Schuld und Sühne

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Summary

Osamu Dazai breathed in the cold November air while the first streaks of golden light became visible above the skyline in Yokohama. A calm morning for most of Yokohama's popularity, one that could have been calm for Dazai as well, if it weren't for the gruesome corpse lying against the brick wall of one of the port's industrial buildings.

The Police are investigating an especially brutal chain of murders in Yokohama aka The Serial Killer AU no one asked for
So this is the first time I have ever written anything at all. Not to mention a long series as the one I'm planning to establish here, so please have mercy!
This is basically a self indulgent fic, since I love crime drama's and such and there wasn't really a big series yet for that sort of story in this fandom, so I wrote one myself at the request of a friend of mine!
Also english isn't my native language, so if you spot any mistakes feel free to point them out to me~
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Comments and Kudos are always appreciated : )

I hope you all enjoy!
Chapter 1

Osamu Dazai breathed in the cold November air while the first streaks of golden light became visible above the skyline in Yokohama. He lazily watched the work of his colleagues as they scurried around in the alleyway.

It was a calm morning for most of Yokohama's popularity, one that could have been calm for Dazai as well, if it weren't for the gruesome corpse lying against the brick wall of one of the port's industrial buildings. The area was ugly and abandoned. And he couldn't help but slightly scrunch up his nose in disgust at his surroundings. A reminder of his early childhood, of a past he would rather leave behind and bury in the ground for all eternity. He averted his eyes and stared back at the streaks of light on the horizon.

“Allright, cue me in” he sighed, while turning away from the dawn to look at a much less pleasant sight; his co worker Kunikida Dippo who shot him an impatient look. “A nurse found the corpse in the early morning hours.” He pointedly checked his phone and then his beloved notebook before gesturing towards Yosano. “She examined the corpse, she can give you all the information you need, I have to leave before the press arrives.” Kunikida finished tiredly while rubbing his eyes, when he looked up again Dazai noticed the dark patches under his eyes for the first time that morning. So he wasn't the only one barely getting any sleep these days. Then again, it was six in the mourning and they had worked until late into the morning for the past days.

“Dazai, did you hear me?” Kunikida's tone was harsh but his eyes shimmered with barely hidden concern.

“Of course, I will talk to her immediately.” He answered hurriedly. If there was one thing he couldn't use right now, it was the concern of his colleague. Kunikida looked stressed out enough as it already was. Normally Dazai would take his time to tease him and banter around for a while, but even Dazai knew the time and place, especially before the background of the past weeks, would be highly inappropriate. Instead he chose to be considerate for once.

“You should get on your way then, the press is waiting as you said. Give your best!” He said cheerfully raising his fist in the air. Kunikida rolled his eyes and muttered something under his breath before turning around. Dazai was sure he had seen the slightest twitching of lips but he simply raised an eyebrow and wisely keeping his mouth shut. He watched Kunikida disappear into one of the informal civilian police cars before making his way past the police bands to their forensic expert Dr. Yosano Akiko.

She was crouching down next to the mangled corpse on the ground. ”A nurse found him in the early morning hours while making her way to her night shift. She thought he was drunk and almost walked by, but when she noticed all the blood she checked for vitals. Upon finding none she immediately called the police.” she said without as much as glancing in his direction. “But I suppose Kunikida already told you as much.”

Dazai nodded before taking a better look at the gruesome scene before him. The corpse (presumably male) had been propped up against the wall, the belly had been cleanly cut open, intestines sprawled on the ground before him. He had bloody marks on the backs of his hands and some smaller cuts on his legs and his face. One eye was blue, his lip was split and he had a few purple bruises on his face. The throat had been slit and the blood from the wound was covering the ground some feet away leading a trail to the hunched figure before him.
The man’s eyes were dull, they had lost all colour. “I wonder what he can see now.” Dazai thought. He didn’t feel any compassion or pity for the man, moreover he found, that he envied him. The man’s eyes were open to the one great secret, the culmination of life. The one thing Dazai had always craved above all other things.

He shivered. In that moment Yosano interrupted his thoughts: “The victim appears to be in his late thirties, male. He is of average height and build. Dark hair and brown eyes. His clothes are... middle class I suppose.” She fixed him with her dark eyes before continuing, now with a certain urgency in her voice as if she desperately wanted him to understand something. “He was ambushed from behind, grabbed by the hair and had his throat cut open with a very sharp instrument. The perpetrator was left handed as far as I can see.” She vaguely gestured to the man’s neck. “The victim's head was smashed against the wall, he was probably beaten before he was dragged to the opposite side. Here his belly was cut open. He was most likely alive, judging by all the blood.” She finished, still fixing Dazai with her inquiring gaze. He gestured for her to go on. Licking his lips, he already anticipated what she would say next.

“The cuts on the hands were inflicted postmortem. They look like stigmata’

Dazai shook his head slightly. “This is the sixth victim already”

“That we know of” She added. They both exchanged long suffering glances before Dazai turned around and Yosano stood up, brushing invisible dirt off of her suit and making her vertebrae pop while stretching. “The press will have a feast”,”They will have our heads” he corrected, watching darkly as the last patches of gold made place for the baby blue of the morning sky.

Yosano passed by him sighing loudly before turning around one last time. “I called the coroners. They should be here any time soon, hopefully we’ll find out more through the proper examination of the body.” He nodded absent mindedly before walking towards Kenji and Ranpo who were immersed in a conversation gesturing wildly around the crime scene.

“Yo, did you find anything?”, he greeted the two of them cheerfully. Ranpo was a detective, just like Dazai, while Kenji was part of Yosano’s forensic unit. They both possessed the odd (but useful) gift of not being affected even in the slightest by their work.

While most of the force supported the two of them and valued their professional insights, a lot of people (especially the assigned police work forces that assisted with the cases but often changed, depending on the type of case and the location) gave them odd glances and generally avoided talking to the two men who were somehow, despite whatever brutal scene they were investigating, in a cheerful mood.

While Dazai could understand the contempt and the general dirty glances, he himself didn’t particularly care if one of his colleagues was emotionally stunted (not that they were, at least Dazai didn’t believe that, different people simply dealt with different situations differently) as long as they got the job done, and the boss seemed to agree with him on that.

Ranpo took off his glasses and fixed Dazai with his sharp forest green eyes. “I suppose Yosano already briefed you about the condition of the body?”

“Yes she did”, Dazai confirmed. “Well apart from the body we didn't really find anything out of the ordinary, at least not yet...” Ranpo provided, and Dazai immediately noticed the sparkle in the older man’s eyes.

“Ah. He's excited”.

Edogawa Ranpo was someone who valued a decent mystery. Someone who was able to conceal their traces as well as this particular murderer, who was most likely responsible for at least six deaths already, would certainly be able to provide a good challenge for the young detective.
It wasn't that Ranpo didn't feel any sympathy, he just chose to ignore those feelings in favour of dealing with the problem at hand. Like a switch he would cut off his emotions and focus on the case and finding the murderer. It was his way of helping the victims and their families.

“It's the same as last time, the murderer didn't leave any traces, no mud, DNA, nothing we have found yet. Well at least nothing obvious yet. But then again to single out DNA from a back alley. Well...” Kenji gave him a meaningful look before adverting his eyes and breathing out tiredly. His breath came out in little clouds and swirled around for a moment before it disappeared. God. He was exhausted himself, he couldn't quite remember the last time he had slept properly.

A flash of ocean blue in his memory, of hair like fire and laughter like breaking glass.

Fuck.

He nodded understandingly. “Well, I can't say that I'm surprised. It was to be expected.”

“It is the same murderer then?” Kenji inquired, searching for the answer in his eyes as he curiously peered up at Dazai with golden irises.

“Oh obviously.” Ranpo answered in Dazai's stead, putting his glasses back on. “The modus operandi is the same. The men was killed after the injuries were inflicted on him, all except for the stigmata. He's the fourth victim whose belly was cut open now.”

Dazai nodded in confirmation. “Yes we think it was the same killer”.

Silence followed after that.

Dazai tried to go over the facts of the case in his mind again, but his thoughts kept derailing and so eventually he started watching his own breath turn into puffy clouds. The other two seemed to mull over their own thoughts because they only started moving when the coroner's car arrived.

They watched silently as the body was carefully put in a body bag before the police hoisted it in the car. Yosano shouted a few instructions at the men before lighting a cigarette and making her way over to the three men who were silently watching the process.

As she stood next to them, they all watched the vehicle disappear. After a few minutes Dazai interrupted the silence “I suppose we should get back to the office then.”. The others nodded and they made their way back to Yosano's car (She was the only one trusted with driving after a particularly nasty incident that had involved an angry shop owner, a furious biker, a lamp post and gourmet sausage as well as a few angry cats, that had, without a doubt been traumatized for the rest of their lives), and made their way back to the station.

Back at central command they all received coffee from Haruno, the secretary of their little unit. She and Naomi Tanizaki worked at the archives and were always able to pull out the most obscure informations through contacts or long forgotten files (and made the best coffee in the entire police unit).

The office was a rather grand, rectangular room with a big table in the middle for their meetings, a few desks at the sides with computers, as well as huge pinboards splattered with information about the latest murders they were investigating. Dazai was rather certain however, that all recent investigation would either be transferred to other units or put on hold after the development of the morning.

(The times between new murders were getting shorter now. Soon they would make a mistake Dazai could feel it, and whenever that was about to happen Dazai and the others would be there, it was always like that. Serial killers want to be caught. They want their work to be recognized. To be
admired)

After they had all received their coffee and the two women had abandoned their paperwork in favour of sitting down and listening to the information they had gathered at the crime scene, the boss and Naomi's Brother Junichirou Tanizaki, their IT expert, (he preferred being addressed by his last name like Dazai and Kunikida) entered with stern looks.

Yukichi Fukuzawa was the boss of their special force and a brilliant albeit greying detective with sharp eyes and a slightly intimidating aura. Although he was strict and always wore a stern look on his face, he was loyal and intelligent, both traits Dazai had learned to value immensely. Above all else he possessed something that most members of their task force did not yet; experience and the respect of the rest of the precinct.

He had started as a police officer and had slowly made his way through the ranks, not someone especially extraordinary, but talented enough and certainly reliable. In other words he was a perfect boss for a bunch of eccentric misfits like the lot of them (well except Kunikida perhaps, but then again rumour had it, if the boss were to retire, he would be the oner taking over, and Dazai really couldn't agree more – although he would never admit that out aloud).

“Well then shall we begin?” Fukuzawa said, taking his seat at the end of the table.

“So we presume this is another murder in this serial killer case, yes?” Fukuzawa summarized looking ahead with a serious expression. They all nodded.

“And Kunikida is still trying to restrain the press, yes?” This time directing his gaze towards Dazai whose expression immediately cheered up at the question. “Why yes, that's true! Speaking if which, did you all know how they're calling this new murderer? The crucifix killer! Y'know because of the stigmata.” He exclaimed happily. But his eyes were dark and his smile didn't reach his eyes. Almost everyone seemed to understand immediately what he was indicating, as their moods turned sour.

“How did they find out about the stigmata?” Naomi asked with barely concealed rage, looking around at everyone as if anyone would have been able to give her the answer.

“I read something similar actually, I just wanted to report it, but well...” Haruno said uncertainly glancing around. “Most of the media outlets only have the general information, bloody crime scenes, murders committed in a similar fashion. They thought of ridiculous names and... well...” She glanced around again, swallowing slightly before continuing. “There were some that were able to describe the crime scenes in much more detail, some even had pictures.”

“Pictures?” Tanizaki asked, obviously surprised.

“That means we definitely have someone selling the press data, not just someone who gave away a little too much information by accident.” He said eyebrows knit tightly together.

“The mole is probably under the police force or the forensic team then.” Ranpo exclaimed, not reacting to the glare he received from Yosano for insinuating the guilt of one of her subordinates.

“It's most likely that it was one of the responding police officers, they're out of the case after their immediate work is done and would not be at a high risk being found out easily.” Dazai added lightly, trying to ease the sudden tension. He didn't believe that it was one of Yosano's men, they were all reliable and hadn't committed anything during the time they had worked together.

“I can try to find the source of the pictures, but then again it won't change the fact that the information has already been leaked.” Tanizaki said a bit uncertainly.
“That's true” Fukuzawa sighed.

In that moment, the director of the station walked in, Natsume Soseki was followed by two of his police captains. Immediately everyone moved to stand up, but he waved his hand dismissively before taking the seat at the other rear end of the table, across from Fukuzawa.

“I'm sorry I'm barging in so unexpectedly, but due to the developments of this morning, it was time for a briefing. This case is slowly getting out of our hands. The people are frightened and it seems we don't have a single real lead yet.” He said looking around the room solemnly. The two captains, a man and a woman, exchanged brief glances before staring ahead like stone figures from where they had positioned themselves behind Natsume's chair like the royal guard.

“All right, I suppose we should go over everything we know about this case then.” They all groaned in union. Dazai couldn't remember how often they had already gone over the information they had gathered (which wasn't a lot in all honesty) in a desperate attempt to find something, anything that could give them a lead.

In that moment Kunikida entered the office, he looked stressed and even more tired than Dazai remembered. Somehow that set him on edge, Kunikida was normally the composed, the rational one. They couldn't afford to lose him to stress. Dazai could feel the unease shifting in his stomach now. His hands were cold and he could feel a headache forming around his temples.

He shot them all a look before stating briskly:“They're really on to us now. They know a lot more than we supposed they did and-” “We know” Ranpo interrupted him. “They know about the stigmata and that they somehow obtained pictures. They could be all over the Internet by now.” Kunikida drastically paled at this, shooting the boss a desperate look, as if he was trying to plead for different information, but Fukuzawa simply nodded.

“We suppose it might have been someone from the normal police force.” Tanizaki added.

“We were just going to go over the latest information for now.” Haruno chimed in gesturing over to Natsume with her chin. It seemed Kunikida had only noticed him in that moment, and he almost fell over while trying to bow for their captain. Natsume simply nodded, expression grim at the latest news.

Kunikida exhaled slowly before taking his place next to Dazai. “Very well let's start then” Fukuzawa said after Kunikida had settled down and Naomi had gotten him a cup of coffee as well.

For a moment tense silence filled the room until Haruno cleared her throat and all heads turned toward her. “As you all know, last month on the 8th of October the corpse of the university student Maki Sugimoto was found. She was discovered in the evening, her body had been found on the shore near the territory of the Port Mafia, thus at first everyone suspected their involvement. She was stabbed in the neck with a sharp instrument, later tests and examinations revealed, that it was the same instrument used on the other victims.” She shot Yosano a look as if to ask for confirmation. Yosano simply nodded and proceeded “The wound on our latest victim looked alike to the ones before, I am confident it's the same weapon.” Her voice was as calm and professional as ever but Dazai could see how tightly set the line of her shoulders was and the steely determined look in her eyes. “We really need a vacation. We deserve a vacation goddamnit”, he thought while Haruno continued.

“She died almost immediately, later the killer carved a stigmata on each hand. She held up a picture from the file before displaying the close up of a tanned hand that had been impaled cleanly with a round object. “Maybe he actually used a nail, like in the new testament” Dazai thought shuddering
slightly and immediately started mentally berating himself. He had seen worse hadn't he? So why was this case suddenly affecting him so much for crying out loud!

(Perhaps because you already know the answers to some of those questions, you just don't want them to be true. Desperately trying to escape your own mind.)

“The weapon used for the penetration of the hand is not the same he uses to kill his victims however.”, She continued, looking more serious with each word she uttered.

“When it was discovered, that several other murder victims with a similar modus operandi had been found, the suspicion fell relatively fast from the port mafia. The work was messy and...” She paused stuttering slightly “The deed was cruel even for the port Mafia, it was a deviation from their usual MO. It was assumed the bodies were all dumped on sights close to the port on purpose, to ease suspicion.” Her hands were trembling slightly and she nervously corrected her glasses.

“That was when our bureau was officially called in.” At that she glanced over at Natsume who had his hands folded neatly over the table, but Dazai could see that his knuckles were beginning to turn white. Dazai absent mindedly rubbed his thumb over his chin before looking back at Haruno.

“Looking back from the time of Miss Sugimoto's death there had been a total of two official murders, a third was added upon closer examination of the cases. Naomi, would you be so kind to continue with the rest of the victims?” She asked correcting her glasses again before putting down her pile of documents. Naomi nodded and stood up as Haruno sat down.

She cleared her throat and overflew the first page with a few glances before beginning.

“Chronologically, the first victim was Mei Matsuhito, her body was found on the 24th October last year. She was 19 years old and worked at a retail shop, well at least as a front, she committed an armed robbery at age 15, however being underage and, while carrying a weapon and generally threatening the customers and clerks, the ring leader and the other adults were convicted to ten years in prison, while she and two other juveniles were only sentenced to 5 years, she was released after 3 for good behaviour.”

At that Naomi scrunched up her nose, obviously disagreeing.

“2 months after her release another robbery took place, one of the bankers was shot fatally. The person who allegedly shot him was around 170cm and female. It fit her description, but she had an alibi. Her sister and her friends told the police she had been with them at the time of the robbery, so they couldn't arrest her.”

Dazai looked behind Naomi at the picture of the young woman. She had pitch black cat like intelligent eyes framed by her unruly hair and expressive eyebrows. Dazai had seen her type many times in his life, and although he had never been able to identify with the sort of driven personality those kinds of people normally had, he could respect the resolve in her eyes. (It was the same as his.)

He was snapped back into reality when Naomi hung up the next picture.

He only listened half heartedly to the information that was given. He already knew everything after all.

Reina Sakamoto, a female government worker, nothing unusual about her, disappeared on the 14th of march, found two days later behind a dumpster. A proper woman with cold, blue eyes.

Asahi Kobayashi, a thug without a job. Koichi Iwasaki, an old priest and last Maki Sugimoto, the university student (she had wanted to major in chemistry).

He sighed, this was nothing new. They didn't know anything about the motive, the victims didn't seem to have a connection at all.
“This doesn't help at all!” Ranpo whined next to him, and although Dazai didn't suspect it was the best way to end the conversation he did have a point.

His gaze wandered back to Mei. A criminal. Then the young office lady Reina. A government worker. Then Asahi. At least two of them had a criminal background. But the rest did not, that simply did not help! Still he suddenly had a strange feeling in his gut. His eyes flew to the priest. Priests. Now, didn't their kind always hide something behind locked doors.

He licked his licks and sat up straighter, they had not personally checked the families and backgrounds after all. It had been the job of the police force before the cases had been put next to each other.

“What if they are linked through their personal history?”
He interrupted. Ranpo gave him a look “No shit Sherlock.” Dazai responded with an unimpressed scowl.
“We have been assuming until now, that he chose his victims randomly, since there doesn't seem to be a connection between them at first glance.”

“You mean like they were all part of a secret cult, or were at all fault for some crime or other they committed together like in the cheap opera soaps?” Yosano asked raising an eyebrow.

“We already checked for any kind of connection between them. We didn't find anything, much less the police force. They never met, they're not connected. They don't have the same jobs, the same age, the same appearance or gender, didn't go to the same schools, colleges, kindergarten. They're not even interested in the same things. No bar they all frequented or a plane or goddamn boat trip they took together! Nothing!” Kunikida ranted, red blotches were starting to appear on his cheeks and his eyebrows were narrowed.

Silence followed his outburst. Everyone avoided their eyes and found sudden pleasure in the wallpaper or the dying plants on the windowsills.
Ranpo next to him was the exception however, he stared at Dazai intently before asking: “What do you mean then, connected by their personal history?”

Dazai cleared his throat before looking back at the pictures Naomi had pinned to the board.
“Well two of them have a criminal record at least, there's the priest, those are always hiding something” He rolled his eyes at the indignant noises of the two police captains. “the two women...” Everyone sighed. “So we have nothing.” Kunikida concluded.

