Unexpected

by thechongz

Summary

Izumi Iori never thought he would present as an omega.
Nanase Riku never thought he would present as an alpha.

But eventually, they find out that everything happens for a reason.

Notes

This story will follow the main story's timeline (and I use a lot of references from the canonverse so if you see anything familiar, it's probably taken from the translations. Translation credits to idolish-seven and i7-translations on tumblr.)

There might be a few spelling errors because I'm lazy to proofread as usual, but I'll edit it if I see any mistakes.

I hope you guys enjoy!
Disclaimer: I (obviously) do not own IDOLiSH7 or any of its characters (though I wish I did).
Izumi Iori liked being in control of his life.

He planned things down to the smallest detail, and almost always had a sort of backup plan should things go wrong. He was good at forecasting the outcome of things, and when things didn’t turn out as he expected, he was always thrown for a loop. He never liked the unknown.

The one thing that he could never have planned for, though, was presenting as an omega.

Iori had been a little over fifteen when he had his first heat. It started off as any normal day; the middle schooler went about his classes, had the bento that his mother packed for lunch, and then went home to help out with the bakery. The rest of his family were betas, and given how plain he was, Iori had always expected himself to present as a beta too.

He’d felt off sometime in the middle of afternoon classes, his body slowly but steadily growing warmer and an itch under his skin that he couldn’t get rid of. It had been fine up until he got to the bakery, and Iori had changed out of his school uniform, into a plain t-shirt. One of the bakers, an older omega lady, had come up to Iori as he was changing, shocking the boy and causing him to jump in surprise.

“Oh dear,” was all she said, not giving any sort of explanation before she disappeared out front where the Izumi parents were. Iori let out a soft groan as he pulled his apron over his head; why did it feel so hot when it was still February?

*Am I coming down with a fever?* was his first thought, but that didn’t explain the heat pooling in his stomach, didn’t explain the way his sense of smell seemed to have heightened, the scent of customers’ alpha pheromones permeating the air.

It was only when his mother came into the back, looking her youngest son over and almost letting out a choked sob, that Iori realised what could possibly be happening. Her words seemed to float over him, but he thought he heard “omega”, “presenting”, “first heat”, and Iori wanted the ground to swallow him up, even as his mother wrapped a jacket around him tightly.

“I’m going to bring you home, alright, honey?” she told him, her voice quivering, and Iori briefly wondered if she was more terrified than he was. She said something to his father, but Iori didn’t quite catch it, his head starting to feel hazy with something that he didn’t want to put a name to.

Mitsuki was still at school, probably at a club gathering or practicing his singing and dancing, and for that Iori was glad. He didn’t want his brother to see him like *this*.

The Izumis lived a few blocks away from the bakery, but even though Iori was wrapped in his mother’s jacket, he caught a few strangers staring at him; some in worry, some in pity, and some in desire. He tried to avoid their gazes, which was easy enough considering that he was using all his energy to just stand upright. It made him almost disgusted when he caught a whiff of alpha pass by him, and a soft whine nearly escaped his lips.

When they finally made it home, Iori’s mother quickly led him to the spare room, one usually reserved for guests. She cleared the bed of anything unnecessary, sitting him down and hurrying off to grab him a few blankets, clothes, and pillows. While she was gone, Iori curled in on himself,
whimpering when he felt the first gush of slick run down the back of his thigh.

His mother returned quickly, setting everything down beside the bed for if Iori needed to make a nest. She also brought in water and some food, kneeling down beside Iori and gently brushing damp hair away from his forehead. “I’m so sorry that you have to go through this, Iori,” she said, and even through the haze of his heat, Iori felt bad for his mother. It wasn’t as if she’d asked for him to be an omega. “Call us if you need anything, alright?”

And with that said, she left the room, closing and locking the door behind her. Almost immediately, Iori was taking his clothes off, throwing them to the side and letting out a short-lived sigh of relief when the cool air hit his already sweaty skin. But it didn’t help to alleviate the heat in his stomach, and Iori pulled his underwear off only to find it covered in slick.

They had been taught about secondary genders in school, and although Iori had been sure he would be a beta, he’d paid enough attention to know how heats worked. He had no toys to help him, no alpha’s knot to satisfy him, so he had to settle with using his fingers.

Iori let out a gasp when the first finger slid in easily, and the second slid in without much trouble. He added a third finger, and began to work himself open, albeit awkwardly. His other hand wrapped around his throbbing member, and it took some time due to his lack of experience, but he eventually managed to find a rhythm.

It didn’t take much for his first orgasm, and Iori bit back a moan as slick gushed out of him, dirtying the sheets along with the strings of cum leaking out of his member. For a few moments Iori thought that maybe he could have a short rest before it started back up, but when he felt the coiling heat in the base of his stomach once more, he let out a keen whine. He shifted a little for easier access, flinching when his sensitive member brushed against the sheets.

He only stopped when he finally managed to exhaust himself, falling into a restless sleep before the heat came back, stronger than ever.

---

Nanase Riku never expected himself to present as an alpha.

Ever since he knew what secondary genders were, he knew that Tenn would be an alpha. That was something that Riku trusted in completely, without a sliver of doubt.

Tenn was stronger than him, kinder, smarter. He had always had an air of charisma about him, something that made people flock to him and lavish him with attention. He was easy to love, and Riku knew that better than anyone else. So even though Tenn left long before he presented, Riku knew that his twin brother was going to be an alpha. It was simply a fact.

Riku, on the other hand, never thought of himself as an alpha. His body was weaker than others, always in and out of hospitals, and he wasn’t particularly smart. Most of the things that Riku knew, he learnt from Tenn. In fact, Tenn had always said that it would be better for Riku to be a beta. Betas had a duller sense of smell compared to the other genders, and with Riku's weak lungs, he didn't need a sensitive sense of smell to worsen his condition.

Apart from the fact that Riku, too, had a naturally charismatic air around him, there wasn't much that would make people think that he would be an alpha.
But then Riku turned fourteen, and at some point, had his first rut.

It had lasted only about three to four days, not nearly as bad as an omega's heat could be, but Riku's body was still weaker than most, and at times his lungs couldn't keep up. He found himself reaching for his inhaler sometimes, but the rut ended without much mishap.

The problems only surfaced when Riku had gone to the hospital for a routine check-up, something that he did once every few weeks. He knew most of the staff in the pulmonary department of the hospital, and even knew some of the patients who, like him, went to the hospital routinely for one reason or another. He'd gone with his mother as usual, greeted the staff with a bright smile, but Riku wasn't dense enough to realise that some people were already treating him differently.

Some of the omega staff tried to keep a distance from him, and although Riku could understand why, it still made him sad to know that this was happening all because he presented as an alpha. His rut had ended about a week ago, but as a newly presented alpha male, he was sure that his pheromones were all over the place. It wasn't as if he knew how to tone his scent down, either, at least not just yet. His father had mentioned it, but he'd also assured Riku that it was nothing to worry about. "It's normal," the older Nanase had told him.

His mother was a beta, so she hadn't said anything about Riku's scent, and he'd mistakenly thought that it was alright. Judging from the varied reactions he was getting, though, Riku figured that perhaps his scent was stronger than he thought it was.

The check-up had gone relatively well, Riku's lungs were in a decent condition and presenting as an alpha probably wouldn't be much of an issue. "Your body will get used to it slowly," the doctor told him, sending him and his mother off with a kind smile. The two were planning to head home immediately, but Riku spotted someone he knew down the corridor and headed towards her – another patient, around Riku's age and whom he had once shared a hospital room with.

"Riko-chan!" he called out, waving to her to get her attention.

Riko, barely a year older than Riku, turned to look at him, lips already curving into a small smile. Then her mother tugged on her arm, shaking her head at her and saying something to her that Riku couldn't quite hear. But he didn't need to, because suddenly Riko was looking at him defeatedly, her smile replaced with a resigned frown, and then she left with her mother.

Riku didn't need to ask to know why. After all, Riko was an omega, and he understood that her parents were very protective of their only child. It still felt bad to know that he'd lost a friend just like that; because of something that he had no control over.

When he got home that day, Riku began to research on alphas. Maybe he wasn't able to choose what he presented as, but he'd be damned if he let being an alpha rule his life.

Riku was a lot of things, and stubborn was one of them.

---

One of the first things they did after settling into the dorms was to find out about each other's secondary genders. It was common for idols to use suppressants and scent neutralisers, because omegas were still ostracised to an extent, and it was generally safer for an unbonded omega to conceal their nature.
But Tsumugi had assured them that the agency had no prejudice against omegas, seeing as how Banri himself was an omega, and it would be better if everyone at least knew each other's genders. At least that way, they would be able to watch out for each other, and schedules could be planned around heats and ruts.

So the newly formed IDOLiSH7 sat in the living room, everyone staring blankly at each other, no one knowing whether they should speak up first. Tsumugi had left them alone to talk; after all, the agency had their basic medical information, secondary genders included.

"Oi leader, why don't you start?" Mitsuki suggested, worriedly glancing at Iori. The younger Izumi had been jittery for a while now, probably ever since the entire ordeal with the auditions. He knew how much Iori disliked being an omega, and he probably didn't want the others to find out this quickly. But Mitsuki also understood that they should all know at least this much about each other, if they were going to be a group from now on.

Yamato glanced at Mitsuki, shrugging and shifting in his seat. "Beta."

"Same as me, huh," Mitsuki mused aloud.

"I'm an alpha," Tamaki chimed in, a cup of pudding in one hand and a spoon in the other.

"Me too!" Nagi said, turning to hi-five Tamaki. The youngest raised a brow but did it anyway.

Sougo reached up to his neck, peeling something off, and a sweet smell slowly wafted through the living room. "I guess I won't be needing these if it's just you guys here," he chuckled, disposing of the scent neutralising patch.

That was enough of an answer for everyone, and Tamaki's eyes widened as he took in the scent. "Souchan, you smell like King Pudding," he said, almost in awe, oblivious to how Sougo seemed to be taken aback. It was common knowledge that fated alpha-omega pairs often smelled like something that the other liked, and Sougo wasn't about to admit that he loved the spicy scent of tabasco.

Five pairs of eyes looked between Iori and Riku simultaneously.

Iori didn't need Riku to say it; he already knew that the singer was an alpha, as shocking as it had been at first. Riku's poorly masked scent was more than enough proof of his gender. The more shocking thing was that Riku smelt of dark chocolate, something that Iori admittedly liked despite having more of a sweet tooth. Over the years of helping out at the bakery, Iori had grown to love dark chocolate just as much as other pastries.

And Riku smelled of dark chocolate.

But dark chocolate was a common thing, nothing nearly as specific as King Pudding. Iori eyed his two groupmates, noticed how Sougo seemed a little nervous, and figured that Sougo had the same suspicions as he did. Fated pairs, huh...

Iori wasn't one to believe in fate or destiny. He'd rather believe in a well-thought-out plan, although things didn't always go the way he expected them to. But Riku was looking at him now, and although Iori had made sure to cover himself in scent neutralising spray, he couldn't help but feel that Riku could see right through him; maybe he smelled like something that the alpha liked, too?

Iori was snapped out of his thoughts by Mitsuki waving in his face. "Iori, do you not want to say it?" his older brother asked, clearly concerned, and Iori shook his head quickly in response. Mitsuki had a way of blaming himself, Iori didn't know what for, but he hated seeing his brother upset. Back when
Iori had presented as an omega, Mitsuki had apologised to him so many times, it made the younger's ears hurt.

"Same as Ousaka-san, I'm an omega," Iori said, not missing how Riku's face went from curious to excited in a matter of seconds. Iori sighed inwardly – he'd had bad encounters with alphas before, and although everyone seemed nice enough for now, that could easily change if they smelled an omega in heat.

Everyone turned to Riku, and the redhead smiled sheepishly. "An alpha," he replied easily, earning a few surprised looks from everyone. Iori frowned at this; was Riku's scent not a dead giveaway?

*Or is my nose more sensitive to Nanase-san's scent specifically?*

Shaking the thought off, Iori tuned himself back to the others' voices, most of them talking over each other about how it was surprising that Riku was an alpha, that Iori was an omega, that Yamato was a beta. It was all a mess, and Iori sighed as he realised that this was going to be his life from now on.

But then Riku turned to look at Iori amidst the chatter, beaming at the younger, and Iori thought that maybe it wouldn't be so bad after all.

For now, at least.

---

**Chapter End Notes**

I've been wanting to write an omegaverse fic for i7 for the longest time, and one fine day I thought about RikuIo a/b/o and... this thing happened. I have no idea how long this fic will end up being, but it'll follow the main storyline up till part 2. The first few chapters stick very very closely to canonverse, so please bear with it! I also have no idea how time actually passes in canon so I'm going have to go with a lot of guesswork.

RikuIo is going to be the main couple, but TamaSou and other couples will (eventually) be added in as well! Updates are apparently every Thursday, and (nice) comments are always appreciated! (If you have nothing nice to say, then don't say it please LOL)
Chapter 2

The first few weeks of dorm life was refreshing, in an odd way.

The group mostly did street performances, not having debuted yet and just wanting to gain more exposure. Iori had honestly been worried when he'd gone up to Tsumugi, suggesting that he help out with management stuff. It wasn't that he expected her to turn him down, not that he gave her a chance to, but he technically didn't have a right to demand something like that from her.

Still, Iori was glad that it turned out well, and their performances were starting to pay off. Their videos online were getting more views, and more people were visiting the webpage.

Choosing Riku as the centre had been the logical decision, but sometimes Iori wondered if he had been just the slightest bit biased. After all, Riku wasn't anything like the other alphas Iori had met. That wasn't to say that Nagi and Tamaki were the typical, dominating alpha type, but with Riku, it was almost like the other wasn't an alpha at all. Nagi was just as energetic and cheerful as the redhead, but Riku's sincerity in everything he did was what made him so endearing.

Of course, it was frustrating when the alpha, who was older than Iori, couldn't seem to do something as simple as handle the chores. Nonetheless, the omega thought it was pretty cute, and that was a dangerous thing to think.

Ever since moving into the dorms, Iori had been less wary about concealing his scent, only ever using scent neutralisers when they had to leave for group activities. He felt safer going out for even something as simple as buying the groceries, as long as it was with someone else. It wasn’t that he didn’t feel safe around Mitsuki, but even though his brother was a beta, he still had a small stature, causing many people to look down on him. In Iori’s opinion, though, Mitsuki was probably the best suited to fight anyone if it ever came down to that, but it was nice to not get harassed at all.

He just hoped things would stay this way even during heat season.

---

It had been nearly a month since the self-imposed dancing and singing ban, and Iori could tell that the others were getting impatient, if Tamaki storming out of the dorm was any sort of indication. TRIGGER’s concert was finally coming up in a few days, and hopefully they would be able to get right back into gear with their performances.

Nobody quite understood why Riku was so obsessed with watching TRIGGER’s DVDs, and Iori briefly wondered if the alpha liked them that much. And yet Riku had shot that thought down immediately, looking between a mix of shocked and anguished when Iori brought it up. Not that the omega understood why, at least not until the day of the concert itself.

To say that they were shocked was probably a major understatement.

*Kujo Tenn's twin brother?* was the thought running through everyone’s minds when Riku finally
decided to reveal the truth. While it was true that they sang similarly, Iori hadn’t quite expected that, and neither had everyone else.

Riku mentioned something along the lines of abandoning his family, but he didn’t delve into the details; they were short on time after all, and the other three were still nowhere to be found.

“You still can’t reach them, manager?” Sougo asked, glancing worriedly at the time. There were only five more minutes till the concert started. Tsumugi shook her head with a sigh, trying for the nth time to dial Yamato’s number, when Mitsuki let out a surprised noise.

Iori heaved a sigh of relief as he caught Nagi and Tamaki’s scents, not even needing to turn around to know that they had finally made it. “Where have you guys been?”

Tamaki tried to explain as he caught his breath, but none of it really made sense. Even Sougo clearly got annoyed at what seemed to be blatant lies, telling Tamaki off and earning a disgruntled “But I worked really hard!” from the alpha.

Riku only heard as much as “We ran into Kujo Tenn”, and had been gnawing on his lip, brows furrowed in thought. Noticing this, Iori could only sigh.

“Let’s go in first and we can discuss this again tonight,” Iori suggested, gesturing to the time.

With that, the group quickly shuffled into the concert halls, just before the doors closed.

---

“Good evening!”

Riku’s head snapped up as he heard his brother’s voice, his eyes immediately focusing on the centre of TRIGGER. His emotions were a mess; was he supposed to be happy or upset? Riku hated the Tenn that abandoned his family, but Tenn-nii had always been his best friend, and Riku didn’t remember a time when Tenn didn’t protect him.

Even after so many years, Riku couldn’t understand why his twin had left with Kujo.

The intro of Secret Night started playing, the three idols onstage already having gotten into position, and then they started performing and Riku couldn’t take his eyes off of Tenn. The elder Nanase twin had always had a flair for singing and dancing, and Kujo had taken that raw talent, polishing it into something much more refined.

The Tenn on stage was one that Riku both recognised and didn’t recognise.

He still performed sincerely, pouring his love for his fans into his performance, but he no longer had any of the childlike innocence he once possessed. And it was natural that he didn’t, considering he’d spent the past five years away from his family. Riku highly doubted that Kujo would spoil and pamper Tenn like he would his own son, if he had one.

From beside Riku, Yamato commented, “He’s really amazing, that Kujo Tenn. Just moments ago, he couldn’t even walk on his own.”

“Oh?”
Yamato nodded in reply. “It seems he got energy from his fans.”

Riku turned his gaze back to the stage, where Tenn was still giving a top-rate performance. If Riku couldn’t tell that Tenn was in a poor condition, he doubted anyone could.

“Tenn-nii…”

---

The concert ended without a hitch, Tenn delivering a flawless performance and stepping off stage with the other two members behind him. Riku continued staring at the stage long after Tenn was out of sight, only snapping out of his thoughts when Iori nudged him. “Nanase-san, let’s go,” the omega said, and Riku looked around to realise that the others had gone on ahead without them.

Scrambling to grab his things, Riku stood quickly, accidentally knocking into Iori and causing the younger to stumble. “Ah, I’m sorry!” he exclaimed, as Iori turned back to sigh and shake his head at the alpha. They made their way out in relative silence, shuffling through the crowd and sticking close so that they didn’t lose each other.

“You smell nice, Iori,” Riku commented as they walked, sniffing the air slightly. “Like donuts. I like donuts.”

Iori shot a glance at Riku; this was probably the first time the alpha was commenting on his scent. He wasn’t sure if Riku simply hadn’t noticed his scent before, or if he had never thought about it. Knowing how Riku was, though, it was probably the latter. “Maybe because we own a bakery,” Iori replied. He tried not to think about the fact that he also happened to smell like something Riku liked, sighing as he was shoved by yet another concert goer.

Riku frowned, moving to the other side of Iori where the stream of people were. His lungs may be weaker than most, but he was still an alpha, and he wasn’t about to let his omega teammate get shoved around by random strangers.

“Thank you, Nanase-san,” Iori said, lips curving into a small smile as he realised what Riku was doing. “You didn’t have to.”

A blush crept onto Riku’s face. He looks really pretty when he smiles like that, the alpha caught himself thinking. He waved Iori’s thanks off easily, grinning at the omega. “It’s nothing!” he said, just as brightly, waving as he finally caught sight of the others.

“You two took a long time,” Tsumugi said, and Riku scratched the back of his head sheepishly.

“It’s not Iori’s fault, manager. I was the one who took too long to get my stuff,” Riku said, bowing in apology. Tsumugi shook her head, indicating that it was fine, and Riku smiled, going to walk alongside Sougo. Iori was strolling beside Mitsuki, the elder Izumi gushing over how amazing TRIGGER’s performance had been. He mentioned something about how Tsunashi Ryuunosuke was manly, and Iori seemed affronted at the thought.

“You’re cuter when you’re small, nii-san,” he said, and Mitsuki looked at his younger brother blankly.
From beside Riku, Sougo piped up. "Your brother's really amazing, huh? I couldn't look away."

"Yeah..." Riku sighed, stopping in his tracks as tears gathered in his eyes. "I want to sing, too."

The others stopped, turning to look over at Riku.

"I want to take powerful steps and hear my voice ring out forever, and have a smile that make people happy," he continued, a determined look on his face. Iori's expression softened, and he wanted to tell Riku, you already do. And it was nothing less than the truth.

Riku's smile was contagious, and whoever looked at it would feel happy too. Or, at least, that's what Iori felt. Over the past few weeks, Iori managed to find strength in Riku's smiles, especially during times when he doubted himself. The ban had been his idea, but he'd worried endlessly over whether or not it would work out the way he wanted it to. In those times, he thought of the alpha's smile, the smile that had managed to etch itself into Iori's mind.

"Iori, you join us too!"

The omega blinked, pointing to himself in confusion. Clearly he’d missed some of the conversation. "Who, me? Here?"

An arm abruptly slung over Iori's shoulder, and suddenly Riku's voice sounded from right beside Iori's ear. "Come on," the alpha said, and if Iori wasn't so good at masking his expression, he might have been blushing furiously by now. Did Riku have to come so close?

As much as Riku was a good guy, a far kinder alpha than the societal norm, Iori still didn't like to be controlled by his omega. He didn't want to react to Riku's touches because the omega wanted to. No, he wanted it to be of his own accord. If he was going to end up being bonded to Riku, or even mated to the alpha, he wanted to at least know that he wanted it, and it wasn't just something that happened simply because they were fated.

Not that Iori was even sure that they were fated, but he would find out soon enough. After all, his heat was due to hit in a month or two, and surely Riku would react rather violently to it if they did turn out to be a fated pair.

With a defeated smile, Iori let himself be pulled along by the alpha. "You're hopeless."

---

Later that night, Riku found himself sitting in the living room, preoccupied with his thoughts.

He didn't even notice when Iori called out to him, or when the omega sat down next to him. It was only when Iori put a hand on Riku's shoulder that the alpha jumped in shock, heaving a sigh of relief when he realised who it was. "You scared me, Iori," Riku whined, and Iori raised a brow.

"You're pretty jittery for an alpha, aren't you?"

"Don't be rude!" Riku exclaimed, clearly offended. Then he sank back down, sighing as he picked up his mug of warm tea, staring blankly down at it. "Hey, Iori? Why would Tenn-nii abandon his family?"
Iori grimaced, not quite sure what to make of the question. "I'm sure he had his reasons."

Seeing that Riku was still rather upset, Iori tried to release calming pheromones. It wasn't something he did often, considering the fact that his family consisted of only betas, but he found that it helped a lot to calm his alpha and omega classmates down. He only hoped that it would do the same for Riku.

Iori found out quickly enough that his pheromones were a little too effective, as he turned to sneak a glance at Riku only to be met with a face full of hair. The alpha was leaning dangerously close to him, eyes closed and nose searching for the source of the relaxing scent.

Riku eventually found his way to Iori's scent glands, his hair tickling Iori's face as he inhaled deeply. Iori's face was bright red by now, the omega no longer able to fight the blush from surfacing. It was as if Riku was in a trance, where the only thing that mattered was Iori's scent, and although Iori knew that Riku couldn't help reacting like this, it was still unnerving.

"N-Nanase-san," Iori called out weakly, unable to prevent a shudder from running through his body when Riku nuzzled his nose against Iori's scent glands. A soft whimper escaped Iori's lips, as his scent rapidly changed from calming to distressed.

It seemed to bring Riku back to reality, the alpha pulling back immediately with wide eyes. Iori's eyes were squeezed shut, and the omega had curled in on himself. Riku could see Iori shaking slightly, and his heart dropped when he realised that it was his fault.

Heck, Riku didn't even know what came over him. One moment his emotions had been warring within him, and suddenly there was the sweetest smell ever, alluring yet calming, and Riku couldn't help but want to find the source of the scent. "I'm sorry, Iori, I didn't mean to," he was quick to apologise.

Iori shook his head, forcing himself to take deep breaths before finally looking up at Riku with a small smile. "I'm sure you didn't," Iori said, now more certain than ever about the whole fated pair issue. He hadn't wanted to react so negatively; Riku hadn't done anything more than sniff at his scent glands, which admittedly had been shocking, but it was nothing bad. Iori had had his fair share of run-ins with alphas, in and out of school, and now he instinctively shut down when an alpha got too close. This was what he hated most about being an omega – it wasn't the heats or the fact that alphas could assert dominance over him, but this utter weakness that he couldn't help but give in to.

Riku was biting on his lip now, feeling even worse than before. He'd always had a decent rein on his alpha instincts, but something about Iori just brought those instincts one step further. Riku had his suspicions, too; he didn't spend his spare time reading for nothing. But it scared him to think that he could be so intricately tied to anyone. What if they just ended up leaving, again, just like Riko's mother had made her leave?

He always thought that he wouldn't let his alpha rule his life, but the current situation proved otherwise, and Riku couldn't help but let out a long sigh. "I'm really, really sorry, Iori," he apologised again. "I don't know what came over me. This hasn't ever happened before."

The truth was that both of them knew exactly why this had happened, but neither of them wanted to voice it aloud. They would probably have to talk about it eventually, but if it could be delayed, then they were determined to delay it for as long as they could.

Instead, Iori gathered himself, standing up and heading to the kitchen. "I'll make us some warm milk with honey," he suggested. "It always helps me to sleep better. Besides, it isn't good to drink tea this late at night, the caffeine will keep you up."
Riku hummed in response, pouring his tea, now cold, into the sink. He pointedly avoided getting too close to Iori, only moving to take the mug of milk from Iori before he returned to standing against the kitchen counter.

"It's really alright, Nanase-san," Iori said in a whisper. He was still a little out of it, he wouldn't deny that, but Iori really didn't blame Riku for it. After all, he'd been the one who went around releasing calming pheromones everywhere, so if anyone was to blame, it was Iori himself.

Still, Riku didn't look quite convinced, and he had a frown on his face while he downed the rest of the milk. Iori figured that there wasn't anything he could do to make Riku stop blaming himself, so he didn't say anything else, simply finished his drink and washed the two mugs.

"Um, goodnight, Nanase-san," he said awkwardly.

Riku forced a small smile, nodding as he said, "Goodnight, Iori."

The two retired to their rooms, each with similar thoughts weighing on their minds.

Chapter End Notes

I'm back with an update! I actually have a few more chapters done but I'll only update when I finish a new one. And idk how long this story is gonna end up as but I'll only follow the storyline up till ingame part2 (because screw part3 I've had enough angst for my whole life). So if this ends up being longer than that then... I'll have fun writing it heh.
The next few days were awkward, to say the least.

Both Riku and Iori couldn’t help but think about what had happened that night, what it meant for them as two idols from the same group. Omegas were a rare enough sight in the industry, but a mated pair was practically unheard of. Although, they were both thinking too far ahead. After all, neither knew what they truly felt about the other, not just yet.

Iori liked to, needed to, think things through carefully, weigh all the pros and cons as well as make sure that this was something he truly wanted. Still, he couldn’t deny that he often found his gaze travelling to the alpha, quickly looking away when he caught Riku staring right back at him.

With how often Iori caught himself staring at Riku, it really shouldn’t have come as a surprise when he was the first one to find out about the alpha’s respiratory disease. It had been a normal day of practice, nothing that would cause anyone to wheeze and fight to catch their breath. Iori frowned as Riku coughed, boldly walking up to the redhead and placing his hands on Riku's shoulder to keep him from moving around.

“Iori?” Riku asked, startled, eyes widening when he felt the omega press his face against his back.

Iori didn’t say anything, keeping silent as he listened to Riku’s erratic breathing. Realisation dawned upon him, and he pulled away to look at Riku in shock. “Nanase-san, you…”

And that was all it took for Riku to realise what was going on.

Yamato and Tsumugi were out, so Iori figured that he would tell them later. For now, he gathered the others. “Everyone, I have something important to discuss,” he began, waiting until all eyes were on him before he continued. “Nanase-san has-”

“Everyone must be thirsty!” Riku cut in, hand pressed firmly over Iori’s mouth. The awkwardness from before was all but forgotten; he could deal with an angry omega later. What mattered now was that his secret wasn’t revealed. He started to back out of the practice room, Iori’s protests muffled by his hand, and the others only stared at the two in confusion.

Once they were outside, Riku asked Iori if he wanted anything from the store, only earning a deadpan stare in response. “Why won’t you let me tell them?” the omega asked, ignoring the way his skin prickled where Riku had held him.

The alpha frowned at this. “I won’t cause any trouble for the others. I’ll continue dancing even if I die, so don’t worry, Iori,” Riku said firmly, and Iori had to resist the urge to roll his eyes. How is that supposed to assure me of anything? Sometimes Iori really couldn’t understand how Riku’s brain worked.
"Your vocals are our greatest weapon, and as long as we have you, IDOLiSH7 will someday stand in the spotlight," Iori said, earning a confused look from Riku.

"Is that a compliment?"

Iori sighed; the alpha was so dense. "Do I really have to say it?" Iori didn't want to have to voice it aloud, because it was simply too awkward to do so. He didn't think he would be able to maintain a straight face if he had to say it to Riku's face. Yes, Nanase-san. I admire your vocals and I think they're amazing. Yeah, Iori wasn't doing that.

Riku smiled. "No, I'm glad to hear that. Thanks."

Iori fought the blush threatening to make itself known. "As I was saying, your vocals are our greatest weapon, which is why your problem could also be our biggest bomb. If we're not careful, it could kill us," Iori tried to explain, and Riku frowned at this.

The alpha's hands clenched into fists, the fabric of his sweatpants bunching up in his grip.

"I know. I know that. But I want to work with you guys, to keep doing IDOLiSH7 with everyone," Riku said, looking at Iori with a fierce determination in his eyes. Iori was sure that he wouldn't be able to say no to Riku, not when the alpha was looking at him like that. "So please, I'm begging you. Don't tell them."

"Nanase-san..." Iori sighed, completely at a loss about what he should do. The right thing was to prioritise the group's interests, which meant it would be better if everyone knew the truth. But Riku was practically pleading with him, an alpha pleading with an omega, and Iori wasn't so sure anymore. Riku could have easily commanded Iori not to tell, and his omega would've submitted immediately. Instead, Riku was asking him, as fellow teammates, as two individuals of equal standing, and Iori couldn't help but respect that.

"If you don't want me to tell the others, fine. At least tell me what worsens your condition, so that I can keep an eye out," Iori compromised, listening carefully as Riku started to list the various possibilities: stress, dust, a sudden change in weather.

With a resigned sigh, Iori nodded. This wasn’t his secret to tell, but he’d be damned if he let it affect the group’s performances. And Iori wouldn’t deny that he was worried about Riku, more on a personal level than a professional one. It was easy to see that Riku wasn’t very good at taking care of himself, which, although endearing, could be awfully frustrating at times. How had he ended up with this alpha, he really couldn’t understand.

He turned to head back into the practice room, pausing for a moment before he faced Riku again. "Do you want me to buy the drinks with you, at least?" he asked, trying not to break into a smile when Riku beamed and nodded.

He didn’t say anything about the blush that crept onto his face when Riku decided to buy an ice-cream for him, too.

---

Riku knew he was pushing himself to his limit.
The weather was terrible, and as it deteriorated, so did Riku's condition.

He could feel his lungs rattling in his chest, struggling for air as he continued to belt out the lyrics to Joker Flag. He wasn’t even sure how much time had passed, but the storm seemed to finally be clearing up, and Riku almost felt relieved to know that he could stop soon.

Iori had tried to stop him, of course he had, but Riku had meant it when he said that he would continue singing even if it killed him. Even now he felt the omega’s eyes on him, watching him carefully to make sure that he wouldn’t collapse.

"Nanase-san, we'll sing the rest. You should rest," Iori said in between songs, one hand on Riku's shoulder and the other over his mic. Riku's brows furrowed, and the alpha glanced at Iori from the corner of his eye.

"I can keep singing."

Iori wasn't so convinced. "You can hardly breathe."

Riku took a deep breath, moving Iori's hand off of his shoulder.

"I can keep singing. I... I can stand onstage."

Perhaps Mitsuki was right, about Riku being exactly the type of person that Iori liked to take care of. At this point, Riku wasn’t sure whether it was because of their secondary genders, the fact that they were likely fated, or if Iori genuinely wanted to take care of him. Both possibilities were weird, and Riku still had no idea how to feel about being tied to Iori so intrinsically. But Riku had lost himself to his alpha once already, and he didn’t know if he could accept being so helpless against his nature. But Riku had lost himself to his alpha once already, and he didn’t know if he could accept being so helpless against his nature.

He didn’t even realise that he’d subconsciously used his alpha voice on Iori. He didn’t notice how the omega had seemed taken aback, rooted in place as Riku walked back to the front of the stage. He definitely didn’t notice the frown on Iori's face, as he realised what Riku had just done.

And after performing the song once more, Riku was bent over slightly, struggling for breath. He looked up just in time to catch Iori glancing at him, an almost sad look on his face.

Focusing back on the present, Riku smiled at the crowd as the song ended, and he caught sight of Tsumugi holding up a signboard. The alpha squinted, face lighting up as he read what it said. “Everyone, the trains are running again! Please go home safely and thank you for your support!” he exclaimed, smiling and waving as the crowd slowly dispersed. He left the stage last, after the other members had gone to the back, one hand clutching at his chest as it got more and more difficult to breathe.

Perhaps it was because the adrenaline of performing was finally wearing off, and Riku’s lungs couldn’t hold up for much longer. He leaned against the wall, chest heaving, desperately trying to get air into his lungs. His hands gripped the towel around his neck tightly, to the point that his knuckles turned white.

Riku smelled Iori coming towards him before the omega spoke up. "Nanase-san."

"How long were we performing for?"

Riku couldn't even find the energy to look up at Iori – he was so tired.

"Two and a half hours," Iori replied, and Riku felt pride swell in his chest.
He barely managed to glance at the omega. "See? I did it. That's as long as a real concert."

Everything was going blurry. Riku felt his consciousness slowly slipping away from him. "Even I can..."

And then everything went black.

---

In the end, Riku had to stay in the hospital for observation overnight.

It wasn't anything new to him, being in the hospital. Ever since he was young, he'd been in the hospital more often than not. He usually had Tenn to accompany him, though, at least until the elder left with Kujo. Riku had always hated the smell of hospitals, hated it even more ever since his sense of smell became better.

Tsumugi had left over an hour ago, promising to make sure the office was spick and span by the time Riku got back. The nurses had come in with dinner a while ago, a nice set meal packed with nutrition. There wasn't anything wrong with hospital food, per se, but Riku found himself missing Mitsuki's homecooked food, missed sitting around the table and eating with the other members.

Suddenly Riku's nose twitched, and his head snapped up to look in the direction of the door. It was a few moments later that a knock sounded on the door, and Iori's head peeped in. "Can I come in?" he asked, opening the door fully and entering the room when Riku nodded brightly.

Seeing Iori was comforting, his familiar scent wafting around the room and making Riku feel at home. The omega truly did smell amazing, and sometimes Riku found himself a little heady if he focused too much on the smell. That never happened with Sougo or Banri though. Banri carried the smell of caramel with him, and although the two omegas did smell sweet too, it wasn't something that Riku would find himself getting addicted to.

He already knew why. Riku had spent a few nights researching more about fated pairs, finding out much more than he'd expected to. It wasn't that every alpha and omega had someone destined for them, but it wasn't particularly rare, either. But the likelihood of finding your other half wasn't high, and most times, people naturally fell in love with someone who wasn't their fated pair. It wasn't hard to break the bond that tied a fated pair together; either one could mate with someone else, and it would be like they had never been a fated pair in the first place.

But he'd also learnt how hard it was for fated pairs to resist the magnetic pull towards each other once they met face to face. Their respective scents played a huge role in that, and scent neutralisers could only do so much to dull their scents, because their noses were attuned to their other half's scent. It was the main reason why Iori and Riku smelled like something the other liked, and although Riku had been sure to tone his scent down on the day they moved into the dorms, Iori still managed to pick up on it.

Given Iori's nature, Riku was sure that the omega had been wearing scent neutralisers on that day, too. But the sweet smell of donuts had been so overpowering that Riku found himself lost in the scent, completely spacing out and oblivious to what was being said around him.

Over the weeks, Iori's scent had become a constant presence, and Riku quickly came to associate it
with home, with IDOLiSH7. He just wondered if Iori felt remotely the same, or if it was all a one-sided thing on his part.

"Nii-san made dinner and I thought that you'd like some," Iori said, frowning at the food that was already sitting in front of Riku. "Was I too late?"

"No!" Riku said, a little too quickly. Sheepishly, he added, "But they'll scold me if I don't finish the food, so maybe you can share with me?"

Iori chuckled, pulling a chair over and sitting down beside the bed. "I just ate, though?"

Riku puffed his cheeks up, pouting at the omega, and Iori muttered, "What a cute person."

"Eh?"

Clearing his throat, Iori shifted the food on the table so that he could put the bento down. "I said, fine, but you'll have to finish most of it."

They ate in relative silence, even though Riku was in a private room and they wouldn't disturb other patients. It was only after the nurse cleared the dinner tray that Iori sat back, looking at Riku seriously, and the alpha fidgeted. "What?"

With a small sigh, Iori shook his head. Was this really the same alpha from earlier today, who had commanded him to back down while they were performing? Iori had been shocked when it happened; up till now, Riku had never used his alpha status to make Iori do anything against his will. He'd always made sure to ask for Iori's opinion, which was something that the omega valued, because he hated being made to do things against his will.

"You... don't know what you did, do you?"

Riku seemed more confused than ever, shaking his head in response, and Iori wondered if he should even tell the alpha what had happened. But he had never been one to lie, and especially not if he wanted to establish any sort of trust between him and Riku. In the long run, Iori was sure that their relationship would change, for the better or worse, so it was probably better to lay everything out in the open before it was too late.

"Earlier at the performance, when I tried to stop you. I don't know if you realised it, but you used your alpha voice on me, to get me to back down," Iori said, frowning as he recalled what had happened. His omega had been quick to obey, and Iori couldn't help but wonder if it had been intentional. Considering that Riku hadn't compelled him to submit even when he asked Iori to keep his respiratory disease a secret, though, the omega guessed that Riku bore no ill will. Or, at least he hoped so.

Riku's eyes widened. "I... did that?" he asked in a small voice. "I didn't even realise."

Iori sighed again. "Nanase-san, I know you probably didn't mean to do it, and I believe you, but it was a very disconcerting moment for me. I hope you don't do it again," he said. "Please."

Blanching, Riku managed a nod. He opened his mouth to apologise again but closed it without saying anything. He couldn't take back what he'd done, after all. The best thing to do now was make sure that it didn't happen again, and Riku was going to do everything in his power to do so.

With a small smile, Iori nodded.

"Thank you, Nanase-san."
The group was gathered in the office, a few days after Riku was discharged from the hospital.

Apparently, news of their performance during the storm had spread, and IDOLiSH7 was quickly becoming a hot topic on the internet. Everyone huddled around the computer, with Tsumugi navigating the various news sites and looking through articles about them.

While everyone was busy discussing their increasing popularity, the gears were turning in Iori's head.

Leaning closer to Tsumugi, Iori asked, "Manager, a moment please?"

Tsumugi looked at Iori curiously, excusing herself before following him outside.

Behind them, Riku frowned.

"Those two have been disappearing together a lot lately, haven't they?" he muttered. Tsumugi was a beta, so Riku wasn't too worried about the two of them potentially getting into a relationship. Even if they did, betas couldn't form a mating mark, so there it wasn't possible for the bond between him and Iori to disappear because of that. Not that Riku disliked Tsumugi, but he didn't want to admit to himself that he might be just a tiny bit jealous.

He was still an alpha, after all, and he was as possessive as an alpha should be. "I wonder what they're talking about..."

Sougo looked over at Riku, mildly amused. "Does it bother you?"

Yamato chuckled. "It's definitely bugging him."

"Want me to teach you how to intervene?" Mitsuki chimed in, grinning brightly at the alpha. He could tell that there was something going on between the two of them; he wasn't Iori's older brother for nothing. Iori hadn't ever had a crush before, until now, and Mitsuki was determined to support him.

Riku blushed as he finally caught on to what Mitsuki was implying. "T-that's not it!"

Outside the office, Iori was telling Tsumugi that now was a good time to have another live concert. The beta was understandably apprehensive, probably thinking of their disastrous first live. But with some convincing on Iori's part, she nodded, and went back in to relay exactly what Iori said to the other members.

Just like Tsumugi, the others had also immediately thought of their first live, expressing their worries about whether or not they would have to perform to only a handful of fans again. And Tsumugi repeated what Iori said, word for word, assuring them that it would definitely work out well.

"We'll never know if we don't try!" Riku finally exclaimed, and Iori sent the alpha a grateful smile, even if he didn't know that the whole thing was Iori's plan. Tamaki and Nagi joined in, talking about their recent experiences and encounters with fans.
This seemed to make Tsumugi remember something, and she quickly entered something into the search engine, seeming satisfied as she pulled up another page. "Iori-san, Riku-san, there's a fan page for the both of you as well!"

Riku's eyes widened, a surprised "Eh?" slipping from his mouth. "Which is mine and which is Iori's?"

"It's the same site, and the same administrator. They seem to like you as a duo," she read off the page.

"Why?" both of them asked at the same time, simply for the sake of hiding how pleased they were.

For Riku, finding out that fans liked him and Iori together was an interesting experience. The fact that they even had a fan page was simply bizarre. They were just an indies group for now, with a handful of outdoor performances under their belt. Riku simply couldn't figure out how the fans ended up seeing them together as a couple, although he wasn't against it at all.

On the other hand, the omega would never admit that he had already seen the said page before, and even often read through the comments on the fan page. And maybe he saved a few of the photos that were posted on the thread. He could hardly help it, with Riku looking so excited to be on stage, and doing his best to make sure the fans had a fun time. It didn't matter that the fans didn't know of their secondary genders, or the fact that they might actually end up being a couple eventually. It wasn't something that they carelessly announced, after all.

Riku was pretty excited that they had a fan page at all, probably would be even if it wasn’t of him and Iori, asking Tsumugi to let him see it as soon as she brought it up. Iori tried to be nonchalant about it, although his omega at least seemed happy that Riku was excited, and Iori ended up glancing at the alpha from the corner of his eye, trying to watch for Riku's reaction.

"All these people are supporting us," Riku said in amazement, and Iori wasn't sure if the 'us' that the alpha was referring to was the two of them, or IDOLiSH7 as a group. And the fact that he actually liked the notion of the first possibility was scary, in his opinion.

They had only met each other weeks ago, but already Iori couldn't picture what his life would be like without Riku in it. Perhaps it was because it was in his nature to mother others, especially those who couldn't seem to take care of themselves, that Iori found Riku so awfully adorable. And maybe it was precisely because of this part of Iori's personality that Riku of all people was his other half, anyway – where else would he find such a hopeless alpha?

---

Expectedly, the concert tickets sold out.

What Iori hadn't expected was for them to sell out in just three minutes.

He also hadn't expected that a major TV station would call to request a live broadcast of the concert.

The seven boys poured all their energy into preparing for the upcoming concert, going as far as to run through the full set once daily. It was more to help build Riku's stamina than anything else; Iori had made the suggestion, not wanting to have to witness the alpha collapse again and be rushed off to the hospital. Seeing that scene once had been more than enough for Iori, and he wasn't willing to
go through that fear and panic again.

Time passed by too quickly and too slowly, and suddenly the day of the concert arrived.

They ran through the set once last time, just a simple rehearsal so that Riku didn't exert too much energy unnecessarily. As the crew set up the rest of the set, Riku looked out at the seats, empty for now, but in just an hour they would be facing a crowd of three thousand fans.

Mitsuki went up to stand beside the alpha. "What's wrong?"

"We're singing here again, and our manager and fans are supporting us. I want to work harder, to answer their voices with all my might. Even if it means I'll collapse."

The beta's eye twitched, and he hit Riku on the back of the head. "Don't you dare!"

"Ow," Riku whined, and Mitsuki sighed.

"I'm still angry that you hid your illness from us, you know," he said pointedly, resisting the urge to roll his eyes when Riku apologised. "What I meant was that you shouldn't hide it from us. But you shouldn't be reckless, even if you want to work hard for the fans. There's no point if you end up making them worry about you, right?"

Riku nodded in understanding, smiling when Sougo came up to him with warm tea. Nagi tried to offer some of his anime merchandise, and Tamaki even went as far as to offer his half-eaten pudding. That was when the alpha started to get slightly exasperated. Why was everybody treating him like glass now?

"I'm fine. You guys worry too much," he said as he refused Tamaki's pudding.

Iori came up from behind him, and Riku felt himself calm down when he caught the familiar scent. Then the omega had to say, "Of course we do. If you fall, we all go down with you, so we can't have you quitting or collapsing," and then Riku was exasperated all over again. Does he have to do this every time? It wouldn't hurt to be a little more honest, sheesh.

Yamato tried to diffuse the situation, the beta stepping in and saying, "We're all worried about you."

Riku perked up. "You too, Yamato-san?"

The leader smiled awkwardly. "I'm not good in serious situations."

"How dishonest," Iori commented from behind Riku, and the alpha turned back to shoot the omega a knowing look. Iori merely cleared his throat, averting his gaze from Riku's, and if the alpha didn't know better, he might have thought that Iori looked bashful. Cute.

Suddenly Riku felt a hand on his head, and he turned back to look at Yamato. "If you make it to the end, I'll buy you a dirty magazine as a reward," he offered with a grin. Riku shook his head, flustered, and tried not to look for Iori's reaction. There wasn't even anything going on between them, not yet, but his alpha needed the assurance that Iori knew Riku wasn't just the playboy type. It was ridiculous, really, how much the omega's opinion mattered to him. Maybe Iori was already taking up more space in his life than he ever thought possible.

At Yamato's words, Iori's omega bristled, and he nearly wanted to hiss at the beta to back off. Mine, his omega wanted to say, which was both true and not true at the same time. They were almost certainly destined, sure, but that didn't mean anything if they didn't allow a proper relationship to happen. Still, Iori didn't appreciate the thought of Riku thinking or looking at anyone else.
Unfaithfulness was something that he absolutely abhorred.

Riku winced when Iori’s smell went from sweet to sour, and he didn’t need to look to know that the omega was displeased. The others didn’t seem to pick up on it though, probably because Iori had doused himself in scent neutralisers, just like Sougo had done. Riku turned to Iori, and even though the omega was smiling at how Yamato teased Riku, the alpha knew better.

Later, before they were called to go on stage, Riku leaned in to whisper to Iori. "You know Yamatosan was joking, right?"

Iori nodded curtly. "I know."

But his scent remained sour, angry and maybe even jealous. Before Riku could say anything else to reassure Iori that he really didn’t care for the dirty magazines, Tsumugi called for them to get into positions. The alpha sighed, noting how Iori pointedly avoided his gaze when they were huddled together for one last cheer.

---

The first leg of the concert went well. The members took turns talking in between songs, and Iori caught Tamaki’s shocked expression when Sougo said that he loved tabasco. Iori couldn’t help but be amazed at how coincidental it was, for two fated pairs to end up in one idol group. Things would definitely be a disaster when heat season came, just three weeks away now.

It had been smooth sailing until a storm started to brew, dark clouds casting shadows over them and encasing the audience in darkness. They had been in the middle of a song, one of their newer ones, when there was a sudden bolt of lightning, and suddenly the speakers were dead, the lights going out immediately as well.

Riku flinched when he heard the crackle of thunder that followed, eyes roaming the stage to make sure that everyone, that **Iori**, was alright. “There’s no sound.” Mitsuki said, voice laced with worry, and Riku found himself staring at Iori, trying to make out the omega’s expression. He knew Iori didn’t deal well with the unexpected, but the younger seemed fine for now, and Riku was at least glad that he wasn’t angry about Yamato’s joke earlier, his scent returning to normal. At least, until the concert was over.

“What do we do?” Sougo asked worriedly, trying to listen for any instructions through the earpiece, but even that seemed to have been cut off from the power shortage.

All of a sudden there was a spotlight directed at Tamaki, the alpha covering his eyes from the abrupt brightness. He seemed to understand what to do immediately, a smirk on his face as he started to dance to no music. “Hey guys, put your hands up!” Nagi shouted, and Iori tried not to wince at the subtle push in the alpha’s voice, even if it wasn’t anything really noticeable. It wouldn’t be nice if the fans picked up on it.

Tsumugi’s voice spoke through the earpiece, then, and everyone was relieved to know that the power was coming back on soon. Sougo got ready for his part, standing in the shadows behind Tamaki and smiling as the alpha finished off his skilful dancing. He didn’t imagine the proud look on Tamaki’s face, directed towards the omega as they passed each other by.

*Did you see, Souchan? Did you watch me well? It’s up to you now.*
The music came back on, and the crowd exploded into screams as Sougo delivered flawlessly. Iori was proud of the elder, if only because he was a fellow omega standing on the same stage as him. Judging from Tamaki’s expression, the alpha was proud too.

The rest of the concert ended without any more issues, and even as they walked off stage, Riku seemed to be pumping with adrenaline, not wheezing in the slightest. “That was really cool, Tamaki!” the alpha gushed, and Iori wanted to laugh. What happened to the stereotype that alphas liked to one-up each other?

But then again, Riku never had been a stereotypical alpha.

“Heh, it wasn’t much,” Tamaki said, and Iori noticed his gaze travel to Sougo. “Hey Souchan, can I talk to you for a bit later?”

It wasn’t hard to figure out what Tamaki wanted to talk about, and even the betas of the group seemed the pick up on it, despite not really knowing what Tamaki’s unique scent was. But it was their issue to figure out, and everyone trusted the two to make a logical decision that would take IDOLiSH7 into account. It wasn’t anyone else’s business to interfere in.

So Iori went up to Riku instead, accepting the proffered water bottle from the alpha. “Good job today, Nanase-san,” he said, uncapping the bottle and humming contentedly as he quenched his thirst. Riku was silent, and Iori raised a brow at the alpha, glancing at him only to see that he was staring intently at Iori’s exposed neck. The omega felt his face heat up, even though he knew his stage costume didn’t expose the crook of his neck, where a potential mating mark would be placed. He tried not to squirm. “Nanase-san.”

“Oh,” Riku said, breaking out of his daze and eyes flicking to Iori’s. He truly had no idea what came over him, but watching the omega chug the water, head faced upwards and neck exposed… his alpha clearly had many indecent thoughts about what he should have done. The realisation made Riku embarrassed and appalled all at the same time; there was no way he would ever let himself take advantage of Iori. “You were really cool today, Iori!”

“Everybody was super cool!” Banri exclaimed, grinning as he came up to them, Tsumugi and Otoharu right behind him. “That’s why we’re having a feast tonight!”

The group erupted into a chorus of cheers, and after cleaning up and changing into fresh clothes, they were off to dinner. Iori wasn’t angry about Yamato’s joke, not anymore, because he was almost certain that Riku would throw the magazine away should the beta really buy one.

He might have been embarrassed by the way Riku looked at his neck earlier, his gaze hungry and possessive, but his omega was pleased to be wanted. And strangely enough, Iori didn’t find it so annoying to give in to his primal side anymore. Fate truly was a strange thing.

Afterwards, if at some point on the way home the two alphas fell asleep on the omegas’ shoulders, both Iori and Sougo didn’t talk about it. They simply exchanged a small smile with each other, almost wanting to laugh at their predicaments, and endured the teasing from the other three.
I finished a new chapter a little early so here's another update! I'm not sure if I'll be busier from May onward because I'll be changing jobs and might have to put in more hours, so as usual, please be patient with me and I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter!
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Tamaki and Sougo's popularity exploded over the next few days, with magazines and news articles covering their breath-taking performance during the concert. It was a hot topic on social media sites, and fans even followed the two around whenever they went out to buy stuff.

The group had been cooling down after practice one day, Riku and Mitsuki talking to Sougo about his rise in popularity. On another side of the room, Yamato was asking Tamaki how it felt like to be on TV for the first time. Iori sighed, continuing his stretching as he listened to the chatter around him. Riku seemed awfully comfortable around Sougo – was it because the other omega was always kind to him?

Iori shook his head. No, why am I even getting jealous of Ousaka-san?

The door opened, and Tsumugi poked her head in. "Tamaki-san, Sougo-san, can I talk to you two?"

The two aforementioned males looked at each other curiously, getting up to follow the manager to the office. The other five stared as they went, all wondering about what exactly was going on. Iori's first thought was that Tsumugi had found out about the bond between them, but that didn't make any sense. There was no way she should have been able to tell, no way any beta would have been able to tell. It was true that she spent a lot of time together with them, but he highly doubted that she'd been present while they had their discussion after the concert.

Speaking of which, Iori didn't know how that turned out, either.

Tamaki and Sougo generally didn't spend time with each other outside of work, and he didn't know what kind of effect this bond between them would have on their relationship. Tamaki certainly didn't seem like the kind to want to deal with a relationship; all he'd been talking about recently was wanting to be shown more on TV.

"What do you think they're talking about?" Nagi asked, voicing aloud what everyone was thinking.

Mitsuki sighed, shaking his head in response. "Who knows. I do reckon there's something going on between the two of them, although I'm not sure what..." he trailed off, looking at the others and silently asking if anyone knew. Yamato shrugged, but Iori looked at Riku, Riku at Nagi, and Nagi at Iori.

The three of them had known almost immediately, when Sougo mentioned tabasco during the concert. The two betas didn't know what Tamaki's scent was, wouldn't know unless they went right up to his scent glands and took a whiff of his scent. It was true that Tamaki had very loudly exclaimed that Sougo smelled like King Pudding, but they wouldn't know for sure that Tamaki also smelled like something that Sougo liked.

But before anyone could really answer, there was shouting coming from outside, Tamaki's voice echoing through the halls. "I told you to wait!"

Within seconds, they were on their feet, exiting the practice room just as Sougo angrily shouted back, "Why don't you go and cool your head down!"

Tamaki was holding Sougo by the collar, holding the omega up against the wall, and Sougo tried
futilely to loosen Tamaki's grip. Both of them were obviously furious, whatever had happened, and Tsumugi could only try to stop them from the side. "You two, please stop!"

Yamato let out a low whistle. "I never thought the first fist fight in our group would be between them."

Iori had the urge to shoot Yamato a very unimpressed look, but the beta was a whole five years older than him, and Iori wasn't the type to disrespect those older than him. Instead he could only ask incredulously, "Is now really the time to be so leisurely about this?"

Well, at least Iori was sure that this wasn't about their secondary genders or their status as a fated pair.

"Ah, both of you should calm down! I don't know what happened, but this is your fault, Tamaki!"

The other alpha turned to glare at Riku. "Why are you assuming it's my fault when you don't even know what happened!" he growled, using his alpha voice to get Riku to get off of his case, despite the fact that Riku was an alpha too. Iori winced, trying not to let himself get affected by the tone, and snuck a glance at Sougo to see that he, too, was barely holding back from submitting to Tamaki.

"First, let go of each other. You're scaring Manager," Yamato said, and there was a chorus of relieved sighs as Tamaki scoffed, roughly letting go of Sougo and turning away from the omega.

Sougo took the chance to straighten his clothes, glaring harshly at Tamaki as he did so. "What happened, Sou?"

"Nothing. I spoke out of line, that's all," Sougo said, and Tamaki's anger shot through the roof, his scent becoming more oppressive as he whirled back to face Sougo, not even caring that the omega flinched visibly at the scent.

"Why are you hiding it? Just say it!"

Sougo bit back a whimper, swallowing harshly and willing himself to stand up to Tamaki. Omega or not, he was older than Tamaki, and he wasn't about to let someone three years his junior step all over him. "It's nothing we need to trouble them with."

"Didn't you say they were your friends!?"

"There are some things you don't need to say precisely because they're our friends!"

"Are you guys hiding something?" Yamato asked, finally piecing things together. It was getting uncomfortable even for the betas of the group, with Tamaki and Sougo's pheromones all over the place. Iori almost felt sorry for anyone innocently walking near the building.

As Sougo pointedly avoided Yamato's gaze, Tamaki replied, "They're talking about a show for me and Souchan."

"For only the two of you...?" Mitsuki asked in a small voice.

Tamaki nodded fiercely, looking at everyone. "You guys are happy for us, right? Right?"

The others kept silent, either looking down or at the side, and Tamaki's face fell as his anger slowly subsided. Sougo huffed, pushing Tamaki away and storming out of the building. The alpha had barely enough time to react. "Oi, Souchan! Wait!"

And even as Tamaki chased Sougo out of the building, the remaining five didn't say a word.
Iori found himself in the office with Tsumugi, for what seemed like the nth time in the past few months. She tried to explain how things had ended up this way, but the more she said, the more Iori could feel a migraine settling in. This was exactly why he had told her to let him help out with management.

The fact that she thought he wouldn't be able to be objective felt like an insult. Iori was perfectly capable of analysing even his own flaws, perhaps did it too well, detaching himself from his own feelings to be fair when thinking things through.

But as he continued to lecture her on why it had been a bad idea to ask the members for their opinions, Riku came into the office, wearing the same genuine smile that he always wore. Iori didn't know if Riku was doing it consciously, but he had an air of calming pheromones around him, and Iori slowly felt the pounding in his temple dissipate.

And when Riku said that Tsumugi only asked for their opinions because she valued them, Iori couldn't help but sigh softly. He understood that much, and it wasn't wrong, but Tamaki and Sougo clearly didn't share the same opinion regarding this issue.

He couldn't even blame Sougo for disagreeing with Tamaki. Iori even found himself seeing Sougo in a new light. Forget about his mild jealousy earlier – he was surprised that Sougo managed to stand up to Tamaki, even when the alpha was trying to force him into submission. The anger hadn't been directed at Iori, but he'd felt the effects nonetheless, and it had been hard to even get a word out of his mouth at the time.

But maybe Sougo had more life experience, being three years older than Iori and Tamaki. Or maybe he'd had more to deal with and had simply learnt how to get around difficult situations. Iori thought he needed to take a leaf out of his book; he couldn't even have Riku staring at him without wanting to shrink away. Or blushing.

The discussion eventually ended without a conclusion, because this was really something that only Tamaki and Sougo could sort out. Never mind being a fated pair, right now the two of them couldn't even find a common ground to work with.

But whatever their differences were, they had to work it out eventually. And fast.

---

Riku and Iori ended up walking back to the dorms together, Riku trying to distract himself from the disaster that was their teammates, but obviously failing from the way he kept quiet. His steps were heavy, nothing like the usual way he walked, with a spring in his steps. Iori raised a brow when Riku spoke up suddenly, stopping in his tracks and looking at Iori seriously.

"Hey, Iori. Those two... are fated, aren't they?"

How straightforward, Iori thought dryly. He'd wanted to avoid having this conversation with Riku,
wanted to delay it for as long as he could so that they didn't end up talking about themselves. But he didn't want to lie, so he nodded. "I would assume so, yes."

Riku made a face, walking slowly as he continued, "I thought fated pairs usually got along well, or something. Were all the books a lie, then?"

Iori couldn't help it; he blurted out the first words that came to mind. "Do you think we get along well?"

The alpha froze. He hadn't been expecting Iori to be so brutally honest. Contrary to what the omega thought, Riku really hadn't intended to bring their own bond into the conversation. But it was too late to take back his words, and Iori was waiting for his reply with a sort of expectant look on his face, so Riku sighed and answered as honestly as he could. "Not really, but we've never argued like that. It's just, sometimes your nagging kind of gets to me, even though I know you mean well. You could, you know, try to phrase things a little nicer sometimes."

"You really are hopeless, aren't you?" Iori asked, corners of his eyes crinkling in amusement, and he shook his head as he continued walking. Riku blinked, stunned for a few moments, before he caught back up to Iori and walked beside him. "I've really never met an alpha who would genuinely request something of an omega, without any intention to compel them to do said thing," he continued.

"What kind of alphas have you been dealing with, sheesh," Riku huffed. "Besides, it wasn't like I asked to be an alpha."

Iori let out an unglamorous snort. "Yeah, you think anyone would ask to be an omega?"

"Sorry."

"It's fine, Nanase-san. We can continue this discussion again, after the issue with Ousaka-san and Yotsuba-san blows over, alright? Now really isn't the time for this," Iori said, desperate to escape this conversation. He wasn't ready to talk about it just yet, although Riku hadn't disagreed with him when he implied that they were a fated pair. It was obvious enough, anyway, with how often the alpha found himself lost to his primal urges. Iori was just glad it was nothing sexual yet, although his omega felt otherwise.

Opening the door to his room, Iori turned give Riku a small smile. "Then, have a good rest, Nanase-san."

Riku nodded, returning the smile with a soft one. He was about to head off to his own room, but turned back mere moments later, as if he'd forgotten to do something important. He shuffled his feet nervously. "Is it okay if I, uh, hug you?" he asked uncertainly.

Iori pursed his lips. A hug wouldn't hurt, right? But there was already the underlying possibility of this thing between them blossoming into something much more, and while Iori was sure that his omega would be ecstatic if it did happen, he wasn't sure about himself. There was still so much he didn't know about Riku, and he didn't want to give the alpha any false hopes.

But already he felt his walls crumbling down around Riku. The alpha brought out sides of him that he never even knew existed. It would be a complete lie to say that he didn't feel flattered, being wanted by an alpha, and at this point Iori couldn't tell if it was the omega in him that was happy, or whether it was his own emotions. Then again, they were one and the same being. You just don't want to admit that you could be falling for him, do you?

"Okay."
Iori didn't think he'd ever seen Riku smile as brightly as he did at that moment. The alpha was quick to open his arms wide, and Iori awkwardly stepped into the embrace. It was bad enough that they were doing this in the hallway, and already Iori could feel his cheeks heating up. When Riku buried his face in the crook of Iori's neck, gently nuzzling him, Iori was sure he was as red as the alpha's hair.

But Riku's neck was exposed to him, too, and Iori found himself leaning closer to breathe in more of Riku's rich scent, a contented purr rumbling in his chest. Just as quickly as he let the purr slip, Iori pulled back, mouth opening and closing as he tried to get an explanation out.

But he didn't, and ended up slamming his door in Riku's face.

---

Of all the ways to solve the issue, Iori didn't think that Tamaki and Sougo would come up with something as ridiculous as this. The omega was nowhere to be found, and instead the alpha was standing in front of them, head hung shamefully as he told them that he and Sougo would be transferring to another agency to debut with them.

Mitsuki was understandably angry, the beta almost ready to throw punches at Tamaki despite being older than him, and the worst part was that Tamaki didn’t even attempt to retaliate. Where was the Tamaki who had put up such an aggressive fight with Sougo? What happened that he was willing to let Mitsuki scream and shout at him without even making a sound?

Iori didn’t want them to leave. It wasn’t about the fact that IDOLiSH7 would only be whole with all seven of them, or that their singing and dancing prowess was something that the group couldn’t do without. What Iori feared most was that if Sougo left, he would be the only omega left in the group, and he needed the assurance of having at least one other person who knew what he was going through.

Omegas always tended to gather together when put in a group, although Iori couldn’t say that he and Sougo were close at all. If anything like touch starvation happened, though, he knew that he could definitely count on Sougo to help him through it.

Tamaki wasn’t bad at heart, either. Iori had seen the alpha stand up for others, himself included, on more than one occasion. Sure, he was a little rough around the edges, but that was an important aspect of his personality that they had all gotten more or less used to by now.

Iori looked at Nagi, who was trying to prevent yet another fist fight from breaking out. He looked at Yamato, who was rubbing the bridge of his nose tiredly. He looked at Riku, the alpha seeming almost torn as he listened to Mitsuki shouting at Tamaki.

“I’m sorry!” Tamaki apologised yet again, and Iori sighed in frustration. What good was an apology, when he’d just told them that he and Sougo were abandoning them just so they could debut faster? Iori felt his blood run cold; he hated unfaithfulness, and this was pretty much the exact same thing. If Yotsuba-san has decided that he doesn’t need us, then maybe we don’t need him either.

Sougo and Tsumugi burst into the room, the other omega looking at Tamaki with a look of disbelief. Unlike Tamaki, whose scent had been painted with sadness and resignation, Sougo simply smelled confused, maybe a little annoyed that Tamaki had done something without consulting him.
This made Iori feel a little better. Maybe Sougo hadn’t made up his mind yet.

“You told them!?"

“I thought I’d apologise for your part too, Souchan!”

“Oi Sou, are you two really going to another agency?” Yamato asked incredulously.

“I’m sorry,” Tamaki mumbled, and Sougo shook his head quickly.

“That’s not it!”

Mitsuki’s eye twitched. “Which is it?”

Riku, ever the peace lover, tried to stand between Mitsuki and Tamaki. Riku was truly too soft to be an alpha, too kind for his own good. Ironically, Iori thought that his personality would have been better suited to be an alpha, and Riku an omega. But Iori had also seen Riku’s stubborn determination to see things through to the end, and that was definitely indicative of an alpha. Ultimately, though, his softheartedness could do him in one day, and Iori wasn’t going to let that happen, not under his watch.

Iori sighed – he’d rather the alpha detest him than let him get hurt. “It doesn’t matter, does it?”

"Iori!” Riku exclaimed, sounding shocked that the omega was so straightforward.

"I’m not sure about Ousaka-san, but Yotsuba-san has already turned his back on IDOLiSH7, hasn’t he?" he said coldly. Iori was fiercely protective and loyal to those dear to him, but he could be just as ruthless to those who had betrayed him. “Then we’ll turn our backs on you as well. So please, leave this place.”

Tamaki kept quiet, brows furrowed together as if this was something that pained him, too. Riku turned to frown at Iori. “That’s too harsh! I’m sure Tamaki has a very good reason, right?” Riku asked, turning hopeful eyes to Tamaki.

"Oh, please, Tamaki. Tell us your reason," Nagi urged, and Iori didn’t missed the subtle push that the two alphas had injected into their voices. Tamaki hesitated for a moment, but he told them everything: his sister who had been adopted, who had gone missing, who was starting high school soon but could be forced to work to make ends meet. His sister, whom he didn’t even know the secondary gender of. He sounded distraught, and Iori felt his anger slowly ebb away.

If Mitsuki was in Tamaki’s position, he would definitely do everything in his power to find Iori. It was simply the nature of older siblings. The fact that Tamaki was an alpha simply brought that nature one notch up; alphas would do anything to protect their beloved ones.

Riku turned to give Iori a look that screamed ‘I told you so’, and there was the slightest hint of a smirk on his face that Iori couldn’t decide was attractive or just plain annoying. “If you’d told us that from the start, we wouldn’t have misunderstood,” Iori deadpanned.

Tamaki apologised, again, and Sougo could only let out an exasperated chuckle. Nagi was deep in thought, and finally spoke up after a few moments. “All you need to do is debut, right?” he asked, and Tamaki glanced at him, nodding in response. “Then let’s go ask the President!”

Otoharu said yes almost immediately, and the group was beyond thrilled, until he mentioned that he would have Tamaki and Sougo debut as a duo. Mitsuki’s shoulders sagged immediately, as did Riku and Nagi’s, even when Otoharu explained why he had to do things this way.
But then Yamato had asked if all they needed to do was become popular quickly, and Banri came bursting into the room right after that. Music Festa wanted them to perform, and it suddenly seemed as if everything was going to be alright.

Except when it wasn’t.

Chapter End Notes

I was... too fast again so have another chapter! I'm really looking forwards to putting chapter 7 up bc it's my favourite chapter so far?!?! (I had no intention of pacing it so that that part ended up at chapter 7, it just happened) and I think thursday updates are becoming a norm now... I'll do my best to keep it up HAHA. Please leave nice comments I love nice comments!!!

MuFes angst coming up next!
The night before Music Festa found Riku in his room, knees drawn up to his chest and watching TRIGGER’s DVD. He couldn’t get over how much of a perfect idol Tenn was, how he managed to exude so much confidence both on and off stage. And he hated that he thought like this, because Tenn had abandoned him, had abandoned their family.

For the past five years, there had always been a nagging feeling in Riku’s chest, telling him that there was so much more that he didn’t know about. Maybe when IDOLiSH7 finally debuted and stood on the same stage with TRIGGER, Riku would confront his brother, get him to tell the truth.

"You're watching it again?"

Riku blinked, turning to stare at Iori. He hadn't even noticed the omega approaching; had he been that deep in thought? Iori didn’t say anything after that, simply looking at Riku with a blank expression, and Riku frowned. "What's wrong with you?"

Wordlessly, the omega picked the remote control up, turning the TV off just as Yaotome Gaku was speaking. Riku made an affronted noise. "What do you think you're doing?" he demanded, getting up from his seat and clenching his hand into a fist.

Iori sighed. "Stop chasing Kujo Tenn's shadow."

"Huh?"

"Please sing your own songs, Nanase-san. I'll definitely make you into a superstar."

"Eh?" Riku asked, his brain trying to process the words. When it finally clicked, his eyes widened slightly, and he cocked his head to the side. Iori, making him into a superstar? *What's that about...* "You will?"

It was Iori's turn to look shocked, as if he hadn't realised what he'd just said, and a faint blush spread across his cheeks. Riku couldn't stop looking at Iori's face; *how is he so pretty?* The omega looked bashful as he tried to cover his slipup, eyes averted to the side now, and Riku was glad that Iori only ever showed such vulnerable expressions in front of him.

"With the manager, I mean," Iori corrected, and Riku pouted slightly. Had he been thinking too much? But Iori seemed to have meant what he said, so Riku nodded, but the small pout remained, and it didn’t go unnoticed by the omega. Hesitantly, Iori asked, "Do you want me to?"

*I want you to do much more than that,* Riku’s alpha wanted him to say, and the redhead had to shake the thought off, earning a very confused look from Iori. Straightening up, Riku grinned. "Of course I do! You're willing to do that for me?"

Iori simply blushed harder than before, clearing his throat awkwardly. “Just so you know, Nanase-san, I’m doing this for IDOLiSH7,” he asserted, wishing that Riku would stop looking at him with that satisfied smile on his face. Riku shrugged, clearly not buying Iori’s lie, and it was a lie, because the omega was more than willing to do whatever it took to realise Riku’s dream with him.

“Anyway, it’ll be best if you stay in the waiting room tomorrow. We wouldn’t want to risk you
running into Kujo-san and triggering an attack,” he added, and when Riku protested to that, he only gave the alpha a knowing look before acting out what would definitely happen. Riku begrudgingly agreed, only when Iori asked him, “Which is more important now, your brother or IDOLiSH7?”

“Of course it’s IDOLiSH7!” Riku answered, as if it could be anything else, and Iori nodded with a small smile. The omega turned to leave, but was stopped by a hand on his wrist, and he looked back to see Riku staring intently at the ground, trying to burn a hole through it with his eyes. “We’re going to do our best out there tomorrow and debut, right? I’m not going to mess up, I promise.”

Riku felt Iori pull his hand back, before arms wrapped around his torso, and Iori nestled his head in the crook of Riku’s neck. It had become routine for them to do this every night, regardless of the fact that they still hadn’t figured out what they wanted from each other. It was mostly calming, assuring, even though both of their primal sides wanted more than that.

With a sigh, Riku let his head drop onto Iori’s shoulder as well, feeling completely at ease with the omega’s familiar scent surrounding him. It was a while before they pulled away from each other, both boys nervous for their performance at Music Festa and taking comfort in the other’s presence. But they knew it would be alright, because they were performing as seven, and there wasn’t anything they couldn’t do together.

---

*All I wanted was a warm drink. A warm drink!*

Iori was weirder than usual today, or at least Riku thought so. He just wanted to ask the omega to help him buy a drink on the way back, since it would make his chest feel better. Did Iori have to drag him to the side so harshly? Riku rubbed at his wrists, frowning at Iori who was busy sneaking glances around the corner and heaving a sigh of relief.

“Why’re you being all suspicious?” Riku asked, eyes narrowing at the omega. For some reason, the first thought that came to mind was that Iori was cheating on him, which was the most far-fetched thing Riku had thought to date. They weren’t even together, hadn’t even talked more about what their relationship was, and already Riku’s alpha was being a possessive little shit.

Besides, Iori would never do something like that, and Riku was glad to realise that fact.

Iori turned back to look at Riku, laughing awkwardly and shifting so that Riku wouldn’t be able to see past him. This only made the alpha raise a brow, getting even more suspicious, and he waited patiently for Iori to reply. Eventually the omega caved. “Okay, a warm drink right? Anything specific?”

Riku groaned. “You’re being dodgy, Iori.”

Iori straightened up, clearing his throat and looking at Riku pointedly. “And we told you to wait in the waiting room, didn’t we? You could’ve just texted me,” he said matter-of-factly. With another small groan, Riku nodded, dropping the matter and turning back to return to the waiting room.

The waiting room was supposed to be empty, but when Riku got back, it sounded like someone was in there. Riku put his ear against the door, listening for any familiar voices, but all he could hear was someone rummaging around their stuff. The alpha wrinkled his nose, trying to catch any scents, but that didn’t work either. *A beta? Manager wears perfume though…* Riku frowned, deciding to just go
in and find out who it was. He opened the door slowly, calling out, “Manager? Are you back already?”

