He could be with Akiteru, the malicious side of his brain piped up, off gallivanting with those ridiculous Rebels who got people killed for their cause. But would he really do that? Another smaller part of his brain, the pathetic needy part that he tried to pretend didn’t exist, asked if he would really leave Kei? Leave him without so much as a single word as he disappeared outside the Dome forever.

No, Kei told himself, Yamaguchi wouldn’t do that. If there was anyone in his life that Kei could be sure of, it was him. Yamaguchi was reliable and loyal to a fault. Sometimes he wished that
Yamaguchi weren’t so unconditionally loyal, that way he wouldn’t have to feel so guilty about the feelings he tried to hide from his friend.

He didn’t know how Yamaguchi did it, trusted people like that. They were so different in that regard. Kei didn’t think he had an unconditional bone in his body. To Kei, everyone had to prove themselves.

He was starting to feel a twinge of panic as he stepped outside into the warm evening air, multiple scenarios running through his head at once.

Akiteru… he had to find Akiteru.

“Tsukishima,” someone called in a monotone voice, making Kei halt in his tracks. He turned to find Keiji of all people standing in the walkway to his building. Confusion clouded Kei’s already compromised mental state.

“What are you…” he started, but Keiji didn’t wait for Kei to finish.

“They found an illegal citizen in the Dome today…”

Kei felt as fragile as glass as he watched the dark-haired boy closely, glass with a massive crack down the center that would cause the whole thing to collapse if touched in the right way.

“Tsukishima,” Keiji held his gaze steadily, “he had your chip in his arm.”

Kei’s stomach dropped so far he was pretty sure it was no longer in his body where it belonged. This was it… These were the words that he had been dreading for years, the ones that had been following him around in the back of his subconscious all this time, constantly taunting him with their possibility. They were the words of his nightmares.

He felt the world begin to sway around him, like it had only once before-on the night he had learned of his mother’s death. Death… Were they going to kill Yamaguchi? Send him back outside the Dome? Kei had no idea, as far as he knew nothing like this had ever happened before. No one had ever been stupid enough to try.

His head swam, and for a brief moment Kei wondered if Chronicle was being affected by his emotions, as unlikely as that sounded. He couldn’t think, couldn’t breathe. All he knew was that he had to find Yamaguchi.

“Where is he?” he demanded of Keiji. “Where did they take him? Where are they going to do it?”

“They’re not going to kill him,” Keiji said in his quiet voice, so calm compared to Kei’s writhing panic. “At least not yet.”

If they banished him, if they kicked him out, Kei would go too. Consequences be damned. He didn’t care, he had to find Yamaguchi.

“What does that mean?” Kei practically yelled at the other boy, anger reaching a boiling point within him.

“I’m sorry, Tsukishima…” He truly did sound sorry. “They took the boy to a labor camp.”

Crack.

Kei felt himself shatter… actually felt it as the pieces that made up who he was began to rain down
around him, until there was nothing left but fragments. Nothing but a bunch of scattered shards that used to make up Tsukishima Kei. Because he knew… He knew now that he had condemned Yamaguchi to a fate worse than death.

Kei didn’t believe in any sort of god, but if he did, now would be the time when he would ask how fate could have been so cruel. Cruel, because all those years ago, Kei had just wanted to remove Yamaguchi from the hell that he was living outside of the Dome. He had just wanted to save him from a life that was full of unknowns and hardships. Little had he known that in doing so, he had been condemning Yamaguchi to a fate much worse.

Kei should have listened to his instincts. He should have kept Yamaguchi hidden. He should have known…

Life was cruel, but that was no surprise.

Chapter End Notes

Things I like: TsukiYama, sleep, dogs.
Things I don’t like: editing this chapter.
The memory of the day that Yamaguchi had been taken away made Kei feel sick every time he saw it. It didn’t matter how many times he watched it play out, he didn’t think those feelings of shear panic he had felt when Keiji told him Yamaguchi had been taken to a forced labor camp would ever get easier to stomach.

He shouldn’t have watched the memory. He knew he shouldn’t have. Every time he did, he found himself walking around in a sort of fog for days. It made him moody. It drew him right back into that wallowing depression that had gripped him so many years ago. He felt the emotions of his teenage self as if they were still a part of him, feelings of helplessness clawing at him from the past with their writhing ropelike fingers.

Kei had never known helplessness like what he had felt back then. But though the despair over losing Yamaguchi had been new to him, it wouldn’t be the last time he felt such helplessness.

“Hey, Kei.” He was pulled out of his trance as Kuroo entered his lab. “I’ve been thinking…”

“You think that’s rude?” Kei asked. “I can do worse.”

“Believe me, I know,” he said dryly. Kuroo sauntered over to the counter, beginning to poke through some of the notes Kei had spread out for the day.

“As long as you know.”

Kuroo rolled his eyes. “What I was going to say, was the more I think about it, the more I’m convinced someone messed with your implant.”

“Kuroo,” Kei sighed. “I didn’t tell you about my implant so that you could cook up bullshit theories about aliens or some such that messed with my head.”

“Really? That’s why people usually tell me things.” He shrugged, and Kei had the desire to punch him, though he probably wouldn’t be able to hit the other man.

“Don’t be stupid, my incredibly blond, incredibly long legged friend. I don’t think it was extraterrestrial beings. That would be ridiculous… No,” Kuroo paused dramatically. “It was
obviously swashbuckling ghosts.”

Kei considered banging his head on the table in exasperation. “Kuroo, do you actually have anything helpful to say, or are you just trying to be annoying? Because I have a lot of work to get done… and if it’s the latter, you should know you’re succeeding…”

“Hmm,” Kuroo pretended to ponder it for a moment. “Actually, I wasn’t trying. Just naturally gifted I guess.”

“Ghosts did not mess with my head,” Kei said testily.

“Swashbuckling ghosts…”

“I don’t care if they were dancing a samba, they didn’t mess with my implant.”

“No,” he replied, “but someone did.”

Kei drew in a sharp breath, annoyance and indifference starting to turn to real anger.

Kuroo held up his hands. “Before you blow an artery, just listen,” he urged. “Someone did mess with your head. No,” he shushed Kei. “Think about it… Someone put Chronicle in your head, right? We know that for a fact. Well, what’s to say they didn’t go a little wild and put something else in there while they were at it?”

The anger that he had been feeling a moment ago left Kei in a rush, replaced instead by uncertainty. “So… you’re saying that when they put Chronicle in my head, they also put in some kind of hidden memory?”

“I knew genius wasn’t just a title.”

It still sounded like a conspiracy theory to Kei. After all, what would be the point? Why would anyone want to give him some hidden memory or message? His mind wandered to The Chancellor, but almost as soon as the thought had occurred to him, he dismissed it. If The Chancellor had wanted to tell him something, he would have just done it in person. There wouldn’t have been a need for all the secrecy.

For a moment, Kei thought of the group of Rebels led by the so called Little Giant. But that idea was just as ridiculous as the first. There was no way that the Rebel spies could run deep enough to infiltrate the Chronicle program. And why would they have chosen Kei anyway? Akiteru hadn’t even been involved with the group back then, and besides, how could they be sure that Kei wouldn’t give any information straight to The Chancellor when he discovered it?

Kei shook his head. It made no sense. Unless…Unless it was some kind of weapon to be used against the Rebels. Could that be possible?

He groaned aloud. Shit. Kuroo was making Kei think like him. Letting his mind run rampant without stopping to check in at logic and reason.

“What would be the point?” Kei asked skeptically. “Why would anyone hide something in my head?”

“Armageddon,” Kuroo replied without missing a beat.

“Okay, it’s time for you to go.”
“Oh, come on… I’ll be serious. I promise.”

Kei snorted. That was doubtful.

“Maybe they were trying to protect you from something,” Kuroo said. He was incessantly fiddling with a thermometer, and Kei had the sudden urge to reach out and still the other man’s fingers.


Kuroo shrugged in response. “I used to have someone I wanted to protect. It’s a powerful feeling… makes people do weird things.”

Kei thought about all that had happened with Kuroo’s childhood friend. He understood what Kuroo was getting at, how could he not? Kei had Yamaguchi after all. In fact, he knew how the other man felt more than Kuroo could ever know. The problem with that theory of course, something Kei knew to be true, was that no one in the Chronicle program had ever felt that way about Kei. Why would they?

“Or,” Kuroo said casually, returning to his normal cadence, “it’s the planted knowledge that you’re The Chancellor’s long lost son.”

Kei tuned Kuroo out as he continued to ponder his ridiculous theories. Instead, Kei was thinking about Kuroo’s suggestion to talk with Keiji about the missing memory. If Kei was going to trust anyone with a diagnostic on his Chronicle implant, it was the sullen son of The Chancellor. At least if they got a diagnostic, Kei would know once and for all if it was just a glitch in his implant, a sign that his mind was deteriorating, or something more human in origin. Maybe Keiji could figure it out for him.

“You have to admit it would explain a lot,” Kuroo said.

“I think you’re right.”

“What?” Kuroo did a double take, looking truly shocked. “You think you and Keiji were really switched at birth, and that’s why The Chancellor loves you so much?”

“What?” Kei griped, trying to retrace the steps of Kuroo’s conversation, but giving up when he realized it was pointless. “What the fuck, Kuroo? No.”

He shrugged casually, “Well, it would explain why he hates Keiji so much. Not that one needs a reason really.”

“Not about that.” Kei interjected. “About going to see Keiji and asking him to run a diagnostic on my implant.”

Kei threw the other scientist a scathing glare. “And I look nothing like The Chancellor,” he added for good measure.

“I don’t know…” Kuroo tilted his head, “If you squint a bit…”

“Shut up, Kuroo.”

“Touchy. Could be because you know something I don’t.”

“The number of things I know that you don’t is countless.” Kei tried to ignore the teasing smile that bloomed across Kuroo’s face.
“Careful, Blondie, or I might not go with you to see Keiji.”

“And why would I want that?” Kei asked.

“Simple,” he responded, “because Keiji is fucking scary.”

Kei was about to reply that Kuroo was being ridiculous, but thought better of it. There was no point really. Plus, he was right, Keiji was a bit intimidating.

“Fine,” he said in an overexaggerated tone. “You are incredibly smart, Kuroo. Your brain knows no equal in this vast universe… In fact, it’s almost as big as your ego.”

Kuroo smiled pleasantly, “Why thank you. See? Was that so hard?”

Kei just grimaced, “Harder than you’ll ever know.”

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Think logically. It was the same thing he had been repeating in his head over and over for the last hour. Sadly, no matter how many times he told himself to be rational about the situation, nothing but panic ran through his mind. All Kei seemed capable of at the moment was sitting in a corner and trying not to rip his own hair out.

Labor camp… Yamaguchi had been taken to a labor camp, and now all Kei could do was sit and fall apart.

Keiji had left hours ago, telling Kei he would let him know if he learned anything more about Yamaguchi’s whereabouts. But really, what more was there to know? Yamaguchi was gone, and there was nothing Kei could do about it.

His body felt shaky, the walls of their small living space suddenly closing in and feeling hostile in a way that they never had before. Shock, his mind supplied. He had gone into shock, and now he was left feeling empty and drained.

Kei’s breath hitched. What was this place without Yamaguchi’s warmth to fill the void he and Akiteru created simply by existing?

Kei had felt numb for a long time after his mother’s death. An emptiness he wasn’t sure he would ever be able to fill had consumed him. Losing her had altered his very being, changing him in a way that he would never be able to undo. But Yamaguchi had helped to fill some part of what his mother’s death had taken away. He had shown up, and as if by some miracle, he had taught Kei how to love again. Only, now he was being sentenced to a fate that made Kei want to spew the rations he had eaten earlier all over those fucking suffocating walls.

He had just wanted the best for Yamaguchi…

He had thought he was doing the right thing…

He had thought that he had built a family from the ashes of something that had burned down long ago…

Kei wanted to scream. He wanted to cry, to laugh, to rage. He wanted to let out every emotion he was capable of expressing in one painful breath. But he couldn’t, his body felt numb once more, as if he had reverted back to a time before Yamaguchi had miraculously thawed him from the cold.
Kei needed someone. He needed help…

He stood, his feet taking him down a side street before his brain could really comprehend where he was going. All he knew was that he had to get out of there, that he had to get out of that place where Yamaguchi’s presence lingered on everything like the sun warming a room.

But Kei knew, like a punch to the gut. He knew that soon that remaining presence would vanish too, just as Yamaguchi himself had vanished.

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He found his brother in the east sector, exactly where Akiteru’s boss said he would be. The moment his gaze landed on Kei, his expression turned to one of incredulity. “Kei… to what do I owe the pleasure? Did you miss your big brother?” He was about to say more, but stopped short when he saw the expression on Kei’s face.

Akiteru had always been annoyingly good at reading all of Kei’s subtle little shifts in mood. He had been attuned to Kei from a young age. Though Akiteru was maddening most hours of the day, he had taken on the role of parent after their mother’s death. Kei knew that Akiteru loved him deeply, and was fiercely protective, even if Kei didn’t deserve it half the time.

But as he looked at the pain evident on Kei’s face now, it wasn’t hard to see the shift from joking older brother to caring protector.

“Oh?” his brother put a reassuring hand on his shoulder, the contact jarring something within him. “What’s wrong, are you hurt? Did someone hurt you?”

All Kei could do was shake his head. “Hey,” Akiteru said softly, sounding far too much like their mother for Kei’s liking. “What’s wrong? You can tell me. You can tell me anything”

He wanted to tell Akiteru, he really did. He had a right to know after all. But standing there, looking at his brother’s concerned expression, Kei couldn’t bring himself to speak the words aloud. They were too horrible, too unthinkable; they made the situation far too real.

He opened his mouth, only to close it once more. Lost… he was lost.

“Kei, come here.” Akiteru lead him to a rock near the side of the road. “Sit down,” his brother gently guided him so that he was sitting on the rock.

Kei felt ridiculous sitting like that, long legs doubled up uncomfortably, making him look like an out of place adult at some kids table. Kei didn’t feel like an adult though, he felt more like a child, vulnerable in a way that he never liked to show in front of Akiteru.

His brother kneeled until his arms were resting on Kei’s bent knees, his head positioned just below Kei’s own. Their gazes met, one questioning and one scared.

“Kei, you have to tell me. Whatever it is… Whatever’s happened, we’ll deal with it, okay? But you have to tell me first,” his brother prompted.

Kei took a deep breath, focusing on his brother’s eyes… his mother’s eyes. He wasn’t sure if that thought was comforting or not. What would his mother say if she were here now? Would she tell him everything was going to be okay? Kei had no idea; after all, he had barely known her. All he had was a handful of memories and the knowledge that she would have done anything to save her sons.
“It’s Yamaguchi…” He finally managed to choke out, hating the words as he spoke them. He saw his brother twitch slightly, but he stayed calm while he tried to pull the full story from Kei.

“What about him?”

Kei took a deep breath, steadying himself. “They found him… I don’t know how… but they know.”

“Fuck,” Akiteru swore under his breath. “Where is he? I can get help… Just let me-”

Kei shook his head slowly, still too numb to really comprehend his brother’s words. “They took him, Akiteru… They took him to a camp.”