But Dazai ignored him in favour of staring at the two women. Reina's cold eyes especially intrigued him. (His eyes had been like that once as well.) Maki on the other hand was completely average, she was pretty in a youthful “cute” sort of way. She had big brown eyes and long black hair with bangs that she kept up in two buns. A few freckles dusted her nose and in the picture she was smiling sweetly into the camera, the picture of perfect innocence. She was wearing nail polish, dangly earrings and a bit if make up. Dazai clicked his tongue.

“I think it is at least worth looking into the pasts of the victims once more.” Fukuzawa interrupted the silent discussions amongst his workforce. Ranpo nodded. “Think about it, sinners and blasphemes were crucified after all!” “But Jesus was innocent wasn't he?” Tanizaki shot back at him. Ranpo simply pouted before turning around and staring into Dazai's eyes. “I think you might be on to something, it's the only thing I can think of that would make sense.” He said, adjusting his glasses. Dazai nodded slowly.

“Well then,” Natsume said standing up and stretching a bit. “I hope you'll find a lead soon, this is simply a mess. One that should come to an end soon.” He fixed Fukuzawa with his gaze before
nooding and leaving the room, his two subordinates at his heels.

“Well then everyone, let's get to work, we'll divide everyone into pairs of two, each pairs is going to be assigned to a certain person they're going to investigate.” Fukuzawa decided.

“The Tanizaki siblings are going to investigate Mei Matsuhiro. Dazai, Kunikida you will take a closer look at Miss Reina Sakamoto,” Dazai couldn't help but grin at that, the Captain gave him a glowering look that was obviously meant to tell him he shouldn't take it too far, but he simply couldn't help but feel giddy. She was exactly the person he was most interested in. He was sure she had something to hide behind her perfect facade.

“Yosano, Kenji you will go after Mr. Kobayashi's acquaintances, be careful.” Yosano raised an eyebrow at this, she and Kenji were on the forensic team after all, normally they weren't send out to gather information. But then again Yosano was very capable of prying information from people (she had previously worked for the institute of the criminally insane, where she had functioned as the doctor). Not to mention both her and Kenji were no-nonsense sort of people who could hold their ground in a fight. Certainly not a bad choice, considering most of Asahi Kobayashi's acquaintances were most likely of the unfriendly sort. “Finally; Ranpo, you'll drag Poe from the archives, the two of you will investigate the priest, Koichi Iwasaki, that shouldn't be too dangerous. Haruno, you and I will investigate Miss Sakamoto.”

“Sir, what about the examination of the body?” Yosano asked.
“T'm sure one of your colleagues can take over.” Yosano pressed her mouth together in a thin line.
“I'm sure they could, but I'd rather take a look for myself. Kunikida could go with Kenji and Dazai could take that boy, Atsushi.” She suggested.

Immediately Dazai's eyes began to sparkle, oh it would be a lot of fun to take Atsushi on the trip. He waited eagerly for the Chef's answer while the man thought about Yosano's proposal.
“Fine then.” He said nodding one last time before handing out the assignments.

Dazai left the office in good spirits that day, making his way towards his flat. He had a good feeling, his headache had disappeared and he couldn't stop smiling as he walked along the cold, dark streets during that early November night.

Finally they were getting somewhere.
Chaper 2

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the nice comments and Kudos! The day after I posted this was really stressful and I was really happy about everything you wrote, it really cheered me up when I checked my e-mails I immediately smiled haha!
Anyway in this chapter Atsushi finally appears! (Don't ask me when Chuuya is going to make an appearance, it might take some time...)
And the detective work begins yay!

Chapter 2

The next morning Dazai stood up in a hurry. He burned his tongue when he drank his coffee and almost died slipping in the bathroom (he wished).

When he arrived at the office almost everyone was getting ready for their trips. Dazai was going to start investigating the women's workplace, then her family, or rather her father who lived in the countryside.

But before that, he had to get Atsushi of course. Cheerfully wishing his colleagues a good day (which was answered by groans and a few curses and sarcastic comment) he made his way over to the old apartment complex Atsushi lived in.
He had picked up the boy from the streets, half starved to death and abandoned by everyone. (He had once known someone exactly like that. But he had failed them, thus this time he had to make sure, that the boy would go on to lead a good life.)

He had brought the boy into the juvenile care centre. Young adults could volunteer there to help out in the community. In exchange for a place to live and a bit of money of course. Atsushi being the ever faithful person he was, had immediately petitioned to join Dazai at the station. Since then he had helped out with a few cases and done some of the paperwork. As he was still a student, he only worked part time on certain days. The entire unit had soon come to take a liking to the boy and they had quickly warmed up to each other. Atsushi, just like Poe was therefore considered a full member of their little task force by its members.

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It was in the early morning hours of the 7th of November when Atsushi Nakajima was brutally torn from his peaceful sleep by someone obnoxiously knocking on his door to the beat of 'we will rock you'.

He groaned, fighting his way out of his Futon and almost face planting into the wall while stumbling over his alarm clock. (It was five in the god damn morning?! Who heck was at his door that early?! He had school for crying out loud.)

After stumbling through the half darkness of his room (It was still dark outside. What the hell?) he finally made it to the door. Upon opening he found none other than Osamu Dazai at his front porch grinning from ear to ear.
“Why, good morning sleepy hat! I see you're thoroughly rested, so let's go!~”
Atsushi blinked a couple of times. It was true that he was very grateful towards Dazai, the man had done a lot for him. Hell, he might have died if it weren't for him, but in that moment Atsushi would have gladly fulfilled all of Dazai's wishes and strung him up by the front porch with the dirty lamp cable.

“What do you want Dazai-san, it's five in the morning.” He exclaimed, trying to sound angry, but he was too tired and ended up sounding more desperate than anything else.
Dazai's smile only grew wider as he went past Atsushi into the apartment. Atsushi simply shrugged in defeat and followed the taller man into his kitchen were he had positioned himself on a stool carefully watching Atsushi as he entered, a smile still evident around the corners of his lips.

“We have to question one of the victims' family and colleagues, of the crucifix killer. You've heard of him haven't you?” Dazai asked nonchalantly. If Atsushi hadn't been awake before, he certainly was now. He stared at Dazai in shock.

“The crucifix killer?! Y-you mean the one that's all over the news?” He asked still unable to move. Dazai rolled his eyes before answering teasingly:’No the other Crucifix Killer. Of course the one from the news!’ He stood up in a fluid motion strolling towards Atsushi before leaning against the table and looking down at him. Atsushi was still speechless and could do nothing but gape at Dazai.

The taller man looked at him inquiringly. “Cat got your tongue, Atsushi?” He asked playfully, before pushing himself away from the table.

Atsushi continued to stare at him before hastily opening his mouth. “I-I don't think I understand, I didn't know you guys were the ones investigating this case? And-and you said you and I have to question...” He stared at Dazai a bit baffled before the other man cheerfully nodded. “Exactly, so go on and get ready! We'll have to drive a bit, her parents live in the country side and we still have to question her colleagues before that.”

“But... I have school today.” Atsushi said helplessly. Dazai only laughed loudly at that, throwing his head back and revealing his bandaged neck. That was when Atsushi noticed for the first time what a good mood Dazai was in. The man really was mystery to him.

Not wanting to question his mentor further he hurried to get his things and quickly got ready in the bathroom, before following Dazai outside.

“I'd say we'll talk to her colleagues first, since she worked for the government at the municipal building. Hopefully we'll find some useful information.” Dazai said, before taking a sharp turn around a street corner and hailing for a cab.

—

The drive didn't take too long but Dazai used the time anyway to fill Atsushi in on the most important details about the case (most of which he already knew due to the damned news).

“Our person of interest is Miss Reina Sakamoto, she was found on the 16th of March near the port area. She was stabbed in the belly repeatedly, before her head was smashed in with a blunt object, that turned out to be a stone a few feet away from where she was found. We weren't able to recover any useful samples of evidence, just like before.” Dazai carefully glanced towards their driver, but he seemed preoccupied with, well driving, and silently catching the tune of the song currently playing on the radio. “Her hands were marked with the stigmata just like the rest of the victims. She had just turned 37 a month prior to her death. She worked as a secretary for the government.” He continued
handing Atsushi a bunch of photographs.

Curiously Atsushi peered at the woman in the picture. She had neatly kept brown hair and intelligent, albeit rather emotionless eyes of a stunning glacial blue. She was wearing a tad bit of make up around her eyes and on her lips that were stretched into a rather cold smile. She was certainly beautiful, but something made Atsushi double back a bit nevertheless. Had anyone told him she was the suspect for the killings he wouldn't have hesitated to believe them.

“She looks... intimidating.” He settled finally, looking through the other pictures which merely showed her in different angles and sometimes surrounded by what he presumed were friends or family.

Dazai observed Atsushi while the boy looked through the pictures. At his remark Dazai immediately eased up, so even the boy had noticed that something was off about the woman. “She wasn't married, nor did she have a family on her own.” He provided, directing his gaze towards the buildings in the front.

The woman's workplace came into sight and he took a last glance at Atsushi while the boy handed him the photographs, chewing on his lower lip.

When the taxi arrived he gave the driver the money and held open the door for Atsushi while the boy scrambled out of the car. They arrived at the grande entrance and upon checking with the receptionist (who gave them both a pointed look upon their arrival but hurried to be polite when Dazai showed her his badge) made their way up to the bureaus where Reina Sakamoto had worked.

While they were waiting in the elevator he noticed the growing unease in the boy next to him. “Something the matter Atsushi?” He asked glancing over at him still whistling a merry tune.

Atsushi looked up at him before averting his eyes. “S' nothing just... I kinda feel awkward around all these... posh people. Y-You know what I mean...” He nervously twiddled with the hem of his jacket.

Dazai gave Atsushi a short one over before raising an eyebrow. It was true that Atsushi stood out a bit in the, as he had called it, 'Posh' environment, with his threadbare clothes and fingerless gloves. His scarf was fraying a bit at the end and his hair was still as unruly cut as ever, but it wasn't as if he was unpresentable. The boys face was flushed by then and in addition to the nervous fiddling with his clothes he began to gnaw at his lower lip as well.

Dazai laughed softly before ruffling Atsushi's hair lovingly. “Don't worry about it, they're not going to throw you out, besides you're with me, nothings gonna happen.” he said winking at the younger male just as the doors opened at a familiar ding sound.

Atsushi nodded, still uneasy but looking a bit more confident as they stepped out onto the floor. Dazai shook his head, the boy simply lacked the confidence, it was hard work to build up confidence, but Dazai was sure Atsushi was set on a good path, he had certainly been able to hold his own against a certain someone.

Before Dazai could get lost in his thoughts again, they had arrived in front of the door of the chef of the bureau unit Reina Sakamoto had worked at. He knocked and waited until he was called in. A tall woman sat behind the desk who absent mindedly read over a few papers, casting them a glance before continuing her readings and abruptly staring up at them again. Apparently she had realised that Dazai and Atsushi didn't exactly belong in the building.

Dazai confidently walked towards the woman stretching out his hand for her to shake. She hurriedly
stood up and took it before turning around to look at Atsushi but obviously deciding he wasn't worth the trouble. “Well what can I do for you, Mr...” She said looking at him head on. She had greying hair that was held back in a tight bun and matching silver grey eyes, that reflected the light like glimmering coins.

He smiled charmingly at her before gesturing at Atsushi and himself. “We're detectives and we're investigating the death of one of your subordinates, a Miss Reina Sakamoto.” He said smoothly watching as her eyes widened for moment before they turned into slits.

“And why would you come back, if the police already questioned everyone here, including me?” She raised a perfectly shaped eyebrow at him before turning around and sitting down gesturing for them to sit down on the chairs in front of her desk.

They both graciously set down while she folded her hands, peering over at them in a way that reminded him of someone wholly unpleasant.

“Why don't we introduce ourselves first!” He exclaimed in his overtly cheerful tone, he was sure she found obnoxious. “My name is Osamu Dazai and this is my colleague, Atsushi Nakajima.” He said while presenting her his badge. “Now what is your name Miss and what was your affiliation with Miss Sakamoto?” She pinned him with a hard look before gazing at Atsushi like a harpy. “It's Mrs. and might I ask why your partner failed to deliver his own ID?” She inquired raising one of her infuriating eyebrows. He simply raised one himself, smiling sweetly. Damn her perceptiveness.

Atsushi had turned bright red and was wriggling uncomfortably in his chair, at another time in his life he might have crushed her windpipe for being so obsolete. “We can always take you in for questioning if you would prefer that.”

“Fujioka, that's my name, and as you might have imagined I was Miss Sakamoto's supervisor.” she hurried to say.

“Would you say she was a good worker.” he asked.

“Certainly, she was very thoughtful and diligent. I didn't know her personally though, our breaks were at different time and so on.”

“So you wouldn't know about any personal troubles she might have had?”

“No.”

“Well simple enough.”, he thought.

“Would you happen to know someone who might have?” She sighed, obviously annoyed. “Why don't you ask her direct colleagues, she worked in Room 6, right down the hall on the left side, ask them if you want to know anything more personal.” She scrunched up her face in distaste when Dazai gave her one of his bright smiles again. He stood up and gestured for Atsushi to do the same, who casted a last nervous glance at Mrs Fujioka before scurrying out of her office alongside Dazai.

“That was useless” Atsushi said before they arrived. Dazai simply gave a non committal sound before knocking and entering the office she had directed them to, this time not bothering to wait for a reply.

—

After they had asked through at least eight of her colleagues and still hadn't found anything out of the ordinary (or something they didn't already know) even Dazai was feeling tired. Maybe he had been wrong after all, and there wasn't more to her than he had assumed.
Reina Sakamoto had been a rather closed up, private person, she wasn't antisocial, but she kept to herself and no one had been ready to call her a friend. 'Acquaintance' was more appropriate, she was a good colleague, responsible and hard working, maybe a bit cold at times but apparently it wasn't beneath her to exchange a few pleasantries. No one seemed to have a real opinion of her, no big emotions. No big opinion or greater knowledge of her personality or about her person seemed to exist. (Except that she was dead of course, brutally murdered. “How horrible!”.“What a shame. So young.”. “How sad, her poor family and friends!”)

He and Atsushi were just about to enter the elevator again, both tired and wrought out after the long, supercilious questioning when he heard footsteps behind them, driven by old reflexes he whirled around at an amazing speed almost making the man who had approached them topple over in surprise.

He had big, warm brown eyes, the colour of chocolate, wiry black hair and mocca skin.
“I'm sorry, but I heard you were asking about Reina again and... uh well we got along rather well, but last time the police were here I was on a business trip so uhm...” He paused casting Dazai a nervous glance before directing his gaze towards Atsushi and then a spot at the wall somewhere behind Dazai. “So I was wondering if I could help you... anything to find... to find that..” His lips were shaking slightly now. “that person that did...that to her.” He cleared his throat and looked up at Dazai who could see the honesty in the man's eyes.

God, honest and righteous people like that. During his old days those had always been the ones who went down first, the ones most easily destroyed and manipulated, but now, now they were the saving lights in the dark of secrets and misguided information during their cases.

Dazai smiled at the man and nodded. “Well lead the way then, tell us what you know. “The man hastily nodded and turned around making an inviting gesture towards the elevator. “Shall we go to my office then, I work in a different sector. That's probably why you didn't check on me in the first place.”

As they entered the elevator Dazai shot Atsushi a big smile, one that crinkled up the corners of his eyes, it was the first real one that day.

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They settled down in the office of the man who had called himself Matt Ravensbrook. He had a nervous tick of adjusting the expensive watch around his right wrist and constantly scratching behind his left ear.
After he had served the both of them coffee (Dazai took his obscenely sweet while Atsushi preferred his with a little shot of milk, Ravenbrook's stayed black) and they had settled down, Dazai immediately jumped to the first question.

“How come you said you knew Miss Sakamoto quite well, considering you're not listed in her contact list, you don't work in the same section and no one seemed aware of your close relationship?”

Mr. Ravensbrook blinked at him over the edge of his cup before carefully setting it down. “I never said we had a relationship of sorts, we weren't even friends. I mean we talked sometimes, but not more than she talked with the other colleagues. No, Reina was a rather distant person. She was able to communicate with everyone just fine, but she just didn't seem to... bother really, like I said she was more distant.”

He looked out of the window and Dazai noticed that it had started to rain. Somehow he was beginning to feel a bit melancholic, sitting in the office talking about a dead woman, who had had
cold eyes and not a single friend in the entire world.

“We worked together at a previous company, that's why I know a bit more about her and why we would occasionally chat.” Dazai blinked. And turned to look at Ravensbrook who had resumed to fiddling with his watch.
“I see. And would you say she was very much always as she is... was at the time of her death?” He asked, carefully prying for a reaction. They simply needed something.

“You mean if she was always distant? Yeah, I guess, there was a rumour that it was because of her dead children.”
Dazai blinked again Atsushi took a sharp breath next to him.“Excuse me, what did you just say?” he stared at the man incredulously.
Ravensbrook gave him a surprised look. “Don't tell me you didn't know! Both of her children died while they were still very young. I don't know the details just that she was pregnant twice and that she lost the children both times during the early months of their lives...”

Dazai stilled. This. This had to be it. He stood up abruptly Atsushi and Ravensbrook both jumped in surprise and immediately hurried to stand up as well.

“Ehm... Does that help you then?”
“What was their cause of death, do you know?” He asked, eyes gleaming.
“N-No I don't, like I said I didn't know her tha-”
“Yes thank you, thank you very much, this is exactly what I was looking for.” Dazai said, grinning widely before shaking Ravensbrook's hand and turning around, hurrying out of the office with a confused but intrigued Atsushi by his side leaving behind a baffled Matt Ravensbrook who was simply left to stare after the strange duo.

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Once they had exited the building Dazai contacted the office, when Haruno received his call he immediately gave her a dozen of orders, documents to check, people to call before he and Atsushi made their way back.

When they entered the bus Atsushi turned around and spoke up for the first time since they had left the office. “What do you think Dazai-san?” He peered up curiously at him with his enchanting eyes and Dazai smiled brightly at the young man. “It's strange, two children dying, she wasn't married or in relationship either. Whose children where they? Why did they die? Why both if them? There are too many questions at the moment. Maybe when we come back we'll find out that there was nothing strange about it after all, maybe she carried a rare genetic disease or something. Fact is, that it's suspicious, and therefore we are going to look into it!” He exclaimed cheerfully.

“Is it really alright for me to stay with you the whole time, I mean, this is a pretty big investigation and all and I'm just-” “Nonsense! You're an essential part of the team Atsushi-kuun, we need you.” He interrupted giving him a soft smile (it was a real one too, he had become weak).

Atsushi nodded, reciprocating the smile and leaned back gazing at the buildings passing by the bus window.

“I really wonder what kind of person did this. And why? Why would they take the lives of so many people. How. How can anyone take away someone else's life with no regard at all.” he asked softly, with an almost sorrowful expression, meeting Dazai's eyes.

He could feel his throat constrict and felt a knot forming in his stomach. Suddenly his sight became a
bit blurry and he had to avert his eyes from Atsushi's inquiring gaze.

“How indeed Atsushi, that is a very good question.”
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Just for clarification and because I don't think it's explicitly stated in the story; I changed the characters' ages a bit around. I tried to make it a bit more realistic and to fit better with the story of course. That's why, most of the ADA are in their mid/late twenties (As well as Chuuya since he's supposed to be Dazai's age still). That's simply due to the fact that that is the average age for entering the profession (at least in Germany and Canada). To be in a position like Yosano is in in this story, would probably take many more years, (Both a doctor and a forensic pathologist as well as head in the unit) even if you're really talented. But we'll just say that due to the special force they created they were searching for some young, very talented investigators fresh out of university, since I don't want them all to be in their mid 40's haha.

Atsushi is about 16/17 (with Akutagawa being around 18/19 then) fyi, just because it fit better with highschool/care centers/ juvenile programs and volunteer work etc.