He came face-to-face with someone he’d never seen before, the stranger only staring blankly at him for a moment before jumping onto Riku and grabbing his collar. “Where is it!? Where is the CD of your new song!?” he demanded, shaking Riku violently with every word.

The alpha coughed, his collar pulled tight against his throat, and he felt his lungs begin to struggle. The stranger was a beta, but he was still pretty strong, and Riku had never been a typical alpha to begin with. He pushed against the beta, starting to wheeze, and the beta scoffed before letting go of Riku and running out of the room.

The moment the stranger left, Riku searched for his inhaler, only to find that it had been broken during their struggle. He held the broken pieces of the inhaler, staring at it with wide eyes, as his breathing got even more laboured. *I can’t have an attack now. Not now!*

“Riku-san!” Tsumugi called out, standing at the door of the waiting room. “We have to get ready now!”

Dread settled in the pit of Riku’s stomach. “Now?”

Tsumugi nodded. “There was a problem, so now they’re rearranging all the indies performances.”

Riku forced himself to get up, taking deep breaths and willing himself not to cough. His chest was tight, and it was starting to hurt, but this was their big chance. For all he knew, it could be their only chance for a long time. He wasn’t about to let his illness drag the whole team down.

The other members were already gathered outside, and they hastily made their way towards the studio where they were supposed to be performing. Riku moved more slowly than usual; even standing upright was a struggle. And of course Iori was waiting for him, telling him to hurry, and Riku could only barely choke out, “I know!”

On hindsight, he should have known that Iori was immediately able to tell that he was on the verge of an attack. Even if it wasn’t visibly obvious, it probably showed through his scent. Alphas didn’t usually get distressed, not unless their mates were in any sort of danger, but Riku had always been unable to help it. He didn’t have the energy to control his scent, not when breathing was already so difficult. His scent was a dead giveaway, and even if he was wearing scent neutralisers, Iori would be the one who would definitely notice.

“Nanase-san,” the omega started, but Riku shook his head. He was determined to see this through.

“I’m fine,” he assured, although he knew that Iori wasn’t convinced in the slightest. They didn’t have any time to worry about him, not when they were already walking onto the stage, greeting fans and the emcee. It was a live show – Riku was going to push through even if it killed him.

When Riku was asked to introduce the group, he ended up dissolving into coughs, to which Shimooka simply laughed and asked, “Are you that nervous, Nanase-kun?”

Riku offered an apologetic smile, trying to ignore the fact that Iori was staring holes through him. He knew the omega was worried, not just about the performance, but about Riku himself. Riku knew it was because of the last time he’d collapsed after a performance, but this was just one song. One song wouldn’t be a problem. Riku could gauge his condition well enough.

The song started, and the seven boys were already in position. It was a new song, one that Otoharu had given them for the sake of performing on Music Festa. The song was more slow
paced than their normal songs, so they had practiced it to near perfection, making sure they executed
the song and dance perfectly.

Riku went through the steps smoothly, even if it was difficult to breathe, and he took a deep breath as
his solo part approached. Before that was Iori’s line, though, and when Riku didn’t hear the omega’s
voice, he turned to stare at him. Why isn’t he singing?

Iori seemed just as shocked as Riku was, eyes wide as he realised his mistake. His gaze met
Riku’s, and the alpha’s impending attack was all but forgotten when he saw how lost Iori looked. It
was only for a brief moment that Riku allowed himself to falter, and then he made the decision to
cover for the omega.

Mitsuki and Sougo were looking at Iori, too, each of them thinking the same thing as Riku. They all
tried to cover for him, but backed off when they realised that they were going to overlap with each
other. The silence dragged on almost painfully, and Riku couldn’t help but notice Iori’s scent slowly
turn sour, upset.

They didn’t recover from the mistake.

---

The seven boys sat backstage in silence, none of them able to find the words to say. Riku had been
staring blankly at the ground, wondering what to say to Iori, when the audience started screaming
and Shimooka announced that TRIGGER was up next.

Riku’s head snapped up, just in time to see the three members of TRIGGER walk onto stage. Just in
time to see Tenn glance at him from the corner of his eye, giving him the most condescending look
Riku had ever seen. It almost made Riku want to shrink back in shame, and that was more than
enough to confirm Riku’s suspicions that Tenn was an alpha.

As the three-man group entered the studio, the screams became deafening, and even as the opening
of Secret Night started to play, Riku wanted to cover his ears. He had never wanted to not listen
to Tenn’s voice as much as he did now. It only reminded him of their failure, of how wide the gap
between IDOLiSH7 and TRIGGER was.

It was only long later that Riku noticed Iori’s absence, having been too caught up in his own
thoughts to realise that the omega’s scent had faded. He jumped up almost immediately, just as Nagi
looked around worriedly. “Oh, where’s Iori?”

He should have known that Iori would blame himself; the omega was always telling him not to mess
up, to do things properly, and now it was Iori who had forgotten to sing, had missed his lines. It was
the most amateur mistake that could have been made, and Iori had done it.

What hurt most was that Riku knew he was the cause. Of course he was. He’d been on the verge of
an attack, and Iori had noticed right from the start. Of course Iori had been worrying about him, not
just for the sake of the performance, but because the omega was genuinely concerned for his well-
being. But Riku had always been stubborn, prideful, and now Iori was bearing the consequences of
it.

By the time they got outside, shouting for Iori, the omega’s scent was barely noticeable, even to
Riku. He wanted to punch a wall for being so useless. If only he was a normal alpha without any
health problems, Iori wouldn't have had to worry about him, and he definitely wouldn't have forgot to sing his part.

But Yamato wouldn't let Riku harp on it, instead asking Mitsuki where they could possibly find Iori.

It took a while, but they finally managed to find the omega by the river near Zero Arena, and if Riku wasn't so guilty, he would've found it ridiculously cute that Iori bolted at the sight of Mitsuki. The beta wasn't fazed, catching up to his brother with ease, and Iori tried to wrench his arm from Mitsuki's grip.

"Why are you running away?" Mitsuki scolded, tightening his grip on Iori's wrist.

"Nii-san, let go of me!" Iori protested, his voice nearly breaking, and Riku felt his heart drop.

"Iori..." the alpha mumbled.

Iori turned away, averting his gaze from the others. "I'm too ashamed to face you. Everyone worked so hard, and yet... I destroyed your dreams myself," he said, and this time his voice did break, as the first tear rolled down his cheek. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry..."

Riku's heart clenched painfully in his chest as Iori started to sob, finally breaking down from all the stress he'd put on himself. The alpha desperately wanted to pull Iori into a hug, to apologise to him and tell him that it wasn't his fault. Iori was always so strong, but even he had a vulnerable side, and Riku hated that he was the cause. He hated even more that he couldn't even comfort the crying omega, because they were still with the others, and Mitsuki was still holding onto Iori, although it looked like the beta wanted to cry, too.

And then Tsumugi started to apologise for not predicting that things would become hectic, for not planning ahead, and she started to cry, too. That seemed to be the limit for Mitsuki, as he looked between the two crying people. "Don't cry, Iori, Manager..." he trailed off, wiping angrily at his eyes. "Even if you cry, it can't be helped..."

Riku felt tears gather in his eyes, choking back a sob only for his tears to end up falling as well. Iori's disappointment in himself was nearly tangible; it was mixed in his scent, along with how upset he was, even though nobody could blame him. Sougo, Tamaki, and even Yamato had started to snuffle, everyone unable to help but feel regretful about how the performance had turned out.

It had been their big chance – how did things go so wrong?

But suddenly Nagi was dancing, throwing out random moves that they had learnt before. He went as far as to invite Tsumugi for a dance, even treating the rest of the group as a music box. "Please, music!" he exclaimed, and the others could only stare blankly at the alpha. He shook his head, looking almost disappointed. "Oh, there's no response. Why don't you try asking one more time?"

"Me?" Tsumugi asked.

"Yes. The music box here doesn’t need coins to work. As long as someone wants to listen, it will be revived many times. Like the waxing moon. Like the rising sun. Our heartbeat will never, ever, stop," Nagi said, before turning to look at the others again. "Hey! Are you ready with your preparations?"

Mitsuki laughed weakly. "Treating us like we’re his butlers. Alright, let’s do something. For Manager."

The others began to join Nagi, and Riku finally saw an opening, approaching Iori without hesitation
and throwing an arm around the omega. It still hurt, to know that he had been the one to make Iori wear such a sad expression, but Riku was nothing if not determined, and he wasn't going to rest until he managed to elicit a smile from Iori. "Come on Iori, you too. It won't start without you."

Iori stared at the alpha, at the kind smile Riku was wearing, and finally let the corners of his lips pull up. It was slight, barely noticeable, but some of his usual sweet scent was beginning to return, and that was enough for Riku for now. "Nanase-san..." the omega said, allowing Riku to pull him up to join everyone.

"That's right, I forgot. I got a very important first-time experience today!" Mitsuki grinned.

Iori turned to his brother, looking confused. "What's that?"

"Comforting my crying little brother with a hug!"

Mitsuki threw his arms around Iori, messing his hair up fondly, and Riku couldn't even find it in himself to be jealous of the older Izumi. "You worked hard, didn't you, Iori? You worked really hard."

"Stop it, It's embarrassing..." Iori mumbled, glancing at Riku and flushing slightly when he caught the redhead chuckling. It was endearing, and as much as Riku wanted to be the one to comfort Iori, he knew that there were things only older brothers could do. He couldn't take his eyes off Iori even as Tsumugi requested for music once more, even as they all started singing and dancing.

Even though they were all hurting, they had fun singing, and that was all that mattered.

---

That night, Iori lay in his room, arm thrown over his face as his mind ran through a million thoughts a minute. As much as he knew he shouldn't harp on his mistakes, he couldn't help it. All the what-ifs kept appearing in his thoughts, even though he tried to push them away.

He had never been one to make such stupid and amateur mistakes, after all. Forgetting to sing his lines? That was something that only a newbie would do, but it had already been over two months since they started staying in the dorms, even longer since they began practicing together. Sure, Iori had been distracted with worrying about Riku, but he had always been good at multi-tasking.

Before the omega could wallow further in self-pity, there was a knock on the door, and Iori already knew that it would be Riku. The scent was a giveaway, but he'd also noticed Riku staring at him the entire time while they were at the riverside. Riku probably felt guilty too, although Iori had never thought to blame the alpha. There was probably a very good reason why he hadn't used his inhaler to stop the attack, but Iori wasn't intent on finding out why. He had too much on his mind already; he didn't need more to fret over now.

"Iori, can I come in?"

Iori hesitated, uncertain about whether or not he wanted to see the alpha now. Riku wouldn't blame him, and neither would everyone else, but that didn't do anything to ease his guilt. Eventually Iori sighed, deciding that perhaps talking to the alpha would take his mind off things. Even if it didn't, he could at least take comfort in the alpha's scent. "Yes."
Riku entered the room, holding two mugs in his hands, and he looked up at Iori with a smile. “I made milk with honey,” he said, discreetly trying to pick up on Iori’s scent and feeling relieved when it seemed that the omega wasn’t as upset as he had been earlier.

Iori climbed down from his bed, sitting down at his desk and taking the drink from Riku gratefully. He took an experimental sip of the drink, almost choking when he tasted how sweet it was. “Nanase-san, how much honey did you use?” he questioned, and his lips threatened to break into a smile at how flustered the alpha became. He would have laughed at any other time, but he couldn’t bring himself to.

“Eh? Two tablespoons, I think…” Riku said, scratching his cheek sheepishly. “Is it bad?”

“No, no. It’s just sweeter than what I’m used to,” he explained, looking at Riku when he sighed. “What?”

Shaking his head, Riku said, “I just wanted to cheer you up, but I can’t even do this much right, huh.”

*I knew it,* Iori thought. He’d been expecting Riku to talk to him about the incident, but he hadn’t quite expected the alpha to make milk with honey for him, something that he usually made for Riku when he was upset or couldn’t sleep. It wasn’t as if he’d had many chances to make the drink for Riku, but he was pleased to know that Riku remembered this much. In spite of himself, Iori felt the edges of his lip quirk up. “It’s alright, Nanase-san. I actually have a sweet tooth,” he said, gesturing to the alpha’s own untouched drink. “Don’t just watch me drink, you drink yours too.”

“A sweet tooth? But I smell like dark chocolate, don’t I?” Riku asked, frowning slightly, and Iori raised a brow. *That* was what Riku managed to catch? Maybe the alpha was even deeper into this whole relationship than Iori realised.

He wrinkled his nose, eyes widening in surprise when he realised, belatedly, that Riku had been releasing calming pheromones, much like what he’d done for the alpha weeks ago, just like what Riku had been doing in the office two weeks ago. It was subtle, so subtle that Iori wouldn’t have realised it until he looked for it, even as attuned to Riku’s scent as he was, but he had been feeling more relaxed, less upset. Once he picked up on it, though, Iori found himself leaning towards Riku, taking long, slow breaths. “It would be weird if alphas smelled sweet, wouldn’t it?” Iori asked, eyes closed as he inhaled the rich, masculine scent.

Riku hummed his reply, finally taking a sip of the drink and wincing at how sweet it was. “Okay, it really is sweet. You don’t have to force yourself to drink it if you don’t want to,” Riku offered with a small sigh, shoulders slumping as he picked up the two mugs to pour them out.

Iori caught his wrist, and when Riku glanced at the omega, he seemed surprised at his own actions. Pink dusted Iori’s cheeks lightly, and he cleared his throat as he said, “It’s not bad. And it feels better with you here, Nanase-san. Stay a little longer.”

“Oh, okay,” Riku replied, trying not to look too happy about it. He moved a little closer to Iori, startling when he suddenly felt a head lean against his waist, Iori looking seemingly contented as he rested there. Riku’s hand moved of its own accord, carefully and gently combing through Iori’s hair with his fingers. The omega’s chest rumbled with a soft purr, and Riku couldn’t help the rush of pride from his alpha when he noticed how much happier Iori was compared to a few hours ago. “I’m sorry. For worrying you.”

He felt Iori shake his head, although he couldn’t see what kind of expression Iori was making. “It’s not your fault,” he said in a small voice, continuing before Riku could get a word in. “I know you’re
going to say that it’s not my fault either, but you have to give me some time to get over it, okay?”

“Don’t take too long though,” Riku teased. “It feels weird without you nagging at me.”

Iori snorted, but didn’t come up with a retort. They stayed like that until Iori finally let out a small yawn, and Riku chuckled, clearing the mugs and telling Iori to get a good night’s rest. The omega climbed back into bed, feeling much more content than before, and fell into a peaceful slumber.

He woke up to a familiar burn on his skin.

Chapter End Notes

This felt strangely draggy but there's finally more abo-related content!! Until I go back to following the main storyline rip. Chapter 7 was fun to write so please look forward to it! As usual comments and kudos are very much appreciated hehe. I hope you guys enjoyed this!
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first thing Iori noticed upon waking up was the touch of a cool hand on his forehead, and next was how unbearably warm it was. There was a layer of sweat on his skin, even though it wasn't summer yet, and there was the undeniable coiling of heat at the base of his stomach. Even with the scent of an omega near him, Iori let out a pained whimper.

He could hear shouting from outside his room, Riku's voice louder than the rest, and the alpha's pheromones were running rampant. Although the door was closed, Riku's pheromones travelled into Iori's room, eliciting a new wave of heat that made Iori shudder with want.

His heat wasn't even due till next week, and Iori's heats had always been on time. It was still early on, though, so the omega was able to at least form coherent thoughts, swallowing thickly through the haze of the heat and blinking blearily up at Sougo. The elder's hand had stilled when he noticed Iori stirring, looking down at Iori with a sympathetic smile.

"What..." Iori managed to ask, his throat parched and his body feeling like it was on fire. Every nerve ending was too sensitive, and he could already feel his erection pushing against the constraints of his underwear, his asshole clenching with the need to be filled. From outside the room, the shouts increased in volume, Riku getting even more worked up than before, and an unfiltered desire seeped into the alpha's scent.

Iori whined, curling in on himself and wincing as he felt slick come out of his ass.

"Riku-kun is a little agitated right now," Sougo explained, as if Iori couldn't already tell. He was smoothing Iori's hair back again, moving his fringe away from his forehead, where it had become matted with sweat. "Tamaki-kun and Nagi-kun are trying to hold him back and get him away from here. We can't bring you to the heat room until he leaves."

When Iori didn't reply, Sougo picked up the bottle of water that he'd brought up with him, opening it and putting a straw in before moving the straw in front of Iori. The younger drank it gratefully, trying to get up so that it was easier to drink, but wincing when he felt more slick leave his throbbing entrance. He only spoke again when his thirst was partially quenched, asking, "Will your heat be triggered, too?"

Sougo shook his head. "I was taking suppressants just in case Tamaki-kun and I ended up having to debut. But enough about that; do you know what brought this on? Wasn't your heat supposed to come only next week?"

Iori frowned, wracking his brain for any possible reason why his heat would come early. He thought of the day before, of the botched performance and of Riku staying with him in his room, comforting him until he fell asleep. At the thought of the alpha, his omega reacted violently, feeding all sorts of indecent images into Iori's mind about being taken by Riku. Iori had to bite back a moan at the thought of Riku claiming him, barely managing to reply Sougo's question. "The stress from yesterday, Nanase-san's scent, calming pheromones," was all he managed to get out, and thankfully Sougo seemed to understand.

"I didn't expect you two to also be... but all the more we can't let Riku-kun near you, not in both of your states," he mumbled, looking worriedly towards the door. They couldn't quite hear what was
being said, or rather, shouted, only making out a few words in between. But they didn't need to be able to hear to know that Riku was most definitely fighting against Tamaki and Nagi, and that even with two on one, the two alphas were struggling.

An alpha was most dangerous when their omega needed them, and to Riku's alpha, Iori most certainly needed him now. Iori was sober enough to know that he didn't want spend his heat with Riku, not like this, but if the alpha's pheromones got any stronger than they were now, he wasn't sure he would be able to hold back. Already his thighs were quivering, wanting to be spread, his ass eagerly waiting for an alpha's knot to fill it up.

Subconsciously, Iori caught onto the hem of Sougo's shirt, clenching his fist tightly and willing the images to go away. Seeing this, Sougo could only let out a small sigh, continuing to talk in an attempt to distract Iori as much as he could. "Nagi-kun said he got up to get a drink, but he noticed that your scent was sweeter than usual, to the point that it made him uncomfortable, so he had been about to check it out when Riku-kun came out of his room. It seemed like he was already out of it from the start, and luckily Nagi-kun managed to hold him back until the rest of us got here to help," the omega explained, recalling what had happened that morning.

Everyone had woken up to the sickly-sweet smell of an omega in heat, as well as to the voices of a very worked up Riku and Nagi shouting at each other. Even the betas had noticed the smell, Mitsuki realising almost immediately that it was Iori who was emitting such a scent. The two alphas had been in the hallway, just outside Iori's room, and Nagi had Riku pinned against the wall. The redhead was putting up a fight, struggling and almost kicking at Nagi in an attempt to break free. "Let me go!" he growled, but Nagi wasn't fazed, looking at Riku head-on.

"Riku, you know this is your alpha controlling you," the blond said, huffing in annoyance when Riku tried to wrench his hand out of Nagi's hold. "Iori doesn't want this, and I'm sure you don't want to claim him like this either. Get a hold of yourself!"

Sougo had barely been able to get past the two alphas, both of them trying to assert dominance over the other, and Tamaki had caught at Sougo's wrist, the alpha's nose wrinkling at the overpowering smell. "Souchan, stay with Iorin until we get Rikkun to the other end of the dorm where the rut rooms are," he said, before looking over at Yamato and Mitsuki. "Yamasan, Mikki, guard the door. Nagicchi, let's bring Rikkun away from here."

With wide eyes, Sougo had nodded, wincing as Riku's anger seemed the flare the moment Iori's room door was opened. He closed it immediately, hands shaking as he fought against Riku's assertiveness. It was almost hard to breathe with the two, now three, alphas trying to fight each other with their scents and voices. Even Yamato and Mitsuki seemed to be having a bit of a hard time, but they stood their ground, moving in front of the door after Sougo entered the room.

The commotion outside seemed to cease abruptly, and even through the aching need and haze of the heat, Iori felt his heart drop. He could distantly hear Riku beginning to wheeze, but he was still struggling, still radiating with pheromones and trying to get to Iori. Nagi and Tamaki finally managed to pull Riku away, the alpha's fight slowly draining out of him as he fought for breath.

Sougo heaved a small sigh of relief, even as he noticed Iori whimpering in distress. "Can you stand? At least for long enough to get off your bed?" he asked in concern, and Iori forced a small nod. Sougo climbed down from the bed first, watching as Iori shakily got up, gripping onto the railings tightly as he made his way down.

With every movement, Iori's ass seemed to leak more slick, every inch of his skin feverishly hot, and his erection brushing against the material of his underwear painfully. Iori nearly collapsed when he finally reached the floor, his knees going weak, but Sougo managed to catch him just in time,
supporting Iori's weight and smiling. "Good job, Iori-kun. Mitsuki-san, can you come in and help?" Sougo called out.

The elder Izumi came into the room warily, seeming just as relieved as Sougo was. The moment the door was opened, though, what remained of Riku's pheromones leaked into the room, and Iori nearly gagged at how strong the smell was. His stomach clenched painfully, a new wave of slick gushing out of him, and the heat becoming unbearable as his omega screamed for release. Iori could feel himself losing his consciousness, his omega taking control, and Iori's eyes glazed over with lust.

"Let's hurry," Sougo urged, noting the change in Iori's demeanour and knowing exactly what it meant. Mitsuki nodded in agreement, and the two of them quickly led Iori to the east side of the building where the heat rooms had been built. There were already two of the rooms that had been claimed by Iori and Sougo respectively, the two omegas having already stocked whatever they needed for their heats inside.

They entered the room and lay Iori down on the bed, and Iori had barely enough lucidity to hold back from stripping right away, waiting until the two left the room and locked it from the outside with the master key. Then Iori was hastily peeling his clothes off, throwing his pants, which had been soaked through with slick, to a corner of the room.

Iori didn't even have to touch himself to come, his skin so sensitive that even the friction from moving against the bed was enough to send him over the edge. But it wasn't enough, and Iori managed to find the dildo that he had in the bedside drawer, pushing it into himself without any further preparation and muffling his moan into the pillow.

He was already too wet, too ready for an alpha's knot, that he didn't have to stretch himself at all. Somewhere in the back of his mind, Iori realised that his heat had never hit this hard and fast before, but all coherent thoughts were thrown out the window as he started pumping the dildo into his throbbing entrance. The omega whined as he found a rhythm, and he couldn't help the flood of images that came to mind, of Riku holding onto him and thrusting into his waiting asshole.

"Nanase-san," he moaned, breath quickening as he felt his second climax approach. He thought of what it would be like to have Riku taking him, to feel the alpha's knot inflate inside him and fill him with his seed, and a shudder ran through Iori's body as he came for the second time.

An almost broken sob left Iori's lips as the heat refused to ebb, seemingly stronger than all the heats he'd ever had, and he briefly wondered if it was because his omega knew that he now had an alpha wanting to claim him, just on the other side of the building.

When Iori came again, for the third time, he thought of Riku biting down on the nape of his neck, marking him as his for life.

---

"Let me go!"

Tamaki let out a long sigh as he stared at the closed door blankly.

They had finally managed to drag Riku all the way to the west wing, Yamato bringing his inhaler to him before they locked him in one of the rut rooms. Riku had finally worked himself up to the point of getting an attack, and Nagi and Tamaki would be lying if they said they weren't glad about it.
Everyone knew that an alpha would do anything for their omega, and Riku's alpha had long recognised Iori as his. A fated pair always drew out more intense emotions than a normal couple, so they couldn't blame Riku for reacting as he did, although they did wish that he was better at holding himself back.

Nagi blanched when he thought about what could have happened, had he not woken up ahead of Riku. Iori was smart enough not to make reckless decisions, but the heat would make his mind muddled, and Riku would have been forceful enough to make Iori submit even if he didn't want to. Alphas were designed to please their omegas, although there were many alphas who'd gone astray, which was probably why Riku didn't even realise that he was in rut.

But it wasn't long before Riku's protests died down, as his body finally registered what was going on, and the other three took that as their cue to leave, heading back to the common space where Sougo and Mitsuki were presumably waiting for them.

Once the five were gathered, they sat around the table, eyes darting between each other as they waited for someone to speak up first. Mitsuki cleared his throat, looking levelly at Nagi with a grateful smile. "Thank you for protecting Iori, Nagi. It means a lot to me."

"No need to thank me. I just didn't want Riku to do something he would end up regretting."

"Anyway, Sou, did you manage to find out why Ichi's heat started early?" Yamato asked, glancing at the calendar hanging on the wall. The alphas and omegas had marked the dates that their ruts and heats were due to start, mostly so that it was easier for Tsumugi to plan schedules, and Iori's heat was clearly marked in red, one week later.

Sougo sighed, glancing at Tamaki as he did so. "He said it was probably the stress from yesterday's performance and... being in close proximity with Riku-kun for too long," he told them, watching as realisation dawned on Yamato's face, and Mitsuki looked as if he finally managed to confirm his suspicions. Neither Tamaki nor Nagi were fazed by this info, which Sougo wasn't too surprised about.

"But we can't have this happening every time Iori's heat comes around," Nagi thought aloud, before looking up at Tamaki and Sougo suddenly. He looked genuinely troubled, which was something that none of them had seen before. "The same goes for the two of you."

"The only way to avoid it is to let them spend the heat together, though," Tamaki pointed out, and the group fell back into silence. It was true, because even if the two of them mated, they would still react as strongly to the other in a heat or rut. In fact, being mated might have the adverse effect, because there was no way Riku would let Iori spend his heat alone if they were mates.

Having an alpha spend a heat together with an omega would definitely shorten it by at least one to two days, and it would be much less painful for the omega compared to spending it alone. As long as they took proper birth control, it wouldn't be an issue, except for the fact that Riku would definitely want to mark Iori as his. A mating bond was irreversible, and the mated couple wouldn't be able to spend too much time away from each other before they started having withdrawal symptoms.

In the first place, were there any alpha-omega couples in the industry who were mated to each other and part of the same group? Maybe there were a few, but they definitely didn't flaunt their status around, keeping it hidden as much as they possibly could.

"I think this is something they need to work out on their own, after this is over," Yamato finally said.
Iori's heat lasted for a week, while Riku's rut lasted four days.

Riku spent the three days waiting for Iori's heat to end, thinking about what he should say to the omega. He couldn't remember what exactly happened on the day right after Music Festa, but he got the gist of it from Nagi and Tamaki. He didn't know what was worse, the fact that he had completely lost himself to the desire, or that he didn't even regret the loss of control all that much.

Of course, Riku knew that Iori must have felt terrible, having to deal with a triggered heat and his alpha pheromones all over the place. For that, Riku did feel bad, because he never wanted to be the cause of Iori's pain. If anything, all he wanted was to make sure Iori was happy, because the omega's well-being came first, and it wasn't just because his alpha thought so.

Riku had been worried about Iori since the fumbled performance, and staying with the omega to comfort him had been of Riku's own will. He hadn't expected that to trigger Iori's heat, and Riku was regretful, because he was sure that Iori had suffered more than he should have. His own rut had been more painful than usual, so he could only imagine how hard it was for Iori to spend a whole week in a heat more intense than what he was used to.

It was only a day after Iori's heat ended that Riku went to the omega's room, knocking on the door gently with a plate of pancakes in one hand. He'd made them with Mitsuki earlier in the morning, the beta having told him that Iori liked to eat pancakes when he was feeling down. The others were currently either at practice or discussing something with Tsumugi at the office, so the dorm was empty except for Riku and Iori. To be honest, Riku was scared that he would lose control again, with no one to stop him now. Nagi was right about one thing; Riku really didn't want to claim Iori while he wasn't in his right state of mind.

"Come in," Iori called out, his voice lacklustre, and Riku felt bad all over again.

He pushed the door open, taking a deep breath to make sure he was in control of himself, before entering the room and setting the plate down on the table. Iori was sitting at his desk, poring over a stack of documents, and Riku frowned before pushing it to the side, instead moving the plate of pancakes in front of Iori. "You should be resting, not doing work. These are for you."

Iori sighed, obliging and taking a bite of the pancake. He seemed surprised, instinctively turning to look at Riku, before he caught himself and quickly glanced away, cheeks burning. "Did you make these?"

He's flustered, Riku realised, Iori's scent giving him away almost immediately. It was strange that Riku could pick up even the finer nuances in Iori's scent now, and he wasn't entirely sure if it had anything to do with the triggered heat and rut. Sheepishly, Riku scratched the back of his head. "I made them with Mitsuki. It was more like he prepared everything and just made sure they didn't get burnt," he admitted.

"Thank you, Nanase-san," Iori said, staring holes into the bear-shaped pancakes as he ate them.

It didn't take a genius to realise that he was purposefully avoiding looking at Riku, and although the alpha had a good guess as to why, it still made him slightly upset. With a small sigh, Riku leaned on the wall right beside the desk, making sure that he was in Iori's field of vision. "Hey Iori, I think it's time we have a talk about this... bond, or whatever you want to call it."
Iori's hand stilled, and he slowly set the fork down before turning to Riku, one hand automatically moving up to cover his face, although his gaze was still averted away from the alpha. He couldn't stop thinking about how he'd spent his entire heat fantasising about what the alpha could do to him, and hell if that wasn't one way to make things more awkward than they already were. He was about to tell Riku to continue when he felt a gentle hand on his wrist, and he glanced up to see that Riku was right in front of him. The alpha was standing too close, and Iori felt like he wascocooned in Riku's scent – the scent that had sent him into an early heat.

"Don't cover your face like that," Riku chided. "You know I won't judge you."

"Is that so..." Iori trailed off, willing himself to look Riku in the eye. "Okay, you start first, Nanase-san."

Riku hummed, clearly trying to find a good way to begin. "I'm sorry, for accidentally triggering your heat. I didn't expect that that would happen, and I'm also sorry for, you know, going berserk that morning. My alpha completely took over, and we obviously know what he wanted," he said with a forced chuckle. Then he swallowed hard, trying to find the courage to say what he wanted to say next. "I'm going to be completely honest, Iori, and I'm sorry if this makes you uncomfortable. Throughout those four days of rut, the only thing I could think about was you."

The silence between them lasted merely a few seconds, Iori's expression deadpan but his cheeks slowly turning red, and Riku made a noise that resembled a dying whale. "Okay, maybe you can forget that part. Okay? Forget I ever said that!"

"No, I was the same," Iori confessed, his teeth worrying at his lip. "But that only means that my omega wants this bond. It isn't a clear representation of what I feel."

Riku tried not to think about the fact that Iori had also thought of him throughout his heat, although his alpha was soaring with joy and it honestly made him feel flattered. He cocked his head to the side, a small smile playing at his lips. "And what do you feel?"

The omega shook his head. "I don't know yet," he admitted, his breath coming out in a sigh. "When I think of how I'm already so used to you being around... honestly? It scares me. And realising that you lost control scared me, too. I don't like to be dependent on others, if it wasn't already obvious enough. We've only known each other for less than half a year, and I don't want to rush into anything that we won't be able to take back."

Riku took some time to absorb whatever Iori just told him, a real smile stretching across his face this time. "Me too. I like you, Iori, but I'm also still unsure if this is what I really want. No matter what we feel, though, this fated pair thing isn't going to disappear on its own, and we already know what our secondary genders feel about this. So instead of rushing into anything, will you let me properly court you?" he asked, bowing slightly to the omega sitting in front of him.

"That's surprisingly mature of you, Nanase-san," Iori couldn't help but comment, chuckling when Riku jolted back upright, looking almost insulted by what Iori said. He opened his mouth to speak, but Iori cut him off, continuing with, "It sounds like a good plan, but what do we do after that?"

"Eh?" Riku blinked, as if he never thought that far ahead.

"If we end up liking each other for, well, ourselves, then what? We're idols, Nanase-san. Nobody outside of the company even knows that I'm an omega. What happens if we want to mate? Get married? Have kids?"

Choking on his saliva, Riku had to do a double-take. Sometimes he couldn't believe that Iori was still
in high school, with how in-depth his thought processes were. But he knew Iori wasn't wrong, and that there was a lot more they had to figure out than just their own feelings. "I guess we'll have to talk to Manager and the President, don't we?" Riku's shoulders sagged, and he couldn't help but sigh. "But if they don't approve of me at least courting you, are we just going to have to tiptoe around each other?"

"I don't know," Iori said honestly, brows furrowed in thought. "We should talk to them as soon as we can then, shouldn't we?"

Riku nodded in agreement, lips pressed together into a firm line. "And if they allow it?"

The corners of Iori's eyes crinkled, and the omega smiled softly at the alpha. "Then I'll gladly accept."

Chapter End Notes

I think at the end of chapter 6 it was pretty obvious that Iori was in heat... right? I've never been very good at writing anything smutty (I enjoy reading it but writing it seems awkward to me idky) so I usually try to keep it short. Unless it's an important part then I'll do my best to write it HAHA. I hope this chapter was up to standards because it kinda jumped to a short flashback and that might have been confusing orz. Hope you guys enjoyed and please leave comments! :')
Riku and Iori had planned to talk to Tsumugi and Otoharu the next day, they honestly did, but then the President told the group that their job for the day was to relax and have fun, and somehow the seven boys found themselves on the way to a camping resort for a barbecue.

It didn’t take a genius to know that they had planned this outing mostly for Iori’s sake, although it was probably good for everyone to unwind and take their mind off what happened during Music Festa. It had been a little over a week since then, and there were a handful of articles talking about how the indies group IDOLiSH7 had messed up their performance on the nationally broadcasted programme.

Things hadn’t really changed between Riku and Iori in the span of one day, the two of them still bickering as they usually did, though both knew that they were only putting up a front for the others. It couldn’t be helped; they couldn’t progress their relationship if they didn’t manage to get the green light from the company.

Riku was pretty worried about it, in fact, almost as much as he was worried about Iori. He really did want to court Iori properly, win the omega over with not just his scent and the fact that they were a fated pair, but with his own charms and personality as well. Knowing the omega, he was probably still harping on what happened at Music Festa, and so Riku found himself treating Iori more delicately than he normally would.

He had been hanging by the riverside, staring into the clear running water in awe, but when Riku looked up, he spotted Iori standing with Sougo where they had unloaded the car. The alpha frowned, heading back up the stairs just as Iori picked up one of their cooler boxes containing the meat for the barbecue. Riku grabbed the box from Iori, grinning at the omega. "I'll carry it. Iori, you go play," Riku told him, going over to the barbecue pit to put everything down.

Iori sighed as he watched Riku walk away, the corners of his lips turned down in a grimace. "Play, huh?"

After Tamaki offered a live crab to Iori, which the omega refused, the group gathered back by the riverside to distribute tasks. The moment Mitsuki offered to fish with Iori, Riku volunteered too, a fierce determination on his face. Iori wasn't sure what the alpha was being so determined about: spending time with him, or actually doing a good job at fishing?

Iori's question was answered about thirty minutes later, as Riku let out a frustrated groan, watching the fifth fish swim away happily with his bait in its mouth. "Another one got away!" Riku exclaimed, disappointment written all over his face. Iori snuck a glance at the alpha, almost wanting to laugh at how cute he was and barely being able to maintain his expression.

Mitsuki sighed, sending a half-hearted glare to Riku. "You idiot! They just ate the bait."

So much for turning this into a competition... Iori thought blandly, recalling Riku’s words from before. "Let's compete to see who can catch more fish!" Riku had suggested.

"The fish must be happy that we opened this free restaurant for them right on the river," Iori muttered, just loud enough for Riku to hear. He was teasing, of course, but it still amused him when
Riku made a strangled noise, clearly annoyed, and frowning at Iori when he thought the omega wasn't paying attention.

Riku turned to Mitsuki, an idea coming to mind. "Hey Mitsuki, what was Iori like as a kid?"

Iori's reaction was immediate, head whipping around to look at Riku while gaping openly. It wasn't that he recalled actually having any embarrassing moments in his childhood, but his memory only went so far – what if something had happened when he was barely a toddler that he didn't know about?

"Well, this one time..." Mitsuki started, and Iori paled, staring at his older brother in horror. Of all the ways to start off a currently non-existent relationship, this was one of the absolute worst. Iori couldn't even control what kind of embarrassing things Mitsuki would tell Riku if he didn't know what it was. The beta paused for a long while, and Iori gulped. He was sure Riku could smell his irrational fear, or maybe it was embarrassment, he wasn't sure anymore. "...Actually, there isn't even an embarrassing episode to speak of," Mitsuki finally continued, and Iori had never felt so relieved. His and Riku's relationship had already started out weirdly, and he wanted to do things in a proper order, although he highly doubted it would be possible. When Riku seemed disappointed, Iori smiled, looking at Mitsuki cheekily. "I have a lot of cute stories about you, nii-san."

"Shut up!" Mitsuki warned. "How about you, Riku? Any embarrassing stories about Kujo Tenn?"

Immediately Iori felt his mood shift, an unfamiliar jealousy bubbling up in his chest when the alpha perked up instantly. *Of course he would be happy to talk about Tenn-nii*, Iori thought sourly, hating how ungrounded his jealousy was. It made perfect sense that Riku was happy to talk about his brother, if Tenn had been a proper brother to Riku. All Iori could think about was the fact that Tenn had abandoned Riku, and that he had been so disgustingly cold to Riku after their Music Festa performance.

He truly couldn't understand why Riku still couldn't accept that Tenn had obviously disowned their family. Riku thought for a few moments, a fond smile making its way onto his face, and Iori's omega wasn't pleased. "Tenn-nii was good at everything, and he was nice, too."

"So why'd someone like that abandon his family?" Mitsuki asked flatly.

Iori couldn't help but want to spite the alpha too. "Was he really that nice?"

Riku's shoulders sagged, and Iori wondered if they'd gone a little too far. He hadn't honestly wanted to hurt Riku's feelings, but his omega was just all over the place with jealousy that was ridiculous to begin with. The alpha sat back down, his brows set in a frown.

"But, man, that ice-cold stare of Kujo's really got to me..." Mitsuki mumbled.

That, Iori could understand, and it felt doubly bad because in Iori's opinion, he was still the one at fault. Riku had delivered flawlessly despite being on the verge of an attack, and he'd gone and screwed everything and everyone over. "Every night, in between bouts of heat, I've had dreams about that concert," the omega admitted. "We're at the same studio, singing the same song, dancing the same dance..."

Riku cut in. "Then you forget the song the same way and wake up in a cold sweat?"

It took Iori a while to process what Riku said, and he exclaimed, "Apparently, you're also insensitive, on top of being stupid! Besides, how could I possibly have woken up in cold sweat in the middle of my heat? Does that make any sense to you?"
Iori knew better than anyone that Riku was far from insensitive; the alpha was perhaps too sensitive, always able to pick up on Iori’s mood, although he didn’t always behave accordingly. If Riku hadn’t been so sensitive and thoughtful, the triggered heat would never have happened in the first place. But perhaps this was Riku trying to lighten the mood.

Or so Iori thought, until Riku continued, huffing indignantly. "You never show any sensitivity either... But I am sorry. If I go too far, I bet you’ll start crying again!" he snickered, and Iori thought he caught a hint of hopefulness in Riku's tone. Does he want me to cry?

"Do you want me to push you in!?" Iori asked, faking anger to conceal his confusion.

Mitsuki’s eye twitched, and he finally snapped at Riku. "You're going to drive the fish away if you don't shut up!"

"Sorry, I'll be quiet," Riku apologised, sounding like a kicked puppy, and Iori nearly let out a chuckle at how ridiculous it all was. Riku didn’t have to take orders from Mitsuki, not if he didn't want to, but Riku was nothing if not a tame alpha.

"Do you think loudmouth Nanase-san could ever keep quiet?"

A growl rumbled in the back of Riku's throat, and Iori felt a shudder run through his body. It would've been a natural reaction, if Riku had actually meant to be threatening, but the shudder was anything but unpleasant, and Iori had to fight to keep a blush from surfacing. "Iori..." Riku's voice was low, almost as if he was trying to elicit some sort of reaction from Iori, and the omega was glad that his heat had just ended. If it hadn't, it certainly would've been triggered now. Then Riku huffed, turning away. "You were cute when you were crying, either way."

Iori's eyes widened slightly, and he looked away from Riku, unsure of what expression he should make. He wasn't going to deny that it felt good to know that Riku thought of him as cute, but the fact that it was only when he was crying was a little upsetting.

Belatedly, Riku gasped, finally realising what his words implied, but by then Mitsuki had thrown his arm around Iori's shoulders and grinning brightly. "Don't worry, you're cute even when you're not crying," he assured, and Iori found himself gaping for the second time that day.

"Nii-san..."

From somewhere behind him, Iori heard Riku say "That's right!", and suddenly he was pushed off the small ledge that they had been sitting on, landing in the stream below.

The cold water broke Iori out of his thoughts, and even as Mitsuki was laughing about how cold it was, Iori frowned, giving Riku the angriest look he could muster at the moment. "Nanase-san-!"

"The fish!"

---

"I'm not doing this anymore. Peeling potatoes and carrots is troublesome."

Sougo turned to look at Tamaki, frowning as the alpha threw the potato and peeler onto the cutting board. "No! Please, keep trying," he urged, already busy with the task of washing and preparing all
"Souchan, you do it," Tamaki drawled. "What's the point of this, anyway?"

"We'll be debuting as a duo soon, so it would be reassuring for the others if we could get along."

Tamaki scoffed, barely resisting the urge to roll his eyes at the omega. What was it with Sougo and his idealism, anyway? It was clear that the two of them had nearly nothing in common with each other.

Sougo worked to please, while Tamaki did things at his own pace. The two couldn't be any more different from each other. *So why are we a fated pair?* Tamaki thought, sighing inwardly.

"If you said you wanted to get along, that's fine. But to get along just because someone else tells you to..." Tamaki trailed off. He briefly wondered why he was so ticked off in the first place. Did he *want* to get along with Sougo?

*No, finding Aya is my priority.*

And yet, the alpha still said, "That doesn't make me happy at all."

Sougo stared at Tamaki blankly, and the alpha stood up with his back facing the omega. "Sorry, I'm not going to get along with you just so that /Yamasan/ will praise y-"

There had been a bite in Tamaki’s voice when he mentioned Yamato, and for a short moment, Sougo let himself fantasise that maybe Tamaki was capable of jealousy after all.

But more so than that, Sougo needed Tamaki to just play nice, at least while they were in front of the others. So, when Tamaki turned to look at Sougo, he was met with a knife in his face.

"Pick up the potato," Sougo ordered, his voice as gentle as always, and yet Tamaki could sense the underlying threat. "Pick up the potato. Peel from top to bottom. Dig the eyes out with the tip."

"Are you threatening me!?"

"Must I repeat myself?"

"N-no! Fine, I'll do it, so put the knife down! That's dangerous!"

Tamaki reluctantly did as told, and Sougo watched to make sure he wasn't slacking off. "You know, during groupwork, we have to match ourselves with others."

Tamaki made a face. "In that case, I hate groupwork."

It was nothing more than a blatant lie. Tamaki could work fine with everyone else, even Iori, although sometimes the other high schooler was a little too strict for Tamaki’s liking.

But when he was with Sougo, he always had to fight his inner alpha's desires. It had been easy at first, convincing himself that he wasn't in the least interested in a relationship. Over the months, though, he was starting to see that Sougo wasn't as perfect as he made himself seem.

And Tamaki wanted to know why.

With another soft sigh, he asked, "Do you like curry?"

Sougo blinked in confusion, nodding. "I like it. It's because I like spicy food."
Nodding, Tamaki said, "Okay. I'll try my best to make curry if you want to eat it. I prefer that kind of groupwork."

"...what's the difference?"

If Sougo himself wanted something, then Tamaki wasn't so against the idea of doing it with or for him. He just hated when Sougo hid behind others, using the excuse of "They want us to do this, so we should."

"Souchan, peeling potatoes or carrots is easier than peeling to your true self," Tamaki commented. Sougo was awfully good at hiding his true feelings, even as sensitive as Tamaki was to his scent. When would the omega stop running away?

Sougo looked perplexed. "I see..."

"You said that without understanding, didn't you? This guy..." Tamaki muttered, somehow unable to help the amused smile that made its way onto his lips.

"I'm thinking about it now."

Ah, well. I have plenty of time to peel through his walls.

---

After what seemed like too long a day, night finally arrived, and the group of ten sat around the table with plates full of food and drinks in their hands.

"Cheers!"

They did a toast, gulping their drinks down before they started eating. The adults were drinking alcohol, as expected, but Riku still wrinkled his nose slightly at the smell. It wasn't so much that he disliked the smell of alcohol, but it reminded him of the club his parents used to own, before it was bought over by Kujo nearly a decade ago.

Shaking his head slightly, because now was a time for celebration and not negative thoughts, Riku picked up one of the fish that they had painstakingly caught. It was a little small, but they had lost half of their catch when Riku accidentally tipped the container over.

The alpha turned to Iori, who was sitting right beside him, and grinned. "Iori, want to split a fish?"

Iori looked at Riku with a raised brow. "It's kind of small, isn't it?"

Riku gasped, looking offended, and waved the fish in front of Iori. "It wasn't easy to catch, alright?"

“Yes, well, if you recall, I was there too, Nanase-san," Iori pointed out dryly, before gesturing at the sad looking plate of fish on the table. “We would have had more if somebody wasn’t such a klutz.”

Looking sadly at the fish, Riku mumbled a “Sorry”, and Iori sighed.

“It can’t be helped, with so little fish to go around. I’ll share with you.”
That made Riku perk up immediately, and he took a small bite out of the grilled fish before handing it over to the omega. Iori chuckled, and they ended up each taking tiny bites and passing the fish back and forth, until there was just a tiny bit left and Riku insisted that Iori eat it. He could tell that the alpha was still clearly trying to take care of him, and although he honestly didn’t need it, Iori found that it felt nice being taken care of once in a while.

They helped to clear the table after eating, quickly disposing of everything before heading into their lodging to play the King’s Game. The pair ended up sitting together, Mitsuki on Iori’s other side, and Iori wasn’t sure if it was intentional, but it was comforting to have the alpha near him.

“Iori, what’s your number?” Riku asked, looking at Iori hopefully.

“We’re not supposed to announce our numbers, Nanase-san,” he pointed out, the two of them turning to look at Sougo as he went up to Otoharu, completely terrified of what he had to do. The omega was visibly trembling as he lifted his hand up, apologising before he flicked Otoharu’s forehead, immediately going onto his knees when the latter scrunched his face up in pain.

Iori felt bad for Sougo, because he definitely wouldn’t have wanted to flick the company’s president on the forehead. The sticks were redistributed, and this time it was Yamato who was the king. The beta thought long and hard, before a smirk made its way onto his face.

“Number 6 has to let the king use their lap as a pillow!”

There was a sort of ominous aura coming from the president, although he too was a beta, and Yamato grinned at Otoharu. “A King’s Game has to be fair. Manager, what number are you?”

“Number 2!” Tsumugi smiled, and Iori snorted as Yamato fell to the ground in a heap.

Suddenly Iori heard rapid patting beside him, as someone asked who number 6 was, and the omega turned to be met with an overly eager Riku. The alpha was patting his thigh, beaming at Yamato and telling him, “Yamato-san, come here!”

Iori narrowed his eyes, barely preventing a scowl from showing on his face. Of all the people in the room, he knew Yamato was the least likely to think of Riku as anything more than a younger brother. In fact, Iori knew he had nothing to be jealous of because Riku had already explicitly stated his interest in him, but his omega was irrational as always.

“Onii-san isn’t really interested in another man's lap…” Yamato trailed off, and Iori relaxed slightly.

"Don't be shy!" Riku urged. "I'm really glad you picked me!"

Iori cleared his throat. “Nanase-san, do you know how this works?”

After Yamato begrudgingly let Nagi take a photo of him laying on Riku’s lap, the game continued without much of a fuss. Nagi got a turn at being the king, as did Mitsuki. The older Izumi had been showing Nagi what shirimoji was, writing his name in the air with his butt, when Sougo drunkenly giggled. "You're both so cute."

Taking his eyes off Mitsuki, Iori agreed, mumbling, "Yes, very cute..." Before turning to where Sougo's voice had come from. He blinked in surprise, shocked to see the other omega lying on Riku's lap. He wasn't sure what to feel, knowing that Sougo was completely drunk and would never do this if he was sober. But he still couldn't help making a face, because, intentional or not, Sougo was an omega, and Riku wasn't his alpha to be lying down on.
But before Iori could say anything, Tamaki exclaimed, "No fair, Souchan! You're not even the king!" Iori couldn't help but wonder if maybe Tamaki was jealous, too, despite the two of them not having mentioned their status yet. Just like himself, Iori figured that Tamaki's alpha wasn't making life easy for him, getting riled up by anything and everything involving their fated partners.

"Taa-kun, shut up," Sougo grumbled.

The alpha frowned more than he already was, pointing to himself. "Taa-kun!?"

"S-Sougo-san, my legs are going numb," Riku cut in, breaking up the fight between the other fated pair.

Sougo let out an displeased whine. "No! I want my pillow!"

Riku turned to look at Iori for help, and the omega gave him an unimpressed look. "You seemed to be enjoying the attention," he snapped, not bothering to hide the bite in his voice. The others were either passed out drunk or busy arguing with each other, so nobody was listening in on their conversation, and Iori didn't bother keeping up his image. "Isn't it nice having an omega on your lap?"

For a moment Riku was taken aback, his smile disappearing as he wondered what made Iori so angry. Then it clicked, and Riku had to bite back a smile. Heh, so Iori is this sensitive, huh? Riku carefully shifted Sougo's head off of his lap, gently resting it on the floor before he shifted closer to Iori. "Do you want to, too?" he asked cheekily.

Iori sputtered, face rapidly turning as red as Riku's hair. "Are you stupid? Why would I?"

Riku's smile only widened. "Are you sure?"

"O-of course! Anyway, we should be getting to ready for bed now!"

Iori was steadfastly avoiding looking at Riku, and the alpha was pleased to know that he had this much of an effect on the omega. He didn't even protest when Iori started rounding everyone up, simply kept smiling as he helped him.

---

That night, Riku lay in bed, unable to sleep with Iori so close to him. The omega was still wearing his usual scent neutralisers, lest any fans happened to see him and find out about his secondary gender, but Riku could smell right through that anyway.

Iori's anger and jealousy seemed to have faded for the most part, for which Riku was glad, and his breathing was evened out as he tried to sleep. The omega sighed as Riku shifted around restlessly, suddenly asking, "Hey Iori, want me to sleep next to you?"

Iori felt his cheeks burn, even if Riku didn't mean it as anything more than actual sleeping. "What for?"

"In case you get another scary nightmare!"

At this Iori opened his eyes, another sigh leaving his lips as he replied, "You can drop it, Nanase-san.
You've been trying all day to ask whether I'm okay, whether I'm still affected by my failure. I just got out of a heat, so it's hard to get back into the swing of things immediately. But you don't have to be so worried. What if you tear yourself down while picking at other people's wounds?

He meant what he said – Riku was sensitive, and he often let people's words get to him. Iori didn't mean to be especially harsh to the alpha, but he'd always been bad at expressing himself, and nagging someone was the way he showed that he cared about them. He just hoped that Riku could understand that much, because he most certainly did not dislike the alpha.

"I'm not torn down," Riku mumbled, and Iori felt him plop back down onto the pillow. "I just feel like it was my fault; both the heat and the performance."

Chuckling, Iori sat up, turning to see that Riku was sulking now. "You're terrible at this, Nanase-san," he said, unable to help the small smile that crept onto his face. The alpha was unbelievably cute sometimes, so much that Iori's mask kept slipping. He turned away, trying not to be too obvious in his staring. "Seriously, I'm fine."

A pillow hit Iori's head, and the omega schooled his expression before turning around. "What is it?"

"That made me happy!"

What did? Iori wanted to ask, but the only thing that made it past his lips was a confused "Huh?" before another pillow hit him in the head again, this time thrown by Nagi. The alpha seemed excited despite having been woken up, with hair sticking up in all directions.

Tamaki woke up next, rubbing his eyes sleepily while asking, "Are we pillow fighting?"

"We're not pillow fighting!" Iori exclaimed, as Mitsuki shoved a pillow right in his face.

Iori groaned and got back up, standing and facing Riku. "You're okay when you're sad, but I like you best the way you usually are!" the alpha exclaimed, hurling the pillow directly at Iori.

The omega caught it with ease. "You're the one who was sad, Nanase-san! Let me just say, it was really obvious!" Iori retorted, because he'd been able to smell it from Riku's scent, too. It wasn't just about the performance, but the triggered heat had really weighed heavily on Riku's mind, too.

Riku flushed slightly, clenching his fist as he thought of a comeback, but Iori merely chuckled.

"W-well neither are you! Are you going to cry again?" Riku teased.

Iori's grip on the pillow tightened.

"I won't cry," he said determinedly. "No matter what happens next time, I'll deal with it right away."

He threw the pillow back at Riku, and the alpha's brows furrowed in thought as he tried to come up with something to say. "I, um... I'm going to watch my health and sing my heart out!" was what he decided on. "I won't make you worry ever again!" and the pillow made its way back to Iori.

Iori smiled, even though he knew it was impossible. He would always worry about Riku, regardless of what it was about, because the alpha was just that hopeless on his own. But the others were awake now, and he wasn't about to admit anything aloud. "I never worried!" Iori said instead, but Riku's grin was enough to let him know that the alpha didn't buy it.

Pillows were flung around as everyone announced their resolutions from now on, until the door to
their room opened and Tsumugi came in, clearly displeased. "You're bothering the other guests!"

"Sorry," the five of them chorused, settling back down onto their mattresses.

It was silent, everyone trying to get to sleep, but Riku spoke up again, this time in a whisper. "My offer still stands, Iori."

"Goodnight, Nanase-san," Iori sighed, and he could almost imagine Riku pouting.

The alpha huffed indignantly, although there was no malice in his voice. Iori wasn't sure if he was flattered that Riku actually wanted to sleep next to him, but it was still too early for something as intimate as that. That didn't mean he didn't think about it, though.

"Goodnight, Iori."

Chapter End Notes

A very filler-ish chapter but jealous Iori is never a bad thing HAHA. I kind of slacked off a little on typing this past week so I won't be updating next week-- gotta catch back up lmao rip. Please wait patiently for chapter 9!

On another note, I know that one of you left a pretty nasty comment on my irl friend's fic. I won't say who, and I won't say which fic it was, but if you're reading this, you know who you are. As much as I'm glad to know that you're enjoying Unexpected as much as I am writing it, please /don't/ bash other fics. It doesn't matter whether you think the writing isn't good or if you simply don't like the pairing. Different authors have their own styles of writing, and nobody's forcing you to read it if you don't want to. If you have nothing nice to say, don't. All of us put a lot of effort into writing fics, and even if we enjoy it, it doesn't mean that it doesn't hurt to see a nasty comment bashing said fic. So please, if you're reading this, don't do it again. In fact, it would be great if you remove the comment entirely. She didn't talk to me about it personally, but she did say that she was hurt to receive such a comment. Sorry for this lengthy nag but I honestly think that the world would be a much better place if people just avoid what they don't like instead of outright bashing others.

That's all from me for now, see y'all in two weeks!
The next day, Iori and Riku were in the office, standing in front of Otoharu. Tsumugi and Banri were on either side of the president, and he seemed mildly confused about why the two were looking for him. After all, they’d just returned from their trip and he’d expected them to want to take a short break.

“So are either of you going to start?” he asked with a small chuckle.

The alpha and omega exchanged looks with each other. They were both nervous, despite Iori not showing it outwardly, because they knew that Otoharu’s decision was going to affect their lives drastically from now on. Iori found that he didn’t want to have to avoid Riku, but as long as the both of them were unmated, it would be difficult to resist the other’s scent.

Riku nudged Iori, urging him to go first, and Iori sighed. It was probably better that he explained things anyway – just like Tamaki, Riku wasn’t the best at explaining himself. It would be disastrous if Otoharu misunderstood their intentions.

Or if Riku accidentally used his alpha voice. That would be bad, too.

Clearing his throat, Iori said, “Nanase-san and I are alpha and omega. I’m sure everyone here knows that. You’re all also aware that my heat ended just a few days ago, but it was actually due to start in two days.”

They nodded, and Iori noticed that Banri could tell where this was going. He took a deep breath, glancing at Riku and receiving an encouraging smile from the alpha. He continued. “I’m not sure if you’re aware that it was triggered from the stress of fumbling the Music Festa performance, as well as… being in close proximity with Nanase-san afterwards.”

“I went to Iori’s room because I was worried about him after the performance and ended up trying to comfort him with calming pheromones,” Riku explained, frowning as he recalled the events from that night. He never would’ve expected Iori’s heat to be triggered, because nothing had seemed off with the omega during the entire time they were together. “The next day I woke up and kind of lost it, I guess. It triggered a rut, too.”

Otoharu nodded in understanding, brows furrowed in thought. Banri seemed to understand enough, being an omega himself, while Tsumugi looked concerned; what for, Iori wasn’t sure. Was she concerned for their wellbeing, or because this was going to have a major impact on IDOLiSH7 as a group?

It seemed like an eternity before Otoharu replied, and Riku’s hand slipped into Iori’s. The omega would have pulled away, embarrassed, if not for the fact that he could smell the nervousness radiating off of Riku. The alpha’s palm was slightly sweaty, and he was gripping Iori’s hand with much more force than he should have. Honestly, Iori couldn’t tell whether Riku was trying to comfort him, or if he was trying to seek comfort from Iori. But it wasn’t a bad feeling, holding Riku’s hand, despite the situation they were currently in. So Iori didn’t pull away.

“What are your plans?” Otoharu finally asked, expression serious as he looked between the pair.

“That would have to depend on your decision, President,” Iori countered, although he didn’t mean to
be rude. He didn’t want to get his hopes up, didn’t want to get Riku’s hopes up. The fact that Otoharu had scouted him at all was already too kind of the beta, because Iori understood how it could be difficult for omegas to be in this industry. He couldn’t assume that this time would be the same.

Otoharu hummed in thought, turning to Riku instead. “How about you, Riku-kun?”

“If possible, I would like to properly court Iori,” Riku replied, earning a smile from the beta.

“Well, I don’t see why you can’t,” Otoharu said, laughing as both boys’ eyes widened in surprise. “Not so fast. Of course, we have to lay down a few rules. First and foremost, never let anyone outside the company find out about your relationship. Rival companies might make use of that knowledge to target you, and fans don’t always take so kindly to relationships between idols. Next, you’ll have to inform us of any big decisions – mating, and whatever comes after that. If you intend to spend heats and ruts together, I expect you to be responsible. For now, I want your priority to be IDOLiSH7, is that understood?”

The two nodded, and Otoharu heaved a sigh of relief. “That wasn’t so bad, was it? Tsumugi-kun, please keep an eye on them,” he told his daughter, and Tsumugi nodded in understanding. Then he turned to Banri, a wistful expression crossing his features for a fraction of a moment. “If you two have any questions, I’m sure Banri-kun can help, even if he doesn’t have an alpha. Is there anything else?”

“No, sir,” Iori said, bowing thankfully and pulling Riku down into a bow with him. “Thank you.”

---

Their web show was launched, and MEZZO debuted.

Up till now, none of them really knew what was going on between the fated pair. They didn’t act any differently from when they first met, although they spoke to each other more often now, if only for the sake of discussing work. Sougo was still on suppressants, too, and had yet to have a heat.

Yamato was casted in a new drama, and IDOLiSH7 steadily grew more popular.

It was only a couple of weeks later that the seven boys were gathered back in the office, and Otoharu was looking at them with a pleased smile on his face. "IDOLiSH7 will be preparing for their debut," he announced, not giving anyone time to react before he continued. "And for that, you will need to shoot your MV. So you'll be headed to Okinawa."

And that was how they found themselves on a plane to Okinawa. Iori ended up beside Yamato, a solid three seats away from Riku. It hadn't been intentional, but they had decided beforehand not to stick together while in public.

Nothing much had changed about their relationship, although Riku found himself in Iori's room almost every night. There was little to no time to go out together, so they usually spent time together in the dorms after schedules. They didn't do much, either – Iori usually looked over schoolwork or tried to come up with promotion plans, while Riku sat at the side with a book or a game. Sometimes Riku would try to help, because Iori had already given up on hiding the fact that he helped Tsumugi out with management, but the omega would chase him back to his bean bag.
Other times, they would lounge around in the living room, sometimes with the others but usually alone. It was awkward at first, since neither of them had any relationship experience. The others already knew about their decision, supported it wholeheartedly, and for that the two were glad.

Iori didn't even know what he was supposed to call Riku now. Was he his boyfriend? But they weren't quite in a relationship yet. Just because Riku was courting Iori didn't mean that they were automatically together, although Iori could foresee himself caving sooner rather than later.

They stayed that way for the entirety of the filming, only finally letting their guards down when they made it to the hotel they were staying in. It had been a long morning, and it was time to take a break as Tsumugi ran through the schedule for tomorrow.

"I'm exhausted," Mitsuki sighed, and Riku hummed in agreement.

"Yeah."

Then they turned to each other, each wearing similar grins. "But I'm having so much fun!"

"Mitsuki!"

"Riku!"

"We're finally debuting!"

Iori watched their interaction blankly, not sure what to make of it. He wasn't jealous of his brother, he knew that much. At least, not in the romantic sense. But Iori had always been more reserved, less inclined to initiate physical touches of any sort, and sometimes he wondered how it came so naturally for others. "Men shouldn't hug each other," he said, trying not to scowl. It was a bitter pill to swallow, but Iori wanted to be comfortable around Riku, too. "It's overbearing."

The two broke apart, Mitsuki wriggling his eyebrows suggestively at Iori, and the younger Izumi felt his eyebrow twitch. He knew Mitsuki could tell what he was thinking; they weren't brothers for nothing, and the beta knew exactly which buttons of Iori's to push.

It didn't help that Riku was looking at Iori with the most innocent smile, completely unaware of the situation, and Iori couldn't even find it in himself to be annoyed by the alpha. Riku made his way over to sit beside Iori, still wearing the same grin, as Tsumugi continued to brief them on their schedules.

They were interrupted by a commercial playing on the large TV screen in the lobby, TRIGGER's Tsunashi Ryuunosuke's face appearing onscreen in a beer advertisement. The group couldn't take their eyes off the screen, not until the advertisement ended and a familiar voice was laughing awkwardly down the corridor.

They all turned to the direction of the voice, surprised to see Ryuu there in person, with a girl hanging off his arm. Then suddenly the other two members of TRIGGER appeared, and Iori watched as Riku got up almost instinctively.

The omega watched Tenn from the corner of his eye, as Riku said, "Tenn-nii..."

He watched Tenn turn away wordlessly, and he couldn't help the surge of anger that rose in his chest. Riku's shoulders sagged in defeat, and he sank back down in his seat. "They completely ignored us," Mitsuki mumbled, and Riku only looked more disappointed.

Iori wanted to reach out to the alpha, maybe try to comfort him. He wasn't good with pretty words
though, so even if he could have the chance to comfort Riku, he doubted that he would do a very good job of it. That didn't mean he was any less angry at Tenn for blatantly ignoring Riku, acting as if the redhead didn't exist.

"Nanase-san, don't mind him," was what he ended up saying. It seemed lacking, even to his own ears, but they were in the hotel lobby and there were guests around. There wasn't much that he could do without revealing their relationship.

The alpha didn't reply, simply smiling sadly and shaking his head.

---

"Hey Iori, I'm going to go out for a bit."

Iori looked up from his book, acting as if he didn't already know where Riku was headed.

It was late at night now, and everyone was in their own rooms. MEZZO was sharing a room, as were Iori and Riku, Yamato alone, and Nagi with Mitsuki. Mitsuki had been supposed to room with Iori, but the elder had strongly objected, insisting that the two fated pairs should room together to improve their relationship with each other.

Tsumugi had had her concerns, but she trusted the boys enough not to do anything reckless, and so Iori found himself in the same room as Riku. They had both already showered and were lounging around doing their own things, as usual. It wasn't that they didn't want their relationship to progress any further, but they simply had no time, and Otoharu was right in saying that IDOLiSH7 was the priority for now.

"Where to? It's already late, Nanase-san. You know your body needs to rest," he sighed, staring at Riku as he shuffled his feet slightly. He didn't feel good letting Riku go to find Tenn on his own, but this was something that Riku needed, and Iori could respect that much. Still, he was worried.

Riku made a face. "I won't stay out too late. Besides, I asked Manager for permission just now, so you don't have to wait up for me," the alpha assured, forcing a smile at Iori. Iori only sighed again, putting his book down and rummaging around his things.

He managed to find his jacket, holding it out to Riku and earning a confused look from him. Iori cleared his throat awkwardly, already feeling his cheeks begin to flush. "Wear this. I'm sure it has my scent on it and maybe it'll help to calm you down if you get agitated," he explained, biting on his lower lip as he waited for Riku to respond.

The alpha looked at the jacket for a moment, deep in thought, before he grinned. "Can I get the real thing, then?"

"Huh?!" Iori sputtered.

"What I meant was, can you scent me?"

"That's..." Iori trailed off, and he was sure his face was bright red by now. He didn't want to admit it, but he had never once been scented by or scented anyone. Why would he, when his family was full of betas? There had never been a need to, and he wasn't sure he knew how, but Riku was looking at him hopefully and he couldn't find it in himself to refuse. "J-just with our wrists, then?"
Riku beamed, nodding, and Iori hesitantly moved closer to the redhead, sitting down on the bed beside him. "I've never done this before, so please tell me if I'm doing anything wrongly," Iori admitted, bringing his wrist to Riku's and rubbing his scent glands against the alpha's slowly. It felt strangely calming, as their scents slowly mixed together, and Riku's eyes fluttered close, obviously relaxed.

Iori was about to pull away when Riku grabbed his hand, bringing it up to the nape of his neck and rubbing it against the scent glands there. Iori thought it was impossible for him to be even more embarrassed than he already was, but he couldn't help the small shudder that ran through his body.

Scenting was an oddly intimate gesture, but it felt nice, and even though he was supposed to be scenting Riku, a soft purr escaped Iori's lips. It seemed like forever before Riku finally let his wrist go, and Iori hid his face in his hands almost immediately. It didn't help that he could smell Riku on him, now, and he quickly grabbed his phone before making his escape. "I'll be discussing something with Nikaidou-san, so I'll see you later," he said, bolting out of the door with a face as red as Riku's hair.

He distantly heard the alpha chuckling as he made his way to the room beside his, knocking on the door and entering when Yamato opened it for him. "Whoa, slow down there, Ichi. What's up with you?" Yamato asked, raising a brow as Iori promptly sank down onto the empty chair and burying his face in the jacket that he was still holding onto.

"Please don't ask," Iori pleaded, barely managing to steady his voice.

The only thing he could seek comfort in was the fact that Riku hadn't been forward enough to suggest scenting each other with the scent glands on their throats. It was far too early for that, and Iori was sure he would've died from embarrassment from it.

"Did Riku do something?"

Iori shook his head wordlessly, trying not to be affected by the fact that Riku's smell was still strong on him. Every time he breathed, he could smell the alpha's rich scent, and he'd be damned if he said that he didn't like it. When he finally regained his composure, he looked up at Yamato with a sort of grimace. "He said he's going out, and I think we all know where to," Iori explained.

Realisation dawned on the beta's face, and soon his expression mirrored Iori's. "Is that so..." he mumbled, already reaching for the telephone by the bed and dialling a number. Iori was confused, until Yamato started speaking to the person at the other end of the line. "Oi Mitsu, get Nagi ready. We have a centre to stalk."

---

The four waited till they heard Riku leave, then they glanced out of their respective rooms and exchanged knowing looks with each other.

There was actually a reason why Iori had wanted Riku to take his jacket, even though it was in the middle of summer. With or without Yamato and the others, Iori had already intended to follow Riku and make sure that he didn't run into trouble. But he knew he would've been discovered immediately, because scent neutralisers wouldn't mask his scent from Riku. He'd hoped that if Riku wore his jacket, he would just think that the scent was coming from the jacket, and not Iori
himself. Riku could be oblivious at times, and if he wasn’t consciously seeking Iori out, he would probably be oblivious to the omega’s presence just a few meters from him.

He certainly hadn't expected to scent the alpha.

It seemed to work though, because Riku didn't even turn towards where the four were hiding. The alpha stepped into the lift, closing the doors and heading to the top floor of the hotel. Iori couldn't help but sigh. He knew that Riku was headed to find Tenn, where else would he go, but it irked Iori nonetheless.

Once the lift stopped at the top floor, the four followed.

"Why are we stalking him?" Nagi asked as they hid behind the wall.

"Because we're worried about our centre."

"Riku went to see his brother, didn't he? Won't it be an emotional reunion?"

Iori nearly couldn't hold back a scoff. Emotional indeed, if you're talking about anger, he thought dryly. He didn't have to reply, because Yamato did it for him. "Normally it would be, but Kujo's scarier than his cute face suggests," the beta pointed out, and Nagi hummed in understanding. After all, they'd met Tenn in person before, so they should know better than Iori what kind of person Tenn was.

"If it looks like Kujo-san's harsh words are giving him an attack, we'll give up and drag him away," Iori instructed, even though Riku's inhaler was with him just in case. The alpha had, as usual, been careless enough not to bring it with him, and Iori was glad he had dropped by their room to grab it.

They watched as Riku brought a hand up, ready to knock on the door, before lowering again. "Tenn-nii, it's me, Riku. If you don't want to open the door, we can talk like this," he said. Iori couldn't stand to see the look on Riku's face – the alpha looked so defeated, for something that wasn't even his fault. Then Riku clenched his fists, looking straight at the door.

"Hey, Tenn-nii. Why did you abandon your family and leave?"

The door opened abruptly, and a certain Yaotome Gaku appeared.

The wrong room! Iori almost wanted to strangle Riku for being so careless.

They watched as Riku struggled to explain his words before Gaku promptly slung an arm over Riku’s shoulder, leading him into the room and closing the door behind him. Iori began to panic, unable to tell if Riku was in trouble or not. Just like Riku, Iori wasn’t able to discern the small nuances in the alpha’s scent as well as he normally could, and the omega felt completely useless as he stared at the closed door.

He was still fairly certain that if Riku's scent turned distressed, he would be able to tell.

“Now what?” Mitsuki asked, just as the lift dinged open and, of all people, Tenn stepped out with a few bags of groceries hanging on either arm.

Tenn looked at them immediately, and even from a distance, Iori could feel his slightly oppressive alpha presence. He did his best to look unaffected; he absolutely did not want Tenn to know that he was an omega. He wasn’t sure if Tenn could smell Riku on him or if the scent neutralisers could conceal Riku’s scent, too, but he wasn’t willing to risk anything.
For all he knew, Tenn probably didn't even know what Riku's scent was.

Iori straightened up, wondering how they should explain themselves, when Tenn looked over at him. “Hey, you’re the kid that forgot to sing at Music Festa,” he said. There was nothing condescending about his tone – Tenn was just stating what he knew, but somehow it made it all the more worse. Iori couldn’t help wanting to shrink away from his failure.

He didn’t catch what Mitsuki said, only that Tenn retorted, “What was that, you terrible dancer?” and the beta went silent as well.

Yamato and Nagi started to back away. “We got the wrong floor,” Yamato laughed awkwardly, shielding the Izumi brothers and pushing them towards the lift.

Tenn wasn’t impressed. “I’m not sure how you just happen to be on the top floor though.”

“We really have to get going,” Yamato said as the lift came back up, and followed the others in.

He and Nagi heaved a collective sigh of relief, glancing to the brothers who were still in a state of shock, glad that they somehow managed to escape from Tenn. Or so they thought, until the doors were forced open and Tenn stepped into the lift with them. He was wearing a devilish smile now, making full use of his status as an alpha and looking at the four boys.

Iori gulped, willing his omega not to cower.

“There’s something I want to tell you, about that sloppy Music Festa performance and your attitude as professionals,” he said, the edge never leaving his voice. Nagi tried to cut in, to refuse, but Tenn didn’t give him an opening to. “I’ll even order room service for you. But in exchange, you’ll sit upright on the floor.”

So much for saving Nanase-san.

---

By the time Iori returned to his room, Riku was in bed and using his phone. The alpha glanced up when the door opened, visibly heaving a sigh of relief when he saw Iori come in. “You’re back! Where did you go? I was getting worried.”

Iori made a face at the memory of the hour-long lecture they were made to sit through. He was glad that Tenn kept it professional, reining his alpha back in control, otherwise Iori was certain that he would’ve been found out. There were too many people still prejudiced against omegas being idols, and he wasn’t sure if Tenn was one of those people. It was too big a risk to let the other find out, especially since Iori and Riku were courting.