Confusion flooded Akiteru’s face. “No… Wh… w-what?” Kei didn’t blame him for not comprehending, it wasn’t easy to understand. The thought of Yamaguchi and labor camp didn’t mix. They were just two things that should never be synonymous with each other, should never be used in the same sentence even.

Kei watched as his brother stood and began to pace. Back and forth and back and forth he went, shoes scuffing dirt the only sound in the otherwise silence.

He saw determination on his brother’s face. They were so very different, Kei and Akiteru. Almost like opposites, he thought in a haze, as he watched Akiteru try to come up with a plan for a world that he somehow didn’t realize had already crumbled.

“Okay?”

“What?” Kei realized he hadn’t been listing to anything his brother had been saying.

“I’m going to go talk to my boss… see if I can get any more information,” Akiteru repeated. “You go home and wait for me there.”

His brother came to stand in front of him once more. “Kei?”

“Wha… oh, sure,” Kei said, still stuck in his daze. He wasn’t really paying any attention to Akiteru anymore. His brain had finally started functioning again, and Kei was beginning to form a plan of his own.

Akiteru placed one hand on his shoulder, no doubt in an attempt to be comforting. “We’ll figure this out. Don’t worry, okay? I’ll see you at home.”

Kei just nodded, hoping that his brother wouldn’t notice anything off in the way that he cast his eyes downward. He wasn’t going home, and he sure as hell wasn’t going to sit back and wait while Yamaguchi got farther and farther away from him. He had already done enough of that.

Akiteru gave Kei’s shoulder one last reassuring squeeze before turning away, calling to him as he left. “Don’t worry… everything’s going to be okay.”

Kei didn’t disagree as he watched his brother go. He was right after all, everything was going to be okay. Because Kei was going to personally make sure that it was.

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“Kei…” It was hard to miss the way the usual fondness in The Chancellor’s voice was slightly less present as he burst into his office.
“We need to talk,” he demanded. This room that had once seemed so open and inviting, now felt hostile and smothering to Kei. But he had to stay; he had to push through his feelings, because Akiteru was wrong. There was nothing someone like him could do…But Kei… Kei had learned a long time ago that a certain power came with the little device that resided inside his head. And now that device was the only hope Yamaguchi had for survival.

“We do,” The Chancellor agreed sternly. “What you did was unacceptable, Kei. I expected, and have come to expect, much more from you.”

Kei didn’t want a lecture. Maybe before Yamaguchi had been taken away he would have been ashamed of the way The Chancellor was looking down on him. He might even have been desperate to make him understand why he had done what he had done. He might have tried to justify the choices he had made, those choices that had changed everything. But now he didn’t care. Now Kei was past all that childish bullshit. Yamaguchi’s life was on the line.

“You have to order your men to give him back,” he commanded, his voice holding an edge that he had never used before.

“Kei!” there was outrage in his voice at the clear insubordination. Kei didn’t care though, he wasn’t scared of The Chancellor. The thing he was most terrified of had already happened. What could he possibly have left to lose? He already lost everything that mattered.

“Watch your tone, Son. I’ll have you know that the council wanted you pulled from the Chronicle program. It’s only because of me that you’re not being punished yourself.”

Oh, right…that…

“I don’t care,” Kei said. “Let them pull me… In fact, I’ll quit.”

The Chancellor ran a hand through inky black hair, visibly trying to calm himself. His voice lost its edge, but Kei knew him well enough to know that it was a mask, and that the irritation wasn’t really gone at all. The Chancellor could play people; it was something that Kei had always admired about him, but today he didn’t have time for it. He didn’t need bullshit lies to make him feel better.

“I know you’re emotional right now,” The Chancellor said, “but quitting doesn’t solve anything. In fact, it will only make things worse.”

“Then do something,” Kei spat. “You have the power. I know you do. Force them to bring him back.” His voice was getting dangerously close to pleading now, but he didn’t care. He would beg if he had to.

“Kei, you know I can’t do that…” The overhead light cast a strange shadow on The Chancellor’s face, making his already stern expression appear even more menacing. “He broke the rules. He doesn’t belong here. Imagine what it would look like to the public if we let him stay after finding an illegal citizen in the Dome.”

“Don’t call him that!”

The Chancellor looked confused, like Kei wasn’t making sense. Maybe he wasn’t.

“He’s a person,” Kei spat. “He’s not illegal. He’s not a thing… he’s a human being.”

“Call him whatever you want,” The Chancellor amended. “He’s still an outsider who shouldn’t have been allowed inside the Dome.”
Damn the rules that said the supplies in the Dome could only support so many citizens. Without it, without those supplies, the people left outside were domed to die. Couldn’t there be any leeway?

“I don’t care what it looks like,” Kei injected angrily. “No one has to know anyway… just bring him back… I…I’m begging you.” Kei was pretty sure he had never sounded so pathetic in his life, broken in a way that his childhood self would be ashamed of.

“Kei…” The Chancellor had never spoken to him that way, commanding and stern, all traces of fatherly affection gone from his voice. “Go home.”

“No!” Kei shouted. “I swear to God, Akaashi, if you don’t get him back I will find some way to take this thing out of my head.”

The Chancellor’s posture stiffened, Kei could tell he was taken aback by the lengths Kei was willing to go to get Yamaguchi back. “You would really do all that for him?” he asked. And then, after a weighted moment, “Who is he to you?”

Kei opened his mouth to reply, but nothing came out. What was he supposed to say to that, how did he explain what Yamaguchi meant to him? He was constantly following Kei around, he was stupidly optimistic, not to mention nice to everyone, he was annoying, perfect, infuriating, beautiful, kind, and he meant everything to Kei. How did you put that into words? Everything… It was such a huge and abstract concept, Kei didn’t know where to begin, there was just too much.

“Kei?” The Chancellor seemed to have caught on to his confusion, taking the opportunity to use it to his advantage.

“I know how hard this can be,” he let The Chancellor move closer to him to rest a hand on his shoulder. “Did you know that Keiji’s mother was an outsider too?”

“No,” Kei said weekly, although he had guessed based on what Keiji had done for him with the chip reading device back when he was trying to get Yamaguchi inside.

The Chancellor nodded. “It killed Keiji when he found out. He used to sneak out to see her, but I couldn’t bring her in, you understand? Not even her… I couldn’t even break the rules for Keiji’s own mother, as much as I may have wanted to.”

Kei wondered why Keiji himself was an exception to the rule if his mother had never been inside the Dome, but he didn’t say anything. He thought it was better just to let it go.

“I really think you should go home and get some rest. Maybe we can talk about this a bit more when you’re thinking a little clearer.”

He was saying no, Kei realized… He wouldn’t help Yamaguchi. After everything Kei had done for him, for the program… He didn’t care that The Chancellor had gotten him off the hook, cleared his name from a crime that, when it came down to it, Kei had committed. He knew that if he had been anyone else he probably would have been killed…

He should be grateful.

He should be thanking The Chancellor.

But all he could think of was Yamaguchi, and how he was beyond Kei’s reach now, beyond his help.

“Get some rest, Kei.”
In his daze, Kei thought he might have nodded, might have spoken and told The Chancellor that he would try to rest. He couldn’t be sure though, on the inside he was too busy breaking all over again. That was it. The Chancellor had been his last shot at getting Yamaguchi back, and now that last hope was crushed along with the rest of him.

Kei was set adrift, helpless and alone, cut off from anyone who could help him... It sounded easy, didn’t it? Get some rest. Kei knew the truth. He knew that it was the most insurmountable task in the world. Get some rest... Kei was pretty sure he would never truly rest again.

"You want me to what?" Keiji said, his normally soft voice holding a strange edge to it as the three of them sat in Keiji’s lab. It was an impressive room, stocked with the most technologically advanced equipment on the ship. Keiji had computers here that they hadn’t even had access to back on earth. Kei was a bit envious to be honest, but he supposed being directly related to The Chancellor had its perks.

Kuroo had made himself at home upon entering the workspace, he was sitting up on one of the counters, back resting against a wall, long legs draped out in front of him. He looked like he didn’t have a care in the world. The same couldn’t be said for Kei.

“Careful there,” Kuroo said slyly. “You almost showed some emotion just then. Well, about something other than Bokuto’s ass, that is.”

Keiji shot him a deadly glare. Kuroo ignored it. “You know, if it weren’t for the ass thing, I might not even believe you’re human.”

“Let me guess,” said Kei, butting in on their conversation. “He’s an extraterrestrial ghost here to observe us and plant memories in our heads. Oh, and he may or may not be a swashbuckler in his spare time.”

Kuroo pointed a finger at him happily, “Yes!”

“Why is he here?” Keiji asked. “Why are you here?”

“I ask that question all the time,” Kei replied.

Kuroo shrugged casually, unconcerned with the question. “Kei and I are bonded by our mutual tragic pasts,” he said.

“We all have tragic pasts, Kuroo” Keiji said blandly.

“Oh really, son of The Chancellor? What was it like living with the most powerful man on earth, huh? Knowing that everyone you loved would get on the departing ships no problem?”

Kei thought of everything that had happened with Keiji’s mother and pity coursed through him. Kei knew that Keiji was anything but spoiled, and yet, the other man had never cared if he came off that way to other people.

“Can we please stay on topic?” Kei asked, attempting to keep things from escalating any more than they already had.

Keiji still looked ticked off, or at least, Kei thought he did. Honestly, it was hard to tell with Keiji.

“Fine. Now, you want me to what?” he repeated.
“Open up his brain, find out how someone can be that much of an asshole. It’s really important research. The knowledge could mean the difference between life and death for the human race.”

Keiji and Kei both shot Kuroo angry glares. Kuroo didn’t seem to mind overly much however. He looked proud of himself as he sat there.

“I want you to run a diagnostic on my implant…” Kei explained. “Take some tests, find out if we can see why, or how it’s malfunctioning.”

“Tsukishima … did you talk to my father?”

“Yeah,” he answered, “I did. He said that there’s nothing to worry about… but he’s wrong, Keiji. I can feel it. And now I’m asking for you to help me figure out what it is.”

“Yeah,” Kuroo piped up, “me too. Can’t have poor little Kei going all batshit on us.”

Kei shot him a you’re-not-helping-look, but again, he didn’t seem to notice, or care.

“Come on, Keiji,” he urged, “it will help us understand these things in our heads a bit better. Plus, you’ll get to run tests on a living specimen. It’s a win-win.”

“Yeah,” Kuroo interjected. “And Bokuto likes Kei… if you don’t do it, I’ll tell him to withhold sex.”

Kei raised an eyebrow, “We live on two separate spaceships orbiting earth…”


“What do you think they’re doing?” Kei couldn’t help but interject, “the only video feed connecting to the civilian fleet is in the common room. Which we all have access to.” He raised his eyebrows. “Not everyone’s as much of an exhibitionist as you are.”

“I don’t know, the common room is supposed to be for socializing, and I’m pretty sure there’s no one in there when he’s ‘using’ it.” Kuroo waggled his eyebrows at them suggestively.

“I’ll do it if he shuts up.” Keiji sounded matter-of-fact as he glared at Kuroo.

Kei felt relief wash over him. He had hoped Keiji would agree to help, but you couldn’t be too sure when it came to The Chancellor’s son. Better not to get your hopes up too soon.

“See,” Kuroo smirked. “I knew I would be helpful.”

Kei groaned. Well, Kuroo was nothing if not sure of himself.

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Kei lay awake in a haze, the crack that he had been staring at on the ceiling had long ago lost its shape and gone blurry, making his eyes hurt. He wanted to take off his glasses and send the fracture into oblivion once and for all, but even that sounded like too much effort. He had been grasping at the straws of some much-needed rest for what felt like hours. He couldn’t sleep though, hadn’t really for days. A constant loop of regrets was swirling around in his head, making it impossible to do anything but wallow in his own misery.

He searched through his memories, attempting to find the moment where it had all gone wrong. A
point in time where Kei could have stopped them from taking him, where he could have kept Yamaguchi safe.

But all he could find was his own arrogance in thinking that they wouldn’t find Yamaguchi if he got a job. Time had passed, years had passed, and Kei had thought they were safe…

…He had been wrong… so very wrong. How could he have been so stupid?

It had been five days since Yamaguchi had been taken to the labor camp, and Kei was a mess. Heavy bags sat under his eyes, his clothes were dirty and wrinkled, and he had hardly eaten anything for days.

It felt like a physical pain. Knowing Yamaguchi was out there, alive and suffering, but try as he might, there was nothing Kei could do to help him. He didn’t even really know where the camp was located, just that it was far away from all three Domes.

Akiteru had been missing since the first night Yamaguchi had been taken. His brother hadn’t gotten any useful information from his boss, and now Kei assumed that he was off with his Rebel friends, trying to come up with some reckless plan that would never work.

Akiteru hadn’t told him anything about the Rebels specifically… But Kei knew… He always knew.

He didn’t hold any hope that they would somehow be capable of discovering where Yamaguchi was being held. The Rebels had no real power, and Yamaguchi was gone. Far beyond any of their reach now.

Kei had been lost before he had found Yamaguchi, wandering around with a mechanical purpose, no heartbeat behind anything he had done. But then Yamaguchi had shown up, and Kei had realized that his world didn’t have to be monochromatic, it could be a wash of colors, each brighter and more vibrant than the last. But even those new vibrant colors paled compared to the contrast between tan skin and freckles.

He was everything… And now Kei felt like he was lost once more. Thrown back into the blackness that had become foreign to him over the years.

Sometimes he thought that if it weren’t for Yamaguchi, he and Akiteru wouldn’t have a relationship at all anymore. Whether he was aware of it or not, Yamaguchi may have saved Kei’s bond with his brother. He had definitely served as a bandage to a wound that Kei had feared was on a path to bleeding out and becoming unfixable.

It felt like where Yamaguchi had been ripped away, there was an even bigger, more all-encompassing hole. And Kei didn’t know how to fix it. Didn’t even know where to begin.

He had been working in the lab, but nothing seemed to make sense anymore. Equations and experiments didn’t hold the same wonder they once had. Instead, they seemed like a chore, mindless and tiresome in their pointlessness.

Kei was roused from his thoughts when he heard a knock on the door. He had no idea who it could be. Akiteru wouldn’t knock, and Kei didn’t have any friends. It could be one of his instructors, here to question why his progress had been slipping so much in the last few days. But why would they come here? Kei was going to the lab today anyway, why wouldn’t they just wait to talk to him until then?

When he opened the door, Kei was greeted by the last person he expected to see standing in the
threshold of his room. “Chancellor,” Kei said, more than a little confused.

The Chancellor had only ever been to his apartment on one other occasion, and that had been to inform him of his mother’s death. A brief panicked thought of Akiteru flashed through Kei’s mind, but he quickly quieted it. He didn’t think The Chancellor would be here if it had anything to do with Akiteru.

“Kei,” he said, stepping into the room without waiting to be ushered in. “We need to talk.”

Kei took a tentative step back. He didn’t know what The Chancellor wanted to talk about, but it probably wasn’t anything good. They hadn’t spoken since Kei had confronted him five days ago, and while the two of them not speaking for a few days was by no means out of the ordinary, there was definitely more of a strain on their relationship than there ever had been before. It was a weird unspoken thing, where Kei felt a sort of distance between them that he had never experienced with The Chancellor until now. It was strange, and Kei wasn’t quite sure how to act around him anymore.