Anyway, I hope you'll all enjoy the new chapter, it's my favourite so far, especially after the second one which wasn't that exciting in my opinion!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 3

*That man* was looking at him, eyes sparkling and mouth stretched into a wide smile.

“Tell me Dazai, what business did you have with that girl exactly.”

“Nothing I, I barely knew her.” He said breathlessly from his position on the table. The man was staring at him with cruel eyes. He wordlessly raised an eyebrow, the rest of his expression did not change and Dazai was starting to panic.

“I barely even know her, I swear!” He said desperately. Tears were slipping out from underneath his eyelids as he futilely tried to wriggle out of the restrains holding him down.

The man clicked his tongue impatiently. His lips stretched even further (it wasn't really a smile any more, it was the grimace of a mad man) and his eyes were gleaming with insanity and some barely restrained emotion Dazai couldn't have possibly recognized, (he had been too young then).

The man bowed down further, their noses almost touching and their breaths mingling.

“Are you sure Dazai-kun, I'm asking for the last time.” He cocked his head, grin still in place.

“Yes.” He said shakily, but determined.

The man sighed before turning around, Dazai saw the flash of the scalpel and then there was only hot, white pain.

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Dazai woke up with a start, breathless and sweaty he reached for the lamp on his nightstand and
switched on the light.
His shirt and his bandages were damp and his breathing was still erratic as he tried to calm himself down.

(“Deep breathes.” he had said, a delicate hand rubbing soothing circles on his back, the other carding through his damp hair. Soft lips were pressed to his forehead lovingly. “It's alright, I'm here, you're not alone, you're not dead, you're alive, you're human, Dazai.”)

“Deep breathes.” He repeated while pushing his hair back and shakily standing up. He looked at the clock on his nightstand, it was 5° clock in the morning, office hours started between 6:00 and 7:00, in other words he still had plenty of time to get ready and calm down before he had to go to work.

After he took a long shower he prepared some coffee and settled down to read one of his many books on suicide. His thoughts betrayed him however, they kept straying to his dream, to him and to the case. Choosing the lesser of the three evils he picked up the files Naomi and Haruno had gathered and given him yesterday.

Reina had indeed been a mother, she had been pregnant four times. Two times she had miscarried while the baby was still inside her body, the other two times the children had died after they had been born.

He looked over the autopsy reports. One child had apparently died from a stomach bug, the other from natural causes coming back to its young age.
It wasn't unnatural or rare that children died in the first few weeks or months of their lives, as they were especially vulnerable then.

Still, both reports seemed sloppy to him. It wasn't unusual that the cause of death was falsely determined simply because the responding doctors or examiners couldn't be bothered.
And again, a child dying was tragic, but most of the time people didn't exactly pry for the reasons, it happened.

Four children dead however, in Dazai's opinion that was something that couldn't be ignored. It was highly suspicious, not to mention the children had all died in different ways.

But even if he went with his hypothesis, that she had somehow been involved, possibly even been the murderer herself, there was no way to prove that now, the children were long dead, all conveniently cremated, erasing all chances of further examination.

That woman definitely had had something to hide, he was sure of that, there simply wasn't any clear evidence, only circumstantial one, he could only hope that further investigation would reveal more.

Hopefully the others had found information that was actually useful, he hadn't had a chance to talk to them yet, as it had been late when he and Atsushi had left the building looking through the information, the others hadn't arrived by then or had simply gone home already directly after their investigation.

What he had gathered from the calls Haruno had received in the background, while he and Atsushi had looked through old documents regarding Reina was, that the others seemed to have at least found something.

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When he arrived at the office later, windswept and with ice cold fingers, he discovered that almost all
of his co-workers had already arrived.

He took his place at the big table and waited patiently while listening in on some of the conversations. Everyone seemed to be in a better mood than they had been the day before.

When Yosano and Ranpo, the two missing ones, finally arrived the excited chatter stopped. Fukuzawa looked around for a minute before standing up and declaring for the meeting to begin, all in old fashion.

“I hope you all had a rewarding search, we’ll be beginning with the first victim, what did you find about about Mei, Tanizaki, Naomi?” He immediately cut to the case.

Naomi instantly began telling them about what the two of them had discovered.

“It took us a while, but we were able to track down some old acquaintances of hers, in Jail, one of them, a young man who simply called himself Nero, told us that she had been involved in the lethal robbery. He was willing to testify if we would help him get on probation.” She looked towards her brother who resumed. “He told us that it had indeed been Mei who had shot the clerk, they bolted and split the money afterwards, he said that she had been really nervous, but they all promised to keep their mouths shut.” Ranpo snorted at this.

Tanizaki continued: “A few months ago he got arrested for dealing drugs, however, upon finding the mask he used during the robbery at his house the police got him for that too. It seems they questioned him about the death before, but he wasn't willing to testify then, in fear of retribution, but now that she's dead and her case is relevant again, well…” He rolled his eyes.

Naomi spoke up again: “We later visited her sister, after a bit of prodding she finally confirmed that her sister had killed the banker, confirming what Nero told us. Apparently Mei didn't mean to shoot him and was really sorry, it was an accident and so on, we all know the story.” She said grimly.

Fukuzawa nodded. “So it has more or less been confirmed that Miss Matsuhito did kill someone then, and that she wasn't punished accordingly due to her family's and friend's testimony. Anything else?”

Tanizaki hesitated for a moment, but then he opened his mouth and began talking again: “Apparently she was involved with some minor criminal organisation, a small brand of the Mafia, according to Nero she sold drugs too and was involved in some smaller thefts.”

“Thank you.” Fukuzawa stated briskly before directing his eyes towards Dazai, who's thoughts were racing, it seemed they had hit the gold vein. He began to recount what he and Atsushi had found out and about the information the two of them and Haruno had discovered.

“So you think she might have killed her children for some unknown reason?” Ranpo concluded, the room had fallen silent, everyone seemed to be chasing their own thoughts upon Dazai's revelation. He couldn't blame them, child murder was always a heavy topic.

“It might have been for her success, children would have certainly ruined those plans, but I think it's probably be something else. If only we knew who the father was.” He conceded.

“I suppose I'll visit her family this afternoon with Atsushi-kun.” He looked up at Fukuzawa and raised his eyebrows in question.

“Of course, let's hope this is the right lead.” Fukuzawa said.

Next were Kunikida and Kenji. Kunikida confidently told them about their discoveries. “Asahi
Kobayashi was as bad a guy as they come, at first we didn't really find anyone who seemed to be able to give us reliable information, but upon prodding a bit we found someone who was willing to share some information with us. A prostitute who simply called herself Leila. This is her number in case we have any further questions.” He held out a little slip of paper and Dazai immediately used the chance to wink suggestively at his colleague who shot him an irritated look.

“Are you sure that's the only reason she gave you her number Ku-ni-ki-da.” He grinned at his partner who promptly shoved up his glasses and turned a shade darker. “Why yes Dazai, this is entirely inappropriate.” “That's right,” Yosano chimed in. “Besides, who would want to go on a date with Kunikida, payment or not.” A few of them chuckled and Kunikida whirled around to give her an indignant look but she simply waved her hands around and grinned cheekily.

Fukuzawa finally intervened and urged Kunikida to go on. “Anyway,” He continued correcting his glasses once again. “She told us of some pretty nasty rumours, apparently Asahi was involved in a big pornography and slavery ring. Child pornography and prostitution to be precise.” If there had been anything akin to a relaxed atmosphere in the room after their light banter, it had disappeared immediately at his words. Dazai could feel his gut turn and his shoulders stiffened instantly.

If there was one thing that was simply the height of fucked up it was anything involving children and sex, he should know. The very thought made him sick to the stomach, and he was sure he wasn't the only one who blacked out for a moment, judging by the pale and serious faces around him. Police work certainly wasn't pretty and he once again questioned why he had chosen this particular branch, especially considering his personal history.

When Kunikida presumed talking his voice was much more quiet and serious. “She couldn't tell us of any specific crimes, but word goes around he had a brothel and that he didn't hesitate to auction any children off or to be downright brutal. According to Leila he even killed a few children when they had tried to escape repeatedly a few years ago.”

The silence that followed was so thick he feared he might choke on it.

“How reliable is that information?” Fukuzawa asked.

“Not very much, I suppose, but after asking around some more, those seemed to be stories concerning Asahi everyone seemed to be able to agree on.” Kenji provided eyes big and thoughtful.

“I suppose we'll continue then” Ranpo said quietly, for once being especially sensible. He looked at Poe, who was actually present for once.

When Ranpo nodded at him Poe cleared his throat and started reporting: “We didn't actually have to search all that long, the priest, Koichi Iwasaki, had a few bank accounts on foreign ground and enriched himself with the money from the church.” He nervously twitched and averted his eyes behind his fringe. “It was only revealed after his death when the accounts were dissolved. Evasion of taxes on a small scale.” He finished with a nervous glance in Ranpo's direction. Poe was quite brilliant really, but just as it was with Atsushi, his own insecurities were holding him back. Recently however he had come more and more out of his shell encouraged by none other than the great detective Edogawa Ranpo himself.

“Moreover, one of the priests at his church died of an overdoses of the medicaments he was taking. It was presumed to be a suicide but upon asking the other staff members the two of them apparently weren't on good footing with each other. They had been seen arguing just a few days before the priests suicide. I'm sure he got close to discovering the tax evasion of Koichi who then killed him.” Ranpo finished, not an ounce of uncertainty in his voice, popping a candy into his mouth.

“So all of our victims could be perpetrators themselves, murderers nonetheless? Interesting.” Dazai
murmured, the others nodded in agreement before turning towards the chef and Haruno.

“It was a bit difficult, but eventually we found something, Maki Sugimoto's sister committed suicide a year prior to her death.” Fukuzawa spoke up. He looked at Haruno who continued. “Her family consisted of her parents, grandparents, and siblings. They all lived on the country side around Tokyo. She had two older brothers, one older sister, one little brother and finally one little sister, Akazawa, she was the one who killed herself. She was seventeen.” Tanizaki let out a whistle. “That's a lot of siblings. Do you know why she killed herself?”

“We're not sure, but we received a statement from the local hospital, she was brought there once by her older brothers battered and bruised, neither she nor her brothers offered an explanation for her state however. We looked through Akazawa's school records as well and found that she was absent quite a lot, her grades were bad and she suffered from panic attacks.”

“So you think her suicide might be connected. That Maki could have been involved somehow?” Ranpo asked, Haruno and Fukuzawa nodded. “We should definitely investigate further. Which is why I would like Tanizaki, Naomi and Haruno to drive to her home town and to look around a bit and gather some information.” He looked at the three in question and they immediately agreed.

“Finally, Yosano, what did you find?”

“All of our predictions were right, he was ambushed from behind, grabbed by the hair and had his throat cut open with a sharp instrument. It's the same as it was with the other victims. The victim's head was smashed against the wall, he was probably beaten before he was dragged to the opposite side of the alley. Here his belly was cut open, he was alive, when this happened. After his death the stigmata were carved into his hands. The murderer was left handed.” She handed the report around.

“This morning the police were able to determine his identity.” Everyone perked up at that. “His name is Ryota Watanabe, 34 years old. He previously worked for the government, but he was fired and sentenced to a few years in prison when child pornography was discovered on his laptop. The discovery was made due to a large scale operation of a certain pornography ring and the investigation of several websites. He was released from jail just last week.”

Tanizaki whistled again. Dazai merely raised his eyebrows and started rubbing at his chin.

“No death involved this time then?” Kenji asked. “Not that we know of yet.” Yosano said darkly.

“Very well, I suppose most of you know what your next steps are going to look like then. Any further comments?” They all shook their heads and stood up to prepare for the day and their further investigations.

Dazai joined Yosano, Kunikida and Kenji who had gathered by the far end to take a closer look at Yosano's report. “You three will be investigating our latest victim then?” He asked gazing at the report. Kunikida nodded. “I really don't want to get involved with this sort of... abhorrent milieu but I suppose it can't be helped. Yosano shook her head grimly, a deep scowl set on her delicate features as she glowered at the files before her. Even the ever cheerful Kenji looked disturbed.

“Well, I wish you all good look then, I better get going to bail Atsushi out of school.” He said with a wink, changing the subject. Kunikida shot him an irritated look. “Don't you dare bring shame upon our unit Dazai!” he grumbled in response. Yosano and Kenji were both shooting him amused looks, Kunikida turned around again with an annoyed “tsk” and resumed his talk with the two forensic experts. Dazai waved at them before tying his scarf more securely around his neck, bracing himself for the sharp November wind outside.
Atsushi sat in the cafeteria picking at his food and absent mindedly listening to his best (and only) friend Lucy, who was ranting on about some reality show she had watched only to somehow end at the topic of the girls in their class that wouldn't stop picking on her. Normally he was sympathetic as he often found himself in similar predicaments, but today he was simply unfocused, his thoughts drifting to Dazai, the Agency and the case of the crucifix killer.

“Hey, are you even listening?” Lucy asked, shoving her face closer to his red hair bouncing around as she searched his face.

“Ah, yes, I'm sorry Lucy-san, I'm just a bit distracted is all.”
“I can see that!” she said raising an eyebrow and looking at him with narrowed eyes. But then her face softened a bit before she leaned in closer again. “Is everything all right? Are those guys-” “No, no, everything is fine, it's just about the volunteer work I do for the police.” He hurriedly told her. “Like I said I'm a bit distracted is all.” he reassured her, sheepishly rubbing the back of his neck and smiling nervously up at her. She raised a red eyebrow again but didn't inquire further. “If you say so.”

It was one of her characteristics that Atsushi had learned to value greatly, she wasn't someone who pried. She knew exactly when she should leave someone alone and when they needed a helping hand or a pat on the shoulder. Although she seemed loud and somewhat bossy to most people at first, she was quite sensible and Atsushi had always quietly contemplated whether that was due to her upbringing, so similar to his own.

Atsushi and her both suffered from the constant teasing and outright bullying from the other students. Just today Atsushi had had a confrontation with three particularly unpleasant boys. They could act both physically and emotionally cruel, today had been a mix of both and as he had arrived in class he had struggled to hold back tears, some of the students had noticed of course, which didn't make his situation any better. Lucy on the other hand barely seemed bothered by the mean comments, she merely shrugged them off, another thing Atsushi admired her for.

Fact was however, that he had found a familiar presence in her and that she was someone he had come to love very much. He smiled at his friend before resuming to pick at his lunch while she started to rant of again, this time albeit a bit more quiet than before.

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After they finished their lunch they made their way over to the staircase leading to the roof, it was popular place to chill for those that wanted to stay under the radar (or in Lucy's and Atsushi's case tried to) and didn't really hang out with the popular kids crowding the classrooms or the mensa.

Just as they arrived at the doors leading down the corridor to their destination Atsushi's phone buzzed and he hurriedly flipped it open, not even checking for the ID, it could only be someone from the Agency or the child services, both of which where important.

“How cruel of you to assume that I would only call because I want something from you!” Dazai sighed dramatically from the other end of the phone. Atsushi rolled his eyes in exasperation.

“Hello?” he asked shooting Lucy an apologetic look, since he had interrupted their conversation. She simply shook her head in acceptance and gestured for him to go on.

“Why Hello, Atsushi-kuun, how are you today?~” Dazai's cheerful voice filled the silence. “Oh Dazai-san, it's you, I'm fine, thank you. What do you want?”

“How cruel of you to assume that I would only call because I want something from you!~” Dazai sighed dramatically from the other end of the phone. Atsushi rolled his eyes in exasperation.
“Well I'm in front of your school right now, I had hoped we could resume our research, but if you don't want to and would rather stay at school that's fine too I suppose.”

“NO-no that's perfectly fine, that would be great.” he said a bit too loudly and Lucy immediately gave him a suspicious look, he could feel his ears and cheeks heat up. “I'll be there, you're at the main entrance I suppose?” After Dazai confirmed that he hung up and nervously put his phone back into his backpack.

“Sorry I have to go.” He said apologetically, Lucy raised an amused eyebrow and nodded. “Why of course Atsushi-kun” She imitated Dazai. “We wouldn't want you to disappoint your Dazai-san after all.” This time imitating himself. Atsushi could feel his blush reignite so he hurriedly turned around scoffing. “I don't know what you mean at all.” He said before starting to leave down the hallway again. He caught a glimpse of her rolling her eyes.

“You will be all right, won't you?” He asked suddenly remembering what she had told him during lunch. “Yes, yes.” She said annoyed shooing him away. “I'll be fine, we wouldn't want you to leave Dazai waiting, would we?” She said teasingly and his blush returned full force. “It isn't like that.” He whined. She simply shook her hand and waved him goodbye, he waved back and disappeared through the doors leaving her to stand in the hallway all by herself.

As it just had to happen he ran into the boys from earlier that morning, this time they seemed to be a bit more prone for violence as they twisted his arm and cruelly smashed him into the wall, their leader taunting Atsushi before asking him for his money, Atsushi gave him what pitiful rests he had before hurriedly running off towards the main entrance.

He ran out into the grey parking lot, letting the cold winter air cool down his flushed cheeks as he searched for Dazai. It had started to snow and it gave the parking lot an even more deserted look.

Finally he spotted Dazai standing next to what appeared to be Kunikida's car. The man was looking at his phone as Atsushi approached. He looked up and the light hit his eyes just right to make them glow a warm hazel gold as the corners of his eyes crinkled up into a gentle smile.

“Why, hello Atsushi-kun, I'm glad you could make it.” It took a moment too long for Atsushi to respond, who was caught up in the sight before him.

“Ah yes, did you clear everything with the school?” He asked, desperately trying to forget the conversation he had had with Lucy just a few minutes ago.

“Yes Fukuzawa called them an hour ago, don't worry.” Dazai replied while making his way around the car and sitting down on the driver's seat.

Atsushi warily followed him and set down next to him. “Say Dazai, isn't this Kunikida's car?” He asked with slight concern, eyeing his mentor who was starting the motor and shifting the gear. Dazai simply gave him a brilliant smile as an answer.

“How did you manage to convince him to let you drive it.” Atsushi asked quite suspiciously.

“I stole his keys when we where discussing the strategy this morning, he didn't even notice, he's not a very good detective, ne Atsushi-kun, wouldn't you agree.” He said slyly grinning at the boy next to him.

Atsushi simply shook his head, he wasn't even surprised anymore and simply put up with whatever Dazai had in tow for them.

“Well then, let's check on Miss Reina's family shall we?”
The drive to Reina Sakamoto's family home took about two hours which Atsushi and Dazai spent either talking about the case or some new information Dazai had gathered the night before, that was very interesting indeed. Atsushi listened in horror and after he was finished they were both lost in their own thoughts. Time flew by like that and they arrived at the small sea side town in what seemed like no time at all.

After arguing over which way to go, since they were both hopeless cases when it came to navigating, they reached the long street by the forest where Reina had grown up.

The house Reina Sakamoto's father inhabited was a middle sized classical Japanese house, the kinds of which were slowly becoming extinct in the big cities and Dazai watched Atsushi with slight amusement as he looked around the neighbourhood practically gaping at the old fashioned houses.

As it had turned out, Reina Sakamoto's parents had split when she had been around Atsushi's age, as the father had resumed living in the old family house and the mother had found a new lover soon, she had wished to stay with her father to resume going to her old school and living in the town she had been born and raised in. The mother had moved to Hokkaido where she and her new partner had married and where still living with two other children, both Reina's half siblings, although it seemed as though they hadn't had much contact in the past years.

Dazai and Atsushi climbed the few stairs up to the front porch and knocked on the grand entrance. After a while footsteps could be heard and a tall man around his fifties with a cold scowl on his face opened the door with a rather violent motion.
“What do you want?” he practically barked, his eyes burning.

Dazai and Atsushi exchanged glances before Dazai smiled politely and shoved his Badge into the man's still furious face.

At that the man blinked before snatching the badge away from him, eyeing it for a second and then giving it back his face eerily blank now.