“We were… accosted,” Iori said lamely. “Then we had to endure a long lecture.”

Riku put his phone down, tilting his head slightly in confusion. “By Manager?”

Iori shook his head, reaching into his pocket to pull Riku’s inhaler out before pausing. He glanced at Riku through the corner of his eye – the alpha would get suspicious if he saw that his inhaler was with Iori. Making a mental note to put it back on the table later, Iori plopped down on his bed. “No, not Manager.”
“With Yamato-san?”

At this, Iori couldn’t help a small chuckle. “Jealous?” he teased, watching in satisfaction as Riku adamantly shook his head. He should have figured that Riku would be like this. There really wasn’t a need to worry, but their inner alphas and omegas were overly possessive as always. “We were with nii-san and Rokuya-san, too. Enough about me. Did you find who you wanted to find?”

Riku grimaced as he shook his head slightly. “I got the wrong room.”

“As expected of you, Nanase-san.”

“Don’t be rude,” Riku grumbled. “But you were right. Your scent did help to calm me down.”

Iori turned to look at Riku, warmth spreading across his cheeks when he saw the way the alpha was smiling at him. He refused to acknowledge the way his heart flipped slightly in his chest, and Iori simply averted his gaze to the floor. “It felt nice. Scenting you.”

The smile never left Riku’s face, the alpha nodding in agreement. “Yeah, I liked it.”

Iori went to wash up and get ready to sleep, climbing into the bed beside Riku’s and turning the lights off. It was silent, and for a moment Iori thought Riku had already fallen asleep, until the alpha spoke up again in a small voice.

He sounded almost shy, asking, “Hey Iori, after we debut, can we go on a date?”

The room was dark, but Iori could make out Riku’s hopeful expression with the help of the light filtering through the windows. The omega hummed, urging Riku to continue.

“It’s just that we say we’re in the midst of courting, but we really haven’t done much and I know it’s because we have to focus on our debut. But I also really want to properly go out with you,” he explained.

Even if Riku couldn’t see it, Iori smiled.

“Yes, it’s a promise then.”

Iori definitely didn’t imagine the happiness radiating off the alpha, and for the first time in a while, Iori didn’t dream of Music Festa.

Chapter End Notes

Surprise surprise! I managed to churn out a chapter in the end (I surprised myself too) and anw I really wanted to upload the next couple of chapters asap bc who doesn't love some angst?

AND SCENTING!! IS!!! SUCH A SOFT GESTURE I LOVE IT but never mind the fact that Iori had an ulterior motive bc we all know he meant well.

We all know what goes on next am I right :) Please look forward to it (and the couple of chapters following) bc good shit happens. That's all from me for now, I hope y'all enjoyed this!
The office was a mess when they got back from Okinawa.

The whole place had been ransacked, papers scattered all over the floor.

Tsumugi flipped through the mess that was her desk, her actions growing more frantic as she searched. “It’s not here! The demo CD for our debut song!” the beta cried, and from behind him, Iori could feel Nagi’s anger.

“Who would come in and steal just a song?” Banri asked, sounding almost confused.

Nagi’s fury only seemed to become more intense, becoming nearly tangible, and Iori winced as the alpha’s scent became oppressive. He didn’t want to turn to see what kind of expression Nagi was wearing as Otoharu said, “No, the songs entrusted to them are just that precious.”

It wasn’t only him feeling discomfort, Iori soon realised. Banri was frowning, and Iori could smell it in the elder omega’s scent. After all, Banri hardly wore scent neutralisers, since there wasn’t really a need to hide his gender from the public.

He didn’t notice Sougo's reaction, though. Not until Tamaki let out a low growl, stepping up to Nagi. "Nagichii, your anger is affecting everyone," he said bluntly, deliberately placing himself in front of Sougo. The latter seemed slightly relieved, and whether it was conscious or not, stepped a little closer to Tamaki.

"Yeah, Nagi," Riku said in agreement, seeming to have sensed Iori's discomfort as well. Just like Tamaki had, Riku moved to stand in front of Iori, turning back to shoot the omega a worried glance. Iori simply shook his head, barely forcing a smile meant to reassure Riku.

Nagi didn't reply, simply continued to seethe with anger, and Mitsuki sighed before tugging harshly on the alpha's arm. “Come on, let’s go for a walk while you calm your head,” Mitsuki suggested, dragging Nagi out of the office before waiting for the alpha’s response.

It was only after Nagi and Mitsuki were a distance away from the office that the omegas exhaled in relief, and Iori nearly sagged against Riku. They had dealt with an angry Tamaki before, which had been quite the experience, but an angry Nagi was something else altogether. It made sense, because he was the eldest of the three alphas – there was something much more controlled about his anger, but somehow that made it all the more worse. Where Riku and Tamaki’s anger manifested itself all over the place, Nagi’s was condensed, concentrated, and Iori had never been good at dealing with angry alphas in the first place.

He was glad Riku was there, and he was sure that Sougo felt the same way about Tamaki. There was only so much the omegas could do against an alpha, even if Sougo seemed to be much stronger than Iori in that aspect.

Riku turned to look Iori over, his expression clearly showing how worried he was. “Are you alright, Iori?”

“I’m fine, Nanase-san,” Iori assured. “But I wonder why Rokuya-san was so angry…”
“Well, our debut song was stolen. Aren’t you angry, Ichi?”

“Of course I am! But did it warrant such a big reaction?” Iori pondered aloud.

Naturally Iori was worried about the song being stolen, but he was far more concerned about why the usually cheerful Nagi was so furious. There was so much that didn’t add up, and if Nagi didn’t want to say anything to them, they wouldn’t be able to understand his anger.

“I’m sure Nagi has a reason,” Yamato sighed, turning to look at MEZZO. “Good job protecting Sou, Tama.”

The alpha huffed, crossing his arms and pointedly looking away from Sougo. “My body reacted on its own. It’s not like I wanted to, alright?”

“Thank you, Tamaki-kun,” Sougo said, smiling at Tamaki, and Iori was sure that he didn’t imagine the way the alpha flushed slightly. Tamaki pressed his lips into a firm line, his brows set in a frown as he turned away and walked out of the office.

Riku stared at Tamaki’s retreating figure. “What’s going on with you two, anyway?”

All eyes turned to look at Sougo, and the omega chuckled awkwardly. “Can we talk about this at home?”

---

"You guys haven't talked about it?"

Riku's voice was surprised, and understandably so.

IDOLiSH7 had been together for more than half a year by now, and even if Sougo was on suppressants, it seemed natural for the pair to have brought the topic up at least once. Sougo let out a long sigh, shoulders sagging tiredly as he shook his head.

"I tried to, but Tamaki-kun always avoided it like the plague," he explained with a grimace. "The only time he brought it up was after that concert, the one where the electricity was cut for a few minutes. But even then, all he said was that he only wanted to focus on finding his sister."

The said alpha had locked himself in his room since they returned from the office, and Nagi was still somewhere with Mitsuki, hopefully cooling off his head. The remaining four were gathered in the living room as they tried not to think about the stolen song, as well as the fact that they were supposed to unveil it in a couple days' time.

Yamato hummed thoughtfully. "Tama's still young, after all."

"He can't keep putting it off forever, though..." Iori trailed off, looking over at Riku. "Isn't it tough to have to deal with his moodiness all the time?"

"I can't say it's not," Sougo replied. "Don't worry about us. We'll figure it out in time."

With that, the topic was dropped. Sougo didn't seem to want to discuss it any further, and the others didn't want to push the matter. Eventually Mitsuki returned with Nagi in tow, the alpha seemingly calmed down for now, and they got around to preparing dinner.
Five days later, they had an outdoor performance again.

They finished performing the songs they had lined up, and before the end, Riku stepped to the front.

"I'm sure everyone knows that we're releasing our new album soon," he began, smiling as the fans cheered loudly in response. "For everyone gathered here today, we'll perform our new song before it goes on sale!"

The crowd's excitement only grew, and Riku continued. "I have a feeling this song will be special for us. We've decided to sing it for our supporters because we really wanted you guys to hear it. The title of the song is..."

Riku cut himself off as he heard the opening to Natsu Shiyouze, eyes widening in shock. He spared a glance to where the song was being played, on the screen opposite of the stage they were performing on. The voices were undoubtedly those of TRIGGER's, and a sense of dread filled Riku as he watched the MV being played.

The song was theirs, but why were TRIGGER singing it?

"Our debut song?" he heard Iori mutter from behind him, and Riku didn't need to turn to know what kind of expression the omega was wearing. It wasn't just Iori who had been shocked into silence; all of the idols standing on stage were staring at the screen with wide eyes, and even Tsumugi couldn't find the words to say.

"Why?"

The first to regain his composure was Sougo, the older omega turning to look at the others. "What should we do? Sing a different song?" he asked. If it weren't for the scent neutralisers, Riku was sure that he would be able to catch the distress in Sougo's scent, even though his voice reflected no such thing.

Yamato glanced at Sougo. "We have to sing the same one."

"But..." Mitsuki started.

"Just for today," Yamato conceded. "If we're not careful, we might not be able to sing it after tomorrow."

Riku frowned, forcing his gaze to meet the crowd. He hoped his voice didn't tremble as he exclaimed, "Here's our new song!"

"They won't get away with this," Nagi muttered.

Mitsuki glanced at the blond, sighing almost audibly into the mic. "Nagi, pay attention!"

The song started, and the seven members of IDOLiSH7 did their best to keep their moods up while performing it. They didn't want the fans to be able to sense their anger, confusion, or sadness. But it soon became apparent that they were singing the same song that was being shown on the screen, as the cheers quietened and fans started looking at each other in bewilderment.
"Isn't this the same song as TRIGGER's?"

"What's going on?"

By the time the song ended, all of them wanted to get off stage quickly and figure out what exactly was going on. The answer was obvious to everyone, but they didn't want to voice it aloud. Instead they sat in the car quietly, waiting till they got back to the office to properly discuss what had happened.

Iori sat beside Riku, close enough to him that their shoulders were touching. Mitsuki was with Nagi, talking to the blond in a low enough voice that the others couldn't quite make out what they were saying. Yamato was sandwiched between Tamaki and Sougo, the fated pair avoiding each other's gazes.

Iori startled when he felt Riku's hand slowly and wordlessly slip into his own, and while he would normally blush like a teenager in love, which he technically was, this time he could only let out a small sigh. While Iori still wasn't quite that comfortable with skinship of any sort, he couldn't possibly deny Riku this. In fact, he wasn't even sure if Riku was comforting him, or if the alpha was seeking comfort from him. After all, Tenn was singing their debut song. He briefly wondered what Riku felt about that.

Upon reaching the office, the eight of them shuffled into the meeting room, still in their stage costumes as they sat around the room. A pregnant silence fell over them, nobody knowing how to breach the topic without causing a ruckus.

Eventually, it was Tsumugi who spoke up. "I'm so sorry for allowing something like this to happen!" the beta exclaimed, bowing forward in apology. "I never thought..."

"It's not your fault, Manager," Yamato said. "TRIGGER, huh."

"I don't think the three members know, though," Sougo sighed.

Riku nodded, obviously agreeing with Sougo. "Tenn-nii would never do something like this"

"Our main issue now is the press conference tomorrow. We can't possibly announce that as our debut song anymore," Iori pointed out, and the silence returned.

The fans who were at the outdoor performance were the only ones who knew that they had performed Natsu Shiyouze, and they intended to keep it that way. With TRIGGER releasing it as their new song, there was absolutely no way that they could claim it as their own.

They had all worked so hard for it, had been anticipating their debut, but that was all going to waste.

"We have to use MONSTER GENERATION, don't we," Mitsuki muttered.

"I really wanted to perform our debut song on a proper stage," Tamaki added.

But all of them knew well enough that this was the only course of action. It was clearly far too late to record a new song, much less a new MV, and the press conference was in less than a day. They didn't have another option, and as tough as it was to accept this truth, they knew that they had to.

Subconsciously, Iori inched a little closer to Riku, wanting to be able to comfort the alpha.

"I guess we should prepare again for the press conference."
"We were able to debut thanks to all our fans."

Tamaki nodded, smiling and trying to make eye contact with as many cameras as possible. "I feel so much better when it's all seven of us," the dancer said, grinning.

"We were anxious when MEZZO debuted first," Riku admitted with a slight chuckle. "But it's thanks to them that we were able to get our names out there. How do you feel, Sougo-san?"

Sougo was deep in thought, looking at a reporter in the crowd. When he heard his name, he snapped back to reality. "Huh?"

"About debuting thanks to MEZZO," Riku repeated.

"Oh, right. We didn't do anything," Sougo said, and Tamaki turned to smile at the omega as he continued. "It's because the rest of you kept working so hard. Thank you."

"We'll move on to the press conference now," the emcee said. "Please raise your hand if you have a question. Yes, we'll start with you."

The reporter who was called perked up. "Is there a story behind your debut song, MONSTER GENERATION? Or anything you'd like to say about it?" he asked, and the seven idols on stage had to fight to keep their expression neutral.

It felt so wrong to not be announcing Natsu Shiyouze as their debut song, after all they had done to prepare for their debut. It had been a tough enough road to walk, the past few months being nothing but hectic and a little less than a disaster. Just when they'd thought they could debut properly at last, their song had to be stolen.

The worst part was that it was stolen by TRIGGER, of all people.

"Oh yeah, our debut song is... uh..." Riku trailed off, unsure of how to continue.

From the corner of his eye, Iori glanced at the redhead. His smile was obviously forced, and Iori hated seeing that expression on Riku. But there was nothing he could say to the alpha, nothing he could do in front of all these reporters, and Iori stared with bated breath as Riku struggled to find the words to say.

Yamato cut in. "It's a really important song to us. Right, Riku?"

As if remembering what Iori had told him to say last night, Riku smiled and continued. "Yeah. MONSTER GENERATION is the first song we sang onstage."

"And the calls during the song are fun, right?"

"Our album tour is starting soon. We hope you'll enjoy it at our concerts with us."
The rest of the conference ended without any further problems, and the group found themselves in the office again that night. They still had so much to discuss in regards to their album tour, now that they had one less song that they were able to perform.

"I told you they'd ask about our debut song," Iori chided gently, and Riku could only look at the floor to avoid Iori's gaze. Iori had thought ahead, as usual, and had gone to Riku's room the night before to go through how he should answer certain questions. But he could hardly blame Riku for blanking out like that; the shock of having their song stolen was still fresh in everyone's minds. "You practiced so much."

"Sorry."

"I understand how you feel, but..." Iori trailed off, letting out another soft sigh. It was probably a little harder for Riku to accept this than everyone else. And he didn't blame Riku for that, either. Iori didn't believe for a second that the members of TRIGGER were privy to the truth behind their 'new song'.

"It's hard to change gears so quickly," Mitsuki mumbled.

Tsumugi bowed her head for what seemed like the nth time. "I'm really sorry! We even filmed a PV, but we can't use the song..." she trailed off.

Sougō shook his head. "It's TRIGGER's fault."

"Tamaki-kun!"

"Isn't it?" Tamaki retorted, leaning back with an annoyed huff. "Their new song was a total rip-off of ours. Maybe they stole it. Why aren't we suing them?"

Iori had to suppress a sigh, and he glanced to the side, at Riku who had been silent the entire time. Of course he could also understand where Tamaki was coming from, but there was more to this than just accusing someone of song theft. "Not only do we not have proof, but they could also sue us for libel," Iori pointed out. "I'd rather not jinx our debut."

"I'd like to think that the members of TRIGGER itself weren't involved," Yamato said, voicing everyone's opinions aloud. They had all watched TRIGGER's concert together and had met TRIGGER on more than one occasion. It was easy for everyone to see how professional they were, how dedicated they were as idols. It was impossible that the three of them would do something as unethical as to steal a song – especially that of a group that had yet to debut.

Nagi suddenly spoke up. "I'm very disappointed. I wanted you all to sing it."

"...you wanted us to sing it?"

"I won't forgive them. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. I don't know who did it, but they'll regret angering me," Nagi said, his voice sounding almost menacing. Iori shifted uncomfortably in his seat as Nagi's aura began to become oppressive; again.

It seemed as if Nagi had been losing his temper too often in the past couple of days, and it was a stark contrast from the cheerful alpha they were used to. Mitsuki sighed, giving Nagi an unimpressed look.
"Not again," the beta deadpanned, raising a brow at Nagi. "How long do you intend to keep this up?"

Mitsuki was about to continue on his lecture when Tsumugi's phone rang, and for a few moments she spoke to the person on the other end. Then the beta let out a surprised gasp, thanking the other person profusely before ending the call and turning to look at the others. "IDOLiSH7 just got a regular show!"

After the initial shock wore off, Yamato looked at Nagi with a chuckle. "Come on, Nagi. Put that scowl away."

"You're ruining your handsome face," Mitsuki agreed. "And your face is 80% of your appeal."

"Oh, Mitsuki. Are you after my body?"

Iori watched as Mitsuki's eye twitched, but he also didn't miss the way his brother flushed just the slightest bit. "Why would I want the other 20%?" the beta bit out, but Iori wasn't stupid enough to miss the nuances in Mitsuki's behaviour. He thought back to when Mitsuki followed Nagi out of the office, wondering if anything had gone on between the two while they were gone.

"This is our moment of truth," Tsumugi announced, as if they didn't already know that. "First, let's focus on making the album tour a success!"

"Yes!"

But of course, everything had to come crashing back down.

Chapter End Notes

Who's ready for some angst HAHA I definitely am!!!! Not much to say for this chapter except that you guys should look forward to chapter 11-15 it's gonna be a wild ride. Hope you guys enjoyed this and see y'all next week!
A week later, the boys went to Osaka.

MEZZO didn't go together with them since they were busy with other schedules and were only able to meet them in the evening. Since they had some time while waiting for the duo, the other five, and Tsumugi, settled for going sightseeing.

Well, it wasn't *just* sightseeing. The main purpose was for Tsumugi to take pictures of them having fun together throughout the tour. The photos would later be included in a photobook to be sold or bundled together with their concert merchandise.

With that, the group found themselves in one of the more well-known malls in Osaka, and before they even decided on where to go or what to do, Nagi was listing down all the local delicacies that he wanted to try out. "I want takoyaki, okonomiyaki, fried skewers, and offal!"

"Let's eat all of them!" Riku exclaimed in agreement, and it occurred to Iori that perhaps the alpha had never been to Osaka in his 18 years of life. It made sense, if Riku spent the better half of his childhood in and out of hospitals. He probably wasn't able to go on many school trips, if he had gone on any at all.

"We can't eat all that," Iori chuckled, seeing how excited Riku was at the thought of trying everything. The omega turned to look around, nearly choking as his gaze landed on an Usamimi Friends mascot. It wasn't one that he had seen around Tokyo before, and he could only assume that it was a local item.

He knew immediately when Riku came up behind him. "What's wrong Iori?"

"Do you want the local mascot?" Nagi chimed in.

Fighting to keep his expression neutral, Iori shook his head and cleared his throat. "I'm not at all interested in something so cheap," he said, walking away to join Mitsuki. He could almost feel the two alphas' gazes on his back, but he refused to let his cool facade crumble. As far as everyone knew, apart from Mitsuki of course, Iori wasn't into cute things in the least. He knew Riku would find out eventually, but he'd rather delay it. It was somewhat embarrassing to be found out so easily.

It would've been fine if he had been alone with Mitsuki – the beta had a cute face, so he never minded helping Iori to buy merchandise of Usamimi Friends. Most people mistook Iori as the older brother anyway, so it never hurt to ask Mitsuki to help him out. Mitsuki was always more than glad to do so, too, often claiming that "This is the least I can do for my cute little brother!"

They roamed around the mall for a while longer before eventually venturing out into the streets and doing all sorts of goofy nonsense. Tsumugi religiously took photos of the five as they enjoyed themselves, and it was only after they visited the arcade that they finally took a break for food.

As promised, Nagi got to try out takoyaki, putting one into his mouth almost immediately after the staff handed it to him. Expectedly, the alpha ended up burning his tongue, his cries of "Hot! Hot!" echoing through the streets.

"It's so good!" Riku exclaimed from beside Iori, and the omega turned to glance at Riku with a smile.
But then he saw the newly purchased strap that was dangling from Riku's bag, and Iori couldn't help but scowl at the damned thing. *Stupid, insensitive Nanase-san.*

"Iori, one bite."

"Huh?"

Mitsuki grinned. "Come on, I'll give you some of mine."

Iori conceded, picking up one piece of takoyaki from his tray and chuckling. "You're hopeless."

Maybe it was because he was so disgruntled over the fact that Riku had bought an Usamimi keychain, but he ended up shoving the takoyaki into Mitsuki's mouth with more force than he intended to. Mitsuki immediately flinched, covering his mouth as tears welled up in his eyes. "It's hot! Iori!" he whined.

"Oh, it's a two-man act!" Nagi seemed happy enough that he wasn't the only one who suffered, earning a well-deserved glare from the beta.

MEZZO was due to meet them after their schedule for the day, which was in another couple of hours, and Yamato sighed. "I hope we have time to eat together."

"Let's buy souvenirs for them!" Riku suggested.

"Let's buy them matching straps!" Nagi chimed in.

"No way. They're not that close," Mitsuki reminded, shooting the suggestion down right away.

Iori frowned, thinking back to when Tamaki had stood in front of Sougo when Nagi lost his cool. "Surely they're getting along by now," he said confidently, even if he was actually unsure of the fact. They went to find souvenirs for the pair once they finished their food, heading back into the mall once more.

They ended up passing by the shop where Iori spotted the local Usamimi mascot, his eyes focused on the keychain until it was out of sight. He jumped a little when Riku suddenly nudged him, about to scold the alpha when a small paper bag was shoved into his hands. "For you," Riku said, tone nearly bashful.

Iori raised a brow, fingers carefully removing the tape that was on the bag. He peeked inside, a shocked gasp leaving his lips as he saw the exact keychain that he'd been eyeing since they stepped into the mall. Then, as if remembering where he was and who he was with, Iori cleared his throat awkwardly and kept the keychain in his bag. "Didn't I say I wasn't interested in something like that?"

"You're so dishonest, seriously," Riku shook his head disapprovingly, tapping his nose as if it was any sort of explanation. "You don't have to lie to me, Iori. I know you wanted that. And no, Mitsuki didn't give me any sort of hints. I just figured it out. Treat it as a... a courting gift?" Riku's voice got quieter, the last few words almost inaudible to anyone other than Iori. The alpha sounded shy, nervous as he watched for Iori's reaction.

It was Iori's turn to feel bashful now, his cheeks slowly heating up as Riku continued to smile at him. They were supposed to be looking for souvenirs for MEZZO, but the two of them were in their own world, and the others didn't try to disturb them. It wasn't often that Riku tried to do something related to their courtship, and even if they were in public, it wasn't as if anyone knew what was going on.
Riku was clearly waiting for Iori's response, so the omega finally let out a small smile. "Don't ever tell anyone that I like stuff like this, alright?" he warned, although his tone was anything but angry. Riku simply nodded, saluting Iori to show that he understood, and Iori could only hope that the alpha wouldn't go about running his mouth to everyone.

He would never admit that his chest filled with warmth, and when they got back to Tokyo, Iori made sure to put the keychain right next to his bed.

---

"Why didn't you wake me?"

"I fell asleep, too!" Sougo said. "Let's grab a taxi."

Tamaki shook his head, pulling his mask down as he tried to catch his breath. "It's faster if we run."

The alpha ran ahead before Sougo could protest any further. "Tamaki-kun, wait!" Sougo called out, sighing as he felt his head start to hurt. He shook his head, trying to push the pain away as he tightened his grip on his bag and followed after Tamaki.

"When does rehearsal start?" Tamaki asked, turning around to look back at Sougo when the omega didn't reply. Sougo was a good distance away from him, but even then, Tamaki could hear him panting. Sougo was good at preventing his emotions from being reflected in his scent, had been hiding it since before MEZZO was formed, so Tamaki couldn't even tell if he was alright or not.

"Are you okay? Want me to carry your stuff?" he asked, stopping to wait for Sougo to catch up.

Sougo had to take a few moments to even out his breathing. "Why?"

"I have more stamina," Tamaki replied, as if it was only natural. In a way it was, since he was an alpha and the main dancer of the group. Then he sighed, looking Sougo over. He was stupid, but he wasn't stupid enough not to notice how lethargic the omega had been in the past few weeks. "And you haven't been looking well lately."

He didn't miss the way Sougo's eyes widened, his expression similar to that of a deer caught in headlights. It was as if Sougo expected him to miss something that obvious, and Tamaki briefly felt insulted, but he brushed the feeling off. "I'm fine, it's okay," Sougo assured, offering a badly faked smile as he continued to walk.

Tamaki's eye twitched in irritation; Sougo could barely walk straight. He grabbed Sougo's arm, forcing the omega to look him in the eye as he spoke. "Listen, I'm an idiot," he started, and Sougo stared at him in mild confusion. "You have to tell me what you're thinking! You have to tell me if you don't like something, or you're mad, or you're struggling!"

He knew he was being unreasonably harsh, especially since he claimed that he didn't want to care about Sougo. But he couldn't stand seeing the omega so exhausted all the time, and he knew that he was contributing to Sougo's stress more than he ought to be.

Sougo nodded, a more genuine smile making its way onto his face. "Okay."

A car drove past them, and Sougo's stared with wide eyes when he caught sight of the plate number.
"Whoa, what an expensive looking car," Tamaki commented. "It was so shiny. Did you see that?"

Sougo didn't reply, didn't even seem to respond to Tamaki's question as he continued to stare at where the car had disappeared to. "Souchan, you okay? Want me to carry you?"

Sougo's hand curled up into a fist. "Dad..."

---

The next few weeks were filled with schedule upon schedule.

They began filming for their regular show, the remaining five members being split into two separate units – Iori and Riku in Fly Away, and the other three in Pythagoras Fighter. In between filmings, the group went to visit various other places as part of their album tour: Hiroshima, Sapporo, and so on.

MEZZO carried on with unit promotions as well, which meant they were almost always on the move. They found themselves on the train more often than not, and usually only returned to the dorms in the dead of night. Sometimes they even slept on the train overnight, heading for schedules right after they arrived at their destination.

Tamaki wasn't so dense that he didn't see Sougo's stress and exhaustion piling up. He knew Sougo was watching out for him, be it because they were a fated pair or they were a duo. He also knew he should be relying less on Sougo for everything, but he always fell asleep first, and Sougo would be left to wake him up, make sure that they didn't miss their stop.

He was sure that it didn't help to be on suppressants all the time, either – omegas weren't made to avoid their heats. But they didn't have a choice, because MEZZO was busier than ever, and Sougo couldn't afford to take a whole week off of work. Neither could Tamaki afford to have a rut, but his had ended a little before MEZZO officially debuted and wouldn't be here again for another few months.

Once, they were on the train somewhere, and Sougo nodded off long before Tamaki even closed his eyes to rest. He was tired enough that his grip on his phone loosened, but Tamaki caught the phone just before it fell off the seat. The alpha couldn't help but look at the omega worriedly, and he had the urge to shift Sougo so that the elder's head was resting on his shoulder.

But eventually he did, because it looked uncomfortable to be sleeping like that. When Sougo woke up, it was to a weight leaning against his head, and upon realising that he had fallen asleep on Tamaki, and vice versa, he jolted awake.

"Huh, Souchan, what is it?" Tamaki mumbled groggily, rubbing his eyes even as Sougo fought to hide the blush threatening to creep onto his face. Sougo shook his head hastily, pointing to the station mutely to indicate that they already reached their stop.

The rest of that day passed by rather awkwardly. Sougo made it a point not to bring the incident up, and Tamaki never said a word. He didn't want to deal with the unnecessary feelings of his inner alpha, not when he had more important matters to attend to. Finding Aya, his little sister, was still his top priority, although it was getting harder to ignore the pull of being a fated pair.

Despite thinking that, it was only a few days later that Tamaki nearly lost his cool.
As usual, the two were on a train in the middle of the night. Sougo was staring out the window, and Tamaki couldn't figure out what kind of expression the omega was wearing. He was tired, that much the alpha could tell. Even if he wasn't able to see it from the way Sougo acted, it was all over his scent. If it was bad enough that Sougo couldn't mask it any longer, Tamaki knew that he had to do something before the omega eventually collapsed.

But he didn't know how, not if Sougo didn't want to rely on him at all.

"Aren't you tired?"

Sougo snapped out of his daze, turning to look at Tamaki with a small smile. "I'm fine. You can sleep."

Tamaki frowned – this had to stop. "I told you, I'm stupid, so you have to tell me if there's anything wrong or I won't understand!" he said, not bothering to hide the push that he was injecting into his voice. He noticed Sougo's discomfort at the use of his alpha voice, but the omega didn't falter.

"Tell you what?"

"Huh!? I-"

Sougo shook his head, turning to look out of the window. "I'm fine. I'll sleep later."

"Oh, really?" Tamaki bit out, completely unconvinced. The temptation to order Sougo to rest was strong, but Tamaki huffed angrily, turning away from the omega and crossing his arms.

Two can play at this game, Tamaki thought. If Sougo wasn't going to talk to him, so be it. It wasn't as if he cared.

He heard Sougo shuffling around his bag, the rustling of paper as Sougo presumably found whatever he was looking for. Tamaki knew Sougo was looking at him, could sense the omega's gaze directed at him, but he adamantly refused to face Sougo. "Tamaki-kun, you haven't filled out your survey again."

Sougo reached over to shake Tamaki's shoulder. "Sorry, can you wake up?"

Tamaki let out an annoyed grunt, although he wasn't sure if Sougo knew what he was annoyed at.

"Come on, fill it out," Sougo tried again.

"Souchan, you fill it out," Tamaki finally replied, sighing as Sougo seemed to back off a little.

"Fine. I'll read the questions to you, so you answer," Sougo said, looking down at the form. "Why did you want to become an idol?"

Tamaki couldn't help it; he snorted incredulously. "You already know, don't you? To find Aya."

He didn't see the passive look Sougo was giving him. "Is it okay if I write that?" the omega asked, and Tamaki hummed in response. "Okay."

"How about you?" Tamaki asked offhandedly. He didn't know much about Sougo – heck, none of them did. Sougo rarely spoke about himself, rarely expressed his true emotions to anyone. It didn't seem to matter that they were a team now, and it certainly didn't seem to matter that Tamaki was his supposed fated alpha.

Sougo kept silent for a few moments, as if he was thinking of a way to answer. "I already did mine."
"I want to know your real answer," Tamaki said. "Not the ones that the fans will like, not the politically correct answer. I want to know why Ousaka Sougo decided to become an idol. It doesn't have to be anything fancy like your hopes and dreams, or whatever else. Just tell me the truth."

Tamaki opened his eyes, finally turning to look at Sougo with a frown. "Why are you doing this job?"

Sougo's expression remained neutral, and Tamaki briefly wondered how far he had to push for the omega's walls to come down. But then he remembered what happened when they went on that camping trip, and a shudder ran down his spine. He didn't want to risk pushing too hard.

"Self-proof, I guess."

"What does that mean?"

"Showing the world who you are," Sougo tried to explain. "But somehow, it feels like I'm doing the exact same thing I did when I was at home."

Sougo sounded almost defeated, and Tamaki stared at the omega's reflection through the window. Why?

---

Their regular show was axed.

Tamaki didn't understand how Sougo remained calm after hearing the news. He recalled the omega once telling him, "Because I don't complain about it, people must think I didn't like it very much to begin with," and now Tamaki could fully understand why.

He didn't know what was holding Sougo back from expressing his feelings, because even though he tried his best to mask it from his scent, Tamaki could tell. He knew how frustrated Sougo was, knew that he was stressed and outright exhausted. More often than not, he looked ready to collapse. But whenever Tsumugi offered to help or follow them to a schedule, Sougo always refused. "It's alright, this is their first tour after all," he would say, with that sickeningly fake smile that Tamaki had learnt to recognise.

It felt like it had been too long since Sougo smiled genuinely, and Tamaki found himself missing the gentle curve of the omega's lips, the way the corners of his eyes crinkled into a smile. He would never tell anyone that sometimes, most times, his heart skipped a little at the sight of Sougo's smile. It's the stupid fated pair thing, Tamaki always told himself, even though he was really starting to doubt that.

Sougo was terrible at taking care of himself, even worse at expressing himself. It didn't matter that he seemed to be constantly looking out for Tamaki, which Tamaki knew he was, because he was neglecting himself in the process. Tamaki could see Sougo growing paler with each passing day, with each night that he spent preparing for the next day's schedule instead of getting a full night's rest.

He desperately wanted to lessen the burden being put on Sougo's shoulders, but Tamaki wasn't completely capable of adhering to strict schedules. Setting alarms didn't always ensure that he would
wake up on time, and by the time he stirred, he would already be running late.

That was exactly what happened one day after school, Tamaki having gone back to the dorm to take a nap before his evening schedule with Sougo. The omega had a separate photoshoot, and he'd made sure to remind Tamaki not to oversleep.

But of course, the alpha did just that, and ended up having to rush to the TV studio.

He didn't even know where it was; Sougo was always the one who led the way. It didn't help at all that he was accosted by a small group of fans right as he stepped out of the subway gantry. They were talking over each other all at once, and Tamaki groaned in frustration. "Get out of the way! Souchan will get angry at me!"

"Aww, you call him Souchan? How cute!"

Tamaki felt his patience dwindling. "Just move!" he barked, uncaring of the fact that he used his alpha voice on them. The girls shrunk back slightly, backing off, and Tamaki quickly sprinted out of the station.

He looked around once he got out, trying to figure out which direction the TV studio was, when a girl approached him. "Where's the studio?" he asked, thanking her when she pointed to a tall building not too far away. He was about to rush off when she spoke again.

"Wait! I know where your sister is," she said. "Do you have time now?"

Tamaki should've known better, but it had been so many months, and Aya still hadn't contacted him. But he was already late, and the schedule today was a live broadcast. The alpha took a deep breath, hesitantly nodding in response.

*Sorry, Souchan.*

Chapter End Notes

MEZZO angst lasts for like 3 chapters I got carried away... But yes we finally get to see some relationship development between these two!! I've been dying to post these next few chapters and I'm glad we finally made it here aaaaa I hope you guys enjoyed!
It had been a lie.

Tamaki started to suspect that things were off when the girl led him out of the crowded streets. She dodged his questions, replying with “We’re almost there” each time. It had been a good twenty minutes by now, and even if Tamaki hadn’t already been late for the schedule, he most certainly would’ve ended up being late anyway.

They turned into an abandoned alley, and Tamaki frowned. "Hey, how far are we going?"

The girl stopped, turning to look at Tamaki. "Can I take a picture?"

Tamaki obliged, albeit unwillingly, and watched as the girl mumbled to herself while staring at the picture. She asked to shake his hand next, and Tamaki obliged again, although he was starting to feel more and more uneasy about the whole situation.

He drew the line when she said, "Please kiss me."

"Huh?"

"If you want to know where your sister, Aya-san, is, then kiss me and introduce me as your girlfriend on TV," she repeated, and Tamaki felt the blood drain from his face.

He knew she was lying by now, but he couldn't help asking, "Why?"

The girl kept quiet.

"Earlier, when you said you knew where Aya was... was that a lie?"

"I'm sorry! I just wanted to talk to Tamaki-san! But I've been your fan since the start! I've always been supporting you!" she defended, and for some odd reason Tamaki felt strangely calm. It was as if he was detached from reality, and while he should rightfully be angry, he was even more disappointed.

He wasn't sure if the disappointment was in the fact that he still couldn't find Aya, or that he'd been stupid enough to believe something that a stranger said. It wasn't only that; because of her lie, Tamaki wasn't going to be able to make it for the schedule. He could only imagine how angry Sougo would be.

Surprisingly, that was what affected him the most.

"How could you do something like this?" he asked, and even though he didn't raise his voice, his anger was almost tangible. The girl shrank back visibly, and Tamaki continued. "You say you like and support me. So how could you lie to me!?"

As he spoke, his voice steadily grew louder and angrier, because while Tamaki was disappointed in himself, he was absolutely furious about being lied to. This wasn't the first time that someone had lied to him about knowing Aya’s whereabouts, and Tamaki simply couldn’t understand how it was possible for anyone to lie about something like this. It was difficult enough finding her, even without
these people adding in with their little falsities.

Tamaki didn’t stick around to listen anymore – he turned and ran towards the TV studio. At the very least, the girl hadn’t seemed to be lying about where it was.

By the time Tamaki made it, though, barely five minutes later, the broadcast had ended. He was stopped by one of the staff before he even stepped in, and the first thing that Tamaki asked was, “Where’s Souchan?”

It didn’t take long for Tamaki’s nose to locate where the omega was, long before the staff even pointed to the far end of the studio. Sougo was talking to the producer. Tamaki squinted; no, he was being reprimanded, and Tamaki could tell that Sougo’s posture was submissive, his shoulders hunched and head hung low.

Even from such a distance, Tamaki could smell the anger seething underneath an apologetic exterior. But more than the anger, it was the bitter disappointment that made Tamaki’s chest clench painfully with an emotion he didn’t want to name. Guilt, probably, although Tamaki wasn’t sure he would feel this strongly if it was anyone other than Sougo. A sense of responsibility weighed him down, and Tamaki made a move to explain why he was late, but the staff’s hand shot out to stop him.

“If you go there, it’ll only make things worse for him.”

Tamaki bit his lip, and he nodded.

He would have to properly apologise to Sougo later.

---

“It’s no wonder FSC gave you the boot!”

Sougo’s blood ran cold. FSC? They’re the reason why our regular show was cancelled?

So he hadn’t been imagining the reporter at their debut press conference. He knew the man looked familiar, knew that he worked directly under his father. And the other night when he saw the Ousaka family car hadn’t been a coincidence, either.

He knew when Tamaki had made it to the venue, although honestly it didn’t matter anymore. The alpha’s pheromones were all over the place, amplified from the physical exertion of sprinting there, although Sougo was probably the only one who could identify it so acutely.

Tamaki seemed angry for some reason, guilty too, and as much as Sougo wanted to let this incident slide, he knew he couldn’t. Tamaki had been missing from a live broadcast, hadn’t picked up any of Sougo’s calls or replied any of his texts. He knew there was probably an important reason as to why Tamaki hadn’t come for a schedule, and if it had been anything other than a live broadcast, it wouldn’t have mattered as much.

But right now Sougo could only nod and apologise as the producer continued to tell him off.

It was another few minutes before said producer finally stormed off, and immediately Tamaki was running towards Sougo, an apology already on the tip of his tongue. “Souchan, I’m—"
Sougo paid the alpha no heed, briskly walking to the changing room and grabbing his stuff. Expectedly, Tamaki chased after him, all the while trying to explain why he had missed the schedule entirely. His words seemed to float over Sougo, the omega not even listening to what was being said.

Sougo’s thoughts were all over the place now, and his head was beginning to pound again. Being reprimanded, finding out that FSC was the reason for their regular show being cancelled, and now being in such close proximity with his fated alpha was too much for Sougo to handle. He barely made it onto the streets, hailing a cab and slamming the door in Tamaki’s face.

Instead of heading back to the office, like what they had originally planned to do, Sougo went straight back to the dorms. He was beyond exhausted, and his stomach was starting to give him problems again. Being on suppressants didn’t help, and right now all Sougo wanted to do was curl up and sleep forever.

He managed to get back to his room, locking the door for good measure and dropping his stuff on the floor. He was halfway through changing his clothes when he caught a whiff of Tamaki’s scent, and Sougo briefly wondered how on earth the alpha had managed to get back so quickly. But his door was locked, anyway, and Sougo went to lie down on his bed.

“Souchan! I know you’re here. Open up so that I can explain!” Tamaki shouted through the door.

Sougo sighed tiredly, rolling onto his side and pulling his blanket over his head, as if it would help to block out Tamaki’s voice. The alpha’s anger had all but disappeared from his scent, and now all Sougo could catch from it was panic and worry. He wasn’t sure what or who for, but he really didn’t want to deal with it now.

Tamaki continued to shout at him to open the door and Sougo steadfastly ignored the younger. It took a while, and Tamaki even kicked his door once, but eventually he went off. Sougo hoped that he was at least going to find the others instead of wander off on his own.

Finally alone now, Sougo let his thoughts wander as he quickly went out to get some water, going back to his room just as quickly. He should’ve known that his father would come after him soon enough, and now the man had made his move. IDOLiSH7 was just starting out; they couldn’t afford to have a company as big as FSC against them. And Sougo knew what his father wanted.

He wanted him to quit.

It was easier said than done. The past months had been more enjoyable than Sougo ever thought possible, and it wouldn’t have been possible if he hadn’t been with everyone else. Of course, Tamaki gave him trouble more often than not, but he couldn’t deny that it was sometimes reassuring to have the alpha around. Tamaki was young and hot-headed, so Sougo didn’t expect him to be perfect. But up till the incident earlier on, Tamaki had been behaving well. It almost seemed as if he was looking out for Sougo, but Sougo shook the ridiculous notion off. Tamaki wasn’t interested in a relationship now, anyway.

Sougo winced as pain stabbed at his stomach, and he curled in tighter on himself. Tamaki probably wouldn’t be all that affected if he left, right? It had to be at least a little difficult to be with your fated other all the time, and yet stubbornly refuse a relationship of any sort. Tamaki’s life would be easier without Sougo in the picture.

The pain seemed to worsen suddenly, and Sougo tried to get up to go to his table. He always had painkillers with him in case of situations like these. But the moment he stood up from his bed, his knees buckled under him, and Sougo clutched at his stomach as whimpers of pain made their way
past his lips.
He didn’t know when he blacked out.

---

Tamaki went back to the office after giving up on getting Sougo to open the door. He knew the omega was beyond pissed at him, and he didn’t want to push any more than he already had. If Sougo needed some time to cool down, then Tamaki was going to be mature for once and let the elder have some time alone.

After all, he knew how annoying it could be to be bugged when you just wanted to rest. He was usually on the receiving end of that, after all.

He was with the others in the meeting room now, and the five had crowded around him when he told them that he skipped work. Unintentionally, but that didn’t change what had happened. He also told them about how Sougo had blatantly ignored him, and that he had no idea what to do.

"Of course he's angry!" Mitsuki scolded. "You left a hole in the live broadcast!"

"...sorry."

Mitsuki pulled Tamaki out of the meeting room, pointing at Tsumugi’s desk where the beta was profusely apologising to whoever was on the other end of the line. "Take a good look at that! Manager's been apologising for a good thirty minutes!"

"I'm sorry."

They went back into the meeting room, and Tamaki slid down onto the floor, pulling his knees up to his chest and sighing. He was tired, but he knew he had a lot to make up for. First and foremost was, of course, to apologise to Sougo. Tamaki wondered how long the omega would be angry for.

Yamato looked at the youngest, crossing his arms and glancing at Tamaki. "Why were you late? Depending on the circumstances, you might be innocent," he said.

Tamaki looked up, a grimace passing his features as he recalled what had happened. "A girl called out to me," he replied, and immediately everyone was frowning at him.

"Guilty."

Nagi said something about how it was deplorable; Tamaki didn't really care.

He thought back to the fan who had lied to him, his brows furrowing as the previously forgotten anger resurfaced. "I hate fans," he said.

"What do you mean by that!?!" Riku demanded angrily.

"I was glad that they were supporting us," Tamaki said, clenching his fists tightly. "But now I hate them!"

All of a sudden, Mitsuki was grabbing him up by the collar. Never mind the fact that the elder was a beta and smaller-sized – they all knew that Mitsuki had a good set of muscles on him. "There’s no
way I'm letting that slide. Why do you think we're able to sing like this!"

Tamaki wouldn't have minded being hit. It might have helped to clear his mind a little, because now all he could think about was how could she lie to me?

But Iori stepped in quickly. "Nii-san, wait! Yotsuba-san, did something happen?"

Tamaki's shoulders slumped as he felt the fight drain out of him. "A fan called out to me. She told me she knew about Aya, so I followed her." Tamaki snorted bitterly. "It was all a lie, of course. She even wanted me to kiss her."

"Say that first! You're always terrible at explaining!" Mitsuki said, sighing and letting Tamaki go.

"Oh... because of that, you were late to the live broadcast," Nagi stated.

Riku looked at Tamaki sympathetically. "If Tenn-nii was missing, and someone told me that, I would probably follow them too."

Yamato ruffled Tamaki's hair. "When you have work, you have to prioritise it, even if she wasn't lying."

Tamaki nodded. "Yes."

"And you shouldn't make assumptions just because one person did something bad to you," Yamato continued with a small smile. "Remember, we only made it this far because of their support."

Tamaki nodded again.

"If you told Sougo why you were late, wouldn't he understand?" Mitsuki asked.

Tamaki sighed, and he shook his head. "He locked himself in his room."

"In that case," Iori spoke up, giving Riku a look. The alpha seemed to catch on immediately, smiling at Iori with a nod. Iori offered a smile in return. "Nanase-san can go and talk to Ousaka-san first. You can think of how to apologise while waiting, alright?"

Riku was out of the room before Tamaki even replied, and Iori hesitantly reached out to give the alpha what he hoped was a comforting pat on the shoulder. Tamaki looked up at him, barely managing to force a small smile. "Don't worry. Nanase-san will be able to get him to talk to you."

---

"He what?"

Four heads turned to look at Iori, the omega frowning as he tried to understand the situation from Riku. He could feel Tamaki's gaze boring holes into his back, and Iori kept his expression as neutral as possible. The alpha was with Tsumugi and Sougo at the hospital, after Riku had discovered Sougo on his floor unconscious. They'd called an ambulance immediately, and the remaining members could only wait anxiously at the office for more news.

Riku hummed, and Iori could tell that the alpha was troubled. "Yeah, the doctor said that this wasn't completely caused by stress. He's been lying about how long he's been on suppressants," Riku
Iori couldn't help but grimace. "Did he give the full details of how serious his condition is?"

"No, he said he could only tell Sougo-san's family or his alpha. If he had one, I mean. But I know Tamaki isn't too eager on the whole fated pair thing," Riku sighed. "Can you ask him, though? The doctor also said if it was at least an omega who came, he could tell us more."

Iori nodded, even though Riku couldn't see him. "Alright, I'll ask him. See you."

He ended the call, turning to look at the other four members. Iori's gaze focused on Tamaki. It was clear as day that the alpha was anxious, and Iori only hoped that this wasn't only due to their fated bond, that Sougo was becoming an important part of Tamaki’s life. He cleared his throat, looking at Tamaki with a level gaze.

"The doctor said he'll only go into the details of Ousaka-san's condition if his family or his alpha are present," he repeated what Riku told him, and Yamato sputtered. Mitsuki's eyes widened, and if it weren't for the fact that the situation was quite serious, Iori would've thought that his brother looked comical. Nagi frowned, and he looked at his fellow alpha.

"So that's how it is?" the blond asked.

Iori sighed, nodding as he stared blankly at Tamaki. "I want your honest reply, Yotsuba-san. If you don't intend on actually being in a relationship with Ousaka-san, then I'd rather you stay here," he said. Omegas were sensitive, always had been, and Iori was fairly certain that Sougo was already upset with how Tamaki was treating their relationship. If he were Sougo, he would very much rather Tamaki give a clear and definite answer, instead of just avoiding the topic every time it was brought up.

Tamaki's teeth worried at his bottom lip, and the alpha took a deep breath before replying, "Okay."

"Tama, are you sure?"

"Yeah," Tamaki said, this time in a firmer voice than before. "Souchan's always been looking out for me, more than he needs to. I'm stupid, and I've told him to tell me if he's tired, but he never does. And I know he's been trying to bring up this topic, and whenever I say that I want to focus on finding Aya, there'll be this sad smile on Souchan's face. I don't like to see him like that. I'm not sure if I can be a good alpha for anyone, but I'm willing to give it a shot."

They collectively heaved a sigh of relief, and Iori retrieved his bag from the corner of the room. The two left for the hospital, promising to update the others when they got more details.

Iori didn't talk to Tamaki often, even if they were classmates. There never seemed to be much to talk about apart from group activities; Iori wasn't into games, and Tamaki wasn't exactly the studious type. So Iori was mildly surprised when Tamaki asked, "Hey, Iorin. How did you know that your feelings for Rikkun aren't being influenced by this… thing?"

Iori glanced at Tamaki, chuckling and shaking his head. "I know they're still being influenced by the bond. But I think the bond makes you attracted to your other half on a more primal level. Sure, Nanase-san’s scent can be really… nice, at times, but I wouldn't be trying out a relationship with him if he had a terrible personality, you know? I guess it's just that you start to find yourself being attracted to every other part of them, not just their scent and their secondary gender."

"Huh… that sounds complicated," Tamaki grumbled. Then Iori caught the alpha smiling slightly to himself. “I think I get it. Sometimes Souchan is scary, and he can resist my alpha voice. He’s terrible
at lying, and he always nags me. But for some reason, that makes me want to take care of him just like he’s been taking care of me. It feels like he’s been fighting alone for too long. Does that make sense?’

Not really, Iori wanted to say, but he bit his tongue to prevent himself from speaking. Tamaki was finally taking a step forward in regards to his relationship with Sougo, and Iori wasn’t about the mess that up for the duo. Sougo had done a lot for him, too, and he wanted to see the other omega be happy.

So Iori smiled, nodding in response. “Fate is so strange, isn’t it?”

---

Riku looked up at Iori as he walked into the hospital with Tamaki.

“The doctor’s office is there,” he said, pointing to the room opposite him. “Manager’s settling some paperwork, then we can bring Souchan back to the dorms.”

Iori nodded, and the two of them went into the doctor’s office. The doctor was a man in his mid-forties, an omega, and he urged the two to sit down before he looked at them seriously. “You’re his mate?”

Tamaki shook his head truthfully, and the doctor’s brow quirked up questioningly. “Fated alpha, but we haven’t started a relationship yet. I’m intending to, so please tell me how Souchan is doing,” Tamaki requested, and the doctor’s features seemed to soften at how earnest Tamaki sounded.

He looked at Iori next. “You’re an omega, right?”

“Yes,” Iori confirmed. “Ousaka-san’s a very important friend, and I hope that it’s nothing too serious. You said that he’s been lying about how long he’s been on suppressants? What he told us was that he’d only started taking them a little over two months ago.”

Iori didn’t miss the way Tamaki’s eyes widened. “But he even marked his heat on the calendar.”

The doctor sighed, pulling out a stack of papers and selecting a few from the pile. He also pulled out an ultrasound, laying everything on his table and pointing at the ultrasound. “This over here is his uterus. A normal uterine lining should be,” he pointed at another document, “this thick. But due to the prolonged use of suppressants, his is only this thin. I can’t say exactly how long he’s been on suppressants, but it has to be at least a few years. A thin uterine lining means that it will be difficult for him to conceive, should you ever want to start a family in the future.”

He let this sink in for a moment, eyes glancing over to Tamaki, then he laid a few more documents on the table. “We ran a few tests, and it seems that the suppressants he’s currently on are a stronger brand than what would normally be prescribed. This means that weaker doses of suppressants aren’t working for him anymore, again because he’s been taking them for so long. And with a stronger dose comes stronger side effects: abdominal cramps, occasional nausea, dizziness and headaches. This, combined with the stress he’s been receiving, led to the acute gastroenteritis.”

“But that’s not all,” Iori said. It was a statement, not a question, and the doctor nodded grimly.

“His body wants to have a heat, needs to, and if he continues to be on such strong suppressants, he’ll
damage his reproductive system past the point of irreparable. As it is, he won’t be able to conceive easily,” the doctor explained. "If it goes on for too much longer... you get the gist."

Tamaki’s hands balled into fists, and Iori was sure the alpha was shaking in his seat. He didn’t seem to be angry, though. Maybe upset, but definitely not angry. There had to be a reason why Sougo had to be on suppressants for so long, and that he didn’t tell anyone else about it.

“His scent didn’t change even when he claimed to have gone on suppressants,” Tamaki scowled. “I should’ve known.”

Omegas’ scents were dulled by the use of suppressants, and this applied to even mates and fated partners. In hindsight, Tamaki should’ve suspected that something was off when Sougo’s scent remained exactly the same as it had always been. He felt so stupid.

Maybe if he’d stopped running away from Sougo earlier, he would have been able to convince Sougo to tell them something. It would've prevented all of this.

Iori sighed. “What can we do now?”

“Make sure he has a heat. His body should trigger one within a few days, as long as he doesn’t take any more suppressants. I understand that it’s difficult to take a week off as idols, but ultimately, this is for his health and I’m sure you understand how important it is. It’ll be rough on him to have a heat after going so long without one, so please make sure he stays fed and hydrated.”

Nodding, Iori stood back up, pulling Tamaki up by the arm with him and bowing gratefully to the doctor. “Thank you very much. We’ll be taking our leave then.”

When they went back to the waiting room, Tsumugi was there waiting with Riku.

“How did it go?” Riku asked, and Iori shook his head in reply.

“I’ll tell you when we get back.”

Tsumugi sighed, looking at the three boys. “We’ll hear about it from Sougo-san, right? For now, let’s get him back to the dorm to rest. I’ve already called a taxi,” she said. The boys nodded, and they went to get Sougo before heading out of the hospital. The omega was awake by now, and he kept quiet on the way back.

Tamaki carried Sougo on his back to his room, and he wasn’t sure if he had imagined Sougo sobbing into his shoulder the entire time.

Chapter End Notes

Not sure how many people were expecting this mess of things to happen HAHAHA sorry I love some angst every now and then. Also tamasou is fated to be the angsty couple for however long this entire fic series lasts (I'm so sorry kids I still love you guys) please give them more love <3 Next chapter is something nice to look forward to! See you guys next week!

P.S. In that sentence that ends with "you get the gist", I actually accidently typo-ed it to... "you get the fist". I laughed when I spotted it but thank god that didn't get posted
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Everyone was gathered in Sougo's room, Tsumugi included, and they stood around Sougo's bed while staring at the omega expectantly. He'd asked Riku and Tamaki to gather the others, saying that he had something to tell everyone.

Sougo took a deep breath as if to steady himself.

"Depending on the circumstances... I may quit."

Tamaki felt his heart stop in his chest. His whole world felt like it had stilled, and he stared at the omega, *his* omega, with wide eyes. *What does he mean by quit? But I finally... I finally decided to stop running away from the bond. How could he say that now?*

"By quit, do you mean MEZZO?" Mitsuki clarified, and Sougo shook his head. Tamaki had realised it before, but now it seemed all the more apparent that Sougo was absolutely drained. The bags under his eyes were darker than before, and he was so pale.

"Not just MEZZO. IDOLiSH7 too, if it comes to that..."

"But that's..." Riku trailed off, unsure of how to respond.

Tears welled up in Tamaki's eyes. He didn't know if they were tears of anger or sadness, because his emotions were a mess. The alpha didn't even realise when words started spilling from his mouth, didn't realise that he had lunged forward and grabbed Sougo by the collar. "If you hated it that much, then you should have said something!"

"Wha-"

"Didn't I tell you to say something if you were tired!? You said you understood!"

"Yotsuba-san, please stop!" Iori tried to cut in, but Riku held him back from stepping between the two.

Yamato grabbed Tamaki by the shoulders, trying to pull him away from Sougo. "Don't grab at someone who's sick!" the beta chided.

Tamaki didn't budge, but his grip on Sougo's collar loosened. "Why are you deciding if you should quit, and everything else, all by yourself!?" the alpha demanded, his voice breaking as he spoke.

"Let go of me!" Sougo said, pulling Tamaki's hand away from himself. Tamaki stumbled back when Mitsuki came between the duo, helping Yamato to get the alpha away from Sougo. Sougo frowned. "What are you talking about!?!"

"You're quitting because you're annoyed with me, aren't you!?" Tamaki asked.

Sougo's frown deepened. "When did I say that?"

"What other reason is there!? When you got taken away in the ambulance, I swore I would never cause you trouble ever again. I thought a lot about what I did, about what I've been doing," Tamaki said, his voice getting increasingly smaller. He sank to the ground on his knees, and the first tear
made its way down his cheek. "I even... I was going to stop running away from the fated bond, and now it's all over?"

He didn't look up from the ground, didn't notice how Sougo's gaze softened. "Tamaki-kun..."

The others were quick to support Tamaki. They all listed reasons as to why Sougo should hear Tamaki out. Sougo sighed, hands clutching his blanket tightly as he shook his head. "That's not it."

Tamaki's head shot up, and he looked at Sougo hopefully. There were unshed tears shining in his eyes, and Sougo wanted to wipe them away. But he couldn't – he wouldn't let himself be selfish like that. "There were problems with Tamaki-kun as well, but..."

"Is there another problem?" Tsumugi asked, worry evident in her tone.

Nodding, Sougo said, "I heard that being denied the regular program was due to FSC. That's my fault."

Everyone looked back at Sougo, completely confused, and the omega exhaled shakily.

"My father is Ousaka Soushi... the chairman of the Five Star Company."

---

Sougo explained everything to them – why his family opposed to him being an idol, how he had been inspired by his late uncle, and how him being in the group would ultimately lead to a similar incident occurring, that he had to leave.

Tamaki seemed pleased when Sougo finally told them everything, smiling at the omega. "You finally talked about yourself," the alpha said, and Sougo couldn't help but feel a comfortable warmth in his chest at Tamaki's words. Tamaki seemed genuinely glad that Sougo had stopped hiding things about himself, although there was still a lot that they didn't know about him.

Mitsuki had dispelled his worries easily, confidently saying that IDOLiSH7 just needed to become bigger, more popular. If they could attain the same level of fame as the legendary idol, Zero, then FSC wouldn't be able to stop them even if they wanted to.

Even Iori joined in, and Sougo felt reassured by their words. He was still worried, but if the others had enough faith in their capabilities, then Sougo didn't want to doubt them either. Most of them left his room after that, Yamato telling him to take it easy for now.

The only one who had stayed behind was Tamaki, saying that he had something else he wanted to talk about with Sougo. Iori had shot Tamaki a wary glance, and Sougo didn't miss the way Tamaki nodded slightly in understanding. The moment the others left, Tamaki scooted closer to Sougo's bed, biting his lip hesitantly as if he didn't know how to begin.

His demeanour shifted. Just moments ago, Tamaki had an air of contentment about him, because Sougo told them the truth about his family. But now the alpha was looking at Sougo with a seriousness that Sougo didn't realise Tamaki was capable of. He didn't seem angry, at least. It wasn't reflected in his scent.

Sougo wrinkled his nose slightly. Tamaki's scent seemed stronger than it used to be. He was certain
that it was because the suppressants were beginning to wear off, and his sense of smell was returning back to normal. It was disconcerting, because while he had known immediately that Tamaki was his fated alpha, he had never quite been affected this much by the alpha’s scent.

He noticed Tamaki do the same, leaning in closer and sniffing the area near Sougo's neck. The omega flushed, trying his best not to shrink back from Tamaki. He knew Iori thought that he was amazing, for being able to stand up against alphas the way he had before, but what Iori didn't know was that the suppressants dulled his instincts, dulled his senses and made him less submissive.

Now that the suppressants were leaving his system, Sougo felt a little overloaded.

"The doctor told us."

Sougo's head snapped up, the omega staring blankly at Tamaki. "About...?"

"How long have you been on suppressants, Souchan?" Tamaki asked, as straightforward as always.

Sougo froze immediately, his hands clenching and unclenching nervously. He didn't reply, and Tamaki let out an annoyed huff. The alpha ran a hand through his hair in frustration. "Okay, then can I guess?" he asked. Sougo nodded mutely. "Three years?"

"...no."

"Four years?"

"No."

"Wait," Tamaki said, his expression that of disbelief. "Five years!?"

Sougo avoided Tamaki's gaze, looking down at his blanket and picking at the stray threads. "I think it was right after I presented," Sougo admitted, wincing at the way Tamaki drew in a sharp breath. "I've had maybe two forced heats since then, or three. That's all."

"But why?" Tamaki asked. He didn't understand what kind of circumstances would lead to anyone having to be on suppressants for a whole five to six years. It didn't matter that Sougo had had to study, or that his parents probably expected him to succeed the company. Did it?

A weak laugh left Sougo's lips. "Why else? My father was ashamed that he bred an omega."

The Ousaka family was not only well-known for owning the FSC group. Their family had consisted of only alphas for many generations now, although occasionally some of them married a beta or an omega. But those with the Ousaka blood were always, always, alphas. Even Sougo's uncle had been an alpha, otherwise they'd never have let him dabble in music in the first place.

The day after Sougo's first heat ended, his father had him go on suppressants, and it just never stopped.

Suddenly, Sougo realised what Tamaki had said earlier.

"You said the doctor told you guys," Sougo asked slowly. "He isn't supposed to tell anyone else."

"He wasn't," Tamaki said simply, and it was obvious that the alpha was trying not to let his anger get the better of him. He was absolutely livid that Sougo's father could do something as cruel as that, and to his only son. Why did it matter that Sougo was an omega instead of an alpha? In Tamaki's opinion, Sougo had achieved so much more than many alphas out there. "He was only supposed to
tell your family or your alpha, was what he said. Iorin came too, because he's an omega."

Tamaki knew he didn't need to explain the rest. He watched as Sougo pieced things together, his eyes widening in shock. "But we're not-!"

"Not yet," Tamaki corrected, and there was a fierce determination in his eyes as he looked at Sougo. "I told you already, I was going to stop running away from the fated pair bond. I wasn't lying when I said that, and I'm not lying now.

"When Rikkun called Manager and said you fainted, do you have any idea how worried I was? Then he told Iorin that the doctor had something even more serious to tell, and I thought I was going to die from worry. I didn't decide this just to find out what the doctor wanted to say. I've been thinking about it for really long, and it wasn't fair to make you wait for me to find Aya."

Sougo didn't realise when he'd started crying, only that Tamaki's hand was suddenly on his face, his thumb gently wiping a stray tear away. He tried to say something, but the only sounds that came out were strangled sobs, and Tamaki pulled Sougo into a hug, quietly hushing the omega while rubbing his back comfortingly.

In truth, Sougo didn't even know why he was crying. Was he touched that Tamaki was finally giving their relationship a try, or was he upset because he knew what else the doctor had told the alpha? Sougo struggled to stop sobbing, enough to ask, "So he must have told you about my uterus, didn't he?"

He felt Tamaki nod, and the alpha's arms wrapped around him a little tighter. Sougo broke down completely, dissolving into a crying mess in Tamaki's hold. He had known about his condition for a while now; their family doctor always made them undergo routine check-ups, and the side effects of the suppressants had begun to make themselves known since nearly two years ago.

The doctor had, naturally, advised against continuing on suppressants, but it wasn't as if Sougo's father cared. His exact words, as Sougo recalled, were, "He can become barren and I'd be happy about it!"

Sougo hadn't been as affected by his father's words as he had been by the knowledge that his ability to bear children was at stake. He was an omega, he wanted to have children. It was something that he had known from the moment he had presented, the moment the haze of his first heat finally cleared from his mind. He always imagined finding an alpha, settling down and eventually bearing said alpha's pups. It sounded cliché, but that was what his body was built for.

It took a long time before Sougo calmed down, face buried in the crook of Tamaki's shoulder and breathing in the alpha's spicy scent. It was comforting, even if it felt like Tamaki's scent was suddenly too strong. Sougo pulled back from Tamaki's embrace, wiping at his eyes and sighing heavily.

"Are you sure, Tamaki-kun?" Sougo asked unsurely. "We might... we may not be able to have children."

Tamaki nodded, putting a hand over Sougo's and holding it tightly. "We'll think about that when we get to it, right?" he said, chuckling slightly. It sounded forced, and Sougo knew that Tamaki wasn't entirely unaffected by it, but he didn't comment on it. Just like omegas, it was part of an alpha's nature to want children. But the alpha was trying so hard to cheer him up, and Sougo wasn't going to make things harder for him by harping on what he couldn't fix.

"So are you courting me now?"
"If you'll have me, then of course," Tamaki grinned. Then he added, "But I'll still be looking for Aya!"

Sougo laughed, nodding as tears began to prick at his eyes again.

But this time, they were tears of happiness, the feeling blooming in his chest as Tamaki leaned forward to press their foreheads together.

For the first time, Sougo felt like he had somewhere he belonged.

---

As expected, Sougo’s heat came the next morning. The omega had seen it coming, locking himself in his heat room just in case. He didn’t want to risk going through what Iori had, didn’t want to make Tamaki’s rut start early.

It was difficult to get through his heat, just as it had always been. Being on suppressants meant that when Sougo finally did have a heat, it would be considerably more painful than a normal heat. His body was no longer used to having heats, either, and it was hard for him to satisfy himself enough to get any sleep.

Iori checked on Sougo often, whenever they were off from a job. He always made sure to bring food and water for the elder, and when he was busy, Banri would take over. They made sure not to go near to Tamaki until Sougo’s scent wore off, and usually Riku ended up scenting Iori, just so that the smell of Sougo’s heat didn’t cling on Iori.

Tamaki did his part, staying as far away from the heat rooms as he could. It was enough to know that Sougo had a few of the alpha’s clothes with him. The night before his heat, after the long talk with Tamaki, Sougo had asked the alpha for a few pieces of clothing, ones that Tamaki usually wore. Normally he would’ve been annoyed at having to sacrifice his favourite clothes, but if it would help make Sougo’s heat just a little more bearable, then he would gladly do it.

MEZZO took a break for the week that Sougo had his heat, the remaining six members focusing on their individual activities or thinking of other ways to promote IDOLiSH7. It was one thing to say that they could become as big as Zero was, but to actually achieve that level of fame was another issue entirely.

One big hurdle that they had to overcome, first, was TRIGGER.

They'd been sitting in the living room one day when TRIGGER's MV came on, and Mitsuki narrowed his eyes at the screen. It wasn't just Mitsuki – all of them wore the same expression whenever they saw the MV. There was always the familiar bitterness burning within them, knowing that they could have, should have, debuted with this song.

"We have to properly repay them for the stolen song," Mitsuki said under his breath.

"Have you checked the artist list for our next recording, the live program 'Soundship'?'" Iori asked, intentionally turning to look at Riku. The alpha nodded, already knowing where Iori was going with this. "We're planned to appear with TRIGGER."

A sort of grimace appeared on Riku's face as he said, "It's the first time since Music Festa..."
Then he straightened up, meeting the gazes of his teammates.

"This time, we'll show Tenn-nii our real power."

---

They were on the way back from a schedule on the day after Sougo's heat ended. Tamaki had, understandably, stayed in the dorms with Sougo to make sure that the omega was resting well. Tamaki had told them about his and Sougo's decision regarding their relationship, though he left out the details of how long Sougo had been on suppressants, how it had affected him and damaged him irreversibly.

Just as they had with Iori and Riku, the others were supportive of the two. They could already see how much happier Tamaki was, as if a heavy weight had been lifted off his shoulders, and everyone was glad for the duo. Of course, they had yet to talk to Otoharu about their newfound relationship, but it wasn't likely that the President would oppose to it, anyway. He had readily accepted Iori and Riku's relationship, and there was no reason for him not to accept Tamaki and Sougo doing the same.

Tsumugi had apparently met with TRIGGER and was relaying what Tenn told her to Riku. The redhead stopped in his tracks, staring in shock at the beta as she said, "Kujo-san will tell you what you want to know, if IDOLiSH7 wins the Rookie Award at the Japan Idol Music Awards this year."

"The Rookie Award at the Japan Idol Music Awards..." Riku mumbled.

Tsumugi nodded, frowning as fans began to crowd around them. She tried to disperse the crowd, and Riku turned to look at Iori. "Iori, is it hard to get the Japan... whatever's Rookie Award?" he asked, and a look of disbelief flashed across Iori's face. It was brief, but it was there.

After all, JIMA was one of the biggest music awards in Japan. But of course, Iori shouldn't have been surprised by Riku's lack of knowledge. The alpha didn't often concern himself with anything outside of actual singing, which made it all the more amazing that Riku had made it so far in the first place.

With a sigh, Iori tried to condense things for Riku. "Of course it is. You're in this industry and you don't know about JIMA?" Iori asked, wanting to snicker at how Riku pouted and attempted to pronounce the word. So cute, Iori thought, willing himself not to break into a smile. "Japan Idol Music Awards, or JIMA for short. It's an award decided strictly by CD sales, and it's the award that holds the most authority for singers in Japan."

Riku nodded, and Iori continued.

"If we win the Rookie Award, we'll be nominated for the year-end Black or White Music Fantasia."

From behind them, Mitsuki perked up. "The Black or White Music Fantasia! For singers, it's a dream event!" the beta nearly gushed. Iori's knowledge about the music industry came mostly from Mitsuki, and it was no surprise that the elder Izumi was knowledgeable on the topic as well.

"It's that big of an event?" Nagi asked.
"Right, you wouldn't know about JIMA," Mitsuki realised. "Black or White is an event where the winners of this year and last year's Rookie Award for each music division have a stage battle."

"Each music division... like the Rock King and challenger, or Enka King and challenger?"

"Yeah. If we perform, we'll probably be in the Male Idol Division," Mitsuki said, and a smirk made its way onto his face as he realised what exactly Kujo 'Tenn was aiming for. "If that happened, we'd challenge last year's Male Idol Division winner, which was..."

Yamato cut in, sharing a similar look with Mitsuki. "TRIGGER."

Mitsuki nodded in agreement. "Right. If we get the JIMA Rookie Award, we can confront them."

"And on the supreme stage of Black or White," Iori added, watching as a fierce determination settled on Riku's face. He liked this expression on Riku, maybe because it was so indicative of his nature as an alpha. It made his omega somewhat proud of the alpha, his alpha, as ridiculous as that sounded.

"If we get the Rookie Award, we can confront TRIGGER at Black or White..." Riku mumbled. "Hey Iori, is it impossible for us to get the Rookie Award?"

At this, Iori smiled at Riku. It was a knowing smile, because he'd spent enough time with Riku to understand his personality. "No. As long as you can show your full power to the live audience and mass media, we should be able to win."

As Iori expected, Riku went quiet.

"I think the guests at our live performances already know your true power," Yamato commented, his brow quirking up as he looked at Riku curiously. "But somehow, you're never at 100% during recordings."

"Why's that? Are you nervous?" Mitsuki asked.

Iori knew the answer, just as well as Riku did. The alpha's strength tended to only make itself known when he was performing for somebody. In this regard, he wasn't unlike Tenn at all. Both twins could only pull out their real abilities if they had an audience to perform to. It didn't matter how many people were in the audience – Riku had performed to a crowd of nine guests just as well as he had to a crowd of three thousand.

The alpha said exactly what Iori thought he would. "Apart from Music Festa, the music shows we've been in haven't had anyone in the audience," Riku replied. "And because everyone's working so hard, I can't help but focus on not making mistakes."

Iori supposed that he was partly to blame for that last bit. He couldn't help but feel the need to remind Riku not to mess up during performances. He didn't mean to put unnecessary pressure on the alpha, god knows that was the last thing he would want to do, but he knew that it would be even worse for Riku if he did end up messing up.

"So you wither away," Yamato concluded. "I get that it's easier to get into it if there is an audience."

They stopped talking abruptly when fans started to gather again, one businessman even asking to shake Iori's hand and saying that he admired how Iori talked back to his elders, that he wished he could do that to his superiors at work too. Iori didn't really get it, but he simply asked, "Why don't you?"

He ended up with Mitsuki's hand over his mouth. "You idiot! Thank you very much! This kid's
actually pretty cute!" Mitsuki told the businessman.

Riku slung an arm over Iori's shoulder. "Everyone dotes on him!"

"You say that so easily..." Iori mumbled, ignoring the slight burning of his cheeks. He couldn't help but think that Riku was getting possessive, if the alpha's scent indicated anything. But the businessman most certainly didn't seem like he was an alpha, so Iori didn't understand what Riku was getting so riled up over. He definitely didn't mind the attention though, his omega preening happily internally.

The businessman left, and Riku let Iori go, but he walked closer to the omega than before.

"I want to win the Rookie Award and find out why Tenn-nii left his family," Riku decided firmly.

Yamato snorted. "Easier said than done. First, we have to increase our popularity..." the beta trailed off abruptly, coming to a stop and staring blankly at a billboard in front of them. "Hey, that face on that stupidly big billboard in front of the station... doesn't that belong to someone here?"

"Nagi-san!?" Tsumugi exclaimed, and they whirled to look at the blond.

Iori's eyes widened when he realised who Nagi was pictured next to. "Clara Lowell... that's a famous high-class overseas brand!"

Nagi beamed.

"Yes! I had a date with Clara the other day!"

Mitsuki scowled, and he hit Nagi on the back of the head.

Chapter End Notes

Wow what a mess but MEZZO finally resolved their issues!! Kind of!!! I mean they obviously still have a lot of things to iron through (as with everyone else) but they're finally making progress I'm so proud of them :')

I think it's not /that/ hard to guess what comes next, judging from the way this chapter ended...? Slightly earlier update today bc I'm not sure what time I'll get home tonight hahaha. Hope you guys enjoyed this and see you next week!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As it turned out, Nagi did have a date with the overseas model. The others shouldn't have been as surprised as they were; after all, Nagi was extremely handsome, and Clara Lowell probably was more attracted to his European looks than she would be attracted to Japanese men.