When he remained quiet, The Chancellor took it upon himself to initiate the conversation. “Kei, you know I think of you as a son… I’ve tried to be there for you since you lost your own parents.”

The way he said it made it sound like Kei had simply misplaced his mother, not like she had been crushed in a freak accident working in one of his factories.

“That’s why I want you to understand that I’m worried about you. I’ve heard from your instructors that you haven’t been yourself lately.”

Kei just blinked at him, unsure of where this was going. Maybe he would be pulled from the program after all…

“I came here today, because I care about you deeply. And I’ve realized that if you feel so profoundly about this boy, then I would be willing to negotiate with you.”

Kei blanched. This was not what he had been expecting. He hadn’t thought, hadn’t dared to hope. Of course he would be willing to negotiate; he was pretty sure he would be willing to give anything to get Yamaguchi back.

“What do you want me to do?” he asked bluntly, attempting to hide the relief that was coursing through his body and making him feel lightheaded. It had worked; he was going to get Yamaguchi back.

“You’d have to stay in the Chronicle program.” The Chancellor leveled him with a serious gaze. “No more of this moping, you understand? You’d have to work as hard as you can to secure our future.”

That was easy, Kei thought. He had already been willing to do that. He would give everything he had. Anything… If he could just get Yamaguchi back.

The Chancellor wasn’t done however, and Kei noticed his gray eyes narrow ever so slightly as he said, “And, there is one other thing… I’d need you to find out where the ‘self-proclaimed’ Rebels are located.”

“What!” the exclamation slipped out before Kei could stop it. Fear pumped though him once more. What did he think Kei knew? Did he think that Kei was somehow a part of that group, a traitor to the Domes?
“I don’t… I-I can’t…”

“I’m sorry, Kei,” he said calmly, “I didn’t mean to imply that you had any affiliation with that vile group of outlaws. But if you think we don’t know that your brother has been getting in contact with one of them, you are sorely mistaken.”

Kei’s gut twisted… They knew about Akiteru… of course they knew about Akiteru. How could he have been so naïve as to believe they wouldn’t be monitoring that kind of activity?

“Chancellor, I-I can explain…” Could he? How was he supposed to get Akiteru out of this?

“No, Kei. Like I said… that’s not why I’m here. In fact, I think that we can both agree that this is an ample opportunity that we must take advantage of.”

Kei knew what he was going to ask before he said the words… After all, he was right. If they wanted to find out where the band of Rebels was located, his brother was a wealth of information just waiting to be tapped.

“What I want is for you to gather all the information you can from your brother, then relay it directly back to me. He’ll never suspect you, Kei… You’ll be able to get all the information we need.”

“And tell you where they are?” he asked, though he already knew the answer.

The Chancellor nodded, “Exactly. The so called ‘Little Giant’ is a menace to everything that we’ve built here. He must be brought down, Kei. You’ll be doing everyone a great service.”

Kei thought about what The Chancellor was asking of him. It was true that he had no love for the Rebel group; they stood for the opposite of everything that Kei believed. So why did it feel so wrong?

A picture of Akiteru popped into his head, and Kei knew what was so hard about the decision. By making this deal, would Kei be substituting Akiteru’s life for Yamaguchi’s? Kei didn’t think he could live with that.

He felt sick. “Akiteru?” he asked.

“Your brother will be fine.” The Chancellor said. “I assure you, he will have our protection in all of this.” He looked pointedly at Kei. “We’re interested in the Little Giant, Kei… Not your brother.”

Even if Kei wasn’t bargaining with Akiteru’s life, he knew that if he did this his brother would never forgive him. The question now was whether or not Kei could live with that. He thought he could, if it meant that both Akiteru’s and Yamaguchi’s lives would be spared.

Wasn’t that the best option that could come out of all this? Kei worked desperately to convince himself that it was, even though he felt like something was eating him from the inside out.

“Okay,” he said slowly, ignoring the unsettling feeling that was waging a war inside his gut. “If you can promise that you’ll bring him back unharmed, and that whatever happens, Akiteru will be left out of it… That you won’t hurt him…”

“You have my word.” He sounded like the fatherly figure Kei was used to as he spoke.

Kei drew in a deep breath. “Then I’ll do whatever you ask.”
The Chancellor smiled at him warmly, exactly how he used to when Kei would tell him about a breakthrough he had made in the lab. Like he was a proud father smiling at his son. “You’re making the right decision.”

Kei nodded in acknowledgment. And though he knew that the offer was generous, and that he was getting everything that he wanted at the price of a group whom he despised, he couldn’t help the feelings of unease churning within him. He was backed into a corner. And Kei had the sneaking suspicion that, though he was escaping pain now, it would catch up to him eventually.

But that was the problem with being backed into a corner. When it came down to it, you didn’t really have a choice, did you?

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It wasn’t until the next night that Akiteru made his way home. Kei was sitting on his bed immersed in a memory, when he walked into the room, determination written all over his face.

“Hey, Kei…” He looked like he was ready to fight an army, a stupid sacrificial battle Kei knew he would lose. Sometimes when the odds were stacked that high against you, it really was better just to give up. “Sorry I’ve been gone so long. But I’ve been working on it, and I think that-”

“Yamaguchi’s coming home.” Kei cut Akiteru off before he could finish telling him about a plan he wanted nothing to do with.

“What…?” his brother looked taken aback. “What are you talking about?”

“I took care of it…” He ignored the shock and mistrust evident on his brother’s face. Mistrust that Kei knew was warranted. “I talked to The Chancellor… He’s coming home. They already sent word to the camp.”


When he looked at his brother, Kei was met by the face of a parent instead the older sibling that should have been looking back at him. He knew how much Akiteru loved him, how much he loved Yamaguchi. He would have done anything for them, and even now, he was just as worried for Kei’s wellbeing as he was for Yamaguchi’s.

Kei felt a rush of guilt sweep over him at what he had promised to do. He knew how badly it would hurt Akiteru when the Rebels were dealt with. It would kill him, and Kei would be the one to drive the knife down. He might not be holding the knife himself, but he would be the force behind the blow.

But then he reminded himself that it was the only way, and that they would both be safe if he kept his promise to The Chancellor. If they were both safe, then Kei felt like he could deal with whatever else life threw at him.

“Nothing happened,” he said flatly, intent on keeping his tone neutral. “I just threatened to have Chronicle removed.”

“What!” Akiteru was struck speechless by what Kei was saying. He knew his brother didn’t believe he was capable of such things.

“I said that if he didn’t bring Yamaguchi back, then I would find a way to take Chronicle out of my head.”
It wasn’t really a lie. He knew that Akiteru wasn’t buying his story though, he could practically see the skepticism rolling off of him in waves. Kei would have to do better.

“He said that he would be watching me though,” he added, “and that if I put one foot out of line again, he’ll send Yamaguchi back without hesitation.” And then, to lay it on extra thick, because he still looked a bit perplexed, Kei said, “I guess you were right… When it comes down to it, I am an asset he’s not willing to lose.”

Akiteru seemed to hesitate for a moment, caught between lingering skepticism and the need to be right about The Chancellor. Eventually, the latter won out though, because he moved to envelop Kei in a hug. “I’m sorry, Kei. But… hey, at least we get him back, right?”

Kei thought about resisting the hug or squirming away, but he figured he could give in to Akiteru just this once.

“Yeah,” he said, realizing that he was taller than his brother now. When had that happened? “It feels strange…” Kei couldn’t help the vulnerability that slipped into his voice. “Like I sold myself or something…” Like I sold us both, is what he wanted to say. “But you’re right, he’s coming back.” Kei wasn’t even lying anymore, he did feel that way, and Akiteru could see it on his face.

Akiteru held him tighter, and again Kei had to resist the urge to pull away. “You did the right thing.” He looked pointedly at Kei with the same golden eyes they shared, the only trait of their mother’s that Kei had inherited. “I’m proud of you. And whatever happens, we’ll get through this together.”

“Wow…” Kei couldn’t help the sarcasm that slipped into his voice, a defense against the emotions that were creeping in at him from all sides. “Who would have thought that it would take threatening a neurosurgical procedure to make you proud…? Guess I should have done that years ago…”

That’s what Kei said aloud. But inside, inside he couldn’t ignore the thoughts swirling around about the real reason The Chancellor had agreed to bring Yamaguchi back. If Akiteru knew what had really happened, if he knew what Kei had promised, proud wouldn’t be the word to describe how he was feeling.

When they finally pulled apart, Akiteru ruffled Kei’s hair just like he had done when Kei was eight years old. “Always the same old, Kei,” he said teasingly.

“Well, one of us had to be the smart sibling… Keep us alive and all that…”

Akiteru half laughed half scoffed, “You’re just jealous because I got the looks.”

“You always were the vain one,” Kei agreed.

“Oi, watch it Little Brother,” he poked Kei in the shoulder. “Don’t you know that sass will get you nowhere.”

Kei leveled his brother with his trademark glare, “Actually, you’re wrong. Sass will get you nowhere… but seeing as I’m so much better at it-”

Akiteru cut him off, smiling a big genuine smile that Kei hadn’t seen since before Yamaguchi had been taken. “He’s coming home,” he said. “You did it, Kei.”

“Yeah,” Kei agreed, letting himself be happy and content in the knowledge that they would all be together again soon… “He’s coming home.”
Kei sat in Keiji’s lab, idly listened to the whirring of some unknown machine as they prepared for the examination. The other scientist worked gracefully around him, hooking him up to various wires and machines as Kei sat waiting. The bareness of the lab reminded him of just how unfeeling this whole ship was.

“So, is this going to hurt?” It wasn’t Kei who was asking, but Kuroo. The man was leaning against the far wall, as if he were attempting to hold it up instead of the other way around. Kei wasn’t even positive why he was here to be honest. Part of him suspected it was because Kuroo was bored.

“You don’t say,” Kuroo said blandly.


Kuroo held up his hands. “Hey, I can’t help it. It’s not my fault I bear the burden of all this,” he gestured suggestively to himself, making a strange satisfied humming noise as he did. Both Kei and Keiji ignored him.

“Okay,” said Keiji. “We’re just going to start with the basics. First I’ll hook you up to the computer and run a diagnostic on the actual implant. If that doesn’t work… Well, then it may get more painful from there.”

“I’ll hold your hand,” Kuroo offered.

“If you want to lose it,” Kei shot back irritably.

He thought of the missing memory once more. He needed to understand what it was, why he couldn’t access it. Kei would take any amount of pain if he could only find out what it was his mind was hiding from him.

“It might feel a bit weird though,” Keiji warned. “It will probably help if you access a memory. It won’t feel so strange that way, and my equipment will be more likely to pick up any abnormalities in how your implant functions.”

Kei nodded. Easy enough.

He really hoped this worked, hoped it would give him a better idea of what was actually going on in his head. Kei needed answers, and he was pretty sure this was the only way he was going to get them. If it ended up failing, he wasn’t sure what the next step would be, but he would think about that later. If worst came to worst.

“Ready?” Kei asked when Keiji seemed to be done fiddling with the wires attached to his head. “Whenever you are,” he replied swiftly, tapping his fingers on a keyboard that was hooked up to his wall-screen.

Kuroo came to stand next to him, and despite his blasé attitude about this whole plan, Kei could see worry etched on to the other man’s face. He knew that Kuroo was nervous about what they might find if this worked.

Kei closed his eyes, the feeling of being hooked up to all the wires strange in the otherwise normal routine. He searched through his mind for a memory, stopping when he came upon the one he was
looking for.

The last thing he heard before he slipped into the familiar surroundings of his past was Kuroo’s voice, soft in his ear.

“Make it a good one…” he whispered.

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A warm breeze blew through his hair, ruffling the blond strands that Kei kept deliberately short so as not to get in the way while he worked.

Living inside the Dome, sometimes Kei forgot that there were still things such as breezes… Sure, he knew about the mass amount of acidic rain that fell, or the uncontrollable storms that raged across the barren lands. But the Domes protected them from all that. For the time being at least, weather wasn’t something that affected them directly. It was theoretical to Kei… something to be studied, along with things like quantum physics and mathematical equations.

But the Dome also sheltered them from less threatening things such as breezes, and now that gust of wind felt just as foreign on Kei’s skin as the feel of rain, or the touch of soft grass beneath his fingertips.

His instructors had always said that earth was like a system made up of smaller subsystems, each working together in their own way to support life here on earth. If you were to destroy one part of those smaller subsystems, then suddenly the whole thing could collapse… Like one giant house of cards.

Well, their house had collapsed a long time ago, and soon they would have nowhere to live.

“Hey, cheer up,” Akiteru said. He stood next to Kei, somehow looking more comfortable out here than he did inside the Dome.

They were waiting for Yamaguchi outside. His transport was supposed to be arriving today, and both he and Akiteru had gotten permission to leave the Dome to meet him when it arrived.

Kei knew he should be happy. And he was…. Really. But…But he was also weirdly nervous for some reason that he couldn’t quite explain.

Part of him was worried that what short time Yamaguchi had spent in that godforsaken camp would be visible in the way he moved now… That he would be damaged in some way that neither of them could fix. The thought terrified him.

Or, what if things were different now? Would Yamaguchi blame Kei for everything that had happened, everything he had gone through. Not only in the last week either, but his whole life… Kei was a stain on the lives of everyone he interacted with, and recently it seemed like the people closest to him were the ones being affected the most.

He listened absently as his brother babbled beside him, something about how good it would be to have Yamaguchi back in the apartment again. Kei was barely listening, but he couldn’t help noting the fact that Akiteru was hardly ever spending nights in the apartment anyway. It seemed like he was gone far more than he was home these days. The thought was a bitter one.

Kei knew he had no real reason to feel so angry. But he couldn’t help it, he was stressed, and everything felt like it was closing in around him… The choices he was making, the deal with The Chancellor, the emotions that were bubbling just under the surface of his skin. Kei wished he could
go back to a time when he didn’t care about anything but Chronicle and his academic research. It had been a cold unfeeling life, but at least back then he had always known where he stood. Now it felt as if he was on a river, jumping from stone to stone, and that at any minute he could lose his footing, plunging to the unknown waters below…

He really needed to talk to Yamaguchi right now.

“Kei!” Akiteru said excitedly, pointing to a speck in the distance, “it’s them!”

Kei’s stomach flipped, but whether out of nervousness or anticipation, he didn’t know.

As the truck got closer, Kei could tell that it was an old military vehicle, equipped to transport prisoners. It was probably a remnant left over from the Oceanic Wars. Kei hadn’t known there were any vehicles like that left in existence. As it drew closer, he absently wondered how the hell they managed to power it, especially considering the distances that they supposedly had to travel to get to the camps.

All thoughts of fuel were wiped from his mind however, as the vehicle came to a stop in front of him and his brother, and a tall gruff looking man jumped down from the front seat.

He eyed the two brothers warily. Kei knew they must look sparkling clean next to the man’s rugged and dirt stained appearance.

“Who’re you?” he asked. “Didn’t think I was supposed to be meeting anyone.”

“Akiteru,” his brother stepped forward and offered the man his hand. “We’re here to meet Yamaguchi.”