Dazai was honestly surprised by the emotions he saw flitting over the man's face, at first recognition, realisation, relief, hope but then for just as single moment, anyone else might have missed it, but not Dazai no, there was fear. And fear in the eyes of a law abiding citizen at the sight of the police always made him giddy.

After all people who were living in a small sea side town in a traditional house who were afraid of the police always had something to hide.

Dazai smiled. “My name is Osamu Dazai and this is my partner, Atsushi Nakajima, we have come to visit because of the case concerning your daughter Reina.” The man immediately nodded and made a motion for them to come inside and take off their shoes. “I'm deeply sorry, I mistook you for someone else.” He said, trying (and quite miserably failing) to smile at the two of them. Dazai simply grinned, shoving his hands in his pockets and shaking his head. “Don't worry about it, we did come on short notice after all.” (Which in this case meant no notice at all of course.)

As he turned around to walk down the hallway Dazai turned around to Atsushi who was standing warily in the entrance hall, Dazai rolled his eyes while grinning like a mad man and motioned for the boy to follow him, Atsushi merely sighed and complied.

As they continued down the corridor Dazai took notice of a few photographs covering the walls. All
of them showed either Reina and the father or Reina only. No other acquaintances or the mother in sight.

“Interesting.” he thought. It seemed the father was quite possessive then, at least that was what Dazai gathered from it. He seemed to only care for his daughter. It was no wonder really, that he had been so riled up, loosing his only daughter whom he must have loved so very much surely had been a great tragedy.

Still Dazai remained cautious. He turned around and almost collided with Atsushi who had somewhere along the way come closer. “Please come in and take a seat” Mr Sakamoto said. Dazai hastily swirled around cheerful smile still in place as he took in the sight before him.

The room they had arrived at had wide traditional windows, a few bookshelves were placed around the warm room and at it's centre was a western style table. The light breaking through the window was reflecting on it's surface quite nicely and Dazai pondered for a moment about whether the man had a housekeeper or kept the house this clean by himself. As far as Dazai was aware he did not have a new partner after all.

“Please sit down.” Mr Sakamoto said as he himself took place. Atsushi and Dazai sat down in front of him.

“Well what did you come here for?” He asked, dark eyes set on the two other males before him. “I suppose you didn't find her killer?” Dazai motioned for Atsushi to answer who fidgeted uncertain before speaking up. “Sadly no.” he replied nervously. Glancing over at Dazai, who smiled pleasantly before getting straight to the point. “We recently found out about your daughters children. Or rather about the fact that all of them died at an early age.”

The reaction was instantaneous, the man's face turned blank, all emotions wiped from it's surface just as it had when Dazai had shown him the badges.

“Why that is true.” He conceded, lips set in a straight line and eyes looking through the space between the two investigators.

“We were merely wondering if you could tell us why exactly they all died and who the father was.” Mr Sakamoto's face immediately turned sour. “Are you insinuating something, Sir?” Dazai blinked in surprise. “Why no, we were simply wonder-” “My daughter was a good, well behaved child, she never got into trouble and she certainly didn't fool around with anyone. She was a proper woman.” The man interrupted him heatedly, rising from the table before sitting down again at his outburst.

Dazai looked at him calculatingly for a moment, he was well aware how he should normally act to avoid confrontation, but he elected to ignore protocol, they were here to find out something that could help them with the case after all, not to have a nice littler chit-chat.

“Well, I would say our information would suggest otherwise.” He said pleasantly. There was a moment of stunned silence. Atsushi looked at him, mouth agape, in utter shock. Reina's father simply stared for a moment before his face twisted into something truly ugly. “WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY?!”

Dazai grinned. “Well your daughter was pregnant, four times, and she wasn't married or had a partner that we are aware of.” Mr Sakamoto was shaking with rage now.

“GET OUT!” He bellowed rising and gesturing for the door.

Atsushi immediately jumped up but Dazai remained seated, gazing at the man cruelly.

“She killed them didn't she? The children.” His voice was silent but there was a cruel note hidden in
his eyes as he stared at the man before him.

The room's temperature seemed to have dropped rapidly, no one moved a single muscle. Mr Sakamoto was breathing heavily Atsushi had frozen in place, only Dazai remained calm as he continued. “I already figured as much. The question is merely why she killed them.”

Mr Sakamoto shook his head. “No, no, she didn't kill them, they, they died of natural causes, because...” He heaved again. “She wouldn't do that, no, no she wouldn't. Our... YOU DON'T HAVE ANY PROVE DO YOU?! THEY WERE ALL CREMATED!” He stared at Dazai with frenzy eyes.

“Ah yes about that, would you be willing to give us a DNA sample to compare to those of the children?” Atsushi next to him took a sharp exhale.

It had been a total bluff of course, they didn't have any DNA of the children and they certainly couldn't prove that Reina had actually killed any of them. But then again this was how bluffs worked out and her father had certainly taken the bait. If Dazai had pieced his words together correctly he and Atsushi were in for some truly ugly revelations.

The man blinked, his face strangely slack and the next thing Dazai knew was that he was lunging towards him, screaming in blind hatred. “ATSUSHI; RUN!” He screamed, just so avoiding the furious man and grabbing the boy by the shoulders and scurrying towards the door.

He and Atsushi started running down the hallway. When they arrived at the door he realised with horror that it was locked.

“Fuck. This way!” He said, looking back at the enraged man, dragging Atsushi through a door that lead to a spacious kitchen with marble tops and wide Patio doors. He made his way over to the doors and just opened one when the infuriated man came into the kitchen. He was breathing heavily and fixed them with a hateful glare.

“Why officer,” he panted, “I think we should talk another moment, you see, I really can't let you escape, everything would be ruined.” he said, contradicting in his own words and took a large kitchen knife out of its handle and Dazai berated himself in his head over and over again for leaving his gun in the car. Just what the fuck was this man thinking? Was he really going to attack two officers? Was he not thinking about the consequences? “And what exactly would be ruined sir?” He asked coldly, slightly shoving Atsushi behind him and positioning himself in front of the young man. Just in case of course.

“So it's true then, they were your children. Hers and yours.” He could feel Atsushi stiffen behind him as he warily took in the man's stance. He was only a bit taller than Dazai himself, but much broader. The man's face twisted cruelly. “And what if?”

“You know, yesterday I found out an interesting detail about this area. Quite a few young girls were killed here over the past few years. Blue eyes, dark hair, quite pretty, they all match your daughter's appearance.” He was jumping to conclusions now, but it had been suspicious once he had found out. He only needed a confession. “Did she help you? With the murders I mean.” The man's face had turned blank again, he was watching Dazai with a calculating gaze, and Dazai had to suppress a shiver, because it wasn't the first time he found himself in such a predicament.

“I really have no idea how you found out about all of that, but I must congratulate you for it at least.” He said grinning madly now. “I hope you understand that I can't possibly let you leave.”

“And I hope you know that it's perfectly suspicious if two investigators go to investigate someone,
only to disappear or to turn up dead.” He said voice pleasant again. Atsushi whimpered slightly behind him. And Dazai could feel a bead of sweat rolling down the back of his neck.

Mr Sakamoto considered him for a moment before smiling slightly, “Maybe so,” he said. “But by then I'll be long gone.”

And with that he charged forwards. Dazai jumped out of the way and grabbed his wrist, as he had predicted however, the man was much stronger than him and tried to grab him, in response Dazai dove out of the way while screaming for Atsushi to get the hell out.

When the man attempted to stab him again Dazai ducked behind the kitchen Island and grabbed a knife from the holder for himself. He was just about swirl around and face the other man when he heard a horrified screech. His eyes widened when he saw Atsushi brandishing a pan defending himself against the man. Mr Sakamoto was a better fighter though, he grabbed the pan and tugged Atsushi forward, the two of them collided and the older stabbed Atsushi about halfway in the leg. The boy let go of the pan that fell to the ground with a clatter and screamed out in pain and shock.

Dazai, who had been frozen for a moment was just about to throw himself at Mr Sakamoto when that man managed to grab Atsushi by the hair and pulled him close. For a moment Dazai's heart leaped out of his throat when he brought the knife close to Atsushi's neck, but then the man stared at him, eyes wild and alight. “If you come any closer, I'll fucking kill him.” He snarled.

Dazai stopped a good metre away eyes wandering between the two of them. There were Atsushi's absolutely horrified ones and the mad pair belonging to Reina Sakamoto's father.

He exhaled shakily and let the knife drop, the sound reverberated loudly in the kitchen. He carefully raised his arms and observed the man before him.

(“A single moment of non-observance, of not paying attention, of letting their guard down, of relaxing, that's all it takes to kill your opponent. Be swift and steady. This next step has to be executed perfectly however, or your life can be over before you know it.” He said right next to his ear. His ribs hurt and he felt dizzy and disoriented. The other laid heavily on top of him and he couldn't breath.)

He couldn't remember if that had been because of his presence or because of his bruising body. Probably both.

The man's posture relaxed, blood was pooling around Atsushi's ankles, who was still struggling in the taller man's hold. “It wasn't her, she wouldn't have killed our children. We were a team, we were partners. She would have never...” Mr Sakamoto's face had become desperate and his eyes hazy, Dazai didn't hesitate for a second longer, he dove for the knife and drove it into the man's hand, the one holding his own to his subordinate's neck.

His grip had become slack and he dropped the weapon and screamed in rage. Dazai grabbed Atsushi away from the man and hauled him behind him as he lunged at the man again. He couldn't hesitate he knew. He had to act while the other man was still distracted.

He stabbed him in the stomach before shoving him to the ground and kicking the side of his head, leaving him delirious and disoriented on the floor.

He swirled around to see Atsushi trying to get up. He shakily made his way over to him, not looking back and crouched in front of his protégé. Atsushi's eyes were wide and his cheeks were stained with tear tracks, but he looked put together and determined all the same and Dazai felt pride swelling in his chest.
He quickly checked his wound, a deep cut in the boys pale thigh and took of his belt and wrapped it around the leg before running into the entrance hall and getting Atsushi’s scarf and clumsily putting on his own shoes.

When he came back into the kitchen Atsushi was pressing his hands on the wound and warily watching Mr Sakamoto who began to stir. Dazai hurriedly tied the scarf around Atsushi’s leg and helped him up, one arm around his waist, the other guiding his subordinate’s arm around his own shoulders.

“Are you alright? It's going to be alright, everything's alright Atsushi-kun.” He said, trying to sound soothing, but his voice was shaking badly and his words didn't make any sense. They reached the patio door and Dazai immediately hauled Atsushi outside.

A last glance back showed Mr Sakamoto trying to get up. He hurriedly made his way to Kunikida's car and carefully put Atsushi in the back before running to the front and locking the doors.

“Here take my phone and call the police, then the Agency, you can do that, right?” He turned around as he started the car to check on Atsushi, pale and mute, who nodded. To his horror he noticed that Mr Sakamoto was making his way over to them, Shirt stained with blood and a grim determination in his gaze. “And maybe an ambulance.” He said breathlessly before speeding away.

As he made his way down the street and glanced into the rear mirror he could still see Reina Sakamoto's father limping down the street. A dark figure in the evening sun.

Chapter End Notes

(A belated) Merry Christmas, I hope you enjoyed the holidays! (In case you celebrate anyways) I'll probably post the new chapter some time after new years, till then, I hope you get well through to the new year then and I hope to see you around!
As always thank you so much for all the comments and kudos, I really appreciate them!
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

So warning:
Some graphic content and mentions of incest (you probably already gussed)
I hope you enjoy! As always thank you for the nice comments! They really do help a lot, it really lifts my Spirit up haha!
Also happy New Years!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Luckily Dazai had remembered where the hospital (or rather clinic) had been, when they had driven through the centre of the town. They had been a bit lost and he and Atsushi had argued over each of their bad senses of direction.

Now he was carrying the boy into the building where he was immediately received by two nurses and a doctor. “You called in advance yes?” One of the nurses asked. She had big green eyes and looked worriedly at Atsushi who was being placed on a metal carrier by the doctor and the other nurse.

Dazai nodded weakly as he watched them drive Atsushi away. He suddenly felt incredibly tired.

“Yes, did you dispatch the ambulance?” He asked. The nurse nodded, “Yes, the police are on their way as well. Are you all right yourself?” Dazai merely waved his hand. “Yes, yes I'm fine thank you, I'll just wait here for Atsushi if that's OK.” He said and sunk into a chair in the hallway.

He didn't wait for a reply as the nurse hurried away. His thoughts were running amok in his head.

Both over the new information they had gathered but also about what had happened.

He couldn't fathom why the man had suddenly attacked them. To get a head start for when the police would come looking for him? Truth was Dazai had only assumed that he could have been involved in the murders, both the daughter and father had had empty eyes.

But that he would attack? He replayed the scenario over and over in his head trying to figure out whether he could have prevented what happened. It was his fault Atsushi was injured after all.

After he had sat glumly in the hall for about an hour, guilt eating away at his insides, Kunikida and Yosano marched through the doors wearing worried expressions. When they caught sight of him they both stopped for a moment and Dazai pondered briefly about how bad he looked. Blood staining his clothes and hands. Blood that belonged to both Atsushi and Mr Sakamoto.

He slowly stood up, bones aching. He still felt incredibly exhausted and empty, but he put on a tired smile anyway.

“What happened?” Yosano asked immediately, eyes narrowed. Kunikida's eyes were wide when he asked how Atsushi was, and so Dazai started retelling the events of the evening.
When he was finished both Yosano and Kunikida wore pensive expressions, faces grim and serious.

“That's a whole lot of shit.” Yosano said and Kunikida (they had both sat down at Dazai's suggestion) stood up and muttered something along the lines of 'need to talk to the others'.

Both he and Yosano sat in silence after that, both watching Kunikida talking, before Yosano spoke up.

“It's not your fault you know. He was the one who attacked. You could not have anticipated that he would try to kill the two of you. You didn't know all of your theories would turn out to be right.”

He met her eyes, they were dark and gentle and Dazai was suddenly stunned by her insight and empathy.

“I should have calculated for that as well.” He said, voice breaking slightly. She watched him for a moment before her mouth broke out into a smile. “You've changed so much since you came to us.”

Dazai considered her before he smiled a little bit himself. He supposed that was true.

“You can go see him now if you want.” A voice said to his right and he saw the green eyed nurse smiling gently at him. “He asked for you.” She added, eyes twinkling.

He and Yosano exchanged glances before standing up and motioning for Kunikida to come over.

When they arrived at a small treatment room they were met with Atsushi's pale face smiling tiredly when he noticed them. “Yosano, Kunikida you're here as well?”

“Yes, and Kenji, Ranpo and Poe are at the house, apparently the police found... something...” Kunikida said, shoving his glasses up. “How are you?” Yosano asked, sitting down next to him on the table. Atsushi smiled again before reassuring her that he was quite alright, he had received a few stitches and pain killers, but apart from that he was fine. The cut wasn't as deep as they had initially thought.

“It could have been much worse if Dazai hadn't saved me.” He said smiling brightly at his mentor, who crumpled at the sight. Despite what Yosano had said, the guilt hadn't disappeared entirely, but he pulled himself together and made his way over to Atsushi to ruffle his hair.

“Did they say anything about your release?” Kunikida asked. “Well, once the paperwork is taken care of I can leave, but I should go to a check up tomorrow and get crutches if possible. And be careful with my leg of course.” Kunikida pulled a face and Dazai's heart twitched again, but when Atsushi caught their expressions he grinned and cheerfully said: "Don't worry about it! I'm quite happy really, I won't have to participate in PE and I don't have to run in our school's annual marathon either.” They all sighed and shook their heads. Atsushi Nakajima was without a doubt too good for this world. They truly didn't deserve him.

Yosano and Kunikida planned to stay behind and meet up with the others, Dazai made sure to remind them to bring Atsushi's shoes and their coats. Kunikida allowed him to drive the two of them back to rest, since the car's seats were were already smeared with blood anyway.

Kunikida drove them to the house, the street was completely shut off, blood staining the road and Dazai hurriedly drove away, he didn't want to linger much longer than necessarily for Atsushi's (and maybe also his own) sake.

Atsushi was sitting on the passenger seat in the front and tiredly watched the scenery before eventually falling asleep.
When they arrived in Yokohama it had started to snow and the city's buildings and people were slowly disappearing in the white storm.

He drove towards Atsushi's home before thinking better of it and making his way to his own apartment. He woke the boy up, who blearily looked at him before trying to get up. Dazai simply half carried, half dragged him up the staircase. Once inside his apartment Atsushi seemed to notice for the first time that it was not in fact his own place.

“What are we doing here?” He asked, voice still heavy with sleep. “It's my apartment, we'll stay here, so I can watch over you, all right?” He said gently before dropping Atsushi on his couch and walking towards his own room to search for a pair of clothes Atsushi could wear for the night.

When he came back into the living room he noticed Atsushi curiously looking around.

“Here are some clothes, the bathroom is down the hallway, the door to the right.” Atsushi nodded and took the clothes from him, wobbling a bit before making his way through the rather small room and disappearing down the hall.

Dazai watched his back before he turned around and made some coffee for himself. He would have to buy some food for the morning.

When Atsushi returned he brought him to his bedroom under much complaining and arguing from the younger male, who insisted on taking the couch.

“Atsushi, you got stabbed, you'll need the bed more than I do, you certainly deserve it more.” He said, trying to smile his usual cheerful smile, not that it actually worked. Atsushi looked at him with big eyes. “You saved me Dazai-san, and I didn't do anything, I don't deserve anything at all.” His eyes were staring to water and his lips were beginning to quiver slightly and Dazai could have punched himself for using the word 'deserve' so foolishly.

He knew of Atsushi's fears and his past after all. “I couldn't do anything, I was frozen and then...” He was breathing irregular gasping for air, Dazai reached out but Atsushi flinched back. “I'm glad it was me and not you, you deserve to live, everyone would have rather seen me than you die anyway, so it's fine really. But because of me, because I was... because he got to me and I-I was too weak.”

Atsushi was only rambling and everything Dazai could do was stare at the boy, the one whom he had put in danger. Atsushi was underage for crying out loud. He was Dazai's protégé, he had to make sure Atsushi wouldn't get hurt, that was his job. A job he was qualified for, Atsushi was not. And yet the only thing that came out of his mouth was:”Do not pity yourself. If you wallow in self-pity, life will be an endless nightmare.”

Atsushi abruptly stopped to stare at Dazai with huge eyes and his face immediately softened.

“You did great today, you stayed calm when you were taken hostage, you didn't run when I told you to, you chose to fight, which was stupid, but also incredibly brave. You're not a real police officer, you're not trained for any of what happened today, I am, but you're not.”

Atsushi simply continued to stare at him and when another tear rolled down his cheek Dazai reached out to gently wipe it away. “Now go to sleep.” He said softly, ruffling the boys hair. “Fukuzawa called the school, you don't have to attend for the rest of the week.”

Atsushi nodded mutely. “Thank you, Dazai-san.” Dazai simply shook his head, ruffling through his subordinate's hair gently and pulling him briefly against his chest before he stood up and turned off the light. As he was about to close the door he softly heard the boy calling out. “Don't close it.
Please?” He stared at the small figure on the bed and nodded leaving the door open.

After that he hurriedly got ready and went to bed, but not before spending a good thirty minutes staring at the small razor blades and contemplating whether to use them or not, in the end he decided not to, if just for Atsushi's sake.

He fell asleep to the soft snores of the young boy seeping through the open gap of his bedroom door.

The next morning Dazai stood up to go grocery shopping, he showered and immediately went out. Once he stepped outside he was met with a changed world. The snowfall had continued throughout the night and Yokohama was covered in white.

The streets seemed cleaner and much more beautiful, innocent even. There was a cheerful atmosphere in the air as he made his way to the store around the corner. Children who were on their way to go to school threw snowballs at each other and the adults were adamantly chatting about the possibility of a white Christmas. It was the first snow that year.

When he returned Atsushi was still asleep, so he silently prepared breakfast before he carefully woke up the younger boy, shaking his bony shoulders and told him that Breakfast was ready.