They made it back to the office, miraculously managing to avoid any further encounters with fans, and Tsumugi was on the computer looking up Clara Lowell's profile. She was in the midst of reading it out, and in another corner of the room, Banri was lamenting on how Nagi should have gone through the company.

"If only... if only she'd gone through the agency! We could've gotten a huge amount of money from talent fees!" the omega cried, and Iori noted that he had never heard Banri sound so tortured before. It was mildly amusing, if only it wasn't so true. As they were now, IDOLiSH7 needed not just exposure, but funding as well. They needed the money to prepare more promotional activities, come up with more songs.

Nagi clicked his tongue distastefully. "It's not nice to mix money into a date with a lady."

Banri continued to exclaim about how they could've earned enough money to eat high-end bentos, and Iori went to stand behind Tsumugi to look at the computer. "Speaking of Clara Lowell, it's a well-established brand that's popular with women," he commented.

He snorted when Tsumugi sighed. "I know. I also wanted to put money aside and buy a bag..."

"That's not what I meant," he corrected, and the beta turned to look at him, tilting her head to the side in confusion. "I meant that since Rokuya-san's face is in this advertisement, it's going to be all over women's magazines, won't it?"

He waited for Tsumugi to connect the dots, her face lighting up in realisation. "That means..."

"Once again, I will be popular," Nagi said, earning himself a well-deserved smack to the head by Mitsuki, for the second time that day. Iori wasn't sure what exactly was going on between Mitsuki and Nagi, but something was up, and he would find out soon enough.

He set the matter aside for the moment, making a mental reminder to ask his brother later.

"Now is when we need to sell IDOLiSH7!" Iori corrected sharply. "Has anything come in? Like a job offer or any requests?"

Tsumugi nodded immediately. "Mr. Shimooka invited us to be regulars for his new program! And... oh! Yamato-san just got an offer for the lead of a new serial drama!"

"What about the theme song?"

"There isn't anything stated about it..." Tsumugi trailed off as she scanned the email.

Iori slammed the table. "Snatch the theme song for this serial drama for IDOLiSH7!"

Tsumugi barely had enough time to look back at Iori with wide eyes, and then she was up on her feet.
and rushing to grab her stuff. "I understand! I'll make a run to their office now!"

"Take your business card!" Iori reminded. "And a sample CD!"

"Right! I'll be right back!"

Nagi looked at the flustered Tsumugi, even as Mitsuki continued to nag him about what not to do as an idol; which of course included going on random dates with famous women from around the world. "Oh... Tsumugi, what's wrong? Did I cause you any trouble?"

Tsumugi stopped just before she left the office, poking her head back in. "Nagi-san, good job!"

"Wow! There was merit in working hard for you!"

"Don't make me laugh," Iori commented dryly, and the alpha turned to him.

"Iori, rather than an idol... you seemed like a manager just now," Nagi said.

Iori's eyes widened slightly. "Isn't that just your imagination?"

It was one thing for Riku to know about this, since he and Riku were courting and he didn't want to hide something like this from the alpha, but he absolutely could not have the others finding out. This included even Mitsuki, since Iori was fairly certain that the elder wouldn't want to take orders from him.

Riku was about to cut in, deflect the topic away from Iori, but Tsumugi beat him to it, and the two heaved similar sighs of relief. "But from now on, if you're going to do a semi-nude photoshoot, please get permission from the agency," she reminded Nagi sternly, and Banri made a noise of agreement.

"Oh... even in your room?" the alpha asked, and Iori didn't miss the way Mitsuki's hand twitched.

A crush? Iori mused. Mitsuki had had crushes before, but girls usually rejected him because he was small and looked cute, and guys rejected him because although he was shorter than them, he tended to be stronger. Eventually Mitsuki stopped confessing, and he spent his free time practicing and going for auditions. Nagi wasn't a bad guy, but he flirted with women all the time. Iori wondered if the blond was even aware that Mitsuki was attracted to him.

Tsumugi blushed at Nagi's words. "Please don't strip in my room! I won't pay the fees..."

"That's fine, Tsumugi. You don't need money or permission in love," Nagi replied with a wink. "All you need is two people's love."

This time, Mitsuki didn't hold back, hitting Nagi for the third time.

Iori sighed – the alpha had it coming, anyway.

Otoharu appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, and cleared his throat.

"Nagi-kun, in Japan, you definitely need a father's permission."

Tsumugi flashed a thankful smile at Otoharu. "Oh, dad! Well then, I'll be off!"

From the corner of his eye, Iori caught Mitsuki scolding Nagi.

Again.
Iori brought the topic up later that night, when he was lounging around in Riku's room as usual. He'd intended on asking Mitsuki outright, but his brother had asked Yamato out for drinks, and they all knew how much their leader loved beer.

The betas were out, Sougo was catching up on work that he'd missed and Tamaki was with the omega. Nagi was presumably watching anime, but Iori hadn't bothered to check. He wasn't about to confront Nagi without knowing whether Mitsuki really was interested in the blond alpha, anyway.

Riku was lying in bed, reading up on celebrity news, and Iori was sitting on Riku's beanbag beside his bed. The omega looked up from his textbook, closing it and setting it aside. "Nanase-san, can I ask you something?"

Riku hummed, looking up from his phone briefly. "What is it?"

"Do you think there's something going on between nii-san and Rokuya-san?"

The question got Riku's attention, and the redhead put his phone aside before scooting over closer to Iori. He tilted his head to the side, asking, "What brought this on?"

Iori shot Riku an unimpressed look, raising a brow at the alpha. "Have you not seen how they interact?"

Riku frowned as he attempted to recall exactly what Iori was talking about. "Nagi flirts... with women? And Mitsuki gets angry at him?" Riku asked unsurely. Iori nodded, gesturing for Riku to continue with his train of thought, but Riku simply shook his head in confusion. "I don't get it."

Iori sighed in exasperation, wondering how Riku could be so painfully dense sometimes. There were times when Riku surprised him with how easily he picked up on things, but other times Iori wanted to hit his head against the wall because of how oblivious the alpha was.

"Does it not seem at all like nii-san is jealous?" Iori asked. "Not at all?"

Riku hummed, trying to figure out where Iori was coming from. "If you put it that way, I guess...?"

"You still don't get it, do you."

"Not really, no," Riku admitted sheepishly. "All Mitsuki does is scold and hit Nagi, though?"

Sighing again, Iori explained from the start – Mitsuki's past experiences when it came to crushes, how he was almost always rejected no matter who he confessed to, and how the beta eventually stopped trying. Mitsuki still had crushes, but he didn't confess anymore, always keeping his feelings to himself and watching his crushes from a distance.

Mitsuki sometimes told Iori about them, about why he was attracted to them. But he would always end up smiling sadly, telling Iori that it didn't matter either way. He was bound to get rejected, again, so there wasn't any reason to even consider confessing.

Iori didn't like to see Mitsuki upset. It wasn't just because he loved his older brother, but he honestly couldn't understand why the beta was always rejected. If only they took some time to get to know
him better, they would see that Mitsuki was so much more than just a plain, shorter-than-average beta male. Mitsuki was funny and was good with interpersonal relationships. Iori always looked up to his brother because of that, and he wished others were able to see Mitsuki's worth.

By the end of his explanation, Riku looked troubled, and Iori was somewhat relieved that the alpha finally understood his worries. Nagi wasn't bad, none of the alphas in IDOLiSH7 were, but Iori wouldn't take to it kindly if Nagi trampled all over Mitsuki's feelings. It wasn't as if Mitsuki would ever confess, either, and it definitely wouldn't feel good to have to hide his feelings. The members of IDOLiSH7 were in it for the long haul, and Mitsuki would crack eventually.

It was Riku's turn to sigh, resting his chin on his palm and looking at Iori. "But what do we do?"

"First I should probably ask nii-san if I'm right," Iori pointed out.

Nodding in agreement, Riku asked, "Should I ask Nagi, then?"

Iori laughed, leaning back against Riku.

"I didn't realise we became matchmakers. But yes, that'd be nice. After I ask nii-san, alright?"

---

The two set to work the next day, right after they ended another broadcast of their web show.

Before Riku could do anything, Iori had to ascertain that his assumptions were right. So, the omega dragged his brother to his room right after they got back to the dorms. He didn't even give Mitsuki a chance to get to the showers, locking his room door and sitting the beta on his chair.

"What is it, Iori?" Mitsuki asked, leaning back and stretching his tired muscles.

Iori had never been the type to beat around the bush, so he cut straight to the matter at hand. "You like Rokuya-san, right?" Iori asked, immediately knowing that he was right when he caught Mitsuki freeze. It was just for a fraction of a second, but Iori knew his brother well enough to recognise that reaction.

But of course Mitsuki tried to deny it, he always did whenever he wanted to hide something from Iori, and the omega wasn't buying any of it. "What are you talking about?" Mitsuki asked, trying to laugh it off, thinking that he would be able to fool Iori of all people.

Just as easily as Mitsuki could tell that Iori liked Riku, Iori could tell that Mitsuki liked Nagi, much more than he should. Iori sighed, raising a brow and giving his brother an extremely unimpressed look. "You don't have to lie, nii-san. I don't know why you're even trying."

Mitsuki's shoulders sagged, the beta smiling that same wistful smile he always did. "That obvious?"

"I've known you for my whole life, nii-san. I have no idea what led you to think that I wouldn't notice," Iori pointed out blankly. Mitsuki sank further into the seat, pulling his knees to his chest and sighing. He was staring at the ground, a clear sign that he wanted to avoid the topic, but Iori wasn't having any of that. "When did it start?"

"Honestly? I have no idea," Mitsuki admitted. "I think it was around Music Festa, because he was
trying his best to cheer us up, and I thought that he was pretty amazing to be able to do that. He must've been feeling as bad as the rest of us, but he managed to hold himself together. And then he helped to protect you when your heat was triggered. It just kept going from there, I think."

Iori couldn't say he was surprised by this, simply asking, "Do you intend to tell him?"

Mitsuki's eyes widened, the beta immediately shaking his head in response. "Of course not!"

"Why?"

Iori knew why, but he wanted to hear it from Mitsuki himself.

"He can do so much better, that's why," Mitsuki huffed, deflating once more and sighing again. "I mean, look at him. He's tall, fair, attractive, and even if he seems stupid, he's actually pretty smart. If he can get pretty and rich girls like Clara Lowell to go on dates with him, why would he even look at plain old me?"

Mitsuki was scowling now, and Iori was sure it was because he mentioned Clara Lowell. The omega wanted to laugh at how blatantly obvious his brother was, and he wondered how Nagi hadn't picked up on it yet. Or maybe he had but hadn't said anything about it. Iori didn't want to get Mitsuki's hopes up, either, knowing how things always ended – with Mitsuki upset and locking himself up for days at a time. Mitsuki was usually cheerful, but he had his off days, too.

With a small sigh of his own, Iori put a hand on Mitsuki's arm, hoping that the gesture would come across as reassuring. "If it helps, I'm sure he's not too concerned about whether you're rich or not, considering that Rokuya-san had never taken an economy class flight before Okinawa," Iori offered, smiling sheepishly when Mitsuki shot him a half-hearted glare. As usual, Iori wasn't too good when it came to comforting others, but he knew Mitsuki understood his intentions.

"I think you should give it a try, though," he added. Mitsuki was about to retort that no, there was no point in doing so, but Iori cut him off. "What if he does feel something for you?"

Mitsuki's eyes narrowed dangerously. "Don't you dare, Izumi Iori."

Iori put his hands up in surrender. "I wouldn't."

But Nanase-san would.

---

That was how Riku found himself in Nagi's room the next morning, a little while after they'd all had breakfast together and those who had to go to work had left the dorms. Yamato didn't have to leave for drama filming till later in the afternoon, and Nagi apparently had a new modelling gig in the evening.

Riku had gotten the full story from Iori last night, and at this point he wasn't even surprised that Iori was right. He couldn't really remember if Iori had ever been wrong, with the exception of Music Festa, but even then Iori hadn't been wrong. After all, if Riku hadn't gotten into a scuffle with the unknown beta in the waiting room, the whole incident would never have occurred.

He figured that Nagi was going to be in his room until lunch, so he knocked on the blond's door,
letting himself in when Nagi said that the door was unlocked. As expected, Nagi was lying in bed with a manga in hand, and he glanced at Riku as the redhead closed the door behind him.

Riku sat down on Nagi's chair, grabbing the body pillow of Kokona and hugging it as he looked straight at Nagi. Just like Iori, Riku was quick to get to the point. "Hey, Nagi, what do you think about Mitsuki?" Riku asked, and Nagi put his manga down before sitting upright.

"In what sense?"

"What comes to mind when you think of him?"

Nagi furrowed his brows in thought, and soon he was wearing a small smile on his face. "He's an important friend," Nagi replied. Riku simply raised a brow, prompting the other to continue. "He's the first person who's ever scolded me, but he also takes care of all of us and I appreciate that a lot."

Riku huffed softly in annoyance. He wasn't sure how to broach the topic without letting slip that Mitsuki liked Nagi as more than just a friend. "If, hypothetically, he likes you, what would you do?" Riku asked, deciding to just go for it. He hoped that Iori would continue being right, that perhaps Nagi also had romantic feelings of any sort for the elder Izumi.

Nagi's face fell, and he laughed weakly. "That's impossible."

Riku couldn't help but notice the immediate change in Nagi's demeanour, and he wondered if maybe, maybe this was a step in the right direction. The redhead perked up slightly, giving Nagi a hopeful look. "But if he did, what would you do? Do you think of him in that way?"

With a sigh, Nagi nodded. "Mitsuki has helped me learn a lot in the past few months, not just about being an idol, but being a human as well. But you've seen how he reacts when I flirt with girls! He just gets angry because it's unprofessional!" Nagi exclaimed indignantly, falling back down onto his bed with a dramatic groan.

Are you serious? Riku thought, staring at Nagi blankly. Granted, Riku hadn't quite identified Mitsuki's outbursts of anger as jealousy, either, but ever since Iori told him about it, it all made sense. They all knew Mitsuki had a sort of inferiority complex, probably somewhat due to the fact that he had an excessively capable younger brother. Naturally the beta would hide his insecurities behind a mask, hide his emotions and keep them to himself.

It wasn't that Riku didn't understand the feeling of being inferior – it was part and parcel of being twins with Tenn, after all. But Riku also knew that if he never said anything, nobody would know how he truly felt. Riku had always been rather open with expressing his emotions, and everyone around him knew that fact well. It was precisely because he didn't, couldn't, hide his feelings that he and Iori were even able to consider being a couple.

With Nagi an alpha and Mitsuki a beta, it was definitely a little harder to make a move because they didn't have the additional attraction to each other from their secondary genders. Yet at the same time, it was infinitely easier to know that they were attracted to each other for their own personalities, and not because their inner alpha or omega wished so.

If Nagi was able to say, with confidence, that he saw Mitsuki as a potential partner, then there was no doubt that it was how Nagi truly felt about the beta. He didn't have to keep second-guessing his feelings, didn't have to worry about it like Riku and Iori did, like Tamaki and Sougo did.

Riku put the pillow down, placing both hands on Nagi's shoulders and looking at him seriously.

"Tonight, when you get back from your photoshoot, I want you to go into Mitsuki's room and tell
him exactly what you told me," Riku said, and Nagi opened his mouth to protest, but Riku shook his head firmly. "Tell him. You'll be surprised at what you'll find out."

Nagi looked cynical, and Riku couldn't quite blame him. The redhead simply offered the blond a smile, patting him on the shoulder and wishing him good luck as he exited Nagi's room. Satisfied with himself, Riku retired to his own room, pulling his phone out and updating Iori.

It wasn't long before his phone pinged with a new message, and Riku grinned as he read it.

From: Iori

Good job, Nanase-san. I'll buy us ice-cream on the way home.

---

"Oh! Is that a new flavour?"

Iori put his bag down by the side, snickering at how excited Riku looked at the prospect of trying something new. He'd been at the convenience store thinking of what to get when he spotted the banner at the ice-cream aisle, and since Iori was sure that Riku would like whatever he bought, he decided that it wouldn't hurt to try something new. He had absolutely no regrets about his decision, if it meant that he got to see the way Riku's eyes sparkled.

What a cute person.

"Yes, it's pineapple. Summer's beginning to hit its peak, after all," Iori pointed out, sitting down beside Riku and handing the cup to him. He was fairly certain that the ice-cream was on the verge of being half-melted by now, which was the reason why he'd opted to buy a cup ice-cream instead of the kind on a stick.

Riku opened the packaging eagerly, making a face when he saw that it was, in fact, turning into liquid. "Ugh. Maybe I should put it into the freezer first," Riku grumbled. "Pass me that. I'll drop it off in the kitchen. Want me to get anything?"

Iori shook his head, handing his own cup over to Riku. "Thanks."

The moment Riku walked out of his room, Iori pulled out the plastic bag he'd hid in the bottom of his bag, heaving a sigh of relief when he took it out and found that the contents were intact. He quickly set it up as nicely as he could, grabbing the lighter he'd bought and lighting the candle before sticking it into the cake.

The door clicked open, and Iori froze. "Wait! Stay there!"

"...what?"

"D-don't come in yet!" Iori shouted. He could sense Riku's confusion, but the alpha did as told, and Iori grabbed the present he'd prepared, putting it nicely beside the slice of cake. When he was sure that the setup looked about right, Iori said, "Okay, you can come in now."

"I can smell smoke, what's goi- oh."

Riku stared dumbly at the slice of cake and small gift bag in front of Iori, barely registering how
impossibly red Iori was becoming. "Oh," Riku repeated. "Wow."

Iori's cheeks were burning; he'd never really surprised anyone before, his family excluded. He wasn't sure how Riku would react to this, but he felt bad that they hadn't gotten to celebrate Riku's birthday. Sougo had been in the middle of a heat, and it didn't seem right to hold a group celebration without him. Besides, in Iori's free time, he'd been making sure that Sougo was doing alright.

On the actual day of Riku's birthday, all he'd done was wish the alpha a happy birthday verbally, not having had time to go and prepare anything for him. Juggling school, idol activities, and management didn't exactly leave Iori with a lot of free time.

"Blow the candle out first," Iori urged, watching the wax drip onto the cake. Riku snapped out of his daze, nodding and quickly thinking of a wish before blowing said candle out. Then Iori pushed the gift bag towards Riku. "You can, uh, open it."

Riku looked inside the bag, eyes lighting up at the sight of what was inside. "A keychain?"

Iori was still blushing furiously. "It's the companion of the one you bought for me in Osaka," he explained, willing his voice to be steady. He didn't think it would be this embarrassing, since Riku already knew that he liked cute things. But implying that it was a couple item made him feel more self-conscious than he would've expected to.

"It's really cute!" Riku exclaimed, grinning brightly. "What's its name?"

"That's... Loppu-chan," Iori said reluctantly. "The one you bought me was Mimi-chan. I managed to get Pero-chan too, from the same seller. God, why am I even telling you this."

"Aww, don't need to be shy!" Riku told him. "I'll treasure her a lot! I promise!"

"You don't have to force yourself," Iori mumbled, taking a deep breath in order to calm his racing heart down. He was expecting Riku to like it anyway, since he'd bought a keychain for himself back in Osaka. "Happy belated birthday, Nanase-san."

Riku chuckled, setting the keychain aside carefully. It was his first gift from Iori, and he'd be damned if he let it get lost or damaged in any way. "While waiting for the ice-cream to chill, should we share the cake?" Riku suggested. Iori nodded, taking the plastic forks out from the bag and handing one over to Riku. The alpha immediately cut into the chocolate cake, holding the fork in front of Iori. "Say ahh."

"I can feed myself."

"We're celebrating my birthday, aren't we? Let me feed you!"

Iori sighed, cheeks flushing red once more. "There's no helping it, then."

"Yay! You can feed me too, Iori!"

"No thank you."

Chapter End Notes

Wow I didn't realise how short this chapter was when I typed it (2 months ago) SO I
added that little bit with Riku's birthday celebration at the end! I went to check the timeline I made for this fic and it managed to fit in somehow, so yay, more rikuio fluff! Since we've been focusing so much on the others in recent chapters (sorry Yamato not you)

Nagi and Mitsuki will get their act together in the next chapter and then we'll (mostly) be going back to following the main storyline! I think this fic should end up around 26-27 chapters? It'll be at least 100k words tbh lmao I'm at chapter 24 with 90k words already. Thank you to everyone who's been supporting so far and to all the new readers! I noticed the views increased a lot since the MEZZO arc LOL. Till next week!
Nagi brought his hand up to knock on Mitsuki’s door, stopping himself just before his fingers made contact with the door. He’d spent the whole day thinking about what Riku had said to him, and try as he might, Nagi just could not figure out what Riku was trying to imply.

Or maybe he could, but he was convinced that Riku was wrong.

After all, there was no way whatever Riku was implying could be true. Mitsuki had done everything but imply that he was attracted to Nagi in the slightest. From day one, Mitsuki had been scolding Nagi about one thing or the other, to the point that his scolding was almost like a BGM in Nagi’s daily life. Nagi didn't even know if a single day had passed that Mitsuki didn't nag him about something, but he didn't particularly mind that.

He didn't want to risk ruining the friendship they had right now, the familiar camaraderie they had built over the past months of working together. It was comfortable being around Mitsuki, knowing that he was free to be himself and act however he wanted, because if he stepped out of line, Mitsuki would be there to rein him in.

But Riku had seemed so confident, and Nagi found himself knocking on the beta’s door anyway. He’d just showered after coming back from his photoshoot, and he hadn't even went back to his room to dry his hair before heading over to Mitsuki’s room. Riku's words kept nagging at him, and if Nagi didn't know better, he would think that Riku had used his alpha voice on him. He probably had, subtly enough that Nagi didn't catch onto it.

Just a few seconds after knocking on Mitsuki’s door, Nagi wanted to change his mind. He was about to step away, turn and go back to his own room, when he heard footsteps approach the door, and the door was opened. Mitsuki peeked out, raising a brow at Nagi. "Yes?"

Mitsuki refused to acknowledge the fact that his throat was going dry from the sight of Nagi fresh out of a shower, hair down and tousled messily. He was glad that Nagi was at least wearing a shirt, although he wished it wasn’t one with Kokona’s face printed on it. It wasn't as if he hadn't seen Nagi after showering before, and maybe he was prone to wondering what exactly it would be like to run his hands over Nagi's body, but one could hardly blame him. He was very much of a legal age, and it was natural that he occasionally had thoughts about sex once in a while.

"I needed to talk to you about something," Nagi said, smiling when Mitsuki opened his door wide enough to let Nagi in. The alpha went to sit on the floor by the table, waiting for Mitsuki to close the door and go over. He heard the lock click and wondered if maybe Mitsuki had a clue about what he wanted to talk about.

Nagi had never been so nervous in his entire life.

"So?" Mitsuki asked, sitting back down on his bed and turning the TV volume down. Nagi wasn't surprised to find that the beta was watching one of Zero’s old DVDs; Mitsuki watched those just as often as Nagi watched reruns of MagiKona.

Nagi bit his lip, wondering how he should approach the topic. He didn't want to seem overconfident, despite the fact that he usually acted that way. He hadn't actually had romantic feelings for someone
else before, even if he often went on dates with beautiful, and occasionally famous, women. They always only agreed to go on dates with him because of his looks after all. It wasn't that Nagi was incapable of holding a proper conversation with them, either, but he'd had enough of that back in his home country.

Mitsuki was one of the few people who saw him as he was, treated him as an equal and looked out for him even though he didn't really have to. He knew the other members of IDOLiSH7 cared for him too, but somehow it wasn't the same. Maybe because more than half of them already had another half, and Nagi never once considered them as potential partners.

Nagi took a deep breath to calm himself. "What do you think of me?" he asked, using the same question that Riku had asked him earlier that day.

Mitsuki was caught off-guard, which wasn't surprising in the least, and he laughed awkwardly as he tried to find a way to answer the question. "What brought this on?"

It was Nagi's turn to be stunned by the question, and he quickly came up with a lie. "Oh, one of the photographers at the shoot today said that they didn't expect my personality to be like... this."

Mitsuki couldn't help but chuckle. "Gee, I wonder why."

"Hey!" Nagi exclaimed, clearly offended. "Now it's your turn to answer my question."

Mitsuki hummed thoughtfully, finger tapping his chin as he pursed his lips. "For starters, you're noisy," he said, grinning when Nagi made another offended noise. "You always force us, me especially, to watch MagiKona with you. At first I thought you were just a stupid foreigner with good looks, honestly."

Then Mitsuki's smile softened, a different emotion making itself apparent across his features. Nagi was surprised to see that it was an expression similar to what he knew he wore when he looked at Mitsuki. "But you're also kind, smart, and you're always there for us when we're feeling down. And I know I've said this before, but I'll always be thankful to you for protecting Iori that day."

Mitsuki sounded resigned for some reason, sighing softly and shaking his head wordlessly. Nagi frowned at this, wondering what could possibly cause the usually bright Mitsuki to suddenly be in such a down mood. He thought about what Riku said to him, and he thought about how Mitsuki had looked just moments ago. It was truly too similar to the way Nagi sometimes found himself looking at the beta — with a sort of longing, for something that he knew he couldn't have.

Okay then, Nagi decided. "Mitsuki, I like you."

"...huh?"

The beta seemed to be at a loss for words, looking at Nagi in confusion.

Nagi simply nodded, a confident smile on his face. "You heard me."

Suddenly, Mitsuki was laughing incredulously, shaking his head as he doubled over in laughter. "That's really funny, Nagi!" the beta snorted. Nagi was about to confront Mitsuki about it, tell him that he was absolutely serious about this, when he heard Mitsuki's laughter slowly dissolve into broken sobs. "Don't play with me!"

"I'm not!" Nagi insisted, reaching over to tip Mitsuki's chin up and force the beta to look at him. He dropped his hand when he saw that Mitsuki's eyes were brimming with unshed tears, and the beta hurried to wipe them away before adamantly averting his gaze from Nagi's.
"What is it, then?" Mitsuki asked, and Nagi was sure he could hear the beta's voice quivering. "You wanted to see what it would be like to be with a beta? Or was it because you got bored of playing around with all those women, so you wanted to be with a man this time? Which is it?"

Nagi's fingers curled into fists, and he was barely able to hold himself back from shouting at Mitsuki that no, he was completely wrong. That he had never had any of those thoughts. But instead he leaned forward, turning Mitsuki's face towards him and pressing his lips against the beta's harshly.

The kiss lasted for all of three seconds before Mitsuki was shoving Nagi away, scrambling up to get as far from the alpha as his room would allow. He wiped at his lips hastily, cheeks burning red as he glared at Nagi. Nagi couldn't quite figure out if Mitsuki was embarrassed or angry.

"What was that for!?" Mitsuki demanded.

Nagi sighed heavily. Was Riku wrong after all? "I told you, I like you," Nagi repeated.

"There's no way you're serious," Mitsuki said, chuckling humourlessly as he slid down to the floor. He pulled his knees to his chest, resting his forehead against his knees so that his face was hidden from view. "No one ever is."

"But I am," Nagi said simply, getting up to walk over to where Mitsuki was.

The beta did his best to shuffle away, but he ended up cornering himself and reluctantly let Nagi tip his chin up again. He smiled bitterly. "Go on, laugh at me. I'm pathetic, aren't I? Why would anyone want me, when they can go on dates with top-class models?"

It was almost ridiculous, how deep Mitsuki's inferiority complex ran, if it wasn't so painful to hear Mitsuki sound so broken. He sounded like this had happened before, and Nagi realised belatedly that yes, of course it had. There was no other explanation for how Mitsuki sounded so sure of himself, how he was certain that nobody would like him, and that Nagi certainly wouldn't.

So instead of forcing another kiss on Mitsuki, Nagi pulled the smaller male into a hug.

"I'm not going to laugh at you," Nagi assured, tightening his hold on Mitsuki when he felt the beta's shoulders begin to shake with silent sobs. He held Mitsuki until he stopped crying, more certain than ever that this man in front of him deserved all the love he could offer.

The two of them sat in silence for a while after that, seated close enough together that their arms touched each other's. Nagi could tell that Mitsuki was still upset, and as much as he wanted to ask what had happened in the past, he knew that there was probably a better time and place for it than now.

He moved so that his hand was over Mitsuki's, slowly lacing his fingers through the elder's and smiling when, this time, Mitsuki didn't run away.

---

Soon enough, it was time for another episode of their web show, just a few days after Nagi confessed to Mitsuki. In the end, the beta never did give him a clear and concise reply to his confession, but he didn't reject any of Nagi's advances, and the blond could only take that as a positive response.
The group was gathered around the set, waiting for Tsumugi and Banri to give the green light to begin.

The beta gave them a thumbs-up, and Riku beamed.

"Good evening! Welcome to IDOLiSH7's An IDOLiSH Night with You!" Riku greeted cheerfully. The others waved to the camera as Riku picked up the set of cards on the table. "Today we'll be repaying the fans! In this corner, we'll be reading the requests that we've received and try to fulfil them as best as we can!"

He looked at the first card, smiling as he scanned the contents. "First, I'd like to read the first request.

"To everyone in IDOLiSH7, congratulations on your appearance on Soundship. Thank you very much! I always watched Soundship's live concert on TV, but since IDOLiSH7 is appearing, I'll be going with my friend to watch for the first time! My heart won't stop racing!"

"I'm really happy to hear that," Sougo said.

Mitsuki nodded in agreement. "Our hearts are racing, too!"

"Now, about my request, the pose where you hold hands and raise them up is really cool!" Riku had to bite back a grin as he read the next line, knowing exactly how flustered Iori would get. "So, I was wondering, why don't Riku-kun and Iori-kun ever do it? I'd like you to do it at Soundship!"

Iori's answer was immediate. "We probably won't."

Even though Iori was sitting slightly behind Riku, the alpha knew that Iori wasn't as calm as he appeared to be. The omega was terribly good at hiding his emotions, keeping his voice completely flat. He didn't have to, but it wasn't as if Riku didn't understand why Iori had rejected the suggestion so quickly.

While they were officially courting now, it wasn't as if the fans were allowed to find out. That was one of Otoharu's main concerns, understandably so, and it wasn't as if Riku wanted fans to know about their relationship anyway. IDOLiSH7 was just starting out, and they didn't need any sort of negative publicity for themselves, even if it was true that the two of them were sort of together now.

He read the rest of the request mail. "P.S., Mitsuki-san looks like he's been hooked in that pose he and Nagi-san do, so I feel bad for him."

"Ahh, the captured alien..." Mitsuki lamented, before he caught himself. He didn't exactly hate it, because Nagi loved doing that pose during concerts and it was nice to see the alpha enjoying himself. "Shut up!"

Riku chuckled, turning to exchange a quick glance with Iori. "I don't really do that with Iori..." he said as he looked back at the camera, smiling apologetically to the fans watching.

Of course, the truth was that he'd always wanted to try doing that pose with the omega, but Iori had never been too open with any sort of physical contact on stage. It didn't apply to only Riku – Iori generally didn't do a lot of fanservice, more because he was too awkward to than because he didn't want to.

And now that they were courting, it was even more important that they didn't do anything that they wouldn't ordinarily do. Fans could be quick to assume, and they couldn't have things being blown out of proportion just over a small gesture that could easily mean nothing.
Iori backed him up easily, adding, "Or rather, I don't really do that." It wasn't a lie.

But naturally, Yamato butted in with a teasing smirk. "It's a request from fans, so do it."

Already Riku could feel Iori's worry, and the alpha was quick to retort, "What!? It's embarrassing!" Then he turned to look at Tamaki and Sougo, an idea slowly forming in his mind. It would surely be strange if he and Iori agreed to do the pose all of a sudden, but if there was a condition... "What about MEZZO? Do you guys do stuff like this?"

Sougo shook his head. "We're not really that kind of group," he explained, and Tamaki nodded.

"We keep things dry."

It was Riku's turn to offer the camera a slight smirk, though it could easily be passed off as a smile. "We'll do it if MEZZO does it!" the alpha announced, earning himself a chorus of disapproval from the parties involved. Yamato sent Riku a pleased smile, and Riku returned it easily.

"You can't just decide things like that on your own!" Iori protested, willing his cheeks not to heat up.

"If you guys do it, then the three of us will do the captured alien," Yamato chimed in, completely ignoring the glares that Iori and Tamaki shot at him. Nagi backed the leader up easily, going up behind Mitsuki and grabbing his hands before raising them up.

"Let's do it!"

Mitsuki grumbled. "Don't call it alien!"

Riku smiled, clearly satisfied. "It's a live show, so I'd like to quietly do it when we have leeway. That said, please look forward to Soundship! We want to show our full power to the guests coming to the venue, and also to everyone in front of the TV!"

---

"What was that about?"

Once the camera was turned off, Tamaki looked at Riku, frowning at the other alpha as he asked the question. Riku simply raised a brow, tilting his head to the side as he retorted with a question of his own. "Don't tell me you don't want to, Tamaki?"

The youngest of the group averted his gaze, pursing his lips as he mumbled, "...I do."

Sougo flushed, glancing at Tamaki with a sort of shyness. "In front of the fans, though?"

Nagi laughed, shaking his head in mild amusement. "Oh, Sougo... You know how much alphas like to show their omegas off, don't you?" he asked, his smile widening when Sougo only flushed harder. Tamaki wasn't much better than his omega, scowling at Nagi even as his cheeks burned. Nagi simply raised his hands up in surrender. "What? It's true!"

"Only omegas?" Mitsuki asked teasingly, dissolving into a laughing fit when Nagi was quick to assure him that no, alphas loved to show their partners off regardless of gender. It was almost endearing how much Nagi tried to make sure that Mitsuki didn't feel left out, just because he was a
Although Mitsuki hadn't explicitly stated that he did want to be together with Nagi, he didn't deny it when the blond told the others about their newfound relationship, and Nagi didn't press him further for any sort of clarification. As long as Mitsuki didn't outright reject him, that was good enough. They'd even gone as far as to inform Otoharu, so Nagi could only assume that things were fine as they were.

"It's just like Nanase-san to do as he wants, isn't it?" Iori asked with a sigh. Riku made a small noise of protest, and Iori paid the alpha no heed. Then he looked at their leader disapprovingly. "And Nikaidou-san, too. Don't just encourage him!"

"Eh... I saw your expression, Ichi. You're such a liar," Yamato said, shaking his head at the omega.

Iori grimaced, because he knew Yamato wasn't wrong. It was just as Nagi said – alphas liked to show their omegas off, and although Iori wasn't one for public affection of any sort, it still would make his inner omega happy to be recognised as Riku's.

But they all knew that their relationships with each other couldn't be found out by their fans, or anyone else in general. It was a nice thought to entertain, but there was no way they could be so blatant with their displays of affection.

Banri clearly had the same train of thoughts as Iori, clearing his throat loudly. "Good job today, everyone! It's all in good fun to play around on stage, but remember, there's a lot at risk now. Fans like to see their idols interact with each other, and as we all know, there are multiple fanpages out there for certain pairings that the fans like," Banri said, chuckling at how a few of the boys blushed. They had seen the fanpages, had scrolled through social media sites and seen various video compilations of a few of the couples together.

"But even so, we can't be sure that they will all take the news of any actual relationship well, so it's best that they don't find out. Is that understood?"

"Yes!" they chorused, and Banri hummed approvingly.

"After this, let's go through the plan for Soundship one last time," Tsumugi announced, handing the camera equipment over to Banri and herding everyone out of the broadcast room, to the meeting room just two doors down.

---

Riku took a deep breath to calm himself down. "Soundship is finally here..."

Tsumugi had just gone off to settle confirm the performance schedule with the directors of the show, and the boys were planning to greet TRIGGER before heading back to the changing room and getting ready for their performance.

Iori turned to look at Riku, firmly placing his hands on the alpha's shoulders. "Nanase-san, I don't want to put any pressure on you, but please sing at your best," he said, and Riku could only offer him a sheepish smile in return.

"That sounds like an aweful lot of pressure..."
But even as Iori said that, Riku could smell the faint calming pheromones that the omega was releasing, and it was comforting to know that Iori was trying to calm him down in a way that only he could. It was always nice to be surrounded in Iori's pheromones, although Riku was worried that someone would come by and be able to smell it.

Mitsuki shrugged. "It's true that we want to succeed. But we also want to be able to brag about how amazing you are! Right, Iori?"

Iori turned away, clearing his throat awkwardly even as a soft smile made its way onto his face.

"Well, you are our centre."

Riku didn't need to hear the unspoken words to know them. I also want to be able to brag about you.

"Take it easy," Sougo reassured. "It's okay even if we fail. What's most important is that we have fun in front of the guests, isn't it?"

"Yes!"

"MEZZO, you've done stuff like this before, right?" Yamato asked. "When there are people in the audience?"

Tamaki nodded affirmatively. "We did it a lot when we just debuted."

"Oh, is it any different from normal concerts?" Nagi asked in confusion.

"It's totally different!" the duo replied.

"I mean, over half of them are fans of other artists," Tamaki pointed out.

Riku hummed thoughtfully, brows furrowed into a frown. "The artist with the most fans today is..."

"TRIGGER, of course," Iori finished his sentence easily.

Just then, TRIGGER passed by them in the corridors. "Good morning," Gaku greeted.

"It's TRIGGER! They're happily singing someone else's song..." Mitsuki murmured spitefully.

Yamato shot the other beta a glance. "Don't say anything unnecessary," he said. "Good morning. We look forward to working with you today."

Ryu smiled, nodding as he said, "Let's both do our best today."

"Good morning," Tenn greeted nonchalantly. He paid Riku no heed, as usual, even when Riku called out to him. Riku's face fell, shoulders slumping, and Iori had to resist the urge to sigh. He was expecting this much of a reaction from the alpha, although it was getting a little tiring to see Riku beat himself up over something that wasn't even his fault.

Riku opened his mouth to speak, but Gaku cut him off. "Hey," he called out, and Riku glanced at the other. "Do your best today, centre." He waiting for Riku to respond, continuing when Riku didn't say anything. "Why do you stand in the centre?"

"Huh?"

"It's to take them to even greater heights, isn't it?"
Riku nodded mutely, and Gaku flashed him a short smile. "See you."

They watched three alphas leave, and Iori commented, "As expected, he has the aura of someone of high popularity, even among TRIGGER."

Sougo nodded. "Even if Kujo-san boasts higher vocal and technical skills, Yaotome-san has an overwhelming confidence."

"Aura..." Riku mumbled.

"Rikkun has an aura too, doesn’t he?"

"Eh? Riku does?" Mitsuki asked.

Tamaki simply grinned. "A healing aura. That can be a weapon too, right? People all have their own weapons."

Riku managed a small smile. "Tamaki..."

He felt Iori's hand on his arm, and he turned to see the omega give him an encouraging smile.

"Don't worry, Nanase-san. We have faith in you."

With a confident nod, Riku squeezed Iori's hand in return.

"Let's show them what IDOLiSH7 can do."

Chapter End Notes

NAGIMITSU!!!!! My 2nd otp after rikuio/ioriku so I'm glad they can finally be together aaaaa although they don't get as much content as tamasou and rikuio ;;; Not much to say for this update so see you guys next week!
“Iori, can you come with me for a bit?”

Iori looked up from straightening his jacket, raising a brow at the alpha and going over to Riku. Before he could even ask what Riku wanted, the alpha was grabbing his wrist and walking out of the changing room, only stopping when they entered the nearest restroom and locking the door.

With an amused chuckle, Iori asked, “Locking the door, really? What is it?”

Riku made a face. “I’m still nervous.”

There was no need for him to explain what he needed Iori to do. Ever since that night in Okinawa, Riku had come to Iori whenever he was too nervous to calm down on his own. It happened more often than not, because Riku had a tendency to put too much stress on himself to do well. It had become a routine for them to scent each other before important performances or recordings, just as routine as it was to have milk with honey and hug each other before bed every night.

“Right, of course,” Iori said in understanding, already shrugging his jacket off and putting it up by the side. Riku did the same before stepping over to the omega, and Iori tilted his head to the side to expose his neck. Wordlessly, Riku peeled the scent neutralising patch off Iori’s neck and rubbed their scent glands together, careful not to stain Iori’s shirt with his makeup.

Iori’s eyes fluttered shut, and he let a purr rumble in his chest as their scents mixed together. At the start, they still mostly used the scent glands on their wrists, but Riku had been so jittery before their first concert during their album tour that it hadn’t been enough. And since then, they’d transitioned to just scenting each other like a normal couple would.

Iori usually just let Riku scent as much as he needed to, letting his omega relish in the intimacy of being scented as Riku calmed himself down. It had been awkward at first, their heads knocking into each other’s and shirt collars occasionally getting makeup on them. But they had long gotten used to it by now, falling into the routine with practiced ease.

It was a couple of minutes before Riku pulled away, smiling contentedly at Iori. “Thank you, Iori.”

“Wouldn’t want you freaking out on stage,” Iori teased, grabbing his jacket and putting it back on. There was a knock on the door, and the two froze momentarily.

“A-ah, just one second!” Riku called out, glancing at Iori.

The omega nodded, already grabbing the small bottle of scent neutralising spray that he had brought with them from the waiting room. He doused Riku in it, then himself, before making sure that the rest of the restroom was covered in it.

Then Riku opened the door, smiling apologetically at Ryuu.

“Oh! You’re Tenn’s younger brother, right?” Ryuu asked. “Why was the door locked?”
Iori cut in, because Riku was one of the worst liars he’d ever seen. “Sorry, my hand must’ve slipped and locked it by accident,” he explained with a sheepish smile.

“That happens to me too!”

Iori couldn’t decide if he was glad that Ryuu was naïve or if he was in disbelief. After all, Ryuu was the eldest member of TRIGGER, and the omega expected him to be a little bit more put together than... well, this. Not to mention the fact that Ryuu should have been able to smell their scents even from outside the door, being an alpha and all.

If Ryuu had picked up on it, he didn't say anything.

But he wasn’t about to complain, instead bowing slightly to Ryuu. “We have to get going, don’t we?” Iori said, glancing at Riku and subtly nudging the alpha.

Riku nodded, sending Ryuu yet another apologetic smile. “We’re looking forward to TRIGGER’s performance!”

“Us too! Let’s do our best!”

They waited until Ryuu went into a stall before hurrying back to the waiting room.

---

Mitsuki peeked out from backstage, eyes widening slightly before he went back to stand beside Iori.

"It's full of TRIGGER fans," he commented, unable to help the slight grimace he wore.

Iori shrugged. "There are some TRIGGER fans that dislike us, after all."

"Huh? What for?" Nagi asked, and the other members of the group gave the blond unimpressed looks.

"There was that commotion with us stealing their guests, right?" Iori reminded him. Then he shrugged again. "Well, we were in the wrong that time."

"Even so, I doubt everyone will boo us off stage," Yamato assured.

"I'm scared of booing..." Nagi muttered, and Iori couldn't help but send the alpha a blank stare.

It wasn't that Iori wasn't scared of booing; he sometimes still thought back to that disaster of a performance called Music Festa. It was hard to completely forget his failure, and Iori didn't have much hope of doing so, either. It served as a bitter reminder not to let himself be distracted, as much as he still worried about Riku sometimes.

Besides, Riku's health seemed to be faring a lot better recently. Iori wasn't sure if it was because his body was adjusting to the physical requirements of performing at full-length concerts, or if it had anything to do with being with his fated omega. He recalled reading that sometimes, being around your fated other could help with existing medical conditions. He wasn't sure how true that was, and he didn't have really have a way of finding out anyway.

But Riku was fine more often than not now, as long as there weren't any overpowering scents like
perfume, and Iori wasn't about to complain. It never felt good to see Riku gasping for breath, and he'd rather not have to witness Riku passing out from an attack again. Once had been more than plenty.

Iori snapped out of his thoughts when Mitsuki asked, "What's wrong, Riku?", and the omega glanced at the alpha to see Riku looking around, his gaze sweeping the area anxiously. He could smell a mix of worry and confusion in the alpha's scent, and Iori pieced things together just as Riku replied.

"Nothing. I just noticed TRIGGER isn't coming."

Riku's tone was matter-of-factly, but Iori wasn't fooled. It was unlike the three members of TRIGGER to show up late, and he highly doubted that they were still changing. Ryuu had already been in his full costume when they had run into him at the restroom, so that couldn't possibly be the case.

"They're probably staying in their room till the last minute," Sougo said, but Riku didn't look convinced.

Tsumugi glanced at her phone, then at the program schedule. "Boys, it's almost time."

"Shall we go?" Yamato asked.

"Yeah!" the others chorused, and Iori tried not to let his gaze linger on Riku's slumped shoulders. *So much for calming Nanase-san down and nearly getting caught*, Iori thought dryly. It was always too easy for Riku's mood to plunge, and Iori just hoped that the alpha would still be able to perform at his best.

The group was on standby, waiting patiently as the emcees introduced them. "It's time for the next artist. Overcoming waves of difficulty, they've finally made it aboard. An idol group brimming with potential, they're IDOLiSH7!"

"Good evening!" Riku greeted, smiling brightly as he waved at the audience.

"I hope you'll enjoy our performance today," Iori said.

The emcees continued to introduce the groups performing, even as the crowd started to murmur amongst themselves, wondering aloud where TRIGGER was. Iori glanced at Riku from the corner of his eye, noting that the redhead's hand was clenched into a fist. "Tenn-nii..." the alpha mumbled.

"Isn't TRIGGER a bit too late?" Tamaki asked.

Nagi nodded in agreement, a frown on his usually cheerful face. "The audience is also starting to lose composure. I wonder if there was some trouble..."

"Okay, up next, we have IDOLiSH7! Come here, everyone."

"I heard the song you're singing today is the theme song for Nemesis, the serial drama that Nikaidou-san is starring in."

Yamato nodded, offering the emcee an easy smile. "Yes. I'm nervous about such an important role, but I hope you'll enjoy both the song and the drama."

"Another hot topic of conversation is that this song is more cool and passionate than the usual."
"Yes!" Riku replied. "It's stylish, and we all also love this song."

"Well, then! Why don't you sing it for us? IDOLiSH7 with GOOD NIGHT AWESOME!"

It was easy to see that at the start, Riku was still concerned about the whereabouts of TRIGGER. But eventually Iori recognised the determination that made its way onto Riku's expression. It was a gradual shift, as the intro of the song began playing and they began to sing. Riku's worry faded away as he focused on performing, and Iori wanted to heave a sigh of relief.

And as they performed, they could hear more and more people in the audience getting into their performance, even TRIGGER fans starting to point out the members of IDOLiSH7 that they could recognise. It made all of them proud to be standing on the stage, and by the end of the song, they'd managed to get most, if not all, of the audience members pumped up and ready for more.

They walked off the stage, each feeling a sense of accomplishment for doing well. The last time they'd been on a program with TRIGGER had been no less than a disaster, and they'd all been waiting for the day when they could prove themselves to who they could consider their rival group.

The only pity was that TRIGGER hadn't been able to watch them live.

---

"That was so fun!"

IDOLiSH7 was back in their waiting room, grabbing water bottles and towels to wipe their sweat off.

Iori was drying his hair, and the omega turned to look at Riku. "Nanase-san, you did really well today."

The happiness that radiated off Riku was instant, the redhead perking up and looking at Iori while smiling brightly. There was no helping the way his chest filled with warmth, his inner alpha surging with pride at being praised by his omega. Riku was always open with his emotions, and when the joy seeped into his scent, Iori found himself smiling as well.

Mitsuki nodded fiercely in agreement. "The fans were really into it, too! They didn't even feel like they were TRIGGER fans."

"I hope so," Riku said, hiding his face in the towel he was holding. "More than half of them weren't even interested in us at first... but I wanted them to have fun, so I gave it all I had!"

Iori's heart did a small flip in his chest – why is he so cute?!

It was a known fact that Riku's happiness, and sadness, was contagious, and it was clear as day that the rest of the group was in high spirits as well. Iori always wondered how it was possible for any alpha to be this naturally adorable, and more so than that, he wondered how such an alpha could possibly be his.

That wasn't to say that they were even an item yet. Courtship didn't always result in a relationship, although Iori was fairly certain that that was how it would turn out between the two of them. It was already hard enough to not dissolve into a blushing mess around Riku, and they weren't even
that affectionate yet. Iori dreaded to think about how he would react when Riku started becoming bolder with his advances.

Nagi went up to the redhead, patting Riku on the shoulder. "That feeling reached them. I'm sure it reached us, and everyone watching on TV," the blond alpha assured.

Riku nodded, but his smile turned wistful even as his cheeks flushed from the praise. "I wish Tenn-nii had seen it, too," he said. There was nothing upset about his tone, just that he honestly had wanted Tenn to see their performance. He wanted to show Tenn that they weren't the same as during Music Festa; that IDOLiSH7 had grown from that time.

From the couch, Tamaki piped up, a piece of biscuit in his mouth. "Yamasan, that sexy look you have in your eyes when you sing is good," he commented offhandedly.

The beta, who had seemed lacklustre at best, nearly pounced onto Tamaki in glee. "Well said, Tama!" Yamato exclaimed, patting Tamaki on the head for a job well done. Tamaki only stared at the leader weirdly, and Iori briefly wondered if he'd been too focused on Riku to notice that Yamato had been waiting for someone to praise him, too.

After all, he was the lead actor of the drama, and the song had meant to be centred around him. But there was no way that Iori wouldn't have focused more on Riku, just as he was sure Sougo had focused on Tamaki.

The other omega had a troubled look on his face now, though.

"Anyway, what happened with TRIGGER?" Yamato asked. "We even met them backstage earlier."

And ran into one of them in the restroom, Iori wanted to say.

Sougo frowned, staring at the clock on the wall. "It's almost time for the headliner..."

There was an abrupt knock on the door, and Tsumugi turned towards the source of the sound. "Yes?"

"Excuse me," a staff member said as he entered, pressing his hands together in a plea. "Can I have a moment?"

---

"TRIGGER won't appear!" Tsumugi exclaimed, the shock evident in her voice.

The staff member nodded defeatedly. "Our higher-ups got into a dispute with their agency, so President Yaotome revoked their performance," he explained. "We've been trying to ask if any other artists can take the main spot..."

Tsumugi was quick to shake her head in refusal. "I don't really want to... Most of the audience are TRIGGER fans, and it's clear that they're disappointed," she said, trying to keep her voice firm even as she noticed the staff's face fall even more than it already had.

"I can't ask IDOLiSH7 to do this?" he asked, his voice steadily getting smaller. Iori felt sorry for the
poor man; it was obvious that he was an omega, which sometimes meant that he was made to run errands that nobody else wanted to do. He doubted that it was easy to approach all the other artists and request that they take TRIGGER's place. No artist was crazy enough to do something like that.

And Iori understood where Tsumugi was coming from, as the beta said, "I'm deeply sorry. I can't expose our talents to any risks that might potentially hurt them..."

But hadn't Riku mentioned before, that Tsumugi valued their opinions?

If it was any other song of TRIGGER's that the trio had planned to perform, Iori wouldn't have even considered taking their place on stage. But it wasn't just any song – Natsu Shiyouze was rightfully *their* song, not TRIGGER's. And now, *now* they had a chance to sing it in front of an audience. It was the debut song that had been stolen from them, and they'd all thought that they would never be able to perform it again.

And yet an opportunity had presented itself in the unlikeliest of places.

Naturally, Riku shared the exact same sentiments as Iori. The omega hadn't even gotten a chance to say anything when the alpha cut in, his voice confident as he said, "Let's do it."

"R-Riku-san!?!"

Tsumugi looked conflicted, and rightfully so. It was as if they were throwing themselves under a bus. But apart from the fact that it was a song they were all more than familiar with, Iori knew they would be fine. Riku was their centre, after all, and just as Tamaki had said earlier, Riku had his own aura. There was no doubt that the redheaded alpha would be able to hype the audience up, using the charisma that was so uniquely his.

"We've been in trouble before, too. And we've felt the audience's disappointment before, at Music Festa..." Riku trailed off, not wanting to recall anything about Music Festa. Whenever he thought back to that night, all he could think of was how it had been his fault that Iori had missed his lines, and the series of events *that* had led to.

"But you can't compare that with this!" Tsumugi protested. "The audience is expecting TRIGGER, and if you're careless, you could be booed!"

Riku shook his head in disagreement. "Don't worry, Manager. Thanks to you, we've grown well."

"Riku-san..."

There were no objections from the others either, each member of IDOLiSH7 smiling confidently in support of Riku's decision. The staff member heaved a sigh of relief. "Thank you so much!" he exclaimed gratefully. "So what song will you be using as the headliner?"

Red eyes swept across the room, meeting the gazes of his fellow teammates. There was a mutual understanding between them, the entire group coming to the same conclusion. There had never been any other option, now that such a chance had presented itself to them.

"I feel bad for making the people waiting for TRIGGER's song to listen to one of ours," Riku started, and Mitsuki had to hide a snicker at that. Sure, the lyrics had been changed, but IDOLiSH7 had never truly seen the versions of Natsu Shiyouze as two separate songs. They had always thought of them as one and the same, if only because they couldn't let go of their debut song. "So let's at least sing TRIGGER's song."

"What?" the staff asked in bewilderment.
Tsumugi’s eyes widened in disbelief. ‘Riku-san!’

This time, Riku allowed a slight smirk to appear on his face. Iori really, really loved when Riku wore this expression. A confident alpha was always attractive.

"After all, we can sing that song!"

---

Even from backstage, they could hear the audience's unrest. Everyone was murmuring amongst themselves, and it didn't take a genius to know that they were wondering where TRIGGER was.

The emcees had done their best to stall for time, but the fans could hardly be blamed for being impatient. More than half of them had come to Soundship solely for TRIGGER’s performance, and the entire show had been building up to the headliner.

The intro to Natsu Shiyouze started to play, and the seven boys took that as their cue to step onto stage once more. The audience had gotten excited again upon hearing the familiar music, and their confusion could be felt by IDOLiSH7 when it wasn't TRIGGER who appeared.

Riku bowed in greeting, but he wasn't wearing the bright smile he usually wore. "Once again, good evening! Due to various circumstances, TRIGGER can no longer perform today!"

"Ehhh!?"

"This is sudden, but please allow us to si-"

The audience spared Riku no mercy, cutting him off mid-sentence and shouting, "We didn't call for you!"

"Bring out TRIGGER!"

"Get off the stage!"

"-to sing in their stead!" Riku continued, seemingly unfazed by the audience's displeasure. Iori knew better than that, could see the way Riku's fingers curled slightly into a fist. But the alpha's expression didn't waver, looking steadily even as the crowd continued to shout at them to leave.

Mitsuki chuckled dryly. "That's some amazing booing."

Yamato tried not to sigh. "Well, we were expecting this..."

The shouting seemed endless, the crowd not giving them any chance to say anything else. It was the same few sentences being repeated throughout, and although the group had been prepared for this much, it was still a little hard to accept such negativity from the audience.

It wasn't long before Tamaki's patience snapped, the alpha shouting loudly into his mic. "Shut up!"

The resounding echo stopped the booing momentarily, Sougo whirling to look at his partner in shock. Tamaki was short-tempered and honest to a fault, but he wasn't usually rude to fans. "Tamaki-kun!?"
Barely seconds later, the crowd started shouting again, calling for someone to throw a plastic bottle at him, and Sougo tried not to wince outwardly. He really didn't want to see Tamaki getting hurt by any random projectiles that the angry fans threw.

"Someone cut Yotsuba-san's mic!"

"T-Tamaki..." Riku trailed off.

"It's not like we planned to sing! We wanted to see their performance too!" Tamaki shouted, sighing as he let the anger seep out of him. He wasn't really angry at the audience, because he sort of understood how it felt to be disappointed, to be anticipating something so much just to be let down just as harshly.

It wasn't as if it hadn't happened to him just a couple of weeks ago.

"They're our role models. But if they said they can't come, it can't be helped.

"Since we're all here, let's sing TRIGGER's song together before we leave."

Riku bowed again, this time in apology instead of in greeting. "To TRIGGER's fans, I'm really, really, really sorry!" Riku apologised sincerely, and Iori couldn't help the nearly inaudible sigh that left his lips. TRIGGER not being able to perform had nothing to do with them, and if Iori wanted to be blunt, they were doing TRIGGER's fans a service. They could have easily not taken on the task, left a hole in the broadcast since nobody else wanted to do it, either.

But the fact was that they were taking TRIGGER's place, whether the fans liked it or not. Iori could sort of understand why they were so angry, but just as Tamaki said, it wasn't as if IDOLiSH7 wanted to replace their rival group.

Maybe Iori was just annoyed that the crowd was constantly hurling insults at them, at Riku.

"We can't compare to those three, but we're going to sing! This is IDOLiSH7 with Natsu Shiyouze!"

The song started to play, and the group began to sing what had once been their debut song. They hadn't practiced beforehand, merely scanning through the revised lyrics of the stolen song before coming onto stage. And as expected, the booing only increased in volume and intensity.

From backstage, the staff member who had gone to their waiting room grimaced at the crowd's displeasure. "This is horrible... Nobody's listening to them sing..." He bowed apologetically to Tsumugi. "I'm so sorry for making them take on this role!"

Tsumugi shook her head. "It's fine. Don't worry."

"Huh?"

"Our idols will always sing with all their power, even if it's in an empty stadium or if they're soaking wet," she explained, a confident smile making its way onto her face. "That's why I'm sure that their feelings, their voices, will be able to reach everyone in the stadium!"
For a good half of the song, the audience didn't let down on the booing, constantly calling out for TRIGGER. But perhaps they got tired of shouting, or perhaps they finally saw that IDOLiSH7 was honestly doing their best on stage for them.

Whatever it was, the booing began to quieten down, and the TRIGGER fans started waving their lightsticks to the music. Riku was quick to notice the shift in their moods, pushing himself even harder than before. "Let's go!"

*I've always wanted to be like Tenn-nii, the alpha mused. I never came close, though.*

Riku spared a glance at Iori, the omega finally looking like he was enjoying the performance as well. He'd noticed how Iori had seemed to be in a slightly sour mood earlier, although he hadn't bothered trying to figure out why. But now Iori seemed to be having fun, and Riku hoped that he'd been able to lift not just the audience's spirits, but Iori's as well.

*But there's some things that only I can do. I understand that now.*

"Everyone! Let's sing together!"

Iori turned to look at Riku, unable to help the soft smile that stretched across his face. *That's what makes Nanase-san so amazing,* he thought. Riku always had a way of convincing others to do as he wanted, and right now, that was to have fun together. Iori had recognised this innate nature of Riku's long before he even considered a relationship with the alpha. It was the main reason why he'd pushed for Riku to be their centre, after all.

He was sure that Riku hadn't known about what he was capable of, at least not until now. Watching Riku put his all into taking over a performance that hadn't been theirs to begin with, Iori felt that maybe now Riku truly realised what he could do.

It was more than satisfying to know that Riku had grown so much over the past few months; in fact, all of them had grown in their own ways, be it as an idol or as a person in general. And that made them all the prouder to be able to call themselves IDOLiSH7.

Yamato listened as the crowd's cheers grew louder, and the beta found himself smiling as well. *If it was anyone other than Riku, they'd definitely be receiving everyone's animosity now.*

*Riku has no ill will, and he always does his best, Nagi thought. It makes people want to cheer him on.*

"Clap your hands! Come on!" Nagi prompted.

The audience was quick to follow the blond's lead, and Riku's smile brightened as he realised that the cheering was still steadily getting louder. "Nice! Get yourselves pumped up!" Tamaki urged.

"So that TRIGGER can hear you!"

"Yes! Pump your love up even higher! Hotter!"

As promised, Riku didn't forget to grab Iori's hand, raising it up as the song came to a close. A quick glance to the side assured him that MEZZO didn't forget about the request, either, mirroring Riku and Iori with ease. The remaining members did it as well, Yamato and Nagi each lifting one of Mitsuki's hands in the air, the beta grinning widely even though he was caught in the middle.

Iori didn't even seem bothered by the action, contrary to how much he had protested during the web show. Riku hoped that it was because he was enjoying himself enough that he could overlook the
awkwardness of performing any sort of fanservice with Riku. Heck, the alpha hoped that Iori was enjoying the contact as much as he was.

By the time the song ended, some of the audience members were calling for an encore. But it was about time for the show to end, and the seven boys thanked the audience once more before walking off the stage. They felt satisfied, content with what they had been able to achieve, and all brimming with a newfound confidence that they didn't realise they could have.

They'd wanted to celebrate their success with Tsumugi, only to find the three members of TRIGGER standing beside their manager. TRIGGER glanced over at IDOLiSH7 as they approached, and Riku's heart sank almost instantly. He had never seen Tenn look so defeated before.

Before any of them could say anything, though, the trio turned and walked off.

Chapter End Notes

I... have nothing much to say for this chapter HAHA. See you guys next week!!

9 days to RTI <3
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Not surprisingly, news of the Soundship performance spread like wildfire. It wasn’t even comparable to when MEZZO’s popularity had blown up; Soundship was a nationwide broadcasted programme, and it was not only the audience who had gone to the venue who'd watched the performance. In fact, many more people had been watching from home.

It was barely a couple of hours after the program ended that they became a trending topic on the various social media platforms, and even if it was already late at night, reporters were calling the office to ask for interviews.

For the entirety of the next day, the members found themselves swarmed with fans wherever they went. Majority of their schedules were vastly different, and Tsumugi could only do so much to stop the fans from following them around.

The moment their various schedules ended, the boys headed back to the dorms to avoid the hordes of fangirls. The first to get back were the Izumi brothers, both of whom had been on a show where they invited celebrity siblings as guests. It was a little past three in the afternoon, and most of the others wouldn't be back till later in the evening.

Iori went back to his room to drop his bag off before joining Mitsuki in the kitchen. "So…" Iori trailed off, brows furrowed in thought. He and Mitsuki had planned to prepare dinner for the others, sort of as a celebration for a job well done at Soundship. But everyone had different tastes in food, and they'd originally wanted to make everyone's favourites.

"I don't even know what Nagi's favourite food is," Mitsuki grumbled, sighing as he opened the refrigerator and looked through what they had inside. He pulled out a few eggs, vegetables, fish, and meat, setting them on the table and staring at the ingredients blankly. "Okay, we can make pudding for dessert, fish stew for Yamato-san, omurice for Riku..." he listed.

"I'm sure Ousaka-san is fine with anything as long as he has tabasco sauce," Iori supplied, rather unhelpfully. Mitsuki gave Iori a relatively unimpressed look, but he couldn't help the small chuckle that left his lips.

"Right. We probably have ingredients for pancakes too," Mitsuki pointed out, clapping his hands together as he worked out what to make first. He didn't have a food preparation license for nothing, and cooking was something that had been in Mitsuki's blood ever since he was young.

The brothers set to work, with Mitsuki giving instructions to Iori from time to time. It felt nostalgic, working together in the kitchen like this. It seemed like so long ago that the two had helped their parents out in their family bakery, although it had been only a few months since their official debut.

Iori may not have been as skilled in the kitchen as Mitsuki was, but he did relatively well, and he would be damned if he didn't prepare Riku's omurice by himself. He knew the alpha liked his mother's recipe best, understandably so, and maybe Iori wasn't very experienced in making omurice, but he wanted to do at least this much for Riku.

After all, it was the least he could do, for the alpha had exceeded everyone's expectations yesterday. Iori honestly hadn't thought that Riku could bounce back that quickly, thought that maybe Riku
would still harp on the fact that TRIGGER couldn't perform.

And yet, Riku had pulled himself back from that, giving the next best performance that the TRIGGER fans could have hoped to see.

Iori had thought this a lot already, but he just couldn't help the rush of pride whenever he thought of Riku's performance. The alpha never failed to surprise him, be it in a good or bad way, and Iori couldn't be gladder that this alpha was the one who had been fated to be his partner.

With that thought in mind, Iori set to preparing dinner, a content smile on his face the entire time.

---

The next to return were MEZZO, just as Mitsuki put the pudding in the refrigerator to chill.

"Whoa, I smell pudding!" Tamaki exclaimed excitedly, about take said pudding out of the fridge even though Mitsuki just put it in. The beta shot the alpha a warning look, and Sougo pulled his partner back to the living room before Mitsuki bit his head off. While Mitsuki was usually patient for the most part, the kitchen was sort of his domain, and he always hated when people messed things up.

Tamaki pouted as Sougo made him wait on the couch, the omega heading back to the kitchen and smiling at the spread of food that had already been prepared. "What brought this on?"

Iori looked up from the pancakes that he was making. "We just thought it would be nice to do a little something for everyone," he replied, flashing Sougo a small smile as he returned to the task at hand. He was just about done with the pancakes anyway, and when he placed the last one on a plate, Sougo went to help set the table.

Yamato's stew was just about done, and Mitsuki was busy making some sort of homemade okonomiyaki for Nagi, seeing as how the blond loved it when they went to Osaka. Which meant that there was only one dish left to make, and Iori prayed that he wouldn't screw up.

Sure, it wasn't difficult to make omurice, but it wasn't exactly easy to make a good omurice, either. Besides, Riku would probably be pretty happy with whatever Iori cooked for him. It seemed like an awfully domestic thing to do, cooking a meal for his alpha, and Iori couldn't help the blush that dusted his cheeks at the thought.

"What's up with you?" Mitsuki teased, nudging Iori on the shoulder playfully as he put the okonomiyaki on a plate. "You'd better hurry up; the others are going to be back soon."

Iori glanced at the clock, eyes widening slightly when he realised that Mitsuki was right, and Riku's schedule had ended nearly a half hour ago. He ended up rushing a little, barely finishing the dish before the door clicked open, and Riku's cheerful voice filtered into the living area.

"I'm home!"

Riku's scent seemed to get closer to the kitchen, and Iori abandoned the plate of omurice on the counter, whirling around and shoving Riku back towards the living room. "Sit there, and don't move," Iori ordered, ignoring the way Riku blinked in confusion at him.
"Did I do something?" Riku asked the others, and Mitsuki simply smiled innocently in response.

It wasn't too long before Yamato and Nagi returned, Tsumugi trailing behind them tiredly. Only then did Iori let Riku head over to the dining table, seating the alpha in front of his plate of omurice. It wasn't much to look at, although Iori had taken the liberty to write 'good job' on the omelette with ketchup.

Yamato let out a low whistle as he took his usual place at the table. "Onii-san's almost jealous."

"Can it, ossan. We made your fish stew, too," Mitsuki retorted.

Sougo chuckled, sitting down and grabbing Tamaki by the wrist before the alpha could hijack the pudding. "Dinner first," Sougo chided, and if they didn't know better, it was almost as if Sougo was his mother instead of his omega. "Thank you for the food."

"Thank you for the food!"

Iori didn't move as the others dug in, eyes fixed nervously on the alpha beside him. Riku didn't seem to notice, though, scooping up a spoonful of omurice and putting it into his mouth. "Mmmm, this is good!" Riku exclaimed, happily eating his food.

Letting out the breath he hadn't realised he'd been holding in, Iori turned back to his own plate of rice, a relieved smile on his face. He reached over to take some pork and cabbage for his rice, glad that Riku was oblivious to the fact that Iori had been the one who'd prepared the omurice.

But, as usual, Mitsuki didn't miss the chance to mess with his younger brother.

"Iori cooked that specially for you, Riku!" Mitsuki supplied helpfully, grinning as Iori's cheeks flushed.

"Eh!?!" Riku sounded genuinely shocked, turning to look at Iori. "Is that why you were so weird?"

"W-well, someone's okonomiyaki was specially prepared, too!" Iori retorted, intent on avoiding Riku's suddenly happy gaze. It was really too easy to make Riku happy, although Iori was fairly certain that it was also because he had been the one who made the omurice. That didn't mean he was any less embarrassed at being called out, so the omega relished in Nagi's exclamations of love and affection for his boyfriend, Mitsuki shooting Iori a mild glare.

He didn't realise that Riku was holding his spoon in front of him, startling when he turned to be met with said spoon. "Did you try it yet?" Riku asked. He didn't bother concealing his joy, the emotion seeping into both his scent and his expression, and Iori found himself feeling almost bashful.

"Not really," Iori admitted.

"Try it!"

Iori hesitantly opened his mouth, allowing Riku to feed him, and he chewed on the omurice slowly. Riku kept looking at him expectantly, he's so cute, so Iori smiled and nodded. "I guess it's not too bad."

"All you couples are so sweet, I think I'm going to be sick," Yamato joked.

Tsumugi chuckled. "I'm sure Yamato-san will be able to find someone, too."

The leader made a face. "Nah, too much trouble. Although if you're volunteering, I might not
mind."

Smiling sweetly at Yamato, Tsumugi shook her head. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to refuse."

Her reply made Mitsuki chortle, the elder Izumi choking on the food that was in his mouth. Yamato snorted as Nagi patted Mitsuki's back with too much force, offering the beta a glass of water. "Anyway, while I was filming today, a co-star told me that we must've been really brave to fill in for a popular group's headline performance while singing their song."

Mitsuki managed to stop coughing, chugging some water to wash the food down. "Wow... if you think about it like that, that's true. It's like we were asking for a fight," Mitsuki commented, before a scowl made its way onto his face. "To be fair, it wasn't really their song."

"We're all herbivores, so when did we get so aggressive..." Iori mused.

"I did it because I thought it was for the best," Riku piped in, frowning in thought. "But I wonder if TRIGGER's angry... I mean, they didn't even acknowledge us after the performance."

"They were disappointed," Tsumugi said with a slight grimace. "They were watching with me."

"But all seven of us were able to sing our debut song in front of those who love music," Nagi said. "For that, I am happy."

Mitsuki nodded excitedly. "Yeah! I feel a bit refreshed after that!"

Sougo and Tamaki got up from their seats, and Mitsuki glanced at the duo. "Ah, Sougo, Tamaki. Are you two leaving now? Is it for a job?" he asked, and Sougo smiled sheepishly.

"No. Tamaki-kun forgot the materials he needed for tomorrow's job at the office..." Sougo trailed off.

"I'm so tired..." Tamaki grumbled.

"Stop nagging," Sougo sighed, shaking his head at the alpha. "...so, we're going to get it now."

Riku nodded in understanding. "It's late, so be careful."

Sougo tugged on Tamaki's arm, pursing his lips when Tamaki didn't want to move. "If I give you pudding, will you stop complaining?" Sougo asked, chuckling fondly when Tamaki perked up almost instantly. He went to grab one cup of pudding from the fridge, thanking Mitsuki and dragging Tamaki out with him.

"Those two seem to have been doing well recently," Yamato said. "I'm glad."

Iori raised a brow at the leader. "Why're you getting all sentimental? Is old age getting to you?"

"Oh, shut up," Yamato groaned, the remaining members bursting into laughter.

---

Sougo and Tamaki walked to the office, not minding the fact that it was already late into the night.
It felt like they hardly spent any time together outside of work, because the two of them were just so exhausted by the time they got back to the dorms. Nights usually consisted of a quick shower, meeting quietly in the living area and conversing over anything and everything while Tamaki ate pudding. They usually ended with a hug, not unlike Iori and Riku, with Sougo burying his face into Tamaki's shoulder and taking in as much of his spicy scent as he could.

It helped a lot to ease the weariness, and Sougo was glad that he was shorter than Tamaki, even though it wasn't by a lot. He fit perfectly in Tamaki's embrace, and although he would probably die before admitting it aloud, being held in Tamaki's arms made him feel protected, secure. He almost wanted to imagine that he was free of all worries, at least for a few moments.

The two walked close enough that their shoulders bumped against each other's, Tamaki happily eating the pudding that Mitsuki had made. It was mostly silent, save for Tamaki chewing, and the occasional clinking of the spoon against the glass cup.

But unlike how it had been back home, Sougo didn't feel the need to fill the silence with conversation. There was nothing stifling about it, no pressure to impress any relatives or potential business partners.

Tamaki never expected anything from him, and that in itself made the silence all the more comforting.

The silence was broken when Tamaki stopped, and Sougo turned to raise a brow at the alpha. Tamaki didn't say anything, simply scooped some pudding onto the spoon and held it out to Sougo. "Want some?" he offered, in the same gruff voice that he always spoke in.

When they'd first met, Sougo had thought that Tamaki was rude, disrespectful, but over time he'd realised that maybe it was because Tamaki lacked the proper parental guidance. God knew Sougo had a little too much of that, with how high-strung he was when it came to honorifics and respecting those of a more senior position than him.

But it was endearing now, Tamaki looking at him with what Sougo could now identify as sincerity, Tamaki's head tilting just the slightest bit to the side as he waited for a reply. With a smile, Sougo nodded, stepping closer to Tamaki. Instead of taking the spoon, however, Sougo simply grabbed hold of Tamaki's hand, guiding the spoon to his mouth and eating the pudding. He hummed appreciatively, licking his lips to get the bits of caramel that had gotten onto them. "It's good."