The man just stared at him blankly, not taking the pale outstretched hand that Akiteru was offering. He narrowed his eyes suspiciously at Akiteru, huffing out a loud breath in what Kei guessed was irritation. “Don’t know their names, Kid… I just transport em. They’re just cargo to me… Though, can’t say I’ve ever brought one back before.”

Kei felt physically ill standing there looking at the man. It took every ounce of willpower he had not to run over there and throw the doors open to get Yamaguchi out of that thing himself. He was so close now, he could feel it as if it were a magnetic pull, this jerk was the last thing standing in his way.

The man made no move towards the truck however, and Kei felt his patience waning with every unnecessary second that passed.

“Not very smart, are you?” he asked angrily. “You probably wouldn’t even notice if your vehicle was filled with rocks instead of people.”

The man bristled, eyeing Kei like he was the filth plastered all over his boots. “You got a problem you little fucker?”

“Funny” Kei said coldly. “You’re the one who looks small from where I’m standing.”

He wanted Yamaguchi back. He wanted him as far away from that man as they could get.

Akiteru must have sensed his uneasiness, because he threw out a hand to hold Kei back. A smile that Kei could mark as fake played across his lips. “We’re just here to meet the boy you’re transporting, we don’t want any trouble.”
“Tell that to the tall one,” the man gestured angrily at Kei.

“Yes, Tall One…” Akiteru said, looking pointedly at Kei as if to say, ‘don’t fuck this up.’ “All we want is to get our friend back, right?” he prompted.

Kei ground his teeth together, summoning all his willpower to remain calm as he spoke. “Right.” And then, because he couldn’t help himself, he muttered “idiot,” under his breath.

Akiteru just plastered that same fake smile across his face again, aiming it at the man in front of them. Kei honestly had no idea how his brother did it. All he could think about was how pathetic the man was.

The driver walked over to the truck, mumbling to himself about ‘entitled brats.’ But as he unlocked the door, all thoughts of the vile man fled from Kei’s mind, as he realized that he was about to see Yamaguchi again. Everything he had done was for this moment.

Suddenly, Kei wasn’t sure what to do with his body. His limbs all felt cumbersome and disconnected, his hands fidgeting at his side. Should he go over to the door? Wait here? What?

He had to remind himself to take deep breaths.

He should probably just wait here. Be patient. Wait for Yamaguchi to-

Yamaguchi stepped out of the truck into the hazy morning light, and all previous thoughts Kei had fled from his mind in a rush. Before he could really comprehend what was happening, he was running to close the distance between the two of them. Somewhere close to the halfway point, he was embarrassed to notice that tears had started to prickle at the corners of his eyes.

Kei didn’t cry. He wasn’t sure he could recall a time he ever had. If anything, it was when he was so young that he hadn’t had Chronicle yet. He hadn’t even cried when he had found out that his mother was dead.

He had always preferred to keep his feelings to himself. Sure, he felt anger and sadness and fear so intense that it threatened to paralyze him at times. But he had always tried to keep those things locked up, it never did any good telling people anyway. What could others do to change what Kei was feeling?

But now as he collided with Yamaguchi, arms wrapping around his slight waist, shoulders knocking into each other, Kei couldn’t help the tears that leaked past his glasses and slipped silently down his cheeks.

“Tsukki,” Yamaguchi murmured to him softly, hands rising to brush the tears from Kei’s face. “Tsukki…” His fingers ghosted across Kei’s jaw, his cheekbones, up into his hair… “It’s okay… I’m here… I’m here.”

Kei noted the ridiculousness of the fact that Yamaguchi was the one comforting him instead of the other way around, but he didn’t say anything, he couldn’t. He couldn’t soothe Yamaguchi’s worries the way Yamaguchi was doing for him…

Kei didn’t have that trait that came so naturally to Yamaguchi. The kindness, the gentleness, the compassion that let him understand others so wholly.

He deserved better, deserved everything Kei wasn’t. Warm, and open, and comforting…and everything Yamaguchi was.
Kei thought he saw tears pricking at the corners of Yamaguchi’s eyes too, as he brought Kei’s head down so that their foreheads met, cutting off the rest of the world so that it was just Kei and Yamaguchi standing on the barren dusty land by themselves. Just two living breathing organisms amongst a backdrop of death.

Yamaguchi was still murmuring incomprehensibly against Kei’s skin, and Kei thought that if they never moved, it would be too soon for him.

Yamaguchi was covered in filth, but for once Kei didn’t care. He had one long gash across his cheek, which Kei lifted his fingers to brush over lightly. He looked thin, which wasn’t abnormal, but still sent a shudder down Kei’s spine. Despite these things, despite all of it, Kei knew that the worst scars were probably the ones he couldn’t see, the ones that you couldn’t bandage so easily. The ones that you couldn’t just sew back together.

Kei had no idea what those camps were really like. But he could imagine, and imagining what Yamaguchi had gone through, even if it was just for a short time, physically hurt him. Thinking about that place made him cling to Yamaguchi tighter.

He didn’t speak. He still couldn’t. And besides, he didn’t need to say anything for Yamaguchi to understand how much Kei had missed him, how much he had needed to get him back.

This whole time Akiteru had been standing off to the side, giving them some space, allowing them some time for just the two of them. Kei was grateful.

He didn’t let go of Yamaguchi, he hid his face in the other boy’s neck, trying to drown out everything but the feel of the other boy’s body against his own. Kei hardly even noticed when the man got in the truck and, without so much as another word, drove away.

Eventually, when he had deemed enough time had passed, Akiteru joined them too, engulfing them both in a tight hug.

This was family, Kei thought. As the three of them stood there holding on to something they hoped would never be out of reach again. These were the people he loved most, back in his arms where they belonged. Kei didn’t even care that it was stupidly sappy, or that it was emotional in a way that he preferred never to touch. They were together… They were safe…

Yamaguchi was back, and right then, that was all that mattered.

Kei was truly grateful that Chronicle would capture every second of what was happening. He knew he would always be able to go back to this moment in time, that he would always be able to experience the happy feelings of standing here with Yamaguchi and his brother. It made Kei feel safe, feel loved, feel complete. Already he could sense the blackness from the days prior beginning to wisp away like smoke in the air. Kei imagined he could see it, spiraling away from his body where it mixed with the already toxic atmosphere.

Just one more human leaving behind sickness wherever they stepped.

“I’m here now…” Yamaguchi whispered. “Everything’s going to be fine. I promise…”

There was no way Yamaguchi could promise that. Kei knew as much as he stood there with the warm breeze blowing though his hair, made even warmer by the body heat radiating off the two people embracing him. Even so, it was a nice sentiment. One that Kei wanted to cling to as tightly as he was clinging to Yamaguchi.

No, Yamaguchi couldn’t promise that everything was going to be fine in the future. But that was
okay. Because for now at least, everything was good, and maybe that was enough.

In fact, maybe it was more than enough.

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That night the three of them had all ended up piled on the floor where Yamaguchi usually slept. Akiteru had fallen asleep about twenty minutes ago, his head resting comfortably on Yamaguchi stomach. They were doing their best not to wake him as they spoke softly, their words barely audible, a soft cadence swallowed up by the blackness that surrounded them almost as soon as they were spoken. Yamaguchi had ended up with his head resting on Kei’s thigh, something Kei liked the feeling of immensely. He had to actively restrain himself from running his hand through Yamaguchi’s messy brown hair, tousling the strands that Kei knew would be soft as silk.

They didn’t talk about Yamaguchi’s time spent in the camp, Kei didn’t think that either of them was ready for that just yet. It would come, but for now they were content to bask in the sleepy closeness that held no nightmares. Instead, they spoke about random things. They discussed Akiteru, and what Kei was working on in the lab. Kei listened as Yamaguchi whispered about dinosaurs, and stars, and all things safe.

When the night had worn on to an unknown hour, Kei’s own eyes began to feel heavy with sleep. Satisfied with the reassurance of Yamaguchi’s body heat next to his, and the soft lull of his voice whispered into his ear, Kei let his eyes close. He was sad when Yamaguchi’s tone changed to that of a more serious one.

“Thanks, Tsukki,” he said softly.

Kei knew what the thanks was for, and yet, he felt like he should be the one thanking Yamaguchi. He always felt like he should be thanking Yamaguchi. Kei was the one who was hard to deal with, he was the one who pushed people away and held his emotions to his chest like a possessive child. He was the one who normally kept people an arm’s length away, so that there was no chance they could shatter his foundation that had begun to crack a long time ago.

But that was the nice thing about being with Yamaguchi. When Kei was with him, he didn’t feel so fragile. Yamaguchi had always handled Kei with care, holding him so that he didn’t rupture the fissures and cracks that ran along Kei’s being. Yamaguchi made Kei feel like maybe, just maybe, it wouldn’t be so bad to let people in every once and a while.

“You don’t have to thank me,” he replied softly. “I would do it a hundred times over. More even.”

Kei couldn’t see Yamaguchi’s face in the dark, but if he could, he knew the other boy would be smiling, his freckles shifting as his nose scrunched up out of happiness. And though it scared him, Kei knew that what he said had been true, he would do it all over again. Not just the deal with The Chancellor either, but everything. Sneaking Yamaguchi into the Dome, giving the other boy his chip, hiding him from The Chancellor, all of it was worth it if it ended like this with Yamaguchi’s head resting on his leg.

Silence encompassed them for a few moments, and Kei wondered if Yamaguchi too had fallen asleep. But then he spoke once more, breaking the hush that had settled over them. “So… what happens now?”

Kei didn’t need time to ponder the question, he already knew the answer. “Now,” he said, “we try to move on. It’s all we can do. I go back to the lab…you go back to work.”
“But…”

“You’re getting a new chip… By this time tomorrow you’ll officially be a registered resident of Dome-1. You’ll no longer be considered an illegal citizen.” Kei thought about the way The Chancellor had said that word. Illegal…It was hard to fathom, the thought that a person, that Yamaguchi, a living breathing being could be considered illegal.

He heard Yamaguchi draw in a sharp breath. “No more hiding?” he asked tentatively.

“No more hiding,” Kei confirmed.

“That’s good,” he said sleepily, “because I’m shit at hiding.”

That was probably true, Yamaguchi had once tried to hide behind a pole.

“Tsukki,” he whined. “That’s when you’re supposed to tell me that I’m excellent at many things, hiding being one of my many talents.

Kei shrugged, “Akiteru is better at hiding than you, and that’s saying something.”

Yamaguchi giggled, “That’s probably true. But it doesn’t matter now, right?”

Once more, Kei reveled in the feeling of having the two people he loved most together and safe, the shadows behind Yamaguchi’s eyes beginning to lessen with every laugh, every smile.

“Nope,” he agreed. “Thankfully for us, it doesn’t matter anymore.”

Kei opened his eyes, Keiji’s stark lab coming into focus as he did so. Kuroo had migrated to his usual position on the countertop, and Keiji was standing in front of the wall-screen looking intently at a bunch of data.

“What happened?” Kei asked somewhat groggily. “Did you find anything?”

“You look cute with a bunch of wires sticking to your forehead,” Kuroo supplied helpfully.

Over by the wall-screen Keiji shook his head, “Sorry, Kei, everything checks out. I can’t find any problems. You have a highly functioning Chronicle implant in your head. I didn’t find a single error.”

Kei felt his heart sink, if there wasn’t anything wrong with his implant, then what was going on? Did that mean something was wrong with Kei? He balled his hands into fists, angry that he couldn’t figure out the answer to the problem. His mind didn’t work that way. It felt like a betrayal of sorts.

There was always a solution… So why couldn’t he find it?

He was about to sit up, tired of feeling like a helpless patient laying there staring at the ceiling, but Keiji stopped him by laying one pale arm across Kei’s chest. “Wait. Let me try one more thing.”

He was looking to Kei for permission, and for a moment, Kei realized he wasn’t sure he was willing to give it. He was tired, and angry, and at this point all he wanted to do was leave and be by himself. He hated the way they were looking at him with pity in their eyes. He wanted it to stop.

But then his mind, having been conditioned from a young age, reminded him that he had to seek
answers. That if Keiji had one last test, or a hundred more, Kei would sit through every one of them. All in the hopes of discovering what it was that was going on inside of his head.

He nodded and sat back, giving Keiji permission to do whatever he was about to do.

“Should I choose another-”

He was about to say memory, but was cut off when a blinding pain ripped through his skull. It was ten times worse than what he had experienced the first time. It felt like it was pulling him apart, ripping his brain in half only to mash it back together haphazardly.

He wanted to yell at Keiji to make it stop, to undo whatever it was that was making Kei feel like he was being split down the middle.

He never got the chance however. Darkness started to close in around Kei’s vision, slowly blotting out that stupid gray ceiling until he was surrounded by nothing but blackness. The last thought Kei had before he passed out, was that at least in unconsciousness he wouldn’t have to feel that god-awful pain anymore.

Chapter End Notes

Akiteru is kind of the champion of this chapter in my head, I love that boy. In other news, major TsukiYama plot points happen next chapter, so look forward to that.
When Kei opened his eyes, he was lying in the same position as when he had blacked out. He was staring at the same ceiling, sitting in the same chair, orbiting earth in the same ship that he had been on for over two years now. It should have all been normal. Except that it wasn’t. Kei wasn’t waking up in his own room, wasn’t even opening his eyes to his own lab, and as he attempted to orient himself, he was met with a less than pleasant sight.

“Kuroo,” he mumbled, “do you really have to be so close?” His voice sounded a bit groggy, but Kei didn’t think he had been out that long.

Kuroo’s face was looming over Kei’s, so close that he could see each individual dark eyelash on the other man’s lids. In other words, far too close.

“I wanted to make sure you weren’t faking.”

“He wasn’t faking,” Keiji’s voice came irritably from across the room. “His scans were going insane.”

“What did you do?” Kei grumbled, still somewhat dazed by the pain that he had been experiencing just a short while ago.

“I ran a diagnostic,” Keiji replied, “and I was right before. You do have a perfectly functioning Chronicle implant. But then I realized that maybe I shouldn’t be looking for an abnormality or flaw, but the opposite instead.”

“What?” Kuroo asked skeptically, thankfully placing more distance between the two of them as he walked over to look at the images on Keiji’s wall-screen.

“Wow, Kei” Kuroo tilted his head comically. “Nice frontal lobe.”

He wished he could see what the other two were looking at, but Kei feared that if he stood up now he might end up toppling over. “Congratulations,” he replayed dryly. “Your flirting has gotten to new lows.”

Kuroo raised one perfect dark eyebrow in a questioning gesture. “What? I like you for your brain…”

“I take it back…” Kei rolled his eyes at Kuroo’s dumb remark. “This is a new low.”

Keiji hadn’t been paying attention to the two of them, he was far too engrossed with the scans he was studying, but when Kuroo poked him he was roused from his daze. “You were saying?” Kuroo prompted.

Keiji looked annoyed at being interrupted. “Are you two actually going to listen?” he asked.
“Yes,” Kei said, at the same time that Kuroo replied, “Probably.”

He looked skeptical as he eyed them from in front of the screen, but he continued none the less, the only indication of his irritation a slight sigh as he spoke. “When I was looking at some of your memory threads on the scan, there was one that stood out as being too perfect,” he explained.