He silently watched the snowfall outside as his mind wandered to the events of the day before while Atsushi got ready.

Atsushi was awoken by gentle hands shaking his shoulders, when he opened his eyes he blearily stared up at Dazai who softly told him that breakfast was ready.

He laid in shock for a second before jolting up and immediately hissed at the pain shooting up his leg. Right. He had been stabbed.

He sat upright for a moment before taking a look at his surroundings. Dazai's room was much bigger than Atsushi's own, though that might have been because Atsushi lived in a two room apartment, meaning he had a bathroom and a living-/bedroom/kitchen in one.

Atsushi was lying on a big bed with at least three covers and a ton of pillows thrown all over it. The room itself only contained the bed, a light stand, a drawer, and a wardrobe not to mention all the stuff just lying around. From clothes to books to papers to old bandages? - Atsushi didn't need to know, thank you very much.

Upon having looked around he heavily let himself fall back into the soft blankets and pillows inhaling Dazai's familiar scent and suddenly he remembered Dazai's words from the night before and his face began to burn. “I must have seemed really ungrateful...”

God, he was embarrassed, Dazai was the person who saved him, the one he admired most and he was acting like a child. He remembered Dazai's words: “Do not pity yourself...”.
It couldn't be made undone. Carefully he got up, balancing on the healthy leg.

He somehow made his way towards the door and peeked out into the living room to see Dazai standing in the kitchen area looking lost in thought.

He hesitantly made his way to the bathroom and took care of his needs before limping out and discovering that Dazai had sat down at his kitchen table and looked out of the window with pensive eyes and face blank.

It was then that Atsushi remembered something from yesterday, he thought he had vague memories of the snow and Dazai carrying him up the stairs and placing him on the couch.

“Did you take the painkillers they gave me?” He asked hesitantly. It seemed Dazai was snapped out of whatever trance he was in and the older man looked at him. Dazai smiled gently “Good morning Atsushi-kun. I hope you slept all right.” His heart fluttered at the words and he nodded. “I did, but I suppose it's not a surprise considering all the painkillers they pumped into me.” He replied sheepishly rubbing the back of his neck, ears still tingling with warmth.

Dazai nodded absent mindedly. “I made breakfast, help yourself.” He gestured towards the table where two plates had been placed with traditional Japanese breakfast, the likes of which Atsushi had only ever seen in movies.

At the sight he suddenly realised how hungry he was, he hadn't eaten anything since lunch the day before.

He sat while Dazai stood up to get the painkillers. Atsushi swallowed them with some orange juice and grimaced at the taste. “I think you're supposed to take these as well, they're to prevent any possible infections.” Dazai said handing him another pill that Atsushi swallowed dutifully.

After that he dug in and was surprised at how good it tasted. He continued to shovel the food into his mouth until not a single crumb was left.

“It was really delicious Dazai-san, I didn't know you were such a good cook.” He said after he had finished. Dazai, who had only finished about half looked at him. “I once had a... good friend. He was a really good cook, he taught me some recipes, he used to say it was shameful that someone who lived all by himself hadn't learned how to cook yet.” He said with a huff.

Atsushi, who hadn't really thought he would be offered an explanation, blinked in surprise. “That's nice, so you do have friends!” He said cheekily and Dazai shot him an amused look before his expression turned into one of mock hurt. “Atsushi-kuun you have been spending way too much time around Kunikida, haven't you. All the world seems to be against me, how cruel!” He exclaimed dramatically and Atsushi laughed quietly at his mentor's antics.

In that moment Dazai eyes seemed to have caught something underneath Atsushi's (or rather Dazai's Atsushi had only borrowed it after all) shirt.

“What's that, I didn't notice that he hit you?” Dazai asked eyes fixed below Atsushi's collar bone. He looked down to check what Dazai meant. “Just a bruise from the fight I suppo-” But he stopped himself and his heart missed a beat when he saw what Dazai had spotted. It was a bruise he had received from one of his classmates just a few hours before the fight.

He awkwardly cleared his throat and avoided Dazai's gaze when he realised that he hadn't ended his sentence. “Ho? Is that so, it looks like you were attacked.” Dazai said, damn his attentiveness.

“Well I was, in case you don't remember.” he said chuckling awkwardly and pushing the shirt over
his shoulder causing it to hang over his back to hide the bruise.

When he nervously glanced up at his mentor Dazai was watching him with sharp eyes. “If you say so.”

The conversation was forced and awkward after that, Atsushi fumbling around for words and Dazai staring at him like a hawk. After they had cleared the dishes and spent a while watching TV Dazai received a call from one of the Agency members.

Atsushi waited patiently for him to clue him in on the latest news. When Dazai returned his expression was serious.

“They found a lot of evidence for the murders in a barn in the forest near the house. It was Mr Sakamoto's hunting hut or something. He is still in critical condition, but if he ever wakes up I suppose he will have to face charges for the serial murders of the young girls in the area.”

Atsushi swallowed and nodded. He couldn't believe Dazai had been right about that. He remembered how Dazai had told him that particular information during the drive and then how quickly Mr Sakamoto had revealed his true colours, proving his guilt, at least in Atsushi's eyes.

He absent mindedly reached for the wound hidden under bandages and an old pair of track pants from Dazai. It still hurt and it was strange to move his leg, even though he had taken a lot of painkillers. Suddenly he remembered something.

“It didn't really hurt, the moment he stabbed me I mean, only later in the car and in the hospital.” He said looking up at Dazai. Dazai met his gaze and nodded. “That was probably due to adrenaline, to help you fight and escape and to forget the pain. It's a natural reaction.” he said dismissively and turned around again. Atsushi's cheeks were burning again.

He sometimes felt really left out about things like that. Common knowledge that was. Due to his poor education in the orphanage he had lived, in he didn't really know a lot about science, history, politics or even classic literature or modern trends. His writing and reading skills weren't all that great either but Kunikida, Haruno and sometimes even Yosano and Dazai had helped him improve. He really was grateful to them.

Still his lack of common knowledge had immediately been one of the things that had singled him out the first week at school.

In that moment he was ripped away from his thoughts when the phone rang once again, Dazai immediately picked up and exchanged a few clipped words with the recipient before hanging up.

“That was Yosano, she said I should come to the shack to look at what they found.” He turned around to look at Atsushi who deflated at the news. “I'll take you back to your apartment.”

He nodded mutely. Although there had been a few awkward silences between them Atsushi had enjoyed staying at Dazai's place, he knew it was a selfish wish, but he had nonetheless hoped it would go on a bit longer. Living all by himself was lonely sometimes, he didn't know anyone in the area, his only friends were at the Agency or Lucy who lived with her foster parents at the rich side of the city.

“Yes, thank you for letting me stay here for the night!” He said bowing slightly to Dazai who nodded with a small smile on his lips, obviously amused by Atsushi's courteous behaviour.
After he had gathered his things (Dazai insisted he could keep the shirt and pants for now since all of his other things, - minus the jacket and scarf someone had brought back,- were ripped or covered in blood), he and Dazai drove back to his apartment through the white streets of Yokohama.

Dazai watched Atsushi limp to the front entrance, he had insisted that Dazai didn't need to help him up the stairs and had then, as if to confirm all of Dazai's worries, almost face planted on the ice covering the pavement. After hastily apologizing and insisting, he had made his unsteady way towards his front door.

He waved one last time at Dazai before closing the door.

Dazai exhaled softly before driving off, thoughts still circling around the events of the past hours.

The drive once again flew by and before he knew it he had arrived at the police bands cutting off the street.

A few vehicles were still present, less than on the day of the attack. He recognized the forensics team's car as well as Yosano's and two other police cars.

When he got out a young officer immediately checked his badge before letting him through and then barking into his walkie-talkie and giving Dazai a vague description of the way to the shack.

About half way he was received by Yosano and Ranpo who had been informed of his arrival.

The forest was thick and dark and one could easily get lost. It was such a typical pace for hidden activities and serial killers it was almost funny.

They arrived at the hut after a few minutes of tracking during which Yosano complained about how hard it had been to get the equipment all the way out there and Dazai filled the two in on Atsushi's condition (although he did not mention the bruise he had discovered).

When he saw the building Dazai was quite honestly surprised.

The shack was much smaller than he would have imagined, considering all the ruckus about it.

It was a small one story hut made out of rotting wood that might have been nice and light at some point but had turned green and black at most spots, or was simply overgrown by plants. It seemed there were spiderwebs in every available corner.

The police and the forensic team (who presented the majority for once) were apparently just taking a break as they were standing in little groups animatedly talking to each other and sipping coffee out of cheap cups or metal flasks. Once Yosano arrived however her team immediately fell silent and the police followed suit.

“We already cleared out some of the evidence, especially the one we have to preserve, the rest is still where we found it. I wanted you to see how it looked 'naturally' you could say.” She said and somehow she managed to sound sinister despite wearing one of those ridiculous white suits and blue protective bags over her shoes and hair.
She gave each Ranpo and Dazai a pair as well and Dazai took a last short glance at the boxes filled with see through plastic bags that held the evidence before they headed inside.

The inside of the shack was at least a little bit cleaner but all the more sinister somehow. The windows were dirty and since the forest was rather thick almost no light filtered into the room, the only source was a chandelier with only two of it's four lamps still burning.

The walls were mostly bare safe for a few items, a board here, a chair there, leaning against them. Some old rugs were covering the ground although they had been removed some places to reveal hollow rooms underneath the floorboards. One was especially big and when Dazai stepped closer he could see that there was a staircase carved into the ground leading down into the dark.

“I suppose this was covered by a rug?” he asked though he already knew the answer.

“Yes, we looked through everything up here, when we found nothing between all this junk we moved all the stuff back and carefully removed the rugs.” She walked to another spot with torn out floorboards. “We found the big one first, but there's a door at the bottom. Here,” She gestured to the ground before her. “we found the key.”

Dazai raised an eyebrow. “I suppose you already went down there then?” “Yes briefly yeserda-” She was interrupted when Kenji stepped into the room looking as carefree as ever. “Why Dazai, it's good to see you here as well, how is Atsushi doing, he's all right isn't he?” Kenji asked with big concerned eyes. Dazai gave a short account of the doctor's prognosis and some reassuring words before turning around to Yosano again and gesturing for her to continue.

“As I said we looked at it briefly yesterday, but... well, you'll see for yourself, it's rather gruesome. Anyway we continued this morning by cataloguing some of the evidence, we didn't take any of it away yet though, only some of the stuff from upstairs, but that's not nearly anywhere as crucial.

Now let's go, Kenji please stay up here, you know that it's rather crowded down there.”

Kenji simply nodded before heading out again, giving them all a cheerful wave.

“Both Kunikida and Tanizaki were under shock after the discovery, we sent them home immediately, some officers took them home. Not many of the force saw what's down there, we supposed it would be better.” Yosano said quietly her expression was serious. “Just a head's up” She added gently.

Dazai nodded before stepping next to her, she carefully pulled out an old key from the pocket of her overall and then the three of them headed down. Dazai didn't know how worried he should be about what they would find. He had seen a lot of terrible things during his career, even Ranpo had been silent the entire time, and although Kenji had masked it well he had seemed worn out as well. Not to mention Yosano was trying to warn him.

He would simply have to see for himself he supposed.

The stairs were old and creaked with every step and he was surprised that the hole was quite deep, deeper than a normal cellar would be. “Do you suppose he built this by himself?” He asked while looking at the crumbling walls.

“He might have had help from his daughter or a friend, most likely even, some of the stuff would have been too heavy to carry for a single man. We doubt that it was built by professionals though, the air down there is bad, the walls are giving in and the overall build isn't very cleanly done.” Ranpo said, speaking up for the first time since they had entered the shack.
When they arrived at the bottom of the stairs Yosano unlocked the heavy wooden door and gestured for Dazai to step in first. The room that awaited him was almost eerier than the room upstairs. It was a small space, tiles covering the floor and the walls.

He could just make out that they were dirty or covered in other substances he'd rather not think about. The weak light of his flashlight was supported by Yosano's stronger one as she stepped into the room beside him, he heard her rustling around and then a small lightbulb turned on over their heads, illuminating the gloomy room.

At the small end were a few cabinets similar to those a doctor would use. At the right side was a sort of improvised operating table with restraints and Dazai couldn't repress a shudder as he spotted brown spots all over it. Dried blood from the victims no doubt.

There was a low table next to it and he could only imagine what it held.

As he made his way over he saw that a few knifes in varying sizes as well as two scalpels and a hammer laid there. His stomach turned a bit at the sight of the scalpels gleaming in the weak light but he almost immediately regained his control. He stopped towards the cabinets and heard the ruffling of Yosano's and Ranpo's suits behind him. Their steps were muffled by the bags around their feet.

Yosano offered him protective gloves and after putting them on he opened the first cabinet. Inside were a lot of boxes, some bigger, some smaller. Some were simple plastic boxes some looked almost like they were meant for jewellery while others looked like the brown boxes used for moving.

He shot Yosano a questioning gaze but she remained silent. When he looked towards Ranpo he saw that the man had avoided his gaze and was staring at the utensils on the table. With a last glance in Yosano's direction he finally took one of the smaller boxes out.

When he opened it it took him a moment to comprehend what he saw.

"Are those...?"

"Teeth." Yosano confirmed. "And the string holding them together most likely consist of hair. Human hair."

"Oh." He managed before looking back at the necklace. That was what it looked like anyway.

In the box was a mess of hair, as Yosano had informed him, that held together several teeth in all shapes and sizes. They seemed mostly clean but upon looking closer Dazai could make out that some were coated with crusted blood at the edges. His stomach turned.

"There's also necklaces of human bones." Ranpo said quietly.

"What the fuck." He uttered, not being able to tear his gaze away. "What else?"

"Mostly bones, teeth and hair, at least for the physical evidence. In the other closet are pictures." Ranpo spoke again.

"Pictures?" He said astonished, turning around to look at his colleagues. They both nodded.

"He photographed them. His victims. Both before and after he killed them." Yosano said so silently that it was almost more of a whisper. He looked up at her. "And?"

She sighed. "Well, as you can imagine he didn't treat them very well." She grimaced. "mutilation mostly, the autopsy revealed that none of the victims were sexually assaulted though." Their eyes
met again.

“I didn't know, the newspaper didn't say.” “They didn't want that information to leak.” She said, nodding in affirmation. He shook his head. He really craved a smoke right now.

“Let's get to work then.” He said tiredly, already dreading what would lay ahead.

They spent the entire afternoon helping the forensic team bagging the evidence and looking through the pictures.

Most of them showed girls laying on the table half dead and delirious in various states of injury with empty expressions and it felt as if with every picture he examined his soul grew a little bit heavier.

It was already dark when they finished. The dark evening blue managed to calm his frazzled nerves a bit. The colour blue always did somehow.

Ranpo, Yosano and the rest of the unit looked as terrible as he felt when they packed together for the day. The evidence was rather overwhelming and he wondered whether Mr Sakamoto would live to be put on trial or if he would die by the injuries Dazai had inflicted on him in self defence. He wasn't sure what he wished for, what the victims and their families would have wanted he knew even less.

Was it more satisfying to know that the murderer of your daughter, sister, friend, loved one was dead or that he had been brought to justice?

“I'll look through the evidence we collected today tomorrow.” Yosano promised when they got in the car. He and Ranpo nodded absentmindedly.

“Do you think this is how he chooses them? The crucifix killer I mean. Because they committed crimes themselves.” Yosano asked in the quiet of the car. Dazai watched the houses pass as Ranpo answered. “It's plausible, it's not an uncommon motive, to kill other criminals. There can be a variety of reasons for that, much more interesting is how he knew that they committed the crimes.”

The car fell silent after that. “Maybe he has a connection to the news or the police?” He asked and Ranpo nodded in the backseat. “That's a possibility.” “Maybe he's just a stalker or information broker or something.” Yosano threw in. “Most likely a mixture of all those things.” Ranpo said elbows on his knees and face resting on his hands. He had purple rings around his eyes.

Dazai sighed, this had become so complicated all of a sudden. “At least we've come a step closer to understanding the killer.” He said. “Although I wonder why our killer didn't kill the father?”

“Opportunity? Or rather lack thereof? Or maybe they had hoped we would discover his crimes by investigating the murder of his accomplice.” Ranpo suggested. “We don't know the exact circumstances of their 'Partnership' either. She didn't look very happy on the pictures holding the victims down.” “You think he forced her?” Yosano asked. “Self protection is more likely, they all did look like her.” Ranpo answered thoughtfully.

“Why do you think he did it.” Yosano glanced at Dazai this time, he was the expert after all.

“Control” he said after a moment. “He loved his daughter and they were all the perfect image of her.
So maybe fear of losing her, fear of losing control. And she feared him. I wonder though, if she really did kill her children. We may never know.”

“Would you judge her if she did, knowing what you know now?” Yosano asked quietly.

None of them seemed to know how to answer that question.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading as always! The chapter and the Story with the father and the daughter was low key inspired by the first (few) episodes from NBC's Hannibal! If you want check it out, it's such a good Show, but it's really bloody as well, more graphic than this Fic in my opinion!
Also next chapter the second part of Double Black will finally make an appearance woohoo, I can't really believe it took so long for Chuuya to make an appearance haha. Kudos and Comments are as always appreciated!
Also, I don't know how frequently I will be able to update from now on since School starts next week and there'll be a lot of work ahead of me for my final exams! The last week of the hollidays I went out a lot and had to finish a lot of stuff as well, since the Hollidays are really the only break we get haha. I'll try to write as much as possible when I can, but I can't promise anything!
Have a lovely day and thank you for sticking around!
When he arrived at his dark apartment he suddenly, irrationally regretted living alone. For a moment he wished Atsushi were still there, just so he wouldn't have to endure the oppressive silence of his dark apartment all by himself. Someone to take his mind off of the case and the haunting images of the afternoon.

The pictures had been the worst in his opinion, he felt alone and hollow just thinking about them.

That evening he sat in a scalding hot bathtub, trying to chase the cold away with the burning water and the red lines he carved into his skin. He almost felt like a dedicated painter in those moments, drawing red lines all over his body in full concentration, in short moments of bliss. Closer to happiness, closer to death, and somehow closer to life all at once, while the water slowly turned red.

He really didn't understand human beings, and yet he understood them much better than he understood himself.

The next morning they met up at the station to discuss any new developments in the case.

The case of Reina Sakamoto and her father was briefly summarised, but it seemed like everyone was up to date with it anyway.

Some new revelations were delivered by Haruno and the President however.

“As you all know Maki Sugimoto was 21 and a student of chemistry here at the university in Yokohama, she had a big family with many siblings and cousins and so on.

We prodded around a bit and found out that there was apparently a lot of competition in the family. Mostly concerning grades in school, friends and popularity. The parents were very adamant on the success of their children.” Haruno delicately fixed her glasses before continuing.

“After asking around we found a few kids from school, who claimed that the younger sister Akazawa, the one who killed herself, had been bullied by classmates and also her siblings.

Apparently they threatened her a lot and she was often covered in bruises when arriving at school.”

“Some neighbours supported that claim.” Fukuzawa picked up on what Haruno had said. “They told us they often saw the older siblings, especially the two older brothers and our victim, Maki. They would drag Akazawa out into the garden and into the cellar, the door was on the outside of the house.”

“Do you think her siblings killed her, maybe per accident while they were, y'know, mistreating her?” Tanizaki asked looking at Fukuzawa with big eyes.

Both Fukuzawa and Haruno exchanged a look at his question. “We can't say for sure of course, but
the autopsy report and the scene were rather obvious. It all looked like a suicide. She slit both arteries in her arms all the way while she was in the bathtub. The room was locked and one of the older brothers had to break down the door to get to her."

They all sat in contemplation, but before anyone could have said anything, a cellphone rang. Confused Dazai looked around before he realised it was his own.