When Tamaki didn't reply, Sougo glanced up curiously, blinking as his gaze met Tamaki's hardened one.

"You really need to stop doing things like that," Tamaki huffed. "Or, not around other people."

"Doing what?"

"I don't know. Licking your lips, for one," Tamaki said, wrinkling his nose distastefully. "Touching other people's hands, letting them feed you. I don't think I'll like it if you do this with others."

Sougo stared blankly at Tamaki, trying to figure out what exactly the alpha was trying to imply. It was a known fact by everyone in IDOLiSH7 that Tamaki wasn't the best at explaining things, and by now, the members tried not to take everything Tamaki said at face value, lest they misinterpret the meaning behind his words. So Sougo tried to think of things from Tamaki's point of view, wondering what exactly was wrong with licking his lips, especially around other people, touching others' hands, letting someone feed him, and... oh.
A light, teasing smile played at Sougo's lips. "Do you get jealous?"

"I... don't know," Tamaki replied honestly, lips jutted out slightly in a pout. "I just don't like it."

Sougo laughed, and he nodded. Sometimes it was easy to forget how young Tamaki was, the youngest in their group, because there were times when Tamaki was so perceptive it was scary. But times like these reminded Sougo that he was still four years older than his partner, and that sometimes Tamaki didn't know how to handle some situations.

Either way, it was really just adorable that Tamaki got jealous over him.

"Don't worry," Sougo assured, falling back into step beside Tamaki as they neared the office building. "I don't really do that with other people. You don't have to be jealous of them."

"You don't see the way some people look at you when you're talking to them," Tamaki mumbled, a tinge of irritation in his voice. It wasn't that Tamaki was specifically looking for people's reactions when they interacted with Sougo – more often than not, his eyes subconsciously looked for the omega, and sometimes he would see Sougo talking to a staff member.

It was all good and well, except that most times, the staff members would have a hopeful glint in their eyes. It was as if they thought they could possibly stand a chance to get closer to Sougo, to know him on a more personal level, more than friends, just because Sougo was kind to a fault. Maybe Tamaki was overreacting, but his alpha never liked when he saw things like that happening, and he would usually end up cutting into the conversation regardless of what it was about.

So maybe Tamaki was a little possessive, even though Sougo technically wasn't his omega. Yet. But he couldn't help it, nor did he think that he was the slightest bit unjustified in feeling that way. Those staff members had no right to think that Sougo would see them as any more than colleagues.

An amused chuckle caught Tamaki's attention, and he turned to look at Sougo, whose eyes were twinkling with mirth. It was like the omega was trying not to break into laughter, and Tamaki made a face at him. "It's not that funny," he said.

Shaking his head, Sougo bit back a laugh. "It's just really cute that you're all possessive. I like it."

Tamaki let himself break into an exasperated smile. "I'm serious, though."

"I know, I know. I'll try not to give anyone the wrong impression, alright? I think I can consider myself taken," Sougo said easily, before catching what he said and cutting himself off. "A-ah, I mean..."

It was Tamaki's turn to laugh at Sougo's rapidly reddening cheeks. "Yeah, you're pretty much taken. Well, I don't think I've been doing this whole courting thing very well, but we don't have time to go out either..." Tamaki trailed off, sighing. "It would be nice to go somewhere together, alone."

Sougo smiled, the sincere smile that Tamaki had missed so much when they had just debuted as MEZZO. "That sounds nice," he agreed, pushing the door to the office open. His mind briefly registered the fact that the door was already unlocked. "I'm sure we'll be able to make time for it eventually."

Tamaki's fingers reflexively moved to flick the light switches on, and the omega called out, "Good evening. I'm sorry for coming in so late at night."

"Nobody's even going to be here this late."
"Even so, I want to say it, just in case," Sougo said. Looking around, Sougo frowned slightly. 
"...huh. No one's here. But the door was unlocked."

"How careless," Tamaki commented, not having realised it himself. They were used to coming in during office hours, and there was usually someone still in the office whenever they dropped by to pick up documents. Now that Sougo mentioned it, though, it seemed highly unlikely that someone would be in the office past nine in the evening.

From his peripheral vision, Tamaki caught sight of a movement, and his instincts flared out as he put his hand in front of Sougo, preventing the omega from taking another step forward. "There's someone here. By the safe." He set the pudding cup down as his nose tried to identify if the intruder was an alpha or omega, wanting to groan in frustration when it seemed that the person was either a beta, or they were using scent neutralisers.

"A burglar!?" Sougo asked, voice clearly alarmed.

The man emerged from behind a table, looking terrified and ready to bolt. "Crap!"

"Wait!" Tamaki demanded, trying to grab hold of the man as he attempted to escape.

The man shrieked as Tamaki managed to get a good grip on his arm, and he twisted around to break out of Tamaki's grasp. Tamaki grunted in annoyance. "Dammit! Don't move!" he shouted, injecting as much alpha command into his voice as he possibly could. It didn't seem to work much, and Tamaki could only figure that the man really was a beta after all.

"Keep him restrained!" Sougo ordered. "Don't hit him at all! No excessive self-defence!"

The man struggled, trashing around wildly and nearly hitting Tamaki in the face. Tamaki tried to do as told, pushing the man down onto the ground and shifting to pin his arms in place. Perhaps he was a little too violent with his actions, and Sougo scolded, "Didn't I just say not to hit him?"

"I didn't!" Tamaki defended. "I tried to pin him down, but he just started movi-whoa!"

With a well-timed shove to Tamaki's chest, the man caused Tamaki to stumble back, temporarily released from Tamaki's hold. But Tamaki managed to catch his collar, tightening his grip and making sure the man couldn't break free again. He seemed to produce a wrench out of nowhere, swinging it in front of him and pointing it at Tamaki threateningly. "Let me go! If you don't, I have no idea what I'll do! Get out of the way!" he screamed, sounding nearly hysterical.

"This old geezer! He's swinging around a wrench!"

Sougo's eyes widened in panic. "Tamaki-kun, that's dangerous! Let go of him!"

Tamaki shook his head adamantly. "I'm not letting him get away! He could be the song thief!"

"Stop it!" Sougo tried again. "What'll you do if he hits your face!? If you're seriously injured-"

Sougo didn't even get to finish his sentence, watching in horror as the man swung, the wrench making solid contact with Tamaki's hand. The alpha let out a pained cry, his fingers releasing their grip on the man's collar as he cradled the injured hand.

"Tamaki-kun!" Sougo cried out, feeling as if his heart had stopped beating in his chest. His blood ran cold as he assessed the harm afflicted to Tamaki, and while he was glad that there was no blood, Tamaki looked like he was in immense pain, so much so that Sougo could smell it in his scent.
And Sougo was pissed.

A threatening growl rumbled in his throat, Sougo's mind working on autopilot as he grabbed the item nearest to him. Never mind the fact that it was an entire computer, Sougo lifting it with terrifying ease and approaching the stranger. "How dare you do that to Tamaki-kun," he hissed, watching the man cower with a sick sense of glee. Nobody was going to hurt his alpha and get away with it.

"Don't kill me!"

Tamaki's gaze shot up from his hand, eyes wide as he processed the scene in front of him. "Wait, wait, wait!" he exclaimed, injury all but forgotten as he rushed to hold Sougo back. "Souchan! If you bring a computer down on his head, he'll die!"

The adrenaline seemed to leave Sougo in a rush, the omega relaxing immediately upon realising that Tamaki wasn't grievously injured. "Thank goodness," he exhaled in relief, eyes running over Tamaki's injured hand. "Are you okay?"

"He just hit my pinkie," Tamaki assured, coaxing Sougo into putting the computer back down. He winced slightly when he exerted too much pressure on the injured finger, and Sougo tensed slightly in response, but Tamaki simply sighed. "You're really extreme sometimes."

Sougo's face softened, a guilty look crossing his features. "I just thought something happened to you, so I got all flustered..." he trailed off, realising just how overboard his reaction had been. But he couldn't help it – Tamaki had looked like he had been in a lot of pain, and Sougo's instincts just kicked into overdrive.

"Could you get flustered a little more softly?"

Biting his lip, Sougo nodded. "Are you okay?" he asked again.

"Yeah."

"That's why I'm always telling you," Sougo sighed. "To prevent stuff like this from happening, you should always be careful not to forget anything, and start moving five minutes earlier..."

"I get it, I get it!" Tamaki groaned. "I'll listen to your lecture later! But before that, we should do something about..."

Sougo followed Tamaki's gaze down to the unnamed beta, the man looking like he had been scared out of his wits. Tamaki was surprised that the man hadn't pissed himself in fear. It wasn't every day that one was threatened with an entire computer. "Help me!" the man pleaded. "I'll return what I stole, so please, don't call the police!"

Tamaki glared at the man, holding his injured pinkie out, the finger already beginning to swell. "As if things will be that nice for you! Apologise to my pinkie!" Tamaki demanded.

Sougo scrutinised the man's face, racking his brain as he realised that the guy looked a little familiar. Now that he wasn't caught in a scuffle with Tamaki, it seemed as if he'd seen the man before somewhere.

Realisation dawned upon him, and his eyes widened slightly in surprise.

"That face...! Could you be...?"
"So you're not hurt or anything?" Tsumugi's voice sounded through the phone, laced with worry.

"He just whacked me a little with the wrench," Tamaki replied, glancing to the sofa where Sougo was sitting. The omega had his legs drawn up to his chest, shoulders hunched in mild shame. "Souchan made it sound worse than it was."

"Sorry..." Sougo apologised.

"We were so scared," Mitsuki told them. "Sougo was suddenly yelling for an ambulance and bandages."

Tamaki snorted, eyes still on Sougo's figure. "He scared me."

"I thought your pinkie might have been sprained," Sougo pouted slightly, and Tamaki couldn't help but think that the omega was too cute sometimes, even without him realising it. He wasn't mad at Sougo for overreacting, not really, although he had been scared shitless at the sight of Sougo holding a computer over someone; the man was called Akihito, apparently, and had used to be a hit maker many years back.

He hadn't been scared for the man. All Tamaki had thought of was that Sougo could have hurt himself. The computer had been an old, bulky one, and honestly, Tamaki didn't know how Sougo had even lifted it up over his head so easily.

It did, however, warm his heart to know that Sougo could be that worried for him. So maybe he hadn't gone about it in the best way possible, but his intentions had been out of concern, and Tamaki couldn't really blame him. He didn't know what he would have done if their positions had been swapped, although he probably wouldn't have gone that far.

Probably.

"We're fine," Tamaki told Tsumugi. "Could you take care of things over there?"

"Got it. Take care."

The beta ended the call, and Tamaki slid his phone into his pocket before turning back to Sougo. The omega was still huddled in on himself, looking as if he was resigned to a lecture from Tamaki, or anyone else in the room in general. With a small sigh, Tamaki reached out to grab Sougo's wrist. "Come on, let's talk about it in my room," Tamaki said, looking over at the others. "Sorry we worried you guys. See you in the morning."

The group chorused their goodnights, and Tamaki led Sougo by the hand to his room. The omega was still dragging his feet reluctantly, and for a moment, Tamaki felt like he was the elder of the two. He belatedly realised that maybe Sougo withdrew into himself because of past experiences with being reprimanded, and he thought back to when he had missed the live broadcast. Sougo had gotten a good tongue lashing that day, and he hadn't even thought to argue back, simply stood there submissively and let the producer scream at him.

Tamaki's heart ached with guilt, seating Sougo on his bed and locking the door with a click.

Sougo was looking at him apprehensively, wondering if he should say something, and Tamaki sighed before going over to his cupboard. He rummaged around it briefly, aware of the
way Sougo was watching his every movement.

He eventually found the item he was looking for, grabbing the plastic bag and turning to glance at Sougo. "Souchan, close your eyes," he told the omega, waiting until Sougo did so before pulling the bag out and emptying its contents. He walked over to Sougo, willing himself to calm down and stop being so nervous, it's just Souchan!

Hoping that Sougo couldn't smell how nervous he was, because his heart felt like it was thudding too loudly, Tamaki put the item in Sougo's lap. "Okay, you can open your eyes now."

Sougo opened his eyes warily, as if he was expecting some kind of punishment, and blinked in surprise at the plush toy sitting in his lap. It wasn't just any plush toy; obviously it just had to be the newest King Pudding plush that had been released in game centres barely a couple of days ago. Staring at the plush in confusion, Sougo asked, "Why're you giving this to me?"

When Tamaki didn't reply immediately, Sougo glanced back up at the alpha, only to be met with Tamaki scratching the back of his neck sheepishly. He seemed somewhat shy, and Sougo was once again reminded that Tamaki was still just a high schooler, after all.

"It's for you," Tamaki eventually said, averting his gaze away from Sougo's. "As a courting gift."

Sougo felt his cheeks heat up, and he noticed that Tamaki was blushing slightly as well. "You didn't have to..." he said, his voice soft with affection. He certainly hadn't expected Tamaki to suddenly present him with a courting gift, although they were supposedly in the midst of courtship. "Ah, but I didn't prepare anything for you."

Tamaki shook his head with a small smile, going over to crouch down in front Sougo. "That's alright. Do you like it?"

The omega let out a small chuckle. "At least I'll definitely know who it's from. But why so sudden?"

"You looked like you were kind of upset with yourself," Tamaki pointed out, and Sougo briefly wondered if he had been that transparent with his feelings.

Ever since getting out of the hospital and spilling everything, almost everything, to Tamaki, Sougo hadn't hid his feelings nearly as much as before. There wasn't much of a point anyway, since Tamaki would likely be able to smell it on him now, even if Sougo did his best to hide it from his scent. Previously, he'd had the extra protection of being on strong suppressants, but now he was off them, and Tamaki was able to read his scent like an open book.

"Thank you," Sougo said, barely louder than a whisper, hugging the plush to his chest.

Tamaki grinned, seemingly pleased with himself. "I did say that I wasn't doing the whole courting thing well, didn't I? I wasn't sure if you'd like it, though, but I'm glad you do," the alpha's voice was tinged with relief, and Sougo let his omega revel in the fact that he was one of the few people who could elicit such a reaction from Tamaki.

"And, do you... do you want me to meet your parents?" Tamaki asked hesitantly. He didn't wait for Sougo to reply, continuing with, "Because I want you to meet the director. She nags a lot, but she's really nice. A little like you, actually. I think you'll like her, Souchan."

Sougo bit on his lip, his grip on the plush tightening subconsciously. "My mother's not that bad, but my father's the one who runs the family," he explained, sighing in resignation. "It'll be better if we don't look them up for now. But yes, I think I'd like to meet the director, too. She was the one who took care of you all these years, after all."
"I'll ask her when she's free," Tamaki said, holding his uninjured pinkie out. "It's a promise."

A fond smile stretched across Sougo's lips, and he linked his pinkie with Tamaki's.

"Promise."

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was... ridiculously long wtf 5.4k words LOL. I didn't even realise it was this long but the entire MEZZO fiasco dragged on for quite a bit oops. Next chapter will be a little later, I'll update next Saturday when I'm back from overseas! I hope you enjoyed this chapter and to those going for RTI, have fun!! <3
One way or another, Otoharu had gone to look Sousuke up, and whatever it was that he said to the other president didn't really matter. The only thing that they cared about was that the incident had finally blown over, and they had a sort of closure regarding the song theft.

Nagi, in particular, seemed relieved to find out that the members of TRIGGER had no idea about the fact that the song was stolen. Even Sousuke had known nothing about it, since Akihito had admitted to acting on his own volition. None of them really knew why Nagi had been outraged when their song had been stolen, and even Mitsuki had yet to wheedle the information from the blond alpha.

With the case closed, IDOLiSH7 went right back into their everyday life, alternating between group and individual activities. They even had schedules for the subunits at times, and as much as Riku loved to be on shows with Iori, he couldn't help the underlying fear that he would slip up, regardless of the fact that Iori always, always, reminded him not to be too careless with his affection.

Riku had always been a little careless, and especially now that he and Iori were getting closer, there was no telling if or when he would accidentally cross the line of being just group members. It sometimes led to Riku being uncharacteristically antsy whenever questions regarding him and Iori were posed, his smile glaringly tight as he replied whoever it was that asked the question.

Still, there was no hiding the fact that Riku enjoyed the journey home with his partner, whether they were discussing the day's schedule or playfully bantering over whatever they could think of. Sometimes, the two of them were tired from consecutive days of work, and they simply stood together in silence, seeking comfort from being in each other's presence.

A couple of weeks passed since the mess with Akihito, and summer was just beginning to peak in the crowded streets of Tokyo. It had been a while since they last had a full day off, and in spite of the stifling warm weather, Riku had asked Iori to go out shopping with him. If it had been a weekend, Iori would've flat out refused, but he didn't mind it so much since it was in the middle of the week, and most people would be at work or at school.

To be fair, Iori did have school, and his lessons only ended sometime after three in the afternoon. He felt slightly bad, leaving Riku alone for the first half of the day while he went for lessons, but there was no helping it. Regardless of the fact that he was an idol, Iori wanted to earn his high school diploma, and wanted to get a degree eventually.

He would usually have gone to school with Tamaki, but MEZZO had had an early schedule, causing the alpha to miss school entirely. They were out of the house before Iori even finished his breakfast, and he briefly wondered how Sougo had managed to wake Tamaki up at such an ungodly hour.

There was just him and Riku at the dining area now, Yamato having had to film Nemesis overnight and the other two still fast asleep together. At some point in time, Nagi had hijacked Mitsuki's room, and it was now a common sight to find the two curled up in the same bed. Sometimes Iori was a teeny bit jealous of Mitsuki – not because he was a beta and didn't have to deal with heats, although that was a plus point. It was more of the fact that he'd never had to deal with second-guessing his feelings.

Iori had said as much before, but it had been so tiring to differentiate his own emotions from the
emotions that his inner omega seemed to force onto him. It had been especially difficult at the start, having to be faced with attraction of such magnitude to someone that he barely even knew. Now, though, Iori could tell the two apart well enough, although sometimes he felt that they were beginning to weave into a single entity.

At this point, Iori was sure that he wasn't just in the stages of liking Riku. He could positively say that he had all but fallen in love with the alpha, as exasperated as Riku could make him sometimes. Despite his general clumsiness, Riku was almost always looking out for Iori in one way or another. Sure, maybe he wasn't the best when it came to showing it, although Iori wasn't the best person to judge that. But Riku was always so sincere, both in his work and in his personal life, and he never failed to surprise Iori.

The alpha was sitting in front of him now, looking at Iori with a slightly worried expression on his face. "Iori, are you okay?" he asked, and Iori cleared his throat awkwardly to prevent a blush from appearing on his cheeks. "You seemed a little preoccupied there."

As comfortable as Iori was around Riku, he wasn't about to admit that he'd been so caught up in thinking about the alpha that he'd completely zoned out. Ugh, it's almost like I'm a lovesick teenager, Iori blanched at the realisation. A year ago, he would never have thought that his life would have turned out like this, and yet here he was.

"Just thinking," Iori said, stuffing the last bit of his breakfast into his mouth.

He got up to bring the empty plate to the sink but was stopped by Riku's hand on his wrist. Iori turned to shoot Riku a questioning look, and the alpha simply smiled at him, nodding in the general direction of Iori's room. "I'll handle it. You can get ready for school."

Iori felt his own lips curve into a smile, and he thanked Riku before going to grab whatever he needed for school. The alpha met him at the door as he was leaving, sending him off with a quick hug and making Iori promise to text him when classes ended.

With a small smile on his face, Iori began the journey to school, trying his best not to look forward to his little outing with Riku too much. And, naturally, failing miserably.

---

Iori generally didn’t have many close friends. It was mostly due to his personality, the fact that he usually kept to himself and concentrated on the tasks at hand. It certainly didn’t help that he was painfully blunt, to the point that some would consider him tactless, and he couldn’t even blame people for thinking that of him. It wasn’t as if he really needed to be surrounded by friends, anyway. Iori had never been much of a social butterfly.

But ever since IDOLiSH7 debuted, the number of people approaching him and Tamaki in between classes was astounding. Not that he couldn’t understand their point of view, since not many people got to be classmates with idols, and especially not two idols in the same class.

It had gotten even more extreme as of late, and Iori could only attribute it to their Soundship performance. He was glad that IDOLiSH7 was getting more exposure and gaining fans, but he most certainly did not appreciate the occasionally endless stream of students approaching him between lessons. They would usually approach Tamaki, the alpha had always been the more
easy going of the two, but when Tamaki wasn’t around, like today, Iori thought that he would never get a break.

It was fine if they came only during the short breaks in between lessons, but the truly annoying thing was that they even came to him during lunch, as obvious as it was that he was having his food. His bento was open, sitting on his table in front of him, and he was halfway through a mouthful of food when he caught the whispers of a few students, some of whom weren’t even from his class.

With a small sigh, Iori swallowed his food and turned to look over at them. “Can I help you?”

“Iori-san! A-ah, I’m too embarrassed to say it,” the girl flushed, hiding her face in her hands.

Iori stared at her blankly, his mind thinking about the homemade bento waiting to be eaten. Mitsuki usually prepared bentos for him and Tamaki if they had school, and after one fateful incident where Iori opened the box to reveal a character bento, *Usamimi Friends, of all things*, he had made his brother promise to make normal bentos.

The girl’s friend, Iori couldn’t recall her name, Matsuoka perhaps, nudged her slightly. When the girl didn’t budge, Matsuoka sighed and took a piece of paper from her hand. Over it, Nanase Riku was written in a neat script, and Iori fought to urge to grimace. “Hana-chan’s really shy, but she really likes Riku-san! Is it possible for you to hand this to him?” Matsuoka requested, a hopeful gleam in her eyes, while Hana looked like she was about to burst into tears.

Back off, Iori wanted to say, bristling unpleasantly at the offensive piece of paper. For all he knew, it could be normal fanmail, but something about the girls’ demeanours told him that it was much more than that. And honestly, Iori wanted to chuck it in the bin.

Immediately after the unbidden thought came to mind, Iori wanted to shrink back in shame. The more popular they got, the more possessive his omega seemed to be of the alpha. Understandably so, but that didn’t mean Iori liked feeling that way. It was irrational beyond belief, and Iori couldn’t understand how he could even have such thoughts.

He eyed the letter, hoping that he wasn’t glaring at it too conspicuously, and held his hand out. “I’ll let him know,” he said eventually, trying not to wince at the happy squeal Matsuoka let out. She handed the letter to Iori, chirping out her thanks and hugging Hana, exclaiming that they did it, that it wasn’t so hard, was it?

Iori watched the girls leave, and for a brief moment, he wanted to crumple the paper up and pretend that it had never existed. But they were just fans, and it wasn’t as if Riku would pay them any attention. If Iori was glaring at his bento while he finished it, nobody called him out on it.

It seemed like forever before the clock finally inched towards 3pm, and the moment the minute hand ticked to the top, Iori was standing up, quickly keeping all his belongings and hoisting his book bag over his shoulder. His fingers deftly typed out a text, hitting send and pocketing the device as he took long strides towards the school gate.

As it turned out, he didn’t even have to text the alpha, Iori’s keen eyes spotting the familiar tufts of red hair poorly hidden under a cap. It had been as if Riku had been in too much of a rush to wear his disguise properly, and in spite of the mask concealing the lower half of his face, Riku was getting prolonged stares from passers-by and students alike.

A fond smile made its way onto Iori’s face, the omega pulling out a mask from his own bag and strapping it across his face. Riku had obviously been looking for him, probably the reason why he’d wanted Iori to text him in the first place, and his eyes crinkled at the corners when he caught sight of
“Aren’t you a little too early?” Iori asked in amusement, as if he hadn’t been rushing out of class the moment it ended. He couldn’t help the flutter of anticipation at the thought of going out with the alpha; this was technically their first date, since they hadn’t managed to find a proper time off after debut. It had always been a whirl of schedules, practice, web shows, and so on.

“I didn’t want to be late,” Riku explained. “Do you want me to carry your bag for you?”

With an unbecoming snort, Iori shook his head. “It’s not that heavy. Anyway, where are we going?”

“I was thinking of Harajuku,” Riku replied, the two falling into step beside each other. He saw the way Iori raise a brow at him questioningly, and Riku let out a soft huff. "I know we stay like, ten minutes away, but we haven't shopped there together before!"

The dorm and office were both situated near Shibuya, and the streets were a familiar sight to them, back when they had gone around handing out flyers for their first live. The only free time that they'd really had was during the singing and practice ban, but Iori and Tamaki had devoted that month to school. Or, Iori did, and would usually retire to his room after dinner.

Riku had gone shopping on a few occasions, be it with Sougo, Nagi, Mitsuki, or Yamato. They didn't usually buy much, especially Riku and Mitsuki. The other three seemed to be looser with their money, although Sougo tended to be a bit more on the thrifty side, and Riku had always wondered why they weren't concerned with their finances. Now they knew that Sougo was the son of FSC’s president, so that much made sense, but he had never figured out what it was about Nagi and Yamato that allowed them to spend so freely.

"Well, yes," Iori conceded. To be fair, the main purpose of the shopping trip wasn't for Iori to buy new clothes. Not for himself, anyway. His heat was coming up again, due to hit sometime next week, and it had taken all of Iori's courage to ask Riku for a few articles of clothing for his nest.

Naturally, Riku had been more than eager to please, immediately agreeing and digging through his closet for the clothes and sweaters that he wore often. That, unfortunately, also meant that Riku's closet was suffering from a bit of a shortage, not that the alpha had that many clothes to begin with. They'd both figured that it would be better for Riku to simply get more clothes, especially if Iori intended to borrow from Riku every time his heat came around.

Iori's school wasn't too far from the dorm, which in turn meant that it wasn't all that far from Harajuku. They opted to walk, first heading to a public restroom nearby so that Iori could change out of his school uniform. Riku had adamantly insisted on holding the extra bag of clothes for him, and Iori didn't bother arguing with the alpha.

---

The walk to Harajuku was a little over thirty minutes, enough that by the time they got to the familiar streets, both boys were thirsty and slightly sweaty from the heat. Riku spotted a smoothie store, telling Iori to stay put before he headed over to buy something for them.

He returned minutes later with two cups in hand, handing one over to Iori with a smile. "I wasn't sure what to get, I hope strawberry's fine with you," Riku said. He watched Iori take a sip of the smoothie, the omega humming appreciatively as the cool drink parched his dry throat, and Riku's
hand twitched beside him. For some reason, the action had seemed awfully provocative. Maybe the heat was beginning to get to him. "Is it good? If it isn't, we can switch."

Iori shook his head. "It's fine, thank you. We should get started if we want to be done any time before dinner," Iori pointed out, and a glance to his watch told Riku that they had already spent too much time dilly-dallying around.

The duo headed into the nearest clothing store, both sighing happily when they felt the air-conditioning cool their bodies down. Riku went about searching for clothes, Iori standing at the side and giving his input every now and then, sitting down and waiting for the alpha to try the clothes on.

The process repeated itself a few times, Riku being surprisingly picky about the clothes he wore. It was either too stiff, too thick, the design was overbearing, the design wasn't enough. The list went on, and Iori didn't let the small details slip past his notice.

By the time they had gone into a good ten shops, Riku had managed to pick out four new tops. It wasn't a lot, but the alpha was as picky as a woman when it came to his clothes. Iori hadn't thought that Riku was like that, and he wasn't afraid to hold back his questions. "Is there really a need to be so choosy with your clothes?" Iori asked, more puzzled than annoyed. Iori himself wasn't picky with his clothes, considering the fact that his closet consisted mostly of collared, long-sleeved shirts, a couple of blazers and vests, and dress pants. He had casual clothes too, but there usually wasn't much of an occasion to wear them, so they ended up acting as pajamas instead.

Riku flushed, scratching the back of his head sheepishly. "I'm not usually picky..." Riku mumbled, and Iori knew that he wasn't lying. Riku didn't come from a rich family, so he probably had to make do with whatever clothes his parents bought him. Sure, they were getting more successful now, meaning that they also had more spending money, but that didn't seem like a valid enough reason to suddenly become as picky as this.

Riku said something else that Iori couldn't catch, and he had to ask the alpha to repeat himself. Riku looked like he was going to die of embarrassment as he said, "It's because I want them to be comfortable for you to use."

Iori blinked at the alpha once, then twice, feeling his entire face slowly heat up. How does he say things like this in public? Iori wanted to disappear there and then; he was sure that under his mask, he was as red as a tomato. He also wanted to pull Riku to some dark alley where no one would see them, hug the alpha away from the prying eyes of the public. There had to be a limit for how considerate someone could be.

It also didn't help that Riku was obviously implying that Iori would be using these clothes, too. Not that he was wrong, but there was only so much Iori could take before he internally combusted. Iori forced himself to calm down, his racing heart be damned, and he tugged the alpha by the wrist into the department store nearby. He led Riku all the way to the back, entering a changing room and locking it before abruptly wrapping his arms around the alpha and burying his face in Riku's shoulder.

"Why are you so cute..." Iori grumbled, hating that he couldn't even hold himself back from the need to hold the alpha. He'd thought that maybe he could hold it off till they got back to the dorm, but he had been wrong.

He felt Riku's arms wrap around his shoulders, Riku's airy laugh muffled by the mask. "Anything for you," Riku said, and Iori wasn't surprised by the sincerity in his voice. He nodded mutely, letting himself enjoy the embrace for a little while longer before letting Riku go.
After they stepped out of the changing room, hoping to whatever god existed that nobody had seen them, Iori made Riku sit down and "Wait for me here" before disappearing off to some other part of the store. The omega quickly hunted down a sweater that he liked, which wasn't too difficult considering that he mainly looked for something soft and fluffy, hurrying to pay for it before returning to where Riku was sitting.

Before Riku could even ask where Iori had disappeared to, he had a bag shoved in his face. "For you," Iori said curtly, even though he knew Riku could smell the nervousness in his scent. The alpha raised a brow, pulling the sweater out and looking at it curiously.

"For me?" he parroted.

"You wanted to get something comfortable for me to use, right?" Iori asked. "I think this is nice."

Even through the mask, Iori could see Riku's lips stretch into a wide smile. "I get it. Okay, I'll use it before I pass it to you," he said. "Can I treat it as a courting gift?"

Iori's response was an immediate shake of the head. "I already have something prepared."

Courtship, honestly, wasn't something that many people did nowadays, but it definitely helped to solidify the foundations of a relationship. Sometimes, it was easy to see whether somebody was serious about the relationship from the courting gift they chose, and although Riku's gift to Iori had been bought last minute, he had still given it some thought. The main thing that mattered was that the other party would like it, and Iori had agonised over what to get Riku for months.

Even now, he felt that the gift he'd gotten was inadequate, sorely lacking, because the alpha didn't seem to have something he liked more than other things. When it came to material possessions, Riku was happy with whatever people gave him, which made it all the harder for Iori to decide on a good gift. He'd eventually decided on something that he knew Riku probably wanted, and he hoped that the alpha wouldn't be disappointed.

Riku's eyes lit up in anticipation, and Iori tried not to be too nervous about it. "I'll give it to you when we get back," Iori told him, glancing at his watch and looking at how dark it had gotten. "Let's go for dinner first, alright?"

---

Since neither of them had an inclination towards what to eat, they roamed the streets for a little while more before a cosy-looking ramen shop caught their eye. It was just about dinnertime now, so they weren't picky with their seats, grabbing a table in the middle of the establishment and setting their belongings down.

Iori stretched his shoulders slightly, beginning to feel the ache from carrying his books and study materials around for the entirety of the shopping trip. He was about to get up to place his order, but Riku shook his head and stood up. "I'll go. What do you want?"

Giving in, only because he was getting a little tired, Iori browsed the menu quickly. "Miso ramen. With an extra egg," he decided, thanking Riku and watching the alpha walk away. With a tired sigh, Iori pulled his mask off, glad to get some fresh air instead of breathing in the same air over and over again. He looked over their purchases for the day, rather proud that they had managed to buy at least this much. He'd taken about four, maybe five, shirts from Riku, along with a towel or two, so this
was just the right amount to replace the borrowed clothes.

Riku didn't take long to return, setting the two meal tickets down on the table and removing his own mask from his face. He wrinkled his nose slightly, rubbing it as he got used to the sudden change. When he looked over at Iori, the omega was staring at him with a fond look in his eyes, his lips curved up just the slightest bit, and Riku's heart skipped a beat.

*Iori is so pretty.*

"Is there anywhere you want to go after dinner?" Riku asked, checking the time to make sure it wouldn't be too late by the time they were done. Iori shrugged, schooling his expression back into a neutral one. "Then I guess we should head home earlier."

Iori nodded in agreement, vaguely remembering that they had an afternoon schedule, meaning they had to get ready in the morning. The counter staff called their numbers, and Riku went to collect the two bowls of ramen, complete with drinks. As Riku came back, Iori looked at his bag, where he knew the letter from Hana was.

If he was completely honest with himself, Iori didn't want Riku to even know that it existed. But he had promised the girls that he would pass it on to Riku, even though every part of his mind was screaming at him not to give it to the alpha. The rational part of him knew that Riku would simply accept it with thanks, because he appreciated the support from fans, but the irrational part kept taunting him with the what-ifs. Riku wasn't going to reciprocate any feelings, but he couldn't help the worry gnawing at him.

It was probably because his heat was coming up, and his omega was getting possessive for nothing. So, when Riku sat back down at the table with their food, Iori reached over into his bag, fishing the letter out and handing it to the alpha. Riku was completely confused, because he was sure that that wasn't Iori's handwriting on the cover.

"Someone in my school wanted you to have this," Iori explained, trying his best not to sound too bitter. Or jealous. Maybe both, because at this point Iori wasn't even sure what kind of emotional turmoil his mind was going through. He had never pegged himself as an insecure sort, but maybe because Riku was just that lovable, everyone flocked around the alpha. He hated feeling like this, but it wasn't as if he could really stop it, either.

Riku nodded in understanding, brows furrowing slightly and pulling the letter out. He read it carefully, and Iori watched Riku's face just as carefully, his heart skipping a beat every time Riku's lips twitched into a smile. When Riku was done with it, he passed it back to Iori, earning a confused frown from the omega. "Why're you giving this back to me?"

"I don't need it," Riku said simply, a light smile on his face. "If it makes you so distressed and unhappy for me to receive such letters, then I'd rather do without them. I mean, I'm happy that they're supporting me and they like me, but it's not worth seeing you so upset."

Iori felt a twinge of guilt in his chest, and he bit his lip while staring at the letter in his hand. Judging from Riku's words, it was obvious that it was more than some regular fanmail, and the fact that Riku was turning it down made Iori inexplicably happy. It was enough to know that Riku could, and would, pay no heed to confessions if it made Iori uncomfortable. Surprisingly, that was all the assurance he needed.

"Keep it," Iori said, once again putting it in Riku's hand. "I'm sure not all of it was a confession."

Riku's smile widened slightly, noticing that Iori's scent had faded back to normal, no longer carrying
the tint of bitterness and sourness that it had just moments ago. He accepted the letter more willingly this time, keeping it in his small backpack and hoping that it wouldn't get crumpled. Iori was right about the fact that Riku wanted to keep it – it was nice to look at fanmail now and then, read about how their performances were able to give the fans strength.

With that settled, Iori's heart felt lighter, and he started on his dinner. Riku followed suit, the two boys eating their dinner quietly. There was little to no conversation, only the occasional snicker from Iori as he spotted a stray piece of noodle at the corner of Riku's mouth, or when Iori's soup splattered over the table and Riku laughed at him.

Chapter End Notes

HELLO I AM BACK FROM THE DEAD. Jk I was in Japan for the past week for i7 live and all I can say is that. It was a life-changing experience. I lowkey regret not going to day1 too but lack of money is sadly a thing that exists. But the seiyuu were all really in character and I ran out of tears within the first hour (no I didn't I continued crying again halfway through) and I just really. Love i7. Thank you i7 for the great live and I'll definitely go to both days of the second live.

Long awaited rikuio chapter is finally here!! It took 18 chapters for them to go on their first date hmmmmmm there's clearly too much going on in the main story lmao. I wanted to make this into one chapter but it ended up being, um, a little long, so I split it into two. I hope this was a good update because possessive/jealous Iori is a good Iori. I'll update on Thursday again as usual! See yall next week!
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It was nearly eight by the time they were done, and after returning the trays, they headed back in the direction of the dorm. It was less than ten minutes by train, but, again, the two of them wanted to get in as much time together as possible. Not that they wouldn't end up lazing around in each other's rooms after showering, but their first date was finally coming to an end, and they wanted to savour every last moment of it.

In the end, Iori traded his book bag off for a bag of clothes, Riku noticing that the omega was getting pretty tired from lugging the heavy bag around. Iori had tried to refuse, saying that even if he was an omega, they were both male, but of course Riku had to point out that, "You were studying for the whole morning and afternoon. I stayed at home and did nothing. Now give me that."

They were just a few minutes away from the streets of Harajuku when Riku stopped abruptly. "Can I go back for a little while?" he asked hesitantly. "I need the toilet."

Iori snorted, eliciting an indignant pout from Riku. He waved the alpha off. "I'll wait here. Hurry."

"It's a little dark here, though..." Riku trailed off, his brows creasing in a tell-tale sign of worry. He was right; they were away from the bright, populated streets from Harajuku now, just entering the residential area which was barely lit with streetlamps. Still, it wasn't late enough for Riku to be concerned, and Iori repeated himself before the alpha reluctantly went off.

Riku tried to recall where the nearest restroom would be, taking long strides to get there quicker. He was probably being a worrywart, and Iori would tell him as much, but it was getting late, and Riku didn't feel right leaving Iori alone in the streets like that. It certainly didn't help that his alpha was acting up, nagging at him that he shouldn't leave Iori alone, that he should have made him come along even if he didn't want to.

In spite of the fact that Riku wasn't fond of listening to his inner alpha, his instincts were usually pretty accurate. He managed to find a small building with a public restroom, quickly going about his business before rushing back out to where Iori was.

Already, he could feel dread settling into the pit of his stomach. Riku couldn't remember when exactly the last time was that his instincts had warned him about something; he distantly recalled being ambushed by a group of bullies who didn't like that Riku was friendly around everyone. The fact that his body had been frail made him all the better a target.

The minutes and seconds it took for him to get back to where he'd left Iori seemed like an eternity to Riku, and when he finally rounded the corner, his blood ran cold.

Iori wasn't there.

In the back of his mind, Riku vaguely registered Iori's scent, faint but still traceable. He forced himself to calm down, willing his heart to stop beating so quickly, because finding Iori was the priority. Using his nose as a guide, Riku followed Iori's scent, winding around the houses to find the omega.

Iori's scent steadily grew stronger, and while Riku was relieved that he was getting nearer to him, he could also tell that Iori was distressed. Scared. Wherever he was, Iori wasn't alone. Riku quickened
his steps, almost breaking into a run when he caught the scent of whoever it was that was with Iori. The twisted, rotten scent could only be from an alpha, a sick one at that.

Turning one last corner, Riku stopped dead in his tracks as he took in the scene in front of him.

Iori was pinned against the wall, the bags of clothes dropped on the floor beside him. He was glaring at the alpha hovering over him, despite Riku being able to see how his clenched fists were shaking not from anger, but from fear. Riku wasn't sure if the man was intoxicated, because he sure as hell smelled like he was drunk, and the redhead's fingers curled into a fist when he saw the stranger lean in towards Iori.

Towards Iori's neck, where his scent glands were.

Riku's mind kicked his body into action, and Riku all but ran and threw himself at the other alpha, landing a punch clean across his face. He winced as his knuckles made solid contact with the alpha's cheekbone – Riku had never punched anyone before, and he was sure that his knuckles would be hurting within a few hours.

Anger coursed through Riku's veins, an animalistic growl ripping itself out of his throat as he glared at the man. Either he had been extremely drunk or Riku's anger had gotten the better of him, because the man looked like he was completely wiped out. And yet, his inner alpha was screaming at him to throw more punches at the man, make him suffer as much as he had Iori.

He was snapped out of the haze of anger when he felt a tug on the back of his shirt, Iori's face burying itself into Riku's back. Iori let out a shuddering exhale, his grip on Riku's shirt tightening until his knuckles turned white. "Don't," Iori whispered, and Riku felt the anger seep out of him.

Riku turned around, wrapping his arms around Iori's trembling frame, guilt seizing his heart when he heard Iori let out a whimper. In the past months, Riku had never once heard Iori sound so terrified, and the thought that it was his fault wasn't helping to ease his guilt. "It's okay," Riku assured, rubbing Iori's arms in an attempt to get him to calm down. "I'm here now. You're safe."

It didn't seem to help much, and eventually Riku had to nuzzle his nose against Iori's neck, scenting him and shrouding him in his own protective scent. Iori flinched back from the touch at first, and Riku's heart nearly stopped in his chest, only relaxing when Iori leaned into his touch, exposing more of his neck for Riku to nuzzle against.

It took over ten minutes of scenting before Iori managed to calm himself down, Riku apologising profusely to Iori the entire time. Regardless of what Iori told him, what Iori would tell him, Riku knew that it was his fault. If only he had listened to his instincts and insisted that Iori come along with him, this would never have happened. Now the omega would be traumatised by the experience, would always think of it when he thought back to their first date.

"Feeling better?" Riku asked, hating how pathetic the question sounded, hating that he even had to ask such a question. Iori nodded slowly, although he refused to look in the general direction of the stranger, and Riku put an arm around Iori's shoulders. He pulled the omega closer to him, uncaring that people might see them. "Let's go."

Iori nodded again, bending down to pick up the bags that he'd dropped, and Riku took them from him wordlessly. There was no way he didn't notice how Iori's fingers were still shaking. Riku led them out of the alley, heading back to the dorm without rushing Iori. It was more than obvious that he was shaken up, and Riku wasn't about to force him to walk any faster than he was comfortable with.
They only made it back to the dorm after nine, and Riku urged Iori to take a shower while he put everything away. Iori didn't even protest, listlessly grabbing fresh clothes before dragging his feet to the bathroom. He didn't stop when Mitsuki called out to him, didn't pay any heed to Tamaki asking him about the day's lessons.

It was only when Riku met him in front of the bathroom that Iori paused, looking at the alpha blankly. He didn't mean to be rude, he really didn't, but he was so emotionally exhausted from the encounter with the stranger alpha that he couldn't find the energy to even change his expression.

Riku held out a shirt to him, one that Iori had yet to borrow, and replaced it with the shirt that Iori had been intending to change into. "It'll help," Riku told him gently, and Iori nodded in understanding before stepping into the bathroom.

He stripped his clothes quickly, hating that they had been touched by the disgusting alpha, wanting to get rid of the clothes even though he knew that it would be going a little overboard. He scrubbed his skin with way too much force, scrubbed until he was sure that he wouldn't be able to smell the other alpha on him,

This was what Iori despised most about being an omega. It wasn’t the heats, nor was it the difficulty in differentiating his secondary gender’s emotions from his own.

No, it was none of that. It was being useless and weak when faced with an alpha, becoming a submissive little thing for them to toy with. Iori knew that alphas weren’t inherently bad, that he shouldn’t stereotype the entire group of them simply because a handful of alphas were terrible, but he couldn’t help it. One run-in had been more than enough to reignite his fear of alphas, and he hated himself for feeling this way.

He dried himself off, slipping Riku’s shirt over his head and letting out a shaky exhale of relief when his alpha’s scent wrapped around him, almost like a protective cocoon. He’d been so worried that Riku wouldn’t have made it to him quickly enough, that the stranger would have had a chance to rape him or, worse, mark him.

Fingers clutched the hem of the shirt, and Iori took deep breaths to make sure he didn’t freak anyone else out. Already he knew that he had some explaining to do, to Mitsuki and Tamaki both. But all he wanted to do now was sleep; he was so tired.

When Iori emerged from the bathroom, he wasn’t surprised to see Riku there, waiting for him. He could smell the alpha nearby while he had been showering, and Iori couldn’t find it in himself to be annoyed at Riku for being overly protective. After what just happened, Iori almost welcomed it.

“Do you want to go to my room?” Riku asked, and Iori considered for a moment before nodding. He didn’t quite want to be alone right now, would even sleep on the floor if it meant that he could have some peace of mind. Riku smiled, reaching out to squeeze Iori’s hand in reassurance before he disappeared into the bathroom.

Iori went to Riku’s room, only briefly stopping by the living area to dump his clothes in the laundry basket. He passed by his own room on the way to Riku’s, contemplating whether he should still give Riku’s gift to him, knowing that the alpha probably wasn’t really in the mood to receive it now. But
he had said that he would, and maybe it would help to take their minds off the incident, even if just for a while.

He grabbed the present, neatly wrapped, before entering Riku’s room and shutting the door.

It was barely a few minutes later that Riku returned, freshly showered and still towelling his hair dry. The alpha went about his usual routine, combing his hair and hanging his towel up to dry. Only after he was done did he sit down on his bed beside Iori, teeth worrying at his lower lip and looking at the omega.

“I’m sorry,” Riku apologised, again, and Iori sighed before shaking his head.

“It wasn’t your fault,” he said, looking at the gift in his hand. “Your courting gift.”

“Can I open it now?” Iori nodded in response, and Riku gingerly peeled the wrapping paper away from the box inside. A few layers of wrapping paper later, Riku was met with a DVD of TRIGGER’s live, the one that they had gone to as a group. A small smile tugged at Riku’s lips – Iori knew he hadn’t bought it yet. “Thank you, Iori. Let’s watch it together, okay?”

Iori nodded again. “Yeah, okay.”

Riku set the gift aside carefully before scooting closer to Iori on the bed. “Want to talk about it?”

He didn’t want to push, knowing that Iori was still shaken up from the incident, so it didn’t surprise Riku when the omega shook his head slowly. As much as he wanted to find out what had happened, and why Iori had been so terrified, he also didn’t want to ask too much, not when Iori’s wound was still so raw.

What Riku was surprised about, however, was that Iori suddenly picked his hand up, eyes fixed on the knuckles that were just beginning to bruise at the edges. Iori’s thumb brushed over the purplish bruises, and Riku winced when he pressed down on one of them. “Does it hurt very badly?”

“Not if I don’t touch it,” Riku admitted. He’d almost forgotten about it until he was showering and, in all his careless glory, hit the back of his hand against the wall. That had not been pleasant.

Iori frowned, getting up and leaving the room without a word, leaving Riku to look at him in confusion. The omega wasn’t gone for long, coming back into the room with a towel in hand. He placed it over Riku’s bruised knuckles, and the alpha realised that the towel was warm. “It should help to dispel some of the blood clots, I think,” Iori explained. “You’re so reckless.”

Riku couldn’t help but let a chuckle slip past his lips, and Iori shot him an affronted look. “It’s just like you to worry about me, even when it’s you that you should be worried about.”

“I don’t really want to think about it,” Iori sighed, grimacing as he recalled the incident again and shaking the thought off. Riku’s smile indicated that he understood, and for the nth time that day, Iori found himself in the alpha’s arms. He didn’t resist the touch, relaxing into Riku’s chest and letting the alpha nuzzle the top of his head affectionately.

Iori may not have voiced it aloud, but Riku knew he was still upset. His scent said it all for him, and while Riku was sure that words couldn’t do much for Iori, he hoped that at least the comfort and assurance of being scented would make Iori feel better.

Already he could feel the built-up tension draining away from Iori’s shoulders, the omega’s breath slowly evening out as he drifted off to sleep. Riku didn’t try to wake him, knowing that Iori needed
the rest desperately. It had been a long day, would have been a long day even if they hadn't encountered the incident with the stranger alpha.

So, when he was sure that Iori was asleep, Riku lay him down on the bed, pulling the blankets over Iori and making sure that he was comfortable. After a long moment of deliberation, Riku leaned down, gently brushing his lips over Iori's forehead, heaving a sigh of relief when Iori didn't stir.

Satisfied with himself, Riku rummaged his closet for the extra futon that he knew was in there, moving his beanbag out of the way and setting it up nicely on the floor. He didn't want to share a bed with Iori, not knowing how the omega would react, and right now, Iori's comfort was his top priority.

Riku turned the lights off, crawling under the blankets and letting Iori's soft breaths lull him to sleep.

---

Iori's heat came exactly a week later, just a day after Nagi's rut ended. This time, Riku was much more prepared for it, purposefully avoiding the area near the heat rooms just in case he managed to catch Iori's scent.

Just like Iori had done for him, Sougo had gone to check on Iori regularly, although MEZZO was fairly busier than Iori usually was, and Sougo often struggled to find time to do so. Banri helped out often enough, as well as Mitsuki, both of whom had made sure to religiously stay away from Riku until Iori's scent wore off. That usually took a little too long, and while it was easy enough for Banri to avoid being in the same room with Riku, the same couldn't be said for Mitsuki.

The beta usually ended up wearing some article of Nagi's clothes in a poor attempt to mask the scent, occasionally even getting his blond boyfriend to scent him, even though betas didn't really get the same benefits from scenting as omegas and alphas. There was no additional sense of security and comfort, and most times they couldn't even smell the scent on them.

The week seemed awfully lonely without Iori with him, and Riku had been overjoyed when Sougo finally gave Riku the green light, telling him that Iori's heat had effectively ended after the seven arduous days. Riku had left Iori alone for the morning, knowing that the omega likely wanted to get some proper rest before being disturbed.

It was only in the afternoon that Riku brought a tray of food to Iori's heat room, knocking on the door softly to get Iori's attention. He heard a muffled "Come in," from Iori, and Riku balanced the tray carefully in his hand before pushing the door open.

Immediately, the scent of leftover pheromones assaulted Riku's sense, and the alpha had to force himself to focus on the task at hand, which was to make sure that Iori recovered well.

Iori looked tired, not having had time to properly fix his appearance just yet. His hair was still in a mess, tufts of his fringe sticking out at weird angles, matted with dried sweat and plastered to his forehead. He was in the midst of dismantling his nest, throwing the pile of clothes into the laundry basket in the corner of the room. Riku's alpha preened with pride when he spotted a few of his jackets, glad to know that he had been of help.

"Nanase-san," Iori greeted, his voice still slightly hoarse from the lack of water and, Riku presumed, strenuous physical exertion. Riku set the tray down, already grabbing the glass of water that had
been sitting on the table and handing it to Iori. The omega shot him a grateful smile. "Thank you."

"Can I sit on the floor?" Riku asked, not wanting to intrude on anywhere that Iori didn't want him to. An omega's heat room also kind of acted as their nest, especially since they were staying in a dorm, and didn't have anywhere else to set up a nest. They could be awfully defensive, more towards alphas and betas intruding on their space than towards fellow omegas. The fact that Iori had let Riku in without any hesitation spoke volumes of what he felt about Riku, and it made Riku glad.

After all, omegas only ever let their alphas into their nests, and even alpha parents would be chased out immediately. Although, all things considered, Iori's nest did already have Riku's scent all over it, so the alpha being physically there probably wouldn't have made much of a difference.

"By all means," Iori replied, wrinkling his nose at the soiled bedsheet, covered with the evidence of his heat. He pretended that he wasn't blushing furiously. "I'd rather you not sit on the bed."

Riku chuckled, plopping down on the floor and watching as Iori stripped the bedsheets off, dumping them into the basket before replacing it with a new one. Pushing the basket to the side, Iori went to join Riku on the floor, taking the tray of food down with him. "Sorry if I look like a mess," Iori said, his tone sounding like anything but apologetic. He just sounded dead tired, like he needed to sleep for the rest of the day. He probably did. "Did you make this?"

"With some help from Sougo-san," Riku admitted sheepishly. "He gave a few pointers about what to make to help you replenish your energy faster."

Iori hummed in approval as he took a bite of the fried rice, eating it quickly to fill up his growling stomach. There was also a bowl of fish soup, along with some dates on a small plate and a side of fruit salad. They were mostly nourishing foods, save for the fried rice, which was meant to be high in starch.

The food was cleared within fifteen minutes, and when Iori was done, he got up and headed to the linked bathroom. "Let me just take a quick shower," he said, waiting for Riku to nod in acknowledgement before grabbing a fresh change of clothes and heading inside.

Iori liked that all of the heat rooms were linked to one shared bathroom. They could only be locked from the outside, so that they wouldn't be able to intrude into other heat rooms as and when they wanted. It was, however, a good way to save space, and it wasn't as if there were other omegas staying in the dorm apart from him and Sougo. If something happened to either of them in the shower, though Iori couldn't imagine either of them slipping and falling, at least someone would be able to check.

He took his time under the stream of warm water, letting it soothe his sore muscles. Getting out of heat was always such a pain, quite literally. His thigh and back muscles ached from holding his body up in positions that Iori wasn't always proud of, doing whatever he could to ease the gnawing ache in his ass. It was fine for now, because Iori didn't have to worry about being seen by anyone, but the thought of possibly spending a heat with Riku in the future made his cheeks burn.

Willing himself not to think about that, lest it start his heat back up, Iori finished his shower and went back to where Riku was waiting for him. By now, Riku had cleared the tray of empty dishes, brought Iori's basket of dirty laundry to the kitchen, and was in the midst of scrolling through his social media.

Riku immediately glanced up when Iori came back into the room, a grin lighting up his face as he stood and went over to meet Iori in a hug. Iori chuckled as Riku buried his nose in the omega's neck, breathing in the scent that he'd missed for the entire week. There was still a slightly sweeter tinge to
it, evidence that Iori’s heat had yet to completely wear off, and Riku started getting a little lightheaded after a while.

“I missed you,” Riku mumbled, reluctantly pulling away and looking at Iori. “We have pretty much the rest of the day off, so is there anything you want to do?”

Before Iori could get a word out, Riku shot him a stern frown. “Nothing work-related.”

“We can watch that TRIGGER DVD. And a nap sounds nice,” Iori suggested, and Riku nodded brightly. They went to Iori’s room together, Iori saying that he didn’t want to go into Riku’s room just in case he got overwhelmed by the alpha’s scent. Riku didn’t fight his decision, simply retrieved the DVD from his room and joined Iori.

Riku recalled the night before Music Festa, which seemed like so long ago, when Iori caught him watching TRIGGER’s DVD and told him not to chase after Tenn. He couldn’t help but think that they had come so far since then, to the point that Iori not only bought the DVD for him, but even suggested that they watch it together. It was easy to forget that he and Iori had met less than a year ago; Iori’s presence was a constant in his life now, and Riku didn’t know what it would be like without the omega.

He had no idea when he’d fallen so deep, but he liked the closeness, the intimacy, of their current relationship. Riku knew that they could do so much more together, and the thought of it thrilled him.

And when Riku glanced over at Iori, eyes sweeping over the omega’s pretty features, he couldn’t help the way his heart leapt in his chest.

There was no denying that he was hopelessly, head over heels, in love with Izumi Iori.

Chapter End Notes

HAPPY FUREFURE DAY!!

Chapter was... shorter than I thought? Idk anymore I typed this quite a while back haha //sweats. Back to following the main storyline after this so yay, more angst! Thank you to all the new readers for the kudos, I hope you guys are enjoying the fic so far! There've been an increase of i7 fics recently so I'm glad the series and getting more popular :D

Until next week!
The next couple of weeks passed by uneventfully, as if it was the calm before the storm.

Work went on as usual, MEZZO preparing for schedules every night after dinner, Iori helping Tsumugi coordinate schedules so that they didn't coincide with each other. They had dance and vocal lessons every other day that they were free, although it was more of individual practice than group practice, improving their skills in preparation for facing off with TRIGGER at Black or White.

They hadn't even received the nomination for JIMA yet, but it was only a matter of time, considering that their popularity was still increasing exponentially, had been increasing ever since Soundship. Riku was getting antsy from the waiting, even though Iori assured him time and again that they would most likely get nominated for the prestigious award. He repeatedly told Riku to focus on honing his skills, making sure that Riku always did his best during any schedules.

It had been smooth sailing. Until the tabloids came.

The first to find out about them had been MEZZO or, more specifically, Tamaki. They'd just finished filming for a show, but the producer told them to stay for a little while, saying that they might be needed for a short segment near the end. They went back to their waiting room to rest, and Tamaki plopped down unceremoniously on the couch.

Sougo was already pulling out the plans for their schedule tomorrow, and Tamaki glanced at the omega, wondering how it was that he could work tirelessly. Well, maybe not tirelessly, seeing how Sougo was often exhausted by the time it was late at night.

There were times when Sougo fell asleep on the couch, the omega working on something while Tamaki watched whatever program was on the TV. The alpha would suddenly feel a weight on his shoulder and turn to find that Sougo was knocked out. He usually carried Sougo back to his room, and most times the omega didn't even stir, simply snuggled into Tamaki's hold and whining when Tamaki left the room.

Tamaki didn't say it often, but he was rather proud of Sougo for always working so hard. He knew he definitely couldn't do it, not even if he tried. Not wanting to disturb Sougo, Tamaki looked around for something to do, eyes landing on a neat pile of magazines on the table. He picked up the first one that had IDOLiSH7 on it, idly flipping to the article about them.

Tamaki had never been particularly fond of reading long articles, but the headline caught his attention immediately, and he scanned through the article, reading faster than he'd thought he was capable of. With each word, Tamaki's blood boiled, and by the time he had read most of it, he was annoyed beyond belief. "What's with this crap!? It's pissing me off!"

Sougo looked up from the stack of papers in his hand, chuckling in mild amusement at Tamaki's annoyance. He knew his partner had a short fuse, so most of the time he wasn't fazed by Tamaki's outbursts of anger. "Tamaki-kun, even magazines rile you up," Sougo commented.

He certainly hadn't expected Tamaki to shove the magazine over his documents, and Sougo glanced up at the alpha in surprise. Okay, maybe there was something that warranted such a reaction from
Tamaki. "Take a look at this!" Tamaki grumbled, and Sougo took the magazine from his hands.

"Mitsuki-san's interview?" Sougo asked, recognising the magazine and vaguely recalling that Mitsuki had spoken to them recently. Almost immediately, there was a frown on his face, Sougo reading the headline of the article aloud. "MEZZO is IDOLiSH7's reserve group...?" he trailed off, brows creasing deeper as he read the rest of the article.

“See? It pisses you off, right?” Tamaki huffed, glaring at the article as if it was the one that had offended him. Tamaki wasn’t so much angry for himself than he was for Sougo; the omega was constantly working himself way past his limits, and for what? For Mitsuki to claim that they were simply a reserve group? This is ridiculous.

Sougo didn’t reply, simply bit his lip and tried to think of why Mitsuki would ever say such a thing. He would’ve been fine if the article was directed at him alone, but there was a line in it stating that Tamaki never did anything, simply rode on the coat tails of MEZZO’s popularity. That was the part that had Sougo fuming, because he had seen how much Tamaki had grown over the course of the past six months. Perhaps Sougo was a little biased, but it was Tamaki that he spent the most time with, after all.

With a sigh, suddenly feeling infinitely more tired, Sougo set the magazine aside and looked at Tamaki with a forced smile. “Let’s not think about that now, alright?” he compromised, knowing that Tamaki would have a lot to complain about later on. Heck, even Sougo was angry, and he hardly ever got this angry over some stupid gossip magazine.

Tamaki begrudgingly nodded, seeming to understand that they were still in the middle of work, and that it wouldn’t do for staff to overhear their conversation.

Sougo patted Tamaki’s arm in what he hoped was a comforting manner, turning back to the documents he’d been reading through in an attempt to forget about the article.

---

The next were Riku and the Izumis.

It was another day filled with individual schedules, and so Riku and Mitsuki found themselves alone in the practice room. They were seated on the floor, leaning against the wall and taking a break from the strenuous dance practice they’d just put themselves through.

"It's been a while since we've gathered here as a group, huh?" Riku commented offhandedly. Mitsuki hummed in agreement, sighing softly to himself. "I'm glad that we're getting work, but it's a little lonely..." he trailed off. As things had been, Riku only had a bit of time every night with Iori. He missed being able to relax together after lunch, watching variety programmes or reruns of old anime on TV.

Mitsuki didn't comment, and Riku glanced at the beta for a moment. Something seemed off, somehow...

"Oh, well. I wonder what everyone's up to today," Riku said, feeling like he was talking to himself more than he was talking to Mitsuki. He pulled his phone out of his pocket, opening Twitter and scrolling through his timeline. He didn't follow many people, mainly the other members and a few other idols.
The first couple of tweets had been from Tamaki and Yamato, and then recommended tweets that Sougo and Nagi had liked. Riku scrolled down further, raising a brow at a tweet that had been directed to him specifically. He tapped the link attached to it, entering into a tweet from a short interview that Iori had apparently been in.

The question that had been posed to Iori was "What do you think of Nanase Riku's ability as a centre?" and according to the tweet, Iori had replied by saying that Riku was weak, that he couldn't be relied on. The tweet ended with the interviewer commenting that Iori seemed like the more reliable in IDOLiSH7.

Riku frowned. "That jerk," he grumbled, sighing as he tried to think things through rationally. Their relationship was still very much hidden from the eyes of the public, and Iori's blunt honesty was a key factor in maintaining the secret. And he supposed Iori wouldn't be Iori if he didn't make a few snide comments every now and then. "I guess he says that all the time, though."

Mitsuki looked at Riku. "Hey, have you seen Yamato-san recently?" he asked. Riku shook his head, and Mitsuki leaned his head back against the wall. "The other day, I heard from the TV station staff that he was planning to quit being an idol to focus on acting."

"Huh?"

The door to the practice room opened, and Iori stepped in. He spotted the two sitting down by the wall, smiling slightly in greeting. "Nii-san, Nanase-san," he said, and Mitsuki immediately stood up from his spot on the floor. He walked out of the room, right past Iori, without even acknowledging his brother. Iori stared at the beta as he went, confusion written all over his face.

Riku mirrored his expression, wondering what had come over Mitsuki. "Did you guys get into a fight?"

"No, we didn't," Iori replied, brows creasing in thought. He was about to walk over to sit down beside Riku but stopped midway as he recalled the article he'd read on the way there. He was sure Riku had no malice behind the comment, the alpha was a little careless with his words at times, but the headline hadn't been so pleasant to read. The article insinuated that Riku felt that the failure at Music Festa had been Iori's fault.

Anyway, to some extent, Iori did still blame himself for it. So, without paying it much heed, he went to put his bag down beside the alpha, sliding down against the wall and sitting there silently. He knew he should be changing out of his school clothes and into his practice clothes, but there was something odd about the way Mitsuki had acted that he couldn't shake off.

He unlocked his phone, looking for the article and showing it to Riku. "Is this true?"

Riku took the phone, eyes scanning through the first few words of the article and immediately shaking his head vigorously. "I would never!" he exclaimed, sounding offended by the accusation. Riku had seen first-hand how bad Iori always felt about the Music Festa incident. There was really no way he could be that insensitive. He opened Twitter again, handing his phone to Iori. "What about this?"

Iori's eyes widened slightly, and the omega glanced at Riku as he shook his head. "Definitely not."

"That's strange..." Riku mumbled. His chest felt a little lighter now that he knew Iori hadn't really said something like that. Not that he had believed it much at all, but it was nice to have a little reassurance from the person himself. "I wonder what's going on."
Iori sighed. "I wish I knew."

---

"You got into the group only because of Iori?" Nagi asked, sounding genuinely confused as he expertly tapped the game controller in his hands, manoeuvring his game character so that he didn't fall off the map. "Did Iori say that?"

From the corner of his eye, he saw Mitsuki shake his head slightly. "It was published online."

"Then it's not true," Nagi concluded easily, wincing as he tripped on an item and lost some health.

"When I asked Banri-san," Mitsuki started, sounding extremely upset, "he said it was true at first. But he also added that if the President hadn't seen my talent, he wouldn't have allowed me to stay in the group. I feel stupid."

Mitsuki put the controller down, uncaring of the fact that his character ran straight into a wall and died. He let his body flop onto the floor gracelessly, turning away from Nagi so that the alpha couldn't see his face. He thought he would have outgrown the insecurity by now, but that obviously wasn't the case. "I was so happy to be accepted, you know? But it turns out it was only because of him."

Nagi sighed softly. He'd always known that Mitsuki's insecurity mostly stemmed from having a younger brother who was too perfect. And he could understand it, to an extent – his own older brother had always been praised by everyone around them since young, and Nagi had been expected to grow up like him. Perhaps it was because of that that they didn't get along particularly well; not at all, actually.

"Mitsuki, you're an important member. IDOLiSH7 needs you."

Mitsuki scoffed. "Even if you feel that way, he probably thinks of me as an added bonus."

Nagi's heart sank. He wasn't sure whether or not to believe Mitsuki. The brothers were always close, always looking out for each other. It wasn't that Mitsuki was the only one who took care of Iori. Nagi had seen just how much Iori worried for his brother sometimes, and he knew that Iori had been the one who told Riku about Mitsuki's feelings for him. There was no way Iori would ever think of Mitsuki as an added bonus, not when he'd been the one who set the condition that they were to become idols together. "Mitsuki, are you serious?"

"Of course not," Mitsuki mumbled, rolling over so that he could curl in on himself, one hand clutching his jacket tightly. "After all, he's my younger brother."

He understood where Nagi was coming from, and he didn't hate Iori. God, he wished he could. But as perfect as Iori seemed to be, he had always looked up to Mitsuki, always wanted to become like his older brother. Mitsuki knew better than anyone that Iori would never say that. But the fact was that it had worked exactly the way the author of the article intended. It had successfully dug deep enough into Mitsuki's insecurities, enough that he wasn't thinking rationally.

"Why is he my younger brother?" the beta asked, willing his voice not to quiver. "I've felt this way since we were kids. I've had enough."
He didn't see the way Nagi's face fell, didn't see how much sadness was reflected in his blue eyes. Nagi hated that Mitsuki had to feel this way. It wasn't Iori's fault, the omega never ever put Mitsuki down, but that didn't mean that Mitsuki would look past his own flaws.

"Mitsuki..."

---

A few days later, the boys found themselves in front of a new minibus. Tsumugi was chuckling smugly, and before any of them could ask her what was going on, she whipped out a card. "I finally got my driver's license!" she announced proudly, unable to wipe the pleased smile on her face when the boys started a round of applause. "From now on, I'll be driving you guys around, so please get on."

Yamato made a face. "I'm sorry, but I'm not sitting next to Tama."

"Huh?" Tamaki asked, frowning at the leader. "Why not?"

The beta scoffed, looking at Tamaki and frowning. "Ask yourself that question, shit-for-brains."

"Huh!?" Tamaki growled, clenching his fists and turning completely to face Yamato.

Mitsuki stepped in between them, looking between the two of them. "Don't fight! Sougo, did Tamaki do something again?"

It was Sougo's turn to frown now, the omega beginning to seethe with anger as well. It was one thing to be called a reserve group, but Tamaki-kun did nothing wrong. "Why are you immediately assuming it's Tamaki-kun's fault?" he demanded. Maybe he came off a little harsher than he'd intended, especially to Mitsuki, who was older than him, but if he didn't stand up for Tamaki, nobody would.

"I didn't mean..."

"It's because Yotsuba-san has a tendency to do things like this," Iori explained. "Right, nii-sa-"

Mitsuki whirled around to face Iori, and the omega shrank back a little at the intensity of Mitsuki's glare. "I didn't ask you to back me up," Mitsuki bit out. "You've always looked down on me."

"I wasn't trying to," Iori trailed off. He recalled back to when Mitsuki had stormed out of the practice room. After talking to Riku and clarifying that the articles they'd read were both false, Iori had done some digging around of his own. He'd managed to find the reason why Mitsuki was so upset at him, but he hadn't expected the beta to still be mad about it.

Riku tried cut in, to diffuse the situation. "But Iori's always treating people like that, isn't he?"

Iori's eye twitched in annoyance. He knew Riku had good intentions and that he sometimes wasn't the best at choosing what words to use. But now wasn't the best time to be insinuating that Iori was a snob that liked to make others feel bad about themselves. "What is that supposed to mean?"

"Oh no, this won't do at all," Nagi said. It was bad enough that his own relationship with his brother was less than ideal. He didn't want the same to become of Iori and Mitsuki's relationship, when they
both clearly cared for each other. "Iori, we need to talk."

The omega whirled around. "About what?" he nearly snapped. It was bad enough that Mitsuki was still angry at him, for something that he hadn't even done, and it wasn't as if Riku had really helped the situation any. "Weren't we talking about Nikaidou-san and Yotsuba-san?"

"Don't bring it up," Yamato said. "I don't want to talk about it anyway."

An annoyed growl rumbled in Tamaki's throat. "What's with that attitude!? It's pissing me off!"

Yamato shot Tamaki a glare. "You're the one who spouted that nonsense about me having something to do with someone in the entertainment industry!"

"I never said that! You want to fight, you son of a-

"Tamaki, knock it off!"

"And why are you only scolding Tamaki-kun?" Sougo demanded. "Is it because we're the reserves?"

Mitsuki was taken aback for a moment. "What? It's because he's the one getting physical!"

By the side, Nagi said, "Okay, Iori? People's hearts are very delicate. They can get hurt by the smallest things. Okay?"

Iori sighed, glancing at the fistfight just waiting to happen. "Rather than worrying about fragile hearts, shouldn't we be more concerned that Nikaidou-san's about to get punched?"

"Huh?" Nagi sounded genuinely confused, and Iori wondered how he could possibly have missed the impending brawl going on right behind them. His eyes widened when he realised that Iori was right, and Nagi abandoned his lecture in favour of breaking the fight up. "No! No!"

Riku stared in confusion at his group members, wondering why they were all so high strung. Iori had told him about what happened with Mitsuki, but he hadn't told him about everyone else. Maybe Iori hadn't even known about what was going on with everyone else. "W-what's going on with everyone?"

He vaguely registered Tsumugi vibrating beside him, although he wasn't sure whether it was from anger or, god forbid, tears. His question was answered almost instantly, and for a second, Riku thought that it would be a terrible thing if Tsumugi was an alpha.

"Everyone! Get in the bus! Now!"

---

Riku sighed, putting his pen down and taking a sip of his iced tea. The questionnaires that TV programs were giving seemed to be getting more and more personal, and it was starting to get on Riku's nerves. It was one thing to ask about generic things like hobbies, likes and dislikes, but delving into personal family matters was a little overboard.

He stretched his neck, working the tension out of his shoulders, and glanced out of the window. Then Riku frowned, wondering if his eyes were playing tricks on him. "Manager...?"
Finishing the rest of his drink and packing up his documents, Riku exited the cafe, smiling politely at the staff who thanked him for his patronage. He walked over to the cafe next door, wondering why Tsumugi suddenly looked like a deer caught in headlights. The more the other man pressed her, the more troubled she looked, and Riku didn't like that their manager was being harassed like this.

He went straight up to their table, completely ready to tell the other person off. "Hey! Stop that, can't you see that she's upset?" Riku questioned, eyes widening in surprise when he processed who the other person was. "Y-Yaotome Gaku!!?"

Gaku shot Riku an annoyed glare, and Riku suddenly remembered that Gaku was also an alpha, and that he happened to be the leader of their rival group. It probably wouldn't be very good for IDOLiSH7's image if Riku got into a brawl with him.

Not that Riku thought he would even stand a chance, if it came down to that.

"Don't get in the way," Gaku snapped. "I was talking to Tsumugi."

Riku stared at Gaku incredulously. Tsumugi!? Even we don't call Manager by her first name.

"But doesn't she obviously seem bothered by this!?"

Tsumugi turned to Riku and smiled at him in reassurance. "Riku-san, don't worry about me," she told him, but Riku wasn't really buying it. If she was anything but a beta, Riku was fairly certain that he would be able to pick up on the changes in her scent easily enough.

Gaku sighed exasperatedly. "Okay then, you tell me, Nanase Riku," he finally decided. Riku was confused for a fraction of a moment; he didn't even know what the two of them had been talking about. The other alpha asked, "How did the seven of you sing that song perfectly?", and everything clicked into place.

Riku stilled, wondering how he had gotten himself into this mess. He could tell that Tsumugi didn't want him to say the truth, be it from the way she was looking at him desperately or the way that she was shaking her head, just the slightest bit. Riku didn't want to tell him, either. He knew that the members of TRIGGER weren't at fault for the entire song theft incident, that they probably didn't even know that the song was stolen. And Riku didn't want Tenn to find out that they'd been singing a stolen song, especially because IDOLiSH7 had yet to even officially debut then.

But Gaku was looking at him now, waiting expectantly for an answer. Seconds passed with Riku saying nothing in response, and Gaku shook his head. "If you won't tell me, I'll ask Tsumugi," he said, turning back to look at the beta. "Tsumugi, can we go elsewhere so that he won't interfere?"

And Tsumugi looked so conflicted, because obviously she didn't want to tell the truth, and there really wasn't any way to lie about something as important as this. Riku sighed inwardly – Iori was going to give him a good dressing down for doing this. But enough was enough, and honestly, Riku had always wanted to get this weight off his chest.

"It was stolen."

Gaku froze. "What?"