Kei knew that the way Chronicle worked was that it stored gathered memories within its system one after the other, sort of like a really sophisticated computer program. But he didn’t exactly get what Keiji was saying. How could a memory be too perfect?

“So… there’s a hole?” he ventured.

“Not exactly,” Keiji responded. He sounded thoughtful as he spoke. “That’s the thing… A big missing memory thread would have shown up on my scans. An anomaly like that would have flagged the system that something was wrong a long time ago. Chronicle has a built-in program that will alert the user and my father if a glitch were ever to occur. But this was different.”

“Spit it out, Keiji,” Kuroo said impatiently. “We already know you have a big brain.”

Keiji sighed, clearly annoyed that they weren’t keeping up with him. “There are these little miniscule breaks between every memory that Chronicle stores,” he explained, “so tiny that my computer can barely pick up on them. That’s just how it works. Chronicle reads those memories like reading words on a page. You can go back and read each individual word or sentence whenever you want. But you…” he paused. “You have two memories that seamlessly bleed into one another without so much as a blip.” The light from the screen dancing across Keiji’s face made him look ominous as he spoke. “Chronicle has no idea what to do with it. It reads as one long stand of words. Even though they’re two separate memories, your implant will always read them as one without that needed break.”

“What?” Kuroo looked skeptical at what he was hearing.

“Not exactly…” Kei took over for Keiji, not needing him to explain anymore. “No warnings will be triggered in my system because it doesn’t think anything is actually wrong.”

Keiji nodded, and Kei started coming to a disturbing realization that made his head spin, and not from the tests he had just undergone either.

“But how does that account for the missing memory?” Kuroo asked. “I don’t get it. Why does he feel like he has a hole?”

Keiji looked at him thoughtfully. “My best guess?” he answered. “The memory he’s missing was between the two that are molded together.”

“So…”

“So…” Kei finished, looking weirdly animated for someone who was normally so stoic. “… Someone took one of your memories and made damn sure it would be near impossible for you to access it. They covered it up, Tsukishima”

It took everything Kei had to comprehend what he was saying, it shouldn’t be possible. Someone had taken his memory. Kei shuddered at the thought. He had always held his mind above anything else. But now…? Now he felt like it wasn’t just his. Someone had been inside his head, rummaging around and taking something that belonged to Kei. Something he thought could never be stolen.
Who could have done it? Someone from H-Corps? One of his instructors? The Chancellor? What could possibly be the motive?

“That’s not possible,” Kuroo said, all traces of teasing wiped from his face. “You can’t just take someone’s memory.”

“Not taken really,” Keiji retorted. “You can’t actually steal something as intangible as a memory… More like hidden.”

Kuroo looked over at Kei, and he could see the deep concern written in the lines of the other man’s face. He looked scared for Kei, which strangely made Kei feel less scared for himself.

“Is it just one?” he asked.

“As far as I can tell,” Keiji responded thoughtfully. “But I suppose there’s a possibility that others are more well-hidden. The headaches you’ve been experiencing might be due to the combined memory starting to unravel.”

That didn’t sound very comforting. Kuroo looked like he was about ready to run down whoever had hidden Kei’s memory and demand that they admit what they had done. Kei though, had a different question.

“Can I ever get it back?”

Silence fell as he and Kuroo both looked to Keiji for an answer. After what felt like an eternity, he finally shrugged, “I have no idea…maybe. Theoretically, and this is just a guess mind you, but since it isn’t technically gone…”

He must have seen something in Kei expression because he quickly backtracked. “That’s just a guess, Tsukishima. And even if it is true…I don’t know if there’s any way that you can undo whatever they did to hide it. And if you could, there’s no telling what the quality of the memory would be after that kind of tampering…”

Kei didn’t care what Keiji said, they were scientists, they practically lived and breathed educated guesses. Theories and hypotheses were Kei’s norm; he just had to think about this like any other problem. Put it all into a box and come at it from a logical perspective.

“I think I can get it back,” he said determinedly.

“Kei…” it was Kuroo’s turn to look skeptical, like he didn’t want Kei to get his hopes up only to be crushed.

“At least I have something to go off of now,” he retorted. “That’s better than I had a few days ago.”

There was kindness in Kuroo’s eyes, kindness mixed with a pity Kei resented. “If you want to look at it like that…” he said. “Or…or you could look at it from the perspective that you now have a stolen memory… There’s a piece of you missing we know nothing about.”

“What are you saying?” Kei growled.

Kuroo shrugged, “Just that I think you should slow down. Maybe it really is something we’re better off not knowing.”

Kei knew what he was implying. Kuroo was saying that Kei had done something, that there was some part of him that needed to be hidden. That it was better this way.
“You have no idea what you’re talking about,” he spat.

“Actually,” Keiji said, “Kuroo’s right.”

He couldn’t believe this. Kei couldn’t believe that the two of them actually thought that the reason for the hidden memory was because of something he had done.

“Well I supposed it was bound to happen eventually,” Kei shot back cruelly.

Keiji ignored the remark, continuing on with his train of thought. “We have no idea what the memory is... but I doubt that someone would go to so much trouble to cover up a bunch of sunshine and rainbows.”

Silence fell over the room as they all contemplated the validity of that statement.

Well, shit.

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Kei was confused, and it wasn’t by the astrophysics they were supposed to be studying. That was a piece of cake compared to what he was thinking about. Instead, his mind kept flitting back to his relationship with Yamaguchi. Ever since he had gotten back from the camp, he and Kei had been extremely close.

Not just emotionally, but physically too. Suddenly, Yamaguchi and Kei seemed to be touching every time they were around each other. Whether it was just casually leaning into one another, or sneakily holding hands when no one was looking, they were always seeking each other out now.

Kei didn’t know what it meant. He still firmly believed that he didn’t want to take advantage of Yamaguchi, that he didn’t want to do anything that would jeopardize the bond they already shared. He was happy with how their relationship worked. Wouldn’t it be greedy to ask for more? There was no doubt in his mind that he loved Yamaguchi, but how did you decipher when friendship turned from one kind of love to another, and did it really matter what kind of love he felt? Wasn’t it enough just to share the deep bond they already had?

And what about how Yamaguchi felt? Though Kei could almost always read what the other boy was feeling, painfully aware of every little expression that happened to flit across his face, Kei realized he had no idea what Yamaguchi’s own feelings towards him were.

Sometimes he would catch Yamaguchi looking at him, and he would be sure that he felt the same way Kei did. But at other times, Kei would catch a familiar glint in the other boy’s brown eyes, a spark of admiration that would remind him of what Akiteru had said about being careful of the sway he held over Yamaguchi.

Sometimes he wished that Yamaguchi would realize that he didn’t owe Kei anything. Or at least, not in the way that he thought he did.

As he was leaving the lab for the day, Kei couldn’t help but notice that Keiji was staring at him. The dark-haired boy was so often immersed in his own world, it was weird to see him paying attention to someone so blatantly. Kei figured it must be because of what had happened with Yamaguchi, no doubt Keiji would know by now. Everyone else did.

He wondered if Keiji was thinking about whoever he had tried to bring inside the Dome, and if he now resented Kei because his father had let Yamaguchi stay. It was unfair, and Kei knew he would be angry if it were the other way around.
He nodded to Keiji as he walked by, half in greeting, but maybe also partially as an apology. Kei knew the helplessness that came with having to deal with words like ‘outsider’ and ‘pointless.’ The other boy quickly turned away, awkwardness at being caught clinging to him like a thick cloak.

It had been a week since Yamaguchi’s return to the Dome, and Kei still walked through the door to his room every day with the fear that he would be gone when he got there. That Kei would come home and, like that day he had been taken, Yamaguchi would be out of reach once more.

The apartment was empty when Kei stepped through the door. His heart started to race, fear kicking in even though he told himself that was ridiculous. Today was the first day Yamaguchi had gone back to work at the childcare center, so there was no reason that he would be here anyway.

Everything was fine, Kei told himself. Unfortunately, that did nothing to make him feel better or slow his racing heart. He needed to get out of this empty room, needed to get away from the reminder of a night not so long ago and all the memories that came with it.

He ended up wandering down a side street, not really caring where he was going, just letting his feet guide him. His mind kept returning to Yamaguchi, and how he was handling his first day back. Kei had thought that Yamaguchi should wait a few weeks at least to return to work, but both Akiteru and Yamaguchi had shut down that idea. Kei had only relented after Yamaguchi had told him that sitting idly in the apartment made the memories of that place that much harder to ignore.

He sighed, watching as a group of factory workers coming off their shift headed in different directions towards their homes. He felt a pang as he realized that it was coming up on the anniversary of his mother’s death.

“Kei?” the sound of his brother’s voice startled him. “What are you doing here?” Akiteru was dressed in his guard attire, clearly making his rounds for the day. Kei had been so lost in thought that he hadn’t realized how far from home he had walked.

Akiteru’s gazed traveled to where Kei had been looking at the factory workers, and an expression of understanding crossed his face. “Ohh…Mom…” He didn’t have to say anymore, they both knew.

“You want to talk about it?” he asked, forever trying to be the supportive older brother.

Kei shook his head. He didn’t. Not now, not with Akiteru. He had always felt like his brother had a stronger claim to their mother than he did. He knew that was ridiculous, but to Kei, someone who dealt with memory, who held the past above everything else, the fact that Akiteru had so many more memories of her felt like an unfair advantage.

Akiteru had been older when she had died. He had known her longer, had more of her in him. It wasn’t Akiteru’s fault, and yet, Kei couldn’t help feeling resentful of it all.

The small things hurt. Things like Akiteru looking just like their mother, whereas Kei was marked by differences that set him apart from their perfectly matching set. And big things hurt. Things like how Akiteru had been the last one to talk to her before she had died…

Akiteru looked at him with a concerned expression. “Hey, I’m almost done here… you want to head home together?”

Kei tried to push his anger aside, he really did. But all the overwhelming emotions he was feeling
about Yamaguchi, coupled with the thought of the anniversary of his mother’s death, made Kei feel particularly distant as he stood in front of his brother.

“You know what,” he mumbled, “I think I’m actually going to go wait for Yamaguchi to get out... See how his first day went.”

He saw what he thought might be the tiniest bit of hurt flit across his brother’s face, but it was quickly covered up by a smile. “Sure, Kei. See you at home.”

He nodded, only feeling slightly bad about the way he had treated Akiteru. He should really be getting used to that feeling by now.

“Kei?” Akiteru said as he was turning to leave.

He looked at his brother questioningly, but Akiteru just shook his head. “Nothing… never mind… just…never mind.”

Kei didn’t wait around to see if he would change his mind, instead, he turned and left his brother standing alone in the narrow street.

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“Tsukki!”

How was it that just the sight of Yamaguchi had the power to make Kei feel worlds better? Seeing the freckles and smile that was somehow made just for him. He soothed Kei, like the sensation of warm water washing over his skin, Yamaguchi had a way of making him feel grounded when everything else seemed to be going to hell around him.

“This is a surprise!” Yamaguchi said, not unhappily. “What are you doing here, Tsukki?”

“I came to walk you home.” He didn’t like the defensive note that slipped into his voice, but he couldn’t help it as he spoke.

“This isn’t because you’re worried about me still, is it?” Yamaguchi asked.

His tone was light, but Kei could tell that there was real concern layered underneath the question. “Can’t I walk you home without being interrogated? I get enough of that from my professors.”

“Yep,” Yamaguchi answered happily.

Kei watched as he started to walk towards their building, a bounce in his step that made Kei raise his eyebrows.

“I know what you’re thinking, Tsukki. But I’m fine, and it was really good to be back.”

Kei snorted derisively, he would never understand Yamaguchi’s love for the childcare center. Those feelings were far beyond Kei’s comprehension. “Why anyone would actually look forward to spending time with the tiny humans is beyond me,” he said.

Yamaguchi laughed at him. “Do you really hate them that much, Tsukki?” His eyes were wide and mischievous as he turned them on Kei. “Don’t you ever want to have any of your own?”

Kei frowned, trying to figure out how Yamaguchi had made the gigantic leap from first day back at work to Kei becoming a father. He looked back at their conversation, drastically regretting his life decisions. He wanted to feel better after all, not worse.
“I’m going to live up on a spaceship secluded from everyone besides Chronicle users,” he deadpanned. “I don’t really think kids are in the cards for me.”

Not only that, but there was the whole messed up earth thing to think about. “Besides,” Kei said, “I don’t think it’s fair to bring kids into all this,” he gestured around them, “not when I know what’s going to happen.”

“Smart.” Yamaguchi said. But even though he sounded sure of himself, there was something in his tone that Kei couldn’t quite recognize. Regret? Sadness?

He found himself thinking about an older Yamaguchi, changed by the years that had passed, and coming home to some faceless girl with ridiculously cute freckled kids. It was a picture that he realized could happen now that Yamaguchi was a legal citizen. It was also a picture that made Kei feel nauseous.

Yamaguchi could have a life with someone else now, he could be happy and content, all while Kei was off on a tireless mission to undo the wrongs humanity had brought upon the earth.

For what seemed to be a newly recurring trend in Kei’s life, the thought of his mission brought up feelings of intense unhappiness. Lately, it felt like Kei would have to give up something precious for his goal, like he would be trading something away. And he knew what it was. He would be giving up a life where he was the other person in that picture, the one Yamaguchi was coming home to.

Did he want that? Could there even be a choice when Kei was a part of something that was so much bigger than himself?

“Is something wrong, Tsukki?” Yamaguchi was just as perceptive as ever, although Kei probably wasn’t hiding his moodiness very well. He shrugged helplessly. He didn’t want to tell Yamaguchi that he felt guilty about the way he had treated his brother, or that the anniversary of his mother’s death felt like a carefully placed knife to the chest. Or that he was now picturing Yamaguchi in some perfect life, one where he had a future outside of labs and kids with altered brains…One that didn’t involve Kei.

Yamaguchi brushed his hand against Kei’s as they walked. It was nice, comforting...

“Is it your mother?” he asked.

Leave it to Yamaguchi to know exactly what he was thinking. At least part of it. Kei just shrugged again. It must have been telling enough though, because Yamaguchi bumped his shoulder against Kei’s lightly. “I wish I could have met her.”

He was glad that Yamaguchi didn’t ask him to talk about her or say he was sorry, because Kei didn’t think he was capable of talking about her right now. She was this strange thing in his mind that existed somewhere between knowing and forgetting.

“I bet she was smart…” Yamaguchi hummed. “You two are way too smart for her not to have been. And beautiful…”

Kei scoffed, “Let me guess, because we’re just so beautiful?”

“Yeah,” Yamaguchi replied without pause, without even a hint of embarrassment. “Family resemblance and all that.”
Kei rolled his eyes, but secretly he felt his stomach twist nervously. Yamaguchi had been so straightforward about calling him beautiful. Kei knew he was good looking, but there was something different about the way Yamaguchi said it. Something that had nothing to do with a concept as trivial as physical appearance.

“Actually, I look like my father,” Kei said matter-of-factly. “Or so I’ve been told.”

“Hmm…”

“Yeah… I always thought it was weird that here I was, walking around looking like some stranger I never even knew.”