When he took it out and excused himself he was even more confused to see that it wasn't Atsushi as he would have assumed, but an unknown caller ID. Hesitantly he picked up.

“Hello? Osamu Dazai here, how can I help.”

“Dazai, it's me, Koyou.

I need your help.”

Dazai stopped breathing, stunned he looked at one of the dying pot plants, trying to catch himself.

“Koyou? Why, this is a surprise, we haven't spoken in soo long, how have you been?” he said slyly, cheerfulness obviously forced.

“Cut it out, Dazai, I just said I need your help, don't try me. Are you willing to listen, or not?” Her voice was as clipped and proper as ever, her tone as demanding and unyielding as it always had been and Dazai felt he wasn't able to answer for a few seconds yet again.

“Chatter away.” he managed and he could hear Koyou taking a deep breath on the other side.

“You're a detective now, right?” He gave an affirmative 'hm', glad Koyou had taken the conversation into her hands, he was still rather stunned.

He could hear Koyou taking another deep breath.

“It's about a girl, her name is Kyouka, she's just fourteen. She was a prostitute down by the port, you know where. It's where all the young girls are.”.

“Anyway, no one has seen her since yesterday, I called her several times on the phone I gave her and checked with several other people, but no one seemed able to tell me where she was. I'm just... I'm worried Dazai, a lot of people have disappeared off the streets, three prostitutes were killed already! One of them was just fifteen, just a year older than Kyouka herself! Please Dazai I wouldn't call if it wasn't urgent! And it's true, isn't it? That your team is investigating the crucifix killer?” He could hear her take in a deep breath while he had frozen in place. His thoughts were racing in his head.

“Yes, it's true. But what does that have to do with Kyouka or the three dead prostitutes?”

He had turned around by now, speaking louder and catching the eyes of his colleagues who were listening in on what he was saying.

“Can I put you on speaker?” He added waiting for her reply. After a moment of hesitation she growled. “Do whatever you have to do.” He nodded even though she couldn't see and put her on speaker.

She took another breath to calm herself before speaking again. “Three prostitutes in our district were killed, a few thugs as well. They were killed by the crucifix killer, he's the one carving crosses into people's hands right?” He looked up to see the shocked faces of his colleagues.
“Yes, that's true.”

“Well that has to be him then!”

“What were they like?”

“Excuse me?”

“The prostitutes I mean, what were they like, did they have a criminal background, does Kyouka have one? Do you know if they committed any crimes?” He asked hastily.

“How do you suppose I would know?! I probably didn't even know their real names.”

He hummed vaguely, looking at the captain who had crossed his arms in front of his body and was wearing a serious expression. He got up and spoke into the phone.

“My name is Yukichi Fukuzawa, I am the captain of the police division and the special unit hunting down the crucifix killer. Were any of those crimes reported to the police Miss...?” The sound of the static of the phone followed, he could hear a rustling and then Koyou was answering.

“Koyou. If I remember correctly one of them was, but the police up here unsurprisingly did not really seem to care, she was a prostitute after all, they die all the time was what they said. It was apparently a rather... bloody affair. Still, no one paid it any special attention until the second one died, she died further up the red light district though, again, a bloody scene, I think her pimps got rid of the body as to not rise suspicion, same with the last one.” Koyou said, tone clipped and cold again.

There was silence for a moment. It was Ranpo who spoke next: “Thank you for the information Miss Koyou, just one question. Do you know to whom we can talk to, to find out out more about the victims?”

“Hm... I think Chuuya knew two of them, you should ask him, I can arrange a meeting if you would like.”

And just like that, Dazai felt as if he was falling. A single name and everything seemed to freeze.

Of course it had to be him whom they had to question, who else could it possibly be?

The world hated him after all.

“Very well, tell us the time and we'll be there. Thank you for your information, ah also it would be helpful if you gave us a picture of the girl you're searching for or a general description.”

“Of course, thank you for your time.”

Without another word she hung up.

“I suppose we'll have to wait for her reply then, until then we should catch up on the paperwork and the investigation. Everyone let's get to work.”

Everyone nodded and started moving, Dazai however had to force himself out of the trance he had fallen into.

“Your phone.” He blinked and looked at Fukuzawa who was holding out his phone for him.

“Oh... thank you boss.”
“Are you quite alright?” Fukuzawa’s eyes were perceptive and Dazai hastily averted his gaze as he took the phone and nodded numbly.

“Of course. I’ll be filing the paperwork then, I still have to write a report about what happened to me and Atsushi at Mr. Sakamoto’s house.” He hurriedly excused himself and fled to his desk where he spent the evening drowning himself in paperwork.

If anyone was suspicious about Dazai’s sudden worth ethnic no one chose to comment on it.

—

Dazai hadn’t even noticed that he had received a message until the end of his shift when he looked at his phone for the first time in several hours. (Or maybe he had subconsciously avoided it the whole time.)

Koyou had given him a location, somewhere in the red light district near the port, and a time; 6pm. An hour still. An hour. Today. He took a deep breath before turning around and entering Fukuzawa’s office.

“I received a message from Koyou, she gave me a place and a time; 6pm.”

Fukuzawa looked up at him. “Very well, please meet up with the informant then, perhaps take Kunikida with you. No actually a women would be better I suppose, take Yosano, Haruno or Naomi.”

He nodded, thoughts reeling at the thought that he had to go see him in a few hours.

It made sense of course, since Koyou had contacted Dazai himself in the first place, still he wished someone else could go in his stead.

When he stepped out he caught Yosano by the Jackets getting ready to leave. He had already decided to take her and not Haruno or Naomi, he had a feeling Yosano would be able to handle herself better. Not to mention that he didn’t want to expose the other two women to that sort of situation. (Or rather to expose himself to gruesome bodily harm, in case he’d take Haruno, Yosano’s, Fukuzawa’s and Naomi’s wrath and in Naomi’s case the reverse plus her livid brother if something were to happen to her.)

And so he asked the forensic pathologist instead. She readily agreed to accompany him, immediately asking for the place and time and getting her gun (and various little throwing knifes) ready.

Just as they were about to leave Ranpo approached them with a big grin.

“Ah! Yosano, Dazai! Fukuzawa allowed me to accompany the two of you!”

Dazai barely held himself back from cursing out aloud. Damn that little brat’s perceptiveness and damn Fukuzawa for having a weak spot for the older detective.

Instead he forced a smile and gestured for Ranpo to follow Yosano, who had already stepped out of the bureau and was eyeing both of them suspiciously. Damn her too.
They drove in silence, Yosano manoeuvring the car through the thick evening traffic, Dazai lost in thought and Ranpo in turn observing the older man and looking at the passing buildings.

The area was not a nice neighbourhood and so they decided to park the car a bit farther away.

As they walked along the port they already spotted the first prostitutes, either huddled together in groups or standing lonely in the chilly breeze by the street corners.

He had always wondered how they managed in their thin clothes when all three of them where freezing although they were wearing thick jackets and warm scarves.

But then again he supposed most of them wouldn't be able to feel much. He knew that a lot of prostitutes were addicted to some stuff or another. Either through a merciless personal situation or through the men standing behind the big prostitution rings of Yokohama, hiding in the shadows and behind their money for safety, forcing the prostitutes into drugs to have netter control over them.

Dazai had never once found in himself a single ounce of respect or empathy for those sort of men. The prostitutes were a different matter however and he carefully observed their grim faces and hollow expressions.

Most of them didn't spare them a single look, it was obvious that they weren't customers.

As they got closer to their meeting place a few other suspicious figures came across their way. Junkies, Pimps, dealers and he was sure the one or other gang member and murderer. Dark, cold eyes directed towards them. He was sure some of them could practically smell that they were with the police.

The place of their meeting was behind a big, abandoned building right by the sea. It was already a bit farther away from the main streets of the district and they all walked in silence, it had started to snow again and so they all wrapped their clothes a bit tighter around themselves.

When they arrived at the abandoned court behind some industrial buildings and warehouses, he could make out a lonely figure in the flurry of the snow.

His hair was illuminated by a street lamp that was in a rather sorry condition. It shimmered an eerie red in the half darkness of the evening and he was sure that he was smoking. The smoke was carried away in the wind but it left a visible trail nonetheless.

“Are you our informant? Chuuya? Koyou told us to meet you here.” The figure turned around and it was as if all air left his lungs at once.

Chuuya Nakahara took the half smoked cigarette out of his mouth and let it fall to the ground where it sizzled in the snow before he directed his eyes towards them. He didn't seem surprised at Dazai's presence.

He was still as stunningly beautiful as he remembered. Red hair curling softly around his pale, delicate, slightly freckled face. Cheeks and nose dusted with colour from the cold.

The most stunning were his eyes however. They shone as brightly as he remembered. Although he couldn't make out the colour in the dark, he knew they were of an extraordinary cerulean blue. In the dark however, they looked like deep pools, framed by dark lashes.
His eyes were half lidded as he took the three of them in, before he nodded affirmative.

“Yes, I'm Chuuya Nakahara, Koyou told me to tell you about the murders of the prostitutes to help find Kyouka. Ah, which reminds me!” He dug into the pockets of his coat (it was a dark blue that complemented his hair) and took out a little photograph looking at it for a short moment and then stretching his hand out, offering it to them.

It seemed Yosano was the first to regain her composure, after a moment of awkward silence and hesitation she took the picture and gave it a short once-over before nodding and murmuring a thank you.

“Well, what do you want to know then?” Chuuya asked, brushing a red lock, that had been gripped by the frigid wind, behind his ear.

“You're a guy!” Ranpo exclaimed and Dazai didn't know if he'd rather Ranpo dropped dead or he himself.

Chuuya raised an eyebrow and oh there it was. That expression he was so used to. Anger and annoyance showed on his face. The raised eyebrow, the slightly crinkled nose, the crooked mouth, eyes staring from beneath his hooded lids with a burning intensity Dazai hadn't seen in such a long time.

“Yes, got a problem with that or what?” He asked between gritted teeth. It was almost funny really, how Chuuya's expressions could change so easily and thoroughly, from relaxed and serene to a livid time bomb in the next. And yet he somehow managed to do it with a certain grace Dazai had only ever witnessed in very few people. (One being Yosano who was fortunately with him that very moment.)

“Not at all! I was merely surprised, I was under the impression we were going to meet a prostitute, a woman you know? As a friend of the victims. Not to mention at first you looked very... you didn't... eh you're not that tall.” Ranpo said cheerfully.

Ah sweet death where art thou when I need thee?

“What did you just say?” Chuuya asked lips trembling in rage. (It was rather adorable in Dazai's opinion, but he doubted very much that mentioning it would improve their situation in any way.)

“I'm sorry, they're idiots.” Yosano intervened. “Just ignore them, I do it all the time.” Ranpo made an offended noise but Yosano didn't pay him any attention, her eyes fixed on Chuuya. “Anyway, what can you tell us about the victims?”

Chuuya shot Ranpo an angry look (he was simply ignoring Dazai it seemed) but turned to Yosano then, his face much more amiable when directing his eyes at her.

“I only knew two of them. I had assumed the police knew, but then again their bodies were taken care of. I knew Jane, Koyou knew her as well. She was sweet, came from the country to study here. She fell in love with some rich, married business guy and got pregnant. She stopped everything for him but he left her and didn't want her to get too close to him 'cause of his family or something. The kids and the wife and his reputation you know?” Chuuya sighed, carding through his hair while they all nodded.

“Well anyway, she got in with the bad crowd when she started dating some guy from the slums, before she knew it, all of her social contacts were cut off and then she got the baby and was even more secluded. They were kind of on and off, you know? Always fighting and shit, it was really
ugly. Around the same time she started to sell her body, for her boy, to have the money, since that F-, her boyfriend always drank it away. It didn't really improve their relationship either. Her son is eight now, it went on like that for years. There were some other guys as well I think, but she always went back to him. It didn't matter what other people said either.” He shrugged nonchalantly but Dazai could see that Chuuya was upset about it, he started shifting around and his brows were furrowed.

“She turned up dead near the docks, down by the bridge. At first we presumed she killed herself, but her body was really bloody, definitely a crime. And her hands were carved open, like the corpses of that serial killer.”

“Would you say that bridge was where she was usually... making her rounds?” He asked, carefully watching Chuuya.

“Hm, she didn't really have a set place where you could find her. If anything the road by the old second hand shop, where they all stand. But if that didn't work she walked other places sometimes, as you do.” He didn't meet Dazai’s eyes, instead he directed his gaze towards the stormy sea where the snowflakes were wildly dancing across the ripply surface of the water.

His hair was tousled and a few droplets of ice hung in the tresses. The blue coat was long, almost reaching his ankles, but the top didn't reach all the way up the neck, exposing the pale skin there. Dazai noticed with a sudden pang in his chest that Chuuya was wearing the black choker he had given him a long time ago. (Or maybe he was only wearing it today? He didn't know. Not anymore.)

He had a sudden urge to give Chuuya his scarf, he looked cold and small in the winter storm with his sad eyes and raised shoulders, trying to shield himself from the wind and thinking about a friend who had experienced so much misery in her life, only to end as a corpse in the freezing waters of a river in Yokohama's red light district.

“I don't know much else about her either. I did know Misaki better, she was the third victim.”

He turned around shooting them a glance before directing his gaze towards the waters again.

“Her pimp is-was a brutal guy everyone just calls Rio, he had a row with Koyou back in the day, a prostitute was trying to escape his clutches, Ane-san had wanted to help her but then the girl turned up dead, beaten to a bloody pulp. An example.”

The wind picked up again and Dazai shuddered, thinking about how it was impossible that neither Chuuya nor the other prostitutes had died in the weather yet.

“She was the typical prostitute you could say, she didn't take drugs but she came from a broken home and turned to prostitution early on when she didn't have anywhere to go and no way to sustain herself. Bad experience with man from a too young age and she somehow ended up on the streets. She hated orphanages and foster homes, I suppose she didn't think that she had a different choice.”

Chuuya's voice had become quiet and he took a deep breath before continuing.

“She would visit Koyou sometimes, so I knew her rather well, she was unhappy and miserable. She could be a real handful at times, screaming and starting fights left and right, rivalry and stress all that, but in the end she was a kind person. She always regretted her outbursts and ended up crying all over
us.” Chuuya scoffed but the corners of his lips were turned up slightly and his eyes were sad and melancholic.

He continued in a soft voice: “She wanted to run away too, always found some guy who she thought was taking her away, married men with some money who loved her, or so she said. It never worked out as you can imagine. She was so young too, just fifteen. Then about a month ago they found her corpse. Mutilated and raped in an alleyway, the crosses on the backs of her hands.” He gestured to his own hands.

“The alleyway was clean though so she must have been killed somewhere else, we searched the area but we found nothing.

Ah, I know this because it was me and two other girls who found her. One of them works for Rio as well and she panicked and told him. His men got rid of the body as far as I’m aware.”

Chuuya turned around to look at them, eyes honest and open. “I hope I could help you. You have to find that pig that killed Misaki and Jane, got it?” His expression was one of disgust now and he strode towards Yosano, still not looking at Dazai. He took out a little scrap of paper and scribbled down a few numbers.

“Call me if you need anything else.” He said resolutely.

Yosano nodded “Thank you, we'll keep in touch because of the girl.” She raised the picture of Kyouka and Chuuya smiled and nodded.

He then walked past her, the snow beneath his soles crunched with every step he took. Suddenly he stopped, turned around and looked Dazai in the eyes. He seemed to hesitate for a moment, but then before turning around and disappearing into the night he softly muttered a “Good luck.” brilliant blue catching hazel brown.

The walk and the drive back was much more animated than before.

“Raped? Gory crime scenes? Mutilated and tortured? It doesn't really fit the killer at all.” Yosano said, shaking her head and car swerving a bit on the slippery street as she took a sharp turn.

“Not to mention they were killed elsewhere and the killer simply dumped the bodies.” Ranpo threw in.

Dazai nodded next to Yosano. “The killer was always effective. He killed them on the spot, his work was clean. He might have killed them rather brutally, but always in a still... orderly fashion. Detached. Not erratic or emotional. This killer is... I don't think it's the same one.”

“I agree.” Ranpo said behind him leaning between the two front seats to listen animatedly.

“So we assume there might be a second killer? A copy cat?” Yosano asked, narrowly missing a trash can.
“It's possible.” Dazai said, nodding. Just as Yosano was about to take a turn he stopped her. “Not that way, to Atsushi please, I wanted to check up on him.”

Yosano nodded and continued driving. They exchanged a few theories and went through the approximate profile they had somehow puzzled together of the killer until they arrived in front of Atsushi's building.

He waved as they drove away and watched, grinning brightly, as Ranpo tried to climb to the front, Yosano swerving the car on purpose to defect his plans.

Dazai let out a huff of breath in amusement before ringing Atsushi's doorbell. Despite the dark skies it was still quite early, around 7 pm and he watched the clouds above him. The snowfall had seized and the world seemed eerily peaceful once again.

His thoughts wondered to Chuuya for a second and he was internally glad that neither Ranpo nor Yosano had further inquired or even as much as breathed a word about their informant. They seemed to have caught on to something though and Dazai couldn't help but feel heavy, unbidden memories flooding his mind.

Maybe that was why he had decided to visit Atsushi instead of going home.

The door buzzed and he pressed against it, stepping inside and quickly making his way up the stairs, where he was greeted by a groggy Atsushi in his pyjamas, looking at Dazai in confusion.

“Dazai-san, what are you doing here?” He asked, sleepily rubbing his eyes.

He rolled his eyes and grinned brightly. “Why Atsushi to take care of you of course! I need to check if everything is all right after all!”

“Oh.” Atsushi looked up at him with big eyes before awkwardly taking a step back, opening the door wider so Dazai could step in.

He watched Atsushi limp past the small bathroom door and immediately felt guilt like icy fingers taking a hold of him again.

He tried to suppress the feeling and instead followed his protégé inside, carefully closing the door behind himself.

Atsushi had gone to the kitchen corner and was rummaging through the cupboards, carefully balancing on the toes of his good leg to reach the shelves. “Tea or coffee?” He asked, looking over his shoulder at Dazai. “Coffee would be good.” He responded taking a quick look around.

The apartment was small, only consisting of a bathroom and a living room.

In the living room was a small kitchenette with a few utensils and herbs Atsushi had somehow acquired. There was also a small table with three chairs, a futon, lying messily on the ground and a few cupboards with books, clothes and some other stuff.

He spotted Atsushi's backpack against the wall and smoothly sat down looking up at the boy who was carrying two steaming mugs and gently sat them down.

After Atsushi had taken a seat, Dazai waited a moment before questioning the boy watching him squirm nervously in his chair.

“Well Atsushi, how are you then? Did you take all the medicine you were prescribed?”
“Ah, eh, yes. It's going well, it hurts a little but Kunikida drove me to the hospital today and the doctors said there don't seem to be any complications. I'm healing fast they said.” Atsushi muttered and smiled shyly up at him.

Dazai nodded, smiling as well. “That's good to hear then. Did they say whether you could go back to school next week? Did you catch up on the work while you were away?”

“Oh, eh well, since there's a weekend still the doctor said it would be all right if I went on Monday again. Speaking of my physical condition at least, he said if I didn't feel like it, I could always be excused. Eh, mentally you know?” He cleared his throat and glanced up at Dazai who was comfortably sipping his coffee and nodded in encouragement.

“Ah, Lucy brought me the assignments and notes from the past three days, she even brought me something to eat and she promised to come by tomorrow! So there 's really no need to worry about me!” Atsushi said with a light hearted smile.

Dazai hummed in response before he grinned, putting his chin on his now intertwined fingers and peered at Atsushi with a curious and mischievous expression. “Say Atsushi, this Lucy girl, you never told me about her! Could it be? Is she your girlfriend?” He teased.

Atsushi looked at him in confusion for a mere second before he seemed to have processed Dazai's words. “Ah! Oh! Eh no, no, no! We're eh, just friends! FRIENDS you know! From school, I mean she's really pretty and really nice, and I like her a lot and, I mean I just don't really like... ehm I mean I don't really... girls... eh...” Atsushi was stuttering and becoming redder with each sentence.