"By a music producer from your company," Riku continued. It was too late to go back now, anyway, and the words just kept spilling from his mouth. He hadn't realised he was still so angry about it, even though Akihito had long been caught and the matter resolved. "The demo tape for that song was stolen. That song was originally our debut song. We even shot a PV in Okinawa!"
By the time Riku was done, his chest was heaving in a mix of relief and anger. The anger was more for IDOLiSH7 as a whole, rather than for himself. He could clearly remember how happy they'd all been when they were shooting the PV. It had only been a little over two months ago, but with how high tension had been running in the group recently, those days felt like they'd happened years ago.

"...is that true?" Gaku asked, his voice barely louder than a whisper.

Riku nodded firmly, brows still set in a frown. "I wouldn't lie about this."

The other alpha slumped back in his seat, gaze fixed on the table in front of him. He seemed to be in a state of shock, and Riku honestly didn't blame him. He was already regretting his decision a little, wondering why he'd been hot-headed enough to just blabber about everything like that. "We sang a song that was stolen from you?" he asked, letting out a chuckle of disbelief. "To think that we were singing a stolen song..."

"Gaku-san, please don't feel responsible for it," Tsumugi was quick to assure. Riku wished he'd been as patient as her; he hadn't meant to hurt Gaku with the truth, even though it did feel a little better, getting this off his chest. "The members of TRIGGER didn't know anything about this, right?"

Gaku smiled sadly, shaking his head in response. "You're really kind," he told her, sighing and grabbing his belongings. He stood up, nodding slightly as a form of apology. "I'm really sorry for suddenly taking up your time. Thank you for talking to me."

He took the receipt and settled the bill before leaving, and Riku felt a new weight settle in his chest. Gaku was a good man, a good alpha, and Riku knew that he genuinely loved being an idol. They watched as Gaku left, and Tsumugi sighed heavily. "TRIGGER didn't have to know," she muttered.

"I'm sorry," Riku apologised, biting his lower lip guiltily. "I shouldn't have done that. But why were you with him? Why did he go out of his way to meet you?"

Tsumugi averted her gaze from Riku's. "That's..."

"If you don't want to answer, that's fine," Riku said, pursing his lips slightly. He wasn't against the idea of Gaku hanging out with Tsumugi for personal reasons, but it seemed a little odd that the two of them would suddenly be going out together.

Shaking her head, Tsumugi sighed again. "I can't tell you, because it involves his family situation."

Riku nodded in understanding, and he waited for Tsumugi to pack up before they headed back to the dorm together. It was barely a few minutes after they left the cafe that they were stopped by a random passer-by, the man's face lighting up as he recognised who Riku was.

"It's IDOLiSH7's Nanase Riku!" the man exclaimed in glee. "So, your older brother is Kujou Tenn? It must be nice to get into the entertainment industry through connections, huh?"

"What?"

The man nodded. "It was in a weekly magazine. Your parents sold off your brother first, and since that worked out well, they sold you off too, right?"

Turning to Tsumugi in confusion, Riku could only ask the man, "What are you talking about?"
We all know what happens next right-- h a h a. More angst!!

Also I'm almost done writing this part of the series so (hopefully) I'll be able to start on part 2 soon~ Although I kinda wanna wait for anime season 2 bc that'll mean more refs but they haven't announced the release date for that yet orz. I estimate this part of the series will be 32 chapters at most? We'll find out soon HAHAHA.

See you guys again next week and I hope you enjoyed this update!
Riku glared at the gossip magazines spread across the table as if they'd personally offended him. Although, Iori supposed they kind of did, considering the kinds of things that were written about Riku and Tenn's parents. He could only imagine how bad the alpha felt.

"What is this!? Of course they didn't do that! It's all lies!"

The group had been summoned to the office by Banri, with the exception of Nagi and Mitsuki who were at a recording. Banri had managed to collect a number of magazines throughout the past few days, those that had malicious articles about the members in them. There was at least one for each member, and some of them were actually accurate, so much so that Iori wondered where they were even getting their information from.

Tsumugi nodded in agreement, having only arrived minutes ago together with Riku. "This is incredibly malicious! We need to protest!" she protested angrily, and while Iori could see where she was coming from, he also knew that they couldn't do much against so many publishers.

"There's no point in complaining," Iori pointed out honestly. "Unless we go to trial, we can't expect an apology from every case. And even if they did apologise, the damage has been done."

Riku sank down onto the couch beside Iori, shoulders slumping in defeat. He knew Iori was right, and their company wasn't nearly big enough to afford so many lawsuits. Besides, the magazines had already been in circulation for a few days, possibly longer than a week. There were probably too many people who had already read the slanderous articles, and word-of-mouth was a dangerous thing.

"Will Tenn-nii deny it?" Riku asked, the question directed at nobody in particular.

"I doubt he'll comment on it," Iori told him, hating how worried and upset Riku was. There was more to it than what was written, and Iori knew that. Riku was concerned about the accusations made against his family, but he was also worried that maybe it wasn't completely wrong. After all, Riku still had no idea why Tenn chose to leave with Kujo, and Tenn would only tell Riku the truth if IDOLiSH7 won at Black or White. "It's normal not to say anything in these situations. People hardly believe them, anyway."

Riku turned to look at Iori, brows creased in worry. "But what if they do?"

From the other side of the room, Banri sighed. "Sougo-kun's family situation has also been exposed. But, as expected, the company's name doesn't appear at all," he scanned through the article again, having read it at least twice by now, and put the magazine down in front of Sougo. "There's even a picture of when he was in college."

Sougo stared blankly at the article, at the image that they featured in the magazine. He could remember when it was taken; people had always tended to flock around Sougo because his family was rich, and they wanted to get into his good books so that they could make use of his family name. As a result, the school magazine also liked to interview him regarding random happenings, and sometimes they would ask him about his opinion on certain business deals.

He never refused them, but that didn't mean he particularly liked those interviews. Some of the club
members were alphas, and they knew how the Ousaka family prided themselves on producing alpha heirs. They thought that maybe they could get close to Sougo and, Sougo didn't really know, marry into the family. What they all didn't know was that Sougo himself wasn't even an alpha.

He winced when Tamaki suddenly cursed. "Don't screw with me!"

Iori looked up. "What is it this time?"

Sougo took the magazine from Tamaki, reading through it quickly and frowning. He could smell Tamaki's anger radiating off him, and it didn't help that they were seated right next to each other. Putting the magazine down, Sougo rested his hand on Tamaki's thigh, hoping that it would provide at least a little comfort to the alpha. "It says that Tamaki-kun's search for his sister is just a publicity stunt," he said.

"They can't be serious!"

"They don't know what they're saying," Sougo assured, finding Tamaki's hand and patting it gently.

"This bastard!"

Iori glanced at Yamato. "...and what is it this time?"

Tsumugi picked up another magazine. "It says that a major actor is suspected of having an illegitimate lovechild, and that child is... IDOLiSH7's Nikaidou Yamato!?" she exclaimed in shock, and immediately all eyes were on the leader.

In the entire group, Sougo, Nagi, and Yamato were the ones whose family background they knew least about. Nagi talked about himself often enough, but hardly ever brought up the topic of his family. Yamato, on the other hand, didn't even talk about himself, just like how Sougo used to be. At the very least, Tamaki could wheedle information from the omega, but there was probably nobody that Yamato would willingly open up to.

The beta faked a laugh, waving the accusation off calmly. "T-that's obviously not true," he said, pointedly avoiding everyone's gazes. Yamato was a good actor, but his lying was sorely lacking at the moment, and Iori raised a brow at the poorly constructed lie. "Can you believe the nonsense they write?"

Apart from Iori, Sougo also didn't believe Yamato, not in the least. But he didn't push the matter, simply opting to lean against Tamaki and make sure the alpha was feeling better. He knew best how hard Tamaki had been searching for Aya, and the alpha sometimes confessed that he was worried about her not wanting to look for him. Or, worse, not being able to because of financial circumstances. For such an article to be published was affecting Tamaki a lot, and understandably so.

"This one has an article on Rokuya-san," Iori read. "The idol everyone's been talking about is actually the prince of a small Northern European country."

He exchanged an incredulous look with Riku, trying to imagine how that would be. Nagi was always so carefree, and although he was actually incredibly smart, he seemed airheaded more often than not. Neither of them could imagine Nagi in such an important role. The only thing that seemed fitting enough was his looks. "That's a lie," they said in unison.

"Iori-san and Mitsuki-san's family situation has also been exposed," Tsumugi said, sounding troubled.
Iori waved her concerns off easily. "It's fine. We're a service business, so this publicity could actually be good for the bakery," he pointed out. Riku stared at his partner, wondering how Iori could be so level-headed about everything. Although, he supposed, it would be very different if the media had found out that Iori and Sougo were omegas. Riku didn't even want to entertain that thought.

"...there's even an article claiming that Riku-san and Iori-san are dating."

That got their attention easily enough, and Riku nearly snatched the magazine from Tsumugi, apologising for startling her as he looked at the article with Iori. It was one thing to have just slanderous things written about them, but this article even had a picture from when they'd gone on their first date.

The picture was grainy, thankfully, but it was hard to mistake Riku's head of red hair. It had apparently been taken when they were at dinner, and even had mentioned their conversation regarding the fanmail. Iori took a deep breath, recalling that conversation as best as he could and heaving a small sigh of relief when he realised that they hadn't said anything too obvious. Well, apart from Riku saying that Iori was upset because of the fanmail, but that could still be interpreted as Iori being jealous of Riku having more fans. It wasn't indicative of any relationship between the two.

"I'm glad nobody followed us on the way home, at least," Riku mumbled.

Iori paled, and he nodded. As distressed as he'd been at the time, he did know that they had been careless. Scenting like that in public, regardless of the fact that it had been at night and the streets were mostly empty, was probably the easiest way to expose themselves, and they'd gone and done it. Maybe it had been the only way to get him to calm down enough for them to make their way home, but that didn't mean that it hadn't been incredibly negligent of them.

Aside from Mitsuki, Iori hadn't told anyone else what had happened that night, and Riku hadn't said anything about it, either. The others were looking at them a little curiously now, worry mixed into their expressions, and Iori cleared his throat. They didn't need to know, didn't need more things to worry about when they all already had so much on their plates.

"Anyway, we should be prepared to have all sorts of stuff written about us. After all, we joined the entertainment industry," Iori sighed. As idols, gossip magazines were commonplace, and considering the fact that IDOLiSH7 was gaining popularity so rapidly, they really should have expected this much. "Please don't get so worked up over something like this."

Yamato and Tamaki turned to glare at Iori, and at the alpha's unconcealed anger, Iori flinched slightly. Sougo noticed as much, sighing and turning so that he could rub his cheek against Tamaki's scent glands, hoping that it would at least quell his anger a little.

"We aren't!" the two exclaimed, and Iori stared blankly at them.

He was about to retort, tell them that they were really too transparent with their emotions, when Banri spoke up suddenly. "Even so, there're too many articles with too much malice," he said, eyes sweeping over the stack of magazines that were now scattered all over the table. He was right; there was at least one article targeted at each member, and Iori was sure that there were more elsewhere. "...don't you think someone's moving behind the scenes?"
"Tamaki-kun!"

Tamaki turned around, ready to tell whoever it was to back the hell off.

It had been a number of weeks since they'd found out about the scandalous articles. The company hadn't been able to do anything about them, and whoever it was that was pulling the strings behind them wasn't ready to stop just yet.

The alpha stopped just as he opened his mouth to speak, staring at the man. He's familiar...

The man beamed when he got Tamaki's attention. "We met in Okinawa, remember?" he asked, and Tamaki's face lit up in recognition. Right after MEZZO had debuted, when the duo had been filming a show, this man was the producer who had approached Tamaki, saying that he could help to find Aya for him. "It's about that show. We'll be filming it today."

It took a few moments for Tamaki to process what the producer said, and then his eyes widened. "You found her!?" Tamaki demanded, his voice a mix of excitement and relief. All these years of looking for her, and now, now he could finally see his sister again.

"I can't tell you," the producer said apologetically. "We want to get your most genuine reaction."

"...I understand," Tamaki said, unable to keep his hands from shaking in anticipation. He returned to the waiting room together with the producer, letting him explain the situation to the other members and thanking him when he left.

Riku looked at Tsumugi once the door was closed. "An emotional reunion?"

The beta nodded in response. "It's something we took on a few months ago, because Tamaki-san had already promised them to do it," she explained.

"Is it to search for your sister?" Nagi asked.

"Yeah. He said they'd use the show's budget to find her."

"But," Iori started uncertainly, not knowing how Tamaki would react to his words. "Is it really okay to do this now? With all these articles still circulating..."

"I don't care what people think," Tamaki said, a fierce determination burning in his eyes. "They can call it fake all they want. Anything's fine as long as I can get to meet her."

Sougo reached out to place his hand on Tamaki's thigh. As glad as he was that Tamaki could finally see Aya again, he couldn't shake off the feeling that something wasn't quite right. But Tamaki was so excited, and Sougo couldn't bear to take that away from him. After all, it was Tamaki who taught him how to be happy again, and the alpha deserved to be happy, too.

And yet, the uncomfortable feeling remained in the pit of Sougo's stomach.

"Have you not gotten any information about whether or not they've found her?" Sougo asked cautiously. Tamaki's shoulders drooped a little, and the alpha bit his lip, shaking his head with a soft sigh. Sougo let out a sigh of his own; it was expected that they would keep it a secret from Tamaki.

Yamato shrugged. "Well, that's the draw of programs like these. They'll probably keep whether or not he can meet her a secret. After all, the purpose is to get Tama's reaction on camera," he said, as if everyone didn't already know that.
"I hope they found your sister," Mitsuki said.

"Yeah..."

A staff member knocked on the door, poking his head in and smiling at the group. "It's almost time."

Tsumugi thanked him, turning to Tamaki and offering an encouraging smile. "Well then, good luck."

---

Tamaki was seated on a chair in the centre of the stage, facing away from the other members and looking straight at what appeared to be a door, hidden by a curtain blind. Shimooka stood behind the podium, narrating what was supposed to be Tamaki's life story.

"His mother passed away, and his father went missing... and later on, he was separated from his sister at the facility," Shimooka read solemnly. "Yotsuba Tamaki has walked a long, lonely road of suffering. But now, at last, it's time for an emotional reunion."

"Reunion?" Tamaki asked, unable to believe his ears. "Did you find Aya!?"

From somewhere behind him, Sougo exclaimed, "Thank goodness, Tamaki-kun!"

Tamaki couldn't help the way the corners of his lips pulled up into a smile, whether it was because Sougo sounded genuinely happy for him, or it was because I finally get to meet her again. Tears pricked at the alpha's eyes when he thought of his little sister, the sister he hadn't seen in so many years. They used to always be together at the orphanage, relying on each other because they had no one else. But then she was adopted, and Tamaki was left alone to wonder whether or not she was doing alright.

And now, he could see her again. "Aya...!"

"Let's bring him on stage! Tamaki-kun's long-lost father, who's been missing since he was three years old!" Shimooka announced, and suddenly it was like the world went still.

The curtain raised itself slowly, revealing the face of the one person Tamaki absolutely did not want to see. He thought he would never have to see his father again, not that he really remembered the man well in the first place, but of all the places he could have shown his face, it had to be here.

Tamaki stared blankly at the man, even as Shimooka said, "I'm sorry about your sister, but we weren't able to find her. But the staff managed to find your father's whereabouts. Now, come on out!"

Tamaki watched as the man, the bastard who dared call himself a father, walk down the steps and stop in front of Shimooka. He had the gall to look awkward, to act as if he didn't know how to react to being on stage. Tamaki knew better. "Ah... Hello, thank you. I'm Tamaki's father."

"How does it feel?" Shimooka prompted with a smile. "Tell us what it's like to see how your son has grown up into a fine young man."

His father returned the smile easily, and Tamaki felt sick to the stomach. "He's really a fine young
"man," he agreed. "He looks just like I used to when I was young. I'm proud to call him my son."

_Bullshit_, Tamaki wanted to spit at him. He hardly even had memories of his father, only recognising the man through old photos that his mother had left behind. She loved him, even when he had left her to fend for two toddlers alone, on top of dealing with his gambling debts. She used to tell Tamaki that his father wasn't a bad man, that he loved them and had his own circumstances, but Tamaki never believed her. His mother had always worn a sad smile when talking about his father, but up till the day she died, she had never once said anything bad about him.

That was the only reason why Tamaki never told Aya anything about their father. Aya had been less than a year old when the man left, and she knew close to nothing of him. Everything she knew was from what their mother told them, and Tamaki didn't want to ruin his mother's efforts in keeping the truth from Aya. He'd decided early on in life that he would bear the burden of knowing what their father truly was like, but then again, he'd never thought of finding the man.

"He says he's proud!" Shimooka exclaimed. Tamaki could barely hold back a scoff, his fingers already curling into a fist. _The only thing he's proud of is that I'm making money now._ "Those words really bring tears to your eyes. Now, Tamaki-kun!"

Tamaki didn't respond, simply silently seething in anger, and Sougo glanced at him worriedly. The omega knew that he was the only one who could smell Tamaki's anger, and he honestly couldn't even blame the alpha for feeling this way. From the moment Shimooka had announced that they'd found Tamaki's father, even before Tamaki's scent changed from nervous to furious, Sougo's heart had sank.

It wasn't because he knew the alpha would be disappointed; Tamaki had been lied to before already, and even though he would feel bad about not having found Aya, he would just try again.

It was because he knew Tamaki hated his father to the core, for abandoning them and leaving a heap of debt for his mother to settle. It was because he knew Tamaki would react badly to seeing his father instead of the sister he'd been hoping to see.

So, Sougo wasn't really surprised when Shimooka said, "For some time now, you seem to be so emotional, you don't know what to say... Tamaki-kun?" and, instead of replying, Tamaki lunged at his father, pulling his arm back before throwing a punch straight at his face.

"How dare you show up here, you good-for-nothing bastard!"

Shimooka was taken aback, rightfully so, taking a step back from the angry alpha. Tamaki's pheromones were all over the place now, and Sougo was almost sure that even the others were able to smell it, in spite of the scent neutraliser they'd used. Tamaki had every right to be angry, but there was a time and place for everything, and this wasn't it. "Tamaki-kun! Stop it!"

"It's your fault that mum died, and Aya and I got separated!" Tamaki shouted, grabbing the man by the collar.

"T-Tamaki, I'm-!"

"Don't try to act like my dad now!" Tamaki growled. "You never did anything but drink, you damn punk!"

Sougo stood up, ready to intervene if need be, even if Tamaki's pheromones were getting a little out of hand. He wasn't even sure if he _could_ step in to hold Tamaki back; Tamaki's anger was making him a little heady. "Stop it, Tamaki-kun!" he repeated.
From behind him, Nagi said, "Tamaki! Violence isn't good!"

Tamaki paid them no heed, shaking his father and tightening his grip on his collar. "What are you after!? Just say it! Is it money? Huh!?" Tamaki demanded, uncaring of the fact that his father paled.

The producer from before came over, trying to hold Tamaki back. "Stop it at once! Hey, you..."

"Let go of me, you old geezer!" Tamaki swung his arm back, and the producer fell onto Shimooka who had been standing right behind him. The veteran emcee groaned in pain, and Riku rushed over to help him up.

"Tamaki, now you've even got Shimooka-san involved in this!" Riku frowned. He figured now was as good a time as any to make use of his status as an alpha, injecting a push into his voice as he said, "Just stop it already! Calm down!"

"Tama! We get it! We get it, alright!?"

Tamaki stopped struggling only when Sougo came in front of him, barely managing to hold him back by the shoulders. He shot a glare at his father, the man still on the ground and clearly in shock. "It's all your fault...!"

"It's fine!" Sougo told him. "It's fine, so... It's alright, calm down."

The first sob was choked out, wrenching itself out of Tamaki's throat. The others let go of the alpha, leaving him to Sougo, and he dropped his head onto the omega's shoulder. Sougo squeezed Tamaki's shoulders, his hands aching to pull Tamaki into a comforting hug. "Dammit!"

Sougo's heart clenched painfully in his chest – he'd never heard Tamaki sound so broken. The fight had all but drained out of the alpha, and now he was crying into Sougo's shoulder, his shoulders shaking as he sobbed. "Tamaki-kun..."

"I apologise," Sougo heard Iori say. "Are you alright, Shimooka-san?"

"Ow, ow, ow... Now's not the time to ask that!" Shimooka barked. "This has turned into a mess!"

Sougo's back was facing the others; he couldn't see what kind of expression Shimooka was making, but he figured it wasn't a pleasant one. "Stop the recording! I'm sure there are reasons behind Tamaki-kun's behaviour. Maybe the people in the planning team were in the wrong, too."

Shimooka paused, and Sougo's grip on Tamaki tightened. One hand went to pat Tamaki's back as Sougo released calming pheromones, just enough that Tamaki would be able to smell them. But Tamaki was so upset, it was as if Sougo's scent had no effect on him at all. Sougo hated feeling so useless, not being able to comfort Tamaki the way the alpha had done for him.

"You are all pros, aren't you? This won't do for a program! You guys don't have enough common sense!"

"I-I'm deeply sorry!" Iori apologised, and the other members echoed him.

In any other situation, Sougo would've done the same. After all, Tamaki was the one who had gotten violent, even getting Shimooka caught in the crossfire. But Sougo understood where Tamaki was coming from, and this was his alpha. If he wasn't going to stand up for Tamaki, he doubted anybody else would.

"Rather than apologising to me, you should apologise to the staff! I'll also have to think about
The group ended up sitting in their waiting room, nobody knowing how exactly to break the silence. It was Tsumugi who sighed first, looking at Tamaki with her brows set in a frown. She hardly ever was angry at any of them, so this was something new. "Tamaki-san, please go and apologise," she said.

Tamaki looked up from the ground, brows set in a frown. "I'm not going to apologise!"

The manager sighed again. "No matter the reason, you've bothered a lot of people by interfering with the production of their program. Let's go and apologise to everyone on set, and to Mister Shimooka-san, alright, Tamaki-san?"

"No!" Tamaki repeated, glaring at Tsumugi.

The manager sighed in defeat, exiting the room to apologise on her own instead.

Iori bristled, stepping forward as if he wanted to pick a fight with Tamaki, only to be stopped by Riku. The omega glanced at Riku, resisting the urge to heave a sigh of his own. "What are you saying? Shimooka-san has done so much for us, but you injured even him!" Iori scolded. "We're lucky that this was only a recording – if it was a live broadcast, this would have caused us to disband!"

"Then why don't we!?"

"What did you say!?"

Riku grabbed Iori's arm, frowning at the omega and shaking his head disapprovingly.

Sougo stepped a little closer to Tamaki. "Wait. Think about how Tamaki-kun feels. He still hasn't sorted his feelings out," he told them. He didn't exactly expect them to understand completely, but for Tamaki to suddenly see his father like that had probably opened some old wounds that the alpha never wanted to touch.

The younger omega pursed his lips. "But if we don't apologise soon, Mister Shimooka could choose to deny our future appearances in his anger," Iori pointed out matter-of-factly. Sougo knew Iori was making a valid point, but all he could think about was how everyone was overlooking Tamaki's feelings.

It wasn't a pleasant feeling.

"Tamaki, I understand how you feel, but you said you'd deal with this yourself, right?" Mitsuki asked. You probably don't, Sougo thought, surprised by how annoyed he was. He wasn't used to having such intense emotions of wanting to defend someone before, though he supposed it was expected. "That's why you have to take responsibility."

"I only agreed to do this show because they said they would find Aya! But instead, they brought that bastard here!"
"Yamato-san, we should go apologise with just us," Riku suggested.

Yamato sighed. "What good'll it do if we leave behind the one who actually injured him?"

"Sougo!" Mitsuki exclaimed, turning to look at the omega. He did a double-take when Sougo nearly glared at him, brows furrowed into a frown. It wasn't the Sougo he was used to seeing. "You need to convince him, too! Why're you taking his side this time?"

_Because I'm the only one who will!_ Sougo wanted to scream at all of them. Perhaps he was being biased, but he wasn't about to blame Tamaki for acting out like that. Heck, they _all_ knew how Tamaki felt about his father, perhaps not in as much detail as Sougo, but it wasn't exactly something that Tamaki bothered to hide.

He looked around, trying to think of who could possibly understand where he was coming from. "I would've been horrified too, if my father came out like that," Sougo said sharply, his gaze landing on their leader. "Yamato-san, wouldn't you!?"

The beta glanced at him. "...what are you talking about?"

"I read the article. About how you're the illegitimate child of a big-shot in the entertainment world."

"I said that was a lie, didn't I?"

Sougo shook his head. "I don't believe it."

He didn't even know why he was trying to pick a fight with the beta. Maybe he was just trying to divert the attention away from Tamaki; he didn't even understand it himself. Yamato took an aggressive step towards him, and Sougo almost welcomed it. There was so much pent-up frustration that he was holding back, and he didn't exactly have an outlet for it. "You're a persistent bastard, aren't you?" Yamato asked.

"No! No, no! Don't fight!" Nagi cut in. "We're dear friends! Teammates! Right?"

Nobody replied Nagi, each of them too caught up in their own thoughts. Nagi's shoulders dropped. "...why isn't anyone answering me?" he asked, his voice clearly upset.

The door slammed open suddenly, Banri bursting into the room with a wide grin on his face. He didn't notice the tense atmosphere between the members as he happily announced, "This is big news! IDOLiSH7 has just been nominated for JIMA’s Rookie Award! This is a great achievement!"

Then, as if finally realising how quiet everyone was, his face fell. "W-what's wrong? Shouldn't you be happy?" Banri asked cautiously. It was obvious that he'd just come from the office, and Tsumugi had yet to relay any details of the day's recording to him.

"It doesn't seem like they're happy about this."

At the sound of Otoharu's voice, everyone's heads snapped up. Banri glanced at the man beside him. "President..."

"If you can't feel happiness when what you were striving for is within your reach," Otoharu continued, not waiting for the others to respond. "Then that isn't your dream anymore. You should quit being idols."

"IDOLiSH7 is disbanded. MEZZO is also disbanded."
"Thank you for your hard work."

Chapter End Notes

Long-ish chapter wew we all knew this was coming am I right :'D

I MANAGED TO GET TICKETS TO THE RTI DELAYED VIEWING IN SG
YAY to those who are going let's scream together HAHA.

On another note I'm left with the last chapter plus epilogue for this fic so... rip I gotta
start on part 2 soon //lies down. Hope you guys enjoyed this and see you next week!!
The drive back to the dorm was painfully silent, with Riku sitting away from Iori. It wasn't that he wanted to avoid the omega, but the tension in the air was nearly tangible. Sougo was looking at Tamaki, but the alpha was staring out the window. Nagi was looking down into his lap, and Mitsuki wasn't looking at him either.

Riku could tell how upset Iori was. In fact, aside from the betas, everyone's scents betrayed the blank masks they were wearing. Otoharu had left with Banri immediately after announcing the disbandment of IDOLiSH7, not giving any of them a chance to explain themselves and why they didn't seem happy upon hearing the news of their nomination.

The entire group had gone quiet after that, each member silently keeping their belongings and getting into the car. The previous anger and frustration that they had been feeling seemed to vanish instantly, and now all they felt was confusion and disappointment in themselves.

They had gotten into disagreements before, so many times, but never once had anyone ever threatened to disband the team. First it had been Tamaki, and then Otoharu. Riku felt his heart sink at the thought of the group splitting up. He wasn't as if they couldn't still keep in contact with each other.

What Riku was most upset about was the fact that IDOLiSH7 could have done so much together, and yet it could be ending just like this. Over the past several months, Riku had grown to love his teammates, caring for them more than just as people that he worked with. They had started off rocky, gone through happiness and disappointment on more than a few occasions, and now their goal was so close.

And yet, was this how it was going to end?

They got off the car just as quietly once they arrived back at the dorm, everyone immediately heading back into their own rooms without saying a single word.

Riku didn't stay there for long, dropping his bag off before heading back out. The alpha didn't even know where he was going, simply wandering the streets in a useless attempt to clear his mind. He hated that he couldn't even bring himself to face Iori right now. The omega hadn't been wrong to get angry at Tamaki, but Riku wasn't about to see them fight with each other. The thought of Iori getting hurt was appalling, to say the least.

That didn't mean Iori was pleased with his intervention. Riku understood that the omega could hold his ground perfectly well on his own, but he couldn't shake off the urge to keep Iori safe. He sighed softly, putting his hands in his pockets and kicking a pebble off the pathway. He wouldn't give up his relationship with Iori even if IDOLiSH7 disband, Riku knew that for a fact, but he wasn't so sure if Iori would be willing to do the same.

He didn't doubt Iori's feelings for him, but in the first place, Iori only ever became an idol for Mitsuki's sake. He wasn't sure if they would still be able to walk down the same path, although they could still continue being in a relationship even if they didn't. But Riku wasn't going to stop aiming to reach the same stage as Tenn, not even if he was no longer a part of IDOLiSH7... would I?
Riku stopped dead in his tracks, realising that he'd somehow made his way to the river opposite Zero Arena. He stared at the building opposite him, leaning against the railings and letting out another soft sigh. "I finally made it this far, so why aren't I happy?" Riku asked. "Maybe it's not my dream anymore."

A lot had changed ever since meeting Iori, and Riku was fully aware of that. At the beginning, all Riku had wanted to do was to get to where Tenn was, to try and understand what the appeal of being an idol was. To try and understand why Tenn left their family.

That was still an important part of Riku's life, something that he still wanted to find out, but maybe that was no longer his top priority. He had someone important to him now, someone that he never thought could take up such an important place in his life, and if Riku had to make a choice, he wasn't sure that he would be able to confidently choose the path of an idol.

He wanted to be with Iori, and Riku didn't know how much he was willing to sacrifice for that.

Looking straight at Zero Arena, Riku asked, "Zero, did the same thing happen to you? Did singing stop being your dream?"

Riku glanced to the side, eyes widening slightly when he spotted a familiar head of white hair. "Tenn-nii?" he asked, the other alpha turning to him in surprise.

"Riku?"

---

Mitsuki sighed, dragging his feet as he walked mindlessly to the one place he always went to when he was upset. All of the times he'd been to Zero Arena were after failed auditions, and then that one time after Music Festa. Mitsuki never expected that he would have to go there to sort his thoughts out because the group was on the verge of disbandment.

Or, rather than on the verge of, they were already disbanded. "Disbanded..." Mitsuki mumbled to himself. The word tasted sour in his mouth, wrong, like it didn't belong there. All his life, Mitsuki had dreamt of becoming an idol, and not only had he successfully debuted as a part of IDOLiSH7, he'd been getting his fair share of individual schedules.

And now, they'd been nominated for JIMA's Rookie Award. "I should be happy," Mitsuki told himself. He stopped walking, not entirely sure where he was right now and not quite caring. "Didn't I want to become like Zero?"

"Mitsuki."

At the sound of his boyfriend's voice, Mitsuki turned around. He saw Nagi coming towards him, Sougo following closely behind the alpha. At any other time, Mitsuki might have been worried at the thought of the two being together alone – not that he wanted to doubt either of them, but he was always so insecure, and it didn't help that Sougo was an omega.

The two came to a stop in front of Mitsuki, and the beta couldn't even find it in himself to force a smile. "Nagi, Sougo," he acknowledged, unsure of what he could say to them. He'd left the dorm after barely a few minutes of staying in his room; his mind was still flooded with all sorts of thoughts, and he couldn't stand being alone in his room.
"I unconsciously headed this way," Sougo said.

Nagi nodded. "Me too. This was where Iori cried after Music Festa. My heart hurt."

Sougo hung his head, shoulders slumping. "You're right," he agreed. "It was hard, but we believed that we'd manage as long as we were together." Sougo wasn't referring to himself and Tamaki, but instead to IDOLiSH7 as a whole. At that time, he hadn't even thought that it was possible for any sort of romance to blossom between him and Tamaki.

Looking back now, Sougo supposed that there was a reason why the entire mishap with Music Festa had happened in the first place. It wasn't that he was glad that Iori had messed up, but if it hadn't been for that, he and Tamaki wouldn't have had to debut as a duo. Without MEZZO, Sougo wasn't sure if his relationship with Tamaki could have progressed at all.

At the thought of the alpha, Sougo's heart ached. It had been a long time since Tamaki ignored him the way he had on the journey back to the dorm. The last time it'd happened was probably before they began courting, and although that was only a couple of weeks ago, it felt like much longer.

He couldn't even begin to imagine how Tamaki felt. It was bad enough seeing his father in the middle of a recording like that, and now they had to deal with this. And as much as Sougo felt that Tamaki's behaviour was justified, it didn't mean that he wasn't wrong.

"Can we not go back?" Sougo and Mitsuki looked at Nagi, the blond's expression sad and forlorn. "Has what makes us happy and is important to us changed?" he asked.

Neither could reply his question. They knew that they still loved to sing, that seeing their fans cheer them on still made them happy. But just as with Riku, they weren't completely certain that that was the most important thing to them anymore.

But then again, nobody ever said that they couldn't have more than one important thing in their life.

---

"I wasn't trying to become an idol at first."

Iori didn't know how he ended up talking a stroll with Yamato. One moment he'd been heading for Riku's room, only to find that the alpha was already gone, and then suddenly Yamato was inviting him out for a walk. It wasn't as if he'd had much to do, not if they were going to disband, so Iori didn't see why he couldn't join the leader.

Yamato didn't reply, so Iori continued. "I just wanted nii-san's dream to come true. But as I secretly helped to manage the group, I came to like this job and IDOLiSH7," the omega said, long having given up hiding the fact that he helped Tsumugi sometimes. Yamato had caught him discussing something with Tsumugi once, and they'd come clean. The beta had taken the news relatively well, especially since he had technically been taking orders from someone five years younger than him.

Iori left the last part of his sentence unspoken, but there was no hiding the soft smile on his face as he completed it in his mind. And I came to like Nanase-san, a lot more than I should.

"And Riku?" Yamato asked at the exact same time, snickering when Iori's cheeks turned pink. Iori wasn't actually surprised that he'd been seen through so easily, considering the fact that everyone in
the group could see the affection he held for the redheaded alpha. He was a little embarrassed that he was so easy to read, but there was really no way to avoid that.

It wasn't as if the rest of the group couldn't see how invested they were in their relationship, and that was expected of them. They weren't just a couple that was in the stage of courtship – they were a fated pair, had been physically attracted to each other almost from the moment they met. It wasn't as if the attraction was going to die down anytime soon, either.

"You're right," Yamato said, turning to smile at the omega. "When I almost left during the audition, I never thought that I would come to love singing and you guys so much. Although, I do wish you guys could tone down the flirting. All of you. Onii-san gets a little lonely sometimes."

Chuckling, Iori shook his head. It might be possible for Nagi and Mitsuki to be less affectionate, even if Nagi's personality made that difficult, but there wasn't really a way for the two fated pairs to be any less affectionate than they currently were. Omegas were needy, Iori wasn't going to deny that, and they loved being scented and touched by their alpha.

If Iori had to be honest, he didn't think they were being anymore affectionate in the common areas than they should be. They already tried to be as discreet as they could. Sometimes they would cuddle on the couch when they were alone, and someone would walk in on them, but that was about as far as it went. After all, they had yet to share a kiss, although Iori had thought about it on more than one occasion.

Yamato shrugged, looking up at the starless sky. "I love singing, but why can't I enjoy it?"

---

Tamaki sat on the steps, uncaring of the fact that he was dirtying his pants, or that TRIGGER's very own Tsunashi Ryuunosuke was standing next to him. He'd escaped from the dorm in an attempt to take his mind off everything that had happened throughout the day. First his father, then disbandment.

He hadn't even managed to find a single clue as to where Aya was. It can't end like this.

Tamaki still had so much he wanted, needed, to do. It wasn't just about finding Aya anymore. Of course, he still desperately wanted to find his younger sister, wanted to know where she was and make sure she was safe. But Tamaki also wanted to make sure Sougo was happy, make sure the omega was taken care of and was able to express himself freely. There was no way he would be able to do that if he went back home.

The thought of Sougo having to go back on suppressants made Tamaki feel sick. More than the fact that Sougo could be rendered infertile if he did continue taking suppressants, Tamaki was appalled by the knowledge that Sougo's father would definitely force him to do as he demanded, for as long as Sougo remained in that household. That of course included taking suppressants, but there was so much more that Ousaka Soushi could make Sougo do.

Not being able to pursue music was bad enough, but Sougo would be made to take over the company, forced into a position that he neither wanted nor was suitable for. Tamaki didn't want to see Sougo shutting himself in once more, not when he'd taken so much time and effort to break through the omega's shell. Sougo deserved so much more than to be treated as simply a lowly
omega. It wasn't as if he'd asked to present as anything other than an alpha.

"I didn't really care about popularity or rules," Tamaki said, knowing that Ryuu was listening to him. The older alpha had told him to talk to him about anything that he needed to, that he was willing to lend a listening ear. "After all, I had a goal."

To find Aya.

"But seeing the guys work so hard made me want to try, too."

Seeing Souchan do his best motivated me to do my part for him, too.

"When I hurt them, I regretted it from the bottom of my heart."

I keep hurting Souchan, and I don't know why it keeps happening again and again.

"When I saw them being so amazing, I got angry, then frustrated, but now I admire them."

I can never understand how Souchan did it. I was so useless back then, such a burden to him, but he managed to pull through and get MEZZO to where it is now. Who said omegas are useless? Souchan is the most amazing person I've ever met.

"I know what you mean," Ryuu said, and Tamaki looked at the other alpha.

"You guys wouldn't understand. You've always been winners."

He noticed the way Ryuu's shoulders sagged, and Ryuu let out a defeated chuckle. "I'm just putting up a front," he admitted. "I'm actually lame, cowardly, and pathetic."

Tamaki couldn't see how that was possible; Ryuu was as charismatic as the other members of TRIGGER.

"But I don't put up a front for myself. It's for a moment's dream," he continued, determination seeping into his voice. Tamaki was slightly taken aback by the change in Ryuu's tone, waiting patiently for him to continue. "Sometimes I want to come totally clean. But at the same time, I don't want anyone to see that weakness."

"Why?"

Ryuu shrugged. "It's not that I want to be loved. I want my singing and dancing to be loved, as part of TRIGGER," he said, and Tamaki's eyes widened, just barely. To some extent, he could understand that feeling. He didn't particularly want or need fans to love him, but rather than just wanting his own singing and dancing to be loved, Tamaki wanted Sougo to be loved.

"Praising me when I fail because they love me. Putting me down when I succeed because they hate me. I want people to go beyond these feelings, and to love my singing and dancing. I always hope that it'll happen so that I can be proud of this strength."

Tamaki never thought that he would be talking to Ryuu one-on-one like this, and he never expected to agree with the elder so completely. The only difference was that, instead of feeling like this for himself, all Tamaki thought of was Sougo. The omega truly deserved the world, or at least Tamaki thought so.

He didn't want it to end like this.
Riku turned to Tenn, smiling awkwardly at his brother. "Um, what were you doing here?"

Tenn didn't reply, simply stared straight ahead, and Riku let out a small chuckle. He should've expected this much from Tenn, with how much importance he placed on professionalism. It didn't matter that they were alone, because they were still two idols from rival groups. "Were you on your way back from work?" Riku tried again.

He knew that Gaku must've told them about the stolen song by now, that that could've been the reason why Tenn was here as well.

Without turning to look at Riku, Tenn said, "Your throat will get cold if you walk around at night."

Riku was honestly surprised; not by the fact that Tenn remembered his health, but that he cared enough to voice it aloud. Tenn had never been very vocal when it came to worrying about Riku, opting to do stuff to cheer Riku up rather than fretting over his bad health.

"I've been getting fewer attacks," Riku supplied cheerfully, glad to know that Tenn still cared. He would have mentioned that Iori kept a close eye on him all the time, but he wasn't entirely sure what Tenn felt about idols being in a relationship. He could guess well enough, anyway, and he didn't want Tenn thinking badly of Iori.

Tenn's expression softened. "I see."

The silence dragged on for a few moments, Riku trying to come up with something to say. "It's too bad TRIGGER didn't get to perform that day," he said, turning to face Tenn. "Since I sang better than usual that day, I wanted you to see it."

The smile dropped from Riku's face when Tenn remained silent, and he sighed softly. "I wanted to sing like you," Riku admitted. He'd spent so long trying to be like Tenn, but he knew that it wasn't possible. And now he knew that he didn't need to be the same as his brother. They were two different entities, and he recognised that clearly now. "But I didn't want Tenn thinking badly of Iori."

Tenn glanced up, his expressionless facade crumbling away to show his surprise.

"Because I couldn't run around outside, you'd sing and dance to entertain me."

It seemed like such a long time ago now, that the two of them were in their living room, Riku sitting down while Tenn did his best to re-enact a performance that he'd seen on TV. Even as young as they had been, Tenn had been exceptionally talented, and Riku had been so proud to call him his brother.

He was still proud of Tenn, but now Tenn wasn't just his brother. He was also a rival.

"Whenever I saw you smile, I smiled," Riku said, his lips curving up at the edges. "I wanted to be able to make you smile, too."

Riku nearly chuckled at how shocked Tenn looked by his statement. It was true that Riku had always wanted to do for Tenn what Tenn had done for him. But now, Riku didn't want to make only Tenn smile. Apart from the fans and the rest of IDOLiSH7, he wanted to make Iori smile.

He thought of the expression Iori wore when Otoharu announced that they were disbanded, and he couldn't help but think that he never wanted to see such an expression on Iori's face ever again. He
wanted Iori to smile.

And Iori smiled the most when Riku performed at his best on stage.

For a moment, Riku thought he could smell Iori nearby, but he shook the thought off. He didn't need Tenn finding out that he was more sensitive to Iori's scent than others. *I must be imagining things.*

With a renewed resolve, Riku smiled. "I won't ask why you left us anymore," Riku decided. "I lost my personal star, but I gained an incredible rival that I can brag about to the world. Kujo Tenn, that's you."

Besides, Riku had a new personal star now, one who he never wanted to lose.

"Sometimes, liking or admiring something isn't enough to make progress. Some things can't be overcome with kindness. But I want to keep singing!" Riku said firmly. "After all, this is my weapon! As long as I have my weapon and my friends," *as long as I'm with IDOLiSH7, with Iori,* "I want to keep fighting for as long as I can!"

"Riku..."

"I want to see for myself how far I can go. So, I'll run towards you with all my strength. I'll keep running till I can't breathe anymore! Until I catch up to you and surpass you!"

Tenn's lips slowly quirked upwards into a smirk. "Sure. Come at me with all you've got. I'll forget that I had a brother who couldn't run."

He stuck his hand out. "Nice to meet you, IDOLiSH7's Nanase Riku."

"Nice to meet you, TRIGGER's Kujo Tenn," Riku replied, taking Tenn's offered hand.

"Very good," Tenn said, lips curving into a smile. "You're finally behaving like the centre of a group. And an alpha, to boot. I'm looking forward to seeing you at Black or White."

Riku didn't question how Tenn knew that he was an alpha – he figured that his scent neutralisers were wearing off. Tenn waved to him. "Bye bye," he said, turning to leave and stopping abruptly when he saw the group of idols on top of the staircase.

Riku stared dumbly at them. So he hadn't imagined Iori's scent nearby. That was embarrassing.

"Guys... and Manager."

"What're you doing?" Tenn asked.

"We happened to pass by."

"Why?" Riku asked. Then he recalled exactly *when* he had caught Iori's scent, looking at his teammates with wide eyes. "Wait a minute. You heard all of that?"

He vaguely wondered if Iori could tell that he'd been thinking about him when he said all of that. That was even more embarrassing than the thought of having imagined Iori's scent nearby. The smiles on their faces told him what he needed to know, and Riku hung his head as they gathered around him.

Riku didn't see the soft smile Iori wore as he looked at the alpha. The smile that, lately, was shown only to Riku. Yamato cleared his throat to get their attention, smiling at his teammates. "Since we're
all here, why don't we think of ways to beg for the President's forgiveness over some ramen?"

The others started listing out what they wanted to eat, and Tsumugi even offered to secretly charge it to the company's expenses. Mitsuki joked that they would have to go bar hopping again, and he sent a cheeky smile towards Iori. "But won't that put us over our calorie limit?" the beta asked teasingly.

Iori shrugged. "Then we'll just have to exercise more to make up for it."

They headed off in the general directions of town, each announcing what they were intending to order at the ramen shop. Riku fell into step beside Iori easily, as if he'd been doing it all his life. Being with the omega was easy, calming, and Riku enjoyed every second of it.

The thought of having to be separated from Iori terrified him, and he was genuinely glad that they could work this out together. He didn't want to ever entertain that thought, not again. He would do anything to ensure that they wouldn't go through that anymore.

All he needed was Iori by his side.

Chapter End Notes

Okay the angst ends here HAHAHA that was fast. Another 9 chapters before this fic is finished! Plus an epilogue probably.

Countdown 11 days till i7 3rd anniv!!
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Everyone was gathered in the meeting room the next day, wondering what exactly they should do to convince Otoharu to retract the disbandment. They'd discussed it over ramen the previous night, or at least they tried to, but they had all been so relieved to be on the same wavelength again that they couldn't focus on the topic at hand.

So much had happened in the short span of a day, and by the time they returned to the dorm, everyone was emotionally drained. They'd all taken their turns showering quickly, retiring to their respective rooms once they were done. At least, Yamato did, while the couples ended up going off into each other's rooms and sleeping together, be it in the same bed or separate beds.

Being near their significant other helped to relieve everyone's tension greatly, even for Nagi and Mitsuki. By the time they woke up for breakfast in the morning, it was easy to see how much more refreshed they all were.

But now they had to tackle the issue of apologising to Otoharu, which was a troublesome issue in and of itself. Mitsuki heaved a sigh. "I wonder if the President will forgive us..." he mumbled.

Yamato shrugged. "He was pretty angry, after all," the leader pointed out.

None of them could really figure out why Otoharu had been so furious. They understood that they had lost their sense of direction, even if it was only briefly. Where they should have been happy about being nominated for JIMA's Rookie Award, their mood had been in the dumps. It wasn't as if they'd wanted to be upset, but the entire incident with Tamaki's father had been completely uncalled for.

"The President really treasures those songs," Nagi said. "He saw how we were when we heard the news of our nomination, and he thought that we weren't qualified to sing those songs. That's why he called for our disbandment."

Nagi had an oddly serious air about him, not at all unlike when they'd realised that the demo for Natsu Shiyouze had been stolen. None of them questioned how Nagi knew this – for all they knew, the alpha could be bluffing. It didn't seem like the case, though. Nagi sounded so sure of himself.

"IDOLiSH7's songs..." Riku mumbled.

Iori scooted closer to the alpha, as if sleeping in the same room last night hadn't been enough physical closeness for him. He didn't want to admit that he'd been terrified when Otoharu disbanded them, afraid of the possibility that he would be separated from Riku somehow. It was so irrational, as if he felt that they couldn't meet outside in their own time. But maybe it was because they'd been living together for so long already, and not staying together seemed like such a foreign concept to Iori now.

Being in the same group as the alpha, working hard together, had been more enjoyable than Iori ever thought possible. Of course, it was also because they were with everyone else, but it would never have been the same without Riku.

He felt Riku's hand move to rest over his own, and the corner of Iori's lips quirked up into a smile.
"Even now, we don't know who wrote those songs," Iori added.

Sougo glanced at Nagi, noticing the way Nagi frowned in thought. "What's wrong, Nagi-kun?"

The blond hesitated for a moment before speaking. "I kept quiet until now, but I'll talk about a secret."

"Secret?" Mitsuki asked, his stomach tightening nervously. He didn't know why he even felt like this. Mitsuki was relatively certain that Nagi wouldn't do something as ridiculous as cheat on him. Or commit murder. Or anything else within that spectrum of possibilities. That wasn't something that the alpha would ever do, even if Mitsuki doubted himself sometimes. Nagi was the one person that he couldn't doubt.

Nagi nodded, looking up from the ground. "I know who wrote IDOLiSH7's songs."

Mitsuki felt his shoulders sag in relief - his choice of words sometimes can really scare someone.

"Really?" Yamato asked in disbelief. It was strange that out of everyone in the group, it was Nagi who knew the composer of their songs. He was neither the manager or leader, no offense to Nagi intended. "When did the President tell you?"

"He never told me," Nagi replied, biting his lip and looking at the others. "The one who sent IDOLiSH7's songs to Takanashi Productions was me."

"You did!?" Tsumugi exclaimed, eyes wide in shock.

"Amazing! So Nagicchi composed them?"

The suddenly wistful smile on Nagi's face made Mitsuki's heart hurt. It wasn't the first time he'd seen Nagi wear such an expression, but he never understood the reason for it. And as much as Mitsuki worried for his boyfriend sometimes, he didn't like to push into territory where he didn't belong.

With a small shake of his head, Nagi said, "No. My acquaintance... my old friend wrote them."

"My friend always wrote songs for a certain person. But one day, that person disappeared. My friend continued to make songs while searching for him, and he eventually came to my country." Nagi paused, and Mitsuki ached with the urge to pull the blond into a hug. There was something sad about the air around him that Mitsuki couldn't quite stand. "My friend's name is... Sakura Haruki."

Sakura Haruki... the name sounded oddly familiar to Mitsuki. It took barely a few moments for him to put a finger to where he'd heard it, and he nearly jumped when he managed to. "By Sakura Haruki, do you mean..." Mitsuki trailed off. He knew Nagi had a good network of connections, but this was just borderline insane.

"Yes. The person who wrote Zero's songs."

"Zero's!?"

Iori's shock was no less than Riku's. It finally made sense now, why Nagi had been furious when Natsu Shiyouze had been stolen from them. It was a song written by his dear friend, and it was only normal that Nagi wouldn't have wanted it to be used by anyone other than its intended recipients. "So, this whole time, we've been singing songs written by Zero's composer?"

"Amazing..." Tamaki breathed out, and nobody could disagree.
Nagi didn't drop the wistful smile he wore. "Haruki let me listen to many, many songs. But slowly, he became sick. I wanted to cure him but, not wanting to inconvenience me, he left. He said that he would cause too much trouble, and he disappeared after leaving behind a letter and his music.

"In his letter, he said he wanted his music to be given to someone who would sing them with care. Since he was Japanese, I thought he would like a Japanese idol like Zero to sing them," Nagi said. "However, there wasn't another idol like Zero in Japan. That's why... I quietly sent them to the president that Haruki used to praise."

"He praised my father?"

"He said he cherished people and songs. After sending the songs, I wanted to see for myself what the President was like, so I came to Japan. Then I was suddenly scouted!" Nagi ended off cheerfully.

Tamaki chuckled. "Boss' scouts are really sudden, huh?"

"He came up to me while I was on the train," Iori said dryly.

From beside him, Riku snorted. "I was singing karaoke at an old folks' home."

"I never knew you volunteered," Iori said, sounding only mildly surprised, and Riku puffed out his chest proudly. He honestly looked rather ridiculous, but Iori wasn't about to tell the alpha that. It was nice to know that Riku was compassionate enough to volunteer at all, though Iori had never really doubted that part of Riku's personality.

"Somehow, I felt like it was fated. I accepted his invitation and became an idol," Nagi smiled towards Mitsuki, and the beta felt his cheeks warm. There was a soft fondness in his gaze, and Mitsuki loved that Nagi only ever looked at him like that. "I'm glad I did, too."

"Does the President still not know? That you were the one who sent the songs?" Sougo asked, swatting Tamaki's hand away from his waist. He sighed in exasperation when the alpha pouted at him, patting Tamaki's head. "Not now, Tamaki-kun."

Tamaki huffed, leaning against Sougo and resting his head against the omega's. "I'm tired."

"No," Nagi answered, "although he might have realised that they're Haruki's songs by now."

"So that's what happened..."

Nagi offered his teammates an encouraging smile. "We will treasure Haruki's songs as we sing them. If we tell him that, I'm sure he'll forgive us," Nagi assured.

Mitsuki's lips stretched into a small smile as well. "That's right."

Then, in a way that only Nagi was capable of, the mood was ruined, the blond alpha holding his hands out and saying, "If he won't forgive us, I'll demand he return them. After all, there's nobody else suited to sing them."

Yamato snorted, and Mitsuki got up from his seat to hit his boyfriend on the head. "Don't ruin an emotional moment like that," he scolded, grumbling when Nagi pulled him down onto his lap. He'd rather die than admit that he liked the physical affection; since he couldn't scent Nagi, it was the only other form of intimacy he could get.

"Let's apologise and ask him to forgive us, for not being happy when we were nominated," Riku said.
Tamaki perked up. "Should we practice our happy reactions?" he asked, stretching his arms excitedly. Sougo looked at the alpha, unable to do anything but chuckle awkwardly. He loved Tamaki, really, but sometimes Tamaki's innocence was just ridiculous. It was endearing for the most part, but it occasionally did come off as slightly childish. Oh well. I'm stuck with him, anyway, Sougo thought fondly, and this time it was he who leaned against Tamaki.

Iori stared blankly at his classmate, unsure of how to respond. "I don't think that's why he's angry..."

They didn't even have to go to Otoharu, though; the door to the meeting room opened, and everyone jumped to their feet at the sight of the president.

He didn't smile, simply looked at them seriously. "Can you boys come with me for a while?"

---

They ended up going to Yoyogi Park, where they used to hold street performances.

Otoharu went up to the person busking there, pulling his wallet out of his pocket. "You're really good. Can I have a CD?" he asked, smiling at the man. The performer was stunned for a few moments before he nodded frantically, rummaging around his bag for a new CD. He handed it to Otoharu with both hands, bowing in thanks, and Otoharu said, "I'll be cheering for you. Good luck. May I shake your hand?"

The man looked like he was about to pass out from joy that someone was acknowledging him, taking Otoharu's proffered hand and shaking it. He stared at Otoharu as the beta walked back to the group, pumping his fist victoriously. "He asked to shake my hand... saying he's cheering for me... somehow, it's really refreshing," the guy mumbled to himself, loud enough that they could hear from a distance away.

"There are many people here who haven't achieved their dreams yet, just like you in the past," Otoharu told them. "And now, you have the chance to stand on the stage that they would die for. You boys mustn't forget how much of an honour that is, or how grateful you should be."

Riku nodded, knowing that what Otoharu said was true. It seemed like so long ago that they were doing roadside performances, when in reality it had been only less than a year ago. Thinking about it now, it truly was amazing that they'd managed to accomplish so much in such a short period of time. They had their ups and downs, but it was only through encountering those problems that they could have made it to where they were currently standing.

Just like how, without Iori's triggered heat after Music Festa, Riku and Iori might not have the relationship they had now.

Just like how, if Sougo hadn't collapsed and Tamaki hadn't found out about his condition from the doctor, Sougo would still be living on suppressants and further damaging his reproductive system.

Just like how, if Riku and Iori hadn't given Nagi and Mitsuki that little push they needed, the alpha and beta couldn't possibly be together now.

Otoharu smiled at the boys. "You should take better care of your past selves, and the dreams they
had. And praise your current selves, for you have reached that dream. I'll tell you once more – you have been nominated for the Rookie Award. How do you feel, Nanase Riku-kun?"

"I'm happy," Riku replied firmly, and he was. If they managed to snag the Rookie Award, he could finally get to challenge Tenn on the same stage. He wanted to show Tenn that IDOLiSH7 was not just another new idol group that would eventually fade out of existence, and he wanted to let Iori experience what it felt to triumph over TRIGGER.

"Nikaidou Yamato-kun."

"I feel like we've achieved something amazing," the leader replied. As much as he sometimes complained about how the rest of the group was too lovey-dovey with each other, he loved them as if they were his younger brothers. He couldn't imagine standing on such a grand stage with anyone other than these six people.

Beaming, Otoharu nodded. "That's right! You've all accomplished something amazing! You've accomplished something so amazing that not even dirty words or sad misunderstandings could blow it away," he told them.

"President..." Sougo said. He thought back to when he'd first seen the supposed magazine interview with Mitsuki, thought about how quickly he'd jumped to conclusions. Of all people, Mitsuki was the least likely to put any of them down, since he'd gone through the same to get to where he was now. It seemed so stupid now, the way Sougo's protectiveness of Tamaki had caused such a big fuss.

"I am proud of you."

Beside Sougo, Mitsuki sniffled. "...yes."

"Be proud of yourselves as well."

Tamaki nodded." Yeah."

"You don't have to doubt what you've worked for these past few months."

"Yes," Nagi said.

Satisfied with their replies, Otoharu stepped back from the group. He looked at each of them, thinking about just how much they had grown since he'd scouted them. "Congratulations. That's all I have to say to you."

Seemingly out of nowhere, a voice asked, "Um... you're IDOLiSH7, right?"

The group turned around to be met with the sight of two girls, both in their first year of high school at best. Riku nodded slowly, slightly surprised by the question. "Ah, um... yes, that's right."

Their faces lit up instantly. "We're really happy to have met you here! We've been supporting you since the start!" one of them exclaimed excitedly.

"I heard you were nominated for JIMA's Rookie Award! Congratulations!"

Riku blinked, as if he was trying to process their words, and Iori nearly snorted. What a cute person.

Then, as if something finally clicked, Riku perked up. "Ah, yes! Thank you very much!"

"Work hard, get the Rookie Award, and perform at Black or White too! And then win TRIGGER!"
"My mum bought a new hard drive, since you'll be on TV a lot over the end of the year! I'll record all of IDOLiSH7's activities!"

Mitsuki laughed heartily. "Thank you! We'll do our best!"

"We don't want that new hard drive to go to waste, do we?" Yamato chuckled.

"We'll get that award for you beautiful young ladies," Nagi said, and Mitsuki didn't even hit him. It felt good to be acknowledged, whether it was by Otoharu or by fans passing by.

"And we'll definitely make TRIGGER lose at Black or White," Tamaki added.

Sougo smiled. "Please continue to support us from now on."

"I'm glad that we were nominated for the Rookie Award, and that we have the support of our fans," Iori said sincerely. Riku turned back to glance at Iori, barely meeting the omega's gaze. Iori wore a soft smile on his face, and Riku's heart warmed. It was one of his favourite smiles. "I'm glad to be a part of IDOLiSH7."

The two girls shook their heads frantically. "We're the ones who feel lucky! Ah! Sorry for springing this on you so suddenly!" they apologised, bowing to the group before hurrying off, gushing to each other about how impossible their luck was. Mitsuki waved to them, telling them to take care, and the girls turned around briefly to wave back before disappearing out of sight.

"That was really refreshing, wasn't it?" Tsumugi asked. She glanced at Otoharu, a sneaky smile on her face. She figured the boys deserved something nice after all that they'd been through in the past weeks, even if she had just treated them to ramen with the company's money last night. "President... dad, how does sushi for dinner sound?"

There was a hint of amusement on Otoharu's face as he looked at his daughter. "Why not?"

---

"Hey, Iori?"

Iori turned away from his work, raising a brow at the alpha on the beanbag. "Yes?"

Riku had a small frown on his face, and he bit his lip in apprehension. "When the President announced that we were disbanded, what did you... how did you feel?" Riku asked.

Iori looked at the alpha, feeling his cheeks begin to flush. He briefly wondered how Riku could ask something so embarrassing with such a straight face. It was a serious question, but that didn't mean that Iori's answer wasn't at least a little embarrassing to say aloud. "Why do you ask?"

"I was scared," Riku admitted, scratching the back of his head sheepishly. "It's kind of dumb, when I think about it now. But the thought of not being able to see your face during schedules, practices, and performances made me feel uneasy. It's strange not to have you nag me to take care of myself, or to remind me not to botch a performance."

At this point, Iori was sure that his cheeks were bright red. "That's..."

Riku got up from his beanbag, walking over to Iori's desk and leaning against the table. He hesitantly
held his arms out, and Iori stood up, stepping into the embrace and burying his face into Riku's neck. They'd spent a solid half hour just holding and scenting each other last night, needing the comfort of being near the other.

Letting the tension drain out of his shoulders as Riku nuzzled his scent glands, Iori nodded. "Me too. It was illogical, but I thought that if we weren't idols anymore, we would end up on completely different paths from each other and eventually go our separate ways. I didn't want that to happen."

Riku hummed in agreement, sharing the exact same sentiments as the omega.

"Can we cuddle?"

"I... guess so?" Iori conceded. "But can we go to your room?"

The two of them only ever cuddled on the couch, but Nagi was holding another Magical Kokona marathon session and had dragged a less-than-willing Mitsuki to join him. Tamaki was there, along with Yamato, last Iori checked. He still wasn't completely comfortable with showing affection in front of the others, since sometimes he would purr out of his own volition and it felt downright awkward to do that with others around.

Riku pulled away from Iori's neck, smiling brightly and nodding. He let Iori pack up whatever he'd been doing, then they went over to Riku's room, just beside Iori's. Riku pulled his beanbag behind him, and Iori snickered at the sight – it reminded him of a toddler dragging his favourite pillow on the floor.

He'd slept in Riku's room a couple of times, but never on the same bed. Riku would volunteer to take the floor, even though Iori always insisted that Riku take the bed, with the reasoning that Riku needed to sleep on a proper bed lest he ended up with more health problems. Whenever that happened, Riku would give Iori an unimpressed look, plopping himself on the spare futon and hiding under the blanket.

It was a little different tonight, Riku climbing into bed behind Iori instead of getting the spare futon from his wardrobe. It took some time for them to get settled into a comfortable position, neither boy having shared a bed with anyone since middle school. At some point in time, Iori had begun to refuse Mitsuki's offers to sleep together, insisting that he had grown out of that. And Riku hadn't slept with his parents since the night after Tenn left.

It didn't help that Riku's bed was meant for only one person, and they briefly ended up as a tangle of limbs in an attempt to find a position they were both okay with. Iori eventually ended up snuggled against Riku's chest despite being slightly taller than the alpha, and Riku hugged Iori like a bolster. Iori tentatively wrapped his arms around Riku's torso, listening to the steady beat of the alpha's heart.

"Iori?" Riku asked. The omega hummed in response, already feeling himself start to drift off to sleep. "After we get the Rookie Award at JIMA, can I meet your parents?"

"To introduce yourself as the alpha courting their son?"

"No, not that," Riku chuckled, shaking his head slightly. "I was thinking that it would be nice to introduce myself as your boyfriend."

"Boyfriend, huh..." Iori muttered, blushing slightly once more. Riku was so shameless sometimes. "That sounds nice. But what if we don't get the Rookie Award?"

"I won't let that happen," Riku said, sounding determined. "I want to officially start a relationship with you. I'm tired of only being in the middle of courtship. Just watch me – I'll get that award for
It was Iori's turn to chuckle, yawning softly. "I'll watch you carefully from the same stage, so don't worry about that. But in return, I get to meet your parents too," Iori said. He wanted to let them know that they could rest assured that Riku was being well taken care of in IDOLiSH7, not just by Iori himself, but by the others as well.

"I'm sure they'll love you," Riku assured. "You're easy to love."

"Speak for yourself."

"Go to sleep, Iori. We've got a long day of schedules tomorrow."

---

Sougo poked his head through the ajar door, glancing at Tamaki on the couch. He'd spent the past hour preparing for the interviews they had coming up over the next week. Tamaki had offered to help, but Sougo told him that it was good enough as long as he filled his own forms out.

He didn't even need to say anything to get Tamaki's attention, the alpha turning to look at him the moment he registered the familiar scent of his fated omega. He smiled at Sougo, patting the empty space beside him. "Wanna join us?"

"Okay."

With the King Pudding plush that Tamaki had gifted him in his hand, Sougo took his seat beside the alpha. The other three looked at him briefly, acknowledging his presence, before turning their focus back to the TV.

"You're done already?" Tamaki asked, receiving an affirmative nod from Sougo. "I'll pass my forms to you later, then. Want some pudding?"

"No thank you," Sougo said, patting the plush in his lap. "This pudding is enough for me."

"Beer?" Yamato offered, earning himself a glare from Tamaki. Everyone knew how easily Sougo got drunk, and how he acted when he was. "What? I need something to take my mind off the fact that I'm sandwiched between you two couples."

"You need it, but Souchan doesn't," Tamaki pointed out blandly, and Mitsuki doubled over in laughter.

Nagi grumbled, trying his best to peek over Mitsuki's head to watch his show. It wouldn't have been a problem, if not for the fact that Mitsuki was seated on his lap. "It's reaching the most important part!" Nagi told them impatiently, and Mitsuki dropped his weight back against Nagi's chest, eliciting an "oof!" from the alpha.

"You've watched this like, twenty times," Mitsuki told him. "You can literally memorise what she says."

"Mitsu's right," Yamato agreed, leaning back against the couch and taking another gulp of his beer. He wriggled his brows at the couple suggestively. "I thought you would spend tonight celebrating
our not disbanding in a different way."

"Huh?"

Sougo covered Tamaki's ears, as if it would prevent Tamaki from unhearing what Yamato had just said, shooting the leader a sharp look. "Not in front of Tamaki-kun," he hissed.

"He's already seventeen, Sou."

"Only seventeen," Sougo shot back. "Tamaki-kun, let's go to your room."

Mitsuki snorted. "Sougo would make a good mum in the future, huh? You're really protective."

Tamaki was the only one who caught the way Sougo flinched at the beta's words, and he wrapped an arm around Sougo's shoulder. "Okay, let's go to my room," Tamaki decided, pulling Sougo against him as they left the living room. Sougo didn't resist, simply hiding in the crook of Tamaki's arm. "Goodnight."

The three echoed their goodnights, and the betas promptly continued to point out why Nagi should stop watching old reruns of Kokona every other day. Their playful bickering got softer as Tamaki and Sougo got further away from the living room, and Tamaki closed his door gently behind them.

Sougo sighed softly to himself, sitting down on Tamaki's bed and letting his shoulders sag. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be," Tamaki told him, sitting down beside the omega and pulling him to his chest. He felt Sougo's hand clench into a fist against his shirt, bunching the fabric up where he held it. "Just because Mikki doesn't know doesn't mean that you can't be affected by it. You can't help it."

"I know," Sougo said, sounding frustrated with himself. "I know, but it still hurts."

"That's why I'm here," Tamaki said gently, tipping Sougo's chin up to find that his eyes were brimming with unshed tears. Sougo blinked, and the first of them fell. Tamaki untangled his arms from around Sougo, cupping the omega's face tenderly and bending down to kiss it away.

Sougo's eyes fluttered closed. The tears were salty on Tamaki's tongue, but he didn't mind. He moved down to Sougo's nose, his cheeks, and finally pressed a quick kiss against Sougo's lips. It was barely a peck, but it was their first kiss, and Sougo flushed when the alpha pulled away.

He sought comfort in the fact that Tamaki, too, was blushing furiously, and Sougo wondered how Tamaki could be so bold. He touched his fingers to his lips, almost in a sort of daze. There was no way he wouldn't be shocked, after he'd just lost his first kiss to the alpha he was fated to.

"Should I not have done that?" Tamaki asked worriedly, and the only thought that ran through Sougo's mind was god, how can he be so cute and manly at the same time?

He knew that Tamaki wasn't innocent; he wouldn't be able to get through ruts without relieving himself repeatedly, after all. As surprised as Sougo was by Tamaki's initiative, he didn't dislike it at all.

Sougo leaned up, closing the distance between their lips once more, and he hooked his arms around the alpha's neck, pulling them closer together in an attempt to deepen the kiss. They were both inexperienced, and they had to break apart for air after just a few seconds.

Tamaki pressed their foreheads together, grinning at Sougo. "Don't ever be afraid to tell me what you
think, okay? Even if nobody else will listen to you, I will. Don't ever doubt that. But, of course, that
doesn't mean I'll let you talk shit about yourself."

"Okay," Sougo whispered. "Thank you for loving me."

Chapter End Notes

Andddd there we have tamasou's first kiss! Rikuio are late bloomers but they'll get their
chance soon enough //laughs

4 days till i7 3rd anniversary!!
Sougo's heat came and went, and soon enough it was almost the day of the JIMA performance.

Within the month that passed, TRIGGER released a new album, no doubt intending to perform the song at Black or White. The preview video online had exceeded a million views in the short span of a few hours, and the view count was still increasing rapidly.

A few days before JIMA, IDOLiSH7 was gathered in their usual meeting room, all of them staring intently at the TV screen in front of them. They were watching a rerun of last year's JIMA, the one where TRIGGER had brought home the Rookie Award from.

It was a nostalgic feeling for Riku, watching the performance again. Naturally, he'd watched it at home when it was being broadcasted live, but there was a difference between then and now.

"Just like today, we're going to win there, too."

The clip ended, and Iori turned the TV off. "After this, just like Yaotome-san declared, they won at Black or White," the omega said. Just like Riku, Iori had watched the exact same performance at home last year, courtesy of Mitsuki of course. He hadn't thought much about the effort it took TRIGGER to get to where they did and had thought that Gaku was overconfident. Now, though, he knew better.

"It's amazing," Mitsuki said. "It's as if they're from a drama."

"But they got emotional just like normal people," Tamaki commented.

Sougo shot his alpha a sharp look, looking like he was personally offended. Tamaki supposed he had it coming, since he knew Sougo idolised TRIGGER, but he couldn't deny that sometimes it made him jealous to see how excited Sougo got over watching the trio. He never gets like that around me.

"Of course they did! It's JIMA's Rookie Award," Sougo nagged. Tamaki had to resist the urge to groan; Sougo was definitely going to get pissed off if he did that. He liked listening to Sougo talk about music, liked the way the omega's eyes lit up as he discussed the thing he loved. But it was a whole different matter when it turned into a lecture. "Ever since Zero appeared, majority of Japan's music scene has been made up of idols with true ability. And among all the talented groups that debut each year, they were awarded the Rookie Award that's given to only one group each year."

Tamaki thought of the night when he'd met Ryuu by the roadside, and he tried to recall what Ryuu had told him. Something about not wanting people to love him, but to instead love TRIGGER and their music. The older alpha had sounded so passionate about it that it was easy to tell how much he enjoyed standing on stage with Gaku and Tenn. "Well, that's true," Tamaki conceded. "They're always just putting up a front. That's what Ryuu-aniki told me."

"Ryu-! You even gave him a nickname!??"

Sougo looked like he was about to burst a blood vessel.

"Yeah?" Tamaki replied, not seeing the problem. "I always thought they just got to where they are now, looking all composed, without putting in any hard work. But when I see them look happy, I
feel like they've worked hard in their own way, too."

"This..." Iori turned to look at Riku. "I watched this at home last year."

*Of course you did,* Iori thought, as if any of them would have expected otherwise.

"At the time, I still thought Tenn-nii abandoned me, so my feelings were really complicated. I was happy for him, but also frustrated," Riku continued, frowning. Iori bumped his shoulder against Riku's, the alpha turning to smile at the omega. "But now, I feel like I can genuinely congratulate him. Now I know how hard it is to get this far."

"I think he had to deal with a little less than you, though," Yamato chuckled. Riku looked at him quizzically, and Yamato gestured towards Iori. Then he looked at Tamaki and Sougo, gesturing towards them as well. "You know, not having to deal with the issues of being a fated couple with your teammate? Unless the TRIGGER members aren't actually all alphas, but they've never bothered to hide their scents, have they?"

"I feel left out," Nagi whined, and Mitsuki shot the blond a glare. "Yes, I don't need to feel left out because I have you. I know. Don't have to hurt my feelings, Mitsuki."

"I think it's not a bad thing," Iori said. "We wouldn't be this bonded if we hadn't gone through all that."

"Bonded, or in love?" Yamato sighed. "Spare a thought for me, will you?"

Mitsuki snorted. "Anyway, I really want to get the Rookie Award. I want to get it and challenge them."

"Are you still angry about our song being stolen?"

*"You're one to talk, Mr. An-Eye-For-An-Eye,*" Mitsuki retorted. Nagi clutched his chest, acting as if he was wounded, and everyone laughed at his expense. Mitsuki sighed, leaning over to place a quick peck on Nagi's cheek, blushing when he turned back to continue speaking. "I'm not angry about it anymore. It's precisely because I don't hate them that I want to face them on the same stage and win."

"I know what you mean, Mitsuki," Riku said, earning himself a knowing side glance from Iori. Riku smiled sheepishly; Iori was the only one who knew of his other motive behind winning the Rookie Award.

Tsumugi was pleased by how motivated they were, popping into the room with a pot in her hands. "You guys are really getting pumped up!" she said, setting the pot down on the table.

Riku's face lit up when he saw the contents of the pot. "Ah, thank you, Manager! Did you make this?"

Smiling sheepishly, the beta nodded. "I'm not sure if it'll be to your taste, though..."

Tamaki was already ladling some of the stew into a bowl, sipping on it leisurely. "Yeah, it's good."

"Tamaki! At least say thanks first!" Riku scolded, and Sougo joined in, telling Tamaki that he should practice proper manners. Tamaki sighed, leaning back and letting Sougo tell him off. He had it coming, he knew, so he didn't talk back.

Tsumugi laughed it off. "It's fine! Eat a lot and get energy in preparation for JIMA. Then get that
Rookie Award!" she told them, pumping her fist energetically.

"Yeah!"