“What happened to him?” Yamaguchi asked curiously.

Kei shrugged. “Don’t know… he was gone before I could walk. I don’t think my mom ever knew what happened to him either. It was like that a lot in Dome-3.”

Kei had almost no memory of what their lives had been like back then, and sometimes he thought the things he did remember were just pictures Akiteru had painted for him, memories that were more his brother’s than his own.

“It’s not like we missed him though…” Kei said. “Mom always took care of us.”

He felt Yamaguchi reach out and take his hand. The first time Yamaguchi had done that, Kei could remember feeling surprised and a little unnerved at the contact. He didn’t think he would like it, it always looked so pointless to him when other people did it. But as was the case with most things involving Yamaguchi, Kei had soon found out that he had been foolishly wrong. He actually enjoyed the feeling of Yamaguchi’s warm fingers intertwined with his own. It was weirdly intimate, in a way that Kei didn’t know two hands clasped could be. And grounding. He could feel Yamaguchi’s pulse pounding away in his wrist, and it made Kei realize how connected they were in that moment. It made him feel like he could tell Yamaguchi anything.

“Sometimes I think it would have been easier if I didn’t remember her at all,” Kei confessed. “That way it wouldn’t hurt so badly…” he trailed off, unable to finish the thought.

Yamaguchi squeezed his hand, “Tsukki, our memories make us who we are. It’s better that you remember her… Trust me.”

Kei raised an eyebrow, “With a face like that…?”

Yamaguchi scowled at him playfully, “What, you think I would lead you astray?”

Ridiculous. He was ridiculous, and in that moment, Kei loved him for it. “It’s always the nice ones you have to look out for,” he grumbled.

“Sorry, Tsukki.”

“What are you sorry for?”

Yamaguchi smirked, a mischievous knowing look on his face. “You.”

Kei rolled his eyes. He was met with a smile. That one he had gotten used to that meant he was being mocked.

“Thanks for coming to walk me home,” Yamaguchi said. Once again, Kei felt like something was
shifting. Like what he had with Yamaguchi wasn’t enough anymore. No, that wasn’t quite right, it was more like he could see beyond what their relationship was now, past their friendship to something they could have if they were only willing to take the first step.

“Hey…”

Kei’s gaze was drawn away from where it was resting on Yamaguchi to a group of two guards approaching them from behind. He surreptitiously let go of Yamaguchi’s hand, letting his arm dangle freely at his side.

“Aren’t you that outsider?” one of them asked crudely.

“Yeah,” spat the second man. “Illegal good for nothing…Taking up our food supplies.”

Kei spun around. “What the fuck is your problem?” he asked.

“Tsukki,” Yamaguchi pulled on his shoulder. “Just leave it… it’s not worth it.”

“They don’t know what the fuck they’re talking about,” Kei turned to leave, but he couldn’t help himself. “Maybe if they got their heads out of their uniform clad asses, they would understand that you work for your rations just like everyone else in the Dome.”

“What the fuck did you just say to me?” asked the taller one with dark hair. “I could have you brought in, you scumbag.”

Kei stepped in front of the other boy so that he was towering over him. Sometimes Kei loved his height. When he wasn’t bumping his head on things, or trying to fit in his bed without hanging off the edge.

“Tsukki-”

“Go ahead. I’d like to see you try,” he goaded them. “It would be entertaining, wouldn’t it, Yamaguchi? We could bring The Chancellor into it.” He glared at the two guards, just daring them to try anything.

Kei had learned a long time ago that acting like you had authority made you more likely to gain it.

“He’s one of those freaks,” the second man spoke up. The dark haired man’s eyes widened in surprise. “Well, in that case… You’re right,” he placed a hand on his baton. “It wouldn’t do any good to arrest you. We’ll have to take matters into our own hands.”

Behind him, Kei heard Yamaguchi squeak. “Should I go get Akiteru?” he whispered frantically.

Kei ignored him. He was angry… Angry about his mother, angry about Akiteru, angry about these assholes. And now all of it was pressing down on him at once in a way that Kei couldn’t take anymore. He needed to let it out.

Unfortunately, it came out when Kei’s fist connected with the dark-haired man’s face. Probably not one of his best ideas.

“Tsukki!” Yamaguchi looked just as shocked at the blow as Kei felt. When it came to fight or flight, they were both firmly on the flight side of things. Yamaguchi looked as if he didn’t know what had come over Kei.

“The fuck!” the man pulled back violently, a stunned expression on his face. He looked like he
couldn’t quite believe what had just happened. Kei didn’t blame him, he wasn’t so sure himself.

In a flash, the other guard was on top of him, his arm snaking around Kei’s neck in a sort of choke hold. Kei had always thought that his height would grant him some form of advantage in a fight. He soon learned that if you didn’t know what to do with said height, it wasn’t as much help as one would assume.

He felt his supply of oxygen being cut off, as the man dug the elbow that wasn’t around Kei’s neck into his back uncomfortably.

The one that Kei had punched had seemingly recovered from his shock, because he sauntered over, taking no time in landing a blow of his own to Kei’s jaw. He heard a sickening thud at the same time he heard Yamaguchi scream his name once more.

Kei tried to twist out of the guard’s grip as Yamaguchi charged the dark haired one from behind.

“No,” he yelled. “Get help!”

Yamaguchi didn’t listen though; Kei saw determination on his face as he jumped on top of the man who was going in for another blow to Kei’s face. The two of them struggled briefly, but then Kei’s world spun, and the only thing he could see was the dirt as he lay face down on the ground. He let out a grunt of pain as a booted foot collided with his stomach, followed by another, and then another.

Why had Kei thrown that first punch? Why had he thought he could be his brother, swift on his feet and in control of his body? Kei didn’t know how to work his limbs, they were just something to get him from point A to point B, tools to be used in the lab. He didn’t know how to make them work the way he wanted them to now. Kei didn’t know how to fight…

He tasted blood as another kick collided with his face. Kei wasn’t sure whether the blood was coming from his mouth, his nose, or both. It didn’t matter though, it tasted horrible all the same.

One of the kicks sent Kei’s glasses flying off in an unknown direction, and suddenly the world was thrown into a blurry mess of shapes and colors… and pain… couldn’t forget the pain.

He tried to pivot his body as the next kick came again. What would Akiteru do? Try to grab the man’s foot? Roll? Stand?

Kei felt stupid now for laughing instead of paying attention all those times his brother had been practicing combat maneuvers. As he swung out blindly with a leg, he cursed himself for not watching what Akiteru had been doing all those times. Maybe he would even ask him for some pointers if he survived this.

He heard a loud grunt from somewhere beside him. Out of the corner of his eye, Kei thought he saw a pair of bodies fall to the ground near where he and the guard were positioned. He could just barely make out Yamaguchi and the other man vying for leverage as they both struggled to gain an advantage over the other.

He had to get up he told himself… he had to help Yamaguchi.

But that was easier said than done, especially when the toe of the other man’s boot was shoved painfully into Kei’s windpipe. He clawed at the man’s ankle, desperation starting to take hold of him, and panic flooding his mind as if somewhere a dam had been broken. Shit… Humans could only survive so long without air. In one minute Kei’s brain would begin to function at a lesser capacity, in three he would pass out, after six minutes he would be completely braindead.
Air, he needed air.

Spots were starting to appear in Kei’s peripheral as the man’s foot dug deeper into Kei’s skin. “I’ll make you regret what you did,” he spat, a glob of saliva hitting Kei right in the face.

“What the fuck is going on here?” In his panicked state, it took Kei far longer than it should have to recognize his brother’s voice. “Get off him,” he ordered. “Now!”

Mercifully, the pressure around Kei’s neck lessened, and he took in a much-needed gulp of air.

“What’s it to you, Tsukishima?” asked the guard that was looming over Kei.

“That person you’re crushing is my brother.” Akiteru replied. “And if you don’t let him go, then I’ll make damn sure you never put on that guard’s uniform again.”

Kei had never heard his brother sound like that before. Gone were all traces of his normal sing-song cadence. Instead, his voice just sounded cold, intimidating even. “In fact, I’ll make sure you never get a job inside this Dome that isn’t waste collector or transporter until the day your pathetic life ends.”

Akiteru outranked these two, he held a higher position than them, but Kei knew he was exaggerating in his threats. Still, they must have been at least the slightest bit worried, because both men released them at the same time, the dark-haired one sneering at Kei before he left.

In that moment, as Kei watched Akiteru lie his way to intimidation, he found himself wondering if he and his brother were more alike than he had previously thought.

“Not worth it anyway,” the one by Yamaguchi scoffed. “The sooner they send you freaks away, the better.” With that, the two guards disappeared down the road Akiteru had just come from.

As soon as they were gone, Yamaguchi was standing over Kei, hands brushing over his wounds and searching his body for damage. “Tsukki,” he crooned. Kei didn’t have the heart to tell him that even that small amount of contact hurt. “Are you okay?”

“He needs to go to medical,” Akiteru said.

Yamaguchi looked up worriedly. “I’ll take him.”

“No,” his brother insisted, cutting Yamaguchi off. “You go home Yamaguchi.”

“But-”

“No,” Akiteru’s tone left no room for arguing. “We need you safe. Right, Kei?”

He knew what his brother was doing, knew that those men and other’s like them could still be out there. It was best for Yamaguchi to lay low for the time being. He managed a nod, even though it hurt like hell to do so.

“I’ll take him. We’ll see you back at home.”

Kei was sure that Yamaguchi was going to argue, but Akiteru’s uncharacteristic glare finally convinced him otherwise. “Fine,” he relented. “But I’ll be waiting. And I won’t be happy about it.”

“I don’t need you happy,” Akiteru replied airily. “I just need you unharmed.”
Kei sat and waited as the medic cleaned and bandaged all his wounds. Well, the physical ones that is. He knew that the other kind couldn’t be dealt with so easily.

He had a broken nose, bruised ribs, and needed stitches for a cut on his cheek. As the H-Corps worker poked and prodded Kei’s wounds, Akiteru hovered around them, never once leaving his side.

“What the fuck were you thinking?” he had whispered when they had first gotten to the clinic. Kei was pretty sure he would have been yelling if they were at home.

“How could you be so stupid?”

That was a question Kei wasn’t used to, one he had no answer for. He had just shrugged. It’s not like he disagreed after all. He had been stupid, stupid and reckless. It sent a chill through his entire body when he thought about what could have happened if Akiteru hadn’t shown up when he did. And for what? Some insults from some asshole who knew nothing about Kei and Yamaguchi’s situation.

…Stupid.

When he was all stitched up, his wounds bandaged and his face cleaned, the worker left the room with instructions for Kei to rest and keep his ribs bound. Akiteru took advantage of her absence, coming to kneel in front of Kei.

“What really happened?” he asked. “I know you, Kei… I know you don’t just start fights with random strangers.”

He tried to ignore the burning feeling behind his eyelids, something Kei feared might be the start of oncoming tears. “Was it Yamaguchi?” Akiteru asked. “Did they threaten him?”

“No.”

“Did they threaten you?”

“No,” Kei responded irritably. He didn’t know how to explain what had come over him back there. Couldn’t speak when his brother’s searching gaze was trained on him that way, asking for an explanation that Kei didn’t have.

Akiteru threw up his hands in exasperation. “Well then, what? You can tell me.”

Why did he feel like such a child when Akiteru spoke to him this way? “It’s nothing… I just… I was…” Kei faltered, he couldn’t find the words. He had gotten too used to talking with Yamaguchi perhaps. Too used to having someone understand without having to communicate something he didn’t know how to describe.

“You know I love you, right?”

He nodded, this had never been a question. Sometimes he thought his brother loved him too much. Kei would never understand why he and Yamaguchi were so willing to give him unconditional love, when Kei so obviously didn’t deserve it, and could give back so little in return.

He leaned his head back so that it rested against the wall. He waited for Akiteru to speak, but when he didn’t, Kei was the one to break the silence.
“I can’t stop thinking about her,” he whispered, speaking to the ceiling instead of his brother’s golden eyes.

“Mom?”

He nodded, wincing as pain shot through his ribcage. He wished they had given him painkillers. Maybe that would have helped him to stop thinking so much.

“I see her in you, you know.” Akiteru’s voice changed from exasperation to something much softer, a sad little smile playing out on his face. “Every day.” And though Akiteru may not have had Chronicle, Kei could tell his brother was just as lost in the past as he himself usually was.

Kei narrowed his eyes at his brother. He didn’t believe what Akiteru was saying. They were the similar ones, his mother and his brother. Kei was just an anomaly who had stumbled into their world, unsuspecting and unalike.

“I’m not like her,” he mumbled.

“Yeah, you are…” his brother assured him. “I see her in the way you move, always so precise and graceful. It’s like you were both made for water instead of land. When we were younger, I used to see you from the very corner of my eye, and for a moment I would think that she was still here…” he paused. “And you’re smart like her. I had always thought no one else could solve a problem the way she could… that is…” Akiteru trailed off. “Until you came along.”

Kei didn’t know how to respond to that. How could it be that his brother, who was so like their mother in every way, looked to Kei for the shadow she had left behind?

“It used to make me jealous,” Akiteru confessed. “She took care of us for so many years, and all I ever wanted was to be able to take care of her in return. But in the end… it was you. You saved us, Kei… You saved her…”

There was a part of Kei that had always guessed at the way Akiteru felt about Chronicle, but hearing him say it out loud was somehow entirely different. It stunned him into silence, a bigger weight on his shoulders than Kei could have ever imagined it to be.

“She would have loved to see how far you’ve come.”

Kei shook his head, feeling a pain in his chest that had nothing to do with the injuries he had received earlier. “I haven’t done anything.” It hurt to admit it, but it was the truth.

“You make a difference,” his brother told him. “You have something you believe in… That’s all she ever would have wanted.”

“And what about you?” Kei couldn’t help but ask, sadness creeping in on him like a vine threatening to strangle any life it found. “Do you have something you believe in?”

Finally, Akiteru smiled, a real smile this time, laced with hope and longing. “I believe in the Rebels.” he said. “They have a camp outside of the Domes. They believe that we don’t have to live life the way The Chancellor dictates, Kei. That’s all they want. I promise. They’re not evil or threatening… They just want to be left alone.”

He almost wished Akiteru would stop speaking, that he wouldn’t tell Kei any more about his Rebels. Because Kei knew that any information he heard would end up with The Chancellor, and for the first time, he saw how much his brother truly loved them. When had his feelings escalated to love? And more importantly, why hadn’t Kei noticed the change?
It scared him.

When had the Rebel group become something more than just a passing fad for Akiteru? When had they become more than just a way to push back against the rules? Kei didn’t know, but the love and devotion that he saw on his brother’s face made him want to plug his ears and hide from the rest of what Akiteru had to say.

The Chancellor would destroy the Rebels like they were nothing but dirt beneath his feet.

And Kei? Kei would have a hand in extinguishing the thing that made Akiteru’s face light up like that. He would be the one to take away the thing that Akiteru believed in.

Kei had gone back to his own lab, taking comfort in the familiar glare of the artificial lights overhead. He had told Keiji and Kuroo that he needed some time alone. Time to process and think about what they had learned. His hands ghosted over the counter, lightly brushing the tools that lay there even though he had no intention of picking them up.