Dazai simply looked at his charge, intrigued and grinning from ear to ear. “What about girls, Atsushi-kun?” He asked playfully.

If possible Atsushi's blush intensified but before he started stuttering something incoherent again Dazai stopped him with a raised hand and a chuckle. “It's all right, I'm just joking, calm down Atsushi-kun.”

He smiled gently at the still heated looking boy. “Just trying to keep track of your wild teenager life outside of the Agency. You're my protégé after all!” he said with a wink.

“Oh.” Atsushi managed. Obviously still embarrassed, he tucked the long strand of hair behind his ear and averted his eyes quickly. He raised his mug and took a deep breath before glancing up at Dazai again who couldn't help but think that Atsushi really was adorable sometimes.

“Are you dating someone then?” His charge asked, obviously just trying to switch topics, yet the question took Dazai off guard. He thought back to the meeting in the red light district.

Chuuuya.

The reason he had come here in the first place.

“No, not right now, but as you know, I'm always on the look out for someone willing to do a double suicide with me!” He covered up quickly, shooting Atsushi a bright smile.

“Oh, I see.” Atsushi said, cheeks slightly pink again.

“And this Lucy girl, is she your best friend then? Or is there anyone else you like at school?”

Now that he thought about it he didn't really know a lot about Atsushi's recent development in school. He knew that the boy had been struggling in the subjects at first, but they all helped him out
and he seemed to be doing fine where his grades were concerned. Still, he didn't know if Atsushi had made any friends, or if he liked the teachers, the buildings, if he was cross with someone, which subjects he hated and which ones he liked.

Somehow it made him feel even worse and then realisation hit him just how much he had really changed. The Agency had changed him. His colleagues had. He didn't know whether to be glad or unhappy about it. About these feelings. He still felt awkward expressing himself most of the time, hiding behind his crafted mask of cheerfulness. And yet, slowly his co workers had come to know him.

“I don’t” He was snapped out of his thoughts by Atsushi’s soft voice. “Have many friends that is. Lucy and I keep together most of the time actually.” He stared at the boy in silence before tilting his head in thought.

“Is that so, that's surprising.” since you're gentle and sweet and so, so unbearably kind and loyal. Everyone who sees something else must be out of their minds. But he didn't say that out aloud of course. He couldn't. Maybe some day he would be able to, but not right now.

Atsushi simply shrugged, obviously ready to drop the topic. Dazai remembered something else in that moment however. The bruise.

“How about your teachers then? I don't even know what your favourite subject is!” He exclaimed, voice as care free as always.

“Oh... well I really like Japanese, talking about poetry, discussing books and learning the script better! I also like art I guess... My art teacher is my favourite, she's really nice, she always prepares tea and gives everyone a passing grade no matter what.” Atsushi smiled a bit dreamily.

“That's nice, it fits you if you know what I mean.” Dazai conceded smiling back gently and Atsushi's eyes seemed to become brighter before he averted his eyes, still smiling to himself while he fiddled with his cup. “Anything else?” he asked, partially trying to keep the conversation up, partially because he really was curious.

And so Atsushi went to talk about his school a bit, the terrifying abandoned arts and crafts building with all it's scary ghost stories, the Math teacher, who had punished a particularly bratty student, about his friend Lucy, about the terrible cafeteria food (“He threw it at the wall and it wouldn't come of! It was just like glue! It was so funny, I mean can you imagine?! What do they even put in the food? It's more mysterious than the food we would get at the orphanage haha!”), the terrifying janitor and the usual gossip about the attractive Spanish teacher and the handsome sports instructor and their secret meet ups after school.

“So you like school then? Overall I mean? You don't have any problems with any teachers or other students?” He asked prying for a reaction. At his question about problems he noticed immediately that Atsushi seemed to crumble in on himself a bit, the brightness fled his eyes and he looked nervous and tense.

“Yes, I like school. There's a lot I don't know, so it's fun to learn about so many new things.” his charge said softly.

Dazai sat in silence for a while, wondering whether he should speak up or not. He knew that Atsushi might become embarrassed or defensive, still he wanted to help his co worker. He really didn't know what it was about Atsushi that made him care so much about him, but here he was.

“You can talk to me about everything you know that, right, Atsushi-kun?”
The boy blinked and slowly looked up at him. “Of course Dazai-san.” His voice was a bit hoarse and he looked guilty. Dazai really wished he was more apt at dealing with people normally, not just psychoanalysing them. He was sure Yosano or Kunikida would have already gotten Atsushi to talk.

“Dazai’ is just fine, you don’t have to be so formal around me.” He said, trying to cheer up the mood.

Atsushi blinked again, looking even more defeated than before. “Oh alright.”

Dazai sighed and carefully stretched out his hand towards the boy, this really was new territory for him. After Atsushi had been injured his body seemed to have run on autopilot, he had just known how to comfort the boy. He had experienced violence and fights and their aftermaths after all. This however was a strange situation, he had never struggled in school, because of his smarts, his guardian and of course his reputation and cold demeanour. Atsushi was different however. (And he was glad for it.)

He carefully patted Atsushi’s shoulder before standing up and stretching. “Thanks for the nice talk then and good luck with that janitor!” He laughed before gesturing towards the door. “I should leave then, it’s already late.” The boy nodded.

After he had gotten ready he turned around one last time. “Take care Atsushi.” The boy looked up at him in surprise before he nodded and opened the door for Dazai. They bid each other a good night and Dazai slowly walked down the stairs, already fearing the cold wind outside.

As he walked through the abandoned streets his thoughts reeled around the two people he had somehow come to love most during the course of his miserable life.

At least those, that were still alive.

Chapter End Notes

I'm really sorry, that this took so long. School is really busy and stressful and demanding.
I hope you enjoyed this chapter, it was kind of an introduction to another aspect of the story and went a bit more into Atsushi's life/things that might come up for him and his relationship with Dazai.
That said the next chapter will introduce some more characters that will stay important throughout the Story and will include some more 'classical detective work' hehe.

Anyway, as always please leave a kudo or comment, they make me immensely happy! Also, I hope you enjoyed of course!
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The next morning, he received a text from Koyou, she told him that Kyouka had appeared again, apparently she and some other girls had simply gotten into a row with some pimp or another and had gone away for a few days, in fear of retribution, the situation seemed to have been dissolved now however. Koyou apologized for being a bother and thanked them for their effort. Dazai in return thanked her for the information they had received from her and Chuuya.

He delayed the information to Fukuzawa who tied everyone in on the good news.

When a missing child turned up again breathing always felt a little bit easier afterwards.

Dazai found himself in quite a strange mood over the weekend, he drank too much, both at home and with his co-workers at the bar they frequented every second Saturday, he thought too much and he spilled way too much blood over his sink and in the bathtub.

On Sunday he checked on Atsushi again, who informed him that he would return to school on Tuesday after a final check up by the doctor on Monday.

They watched a movie together and at some point they were joined by the Tanizaki siblings, Ranpo and Poe who somehow managed to force them into a lord of the rings marathon (who does that on a Sunday?!).

On Monday he went to the check up with Atsushi, where his charge was declared able enough to go back to school again, he was simply advised to proceed with caution and not to over strain the leg. The wound was shallow however, and they supposed he would be better in the week to come, although he was exempt from PE and the marathon in December (Atsushi was in a quite cheerful mood after the appointment).

After the check up he brought the boy back to his apartment and went to the office, where he spent the afternoon filing away paper wok.

The investigation went slow for the week to come, it was unfortunately how these sort of cases often proceeded. Serial killers rarely made mistakes, they were organised, a connection and the method of finding the victims, therefore knowing where the culprit would strike again was often extremely difficult to pin point.

It was often frustrating work, consisting of looking over old clues, working over other cases and, as terrible as it was, waiting for the next victim to turn up, hoping to find some clues at the new crime scene. (Or for the murderer to turn himself in, for someone to catch him during the act or the victim themselves escaping and being able to give them clues, none of these things ever really happened very often however, as unfortunate as it was, but one could still hope.)

Most Serial Killers slipped up at some point though, question was when that would be and how many more people would be killed until then.
Both he and his co-workers were acutely aware of these facts, but that didn't make the wait any easier. Didn't make it easier to concentrate on cold cases.

Especially Kunikida suffered during those times, he hated being helpless and hated whenever they weren't able to act immediately and acutely catch the perpetrator. It was nerve wrecking to say the least.

Haruno and Fukuzawa managed to pry some information from the college student's older sister, she confessed, that they had been torturing their little sister, a mix of social pressure and the vindictiveness of children he supposed.

They had also checked their latest victim, as expected however, they didn't find out much more than they already knew, there we no suspects, no witnesses, no clues whatsoever.

And so the weekend came again, spent with less drinking and less self harm and the continuation of their movie marathon in form of 'the hobbit' (he couldn't believe Atsushi had never heard of any of these movies, even Dazai had known them!).

On Wednesday however, things finally started moving again. The thing they had all dreaded happened.

Yosano got a call from no other than Chuuya Nakahara himself in the early morning hours who told her that a corpse had been found in the red light district, mutilated and raped, stigmata on hands, as the previous ones.

They hadn't really spoken about it in the open, but they all knew, that they would take over the case of what they supposed was a copy cat killer of the murderer they had been chasing initially.

When they arrived at the scene the streets had miraculously emptied. It was a busier part of town and the night they had met there with Chuuya the streets, despite the late hour, had been filled with people. Now the streets were abandoned.

A few police officers and the forensic team had already arrived, Yosano at the top, directing everyone and leading the search for evidence.

When Dazai looked around the alleyway (it was a similar place to the one they had found Ryota Watanabe in, the detail didn't escape him), he spotted four figures standing to the side, two police officers seemed to try to engage them, but they were stubborn, expressions tight and eyes narrowed.

Dazai immediately identified them, the smallest was (unsurprisingly) Chuuya, he was wrapped in the same coat as last time, he was still wearing the choker as well, only his pants were grey now, instead of black, and he was wearing thicker boots.

Next to him stood Michizou Tachihara, he was dressed in clothes that seemed slightly too big, wide shirts and wide troughers, he was buried in a thick green parka and was sporting a bandage on his nose. The young man was standing suspiciously close to Chuuya. They had always been close, good friends, if Dazai remembered, he also remembered that, as far as Tachihara was concerned that that could very well change.

He knew the brunette had had a crush on the read head. Well 'crush' was a bit weak a word to describe Tachihara's feelings, *infatuation* was more like it. It was annoying really, (had been really annoying, he corrected himself) he couldn't see what Chuuya saw in the taller man.
To Chuuya’s right stood another one of his friends, Gin Akutagawa. She was dressed in a white coat and her shimmering black hair seemed to flow over her back like a river, reflecting the sunlight on its surface. She, like Chuuya and Koyou was man (or rather woman) for everything.

To her right stood her brother, Ryunosuke Akutagawa, he preferred being referred to by last name though, and so the siblings were known as 'Akutagawa and Gin'.

His backstory with Akutagawa was rather complicated (maybe not as complicated as it was with Chuuya, but still a considerable amount so). The young boy (he would be 18 now wouldn't he be?) was still dressed all in black, just like in old times. He even wore the same coat if Dazai remembered correctly. His hair was as strange as ever, black with faded out roots and his expression and air hadn't changed either. His atmosphere was oozing with malice and bad intentions.

It was almost adorable really, he looked like a feral dog, vicious and ready to strike, but when Dazai closed in on the four his entire facade dropped, he seemed unsure and submissive and yet his eyes began shining with hatred in equal parts to admiration.

“The red head is our informant, yes?” Kunikida asked next to him with a lowered voice. Dazai nodded in response.

“Dazai-san.” It was Gin who had spoken up, a smart move, considering that she was the only one he didn't really have bad blood with (directly).

“Why hello everyone, it's been a while! How are you on this beautiful day?~” He asked cheerfully, grinning from ear to ear. “When did you discover the corpse?” Kunikida interrupted, not sparing a single glance in Dazai's direction.

“My brother did. He called us around 7.” She answered and his partner nodded, writing down the information in his beloved notebook, the two completely talking over him.

“That would be you, yes?” Kunikida asked, directing his gaze towards Akutagawa who looked at Kunikida with screwed up eyebrows and narrowed eyes. Dazai had to physically fight his eyes from rolling to the back of his head. Akutagawa was soo dramatic.

“Yes.” He answered clipped. Somehow he managed to pour all of his hatred into a single word and Dazai could see Kunikida blinking in surprise before anger etched onto his features as well.

“Well, when did you find him?”

“Yes.” He answered clipped. Somehow he managed to pour all of his hatred into a single word and Dazai could see Kunikida blinking in surprise before anger etched onto his features as well.

“Do you know the victim?”

“His name is Sakakibara, he was a prostitute down by the docks.” Tachihara intervened, throwing Akutagawa an irritated look, it was all rather amusing really.

“Well, can you tell us anything else? Where he came from, any relatives, friends?” His partner pressed on.

The four of them stayed silent before exchanging glances, Gin spoke up again. “Maybe we could talk in private?” She suggested, and Dazai had a gist of why that would be.

The two of them exchanged a look as well and Kunikida sighed and put away his notebook. “Fine, there's a good restaurant down by the Agency, it's private, we can talk there.” He said.
The four looked at each other again before Chuuya spoke up this time. “Akutagawa and I will go then. He found the body and I knew Sakakibara the best.” ’Of course you did.’ Dazai thought viciously but he only nodded and told them to wait for them by the car.

He and Kunikida then made their way over to the victim on the ground. He was covered slightly in snow, the skin purple and blue.

He was male, but they already knew that. Around his mid twenties, black hair, brown eyes, approximately 176 cm.

He had been sexually assaulted, probably while he had still been alive, he was missing a finger and he sported a few cuts on his arms and legs. The final cut had killed, from one ear to the other.

Dazai observed the corpse on the ground. His clothes were poor and too thin for the weather, he was wearing fingerless gloves, like Atsushi did and he had had a pretty face. Soft and kind, deep brown eyes that were looking at the ground before him.

Dazai turned away, he and Kunikida briefly informed the team of their plans and then made their way over to the car where Akutagawa and Chuuya were still waiting; they seemed to be deep in conversation, both looked stressed and agitated, but when they arrived they immediately fell silent.

Well this would be fun.

It had started to snow again, he was glad for it since snow always managed to calm him down.

His heart seemed to settle and his thoughts were being carried away while he was watching the peaceful dance outside.

Akutagawa next to him seemed uneasy, although he didn't let it show. The other two men were silent. Dazai was silent. God he really didn't want to think about this.

The café was in a small white building with romantic arches.

The interior was warm and the atmosphere cheerful. Unfitting somehow, considering the circumstance of their arrival there. but then again, the death of a single prostitute didn't affect the rest of Yokohama. He knew, and he knew that he shouldn't be upset about it, but he was. It felt unfair, that such a tragedy as the loss of a life could not stop the world from moving.

They settled down at a table in the corner and ordered hot drinks (Dazai flirted with the waitress and it reminded him so painfully of the past he blacked out for a second). In the warmth his fingers finally defrosted a bit.

“Well, what can you tell us about the victim then?” the man with the glasses (Kunikida?) started.

His eyes were narrowed and he carried himself with the sort of air detectives usually do. He seemed strict and Chuuya couldn't quite say yet what he thought of him.
Akutagawa next to him shifted uneasily but Chuuya calmly took a sip from his hot chocolate (Dazai had scoffed silently when he had ordered it, but he didn't care, it was warm and sweet, just what he needed).

“His name is-was Sakakibara, he was born here in Yokohama, he had abusive parents I think, so he ran away. Got into prostitution fairly early, he did drugs and needed the money. He had a girlfriend till a month ago or so, but she overdosed. He was pretty heartbroken and erratic, her death really hit him so he tried to quit, but he was back at it four weeks later.”

The two men stayed silent, Dazai, the bastard, as unreadable as ever but Kunikida's eyes were sad as he spoke and Chuuya found that maybe, the man wasn't as strict and uptight as he had thought at first.

“Did he have a criminal record?” Dazai asked when he didn't speak again.

He looked at Akutagawa in question who slightly raised his shoulders in nonchalance.

“I think so, he got busted for drugs a couple of times...” Kunikida jutted his words down quickly before correcting his glasses.

“He didn't get in much trouble apart from that though, he was a prostitute on his own whims and so was his girlfriend, her name was Miri, she has a sister who goes to university by the way, but I don't know if that helps.”

“When did you see him last?” Dazai asked fixing him with his cold eyes. Chuuya had to suppress a shiver.

“A couple of days ago I suppose.”

“I saw him yesterday, he was standing by the old pawn shop, but that was it.” Akutagawa spoke up. Dazai averted his eyes to look at his old prodigy (if that's what you wanted to call it anyway).

Kunikida wrote the address down before asking: “Did you notice any strange behaviour? Or maybe a person you haven't seen before? Was anyone there, following him perhaps? Did he mention a suspicious client? Anything at all?”

They exchanged looks. “I didn't see anyone that day, but...” Akutagawa trailed off shooting Chuuya a look once again.

“There was this client...” Chuuya began, turning the mug in his hands. “He was really obsessed with Sakakibara, a real creep, y'know? He paid a couple of times but then he started following him around, wanted more, a relationship or whatever. I thought the situation had dissolved a few months ago or so, but you can never be sure I guess.” he shrugged his shoulders.

Kunikida nodded encouragingly. “Do you know his name or what he looks like?”

Chuuya could feel his cheeks heat up. “No, but I do know where he lives.” he said clearing his throat, the two detectives looked at him for a moment in surprise before Dazai's expression turned sour and Kunikida nodded again. “Can you provide the address?”

“No, but it's one of the big houses down in the posh area, it's a big fancy house, white with roses in the front, although they'd be dead now, since it's winter.” he supplied, grateful that they hadn't questioned him further.

It probably didn't come as a surprise that he sold his body, (even if only from time to time, there were
other things one could do in the underworld to earn money, things he'd rather do, but sometimes
when desperate times called for it...) but the reactions were still very different, especially since he
was a man. Homophobia had lessened in the past years but it hadn't disappeared entirely.

Prostitution had always had a bad reputation; 'whores' was what they were, but the sympathies had
risen with more outspoken people talking about it, books and documentaries released and of course
the stagnating feminism in the world.

“I would be able to recognize it if you got me there.” He said resolutely. “But then again... this is a
serial killer...” He had his doubts that the client was responsible for Sakakibara's death, but then
again he supposed every lead was important.

“We should still check on him.” Dazai confirmed, nodding cheerfully.

—

It didn't take him long to find the house (or rather mansion), a big, modern block, all in white with
big windows and grey rose bushes in the front. The whole property looked strangely sterile with the
white facade and the white snow.

They got out of the car under protest from Akutagawa who was silently cursing and demanding to
know why he had to come as well. They ignored him and made heir way to the front porch where
Dazai rang the doorbell. He cheerfully swayed from one foot to the other while they waited and
Chuuya couldn't help but be perplexed at how surreal being around Dazai again was.

He had been prepared of course, Koyou had contemplated calling him for a few days and when she
did Chuuya had already gone over the shock of the possibility of seeing Dazai again. When they had
met at the port area he had done his best to ignore his presence only to drown himself in alcohol later
to forget.

Still the image of Dazai as handsome and windswept as ever, standing in the snow with slightly pink
cheeks and those warm brown eyes looking at him longingly... it had been hard to force that image
out of his head and now, now they had to meet again and even spend time together!

It was infuriating really! His cheerful air, still hiding behind that dumb mask everyone could easily
see was as real as Koyou's eyelashes, the careless attitude. (All those things he had fallen in love with
back in the day.)

He knew of course, that leaving everything behind had been the best thing for Dazai to do. He
wasn't caught anymore, in the Mafia's fangs. Not to mention the harm that could have come to him
after having one the Mafia's most prominent figures arrested.