---

Riku released a long sigh, gripping onto the bottle in his hand tightly. His heart was beating faster than usual today, which was to be expected, because their performance at JIMA was going to determine whether or not they got to face TRIGGER at Black or White.

And, for Riku, it also determined whether or not he would be able to keep his promise to Iori.

Even if they didn't get the Rookie Award, Riku knew that Iori would eventually accept that they were officially in a relationship, instead of just in the midst of courting. But Riku didn't want that. He wanted it to be more memorable for Iori, something that he would remember even decades down the road.

"I'm really nervous..."

Without even opening his eyes, Riku knew that Iori was standing beside him, giving him that deadpan stare of his whenever he was concerned. Sometimes Riku wished that Iori was better at showing his emotions, but he supposed that was another thing he liked about the omega. "Please don't do it. Not here, of all places," Iori pleaded. He didn't want Riku to have to go through the feeling of bungling an important performance; it was enough that he knew how it felt.

He also didn't want to let himself run the risk of repeating the incident at Music Festa, and for that, he couldn't afford to be distracted by worrying about Riku. Try as he might to tell himself that he wouldn't lose focus, Iori knew that if Riku was on the verge of an attack, his mind wouldn't be able to concentrate on the performance.

Riku opened his eyes, frowning at Iori. "I know! You don't have to tell me that every time," the alpha grumbled half-heartedly. He'd already lost count of how many times Iori fussed over him before performances. "Have some faith in me. I want to win as much as you do."

"It'll be fine," Sougo said, fixing his hair in the mirror. "Just keep your throat warmed up."

"There are so many flower stands here," Nagi said delightedly. "This one's from Mister Shimooka-san, one from the fans... oh! Clara sent one, too!"

Mitsuki sighed, unable to do anything but accept the fact that his boyfriend was popular with women. He looked around the various flower stands, eyes widening when he spotted the one sent by their rivals. "There's one from TRIGGER, too."

"TRIGGER is supporting us too," Riku said. He thought of what Tenn told him in front of Zero Arena, about how Tenn would accept his challenge head-on. "Is it alright to think like that?"

Yamato nodded. "Yeah. That's why we have to do our best, to be able to challenge them."

"Hey, there's one that was sent anonymously," Mitsuki said, studying the stand curiously. "I wonder just who they're from."
Sougo walked over. "They're moth orchids. What elegant flowers."

"As expected of Souchan," Tamaki said, grinning. Sougo turned to look at the alpha, giving him an unimpressed stare when he saw that Tamaki was eating pudding. He should've known that this would happen, but he'd thought that JIMA was an important enough performance that Tamaki would be more nervous. That clearly wasn't the case.

"I'd hate to bring up their price, but I believe they're rather expensive flowers. Ousaka-san, could they be from your family?" Iori asked.

Sougo laughed, dismissing the thought immediately. "No way. They wouldn't be happy for me like this," he chuckled. He didn't miss the way Tamaki frowned slightly, and Sougo hurried to assure the alpha that he really wasn't upset. He was used to it by now, having his father oppose him chasing his dreams.

"Isn't it fine if you think they are?" Yamato said. "Even if they're not, it's empowering to think that way."

"Yamato-san..."

Shrugging, Yamato continued, "The flowers have done nothing wrong, anyway. I don't know who they're from, but we should accept them gratefully."

"Then I'll think they're from Aya," Tamaki piped up.

"That's nice," Mitsuki commented with a small smile. "Then I'll think they're from Zero. It'll be like he's telling us to do our best on stage."

"Mine will be from Haruki," Nagi decided. Mitsuki turned to look at him, and Nagi shook his head. "It's fine. It's a gift full of spirit, because we're performing his songs."

"I'm going to think of them as a personal gift from Tenn-nii!" Riku exclaimed. "That way, I'll be invincible!" He turned to Iori, noticing how oddly quiet the omega had become. "How about you, Iori? Who do you want the present to be from?"

The smile on Iori's face was wistful, and he said, "From the me at Music Festa."

Riku's heart sank, and he reached out to place a hand on Iori's arm. "Iori..."

"You were still bothered by that?"

"That's not it," Iori said. "I want it to be from the me from Music Festa, telling me that because of my mistake, I led everyone the long way around. But it's fine now; we've arrived at the place we were aiming for on that day. And I want to tell him that if everything hadn't happened the way it had, we wouldn't be the same as we are now."

Iori sighed. "And he would tell me that I can take it all back today."

Riku threw an arm over Iori's shoulders, ruffling his hair affectionately. "You're always calling me an idiot, but you're the real idiot, you know that? You've already done plenty to make up for what happened that day. You've been working really hard."

"Nanase-san..."

"He's right, Iori," Mitsuki said. "You can forget all about that now, you idiot. You really regretted it..."
and were so upset that it even managed to trigger your heat. But after that, you did your best. Everyone here knows that!"

"Nii-san..."

"Nobody is blaming you," Yamato added. "The only one doing that is you."

Sougo nodded firmly in agreement. "That's right. In fact, the two of us debuting first has shown good results, hasn't it?"

"By good results do you mean for our popularity, or for the development of your relationship."

"Shut it, ossan."

"If you think too hard about every single thing you've done, you'll go over your limits, Iorin."

Sougo shot the alpha a tired look. "I wish you would do that more often, though..."

"Whoa, no fighting."

Iori's expression softened into a smile. "Everyone..."

"We're all afraid of mistakes. The shadows of your past mistakes stab your heart like a thorn, prick ing it with pain. But with time, it had started to come undone within you. Tonight, let's say bye-bye. We'll get the Rookie Award, and then the letter of challenge to TRIGGER. And to the place where the thorn was, say hello! You will gain confidence, and your heart will grow strong."

Iori stared blankly at Nagi. The alpha had a really long-winded way of cheering him up. But Iori's smile widened slightly, and he nodded in response. "Yes."

"I'll sing properly for sure," Riku assured. "Just like you told me, I won't be nervous. I'll sing with my best voice, put up the best performance that I can. I'll keep my promise to you, Iori. Just make sure you're watching carefully. Let's get the Rookie Award with our own hands!"

"Yes!" Iori replied, finally wearing a genuine smile. Riku wanted to make sure that smile stayed there forever, and he would do whatever it took to keep it this way.

Mitsuki jumped onto Iori, exclaiming, "Alright everyone! Let's hug Iori!"

"No fair! I should be first!" Riku protested.

"Alright, there there."

"There there."

Iori's cheeks were tinged pink as Yamato and Sougo patted him on the back. "S-stop it! Don't treat me like a child!"

---

"The 13th Japan Idol Music Award Rookie Award goes to... IDOLiSH7!"
The audience erupted into cheers, and the spotlight shone on the seven idols. They jumped to their feet, pumping their fists in the air with wide smiles on their faces.

"We did it!"

"We get to go to Black or White!"

They went up to stage to receive their trophy, Riku taking it from the judge gratefully.

Shimooka came up to the boys, shaking their hands individually. "Congratulations, IDOLiSH7! How do you feel about winning the Rookie Award, Nikaidou-kun?"

Yamato took the mic from Shimooka, looking directly into the camera. "With this, we're one step closer to challenging TRIGGER at Black or White. We're really looking forward to having that showdown."

"It's getting really competitive between you two, huh?" Shimooka chuckled. "Mitsuki-kun?"

The beta had tears running down his cheeks. "I'm really happy."

"Tamaki-kun, who do you want to tell the most?"

Tamaki didn't even hesitate, confidently speaking into the mic. "Aya, are you watching this? I've never stopped looking for you. I'll stand on even grander stages than this, until I find you!"

Sougo looked at the alpha with a small smile. I really hope he manages to find Aya-chan.

"And Riku-kun! How does it feel to be the centre of such an impressive group?"

Riku smiled, his gaze briefly darting to Iori. The omega met his gaze, turning away immediately as his cheeks heated up. Riku nearly couldn't suppress a chuckle. Then, just as Yamato did, he looked directly at the camera. "It's amazing. I'm glad to be a part of IDOLiSH7. We're going to win TRIGGER, too."

"Once again, congratulations!"

"Thank you!"

They took a commemorative photo, Riku holding the trophy above his head, smiling brightly.

The moment they stepped backstage, Riku handed the trophy over to Yamato, earning himself a quizzical look from the leader. With a sheepish smile, Riku said, "I need Iori for something."

A knowing look came across Yamato's face, and he glanced at a blushing Iori. "Don't get caught," Yamato whispered, and Riku nodded in understanding. Iori's face only became redder as Riku jerked his chin in the direction of the toilets, and Yamato watched the duo leave. "Young love."

"Where are they going?" Nagi asked curiously. Yamato shrugged, herding the rest of the group back to their waiting room. It was enough for one of the three couples to go off and have their own mini celebration – he didn't need the rest of them to follow suit.

Iori was becoming oddly familiar with sneaking around in toilets. He wasn't sure what to feel about that, as Riku led him to, of course, yet another toilet. Since most of the guests at JIMA were either mingling with each other or in their own waiting rooms, the stalls were empty. Riku locked the door.

"We won," Riku said, walking slowly towards Iori.
The omega bit on his lip, feeling oddly nervous. "We did, didn't we?"

With every step that Riku took towards him, Iori took a step backwards, until his back hit the wall and he had nowhere to go. For some reason, he couldn't bring himself to look Riku in the eye, fixing his stare on the tiles beneath him. He had a feeling that Riku wanted more than just to scent him, and although Iori wasn't at all against the idea, he had absolutely no idea how to go about it.

He nearly flinched when he felt Riku's fingers under his chin, and Riku drew back his hand. "Iori, do you not want to?" the alpha asked, sounding hurt by Iori's reaction. It wasn't as if he'd wanted to flinch away, but Riku should've known how bad he was with physical affection. He'd thought that was a known fact by now, but he supposed he wasn't the only one who was nervous.

"I... do, but I'm not sure how," Iori admitted. He was experiencing a lot of firsts with Riku – first time scenting another person, first time feeling such a level of attraction to someone else, and now a first kiss. Riku was also his first love, and even if Iori would rather die than admit it, he hoped Riku would be his last. It was definitely possible, since they had long accepted that they were a fated pair.

Riku's relief was almost tangible. "I thought I was forcing you into something you didn't want," he chuckled. "It's alright if you don't know how. I don't either. They do say that practice makes perfect, right?"

"How can you say something as embarrassing as that?" Iori mumbled, feeling the tips of his ears warm.

"You can't blame me for being excited," Riku said defensively. "I kept my promise, right?"

Iori nodded. "You did really well today, Nanase-san."

Riku leaned in again, and Iori shut his eyes. He stayed completely still, holding his breath as if, if he made any sort of movement, he would break the atmosphere. But when he didn't feel the touch of Riku's lips on his, even after almost a full minute, he cracked an eye open.

Riku had pulled back, and he was now smiling apologetically at Iori. "I feel like we should wait, if you're not ready," Riku said. His shoulders had sagged, and Iori felt bad for the alpha. It wasn't Riku's fault that he was inexplicably nervous. He doubted he would ever get over this nervousness, anyway.

When Riku turned around, saying that they should probably head back, Iori's hand shot out to grab Riku's wrist. Riku glanced back at Iori, a hopeful gleam in his eyes, and Iori took a breath to steady himself. "Kiss me."

"Okay," Riku whispered.

This time, Iori forced his body to relax, as much as he possibly could. He still kept his eyes closed, because Iori was sure that he would chicken out if he had to look at Riku. He could sense Riku leaning in, could feel Riku's breath on his face. And then there was the featherlight touch of Riku's lips on his, their lips brushing against each other's for just a briefest of moments.

Iori opened his eyes to see that Riku was blushing, probably just as red as Iori was, and the alpha offered him a sheepish smile. "That wasn't so bad, was it?" he asked.

_It wasn't_, Iori wanted to say, and the fact was that it really hadn't been as bad as Iori thought it would be. Rather than that, his inner omega wasn't exactly satisfied. It had been too short, their lips barely making contact and leaving Iori's inner omega wanting more.
Riku was caught off-guard when this time it was Iori who initiated the kiss, crashing their lips together with much more force than before. The omega let his instincts take over, tilting his head to the side so that they could deepen the kiss. Iori felt Riku's teeth worrying at his bottom lip, and he let out a soft gasp. Riku didn't miss the chance to dart his tongue into Iori's mouth, eliciting a moan from the omega as Riku took his time to familiarise himself with the inside of Iori's mouth.

They didn't care that their noses bumped against each other's, only breaking apart when their lungs demanded air. It took some time for them to catch their breaths, Riku even beginning to wheeze at one point, but he managed to get it under control. Once he was sure that his breathing was steady, Riku let out a chuckle. "I wasn't expecting that."

Iori flushed. "Me neither. It was... nice. Although it would've been better if it didn't almost trigger an attack," Iori said. Riku didn't even look sorry that he'd almost had an attack, not appearing to care about the fact that he'd been the one who didn't want to break the kiss.

"It seems like our lung capacity as singers is coming into handy," Riku commented, laughing when Iori let out an embarrassed groan. He took the chance to press a kiss to Iori's cheek. "Now that we're officially together, I can do this as much as I want, right?"

"Why do I feel like I already regret my decision?" Iori chuckled exasperatedly. "Should've told you to win Black or White before becoming your boyfriend."

"Hey!" Riku protested. "No taking it back now!"

"Yes, yes. My mum's going to go crazy once she finds out I have a boyfriend."

Riku's lips stretched into a grin. "Wow, meeting the parents. How scary."

Iori rolled his eyes, playfully shoving the alpha's chest. "They'll love you. I think. Let's get back before the others start suspecting us of doing things other than kissing."

---

As expected, once the two returned to the waiting room, they were met with Yamato's suggestive eyebrow wriggling. Iori groaned immediately, walking away from the leader and going to change out of his stage outfit. Riku, on the other hand, went over to take a picture with the trophy, tapping a caption into his phone and uploading it on social media.

"Where did you guys go?" Sougo asked, already back in his own clothes and scrolling through entertainment news. Iori choked, face turning red, and he pointedly ignored Sougo's question. He didn't mean to be rude, but he also didn't quite want to admit to the other omega that he and Riku had been making out. In a toilet, no less. *What a place to lose your first kiss.*

"Iori, are you okay?" Mitsuki asked, coming up to Iori and placing a hand on his forehead. The beta frowned. "Your face is a little red. Are you coming down with a fever? The weather's been a little chilly."

Yamato snorted, and when Mitsuki raised a brow at him, he cleared his throat. "It seems I might be coming down with something too," Yamato lied easily. Iori wasn't sure if he should be thankful to the leader or not, shaking his head and shrugging his jacket off.
Tamaki stared at Iori. "Iorin, your lips are kind of swollen. Are you sure you're alright?"

"O-of course I am! Let me change in peace, please."

"Oh, Riku and Iori..." Nagi trailed off, a look of understanding flashing across his face.

It didn't take long for Mitsuki to piece things together, looking at a blushing Iori with wide eyes. "Oh?"

"Nii-san, please don't," Iori sighed, wishing that the ground could swallow him up there and then.

"Yeah, remember when I told you not to expose me?" Mitsuki said dryly, gesturing to Nagi. The blond alpha was busy catching up with updates of the latest anime and manga, briefly glancing up to flash a smile in their direction. "You told me you wouldn't, you little liar."

"In all respect, nii-san, it worked out well for you," Iori pointed out. He had absolutely no regrets regarding his decision to matchmake for Nagi and Mitsuki. Their personalities balanced out well, if Iori didn't take into account the fact that they were both easily excitable. It was nice to know that Mitsuki was happy with Nagi.

Mitsuki rolled his eyes. "Sure it did. For real though, next time maybe wait till we get back to the dorm to do whatever you were off doing. It wouldn't do to get caught. We're still at the event venue."

"Don't worry!" Riku assured. "I made sure to lock the door!"

Tsumugi coughed to get their attention. "Please do be careful. There's only so much the company can do if rumours get out. We don't want a repeat of what happened with the gossip magazines," she told them sternly. Riku smiled sheepishly, nodding, although Iori was quite sure that the alpha wouldn't be against sneaking off again. It wasn't as if they didn't already sneak off all the time before performances to scent each other.

Yamato stood up, bag slung over one shoulder and their trophy in hand. "Let's get back to the office and show this off, shall we? Maybe we'll even get a celebratory feast from the President."

Chapter End Notes

No idea how to write kiss scenes but hey these two idiots finally got their first kiss!! It was about time am I right...

I'm officially done typing the rest of this fic! \o/ (complete with an epilogue that became way too long because I have no self-control) Including the epilogue, there are 8 more chapters to go!!! I really need to go and reread part 2 so that I can start on the sequel to this thing...//deep sigh.

The next few chapters are extremely self-indulgent and, again, it ended up being much longer than I thought it would ;'D I hope you guys enjoyed this and see you again next week!

Happy 3rd Anniversary to IDOLiSH7! <3
Iori sighed, looking at his phone and replying to Tsumugi's messages.

It was one of the rare days that the entire group had no schedules, and as much as Iori would've loved to go out with Riku after school, he was stuck with Tamaki for the day.

He didn't mind spending time with Tamaki, but what he did mind was that it was because Tamaki had to take supplementary lessons. They would be off for winter break soon, which meant that their tests were coming up, and Tamaki wasn't faring well in any of his subjects.

Their school was flexible when it came to attendance, which was one of the main reasons that they'd chosen to transfer to this particular school. But in exchange for that flexibility, they had to do well for all of their tests and exams.

As it was, Tamaki had failed the test, the makeup test, and the makeup of the makeup test. Their teachers weren't exactly impressed with his academic performance, and neither was Iori. It certainly didn't make it any better that Tamaki's attention span was painfully short when it came to anything remotely 'boring', as the alpha called it.

Iori understood how busy MEZZO was, but that didn't mean he wanted to stay back for subjects that he was faring well in. At the same time, though, Iori didn't really want to think about Tamaki becoming his underclassman. It probably wouldn't be very good if the alpha ended up being retained for a year.

It was currently lunch break, and Iori would've loved if Tamaki was making any sort of attempt to study. Instead, all Tamaki was doing was munching on a bunch of snacks. The only upside to the situation was that the snacks Tamaki had bought happened to come with Usamimi Friends' freebies. They were from the Christmas collection, and Iori was glad that he didn't have to spend his own money to buy the chocolates to get the keychains.

From the corner of his eye, he caught sight of a Loppu-chan, and the omega had to will himself not to look too excited upon seeing it. Tamaki didn't know that he was a fan of the series, and neither did the rest of their class. Iori intended for things to remain this way.

"Yotsuba-san, you have no use for these, do you?" Iori asked.

Tamaki glanced up from his chocolate bar, staring blankly at the keychain that Iori was currently holding. "No. Are you helping me to throw them away, Iorin? That's really helpful of you."

Iori cleared his throat. "Since you don't need them, I'll find someone who will want them," the omega said, pleased by the knowledge that he could keep these keychains. The Loppu-chan he was holding, in particular, was super rare – apparently, the company produced only 500 of them nationwide.

He took a picture of it for Tsumugi, showing off Tamaki's godsent luck, snickering when Tsumugi seemed amazed by it. This definitely makes up for staying back for supplementary lessons, Iori thought to himself. He highly doubted he would be able to find this particular design online, and even if he did, there was no doubt that it would come with a ridiculous price tag.
Glancing at his phone as it lit up, Iori opened the latest message from Tsumugi. "So cute! How nice!" the message read, along with a bunch of envious emojis.

Iori would never know what possessed him to offer said keychain to Tsumugi; maybe it was because she'd been working pretty hard recently, too, and he thought it would be nice to give her a little something as a reward. “Do you want it?” he typed out, looking over the message for a few long seconds before deciding to send it out.

As soon as he hit the send button, though, Iori was filled with regret. Iori wasn't surprised that Tsumugi wanted it; it was incredibly cute. But she also told him that if he was going to use it, then he could have it. He stared at the message for a long time, internally debating over whether or not he should give it up to Tsumugi. As it was, Riku and Mitsuki were the only ones who knew that Iori liked Usamimi Friends. He'd even gone as far as to tell Tsumugi that he liked cool and sharp stationery, and he wasn't about to expose himself now.

With a sigh, he typed out another message, looking at the keychain in resignation. *And that's goodbye to you, Loppu-chan. I hope Takanashi-san treasures you more than I would have.*

"Iorin? Where're you going?"

"To get you more snacks," Iori replied curtly, walking out of the classroom with his wallet in hand. He headed straight for the cafeteria, spotting the shelf with the limited-edition chocolates and buying a whole bunch of them.

Iori pointedly ignored the students staring strangely at him as he returned with over a dozen chocolates, setting the pile down in front of Tamaki. "Please open these, Yotsuba-san," he requested bluntly.

"Whoa, that's a lot," Tamaki said, obediently doing as told. Iori held his hands together in a silent prayer, peering at the slowly increasing stack of keychains on Tamaki's table. The more chocolates Tamaki opened, the more Iori's shoulders sagged in disappointment. Most of the keychains ended up being repeats, with a few new ones here and there, but Iori should've expected that he wouldn't get another one of the super rare Loppu-chan design.

Iori slumped over his table, regretting every life decision ever. "Why did I offer it to her..."

"What was that?"

"Nothing," Iori sighed. "It's nothing at all."

---

Riku flipped through his book, taking a sip of the tea that Sougo had prepared. Iori was at school, which would've been fine except that they weren't going out together after Iori’s lessons ended.

It felt like it'd been a while since they'd gone out together. Of course, they went out with the other members on common off days, but they hadn't gone on a proper date alone since that first time, and that had been a good three months ago. Too much had happened in the past several weeks, and they simply hadn't been able to find a good time or occasion.
And now that Iori finally had an off day, he was staying back in school with Tamaki for supplementary lessons that he didn't need. Riku grimaced, turning the page. It wasn't Tamaki's fault that it was difficult to keep up with studies; Riku himself hadn't been the best student. He just wished that it didn't compromise his alone time together with Iori.

*Oh well,* Riku thought, sighing inwardly. At least he was going out with Nagi in the afternoon, after the blond was done watching whatever episode of Kokona he was currently on. All Nagi had said was that he had something he absolutely needed to find out regarding one of the side characters and was now busy re-watching the show.

He could've spent time with Sougo or Yamato, but the omega was occupying himself with helping out with the chores, and the beta was still in bed. Riku could understand why Sougo wanted to distract himself, probably feeling a little lonely just like Riku was, but how Yamato was still in bed was completely beyond him.

Riku glanced at the clock, seeing that it had been a good two hours since he'd started on his book. He marked the page he'd been on, closing the book and setting it on his table. Then Riku went over to Nagi's room, knocking on the door and looking in. "You're not done yet?"

Nagi was dabbing at his eyes with a tissue. "Not yet," he sniffled, and Riku closed the door.

With nothing else to do, Riku went out to do some shopping while waiting for Nagi to be done. It was good that they stayed near the shopping district, and Riku managed to get to Harajuku in under ten minutes. He set out to find presents for Banri and Tsumugi, seeing as how Christmas was coming up in a little less than a month, and the two had helped him out tremendously.

Banri was always the one who brought Riku to the hospital whenever he had an attack, even after Tsumugi got her driving license. The older omega could carry him to his car easily enough, and Riku couldn't imagine Tsumugi carrying him anyway.

He sent the manager a quick text, asking if there was anything that Banri would like, before roaming the streets and keeping his eyes out for a suitable gift. He offered polite smiles to fans that came up to him as he shopped, picking out a shirt or two for himself while he texted Tsumugi.

Riku had no doubt that more of his shirts would end up being loaned to Iori, seeing as how Iori had borrowed a few different clothes from Riku this past heat. The weather was getting a little chilly now, and Iori had opted to build his nest with slightly thicker articles of clothing.

Riku stopped in front of a winterwear shop, a small smile appearing on his face as he went in to take a look. He ended up leaving with a couple of scarves, a new sweater, as well as a pair of gloves. He left the store, fully satisfied with himself, and sent a text to Tsumugi telling her that he'd bought something for her, too.

Thankfully, Nagi was done with his DVD by the time Riku made it back to the dorm, and the duo got ready to leave for their first destination of the day – the limited MagiKona collaboration cafe. It was located in the crowded streets of Ikebukuro, so Nagi helpfully informed Riku that he'd prepared a disguise so they wouldn't be recognised.

What he *didn't* tell Riku, however, was that it was a mafia disguise. The redhead stared at the disguise almost incredulously, looking at Nagi in disbelief. "How is this supposed to help us blend in?" Riku asked. Apart from potentially standing out like a sore thumb, Riku didn't want to think about what Iori would say if he saw pictures of the alpha in such a disguise. "This is ridiculous."

"But Riku! We need a disguise!"
"I have plenty of glasses for you to borrow," Riku said.

"Nonsense! With these, even if people recognise us, they'll stay away!"

Riku continued to stare at the outfit blankly. He looked at Nagi. "Iori shall never find out about this."

Nagi nodded solemnly, and Riku took the disguise from Nagi. Once they were changed, Riku pointedly avoided walking past the kitchen where Sougo was, suddenly glad that Mitsuki was off working part-time in the Izumi family cafe, Fonte Chocolat.

Or not, because he was sure the beta would knock some sense into Nagi. Maybe if Mitsuki was in the dorm with them, he wouldn’t be subjected to Nagi’s ridiculous suggestions.

They took the subway to Ikebukuro for the collaboration cafe, getting strange stares from passengers all around them. Riku hadn't felt this self-conscious in a long while, and he pushed his sunglasses further up to make sure he didn't accidentally meet anyone's gaze.

They made it to the cafe without anyone coming up to them, and Riku wasn't quite sure what to feel about that. He'd rather fans see him going into a MagiKona cafe, as himself, than to have people avoid them like the plague because of what they were wearing. He'd sooner die than to have Iori find out about this.

Nagi had made prior reservations at the cafe, so they were seated once it was their allocated timeslot. The blond alpha immediately ordered a variety of food and drinks. "I need Kokona's coaster!" Nagi announced, and when the waitress came over with their food and coasters, Nagi immediately flipped them over. He promptly deflated. "It's a magical angel coaster..."

They ended up repeating the process thrice – Nagi ordering way too much food for just the two of them, getting another magical angel coaster, and deflating once more. By the time they finished the food and drinks from the third round, Riku was ready to explode.

Nagi was so close to ordering another round, with Tsumugi egging him on through their group RabiChat, but Riku really didn't want to end up having to eat even more than he already had. It didn't help that they ate more desserts than actual food; yet another thing that Iori absolutely couldn't find out about.

"Why don't we just trade them?" Riku suggested, glancing around them in hopes of finding someone who had a Kokona coaster. He didn't wait for Nagi to reply, snagging their existing coasters off the table and approaching the other customers. Maybe it was because he was personable, though Riku personally felt that it was because of his disguise, he managed to trade for a Kokona coaster easily enough.

Riku sat back down at their table victoriously. "Here! Are we finally done?"

Nagi let out an excited shout. "Bravo! Beautiful! Fantastic!" Then he pulled Riku into a hug, and all eyes were suddenly on them. "Uh-oh," Nagi said sheepishly, already grabbing for their belongings. "Let's make a run for it."

They hastily thanked the staff for the meal, swiftly exiting the restaurant and heading for their next destination.

---
After they went to TRIGGER's public recording and accidentally caused a spectacle, again, Riku and Nagi found themselves on the way to Fonte Chocolat.

Nagi had been the one to suggest a candid visit to the bakery cum cafe, wanting to support Mitsuki while he was working yet without revealing their identities. Riku agreed almost immediately, even if he was feeling a little nervous about meeting Iori's parents. Iori had said that they would like him, but he hadn't officially met them yet.

It didn't really help that Iori wasn't there to be the middleman.

He could bet that he would make a lasting first impression, considering the ridiculous outfit he was currently wearing. For the nth time that day, Riku wondered why he'd ever agreed to wearing such a disguise. Maybe he could tell the Izumis that Nagi coerced him into it. That sounded believable.

It wasn't hard to find the quaint little bakery located in between the rows of shops, its signboard standing out from the others. What made Riku notice it immediately was the small rabbit motif beside the printed words, the redhead thinking about how Iori liked rabbits and other cute animals. Ah, so this is why, Riku realised with a smile. Iori was too cute.

The bell rang as they entered, and the waitress jumped in surprise. "Oh my! What can we do for you?"

"We're not the mafia!" Riku assured, lifting his shades up and smiling sheepishly at the lady. While that was effective in stopping her from panicking, it was also effective in alerting everyone in the establishment of their identities. A few customers were already looking at them in mild awe, and the Izumi parents came over from behind the counter immediately.

Riku startled when who he assumed to be Iori's mother came up to him with a kind smile. "Are you boys from the same group as Mitsuki and Iori?" she asked, as if they weren't recognisable enough by their hair. Riku nodded, and she abruptly pulled them into a hug. "Thank you for taking care of them."

It was simply a coincidence that both he and Nagi were attached to her sons, the two alphas glancing at each other, completely at a loss as to how to react. Riku was glad that he wasn't alone in this; it was Nagi's first time meeting his boyfriend's parents, too.

"Hiroko, you're going to give them a heart attack," Iori's father told his wife, pulling her away from the two boys and holding a hand out. "My name is Izumi Yosuke. My sons talk a great deal about you two."

Riku blushed, Iori tells his parents about me, pulling Nagi down into a bow. In hindsight, he probably should've taken the proffered hand, but he was so nervous that he couldn't think straight. "It's nice to meet you! My name is Nanase Riku!"

"Rokuya Nagi, at your service," Nagi said, standing upright and saluting the elder Izumis.

"Nagi," Riku hissed. "Be respectful!"

Hiroko laughed, waving it off. "It's fine, Riku-kun. No need for formalities. Take a seat! Would you like me to tell Mitsuki that you're here?" she asked, leading them to an empty table. "Are you dressed up for some kind of event?"

Riku wanted to die.
"No, these are simply our disguises," Nagi answered easily. Hiroko nodded in understanding, although Riku doubted she understood why a mafia disguise, of all things. He didn't understand either. "Please don't tell Mitsuki that we're here. We wanted it to be candid."

"That's nice!" Hiroko beamed. It was the same smile that Mitsuki and Iori had, so it was clear that they got it from their mother. She handed a menu to them, telling them to look through it and take their time to decide what to get.

They eventually decided on a cake set, specially requesting for "Mikki, Thank You for Your Hard Work" to be written on a plate as well. Yosuke was the one who took their order, telling them that he would make sure Mitsuki was the one who personally wrote the message for them.

While waiting for their food, the two idols took a few selfies with some fans who recognised them, on the condition that the photos not be uploaded. Apart from Iori finding out, Riku didn't particularly want Tenn to know that it had been them who caused the ruckus at their public recording.

It wasn't long before Yosuke returned with their cake set, putting it down on the table and telling them to enjoy their food. They ate slowly, Nagi asking Riku about the book he'd been reading and Riku asking Nagi about the backstory of a Kokona side character – that was the main reason why Nagi had been rewatching Kokona that morning.

After they were done eating, Nagi went to pay, refusing the Izumi parents' offer to treat them because "You're running a business, and we're customers!" For the first time today, Riku was thankful that he was with Nagi.

But that gratitude vanished the moment Nagi asked if they could pay a visit to their house.

Suddenly, Riku felt that it would be really nice if the ground opened up and swallowed him right there and then.

---

Sougo browsed through the aisles at the grocery store, staring at the list of ingredients he'd prepared. He'd stumbled across an interesting looking recipe online while monitoring social media trends, and since the whole group had the day off, he wanted to do something nice for them, just like Mitsuki and Iori had done a while ago.

This would be the first time he was cooking for Tamaki, and Sougo genuinely hoped that the alpha would like it. He wore a small smile on his face as he picked out vegetables and meat, trying to alter the recipe slightly by using vegetables that Tamaki liked instead. He couldn't help that Tamaki was picky, since he was still immature after all, and Tamaki always had the habit of leaving food on his plate.

He texted Tsumugi as he shopped, inviting the manager over for dinner as well. It was only then that he found out that Mitsuki had suggested having a hotpot tonight, and Sougo's shoulders slumped in mild disappointment.

So much for doing something nice for everyone, he thought, sighing inwardly. But Mitsuki would only be back from his family bakery later at night, so Sougo could still prepare some food while
waiting for the beta to return.

A new text from Tsumugi lit up on his screen, and Sougo's lips stretched into a smile once more. "When I went out for a meal with Yamato-san before, he mentioned that he wanted to eat something spicy while having beer," the message read. Sougo glanced at his basket, walking back to the produce section to pick up a few more peppers.

"Oh, there's a new flavour of King Pudding," Sougo murmured to himself, hesitating for barely a second before adding that to his basket as well. Tamaki would probably already buy it in school during lunch, but he was sure that Tamaki would appreciate it nonetheless.

Once he was satisfied with the items he had, the omega went to the cashier, smiling sheepishly as her eyes widened in recognition. "Ousaka Sougo-san?"

"That would be me," he said, shaking her hand and thanking her for supporting IDOLiSH7 and MEZZO. She told him about how she'd been at their concert and had gone to watch them at Soundship, all while scanning his items and packing them into bags. He paid for his groceries, thanking the cashier once more. "Please support us at Black or White as well."

"Definitely! Please do your best!"

it always felt good to be cheered on by fans, and Sougo walked back to the dorm with a renewed determination. He was going to make the best dinner ever, and they would win at Black or White.

"I'm home," Sougo called out, putting his shoes aside neatly and heading to the kitchen immediately to put the groceries away. Seeing that it was already in the late afternoon, Sougo started working on his dish once he was done keeping everything he didn't require, referring to the recipe on his phone as he prepared the ingredients.

He put on their songs as he worked, humming to himself while thinking about how he was going to surprise Tamaki later on. He still hadn't gotten anything in return for the courting gift he'd received, but Tamaki wouldn’t want anything except for King Pudding anyway.

Sighing exasperatedly, Sougo tried to wipe the fond smile off of his face. He didn't know when he'd fallen so deep in love with Tamaki, even though the alpha made him frustrated beyond belief sometimes.

Sougo winced as he felt a jolt of pain through his finger, putting the knife down as he examined the cut on his finger. It wasn't deep, but it was bleeding, and the omega went to rinse it under running water to make sure it didn't get infected. He wasn't often careless while cooking, but he also hadn't cooked for Tamaki before. It seemed like such a domestic thing to do.

"It isn't as if we're married," Sougo thought, shaking the notion off. They were just dating for now; Sougo hadn't met the director of the orphanage that Tamaki grew up in, and the alpha hadn't met his parents. The mere thought of his father meeting Tamaki made Sougo shudder.

It wasn't that Tamaki wasn't a good person, although he was a little sloppy at times. Most times, maybe. But his father was an extremely strict man, considering how he'd forced Sougo to take suppressants once his first heat had ended.

Tamaki was an orphan, had a missing sister and a drunkard father. The moment Ousaka Soushi decided to do a background check on Tamaki, he would know about these facts. Heck, he didn't even need to do a background check, since Sougo was sure that his father had insider info regarding what happened during that recording.
He was relatively certain that his father didn't have a good impression of Tamaki already, and he
didn't want to think about having to introduce Tamaki to his father. His mother didn't usually have
much of an input regarding anything, simply following as his father said.

Sougo sighed. He would delay it for as long as he could.

Putting a plaster on the injured finger once it stopped bleeding, Sougo got right back to work,
continued from where he left off. He made sure not to let his mind wander this time, not wanting to
end up with a multitude of injuries from preparing a simple dish like this.

At some point, Yamato came out of his room in search of something to drink, stopping dead in his
tracks when he saw Sougo standing in front of the stove. A sort of dread filled his stomach as he
catched the scent of whatever deadly peppers Sougo was using in his dish, and Yamato considered
going back to his room to save himself.

But of course, Sougo turned around right then, his face lighting up at the sight of the leader.
"Yamato-san. I thought you were still asleep," Sougo said. "I heard from Manager that you wanted
to eat spicy food to go with beer. We can eat this together while waiting for the others to get back."

Yamato peeked around Sougo to look into the contents of the pot, trying not to balk at how red the
concoction was. It looked like it was made to kill, and Yamato's spiciness tolerance was rather
decent, in his opinion. It was nothing compared to Sougo's, nobody could compare to Sougo, but his
own tolerance was good enough by any normal standard.

He wanted to refuse, maybe run out of the dorm, but Sougo was looking at him so earnestly and
Yamato was too soft towards his members.

With a resigned sigh, Yamato nodded. "Okay. Isn't that too much for just the two of us, though?"

"I made some for Tamaki-kun, too," Sougo supplied helpfully.

Yamato choked on his saliva, earning a worried look from Sougo. "Yamato-san? Are you okay?"

*I am, but Tama won't be*, Yamato thought dryly. Maybe Tamaki had done something wrong,
pissed Sougo off in one way or another. There was no other reason why the omega would be
attempting to murder his own alpha – Sougo should know that Tamaki was terrible with spicy food.

But that didn't seem to be the case at all, because once Yamato told Sougo that he was fine, he went
back to cooking, humming softly as he followed the recipe to a t. Yamato wasn't sure what to make
of the situation, deciding that perhaps it would be best if he didn't ask any more questions. He would
do his part as the leader, sacrifice his tongue and stomach, and maybe Tamaki wouldn't have to
endure the same suffering as him.

Opening the fridge and retrieving a few cans of beer, Yamato went to turn the TV on and sat at the
dining table, already starting on the first can. If he was drunk, he might not feel the burn of his
tongue and stomach.

Or, well, he could hope so.

Chapter End Notes

*For those who don't know, these scenes are taken from their Off Day RabiChats! I'm*
sure these are supposed to happen much earlier in the timeline (and on different days too) but I decided to combine them all into the same day-- and then my self-indulgent ass went overboard so this entire thing spans, uh, 3 chapters. LOL. //laughs

I hope you guys enjoyed this and see you next week!!
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Iori had no idea how he ended up visiting the orphanage that Tamaki had grown up in. One moment they'd been finishing up supplementary lessons, finally, and the next moment Tamaki was telling him that he'd forgotten to get a signature on a form he needed to submit tomorrow.

It was just like Tamaki to forget something important like this, of course. Iori couldn't really say he was surprised at this point, but it was a pointless detour which meant that he would get home even later than he would have. Which meant that, ultimately, he had less free time to spend with Riku.

Ever since getting the Rookie Award and officially starting a relationship, he and Riku had been more physically affectionate with each other. It mainly involved kissing, initiated by Riku more often than not, but they'd also shared a bed on a couple of occasions. It was a level of intimate closeness that Iori had never in his wildest dreams thought that he could achieve, but he'd done it, with his fated alpha no less. It was to be expected that he looked forward to it, especially after a long day at school.

Right now, though, they were standing in front of the building that was oh-so-familiar to Tamaki, yet completely foreign to Iori. Tamaki let himself in, raising a brow when Iori remained outside, unsure of whether he should enter. "Just come in," Tamaki drawled. "You can meet the Director."

"Tamaki-niichan!"

The alpha had just enough time to turn around to the source of the voices before three kids barrelled into him, each clinging to Tamaki or hanging off his arm. Tamaki chuckled, peeling them off of himself and pointing to Iori. "This is Iorin. He's in IDOLiSH7 with me," he introduced. "This is Reichan, Rinchan, and Yokkun."

Iori offered them an awkward smile and a small wave. He liked kids, it was part of his nature as an omega, but that didn't necessarily mean he knew how to act around them. After all, he'd been the youngest in his family, and he didn't have any younger cousins, nephews, or nieces. "I'm Izumi Iori. Nice to meet you."

"Is he scared of us?" Reiji asked curiously, blinking at Iori with wide eyes. Iori flushed; had he been that obvious that even a kid could see through him? He really needed to work on his people skills.

Youichi frowned at Reiji disapprovingly. "Don't be rude to a guest. Obasan taught us to be polite."

Rinka ran up to Iori, bowing politely to the omega. "Hello, Iorin-san! I've seen you on TV!"

Iori was unable to stifle the chuckle that left his lips – Tamaki was such a bad influence. He bent down so that he could be at eye level with Rinka, smiling and holding out a hand. "Rinka-chan, was it? You have really good manners. Obasan would be proud."

"Is he scared of us?" Reiji asked curiously, blinking at Iori with wide eyes. Iori flushed; had he been that obvious that even a kid could see through him? He really needed to work on his people skills.

"Don't be rude to a guest. Obasan taught us to be polite."

Rinka ran up to Iori, bowing politely to the omega. "Hello, Iorin-san! I've seen you on TV!"

Iori was unable to stifle the chuckle that left his lips – Tamaki was such a bad influence. He bent down so that he could be at eye level with Rinka, smiling and holding out a hand. "Rinka-chan, was it? You have really good manners. Obasan would be proud."

The little girl beamed, taking Iori's hand and tugging him towards one of the rooms down the corridor. "Tamaki-niichan, you can go and look for obasan! We'll take care of Iorin-san!" she assured. Iori glanced towards Tamaki for help, but all the alpha did was shrug and head off in the direction of where was probably the director's office. "Iorin-san, look at the drawings we did today!"

*There's no helping it, I guess,* Iori thought, letting Rinka pull him into their activity room and show
him her masterpieces. Reiji and Youichi followed close behind them, bringing along an entire horde of their friends to play with Iori as well.

Tamaki returned a little after ten minutes with the director in tow, snickering at the sight of Iori being fussed over by a bunch of kids. He took a quick picture, saving it so that he could show it to Riku when they got home later. "That's Iorin," Tamaki told the director. "He helps me in class."

"Kids, let me speak to Iori-san for a moment," the director said, and Iori flashed her a grateful smile when the kids got off him. The omega walked to the two, greeting the director and introducing himself. The director was an older woman with greying hair, but she carried herself extremely well. Iori could tell from her scent that she was an omega – it explained why she'd chosen to run an orphanage. "I'm Sawamura Yuuko. It's nice to finally meet you, Iori-kun. Tamaki, go play with the kids. You know how excited they get when you visit."

Iori watched as Tamaki got jumped on by another wave of children, the alpha laughing as he fell over backwards. They climbed all over him, just like they had Iori, and Iori couldn't help but think that Tamaki was really good with children. He thought of Sougo's condition, sighing inwardly. It was probably a good thing that Sougo wasn't here to see this; it would probably make him upset.

Sawamura led Iori to the room opposite the activity room, closing the door and urging the omega to take a seat. "Thank you for looking after Tamaki," she told him, and Iori could tell from the sincerity in her voice that she really meant it. She'd raised Tamaki for over ten years, so it was expected that the elderly lady felt motherly affection for him. "I was worried when he told me that he was debuting as an idol, but I'm really glad that he's doing well."

Iori shook his head with a small smile. "Yotsuba-san's been working hard in his own way," he told her.

"He told me he wanted to introduce me to a... Souchan, was it? That's his unit mate in MEZZO, right?"

"Ah, yes. Did he tell you how they are related?" Iori asked curiously.

Sawamura frowned slightly, shaking her head. "No, he hasn't."

"Does he intend for it to be a surprise? "Then I guess I shouldn't say anything, either," Iori chuckled. "I'm sure you'll be very proud of Yotsuba-san, and you'll like Ousaka-san as well."

She hummed thoughtfully. "Tamaki's come a really long way since he was younger. He used to centre his life around protecting Aya, and he was really heartbroken when she was adopted," Sawamura sighed softly, smiling wistfully at the memory. Tamaki had thrown a tantrum and cried for days, clamouring to see Aya again. "He's a good kid at heart. All of us here know that. Even if he's bad at expressing himself sometimes, Tamaki doesn't mean any harm."

Iori chuckled, nodding in agreement. "Indeed. He's started a few arguments before," he said, quickly correcting himself when Sawamura's expression turned to that of concern. "What I meant was that because he's not very good at explaining things, a few misunderstandings have arisen."

"He's always been like that," she chuckled. "I must trouble you to look after him from now on."

"It's no problem at all," Iori assured. Besides, Sougo would do a far better job than Iori in that aspect; Iori had his own hopeless alpha to look after.

They returned to the activity room, and the kids reluctantly said goodbye to Tamaki and Iori. Iori promised to visit again, maybe with Riku in tow next time, and the two idols waved to the kids as
Riku felt like he was doing something terribly illegal. It wasn't as if he was breaking into Iori's house or anything; Iori's mother was leading the way, chatting to the idols as they walked down the street to the Izumi family home.

But he still felt like he was trespassing on territory he wasn't supposed to be on. Going into Iori's room at the dorms was one matter, since they all shared the living space and knew what each other's rooms looked like. Going into Iori's room in his home, though, was a different issue entirely. For all he knew, maybe Iori didn't even want Riku entering his room. It was his private space, after all, and it just didn’t seem right for Riku to be entering as and when he liked.

That, and Riku didn't want to accidentally stumble upon something he shouldn't.

Riku doubted that Iori would have something like, say, a porn stash, but one could never be too careful. But Izumi Hiroko was already pointing to the cosy-looking house up ahead, the words *Izumi Residence* printed neatly on the wall beside the gate.

"Nagi," Riku hissed, keeping his voice low in the hopes that Hiroko wouldn't hear him. The streets were already rather quiet, though, and Riku's voice sounded too loud even to himself. "Remind me again why we're going to Iori and Mitsuki's house?"

"Don't you want to see what kind of place they grew up in?" Nagi asked, not even attempting to be quiet. Riku winced as Hiroko turned back to smile at them, an almost knowing look on her face as she unlocked the gate and let them in. "I bet Mitsuki has lots of Zero's posters."

"That he does," Hiroko piped up, chuckling when she saw how Nagi's eyes sparkled in wonder. "Would you like me to show you to their rooms? Or shall I get some tea for you?"

Riku shook his head politely. "Water is fine, Izumi-san! You don't have to go out of your way for us."

"Nonsense! It's the least I could do, since you've taken such good care of my sons," she told them, already heading to the kitchen. She pointed up the stairs. "Mitsuki's room is the first on to the right, and Iori's is just beside his."

Thanking her, Riku and Nagi headed up the stairs, but not before Nagi put up a Nemesis poster in the entryway. Riku had no idea where he got it from, nor did he care, the redhead vibrating with nervous anticipation. He could smell the lingering remnants of Iori's scent, be it from his room or from the last time he'd been home. It was scary how he could pinpoint the faint scent so accurately, and Riku was sure that he would've easily found Iori's room even without Hiroko's directions.

They went into Mitsuki's room first, the one nearest to the stairs. Just as Nagi had predicted, there were posters plastered all over the walls. The most prevalent were, of course, those of Zero, but there were also IDOLiSH7's and TRIGGER's posters. His room wasn't much different from the one at the
dorm in regards to furniture, Mitsuki keeping things simple and organised. He had a rather impressive number of CDs and DVDs, all arranged neatly on a shelf.

Nagi was already taking selfies – with the room, with Mitsuki's bed, on Mitsuki's bed, with his Zero posters. Riku stared blankly at the blond, not entirely sure of what to make of the situation. "Are you sure you should be making yourself at home like this?"

"Why not?" Nagi asked, and Riku was reminded that Nagi had a tendency to do as he liked; Riku couldn't exactly judge, since Iori was always scolding him for that exact same thing.

While Riku was looking through Mitsuki's collection of albums, Nagi pulled out the new Kokona plush he'd bought at the cafe earlier that day, as well as a small hand sewn apron – the exact same apron that Mitsuki always wore while cooking in the dorm. He put it on Kokona, heaving a small sigh of relief when it fit nicely and putting her on Mitsuki's bed. He also put a card under it, one that he'd spent the past few nights agonising over, before taking a selfie and sending it to Mitsuki.

From: Nagi

I left a present on your bed! (≧ω≦*) Pick it up before you go back to the dorm tonight!

Satisfied, Nagi turned to Riku. "I'm done! Now to put up a commemorative poster of MEZZO in between their rooms," the blond said, producing a poster out of nowhere and taking the liberty to paste it on the wall. "Now, to Iori's room!"

"Let me go in first," Riku said. It wasn't because he was possessive of Iori – he was, but that wasn't the main reason why he wanted to check Iori's room out before Nagi went in. There were things that Iori didn't want the others to know about him, the biggest example being his love for anything cute.

Nagi didn't argue, so Riku slowly pushed the omega's room door open, peeking into it to see that there were, in fact, an impressive number of Usamimi plush toys. There were a variety of sizes, ranging from small keychains to full-sized huggable toys.

Riku immediately shut the door, holding his arms out in front of the door. "Okay, no going in."

"But why?" Nagi asked in confusion.

Riku shook his head firmly. "No means no. We shouldn't keep Izumi-san waiting."

"Okay..." Nagi conceded, and they went back down the stairs to the living room. As expected, Hiroko was already sitting on the couch, two glasses of water as well as a tray of cookies on the table in front of her.

Her face lit up when the boys came back down. "Take a seat! I wanted to ask a few things."

The two sat on the floor, thanking the beta for her hospitality and taking a sip of their water.

"First thing's first – you two are dating my boys, right?"

Riku nearly snorted the water out through his nose, but he managed to avoid embarrassing himself like that, instead simply choking on it. Nagi wasn't much better off, barely managing to swallow the water in his mouth before he ended up doing a spit take. "Eh?!"

"Oh dear," Hiroko said, pursing her lips slightly. "Did I get it wrong after all? They've each been talking about the two of you an awful lot lately, and I won't lie; Iori has never talked this much about
another person, apart from Mitsuki of course."

Nagi’s eyes widened when he realised that Riku was still coughing, and even if he wasn’t as good at recognising Riku's symptoms as Iori was, he was fairly certain that he was borderline wheezing. "Is your inhaler in your bag?" Nagi asked, earning a nod from Riku. He retrieved it quickly, uncapping it and handing it over to Riku.

After taking a puff of medicine and getting his breathing back to normal, Riku sent Nagi a grateful smile. "Thanks, Nagi," the redhead said, turning back to Hiroko with a sheepish smile. Of all the ways to make a first impression on his omega's parents, it had to be this way. First a mafia disguise, and now an attack. The day was going great.

"Are you okay, Riku-kun?" Hiroko asked worriedly. "Do you need to rest?"

"It's fine," he assured. Taking a deep breath, Riku said, "Yes, I'm dating Iori. I have every intention of eventually becoming mates with him."

"The same goes for me as well. I mean, not mates, but getting married would be nice."

Hiroko hummed thoughtfully. "I'm definitely not against it. I haven't seen my sons this happy since they were little boys. For Iori to accept an alpha and for Mitsuki to accept a relationship mustn't have been easy," she said. "I don't suppose they know you came here today?"

Riku shook his head instantly. If Iori knew that he'd come to his house unannounced, he would be getting an earful from the omega tonight. His nose twitched; is that Iori's scent? "Iori doesn't know, and he probably shouldn't."

---

"Yotsuba-san, I was surprised by how much you acted like a big brother back there," Iori commented, sitting down while waiting for the bus to come. Tamaki shrugged, and Iori bit back a smile at the faint tinge of pink on the alpha's cheeks. "You were really popular."

"It's just 'cause I got on TV," Tamaki said. "Besides, they don't get to see me as often as they used to."

Iori raised a brow, completely unconvinced. Tamaki wasn't a good liar, and it was obvious that he was acting bashful right now. He tried pushing a little further. "You always tell us how scary the director is, but Sawamura-san is an incredibly refined and kind lady. She was a gentle person."

"She was praising you, though?"

"Seriously?" Tamaki asked in mild disbelief. He wasn't able to bite back a grin from showing on his face, and Iori snickered. It was so easy to rile Tamaki up. "Hey, what'd she say to praise me?"
The bus came, and the two idols boarded, ignoring the curious glances of other passengers. Iori thought about it for a moment, pretending to recall what Sawamura had told him, before shrugging. "It's a secret," he said eventually, and Tamaki groaned in annoyance.

"What's up with that... ah!"

"What is it?"

Tamaki was glancing out the window, studying the street names carefully. "Iorin, your place is pretty near here, isn't it?" Tamaki asked. Iori nodded, not quite sure where Tamaki was going with this. The alpha beamed. "I called your dad when you were talking with the Yuuchan, and he told me he'd give me a ton of cake if I visited."

Iori stared blankly at Tamaki, resisting the sudden urge to sigh. "And what were you doing talking on the phone with someone else's father?"

"He seemed nice," Tamaki commented, and Iori snorted. They'd never seen his father angry before, so of course he appeared to be a nice person. He was, but he was also terrifying when he was mad about something. "Cake!"

"Fine," Iori gave in. It wouldn't hurt to pay a visit to the bakery anyway, and Mitsuki probably hadn't gotten off work yet. Maybe they could go back to the dorm together. The omega typed out a text to Tsumugi to let her know where they were headed, in case she got worried about them. Then they got off the bus, and Iori led the way to Fonte Chocolat.

Tamaki glanced through the message Yosuke had sent him a while after they'd left the orphanage, about Nagi and Riku also having gone to their shop. The first thing Tamaki had done was to tell the elder not to inform Iori about it. Tamaki was sure that Iori missed Riku already, and as thanks for helping him out at school, he figured that this would be a pleasant surprise.

The walk to the bakery wasn't long, and the moment Iori pushed the doors open, he stiffened. He took a whiff of the air, frowning at the familiar scent that could only have been Riku's. It was still rather strong, so Iori assumed that the alpha had been here not too long ago.

"Iori," Yosuke said, coming out from behind the counter to greet his son. Iori looked around for his mother, not seeing her anywhere, and his father quickly explained, "Your mother went home to, uh..."

Tamaki caught Yosuke's eye, shaking his head, and the beta continued, "She had to pick something up."

"Iori," Yosuke said, coming out from behind the counter to greet his son. Iori looked around for his mother, not seeing her anywhere, and his father quickly explained, "Your mother went home to, uh..."

Tamaki caught Yosuke's eye, shaking his head, and the beta continued, "She had to pick something up."

Iori narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "Did anyone else from IDOLiSH7 come by earlier?"

"Your brother's in the kitchen, if you need him-"

"Not nii-san, dad. The other members."

Yosuke glanced at Tamaki, and the alpha raised his hands in defeat.

"Well, a Nanase Riku-kun and Rokuya Nagi-kun did come by," Yosuke admitted, and Iori sighed.

"Where are they now? Does nii-san know?"

"Nagi-kun said he wanted to see our house, so-"
Iori's eyes widened. "They're at our house!?"

Tamaki had never seen Iori lose his composure so quickly – apart from that one time at Music Festa, but that had been understandable. It was almost amusing, if Iori didn't suddenly whirl around to send a glare in Tamaki's direction.

Yosuke nodded, not even bothering to hide the fact anymore. Iori groaned, willing himself not to blush at the thought of Riku entering his room. There really wasn't anything to find, apart from the heaps of Usamimi Friends' merchandise he owned, but it was still his room. He left Tamaki to his father, going into the kitchen and looking for Mitsuki. He spotted his brother easily enough, going up to the beta quickly.

Mitsuki glanced up from the cake he was packaging. "Iori? Why're you here?"

"Long story," Iori said. "Nanase-san and Rokuya-san are at our house."

"They're where?"

Iori nodded, and Mitsuki rolled his eyes. "Of course he would do that, that idiot," Mitsuki muttered. "Let me finish this up and we'll go get them, okay?"

Mitsuki finished in record speed, hastily tugging his apron off and informing the head chef that he would be leaving early. The man waved him off, thanking him for helping out on his off day, and the brothers quickly headed out of the bakery.

Before they even stepped out of the shop, Mitsuki received a text, opening it to see the picture that Nagi had taken. On his bed. The beta stared at the image for a few moments, almost dumbfounded, and Iori peeked at the screen. "They're touring our rooms?" Iori asked incredulously. "Let's hurry."

Tamaki watched them leave, half a slice of cake in his mouth. "I'll wait here."

Iori nodded without looking in Tamaki's direction, and they walked down the familiar street to their house. The entire way, Iori could pick up the faint traces of Riku's scent, indicating that the alpha had indeed come through this route.

When they finally made it home, Iori pressed his ear against the door. Riku's voice could be heard, and although it wasn't very clear, Iori could make out the words easily. "Iori doesn't know, and he probably shouldn't."

"What're they saying?" Mitsuki asked in a whisper.

"I don't know yet," Iori whispered back.

"Why not?" their mother asked curiously.

Iori heard Riku chuckle nervously. "Don't think he would like to know that I came to his house without him," the alpha explained, and Iori snorted. At least Riku was smart enough to realise that. Iori didn't bother listening to more, opening the door loudly enough that those in the living room would hear.

"We're home!" Hiroko poked her head through the doorway, and Iori raised a brow at his mother. "Really, mum? Bringing our friends over without even informing us?"

"Are they really just friends?"
Iori glanced at Mitsuki, the beta shrugging, and they went to the living room to confront their respective boyfriends. They didn't even get to say anything, though, mouths hanging open at the sight of two idols decked in mafia outfits. Riku raised a hand in greeting, smiling sheepishly at his boyfriend. "Hi?"

"What on earth are you wearing?"

---

After a five-minute long lecture from both Iori and Mitsuki, which Hiroko bore witness to, the two alphas apologised for coming to their house uninvited. Hiroko had waved it off, giving her boys a hard stare. "They were very much invited, weren't you, Riku-kun? Nagi-kun?"

The alphas glanced at their respective boyfriends, smiling sheepishly at Hiroko. "We were very much not invited, Izumi-san," they replied in unison, and the mother sighed.

"Don't get me started on you two," she chided. "How could you not tell me that you're dating?"

"Mum," Iori groaned. "I'll be borrowing Nanase-san for a bit."

"Nagi too."

"Fine, but I'd better get a good explanation from you two afterwards."

Iori dragged Riku by the hand to his room, shutting his door and locking it. He turned to look at Riku, arms crossed as he waited for an explanation. "Mind telling me why you're in my house, Nanase-san?" Iori asked, raising a brow at the alpha. "In that outfit, no less."

"In my defence, I really didn't want to wear this," Riku said, sighing and putting a hand on Iori's arm. The omega shrugged it off, tapping his foot impatiently against the floor. He didn't even know why he was so mad; more than being angry, Iori was mortified at the thought of Nagi having seen his room. "I'm sorry. Nagi wanted to come, and your mum was so happy to have guests over."

"Did Rokuya-san come in?"

Riku shook his head quickly. "I made sure to check beforehand. I knew you wouldn't like it if other people found out that you like cu-" Riku cut himself off, "-rabbits. That you like rabbits."

Iori pursed his lips. He was glad Riku was sensitive enough to know that much. "...fine. You're forgiven."

The change in Riku's mood was instant, the alpha beaming and throwing his arms around Iori's neck. Iori chuckled softly, wrapping his arms around Riku's torso and leaning into his neck. It'd only been less than a day without Riku, but already Iori felt like he was having minor withdrawal symptoms. *When did I become so dependent?* Iori mused, breathing in Riku's unique scent. "But next time, tell me before you drop by, please?"

"I will," Riku assured, pulling back to place a peck on Iori's cheek. The omega flushed, still not quite used to the physical affection. "You're so pretty when you blush," Riku commented, earning himself a soft slap on the arm. "Don't be embarrassed. It's true."
"Ugh, I hate you so much sometimes," Iori grumbled, dropping his head on Riku's shoulder so that the alpha couldn't see the way he was smiling like an idiot. He was getting too soft, being this affected by a simple compliment like that. But if it was Riku, then he didn't mind.

In the room next door, Mitsuki had locked his door as well, picking up the Kokona plush that was on his bed and studying the apron she was wearing. The beta squinted at the small details of the apron, surprised to find that it was almost exactly the same as his own.

"You know, I'm sure you had good intentions while making this, but it makes me feel like you want me to cosplay Kokona while wearing my apron," Mitsuki said, snorting when Nagi offered him a small smile. He was so easy to read. "Hit the nail on the head, did I?"

"Maybe," Nagi conceded. "You'd look so cute!"

"I'm a man, Nagi," Mitsuki reminded, trying not to grin. He didn't want to cosplay Kokona, ever, but the fact that Nagi had taken time to make this for him was touching. Nobody had ever done anything like this for him before, with the exception of Iori, but Iori was family and he didn't count. "If you wanted someone to cosplay Kokona for you, you should've gotten a girlfriend."

Nagi pouted. "But I don't want a girlfriend. I want you."

That, Mitsuki couldn't not blush at. Nagi's shamelessness knew no bounds. "I'm quite sure my boyfriend isn't part of the mafia. Last I checked, at least," Mitsuki said, eyeing the disguise that Nagi was still in. He snickered as Nagi hurriedly took the shades and jacket off, and he was on the verge of removing his inner shirt as well. "Okay, stop. Stop! I get it already, sheesh. Thanks for the, um, present."

"When you see her, you'll think of me!" Nagi exclaimed proudly, and Mitsuki rolled his eyes. Every day, he wondered what it was about Nagi that he was in love with. He startled when Nagi suddenly leaned down and kissed Mitsuki on the lips. The alpha grinned. "Let's go back down."

They exited the room at the same time as Riku and Iori, and they resigned themselves to the fate of being reprimanded by their mother for hiding their relationships from her for this long.

Chapter End Notes

Lmao I forgot about the end note HAHA more couply stuff (based off their Off Day rabichat)!! Next is the last part of this Off Day bit, then we're back to the main storyline :') and then this fic will be over before we know it. Hope you guys enjoyed this!!
"So, boyfriends. Both of you."

Iori raised his hand, and Hiroko turned to look at him, raising her brow. It was probably better to come clean now than to let her find out later on. He knew his mother well enough to know that she would be at least a little angry at him for hiding something this big. "I'm not sure how to tell you this, mum, but... Nanase-san is also my fated alpha."

In hindsight, Iori should've been expecting the way his mother let out an excited scream. For a lady in her early fifties, she was surprisingly excitable. "I need to tell your father!" Hiroko exclaimed, a wide grin stretching across her face. He couldn't blame her, since he'd been completely against being together with an alpha before meeting Riku. He supposed she must have thought that he would never get into a relationship.

The Izumi mother turned to her elder son. "And Mitsuki?"

"Iori betrayed me," Mitsuki answered honestly, narrowing his eyes when Iori pretended to be innocent. He didn't even know why Iori was trying. The only person he'd told had been his younger brother, and clearly his secret hadn't remained a secret. "I told you not to tell Nagi, but what did you do?"

"I told Nanase-san."

"And he told Nagi!"

"Mitsuki, don't you like being with me?" Nagi asked, and Mitsuki groaned in defeat as he leaned against his boyfriend. He couldn't argue against that. Nagi beamed, wrapping his arms around Mitsuki tightly and pulling the smaller male onto his lap.

"This is embarrassing," Mitsuki grumbled, cheeks tinged pink. He didn't think he would have to deal with the whole meet-the-parents thing just a couple of months into their relationship. He didn't want to think about meeting Nagi's parents; not that the alpha talked about them much at all, which was rather strange considering how open Nagi was with most things. Mitsuki made a mental note to ask him about that in the future.

Hiroko smiled fondly at their interaction. Maybe some mothers would be against their son dating someone else in the same idol group as them, or that their son was rushing into a relationship, but Hiroko didn't think like that at all. She recalled all those times when Mitsuki would come home, upset and locking himself in his room, and she'd told herself that she would support him if he ever did come home with a partner.

Provided said partner wasn't a complete asshole, but Nagi seemed to be doing just fine in that aspect.

"Oh, right, Riku-kun seemed to be having some breathing difficulties earlier," Hiroko said worriedly, recalling the way Nagi had had to hand the redhead his inhaler. "Is he alright? He said he's fine, but are you sure he doesn't need to go to the doctor to check it out?"

Iori's eyes widened slightly, and Riku offered him a small smile. "You had an attack?"
"Only almost! Nagi got my medicine for me!"

"I leave you alone for half a day~"

"Iori, I'm fine," Riku said firmly, chuckling at how the omega was fussing over him. It was a little frustrating to know that Iori was always worrying about him like this, but it was also endearing. It was nice to have someone, apart from his family, care about him as much as Iori did.

Iori didn't look convinced, but he sat back down. "Nanase-san's health isn't the best," he explained, and Riku scowled. On top of being seen in a ridiculous disguise, getting an attack, and his weak lungs being revealed, he didn't know what else could go wrong. Iori’s mother’s impression of him was probably terrible at this point.

But Hiroko simply looked at him in concern. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

"It's fine!" Riku was quick to say. "I'm really alright now, Izumi-san."

"He seems to be okay for now," Iori agreed. "Anyway, we should be getting back to the shop."

Mitsuki stared at his brother for a few seconds before his eyes widened.

"We left Tamaki there!"

---

All things considered, Iori didn't know what else he would've expected from Tamaki.

They walked back into Fonte Chocolat to see the alpha at a corner table, six plates on the table in front of him. Some had a few bits of cake left, others were completely clean. He should've known that this would happen the moment Tamaki was left alone, but what Iori hadn't expected was for his father to enable such gluttony.

The thought of having to explain this to Sougo later on made Iori sigh. It would be troublesome if Tamaki ended up with a stomach ache or sugar rush. And Iori didn't even want to think about the diet regime they were supposed to be following. "We're back," Iori called out dryly, raising a brow when Tamaki turned to look at them. "You're going to get sick from eating so many desserts."

"Your dad said I could!" Tamaki replied defensively, shielding his almost-empty plates with his arms. Iori didn't even know why he was trying; it wasn't as if he was going to steal any of Tamaki's food. His parents would be more than happy to let them bring some back to the dorm to share. Yamato and Sougo could definitely use a treat.

Iori looked at his father. "...why?"

"I asked your mother for permission," Yosuke said.

"Mum..." Iori sighed.

Riku chuckled, patting Iori on the back. "It's fine. He rarely gets to eat cake."

"He already ate like, twenty chocolate bars today," Iori said. He conveniently left out the part where it was because of him that Tamaki even ate so much chocolate – and he still didn't get another one of
"Maybe if you get Sougo to threaten him..." Mitsuki suggested helpfully.

Iori was already dialling Sougo's number, holding his phone to his ear and waiting for the call to connect.

The voice that answered was decidedly not the omega Iori was expecting. "Hello? Ichi?"

"Is that Iori-kun? I want to talk to him!"

"Soun, stop drinking already," Yamato sighed. There was something off about his voice, almost as if the beta was breathless. Which was strange, considering they were just drinking together. Iori highly doubted they were doing any type of strenuous exercise. "You needed him for something? Tama's with you, right?"

"Yes, but I think now isn't a good time," Iori replied slowly, glancing at Tamaki. "Since he's drunk."

It worked just as Iori wanted it to, the alpha looking up from his cake instantly. "Drunk? Again?"

Iori was just glad that the shop was closed for the evening. They were making Sougo out to be an alcoholic. It wouldn't be good if the fans caught wind of something like this. "Yes."

"Is that Taa-kun? Taa-kuuuun."

"Stop that. Come back and save me, please."

Tamaki groaned, looking at his cake sadly. He loved cake, and Fonte Chocolat had delicious cakes and he didn't even have to pay, but it didn't seem right to leave a drunk Sougo alone. He didn't doubt Yamato's ability to take care of Sougo, but Sougo was his boyfriend, not Yamato's. "Alright, let's go back."

"That was fast," Nagi whispered to Mitsuki. "I've never seen Tamaki give in so quickly."

Mitsuki jabbed his boyfriend in the side. "That shows how much he cares for Sougo, doesn't it?"

"Thanks, Iorin's dad and mum," Tamaki said, bowing slightly to the Izumi parents.

"Everyone in IDOLiSH7 is always welcome," Yosuke assured. "Do you need me to give you a lift home?"

"We can get a cab," Mitsuki told her. "I'll drop by again on my next off day."

"No! Go on a date if you have time!" Hiroko urged, chuckling when her sons both rolled their eyes. "Okay, see you boys. Bring everyone else with you next time, alright?"

"If we're free," Iori compromised, giving his mother a quick hug. Mitsuki did the same, and they left the shop to head back to the dorm. They split up into two taxis, Mitsuki with Nagi and the other three together. They brought back some cake for the others to eat, although they highly doubted Sougo would be able to eat it tonight.

Tsumugi sent them a text, telling them that she was also on the way to the dorm with ingredients for a steamboat, and they agreed to meet her outside the building before heading in together.
All Yamato had wanted to do on his off day was to sleep in and have some beer. He'd never signed up to kill his taste buds by eating Sougo's cooking, nor had he signed up to have Sougo as a drinking buddy. He didn't think Sougo would get drunk from just one can of beer and end up demanding more, whining when Yamato didn't give it to him.

To be fair, Sougo hadn't intended to drink. Yamato supposed he only had himself to blame for that.

"Yamato-san, aren't you drinking a little faster than usual today?" Sougo had asked in alarm. The leader had downed three cans of beer in the past fifteen minutes, and the way he was panting slightly didn't seem very good at all.

Yamato looked at Sougo accusingly. "And whose fault is it that I'm eating this? My tongue is screaming."

Sougo bit his lip, looking down guiltily. "But you said you wanted to eat something spicy with beer..."

"There's something called a limit, isn't there?"

"I'm sorry," Sougo sighed. He put another spoonful of the stew into his mouth, wondering what exactly was wrong with it – it tasted perfectly fine, in his opinion. In fact, it was pretty delicious, if he did say so himself. But Yamato had an insane amount of perspiration all over his skin, and he was well on the way to his fourth can of beer already.

"It's no surprise that you damage your stomach, eating stuff like this all the time," Yamato commented, forcing another mouthful of food down his throat and chugging beer to wash the spiciness down. "Eating something like this is the same as an act of self-harm, seriously."

"You don't have to eat it if you don't want to," Sougo said, glancing at the bowl of stew that he'd set aside for Tamaki. If Yamato found it intolerable, he didn't imagine that Tamaki would be able to stomach it either. *All that effort for nothing, huh.*

Yamato sighed. He didn't mean to make Sougo feel bad about himself, but not many people had the same level of tolerance for spicy food that Sougo apparently had. He was about to apologise for his harsh words when the omega stood up suddenly, taking the pot of stew to the kitchen without saying anything. "Ah, Sou, what are you...?"

"I'm adding some milk in," Sougo explained. "To make it milder."

"Oh," Yamato said. "I thought you were about to throw it down the drain."

Sougo chuckled, shaking his head. "I couldn't possibly have you eating it while calling it self-injury," he pointed out. "And if that's the case, Tamaki-kun will develop diabetes soon as well. The way he overeats pudding should be considered self-harm too. Please also scold him in the same way."

Yamato shrugged, taking a sip of the watered-down stew. It was still way too spicy for any normal human being, but it was significantly more acceptable than what he'd been eating moments ago. Yamato wasn't about to complain.

"Hey, Sou. Since I'm going along with your punishment cooking, you should join me for my evening drink," Yamato suggested, wriggling his brows suggestively while starting on his fifth can
Sougo hesitated briefly, knowing full well how he was when he got drunk. Or, at the very least, he knew what people always told him, and it wasn't something he was particularly proud of. But Yamato was already handing him an open can of beer, and Sougo accepted it reluctantly. "Then, please take care of me," Sougo said, taking his first sip of beer and continuing with his food.

It didn't take long for Sougo to get drunk, as he usually did. The first can of beer was finished in a matter of minutes, and then Yamato was opening a new one for him, and then another.

Sougo's phone rang suddenly, but Sougo simply giggled at the device as it vibrated, moving itself across the table. Yamato answered the call. "Hello? Ichi?"

"Is that Iori-kun?" Sougo asked happily. "I want to talk to him!"

"Sou, stop drinking already," Yamato said. He briefly wondered what had possessed him to invite Sougo to drink with him at all. Perhaps some part of him thought that maybe Sougo would have built some sort of alcohol tolerance by now. He clearly hadn't. "You needed him for something? Tama's with you, right?"

"Is that Taa-kun? Taa-kuuuun," Sougo called out, sounding every bit like a needy omega.

Yamato glanced at Sougo with a frown. "Stop that. Come back and save me, please," Yamato pleaded, ending the call abruptly and putting the phone back on the table. Sougo was drinking again, looking somewhat upset as he finished off the last of his stew.

"You know, Yamato-san," Sougo started sombrely. "Have you ever known anyone who'd been told off in the middle of a drinking party at home, then left abruptly, and passed away? Just like that?"

Yamato stared at the omega blankly. Sougo was smiling sadly to himself now, staring into the contents of his beer can before taking another swig of the alcohol. He didn't get to see Sougo drunk very often, since they only ever drank during celebrations and the last time had been a good few months ago, before Sougo opened up about his family history.

Now, though, Sougo was going on and on about how his family always ridiculed his uncle for pursuing music, about how he had disowned his own family for the sake of following in his uncle's footsteps. Yamato wasn't heartless, and it hurt him to hear Sougo talk about his past like that.

All that Sougo was talking about were his regrets and desires – why did he not help his uncle, why did his family treat him like that, how he wanted to become successful to show his father that music was a respectable career too.

"Stop drinking," Yamato told him, gently taking the can of beer from Sougo's hold. Sougo whined, grabbing for the can but falling face-flat onto the table when he couldn't reach it. He was asleep almost instantly, completely knocked out from the beer he'd drunk. "You idiot. If you tell us these things when you're sober, then we'd at least be able to tell you that it's okay."