Someone had hidden one of his memories. They had tampered with his implant, leaving Kei less than whole. He felt adrift. What was he supposed to do now? What could he possibly do with this knowledge?

He wanted a distraction, but he hated the memories that came next. He hated the way he had played a hand in Akiteru’s death. If Kei hadn’t fed all that information directly to The Chancellor, would his brother still be alive? Or did it not matter, in the end, would he still have suffered the same fate as Yamaguchi?

Death down every path, every crossroad.

Kei took a seat, leaning back so that his weight was fully supported by the chair. He couldn’t change what he had done in the past. He had to live with the mistakes he had made, to suffer the consequences of what he had chosen back then. And he was paying for his mistakes, paying for them deeply with the loss of his family.

Maybe Kei had a hole in his memory, maybe he would never get it back, and maybe Kuroo was right that it was hiding some form of atrocity or crime he had committed in the past. But what could be worse than the things Kei had already done?

He hurt people, the ones he loved he hurt the most. He had gotten them both killed in different ways, all so Kei could sit up here in this chair playing scientist in the endless joke that was his life.

Well, he had gotten what he wanted. All he had now was his work. His work and an endless loop of memories for him to obsess over.

What a life…

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It was the day before the anniversary of their mother’s death, and Kei was trying as hard as he could to think about anything but that. His wounds were healing, though he was still sore in ways that made him move with tentative, deliberate motions so as not to hurt himself further. He was in that strange stage of not being fully healed, but not fully injured either.

He wasn’t sure if it was because of his wounds, or the fact that the dreaded day was almost upon
them, but both Yamaguchi and Akiteru had been treating Kei with kid gloves. They had been going out of their way to be nice to him, but all it seemed to accomplish was to make Kei feel even more restless and out of sorts.

He looked down at his notes. His teachers had let him take work home while he was going through the healing process, but Kei hated it. He wanted to be back with the other kids, wanted to be back in the lab. But for the time being at least, he would have to be content with taking notes and doing busywork.

The idea of work that wasn’t really that important made Kei groan. He wasn’t even allowed to bring any books home.

Yamaguchi was sitting on the floor next to him. He had asked Kei if he could look over some of the homework his teachers had sent over, but every few seconds Kei would catch Yamaguchi glancing at him out of the corner of his eye. That was how it had been for the last few weeks. It was as if they thought that Kei would do something destructive the moment one of them wasn’t watching. If he had to write anymore bland notes, Kei thought irritably, they might just be proven right.

Yamaguchi seemed to sense his sudden restlessness, because he spoke up before Kei could crack his head against the wall and see what Chronicle looked like first hand. “Do you want to take a break?” he asked.

“No,” Kei grumbled. There was a brief pause where Yamaguchi nodded and turned away, but then Kei relented. “Yes.”

Yamaguchi stood and pulled him down to the floor so that they were sitting opposite one another. The lights in their room would shut off for curfew soon, and Kei wanted to drink in the sight of Yamaguchi while he could still see.

“Tsukki… Do you want to go to space?”

Kei wished that the question had been anything else, because he wasn’t sure he knew how to answer it anymore. Of course he wanted to go to space. He had wanted to go to space since he was seven years old and he had learned about the program. But now he thought about leaving his brother, about leaving Yamaguchi, and the same dread he felt when he thought of being on a separate ship from them sprang to life inside his chest. How could his goals have change so much over the course of a few years, how had the ground shifted so completely out from underneath Kei’s feet?

“I don’t know anymore,” he said honestly. What could he do but tell Yamaguchi the truth? “Sometimes I think there are more important things…” The words went against everything he had been taught, and yet, he couldn’t help but mean them.

“More important than your work?” Yamaguchi questioned, “Than saving the earth?”

“No...” Kei admitted. “But there are things that make it harder.”

He watched as an intense sadness washed over Yamaguchi’s face, like he was the one holding the weight of the world on his shoulders. Hell, maybe he was. “Whatever happens,” he nudged Kei’s shoulder softly, “you know Teru and I will be fine, right?”

Kei shrugged. That might be true, but what if it wasn’t them he was worried about? They would have each other after all, but Kei, Kei would be by himself. He couldn’t imagine a life where
Akiteru was no longer there to simultaneously comfort and tease him, where Yamaguchi wasn’t waiting for him after a long day with a smile and a playful tap on the shoulder.

“Where is Akiteru anyway?” he asked. He wanted to change the subject. He didn’t want to talk about the inevitability of their separation anymore. It had gotten to the point where the few hours a day they spent apart were hard to bare, how could he talk about the insurmountable space that would soon separate them?

Yamaguchi cast his gaze downward, and immediately Kei regretted asking the question. That could only mean one thing.

“He’s been really sad about tomorrow. He… he went to spend some time with the Rebels…” Yamaguchi trailed off, waiting for Kei’s reaction.

It was anger.

Kei felt angry that his brother would choose them, complete strangers, over him. Especially when he thought about what tomorrow would bring. Akiteru had left, even with the knowledge that they were the only two people who could possibly experience the anniversary of their mother’s death in the same way.

“Why the fuck would he want to be with them at a time like this?”

Yamaguchi winced at Kei’s outburst. “He’s in pain, Tsukki. Try to understand…”

“Try to understand,” he shot back incredulously. “Try to understand? I’m the only one who can understand, Yamaguchi. I’m in pain too.”

“I know you are.” Yamaguchi grabbed his hand, rubbing slow circles into his palm. The contact sent a tingling feeling up Kei’s wrist, but he tried to ignore it. His body was betraying him, he gritted his teeth in anger, just like his brother was betraying him.

He wished Yamaguchi wouldn’t look at him like that. Like he expected Kei to be reasonable. Kei didn’t want to be reasonable. Not now.

“Tsukki,” he looked away again, “t-there’s something else…” Kei saw indecision about whether to spill Akiteru’s secret flash across Yamaguchi’s face, but eventually he must have decided that Kei needed to know.

“There…” he paused, clearly debating with himself. “There’s a girl…” he said tentatively.

Kei couldn’t help himself. “Of course there fucking is,” he scoffed. “This is Akiteru we’re talking about.”

“No, Tsukki.” Yamaguchi shook his head. “It’s not like that. He… he’s in love with her.”

Kei sincerely doubted that. This was Akiteru after all. Akiteru who flitted from one thing to the next without a second thought or so much as a glance sideways.

“It’s true.” Yamaguchi said, seeing the doubt Kei was doing nothing to hide. “They’ve known each other for years now. She and her brother live with the group outside of the walls. Her name is Saeko. She was the first one of the Rebels to get in contact with Akiteru.”

Kei wished Yamaguchi would stop, wished he would shut up. Because saying all this was like saying it directly to The Chancellor.
“It’s real, Tsukki…” he was asking for Kei to understand, to take what he was saying seriously. “I think he’s been in love with her for a long time.”

Kei didn’t want it to make sense, but looking back, what Yamaguchi was telling him fit with his brother’s behaviors. How often Akiteru snuck outside, how Kei hadn’t seen him hanging around women inside the Dome for a long time. How happy he seemed at random times that Kei had assumed had something to do with his job or with the Rebels. Well, it had been the Rebels... It’s just that it was one Rebel in particular apparently.

“So…” Kei’s anger had turned to something else, and now he was just trying to wrap his mind around it. “What happens now?”

“What do you mean?” Yamaguchi asked.

Kei shifted uncomfortably. “Is he going to run away to live some reckless life outside?” He didn’t want to admit how much that idea hurt him.

Yamaguchi scooted closer, gently turning Kei’s face so that he was forced to meet his gaze. “He’s not going to leave you, Tsukki. Love is a good thing. He may love her, but he loves you too…” A breath passed before he spoke again. “Just like I do.”

Kei shook his head. He didn’t want to hear this, didn’t want Yamaguchi to say it.

“I do though.” Yamaguchi brushed his fingers along Kei’s wrist. “My Tsukki,” he hummed, and Kei wished he wouldn’t, wished the words didn’t make his heartrate pick up speed. “I love you more than I’ve ever loved anything in my entire life.”

Kei wanted to pull away, break the contact of skin on skin. But he found that he couldn’t do it, maybe he wasn’t strong enough.

“When I was…,” Yamaguchi paused, gathering strength. “When I was… in that place. I just kept thinking over and over that I would die without ever telling you how much I love you.”

He moved his hand up Kei’s arm slowly, a sort of question. Kei’s pulse jumped. They were so close now. He breathed in a scent that was distinctly Yamaguchi. Kei didn’t know what to do. He wanted to run. No, he wanted to get closer…

He loved Yamaguchi too, of course he did. But he didn’t know how to do this, any of it.

Kei shifted forward so that their foreheads came together. Sitting like that was intensely intimate, but in that moment, it wasn’t enough for him. Kei wanted more. Before he could think about it, he brought their lips together. It didn’t take much, they were already so close.

They moved together, the sensation of Yamaguchi’s mouth on his own a new and not entirely unwelcome experience. Kei tried not to over think it, he tried to quiet his overactive mind that wanted to perform equations and calculate angles. But then Yamaguchi ran his hand up the back of Kei’s neck and into his hair, and Kei couldn’t think of anything anymore.

He had never thought that kissing, that touching even, could make him feel this way. Scared, and happy, and overwhelmed all at the same time. But when it came to Yamaguchi, Kei wanted more, he wanted to press their bodies together until he wasn’t sure where one of them began and the other ended. They were meant to be like that, connected in a way that Kei had never even dreamed possible.

Except he couldn’t do that—shouldn’t do that—Kei realized with a jolt. This was wrong. Kei was
“What’s wrong?” Yamaguchi asked as Kei pulled back violently. “Tsukki, are you okay?”

Why was Yamaguchi looking at him like that? Like Kei had wounded him. This was why he could never get close to Yamaguchi in that way, why their relationship had to stay the way it was. Kei couldn’t be the reason that look was on his face, he never wanted to be the reason for Yamaguchi’s pain.

“I… I can’t do this,” he mumbled. Kei hated it when people mumbled.

“Because of the mission?” Yamaguchi questioned. “Because you’ll be leaving?” His eyes were so big, trusting and inquisitive all at the same time.

“Yes… No…” Kei didn’t know. He only knew that he had just gotten Yamaguchi back, and that he couldn’t risk doing anything that would cause them to crumble again. Kei didn’t think he could take it if they did.

“Tell me, Tsukki,” he urged.

He made it sound so easy. Like Kei could put into words the swirl of thoughts that were constantly getting tangled in his head.

“You… You don’t love me,” he attempted.

It was Yamaguchi’s turn to look confused. “What…? Of course I do.”

Kei shook his head. “No, you don’t understand. I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Okay…”

“No,” he was mad now. Mad that Yamaguchi wasn’t taking this seriously. Angry with himself for being so confused, for not being able to articulate what he wanted to say. Kei liked things in black and white, for questions to have yes or no answers, for there to be a right and a wrong. But how he felt about Yamaguchi made him spin in endless circles, no clear resolutions in sight.

“You treat me like a savior.” He watched Yamaguchi intently as he spoke. “I protected you and brought you inside the Dome, and ever since you’ve thought you owe me something.” Now that he had started, it was hard for him to stop. “I don’t want you to feel like you owe it to me to be with me Yamaguchi… I never wanted us to be like that.”

It felt good to get it off his chest, but Yamaguchi wasn’t taking it the way Kei had intended. He looked mad. Dangerously mad, Kei realized.

“You really believe that?” he asked.

Kei wasn’t sure what the right answer was, or why Yamaguchi was glaring at him that way. “I don’t…”

He was startled when Yamaguchi sprang to his feet, almost knocking Kei over in the process. “You actually believe that I can’t think independently of you? That I can’t make my own decisions?”

Kei blanched. That’s not what he had meant at all. Of course he thought that Yamaguchi could make his own decisions. He was one of the smartest people Kei knew, the fact that Yamaguchi
could think otherwise was baffling.

“That’s not what I-” But Yamaguchi wouldn’t let Kei finish.

“How can you be so fucking arrogant?” Kei was surprised by the derision leaking from his voice, by the anger that was directed solely at Kei. “Oh, wait. I forgot. You always know best, don’t you, Tsukishima?”

Kei winced at the use of his full name. Yamaguchi had never called him that in all the years he had known him. At least not like this, not in a way that made Kei feel like it was an insult.

“I just don’t want you to get hurt,” he tried again.

Yamaguchi sneered at him, a look that was foreign to his face. An expression that didn’t belong there amongst the freckles and laugh lines. “That’s bullshit, Tsukki. Everything you’ve said is excuses, and you know it. You’re just scared... Terrified of feeling anything that some egotistical academic didn’t shove down your throat.”

Kei felt a flare of anger once more. “You’re wrong,” he said.

How had they gotten here? How had they gotten to this point?

“You’re blaming people who have nothing to do with this, have nothing to do with us.” Kei didn’t mean for it to come out so heated. He really didn’t want to fight. But Yamaguchi was twisting Kei’s words, spinning what he had meant in the complete wrong direction.

Yamaguchi made a weird sound that was somewhere between a snort and growl. “You know Tsukki, you can be pretty ignorant when you want to be.”

“Yamaguchi get back here,” Kei demanded as the other boy made for the door across the room.

“No.” It was so final, so definite. It was one word, curt and brisk, but it was worse than if Yamaguchi had spat a thousand insults at him.

“Yamaguchi…”

“You’re the one who can’t think for himself,” Yamaguchi spat. And just like that he was gone, leaving Kei stunned and alone.

He felt a bit shaky as he tried to take in what had just happened. He wasn’t sure what to do. All he had wanted was to protect Yamaguchi, to keep him safe and happy. But somehow, Kei had ended up hurting them both, just like he always feared he would.

Kei spent the rest of the day wallowing in self-pity. The less than happy memory he’d just watched seeming to fit perfectly with his mood. He couldn’t really focus, and he felt listless and adrift as he made his way back to his room.

Kuroo had come by at one point, but Kei had made it pretty obvious that he didn’t feel like company, and after being completely ignored, even Kuroo had eventually given up and left.

After the boredom had become too much for him, Kei had ended up poking through old documents on his wall-screen. There were files and files of information about Chronicle, all things Kei knew, but he kept looking. He thought that if he just kept digging, eventually he might find something
that could help him to understand his missing memory.

Hours passed, and Kei had given up on finding anything even remotely helpful. Now he was just scrolling through pages at random. They had files on each person on the ship, and Kei snorted at the way Kuroo’s short attention span was explicitly described.

He was about to turn off the screen altogether, when something caught his attention. It was a girl’s file, nothing that should have been out of the ordinary or raised any suspicion, except that her name was Michimya. That in and of itself shouldn’t have been strange, except… Except no one with that name had ever been on this ship…

Kei pulled back from the screen, double checking just to make sure. But, no… He had been right. If there were twenty people onboard now, then why were there Twenty-one files in the system?

Could it be a coincidence, Kei wondered? It was unlikely that the missing Chronicle user had anything to do with his missing memory. But something within Kei told him that there were too many mistakes in a program that prided itself on being mistake free.