Chuuya could understand why, had even felt happy for that idiot. For finally breaking out, for finally
getting the man behind bars from whose hands they had all suffered so much.

Still he couldn't help but shake and scream at the thought that Dazai had left him behind. That he
thought he had had a responsibility towards Chuuya to protect him. To not interfere in his life. For
once Dazai had been considerate and yet he wished he had taken him with him. That Dazai had told
him everything, that they had done it together. Extracted Dazai's, their, revenge for Odasaku and for
the childhood they had lost.

He was ripped out of his thoughts when the front door opened and a man in his late 40s poked his head out.

He was of average height, maybe around 175, his crouched shoulders and sunken eyes didn't manage to make him look any more confident in comparison to the two detectives who both towered above him.

He looked pathetic really and Chuuya couldn't help but sneer slightly (but then again, as far as he remembered, that was exactly what had driven this particular man crazy so he hastily put on a blank face).

“Why hello Mr.-” Dazai checked the name tag on the bell. “Kanno. Would you be willing to answer some of our questions?” He asked airily while shoving his badge under the surprised men's face.

'Mr. Kanno' looked at them in shock, his eyes measuring them and when they met Chuuya's his face seemed to constrict even more in fear.

“Eh... yes of course officer, plea-”

“Detective.”

“Eh?”

“We're detectives, homicide detectives, not police officers.” Kunikida corrected and Chuuya could see Dazai grin from ear to ear.

“Oh, ah, well... please come in then.” The man offered, obviously even more nervous than before.

They all followed him inside, the house was as clean and sterile as the front garden, the only decorations seemed deliberate, there was no soul behind it.

They arrived at a big, light flooded dining room with an adjoining living room.

The rooms were in white and beige and so utterly cold he immediately felt uneasy.

He remembered that he had been quite impressed by the house when he had come there the first time, it was big and spacious and smelled of wealth. The bed room had been tinged with white and a soft baby blue. On one of the drawers had been a photo line up showing a happy family of four, the husband, the wife and two sons.

The man that had been fucking him on the baby blue covers was standing there next to a pretty woman with blonde hair, the two sons were sitting on chairs in front of them, it looked like they were at a garden party or some fancy shit like that. The two boys had both remarkably resembled their mother and he remembered that he had back then, absent mindedly thought, 'They're lucky, they look like her...' while the man had groaned in his ear.

It was always strange to know that a client had a family. Most did of course, he knew, but to be faced with direct proof... Normally the men came with their cars, sometimes they'd do it right there, sometimes they would rent a hotel room. They rarely ever took them home, only rich bastards who were young and not yet married or poor men out for quick relieve ever did.

To buy a prostitute was rarely ever something discussed openly, not something many men were proud of. It was secretive thing, dirty and that's how it was done. In secret, in dirty alleyways, cars or
hotel rooms.

So that the man had taken him to the house where his family had lived in as well, had taken him by surprise. It wasn't that he had never experienced it, and he knew then it wouldn't be the last time, and yet it was disturbing in its own every time.

“Please sit down.” Mr. Kanno said, pulling him out of his reverie.

After they had all taken place and the man had brought them all a glass of water there was an uncomfortable silence in the room while the man waited for them to ask questions, eyes flitting between the two detectives and Chuuya (he seemed to ignore Akutagawa, but then again, the young men wasn't looking up either, he seemed angry and disinterested if everything.).

Finally Dazai spoke up, pulling a picture out of the inner pocket of his coat. “Do you know this man, Mr. Kanno?” He asked, smiling eerily calm but there was a slight edge to it that Chuuya remembered all too well from the past.

Their suspect swallowed hard, nervously looking at Chuuya again.

“Yes.” he said, his voice was raspy and broke slightly at the end. He cleared his throat awkwardly.

“Well, go on.” Kunikida demanded, arms crossed in front of his chest.

“...Well...he... I...” The man cleared his throat again, folded his hands on the table and stared at them when he picked up where he had left. “He... his name, I, Sakakibara, I think, I mean...” He nervously glanced up at Kunikida, who was glowering from underneath his glasses and then at Dazai, who looked cheerful and threatening at the same time, and now that was a terrifying picture.

“We...um, we used to meet he and I we...”

“You had an affair, no not quite you were a regular costumer, yes?” Dazai interrupted sharply.

“...yes, I ... I'm sorry, but why are you even asking me about him?” the man managed, his eyes were big but there was some confidence in his posture now.

“He's dead.”

The man's face fell, his eyes widened and he blinked several times as to free himself of a stupor.

“Dead? I... I didn't know...”

“He was murdered.” Kunikida supplied, watching the man carefully who stared at him in return.

“Oh... you think I did it, that's why you're here.” he looked worn out as he said that. “You, you knew Sakakibara, you stood together sometimes and...” He was looking at Chuuya now. He didn't quite know what to make of this man. He didn't really seem like a killer.

“You stalked Sakakibara, is that right?” Dazai pressed on.

The man's eyes widened. “I...no. NO! I would never do that, I mean I, I liked him, loved him, at least that's what I thought. And I thought he liked me too, always acted like he was actually in love.” The man laughed bitterly. “I should have known better of course. Those prostitutes are all the same, just acting.” He was looking at Chuuya now.

“I was ready to give my life up for him, leave my wife and my children, but he suddenly refused, of course I was angry. Yes, I followed him and asked him about it, but after a while I gave up. It was
obvious I didn't matter to him.” He looked defeated now and Chuuya felt quite sure that he hadn't killed Sakakibara, he didn't seem the type. Too weak, not overly intelligent and most importantly, too dejected.

“Please, you have to believe me. I didn't kill him, I swear!”

“Very well, where were you yesterday around 6pm and this morning around 7am?”

The man looked at Kunikida with his big eyes, Chuuya almost felt sorry for him, he seemed so small and pathetic, but then he remembered the picture on the drawer, remembered that night and the nights after that, remembered Sakakibara's unsettled face as he told them about the man who continued to harass him.

“I was at home, with my wife. I came back around five from a meeting, we had dinner, watched a bit TV and then we went to bed. We sleep in the same bed so I suppose she would have noticed if I had left, and my sons would have too! The bedroom door is rather loud.”

’Soo you fucked me in your marriage bed then, yes? Was it the same with Sakakibara?’ He thought bitterly, he really wanted to leave.

“Your wife would confirm this then? Your sons as well?”

“Yes, but... you wouldn’t tell them about...” his eyes flickered to Chuuya, they were panicked and desperate and Chuuya recoiled slightly at the sight.

“I'm afraid if any of them would ask we would provide them with the reason for our questioning.”

The man paled considerably. “Where is your wife right now?”

“She went shopping, she could be back any minute. I... please!”

“We will wait then.” Kunikida decided.

After they asked Mr. Kanno to call his wife, he left the room and they quietly discussed their thoughts, it seemed that none of them really believed that Mr. Kanno was the murderer.

A while later they heard the front door opening and hushed voices. Then there was the prominent sounds of heels on hard, wooden floors and barely a second later a women appeared in the doorway.

She was tall, blonde hair shimmering in the kitchen light. She had big, expressive grey eyes and a sweet, round face with straight eyebrows.

She looked like a foreigner and there was an air of gentleness around her that was rare in Chuuya's experience.

“Good afternoon Mrs. Kanno, we would just like to ask you a quick question and then we'll be out of your hair.” Dazai said, flashing her one of his most charming smiles.

She didn't seem to notice however, her eyes wandering between the two detectives in their business attire to Akutagawa and him, dressed in light, dark clothes, Akutagawa all filth and grime, Chuuya all leather and accessories.
She seemed to finally pull herself together however, straightening and sitting down, carefully smoothing out the lines of her heavy skirt.

“Well,” She cleared her throat. “What can I do for you gentlemen?” She spoke with a slight American accent.

“Can you confirm that your husband was with you yesterday the entire evening until morning?”

She looked at Kunikida, uncertainty flittering across her face.

“...No...”

“What?!” Mr. Kanno yelled, utterly shocked.

“I'm sorry, I can't, I have trouble sleeping, and so I take medicine that basically knocks me out for six hours on end.” She said, eyes downcast.

“May I ask, why you're asking?” When she looked up her eyes were filled with tears and Chuuya had the bad feeling that she knew.

“A young prostitute died, your husband was a regular costumer of the young man in question, we're simply looking at every possibility ma'am.”

Mrs. Kanno had paled considerably at his words but she didn't utter a single word in response.

“We're trying to confirm his Alibi, you see?”

As if in trance the young woman stood up, she turned around to look at her husband who was standing shakily in the doorway still. Chuuya wished he could see her face to at least guess what was going through her mind.

“get out.”

“W-What?”

“I said... Get. Out.”

“Honey, I...”

“GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY HOUSE!”

Before any of them could react Mrs. Kanno had stormed out of the room up the stairs, right past her husband who was a trembling mess standing in the doorway.

In the next moment they all moved, Mr. Kanno ran after his wife and the four of them ran after him.

They all sprinted up the stairs into the Master bedroom (The same room from many months ago) where they were met by a picture of domestic chaos. Mrs. Kanno had thrown her husband’s clothes to the ground and was screaming at the top of her lungs.

“You said never again! YOU PROMISED! You said you'd never...” She was crying now and Mr. Kanno looked like he might break at any moment.
“LEAVE! You promised to never betray me again, but here we are now.” She said bitterly, picking up a pile of clothes and throwing them at him.

“I suppose men never change.” She laughed, high and erratic. “Yuzu was right! I should have never forgiven you!”

She threw another pile at him. Dazai and Kunikida were now trying to calm the married couple down while Akutagawa and he himself stood off awkwardly to the side. It wasn't the first fight he witnessed between a couple, as a matter of fact he and Dazai had had similar fights in the past. He would get jealous whenever Dazai flirted with baristas or clerk shop assistants and Dazai would fume whenever a man so much as touched him or looked at him strangely, not to mention Chuuya’s tendency to befriend prostitutes back in the day. Yes, they had often accused each other of cheating or at least flirting, so he understood very well, but never like this, there had always been hope (until the very end at least). Still it didn't make the picture in front of him any prettier.

In that moment his eyes caught something.

“Dazai. Oi, Dazai. DAZAI!” Everyone in the room stopped finally when he raised his voice and picked up the light grey sweater with a blood stain on the sleeve.

“I suppose this belongs to your husband?” He asked calmly, looking at Mrs. Kanno. Her eyes were wide and her mouth slightly agape, he supposed she, just like the rest of them it seemed hadn't really expected her husband to be the killer, despite the connections between him and the victim.

Even after she had denounced his Alibi, he just didn't seem the type. And yet... Maybe he was just a damn good actor.

“Yes, yes it is.” She said, her voice only a whisper, a stark contrast to her yelling from earlier.

“You didn't by any chance accidentally cut yourself sometime in the last hours Mr. Kanno?” Dazai asked with a raised eyebrow.

Mr. Kanno mutely shook his head, staring at the piece of cloth in shock. “No. But that... it isn't my... I don't, I swear it wasn't me!” He begged looking around widely at them.

“You monster... YOU FUCKING MONSTER! Oh god, oh god...” Ms. Kanno was looking at her husband in terror now, her eyes were wide and her teeth bared in disgust.

“Listen, just LISTEN! IT WASN'T ME! I WAS SET UP!” They all instinctively took a step back.

Mr. Kanno looked desperate now and suddenly Chuuya felt a pang of fear. People who felt driven towards the edge normally tended to act erratically and did stupid things like harming themselves or others.

Dazai seemed to have the same thought as he gently raised his hands. “It's all right, we believe you, you might have been set up, if that's the case we'll figure it out, all right?” his voice was soothing and his eyes were soft and suddenly Chuuya remembered that Sakakibara had bared a certain resemblance to Dazai.

He stared at Mr. Kanno in anticipation who stood by the wide window and was looking at Dazai with big eyes, whole body tense. He looked like an animal in a corner, desperately trying to flee.
“If you're innocent, we'll prove it, I promise.” The man nodded, he seemed to calm down now.

“Kunikida, if you'd be so kind to call the police please.” Kunikida nodded.

Their procession made its way down the stairs, Akutagawa in the front, Mr. Kanno flanked by Kunikida and Dazai and Chuuya and Mrs. Kanno at the end. They settled down in the kitchen, Mrs. Kanno ‘Call me Anna please’ made them some tea to calm down and so they waited in silence for the police to arrive.

When they heard the sirens in the distance they finally moved from their positions and Mr. Kanno was taken into custody. Dazai held the team off however. “I want to take a quick look around first.” He explained and motioned for the three of them to follow.

“It's strange, isn't it? I mean, who of us thinks that this man is really capable of murder?”

He was met with silence.

Kunikida and Akutagawa were to carefully search the upper floor, especially the master bedroom and bathroom while Dazai and Chuuya went into the garden. It was an isolated speck of green. Well kept but without any colour or love, just like the house.

Dazai looked around for a while when his eyes fell on the bushes to the east side.

“Chuuya, come look at this.” Chuuya obediently crouched down next to him, following Dazai's pointing finger.

He screwed up his eyes. “There's a small hole in the bushes, like someone tried to get through.” He observed, Dazai next to him nodded excitedly. “I already noticed it when we drove by. And look, these look like footsteps, covered a bit by snow, but still identifiable.”

“You really do think that he was set up, don't you?”

“I do.” The taller man confirmed, grinning widely. He was a bit taken aback, Dazai’s mood changed so quickly sometimes. The day he had delivered the information he had seemed sad, this morning he had seemed irritated and now he was strangely agreeable.

He hummed low in his throat, not agreeing or disagreeing. “How do you suppose the killer knew about their history?”

“Hm, maybe he scouted his victim out as well, or he has access to police information, we told Fukuzawa of the development when we drove here, remember?” Chuuya nodded.

“Still, this is all speculation. Let's go question the lady on the other side.” He said, grin firmly back in place.

Chuuya raised an eyebrow but didn't question him further.

After informing the force Dazai and Chuuya made their way to the neighbour, a middle aged lady with a sour expression that immediately softened as soon as she laid eyes on Dazai. (Chuuya was sure he only imagined the irritated feeling nagging at his chest.)
“Well how can I help you?” She asked sweetly, eyes directed towards Dazai.

They had settled down in a disgustingly clean living room with peach coloured sofas on which they were currently seated. She had offered them something to drink but they had both refused, wanting to get down to business as soon as possible.

“Is it true that you called the police yesterday evening because you suspected a burglar was trying to break in?”

She looked at Dazai with big eyes before she smiled eagerly. “Why, yes! It's terrible really, there have been a lot of break ins lately, and now the neighbours seem to be involved with some sort of crime as well, did you he-” “We did, thank you ma'am, as of now we're more interested in what you saw yesterday.” Dazai said, smile as fake and sweet as the woman's.

Her cheeks flushed in excitement and she hurriedly continued. “Of course, of course! Well you see, yesterday, I think it was around 7pm? I saw someone standing inside my garden. Come I'll show you.” She stood up and they followed suit.

They stopped in front of the sliding door, similar to the one in the Kanno household, and she gestured into the garden.

“Right there by the hedges I saw a dark figure. I saw him from the bathroom window as I was getting ready, I immediately called the police of course, I was so afraid. I suppose the sirens must have scared him off.” She concluded brightly, eyes fixed on Dazai the entire time.

“Could we take a look?”

“Why of course!” She hurriedly agreed and unlocked the door.

The garden was covered in snow and Dazai gestured to some parts in the white mess.

“Here are some deeper parts, just like in the garden of the Kannos. He must have come through here and then went through the hedges into their garden.” Dazai whispered quietly in his ear and Chuuya couldn't help but be pleased that Dazai had excluded the old hag from his deduction.

He nodded in agreement and rubbed his cold hands together as he ducked to look at the bushes.

Dazai and Chuuya looked around the garden for a while accompanied by the woman's reassurances, that the police that had come by the night before hadn't found anything either.

“Aha!” Chuuya turned around to look at Dazai who was smiling brightly while holding up a dark piece of garment.

“What is it?” he and the neighbour asked almost at the exact same time. Dazai carefully pulled out a plastic bag and put his findings inside.

“It looks like a mask, we'll have it tested in the lab. Let's go Chuuya, thank you for your help.” Dazai turned towards the woman, giving her a big smile before turning around, ignoring her sputtering. Chuuya hurried alongside him, confused and excited.
After they had given the evidence to the forensic team (he recognized the woman from the night before, Yosano), Dazai declined for them to search the garden.

They waited by the side for Akutagawa and Kunikida who were still inside the house.

“That was quick. And convenient.” he said, looking up at Dazai who was looking at the warm puff of his exhale disappearing into the air. He hummed vaguely.

“You're strangely observant, slug.” Chuuya scoffed. “Well. What do you think?”

“I think, it's, as you said, quite convenient that we found this sort of evidence that could lead us to the culprit.”

“Why did you not want for the team to look at the neighbour's garden?”

Dazai's lips curled up and he looked down at Chuuya with whirling hazel brown eyes.

“I hope that, if it seems that we didn't find anything interesting the culprit might think that whatever he lost is still here. I hope that he will come to take it back.”

Chuuya stared up at Dazai. “That would be convenient.”

“Less convenient than finding something in the first place.”

“So what do you think then?”

“I think... that something is... not quite right. We'll see tonight, whether the murderer will show up or not. For now we will keep our suspicions to ourselves. The culprit has to think that he has a chance to get his item back unnoticed. And he'll do it tonight, since the police might find it otherwise in the next few days of checking for evidence. He knew he was seen, since the neighbour called the police, so he knows it will only be a matter of time before someone notices.”

He blinked in amazement. “That's... not entirely wrong.”

“It's not the best plan of action, but it's the only one we got.” Dazai admitted, shrugging nonchalantly.

They stood in silence before Chuuya spoke up.

“You're... really quite good at this.” As soon as those words left his mouth he immediately regretted them, he could feel his cheeks heat up and awkwardly looked away. He saw Dazai stiffen and turn around in his peripheral vision.

“Thank you.” He said softly and Chuuya looked at him in surprise.

Dazai was gently smiling down at him. It was a genuine smile and Chuuya was caught of guard by how handsome it was. Dazai's caramel eyes shone with warmth from beneath long lashes, the corners slightly crinkled and his mouth was pulled into a crooked line.

“I'm so glad you finally recognize my genius after all this time! It seems your silly hats haven't eaten your brain yet!”

He hastily averted his eyes. “Don't let it get to your head, bastard.”

“I have to thank you as well, for giving us the hint that lead us here.”
Chuuya was yet again surprised. “That's alright.”

“I bet it wasn't easy, coming here.” Dazai added, his voice had taken on a strange tone Chuuya couldn't quite analyse.

“Like I said, it's alright.” He said, feeling irritated once again.

In that moment Akutagawa and Kunikida stepped out of the house. He took a deep breath before turning to Dazai again.

“I... If you need anything, I gave my number to the doctor.” Dazai blinked down at him before smiling owlishly.

“I'll call you then, for the stake out!” He exclaimed cheerfully.

Chuuya doubled around. “Ha?!”

“Ah Kunikida, there you are! You'll take these two home, won't you? I'll have to talk to Yosano real quick. I'll see you two around.” He winked at them and waved cheerfully as he made his way over to the police officers.

“Oh, bastard! Dazai, what? Ugh, stupid mackerel.” He muttered angrily when Dazai simply continued to saunter off into the crowd of investigators.

And yet, something inside of his chest fluttered as he watched his old partner disappear through the flock of people.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the Long wait! I'm in my finals Phase right now and the preperation is really time consuming! Another month and a half and I will be completely free, FINALLY! However, that also means that (as unfortunate as it is) it could take another 2 months to finish a new chapter. I'll try my best to update and write more frequently, but I can't promise anything until mid May/the start of June...

Oh also I'm on tumblr now https://qu-crimson.tumblr.com/ so, like hmu or somth

Anyway, as alway I hope you enjoyed and have a nice day!
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!