A few more swipes of the screen, and Kei learned that the girl had grown up in Dome-2. He knew he should let it go. It would be the smart thing to do. What he should do now was turn off his screen and forget that he had ever seen her name. But Kei couldn’t do it, as hard as he tried, he couldn’t shake the feeling that the missing girl was important somehow.

These people didn’t make mistakes, so what then were they trying to cover up?

“Kei,” Kuroo sounded surprised as Kei walked into the lab that was always slightly messier than his own. “This is a surprise. Feeling more sociable?”

Kei ignored Kuroo’s taunts, choosing instead to ask him the question he was dying to know. “When you were in the Chronicle program in Dome-2, did you know a girl named Michimiya?” He got straight to the point, never one to beat around the bush.

Kuroo looked taken aback at the question he obviously hadn’t been expecting. Kei watched as he thought about it, slipping into a Chronicle memory from his time in Dome-2. “Yeah,” he finally responded. “There was a girl with that name where I grew up. I totally forgot about her. She’s not on the ship though… I wonder if she died…”

Kei disregarded Kuroo’s line of thinking, shaking his head. “She’s supposed to be here, Kuroo. Her information is in the system.”

“That’s strange,” Kuroo admitted.

“You don’t know anything about her at all?” he asked. Kei wasn’t in any position to judge, growing up he had hardly ever spent time with his fellow Chronicle members. Keiji was as close as Kei had gotten to real interaction.

Kuroo looked embarrassed at the question, “Sorry, Kei. I never really talked to her.”

He felt his hopes dashed. How else could he find information about someone who had become a ghost?

Suddenly, Kuroo’s face lit up from where Kei suspected he had been watching another memory. “Every time I see her she’s hanging out with Suga,” he said.
Kei’s head snapped up. Suga, of course… He had grown up in Dome-2 as well. Why hadn’t Kei thought of that?

“I have to go,” he called to Kuroo, not stopping to hear the other man’s questions or protests as he fled from the room.

Suga wasn’t in his lab when Kei went looking for him, a rarity for someone who spent so much time there. He wondered if he should wait, but after a few awkward moments sanding idly, Kei decided to try his room instead. He knew where it was, Suga had made sure that he did. In case Kei ever need help, he had insisted.

“Kei,” Suga opened the door after only a few knocks. He had thought that Suga would be surprised to find him standing outside his door, but he acted as if he had been expecting the visit. It made Kei uneasy.

“What can I help you with.?” he asked in that calm knowing voice.

Suddenly, Kei felt self-conscious, he didn’t know how the other man would react to questions about his past. He should probably tread carefully he told himself. He knew he would be suspicious if someone came to him asking about Yamaguchi or Akiteru.

“I…” he didn’t know how to start. “I was wondering if you could tell me about a girl named Michimiya? Kuroo thinks you might have known her,” Kei explained.

He tried to read the expression that flashed across Suga’s face, but it was cloaked in a million things Kei couldn’t identify. He thought he may have detected a lingering sadness over everything else, but the older scientist was a mystery to him, so he couldn’t be sure.

“What did you hear that name?” Suga asked.

Kei hesitated, “I found her name on one of the logs… it’s like she’s supposed to be here…” he trailed off.

“She’s not.” Suga’s voice had lost its normal soft-spoken cadence. Kei had never heard him sound like that before, ruthless and cold in a way that contrasted so strongly with his normal demeanor. But whether he meant that she wasn’t on the ship, or that she wasn’t supposed to be on the ship, Kei didn’t know.

It was obviously a touchy subject, and for a moment, Kei regretted bringing it up. He should have just let it be. But then Suga let out a sigh and gestured for Kei to come inside.

“What do you want to know?” he asked.

“I’m not sure,” he admitted truthfully.

There was a deep sadness that could be seen in Suga’s eyes, and Kei could tell that he and this girl must have been close in the past.

“Who was she?” he asked, going with the obvious question.

Suga bowed his head so that Kei couldn’t see his face as he spoke. “She was one of my best friends back on earth. A Chronicle user… Smart. But kind above all else…”
Kei nodded, even though this wasn’t the kind of information he had been looking for. Sometimes people needed to be sentimental though, Kei knew that.

“What happened to her?”

Again, Suga sighed. “There were three of us,” he seemed resigned to telling the story now, letting it flow from him like it was a relief now that he wasn’t holding it back anymore. “Me, Michimiya, and our friend Daichi.”

Kei had never heard the last name; he must not be a Chronicle user.

“We shared a room with our families and one other in Dome-2.” With a soft smile, he said, “I’m pretty sure that the three of us were born friends. When you lived that close you didn’t really have much of a choice.”

Kei remembered what Kuroo had said about overpopulation in Dome-2, and pictured all of them cramped in together. It sounded like hell to him, but maybe it could be a way for others to form bonds.

“We were always together, even after Michimiya and I were chosen to become part of the Chronicle program. The two of us may have had Chronicle, but Daichi was always the leader.”

There was a seedling brought from the lab that Suga had resting on his small table, and he looked down on it fondly as he continued. “We were both in love with him,” he admitted. “We would have followed him to the ends of the earth and back, no questions asked.”

Kei wondered how it was that they hadn’t hated each other. If anyone else had loved Yamaguchi the way Kei had, he sure as hell wouldn’t have been friendly. But that’s how Suga was making their relationship sound… almost like he and the girl were closer because of the love they shared for their friend.

“One day, some men from H-Corps came in, they said they needed to do some tests on a Chronicle user. They told us they were going to choose one of us to remove from the program. Michimiya and I were both in the middle of the pack, we weren’t the smartest, but we weren’t at the bottom of the group either. We were just what they were looking for.”

Kei was confused. He had never heard of anything like that happening before. “What tests were they doing?”

Suga shook his head. “They didn’t tell us. But even back then we knew it couldn’t be good.”

He tried to imagine why H-Corps could have been taking kids out of the program to run tests. Had they been looking for bugs? Trying to make improvements? His mind couldn’t supply anything else.

“Daichi kept talking about running away,” Suga continued, “but deep down we all knew we wouldn’t make it very far outside the Dome.”

Kei thought about three kids fleeing the Domes by themselves, and knew Suga was right. They wouldn’t have made it very far.

“I got a note that night saying that they had chosen me.” His fingers brushed the base of the plant’s pot. “That they would come to collect me in the morning.”

“But you didn’t go?” Kei asked.
Suga shot him an annoyed look, as if chastising him for not having enough patience. Kei looked down politely, Suga was one of the only people on this ship that Kei would always back down from. There was just something about him, something that made people not want to mess with him.

“I was going to,” he said softly. “I had already said my goodbyes. To Daichi… To Michimiya… To my family. But then the next morning came and the men never showed up.” He looked sad again. “There was this short time where I thought that they had changed their mind, that they weren’t going to come… That we could all go back to normal… But of course, that wasn’t true…” he paused. “We realized Michimiya was gone the next morning.”

“She took your place?” Kei was surprised. He knew that whatever tests they had been planning wouldn’t have been good, it was a huge sacrifice to make.

Suga nodded, he had a far-off look in his eyes. “I’m still not sure why she did it…” he admitted. She never said anything to us, just snuck off in the middle of the night…”

Kei shuddered at the thought. He understood all too well how people could be there one moment, and then gone the next.

“Daichi was distraught, he felt like he had failed her.” Kei watched the plant now too, it was so tiny, hard to believe it would one day help to feed what was left of humanity. “I never told him… but I think she did it so that I could have Daichi…”

He didn’t want to hear this. Kei hadn’t wanted to know about the people Suga had lost, or the suffering he had gone through back on earth. All he wanted was to know who she was. An unhelpful voice in his head that sounded disturbingly like Suga told him that to know who she was, he needed to know these things first, needed to understand who she had been.

“So, you never saw her again?” Kei prompted.

Suga shook his head. “No… we saw her. Daichi found out where they were keeping her and he hatched a plan to break her out.”

Suga paused, “I’ve never told this to anyone before.”

Kei shifted awkwardly, trying to appear supportive as Suga continued. “We snuck into this compound near the edge of the Dome.” He shuddered at the memory. “Horrible place, I don’t know what it was for originally, but it couldn’t have been anything good. When we found her, she wasn’t the same…” He wondered what Suga was seeing as he spoke, it definitely wasn’t the small plant in front of them.

“How so?” he asked.

A disgusted look crossed the other man’s face, anger mixed with revulsion. “Something must have gone horribly wrong with the experiment, because when we found her, she didn’t remember us… Not just that though… She didn’t remember anything.”

Kei frowned. Suga must be mistaken, what he was saying wasn’t possible.

“It was awful,” he said, a far off look in his eyes. “They had her strapped down, and she was there… but… not there, at the same time. She was just… empty,” he finished.

Suddenly Kei’s mind was working a mile a minute. Loose threads were beginning to weave together in his brain, creating a bigger picture. A girl, taken to be experimented on, found with no memory when she shouldn’t be able to forget the simplest things. An experiment gone wrong? Or
right perhaps…

“And you’re sure they never told you what the experiment was?” he asked.

Suga looked startled by the change in Kei’s tone. “No… They just took her.”

“What if… What if they were trying to make her forget?” He couldn’t help the curiosity that slipped into his voice. He knew that he should be more sensitive to Suga’s situation, but he couldn’t help himself. Things were finally starting to make sense.

It was Suga’s turn to look confused. “Why would they do that, Kei? The whole purpose of who we are, of what we do, is to make sure we never forget.”

Kei stood suddenly, “I have to go,” he said.

“What…?” Suga looked stricken. “Kei, what was all of this about?”

“Nothing,” he lied smoothly, “like I said, I was just curious.”

Suga had no reason to suspect, to be suspicious of those experiments, but Kei knew something he didn’t. Kei knew that he and Michimiya had something in common, that they were linked by a shared experience. Neither should have been able to forget, but both had. That lead to only one conclusion… What if H-Cops had wanted them to forget? What if the tests performed on that girl all those years ago had been about gathering the knowledge of how to erase memories from Chronicle? What if they could make any one of them forget anything at any time?

H-Corps were the ones who had taken his memory, Kei was sure of it now. He felt a burning in his chest. He had to get that memory back.

“Hey, Suga,” he called as he turned to leave, “what happened to Daichi?”

Suga turned away from him so that Kei couldn’t see the other man’s face. “I wish I knew…” he said sadly.

Maybe, Kei thought…

But then he remembered all those bodies down on earth. He thought about Michimiya and what had happened to her. He remembered Kuroo with Kenma’s blood running down his face.

…Or maybe not.

****

Kei sat alone in their room, counting the minutes until midnight. Soon it would be the anniversary of their mother’s death, and a reminder of the day Kei’s life had changed forever. On that day ten years ago, their mother had been crushed by a falling steel plate with no hope of survival. At least it had been quick, Kei told himself, at least he didn’t have to think about her in pain, struggling while blood filled her lungs and her bones snapped at odd angels.

It had been fast. The Chancellor had told him as much. She hadn’t felt anything. Of course, there was no way The Chancellor could really know what his mother did or didn’t feel before she had died. But Kei found that after all these years, after all this time, he still held on to the notion that his mother had slipped from life without feeling the pain that came with the circumstances of her death.
He watched the minutes pass, one after the other. As he did, he thought of Akiteru and Yamaguchi, of all the wrongs he had committed that would leave him alone on the day that he wanted to be alone the least.

Yamaguchi had left hours ago, and Kei had no idea where he was. He wasn’t accustomed to fighting with Yamaguchi. Was Kei supposed to go looking for him? Let him cool down? He didn’t know, and he wasn’t sure how to find out.

And what about Akiteru? Kei felt stupid now for the anger he had felt towards his brother. Could he really be mad at Akiteru for leaving? Could he really begrudge his brother for wanting to spend this horrible day with someone he loved, the person who would hold him and comfort him, the person who would make him smile. Kei had wanted to do the same thing with Yamaguchi after all.

He was being unfair, and he knew it.

One minute to go… Kei held his breath. No matter how many years passed, or how much older he got, this day never seemed to get any easier. With Chronicle, Kei could remember every anniversary perfectly, but this would be the first time he was alone. No one would be there to hold Kei. No one would comfort Kei. No one would make him smile…

“Tsukki?”

Kei’s head whipped up to find Yamaguchi standing in the doorway. He was here… he had come back. Kei felt his heart lurch.

“Yamaguchi,” he breathed, “I’m so sorry… I never meant…”

Yamaguchi silenced him as he came to stand in front of Kei in the dark room. “I’m sorry too, Tsukki. I was angry and I lashed out at you.”

“I…”

Yamaguchi delicately laid a finger across Kei’s lips to shush him, “No, Tsukki, let me finish,” he took a breath. “I tried to rush you into something when you weren’t ready, and I’m sorry.” He smiled at Kei. “I understand that you’re scared… Believe me, I understand…”

“I was scared,” Kei whispered softly, “I am scared…”

Yamaguchi nodded. “I know.”

He didn’t know how to tell Yamaguchi what he needed to say. Kei didn’t know how to tell him how sorry he was, or how thankful he was that he had come back.

“Tsukki, you’ve been in charge of saving people for such a long time. And you saved me too. I can see where you would think that I owe you something, and maybe I do.” He brushed his fingers over the ridge of Kei’s cheekbone, making a trail all the way down to his jaw. “But the thing is, we all owe each other something in life. But with the people we love most we have to learn to let those things go. I would do anything for you, and I know you would do the same for me.”

Kei looked away, ashamed of the way he had acted earlier. He knew what Yamaguchi was getting at, but it was still hard for Kei to accept that people could give without expecting anything in return.

“There are no debts or tallies,” Yamaguchi brought their foreheads together like so many times before. “The only thing we really owe each other is to love one another. And I think we have that,
Tsukki… I hope we have that…”

Kei wanted to tell him that they did, of course they did. They loved each other, and what did anything else matter when compared to that. But as was the case when Kei seemed to need them most, words failed him.

“You don’t have to save me,” Yamaguchi whispered.

“I love you…” Kei responded quietly. He meant the words, meant them with every fiber of his being.

“I know.” Yamaguchi breathed into the darkness. “I know, Tsukki.”

“I want to be with you.” Kei wasn’t sure why it was so hard to say aloud.

Yamaguchi wrapped him in his arms, nestling his face into the crook of Kei’s neck. He nodded in response to Kei’s words.

“But I’m still scared,” he admitted.

“I know,” Yamaguchi repeated gently. “But we’ll take things slow, and we’ll learn together. Okay?”

Now it was Kei’s turn to nod. It was the anniversary of the day his mother had died, and somewhere out there, Akiteru was taking comfort in the arms of a women that Kei had never met, but who made this day just a bit more bearable. And here, in this tiny room that he had grown up in, Kei was doing the same. He was wrapped in the embrace of the person he loved most. For so long, he and Yamaguchi had been standing on the edge of a precipice, and looking at Yamaguchi now, Kei knew that they had jumped.

There was no going back once they were falling. Or maybe, Kei thought, that was actually false, and they had really been falling this whole time. Right from the moment they had first met one another. But maybe that too was okay, because like always, they were falling together. And if they were falling together, well, then maybe falling wasn’t such a bad thing after all.

Chapter End Notes

Yay for progress! <3

End Notes

It'll be dark for the boys for a while, but it’ll get better eventually. Yama’s not dead, I promise…

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