Naturally, Sougo didn't respond, the only sounds coming from him being soft snores. With a small sigh, Yamato got up, clearing up their empty bowls and putting it into the sink to deal with later. Then he brought a jug of water out to the living room, drinking some of it to flush the alcohol out of his system.

"What an idiot."
It was around thirty minutes later that everyone else arrived, and Yamato waved lazily at them as they came into the living area. "Yo."

Tamaki spotted Sougo immediately. "How much did you let him drink?" Tamaki asked incredulously.

"Four cans, maybe," Yamato replied.

"Souchan," Tamaki called out, shaking Sougo slightly to get him to wake up. The omega groaned, turning his face away from the source of the noise and sighing softly. Tamaki rolled his eyes. "Wake up, or I'll carry you to bed."

"Don't wanna," Sougo whined, pushing Tamaki's hand off his shoulder. Tamaki huffed, sitting down beside his partner and shifting Sougo so that his head was resting on his shoulder. Sougo hummed contentedly, burrowing himself into Tamaki's side and falling back asleep.

"Leave him be," Mitsuki suggested, already heading to the kitchen to prepare something to eat. "Nagi, you wanted to eat hotpot, right? Come help me prepare the ingredients."

"Okay!" Nagi exclaimed, and Yamato winced at the loudness of the alpha's voice.

Tsumugi took a seat at the table, as did Riku and Iori. "How was your dinner, Yamato-san?" Tsumugi asked. Yamato had given her live updates as he ate Sougo's cooking, complaining to her and asking her why she'd told Sougo that he'd mentioned wanting to eat spicy food while drinking beer.

"You ate Sougo-san's cooking?"

"No wonder you're sweating so much."

Yamato glared at the couple. "You two are too in tandem with each other."

Iori shrugged, his stomach growling slightly from the lack of food. Nagi, Riku, and Tamaki had eaten something at Fonte Chocolat, Mitsuki had to taste foods while working in the kitchen, and Yamato had clearly just eaten. Out of the members, Iori was fairly certain that he was the only one who hadn't eaten anything since lunch. He was starving.

Nagi brought the portable stove out, setting it in the middle of the table while Mitsuki carried the ingredients over. "I'm guessing you haven't eaten, right Iori?" Mitsuki asked, turning the stove on high so that the soup would boil more quickly.

"Eh!?" Riku asked in alarm. "Since lunch?"

"I would've eaten at the shop," Iori said dryly, pursing his lips, "if only somebody wasn't at our house."

"You went to their house?" Yamato whistled. "How bold, Riku."

Riku blushed, pouting at the implication behind Yamato's words. "It was Nagi's idea!"

"But Mitsuki's mum brought us there!"
"What was their house like, Riku-san?"

"You're being noisy," Tamaki suddenly snapped, as Sougo stirred slightly from the commotion. The others winced; it wasn't often that Tamaki lost his patience this quickly. Even less often than that was to have him use his alpha voice on them.

"Taa-kun...?"

Tamaki sighed. "Go back to sleep, Souchan."

Sougo shook his head groggily, clearly still under the influence of the alcohol he'd consumed. "I cooked for you," Sougo mumbled, blinking awake slowly and looking up at Tamaki. Tamaki spared a glance at the omega, regretting his decision immediately – Sougo was ridiculously cute when he was drunk, cheeks flushed and pouting slightly. "I'll go get it..." he yawned.

"It's okay," Tamaki insisted, but Sougo was already heading to the kitchen, swaying slightly as he walked. Tamaki stared blankly as Sougo retrieved the bowl of whatever it was that he'd cooked, sighing in resignation to his fate. "I'll just die then."

"You don't have to if you don't want to," Mitsuki offered.

"Trust me, Tama," Yamato chimed in. "I'd suggest you don't."

"I'll get you a cup of pudding," Riku said, walking to the fridge to grab said pudding. He had a feeling that one wouldn't be enough, but he also doubted that Tamaki would force himself to finish the entire serving. That sounded suicidal at best.

Sougo came back with the bowl of stew, putting it in front of Tamaki and looking at the alpha somewhat hopefully. Tamaki tried not to show his alarm too outwardly, but the sight of the stew was something else. It was as if it had been made purely from chili peppers. "...do I have to?" Tamaki asked hesitantly.

The change in Sougo's mood was instant, the omega biting slightly on his lower lip and eyeing the bowl sadly. "I... guess it's fine," Sougo said, forcing a small smile. If Sougo was overly serious and sombre while sober, it was doubly bad when he was drunk. "I just thought it would be nice to cook for you for once. But, as expected, you wouldn't want to eat it, huh?"

Tamaki could already feel himself regretting all his life choices. "Fine. One bite first, okay?"

Sougo's face lit up, even as everyone else's eyes widened at Tamaki's bold decision.

"A-are you sure, Tamaki-san?" Tsumugi asked worriedly.

Yamato was looking at him in a way that screamed, "Don't do it, Tama. You'll regret it."

"Yeah," he said in reply to Tsumugi's question, looking at Sougo who was wearing an expectant expression on his face. "Just a small bite first," he reiterated, scooping up a little bit of stew onto the spoon and eyeing it warily. It was probably the reddest thing he'd ever eaten.

The moment Tamaki put it into his mouth and the stew made contact with his tongue, tears pricked at his eyes. His tongue felt like it was on fire, and he quickly took the cup of pudding that Riku had kindly opened for him, swallowing the stew before shoving a few spoonfuls of pudding into his mouth. Even still, his mouth was burning, and so was his throat.

"Is it that bad?" Sougo asked in a small voice. He looked almost like he wanted to cry, and damn if
Tamaki didn't feel like a horrible alpha. It wasn't exactly his fault that he didn't have the same tolerance for spicy food that Sougo had, but that didn't mean he liked to see the omega on the verge of tears.

"It's not bad," Tamaki said, his voice sounding strange even to himself. His tongue was past the point of pain now, and it had pretty much lost all feeling. He blinked the tears away, groaning inwardly when they ended up trailing down his cheeks. "I'm just not good with spicy food."

Sougo pouted. "I'm sorry."

If Sougo ended up looking any cuter than this, Tamaki might just kiss him.

...or not, since he couldn't really feel his lips either. Kissing Sougo without being able to feel anything didn't seem like a really appealing option. "Why not I feed you instead?"

"That's so sweet, Tamaki!" Nagi gushed, and Mitsuki elbowed his boyfriend in the side.

"Okay..." Sougo conceded reluctantly, opening his mouth obediently when Tamaki held a spoonful of stew in front of him. Tamaki didn't speak as he fed Sougo, letting his mouth recover from the aftereffects of one mouthful of Sougo's stew.

Tsumugi glanced at the others, clapping her hands together to get their attention. "Shall we eat?"

Iori heaved a sigh of relief. "Yes, please."

"Want me to feed you too?" Riku asked teasingly.

Iori rolled his eyes, cheeks burning slightly. "No. I might starve to death with how slow you are."

"Hey!"

"Okay," Mitsuki said, eyeing the couple sternly. "The soup is boiling. I'd suggest you throw something in to let it cook before Iori really starves to death."

---

After finishing his second bowl of stew that night, Sougo fell back asleep against Tamaki's shoulder. The alpha was glad he'd had some food before having that mouthful of stew; if he'd eaten it on an empty stomach, he was sure he'd be in the toilet right now.

Yamato had somehow managed to rope Mitsuki into a second round of beer, god knows where all the beer even came from, and now the two eldest members of IDOLiSH7 were drunk. Nagi was watching on in horror as Yamato tried to steal a kiss from Mitsuki. "No, no! You can't do that, Yamato!" Nagi cried, pulling Mitsuki towards him by the waist.

"Huhhh?" Yamato slurred, clearly more drunk than any of them ever remembered seeing him.

"Why?"

"Get your own boyfriend or girlfriend!"

Riku leaned in to whisper to Iori and Tsumugi. "I didn't realise Yamato-san was a touchy drunk."
"A perverted drunk, you mean," Tamaki chimed in, happily eating the decidedly not spicy hotpot. He stopped abruptly, narrowing his eyes at Yamato dangerously. "Yamasan, you'd better not have made any moves on Souchan before we came."

Yamato hiccupped, giggling stupidly and waving Tamaki's accusations off. "No way. I wouldn't do that to a guy. Who do you think I am?" Yamato asked, sounding offended by Tamaki's words.

Iori stared at the leader blankly. "Right, because you didn't just try to kiss nii-san. Maybe Rokuya-san should knock him out so that he stops this," Iori stated. "I'm not sure how much more of a drunk Nikaidou-san I can handle."

"I-Iori, that's a little..." Riku trailed off.

"You wouldn't say that if it was me he was trying to make a move on," Iori pointed out, snorting at the way Riku's smile dropped off his face entirely. "Thought so. Anyway, it's getting late. Should you be heading back soon, Manager?"

Tsumugi smiled sheepishly, nodding as she checked the time. "I should. The President's going to be worried about a girl being alone in a guys' dorm at this time," she chuckled. "Even though most of you are already attached."

"You're his only daughter, after all," Riku said in understanding. "We'll walk you out."

"Nagicchi, do something about Yamasan."

"Stop trying to kiss Mitsuki!"

"Naaagi, you're holding onto me too tightly. I can't breathe."

"Okay, off we go," Iori decided, herding Riku and Tsumugi out of the living area while they had a chance.

They walked her to the car park on the ground floor, waving to her as she drove off. Then Iori sighed, not entirely sure if he wanted to head back to the dorm just yet. But it was late, and the temperatures were low. He didn't want to risk Riku getting an attack from being in the cold for too long. "Let's head back."

"Do you want to maybe go and shower first?" Riku suggested, sticking his hands in his pockets as they walked back up the stairs. It was past eleven already; Riku hadn't realised how much time had passed while they ate and chatted. They still had an early morning meeting tomorrow regarding their Black or White performance.

"Sure," Iori agreed. "We can clear up the kitchen afterwards. I think Rokuya-san has enough to handle, and Yotsuba-san needs to bring Ousaka-san back to his room as well."

They quickly grabbed a change of clothes from their rooms, heading to the showers together. Iori made sure they kept their backs to each other as they showered – he'd bathed with other guys before, of course he had, but Riku was a different matter entirely. If Iori had to see Riku naked, or vice versa, he might die of embarrassment.

By the time they went back to the kitchen, Nagi was hoisting Mitsuki into his arms in a princess carry, winking at the couple as Mitsuki wrapped his arms loosely around Nagi's neck. "I'm tired..." Mitsuki mumbled in his sleep, burying his face into the crook of Nagi's neck. Iori was mildly surprised by this, because Mitsuki had never been in a relationship that was this intimate before. He was genuinely glad for his brother.
Yamato was presumably already in his room, and Tamaki was finally trying to get Sougo back to his room. He couldn't even get the omega to let go of him, though, Sougo clinging onto him like a koala. "You're heavy, Souchan," Tamaki grumbled, sighing defeatedly when Sougo giggled and snuggled further into Tamaki's chest. "Why do I have to deal with this... Up we go."

The alpha ended up standing up with Sougo still clutching onto his torso, supporting the back of Sougo's thighs to make sure that he didn't end up falling. For someone who was supposedly dead drunk, Sougo had an impressive grip on Tamaki. "Be careful," Riku called out, watching worriedly as MEZZO left the living area. Once they were out of sight, he turned back to Iori. "Where do we start?"

Chapter End Notes

I personally don't like the way I ended this chapter bc it feels so awkward lmao but I had no idea how to end it ;;;

Five more chapters to go!!

P.S. Happy belated birthday Bansan <3
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Riku sneezed, and Iori heaved a small sigh. He tugged Riku's scarf a little tighter around the alpha’s neck, and Iori contemplated if he should just take off his own scarf and wrap it around Riku's neck as well. They couldn't afford Riku falling sick now, and Iori would do whatever he could to make sure Riku stayed healthy.

"Don't be such a mother hen, Ichi," Yamato chuckled, rubbing his hands together to warm them up. A month had passed and, with it, Tamaki's rut. They were just a couple of days away from Christmas now, and although IDOLiSH7 had nothing much planned for the holiday, Black or White was also coming up soon.

Riku was as excited and nervous as one would expect. They were finally going to face off with TRIGGER on a grand stage, grander than any stage they'd stood on thus far, and Riku really, really didn't want to mess up. He'd been working doubly hard during practices, and honestly Iori was a little worried that he would end up overworking himself. The thought of Riku collapsing wasn't one that Iori wanted to entertain, so he made sure to keep a close eye on Riku's condition at all times.

He knew Riku found it sort of stifling – he would too, if he put himself in the alpha's shoes. He didn't exactly mean to hover so protectively around Riku, but it wasn't just him that would be affected if Riku collapsed. Sure, he would feel like the worst omega ever if he let his alpha work his body past his limits again, but they also couldn't afford something like that to happen just two weeks before Black or White.

"It's fine to worry, isn't it?" Sougo asked with an understanding smile. Tamaki was walking beside him, eating pudding as he usually did.

They were all headed to the office to discuss their promotion plans after Black or White; Otoharu hadn't told them what he had in mind regarding promotions for the new year, but they were certain that they would have to come up with a new song to have a fighting chance against TRIGGER. Leopard Eyes had already broken TRIGGER's previous record sales and was still climbing steadily in sales with each passing day. In order to stand a chance to win, IDOLiSH7 couldn't be resting on their laurels.

They made their way into the all-too-familiar meeting room, closing the door and seating themselves. Mitsuki stretched slightly, failing to stifle a yawn from making its way out of him. "I'm glad we've been getting a lot of work, really, but I'm kind of looking forward to getting a break once Black or White is over," he admitted, dropping his head onto Nagi's shoulder. His lips curved into a small smile when the alpha wrapped an arm around his shoulder, pulling Mitsuki closer to him and letting the beta snuggle into his chest.

Ever since their win at JIMA, the amount of work that they got had increased significantly. If they'd thought that they were busy after the Soundship performance, well, that was nothing compared to what they'd been experiencing over the past several weeks.
Yamato hadn't even had the chance to sleep properly for a few days in a row now, being preoccupied with the filming of the second season of Nemesis. They were still regularly guesting on Shimooka's programme, MEZZO had their own concert appearances, and Riku co-hosted a radio show with Mitsuki sometimes. Iori was still helping out with management, and Nagi, as always, had his modelling gigs with various high-end brands.

IDOLiSH7 was doing well, extremely so, but they were also busier than they ever remembered being.

With Black or White just around the corner now, the group had to devote whatever extra time they had in between schedules to practice for the upcoming showdown. It was tough, but it also meant that once Black or White was over, whether they won or lost, they would be able to catch a breather for at least a couple of days. Or at least they could hope so.

Tsumugi was discussing something with Banri, and the rest of them were just waiting for her to update them on the song they would be performing for Black or White. They needed time to distribute the lines, come up with a viable choreography and to perfect the performance. With less than two weeks, that was a lot to ask of the group; after all, it'd only been months since they'd debuted.

Tamaki grunted in agreement. "I'm sick of taking the shinkansen."

"Would you rather a plane?" Iori asked dryly, recalling the first time they'd taken a flight together. It had only been a domestic flight, back when they'd gone to Okinawa to film the PV for Natsu Shiyouze, but Tamaki had been scared out of his wits. Iori vaguely recalled pitying Riku and Mitsuki for being seated next to Tamaki.

Tamaki shook his head quickly, pouting when Sougo chuckled softly. "It's not funny!"

"It's not," Sougo agreed easily. "Tamaki-kun is just kind of cute, is all I was thinking."

"Okay, enough with the flirting," Yamato rolled his eyes. "Have you seen the latest music charts?"

"TRIGGER is still topping all of them, as expected," Riku sighed. He was glad for Tenn that TRIGGER was still gaining popularity, but Riku also knew that he was putting unnecessary pressure on himself. He could tell Iori was worried about him, and Iori's concerns were valid, but it wasn't as if Riku was able to just stop being stressed just because he wanted to.

"Oh, Riku, don't be too worried!" Nagi assured, as cheerful as ever. "We'll do just fine!"

The door to the meeting room opened abruptly, and all seven idols turned to be met with a wide-eyed Banri. "Nagi-kun, could you come with me for a bit?" he asked, not even waiting for Nagi to reply before grabbing him by the arm and leading him out. He seemed completely oblivious to the fact that Mitsuki had been leaning against his boyfriend, and the beta barely had enough time to sit upright before Nagi was pulled away.

"What was that...?" Mitsuki asked in confusion. Everyone else was just as stumped as he was, and they peeked into the office to find out what was going on.

Nagi was speaking on the phone in accented English, with Tsumugi and Banri standing on either side of him. They looked anxious about whatever it was that was going on, carefully listening to the bits and pieces of what they could hear. None of them were especially well-versed in English, not even Iori, and it didn't help that Nagi's English had a tinge of his native accent – English wasn't his country's language, after all.
"Okay! I will take care of it."

Banri turned to Tsumugi. "Did you just hear him say okay?"

Nagi's face lit up in delight. "IDOLiSH7 will happily sing for you!"

"Did he just say IDOLiSH7 will sing!?"

Riku's eyes widened. "Who are we singing for?"

"How would I know!?!"

Nagi put the phone down, and Tsumugi immediately asked, "What did the other party say?"

"That was Douglas Rootbank," Nagi started, and Sougo choked on his own saliva.

"Souchan? Souchan, get a hold of yourself!" Tamaki exclaimed.

"He will be coming to Japan for his Christmas performance, and he wants us to be his opening act."

"D-Douglas Rootbank?!" Tsumugi asked incredulously, and for a brief moment it sounded like something dropped in Otoharu's office. And glass breaking. Something crashing. None of them were really sure.

"The popular pop-rock singer from America, Douglas Rootbank!?!" Banri repeated.

"Yes!" Nagi replied brightly. "He saw a video of us online and became a fan!"

Sougo was still freaking out, Tamaki was fussing over him slightly, and the others turned to look at him.

"Who is Douglas Rootbank?"

---

Once they were all gathered in the meeting room once more, Sougo launched into a detailed description of who exactly Douglas Rootbank was: an amazing artist who was leading the worldwide pop scene. His albums always placed on hit charts all over the world, and his most recent single had already sold over 5 million copies.

Riku blinked at the omega. "Sougo-san is unusually excited today..." he commented.

"And my uncle also liked him," Sougo gushed. "I can't believe I get to meet him."

The scowl on Tamaki's face wasn't a pleasant one, but he kept his mouth shut. It wasn't often that he got to see Sougo this happy, and even if it wasn't because of him, Tamaki didn't want to be the one to put a damper on Sougo's mood.

Yamato, however, clearly didn't seem to mind.

"I see. That's great, Sou."

"Is that all?"
The beta stared blankly back at Sougo. "...what else should I say?"

"It's Douglas Rootbank!" Sougo exploded, and Tamaki winced. Sougo wasn't angry, per se – he sounded more appalled than anything. "Aren't your reactions a little weak? Do you not know much about Western music?"

"I don't know much, no," Iori admitted. His knowledge was vast, but only when it came to things he was interested in or would potentially be affected by. Western music had many good songs, but it was too much of a hassle to find lyrics translations.

Mitsuki nodded in agreement. "I don't listen to it much, because I don't understand the lyrics..."

A determined look came across Sougo's face. "I understand. I'll be holding a lecture starting from now. We can't have anyone coming across as rude in front of Douglas Rootbank, after all," he decided. Tamaki wanted to groan, but he didn't really want to be on the receiving end of Sougo's wrath. As much as he loved Sougo, he didn't quite want to sit through one of his music otaku lectures.

"Wait, you're going that far?" Riku asked incredulously, shrinking back against Iori when Sougo glared at him. It was a relatively mild glare, but a glare nonetheless, and Iori almost felt bad for him.

"Prepare a pen and paper. I want you to take notes without letting anything I say slip by."

Yamato cleared his throat. "The fact that you like him a lot has come across just fine," he said, getting up from his seat. "But I'll have to pass this time. I have a filming to go to."

Iori glanced at Riku hesitantly. He didn't want to leave Riku to sit through this alone, but it wasn't as if he wanted to sit through a lecture by Sougo. He got up. "I also have work to do."

"Iori," Riku whined, feeling completely betrayed by his boyfriend.

"Me too," Mitsuki said.

"It's time for anime."

"I'm hungry. I'll go and buy some pudding."

Riku watched in despair as his members left one by one. "Ah, wai-"

The door closed, and Sougo smiled at the redhead. "Riku-kun, I'll teach you strictly, one-on-one."

"O-okay. Thank you very much."

---

Iori looked up from his laptop as Riku came into the living area – without Sougo. "How did it go?"

"He's amazing! Douglas is really amazing!"

Iori couldn't help but sigh softly. "And as usual, Nanase-san's been so easily influenced."
Riku pouted. "But he is!" he insisted, and Iori had to bite the inside of his cheeks to prevent himself from breaking out into a smile. _How cute_. "His dancing is so extreme, but yet his voice really comes out! You absolutely need to watch his concert DVD too! We're super lucky to be able to meet him!"

When Iori didn't give any sort of reply, not entirely sure how he was supposed to respond, Riku turned to the elder Izumi. "Mitsuki, too! You'd definitely like him!" Riku said firmly.

Mitsuki looked apprehensive. "I've devoted my mind and body to Zero."

"Then Zero can stay at number one!" Riku replied quickly. "I'll come over to your room later with Sougo-san, so let's watch it together!"

Riku could be awfully pushy if he wanted to be – most of the time, he managed to get his way. It wasn't only with Iori, because all of the members had a soft spot for the alpha. It might have been because his health wasn't the best, or because he was their beloved centre, but everyone tended to give in to Riku more easily than they did to others.

"I won't be heading to your room tonight then, Nanase-san," Iori said without looking at the alpha. He could feel, could _smell_, Riku's disappointment, but Iori had schoolwork to do and schedules to plan. There was more than enough time to find out more about Douglas Rootbank after he'd settled all the important work.

It did feel a little strange to break their night-time routine simply because Iori didn't want to get caught up in Riku's newfound love for Douglas Rootbank, but Iori couldn't afford that sort of time right now. He would make it up to Riku later, maybe cook a nice meal for him as a form of apology.

"Maybe we should watch it in Sougo-san's room, then," Riku thought aloud. "I don't want to disturb you when you have so much work to do."

"It's fine," Iori assured. Riku's room was in between his and Mitsuki's room, meaning that they would be two rooms away and Iori doubted they would be _that_ loud. "You won't be disturbing me, I promise."

"You're sure?" Riku asked.

Iori chuckled, nodding in reply. "Yeah. I'll finish up my work in my room. See you."

Riku managed to plant a brief peck on Iori's cheek before the omega went off, grinning as Iori's cheeks burned a bright pink. Mitsuki sighed forlornly, watching as his brother escaped from the clutches of their very insistent centre. "Do I have to..."

---

"Douglas is the best."

Iori raised an incredulous brow. All it'd took was one night, and suddenly Mitsuki was a fan of the American singer. Not that he doubted the ability of Douglas Rootbank, considering how highly Sougo spoke of him, but for _Mitsuki_ to cave so easily was still surprising. _So much for devoting himself to Zero_.

"Isn't he!?!" Riku and Sougo cried in unison.
Iori and Tamaki each let out a soft sigh.

They were in the meeting room again, heading to the office right after breakfast because Otoharu had ordered them to be there. Iori wasn't sure what had transpired after the three locked themselves in Mitsuki's room to watch DVDs of Douglas' concerts, but Riku had crashed his room after they were done. The alpha had been smiling giddily, probably the aftereffects of watching an exciting performance, and had made Iori promise to watch the DVD with him tonight.

Iori wanted to refuse, but he knew he was weak when it came to Riku. Whenever the alpha looked at him with that expression, honestly, there was no way Iori wouldn't give in.

Riku hadn't said much about the DVDs apart from that though, not wanting to accidentally give away spoilers of the things that Douglas did or said during his concert. All he'd said was that Iori would definitely also become a fan of Douglas, as long as he watched one of his concerts.

Mitsuki nodded. "I cried. It was amazing. He was always smiling, like he was having so much fun!" the beta exclaimed. "I started smiling, and before I realized it I was crying... I can't believe someone like him called out to us..."

"Oh, Mitsuki, don't cry!" Nagi said, and Mitsuki rolled his eyes, even as he smiled fondly at the alpha.

"It's like a dream," Sougo agreed.

"Better than being with me?"

"I can't compare this with that, Tamaki-kun!"

"I wonder if I'll be able to get his signature."

"Nanase-san..."

Yamato cleared his throat. "Oi, the three of you. Don't talk together with your eyes sparkling like that," he grumbled. "It's kind of creeping me out."

Mitsuki scowled, but before he could complain about it, Tsumugi opened the door to the meeting room. "Ah, could everyone gather in the President's office, please?"

They did as told, standing in a neat line in front of Otoharu's desk. The President seemed deathly serious about something, although the image of Kinako seated in his lap helped to alleviate the tension a little. His gaze swept across each of the seven boys. "Since we were appointed by Douglas himself, it wouldn't do to not release your new song at his concert."

"Sir, could you possibly be a fan as well?" Yamato asked carefully, not wanting to make any assumptions.

Otoharu nodded gravely. "It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that I devoted my youth to Douglas Rootbank," he told them, and Tsumugi had to bite back a smile. She was no stranger to the impressive collection of CDs and DVDs that her father owned.

"Ohh, he must be really amazing then," Tamaki commented. "Maybe I should watch the DVD too."

Sougo clicked his tongue. "When I tell you to watch, you escape. But when the President says that he's a big fan of Douglas-san, suddenly you're willing to watch?" Sougo asked, a tinge of annoyance in his voice. Sure, Otoharu was important. He was the President of Takanashi
Productions, after all. But it would have been nice if Tamaki took his opinions as seriously as he did Otoharu's. So much for being a fated pair.

"It's just, you can be a little... passionate, sometimes," Tamaki said. Sougo's glower didn't waver.

"I'll be watching it tonight as well. Perhaps we could watch it together as a group?" Iori suggested.

"Tada!" Otoharu exclaimed, presenting the group with a new set of music scores. "This is IDOLiSH7's newest song! I expect you boys to do great things with this song, both at Douglas' concert as well as at Black or White."

Riku took the scores from Otoharu, eyes scanning quickly through the first verse up till the chorus. A slow smile spread across his face. "Wow... this song feels like it could really get you emotional! And it sounds danceable, too!"

"I can't wait to sing it!"

Otoharu smiled at the boys. "While watching Douglas' concerts, feel that inspiration and come up with the choreography," he told them. "I bought a new screen for that purpose."

Tsumugi's eyes widened slightly. "Oh, dad..." she sighed.

"It's at home, so could I ask you to help carry it over? Iori-kun, Tamaki-kun, you two stay here and watch over the office," he instructed. The high schoolers nodded in understanding, watching as everyone else left the office to head to the Takanashi household.

"Be careful, you two," Sougo told them before shutting the door behind him.

Tamaki was quick to take a seat, already pulling out some snacks from his backpack. He held one out to Iori, and the omega immediately recognised it as the Christmas edition Usamimi Friends chocolate – the one that Tamaki had managed to get a rare Loppu-chan from, but Iori had given it up to Tsumugi. "Iorin, want some?"

Iori sighed softly. "It's fine, but... Yotsuba-san, do you need the freebies that come with those snacks?"

"Nope. Didn't you buy a bunch of these for me before, too?"

"A-ah, well, it would be a waste to throw them away, so I'll take them off you," Iori offered. He wondered if he was being too obvious. "It's just with the intention to recycle them."

"Okay," Tamaki said, glancing up as a door slammed open. It'd barely been three minutes since everyone left; surely they couldn't be back already. "Are they back...?"

Iori got up to check. "Maybe they forgot to take their phone with them," Iori reasoned, twisting the doorknob to greet whoever it was. "Welcome ba."

"Hahaha, IDOLiSH-" 

Iori slammed the door shut, eyes wide as he pressed his back against the door.

Tamaki raised a brow at his fellow member. "Why'd you close the door?"

"There was someone strange," Iori told the alpha. He'd only caught a brief glimpse of the man, but he'd been wearing shades despite it being the start of winter, with a oddly colourful headband and, honestly, his fashion was plain weird.
Snorting, Tamaki put his chocolate down and went over to the door. "Yeah, right. Open it."

Iori shook his head adamantly, standing his place. "I don't want to. Ever since I was a child, my parents strictly taught me not to open the door when there was a stranger."

"Then I'll open it."

Tamaki left no room for argument, and Iori stepped aside briefly to let the alpha open the door. The moment it was opened, the strange man was beaming at them once again. "Hahaha! IDOLiSH7! My name is-

Tamaki slammed the door shut. "There really was."

"Right!?” Iori exclaimed. The man didn't seem hostile, but he was definitely not a local, and Iori was too young to die. Not that the man looked like a murderer, but one could never be too careful. His parents had drilled that into him since before he'd started kindergarten.

"He was really showy, like a namahage," Tamaki agreed. "Souchan told us to be careful."

"Maybe he's a stalker..."

Realisation dawned on Tamaki. "Oh, maybe he's that. The person who's coming to install the screen."

"I see," Iori muttered. Otoharu certainly hadn't mentioned any sort of technician coming over to set up the screen, and certainly not a foreign one. "I wonder if he can speak Japanese. We should let him in."

Tamaki opened the door again, and immediately the man was wrapping his arms around Iori. "Hahaha! Nice to meet you! My name is-"

Iori didn't mean to be rude, really, but physical affection was still so foreign to him. He didn't know if this man was an alpha, beta, or omega, but the thought of anyone other than Riku being so familiar with him didn't sit well with Iori. "H-hold on a moment! Don't just suddenly hug me! You're far too familiar," Iori told the man, pushing him away slightly.

"Oooh! My name-"

Tamaki cut him off. "Hey pops, we're underage, so we won't get hard stuff if an adult isn't here."

"We won't buy any vases or grave sites, either."

"Konnichiwa!"

Iori glanced at Tamaki. So the man can speak Japanese. "Konnichiwa."

"Konnichiwa."

"Hahaha! My-"

Iori resisted the urge to sigh, watching blankly as Tamaki shook his head and cut the man off again. "For now, come here," he instructed. Iori wondered if the man was a beta. "We don't have the screen yet."

"Yay! My name is-"
"Not yet," Tamaki repeated exasperatedly. Iori almost felt bad for the man, with how often they were cutting him off. His English wasn't good by any means, but he could at least tell that the man was attempting to introduce himself. "Screen, nai, got it?"

The strange man blinked. "Nai."

Tamaki perked up. "Iorin! We can communicate! I can speak English."

"Then ask him if he needs a stepladder," Iori suggested. What Tamaki considered as knowing English seemed awfully forced in Iori's opinion, but whatever. Better Tamaki than him.

"Kyatatsu? How do you say that in English?" Tamaki asked in confusion. An idea seemed to come to mind. "Ah. Hashigo. Go up? Go down?"

"Yes...?"

"He says he needs it."

Iori fetched the ladder from the storeroom next door, setting it against the wall. "Then I'll leave one here. Please use it," he said. He was still sceptical about the way Tamaki was communicating with the unknown man, but it wasn't as if he would be able to do any better than the alpha.

The man was completely and utterly confused by the appearance of the stepladder. "What?"

"He means you can get on it," Tamaki explained slowly, as if he was speaking to a little kid, even though he was easily twice their age. He was probably at least around Otoharu's age, if Iori had to hazard a guess. He pointed to the lowest step on the ladder. "Here, ashi, okay. Foot, here."

A look of understanding came across the man's face. "Okay, okay!"

Iori watched as the man climbed up the stepladder, until his head was nearly touching the ceiling and he couldn't go up any further. The omega's eyes caught sight of the ceiling light, and he only hesitated for a brief moment before asking, "While you're up there, could you take out that light cover? I've been bothered by how dirty it is."

He looked at them in confusion, and Tamaki pointed to the light. "There, that light!" he said, mimicking the action of pulling the light cover off. "Cover, off. Gui, paka-"

"Paka -"

Iori was relatively certain the man had no idea what he was doing changing their light cover for them, if the look on his face indicated anything. But he did it anyway, handing it over to Tamaki who set it down immediately. "You're good at this," Iori commented, turning to look at the door when he caught Riku's scent getting closer to them.

The door clicked open, and Riku's voice floated into the room. "We're back..."

And then the redhead cut himself off, staring at the figure on the stepladder with wide eyes. He opened his mouth to speak, barely holding himself back from pointing at the man in case he came across as rude. "W-why is Douglas Rootbank replacing the light cover?!"

Iori whipped his head back to look at the man, dressed in bizarre fashion and with shoulder-length hair. It'd been obvious enough that he was a foreigner, definitely not a Japanese man, but Iori hadn't thought that this could possibly be Douglas Rootbank. After all, hadn't he just contacted them a day ago?
"Douglas!?

"This old guy!??"

Chapter End Notes

RIP Riku you have been abandoned by your boyfriend. Tamaki is an idiot and so is Iori. 
I love Douglas Rootbank he is a great man.

Four more chapters till the end of this Really Long Thing :'}
Tamaki had never seen Sougo this livid before.

The moment Riku had let out his exclamation of "Why is Douglas Rootbank replacing the light cover?!", all hell had broken loose. Sougo probably apologised at least forty times a minute, if not more, and the glare he'd directed at Tamaki wasn't something that the alpha wanted to relive.

Nagi came to the rescue barely a few minutes later, having been lagging behind the group and, ironically, talking about Douglas with the Takanashis. Yamato had alerted them of the apparent situation, dragging Nagi over into the office to be met with the sight of three of their groupmates profusely apologising to the Western singer.

It took some time for the fuss to die down, Otoharu also beginning to apologise to Douglas in every language that he could think of and Tsumugi hurrying around to prepare some tea and snacks for their surprise guest. The newly-bought screen was all but forgotten in a corner of the room, and now everyone was seated in the meeting room, waiting expectantly for Douglas to say something.

"Nice to meet you, IDOLiSH7! My name is Douglas Rootbank!"

"Maybe if you hadn't cut his introduction off so many times, we would've been able to find out who he was!" Iori hissed, trying to keep his voice as low as possible.

"I deeply, truly apologize for how remarkably rude our members have been to you on this occasion," Sougo said, standing up and bowing a full ninety-degree bow to Douglas. "So that this kind of discourtesy never happens again, I will diligently work at my professional duties."

Nagi sighed, shaking his head at Sougo's words. "Oh, Sougo. That is too much to translate."

From what they'd found out, Douglas was an alpha – not surprising, considering the kind of stage presence he had. He was also married, but whether he was mated or not, they didn't know. Still, it made the couples in IDOLiSH7 feel a little better about being in a relationship, although their circumstances were considerably different from Douglas'.

"Then, please sincerely and earnestly convey to him that I will take all responsibility and hand over my pinkie if he will accept it," Sougo said seriously. Tamaki blanched; he didn't want Sougo to lose his finger because he didn't realise that the man in front of them was Douglas Rootbank. Surely his partner didn't need to go that far.

"No, please treasure your pinkie," Nagi told him with another sigh.

"I didn't expect that Douglas-san would come all the way to our office!" Tsumugi exclaimed, effectively stopping Sougo from offering any other parts of his body as a means of apology. "I'm deeply moved!"

"As am I!" Otoharu echoed, and he looked to be on the verge of tears.

Douglas laughed heartily, saying something in English that none of them understood. Nagi's face lit
up, and he translated for them, "It seems he wanted to surprise us."

Yamato eyed his star struck members with a small smile on his face. He pushed each of them towards Douglas slightly. "These guys are huge fans," he told the Western idol, waiting for Nagi to translate for him. "Go on, ask for his signature."

"Ah, but that's..."

"A signature is..."

"We can't accept that..."

Even as the three of them said that, Yamato spotted the blank shikishis they were holding onto. He nearly snorted at how ridiculous they were being. He knew that it was probably intimidating to be standing in front of an idol they really admired, although he didn't really understand the feeling personally, but they were all fellow idols now. He'd thought that at least Sougo would be used to being around high-profile people, but clearly, he'd forgotten how much of a music otaku the omega was. He gave them another soft push. "Don't be so hesitant."

They each approached Douglas hesitantly, holding out the shikishi with both hands. "Hahaha! Okay, okay!" Douglas exclaimed, happily giving his autograph to each of them. When he was done, he passed the marker back to Otoharu who looked at it like it was a godsend.

Otoharu wasn't the only one. Tamaki could almost see Sougo's eyes sparkling in amazement as he gripped onto the shikishi tightly, as if it would disappear if he put it down or took his eyes off of it for even a second. Tamaki would be jealous, but Sougo would probably be even more pissed off with him if he said anything, so he opted to keep quiet.

"Douglas' signature," Sougo said in amazement. He looked up to meet the gaze of the elder. "Thank you so much. Even if my room burns down, I will absolutely protect this. Please tell him that."

"Oh, Sougo, your recent expressions are too heavy," Nagi sighed.

Tamaki groaned in mild annoyance. It was as if dealing with Sougo's obsession over TRIGGER wasn't enough, and now he had to deal with his boyfriend's obsession over Douglas as well. "He wasn't even angry when I made a hole open in his stomach, but when I made this old guy-"

Sougo was quick to shoot another glare in Tamaki's direction, this one more threatening than the first. "Don't call him old guy," Sougo warned, a bite in his voice that indicated he wasn't kidding around.

"-Douglas take off the light cover to replace it, he got super angry."

"I was super angry too!" Otoharu chimed in, a stern frown on his usually kind face. "I was about to take responsibility and slit my stomach open."

For Sougo to say something like offering his pinkie was one thing, but for the President of Takanashi Productions to agree with him was plain crazy. "Aren't you important?" Tamaki asked incredulously. It wasn't that Sougo wasn't important – he was probably one of the most important people to Tamaki now, if not the most important, but the company would be nothing without Otoharu running it.

"Douglas is more important!"

"Oooh," was all Tamaki could reply with. It seemed that Douglas was an even bigger figure than he'd originally thought. It wasn't every day that he had not one, but two people offering to cut their
pinkies off or stomachs open for the sake of one man.

The few of them hadn't even realised that Douglas had been saying something, not until Nagi translated his words. "I watched the video with the seven stars, and my heart quivered. I absolutely wanted to meet all of you. I am happy I can spend Christmas with you. Let's spend the hottest night together... is what he says," Nagi told them.

Douglas nodded, although he probably wouldn't know even if Nagi had mistranslated anything. "Hahahaha! Happy Christmas! IDOLiSH7!"

Riku chuckled; he could understand that much. "It's a little early, but Merry Christmas!"

"I look forward to working with you that day!" Mitsuki grinned. "Douglas is the best!"

"Hahahaha! Yay! Saikou!"

"Yay!" Tamaki echoed, and even if Sougo was still mad at him, he couldn't help but smile at the younger. Tamaki was ridiculously cute sometimes.

"We're lucky enough to have a great musician here. Why don't you ask some questions?" Otoharu suggested. He was sure that even more senior idol groups, such as TRIGGER or Re:vale, would love to have a chance to meet Douglas in a private space like this. There was no better time to ask for small tips on how to triumph over their rival group at Black or White than now.

Riku nodded in understanding. "That's right. Um..." he trailed off, trying to think of a way to phrase his question properly. "We have a large concert coming up, and we'll be having a match with our rivals there. Are there any secret tips to help us win? Nagi, try asking that."

"Okay," the blond said, quickly translating Riku's sentence into English.

Mitsuki eyed his boyfriend with envy. "Nagi's amazing, isn't he," he mumbled, feeling a blush creep onto his face when Iori raised his brow at him. "I didn't mean it in a dreamy way or anything! It's just that, if I knew I could directly speak with Douglas, I would've studied English too."

"I'll teach you!" Nagi offered enthusiastically. "We can have one-on-one sessions every day!"

Douglas replied the question, and Mitsuki was glad that Nagi turned back to face the Western idol; he was sure his cheeks were burning. Nagi wasn't even implying anything remotely sexual, but Mitsuki couldn't help the unbidden thoughts that came to mind. Something about the phrase one-on-one just seemed suggestive. Maybe Mitsuki was going crazy. They hadn't done much more than kissing, and Mitsuki would be lying if he said that he didn't want to bring things a step further. "N-no need for that!"

"The match will be decided by god. However, to lift yourself higher, what you need is love," Nagi said.

"Love..." Riku repeated. His gaze flicked over to Iori, grinning slightly when he caught Iori's gaze. The omega was quick to avert his eyes, but there was no mistaking the pink hue of his cheeks. Love, huh.

Yamato cleared his throat, and Riku laughed sheepishly.

"You listen to music with your ears, but songs with love will first cause your heart to quiver, and lead your body to dance," Nagi continued. "Zero's songs were like that."
"Zero!?" Mitsuki exclaimed. He'd heard Douglas say Zero's name, but he hadn't been sure if Douglas had been referring to the idol or something else entirely. "Douglas knows about Zero!?

"Yay! I love Zero! We love Zero!"

"I met Zero only once. Being able to listen to his music right in front of me was a very valuable experience in my life."

"Miracle!"

"I felt like magic had been cast on me," Nagi finished off with a smile, turning to look at his members only to realise that Mitsuki had tears streaming down his cheeks. "Mitsuki, what's wrong?"

"...amazing! Zero and Douglas are amazing!"

A smile tugged at Nagi's lips; he'd always found it cute how easily touched Mitsuki was. Of course, he did understand the underlying reasons behind it. Having been overshadowed by Iori's perfection for most of his life, Mitsuki treasured every bit of praise and acknowledgement that he could get. But as much as Nagi would've loved to pull Mitsuki into a hug, he wasn't sure if Douglas would approve of relationships within the same group.

Tamaki hummed. "So, your heart shakes, and your body starts dancing! Old man-"

This time, Sougo didn't glare at Tamaki, but the smile he wore on his face was more sinister than any glare he could've conjured. It vaguely reminded Tamaki of the way Sougo had smiled on him when they'd gone for that barbecue trip after Iori's triggered heat. Maybe a little scarier. "Douglas-san."

"-Douglas says some good stuff!"

"Hahaha! I love Zero! I love IDOLiSH7!"

Riku beamed at Douglas, and a chuckle escaped Iori's lips. "We also love you."

---

They sent Douglas off about an hour later, the Western singer rejecting Tsumugi's offer to drive him to his hotel in favour of taking a cab instead. "Thank you very much, Douglas-san!" Riku shouted, waving as Douglas got into the cab. "We'll repay you for tonight at your concert!"

"Bye-bye!"

They watched as the cab drove off, waiting until it was completely out of sight before heading back into the office. Since it was a weekend, none of the other office staff were in, so the moment the doors were closed, Sougo whirled to glower at his alpha. "You made him change our light cover?"

"How was I supposed to know that that old- Douglas looked like that!?"

"Maybe if you actually watched his DVDs with me like Riku-kun and Mitsuki-san did..."

"Okay, break it up," Yamato sighed, cutting between the arguing couple. Sougo telling Tamaki off was nothing new, although it had been a while since they'd had a fight like this. Yamato looked at their youngest, raising a brow at him. "Tama, you should really apologise."
“But Douglas didn’t even scold me!”

“He actually found it a little funny, when I explained the situation to him,” Nagi piped up, letting out an exaggerated cry when Mitsuki jabbed him in the side with his elbow. Sougo was plenty angry as it was; Nagi didn’t need to add fuel to the fire. The blond cleared his throat. “But Sougo is right, Tamaki. You shouldn’t have assumed that Douglas was the technician.”

“You even cut his introduction off, multiple times,” Sougo added.

“Iorin didn’t disagree with me, either!”

Iori scratched the back of his head sheepishly. “It’s true that I closed the door on him the first time. Believe me, I feel terrible about it. It didn’t at all occur to me that Douglas-san would want to surprise us by making a trip down to the office.”

“Can’t you take a leaf or two from Iori-kun’s book, Tamaki-kun? At least he’s willing to admit that he made a mistake,” Sougo continued. He could tell that Tamaki was annoyed, extremely so, but he wasn’t just reprimanding the alpha because he’d treated Douglas like a technician; at the very least, Douglas had forgiven them. He just thought that maybe it was about time for Tamaki to pick up some proper manners regarding how to treat one’s elders, whether they were seniors in the industry or simply random people on the street.

Tamaki groaned, rolling his eyes and grabbing his bag off the couch. “I’m heading home.”

“I’m not done with you yet.”

“I am. I’ll think about the choreography for the new song later on, so don’t worry about that.”

Pushing his way past Yamato and Riku, Tamaki stormed out of the office, slamming the door shut behind him. Sougo was about to chase after him; something about this scene felt strangely nostalgic. He thought back to when the group had first gathered – Tamaki had left the dorm in a fit of anger as well.

With a small sigh, Sougo moved towards the door, only to be stopped by Otoharu. “President?”

The beta put a hand on Sougo’s shoulder, smiling at him in a way that he hoped would quell some of Sougo’s anger. “I’m angry about it too, but what’s done has been done. It’s not fair to simply chastise Tamaki-kun and pin all the blame on him. Douglas had definitely had the option of using his alpha voice on Tamaki-kun, but he didn’t, right?”

“President’s right,” Tsumugi agreed. “But he chose not to; he chose to go along with it.”

Sougo stared at the ground, letting their words sink in. Theoretically, he understood. It was just like how Tamaki could’ve used his alpha voice on Sougo, he’d always had that choice, but he hadn’t done it ever since before Sougo had been brought to the hospital. Douglas would certainly have the upper hand when it came to using his alpha voice, had he chosen to use it on Tamaki. “I guess...”

“Why don’t Mitsu and Ichigo go back with Sou? The rest of us will set up this screen, then we can all watch Douglas’ DVDs together, alright?” Yamato suggested.

The Izumi brothers nodded, and Riku gave Iori a quick nuzzle on the cheek before they left.

“Don’t be too hard on Tamaki, Sougo,” Mitsuki said, stuffing his hands in his pockets as they walked. “He didn’t mean to be rude to Douglas.”
A couple of schoolgirls walked past them, squealing to each other and not-so-discreetly pointing to the trio. Mitsuki grinned at them, and the girls flushed.

“If only Rokuya-san were here to see this,” Iori mumbled under his breath, snickering when Mitsuki turned to shoot a glare at him. Seeing Nagi flirt with women and them swooning over him was a norm, although Mitsuki still got annoyed by it at times, but it wasn’t so often that Iori saw people gushing over his brother. Nagi certainly didn’t like it, and honestly Iori thought the blond was just a hypocrite.

“Good luck at Black or White!” the girls said. “We’ll definitely vote for IDOLiSH7!”

“We’ll do our best!” Mitsuki told them, waving as they left. “Stop laughing already!”

“Sorry,” Iori chuckled, not sounding apologetic in the least.

“Mitsuki-san’s popularity has been increasing recently, hasn’t it?” Sougo commented.

Iori nodded at the same time that Mitsuki waved Sougo’s praise off. “It’s not nearly enough to catch up with the rest of you guys, especially MEZZO,” Mitsuki said, shrugging nonchalantly. “But it’s fine. I like seeing familiar faces during variety show recordings.”

“We’ll win at Black or White and get even more fans,” Iori assured.

Sougo unlocked the door to the dorm and, after receiving an encouraging nod from both Iori and Mitsuki, headed over to Tamaki’s room.

---

“Tamaki-kun, open up.”

Tamaki glared at the door. “Go away.”

“I won’t leave until you let me in, you know.”

“Be my guest then.”

Sougo went quiet, and if not for the fact that his scent was clearly still nearby, Tamaki would’ve thought that the omega had left. But he knew better than that, easily able to detect Sougo’s scent right outside his door, and Tamaki resisted the urge to sigh. How persistent.

For the next fifteen minutes, Tamaki paid Sougo no heed, simply tapping away at his mobile games and looking at his social media feed. Sougo had ignored him before, and Tamaki was childish enough to do exactly what the omega had done to him months ago. He could wait until Sougo got tired of waiting.

...or so he thought. When he glanced back up, already bored of looking through his phone, Tamaki could faintly see Sougo’s shadow through the tiny gap at the bottom of the door.

Realising that Sougo was serious about this, as he was with everything he said and did, Tamaki rolled off his bed, walking to the door and unlocking it. He pulled it open, and Sougo nearly fell over from where he’d been leaning against the door. He waited for Sougo to get up from the floor before asking, “What? You’re going to continue nagging me?”
Sougo’s shoulders sagged, and the omega shook his head. “No. I came to apologise.”

“What for?”

“Scolding you like that.”

Tamaki scoffed. “Did Yamasan tell you off?” he questioned. Sougo blinked, and Tamaki wrinkled his nose distastefully. He’d thought they’d already been through this; Tamaki didn’t like Sougo to do things just because people told him to. Sougo was always trying to please everyone, everyone except himself, and Tamaki hated it. He’d very much rather Sougo had come on his own volition, do the things that he wanted to do, instead of what people told him to do.

“Actually, it was the President,” Sougo corrected.

“Same difference. I don’t wanna hear it,” Tamaki said dryly.

Sougo bit on his lower lip, wondering what he should do when Tamaki moved to close the door. Without even thinking about it, Sougo’s hand shot out to stop the door from closing completely, the omega hissing in pain when his fingers got caught between the door and the doorframe. He pulled his hand back immediately. “Shit, that hurts,” Sougo cursed.

“What the hell, Souchan?” Tamaki asked incredulously. “Let me see that.”

For how angry he’d been just moments ago, Tamaki was incredibly gentle with Sougo’s injured hand, frowning as he inspected the areas that were beginning to turn red. He pressed down on one finger tentatively, apologising when Sougo flinched. “The two of us need to stop injuring our fingers, seriously,” Tamaki muttered. “We should ice this.”

Tamaki took hold of Sougo’s other hand, leading him to the kitchen to get an ice pack, and Sougo couldn’t help the stupid smile tugging at his lips. His hand felt warm in Tamaki’s, fitting perfectly in the younger’s hold. At least he’s not mad at me anymore.

Iori raised a brow as Tamaki came into the kitchen with Sougo, but the other omega simply smiled, and Iori nudged Mitsuki slightly. They’d been in the middle of cutting some fruits to snack on as they watched DVDs together, but he didn’t want to intrude.

They abandoned the fruits on the table, slipping out of the kitchen wordlessly and heading to Mitsuki’s room to pass the time. “You think they’ll be okay?” Mitsuki asked, picking up the plush that Nagi had given him and setting it on his table.

“They’ll be fine.”

---

Tamaki found an ice pack in the freezer, taking it out and putting it on Sougo’s hand. The weather was cold enough as it was, and Sougo shuddered as the ice pack made contact with his skin. “Keep it there,” Tamaki instructed, as if Sougo didn’t already know that, walking around the table to sit down opposite of Sougo. He refused to meet Sougo’s eyes, instead staring fixedly at Sougo’s injured hand. “Sorry-”

“I’m sorry, Tamaki-kun-”
The couple looked at each other, and a chuckle escaped Sougo’s lips. Tamaki huffed, crossing his arms and turning away from Sougo once more. “For the record, I’m not apologising for what happened with Douglas. I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“I know,” Sougo sighed. “I’m sorry for going on a rant like that. I didn’t mean to.”

Tamaki pursed his lips. “Sometimes I wonder if you like all those idols more than me.”

Try as he might, Sougo couldn’t stop himself from grinning. “You’re really cute, Tamaki-kun.”

“Shut up.”

“Aww, but it’s not often that I get to see you jealous,” Sougo teased – a lie, really. Tamaki got jealous plenty often at work. Sougo would never admit it, but he revelled in the way Tamaki would pull him aside once they were alone and scent him possessively.

Tamaki was pouting now, and Sougo leaned across the table to place a kiss at the corner of his lips. The alpha blushed, and Sougo let out a small giggle. Even if Tamaki had been the one to initiate their first kiss, Sougo was still the older of the two, never mind the fact that he had never been in a relationship prior to meeting Tamaki. “See? How cute.”

“Am not!” Tamaki grumbled.

Sougo got up from his seat, the ice pack forgotten on the table as he walked over to Tamaki and cupped the alpha’s face with his hands. Tamaki flinched, and Sougo laughed. “Sorry, sorry, I forgot my hand was cold,” he apologised, leaning down to press a firm kiss on Tamaki’s lips. “You won’t forgive me?”

When he pulled away, Tamaki was staring at him. “What for?”

“Scolding you, teasing you, touching you with cold hands...” Sougo tried to think of all the things he’d done that could possibly have made Tamaki more annoyed with him. His own anger was all but dissipated; Sougo idolised Douglas a lot, and he really felt that Douglas was an amazing musician, but he’d much rather have Tamaki’s affection than Douglas’ attention.

Tamaki grabbed Sougo’s injured hand. “And injuring yourself, don’t forget that. Offering to cut your pinkie off just because I might have offended Douglas. Your body is important too, Souchan,” Tamaki told the omega seriously.

Sougo nodded, biting back a grin when Tamaki pulled him onto his lap and buried his face into the crook of Sougo’s neck. His inner omega loved the physical contact with Tamaki – omegas were made to be physically affectionate and being in contact with their alphas was honestly just the best. Of course, Sougo would be lying if he said that he didn’t occasionally think about more than just hugging and scenting each other, but that could wait.

“What if I don’t take care of myself?” Sougo asked. “You’ll stay angry?”

“Of course,” Tamaki mumbled, voice muffled slightly as he nuzzled his nose against Sougo’s scent glands. Sougo craned his neck to the side, humming appreciatively as Tamaki pressed his lips against his scent glands. “You’re always telling me to take care of myself. Maybe you should take your own advice.”

“Or,” Sougo suggested, “you can nag at me too.”

“Geh, that sounds troublesome,” Tamaki complained. With a soft sigh, he added, “Guess there’s no
helping it then. Should we go and tell Iorin and Mikki that it’s safe to come out of hiding now?”

Sougo chuckled, nodding in agreement. “Their fruits are going to go bad soon. Let's go.”

---

The days leading up to Douglas’ concert was hectic. Between schedules and practicing their new song, there was little to no time for rest. They recorded the song the day after receiving it from Otoharu, and Banri had made sure to produce the CDs the moment the song was fully recorded.

After that, Tamaki had to work out a choreography for the song together with their dance instructor; that had been done within one day as well, and then they had to teach the new choreography to the rest of IDOLiSH7. With so little time and so much to do, everyone practiced whenever they weren’t on some sort of schedule, only managing one or two group practices before the actual day of the performance.

As expected, the turnout for Douglas’ concert was something that IDOLiSH7 could only hope to achieve one day. With a crowd of nearly forty thousand guests, to say that the boys were intimidated was an understatement. But they knew that Black or White would be witnessed by many more people, be it in the live audience or on TV.

And when Douglas announced that IDOLiSH7 was making a special appearance and would be performing their newest song for the first time, the only word to describe the fans’ screams was heartwarming. Even if it wasn’t their own concert, or precisely because it wasn’t their own concert, the support from the audience made them all the gladder that they had been invited.

“Merry Christmas!” Riku greeted, smiling brightly at the crowd. “We are IDOLiSH7! Tonight, let’s get pumped up together at the concert for the world’s most passionate man, Douglas! Everyone! Let’s have fun together!”

Chapter End Notes

RIP Tamaki it has been nice knowing you. Also RIP mezzo’s fingers (war flashbacks to the scuffle with akihito and a wrench)

Next chapter is kinda short, kinda filler-ish, but two chapters + epilogue to go! I already have a few chapters of the next instalment of this series typed out, but I probably will still take a month off from uploading chapters bc irl is getting busy af orz. Thank you for reading and I hope you guys enjoyed this week's update!!
Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

A knock sounded on Riku’s door, and the alpha paused the video he was watching to glance up. He didn’t need to open the door to know that it was Iori, even before Iori’s scent travelled into Riku’s room – there wasn’t anyone else who would be looking for him this late at night. “Yes?”

“Can I come in?”

“Do you need to ask?” Riku asked back. "You're welcome in here anytime, you know."

Iori pushed the door open, giving Riku a deadpan stare. “I was being polite.”

“Of course you were,” Riku chuckled, eyes lighting up when he saw the cups of steaming milk with honey in Iori’s hands. It wasn’t as if he’d been waiting for Iori. Scooting over to the side a little, Riku patted the empty space on his beanbag. “Join me!”

It was a bit of a squeeze, two grown men trying to fit on one pathetic beanbag, but they made do. Iori passed one of the cups to Riku, sitting close enough to the alpha that their bodies were touching. Glancing at the screen, Iori asked, “Again?”

Riku pouted, taking a sip of his drink. “Are you going to give me that talk again? Like the time before Music Festa?”

“Not really, no,” Iori replied, pressing the play button and watching as Gaku blew a kiss to the fans.

It was nothing new, seeing Riku watch old TRIGGER performances. It wasn’t always DVDs of their concerts; right now, it was their Soundship performance from last year. Iori knew how much Riku still looked up to Tenn, despite whatever he’d told his brother when IDOLiSH7 had been on the verge of disbanding.

Seven months ago, Iori had told Riku not to watch TRIGGER’s DVDs anymore, that he would make Riku into a superstar. That IDOLiSH7 would surpass TRIGGER, so that Riku would no longer have to chase after the back of Kujo Tenn. The Iori from back then had yet to taste the bitterness that was his failure at Music Festa, had thought that it could be that easy to make it big.

Now, though, Iori knew just how difficult the road of being an idol was. If Riku needed to watch TRIGGER’s performances to get the motivation to do well, then Iori wasn’t about to stop him. Besides, TRIGGER had had their fair share of struggles to make it to where they were today, too.

The performance lasted only for a few minutes, TRIGGER having only sung their debut song before stepping off stage. When it ended, Riku turned the TV off, leaning his weight against Iori while sipping on his drink. “You’re heavy, Nanase-san,” Iori complained, even though there wasn’t a hint of annoyance in his voice.

“Cut me some slack,” Riku whined, lips forming a pout around the rim of his mug. “I’m nervous, okay?”

Iori knew, of course he knew. Riku wore his heart on his sleeve, and even if Iori couldn’t recognise the signs of nervousness from Riku’s facial expressions, he could definitely recognise it from the
alpha’s scent. And why wouldn’t he be, with Black or White just less than a day away?

“I wouldn’t have come here if I didn’t know that you were nervous,” Iori pointed out, finishing his drink and setting the cup on the floor. Riku did the same before turning to wrap his arms around the omega’s neck, nuzzling his nose against Iori’s cheek affectionately. Iori chuckled, letting Riku do as he wanted to calm his frazzled nerves. “You’re being awfully clingy, aren’t you?”

Riku didn’t reply, simply moving to peck Iori’s cheek softly, staying in place for longer than he usually would. He smiled when Iori’s face heated up – they’d kissed multiple times over the past weeks, but Iori was still embarrassed whenever they did. “You say I’m clingy all the time.”

“Because you are,” Iori retorted easily. Riku definitely seemed to be in a better mood now, and Iori was proud of being able to lift Riku’s spirits up so easily. Just his presence was enough to ease some of Riku’s anxiety about their upcoming showdown with TRIGGER, and he could only hope that Riku stayed this way until their performance tomorrow was over.

“Hey, Iori?” Riku said, face now buried in the crook of Iori’s neck and taking in the calming pheromones that Iori was releasing. Iori hummed, waiting for the alpha to continue. “I’ve already met your parents, but you haven’t met mine yet, right? Do you think we could go on, say, your birthday? My mum makes some amazing omurice.”

When Iori didn’t answer immediately, Riku pulled back from the hug hesitantly. “Is it a bad idea?” he asked, wondering if he’d said something wrong. But then he saw the way Iori’s teeth were worrying at his lower lip, and Riku nearly laughed. \textit{Iori's cute when he's nervous.}

“...will they dislike me?” Iori asked, and if he didn’t look so worried, Riku would’ve thought that he was joking. But it wasn’t as if Riku couldn’t understand where Iori was coming from; he’d been just as nervous when he’d met Iori’s parents, maybe even more so because he’d nearly had an attack right in front of the omega’s mother.

Riku pursed his lips thoughtfully, breaking into a grin when Iori made a frustrated noise. “I’ve told you before, they’ll love you,” Riku assured. “I don’t think they can find anyone who’s more worried about me than you, Iori. Really. Besides, it’s not as if they can break a fated pair up that easily.”

Iori didn’t look convinced, but he let himself slump against Riku. “If you say so.”

“It’ll be fine! Before worrying about meeting my parents, I think we need to worry about how to win tomorrow,” Riku chuckled. “What was it that Douglas said? We need love to win, right?”

“Yes, there’s that. I'm sure he wasn't referring to love for me, though,” Iori said pointedly, getting up with a soft yawn. "But we also need to get enough sleep. Come on, let’s get ready for bed.”

“Yes sir!” Riku saluted, getting up and following behind the omega. “Can we sleep together tonight?”

“No.”

“Please?”

“...fine.”

---
Yamato sighed as Nagi bounded into the living room. “Why are you awake, Nagi?”

“Speak for yourself, ossan,” Mitsuki grumbled from behind his boyfriend. “I don’t know where all his energy is coming from either. Told me he wanted me to whip up some instant ramen for him to eat.”

“I’m excited!”

“I’m tired,” Mitsuki sighed, rummaging through the cupboards for ramen. He’d had work until late in the evening, only reaching home barely an hour ago. All he’d wanted to do after showering was to sleep, but then Nagi had barged into his room and asked Mitsuki to cook for him. “Chicken, seafood, or curry?”

“Seafood, please!” Nagi requested, sitting at the kitchen counter and watching with a smile as Mitsuki put his apron on. He was only cooking instant ramen, but Mitsuki was always strict when it came to kitchen hygiene.

Yamato looked over at them lazily, a half-empty can of beer in hand. “Can’t Nagi cook it himself?”

“Right?” Mitsuki questioned incredulously. “You literally only have to boil water and throw it in.”

“But Mitsuki always adds in meat and vegetables for me,” Nagi said, and as if to prove his point, Mitsuki was already pulling out carrots and cabbage from the chiller. The other obvious reason that Nagi was asking his boyfriend to cook supper for him was because maybe he liked seeing Mitsuki in an apron. It wasn’t something that Nagi would consider a kink, but Mitsuki just looked really cute in an apron.

The beta turned to raise a brow at the alpha. “I can feel you staring at me.”

“What a pervert,” Yamato called out.

“I am not!” Nagi gasped. “Mitsuki, you know that, right?”

“Not particularly,” Mitsuki replied, putting the cut vegetables into the pot and covering it. He went over to sit down beside Nagi, unceremoniously plopping his face down on the table and closing his eyes. His cheek was smushed against the table, but he didn’t have the energy to care. “Turn the fire off after three minutes,” Mitsuki mumbled. “I’m going to sleep.”

Nagi pouted, even though Mitsuki couldn’t see him. He felt bad for asking Mitsuki to cook for him when he knew how tired Mitsuki was, but he also knew that Mitsuki was probably nervous for their performance tomorrow. Mitsuki didn’t have to voice it aloud, and he likely wouldn’t, but Nagi could tell that he was worried about not being able to perform up to standard.

Still, Mitsuki had been working extremely hard the past week to make sure that he wouldn’t, as he’d said, “Drag the team down.” Nagi thought that his boyfriend was being ridiculous; Mitsuki had always worked twice as hard as everyone else because he was smaller in size and had to adjust his dancing to match everyone else’s.

Dropping a kiss onto Mitsuki’s temple, Nagi went to retrieve the blanket they usually draped over the couch, putting it over Mitsuki’s shoulders so that he didn’t catch a cold. Mitsuki stirred slightly, but he didn’t open his eyes, and Nagi made sure the blanket wouldn’t fall off before he went to turn the fire off.
He sat down on the couch, setting the bowl of noodles down on the table and digging into it as quietly as he possibly could. Yamato snorted. “What’s with the sudden quietness?”

“Mitsuki’s asleep,” Nagi answered simply.

“Whose fault is that?” Yamato asked dryly, taking a sip of his beer and sighing when he realised that it was already empty. He put the can down, turning his attention to whatever was playing on TV. Coincidentally or not, it happened to be an ad for Black or White. “Tomorrow’s finally the day.”

“We’re going to win,” Nagi said firmly. “Anyway, Yamato, why aren’t you asleep? Are you also nervous?”

Shrugging, Yamato said, “It’s normal, isn’t it? TRIGGER has a lot of supporters.”

“They do,” Nagi agreed. “But we have Haruki’s songs, so we can’t lose. We have our own fans, too.”

“I’m guessing Mitsu is nervous, isn’t he?”

“Naturally,” Nagi sighed. “If I didn’t bug him to cook for me, he wouldn’t have let me into his room. He’d probably worry about it until he fell asleep. Mitsuki is so stubborn sometimes.”

“He has you looking out for him, at least,” Yamato pointed out, turning the TV off. “I’m going to sleep.”

Nagi waved to Yamato as he disposed of his empty beer can and left the living area. “Goodnight,” the blond called out, finishing the rest of his ramen as quickly as he could.

After he was done eating and washing the dishes, Nagi went over to the counter where Mitsuki was, surprisingly, still fast asleep. Mitsuki was usually quite a light sleeper, and by now he would’ve woken up from all the ruckus that Nagi had made while cleaning up.

*He must be really tired.*

“Good work today,” Nagi said, a soft smile on his face.

He picked Mitsuki up with ease, heading back to his room instead of the beta’s. When he turned to leave after laying Mitsuki down on the bed, wanting to brush his teeth, Mitsuki caught at his wrist. “Where’re you going...?” he mumbled sleepily, only barely conscious, and Nagi very nearly squealed at how cute Mitsuki was.

Instead, Nagi gently pried Mitsuki’s hand off his wrist. “I won’t take long,” he assured, pulling the blanket up to Mitsuki’s neck. The beta hummed contentedly, drifting back off into sleep, and Nagi very nearly squealed at how cute Mitsuki was.

Instead, Nagi gently pried Mitsuki’s hand off his wrist. “I won’t take long,” he assured, pulling the blanket up to Mitsuki’s neck. The beta hummed contentedly, drifting back off into sleep, and Nagi made quick work of washing up before jumping into bed with his boyfriend.

Mitsuki snuggled up to the warmth immediately, and Nagi wrapped his arms around Mitsuki protectively. He planted a kiss on Mitsuki’s forehead. “Let’s do our best tomorrow, too.”

---

It was midnight, and Tamaki had absolutely no idea what Sougo was doing.
“Souchan, let’s sleep,” the alpha whined, hugging Sougo’s King Pudding plush with his knees pulled up to his chest and frowning in Sougo’s general direction. Whatever Sougo was working on, he’d been working on for the past hour and a half. He’d waited patiently for the first thirty, maybe forty, minutes, but it was late and tomorrow was an important day.

Sougo put his pencil down, pursing his lips at the stack of papers in front of him. With a sigh, he set them aside in a file, making sure to stow it away lest Tamaki find it. “Okay, we’ll sleep,” Sougo conceded, chuckling at the way Tamaki’s face lit up happily. If Tamaki was a puppy, his tail would definitely be wagging in excitement now.

“I thought you were never going to be done,” Tamaki grumbled, scooting over to give Sougo some space to crawl into bed. They’d already brushed their teeth earlier, having run into Nagi as they did so. Apparently, everyone else were also in their rooms already, and Tamaki assumed they were all turning in early in preparation for tomorrow.

Not Sougo, though. The omega had been working on god-knows-what with a scary amount of concentration, but when Tamaki went over to see what on earth it was, Sougo had hid the papers away with a placating smile. “I’ll tell you about it next time, okay? It’s a secret,” Sougo had said.

Had it been anyone else, Tamaki would’ve pushed on to find out what exactly it was, but he knew that it was better not to push Sougo’s buttons too much. He’d been subject to, or witnessed, Sougo’s threats more than enough times to know how to protect himself.

“Are you not tired?” Tamaki asked incredulously. The omega had had a late-night schedule the previous day, only reaching the dorms at two in the morning. Then they’d had a recording first thing in the morning, so Sougo had gotten four hours of sleep at best. Tamaki didn’t even know how Sougo wasn’t already dead on his feet, with how packed his schedule was.

Sougo yawned in reply, burrowing his face into Tamaki’s chest. “I am.”

“Then maybe you should’ve continued whatever it was that you were doing on another day,” Tamaki told him gruffly. He wrapped his arms around the omega, resting his chin atop Sougo’s head. “And here I thought you were responsible enough to take care of yourself.”

When Sougo chuckled, Tamaki huffed in annoyance. It was so frustrating when Sougo brushed his concern off so easily. “Thanks for worrying about me,” Sougo chuckled, purring softly as Tamaki nuzzled the top of his head with his nose.

Sougo knew Tamaki hated seeing him overwork himself, but he’d had a sudden burst of inspiration during his shower, and he knew that if he didn’t write his ideas down somewhere, he would forget everything within a few days. He’d clearly lost track of time, and if Tamaki hadn’t been complaining about it, Sougo might have ended up burning the midnight oil just to pen down whatever was running through his mind.

He really didn’t mean to make Tamaki worry about him, although it admittedly felt nice to be cared for. It wasn’t something that Sougo had experienced often when he’d been staying at home, because most people only cared for him since they were hired to do so. There were some maids whom Sougo was closer to, but his father was always reminding him to keep a professional distance from their helpers.

“Just because I’m here to remind you to take care of yourself doesn’t mean you should neglect your health however you want.”

“Yes, yes. I’ll still make sure to take care of myself, and the same goes for you,” Sougo chuckled.
“We should really get to sleep, though. I wouldn’t want to mess up tomorrow due to lack of sleep.”

He felt Tamaki nod, the alpha pulling the blanket over the two of them just a little higher.

“Night, Souchan. Love you.”

Sougo’s face heated up slightly – he still wasn’t used to such straightforward declarations of love.

“Hmm. Goodnight, Tamaki-kun. I love you too,” he replied, yawning again and making himself comfortable in Tamaki’s arms.

---

Tsumugi pulled the minivan into a parking lot, turning the engine off and looking back at the boys. They wore a variety of expressions on their faces – some nervous, some deadpan, but mostly excited.

“We’re here!” she announced. “Let’s head into the venue!”

They located their waiting room easily enough, settling down and changing into their stage outfits.

Before leaving for the event venue, the group had run through their performance thrice to make sure they could execute it perfectly. It also served as a good warmup, and now they were all raring to go on stage and finally have their long-awaited showdown with TRIGGER.

Riku wasn’t nervous. If anything, he was excited to show Tenn what he could do when he was with the rest of IDOLiSH7. Being with Iori had done wonders to relieve any stress that Riku had felt previously, and Riku could confidently say that they had a fair chance at defeating TRIGGER.

They made their rounds greeting the other artistes that were performing today, wishing them all the best for their performances after briefly introducing themselves. All of them were mildly surprised by the fact that everyone knew of IDOLiSH7 – it had only been half a year since they’d debuted, and they hadn’t expected their popularity to skyrocket in such a short time.

“It makes sense, though,” Iori said on their way back to their waiting room. “We did perform in TRIGGER’s place at Soundship, and we won the Rookie Award at JIMA. It’s natural that people would be curious to find out who we are.”

“Ichi has a point,” Yamato agreed. He looked ahead, stopping in his tracks. “Ah, it’s TRIGGER.”

“IDOLiSH7,” Gaku greeted.

Riku nodded in response, a look of unwavering determination on his face.

Gaku smirked at the redhead. “I’m going to make your brother and Ryuu win.”

“Then I’ll make my friends win,” Riku replied firmly, without a hint of hesitation in his voice. “I’ll stand in the centre and pull them along with me!”

The other members of IDOLiSH7 looked at Riku in shock, and Iori had to hold himself back from breaking into a smile. God, he loved when Riku was confident like this. Riku definitely had the ability to back his claim, and Iori wished that the alpha had more faith in his abilities. After all, a confident alpha was an attractive alpha; Iori only realised how true this was after meeting Riku.

The smirk on Gaku’s face slipped into a confused look for a split second, and then the leader of
TRIGGER was laughing in amusement. “You’ve got guts,” he said.

Riku returned the smile. “You too, Yaotome-san.”

“Riku.”

“Tenn-nii...”

“I wasn’t expecting to meet you on this stage,” Tenn admitted. Iori saw the way Riku’s shoulders sagged, enough that anyone would notice it immediately. Before Iori could cut in, though, Tenn continued, “I won’t hold back. Good luck tonight, IDOLiSH7.”

That was enough to appease Iori’s anger, he isn’t looking down on Nanase-san anymore, and Riku perked up as well. “You, too!”

They passed each other by, TRIGGER walking backstage and IDOLiSH7 going back to their waiting room to watch their performance. They could hear Shimooka announcing TRIGGER’s turn on stage, and Nagi increased the volume of the TV slightly.

The beginning of Leopard Eyes started to play, a tune that they were all familiar with by now, but were watching live for the first time. The song was sexy, as TRIGGER's songs tended to be, but Secret Night couldn't even hope to compare to this. "This song is TRIGGER on full blast."

"TRIGGER's world view is totally complete," Sougo commented.

Tamaki's eyes widened. "Whoa, those moves."

"It's great!"

"Since that day we watched TRIGGER's concert and started singing together, we've finally made it this far," Riku said. Iori was sitting right beside him, and despite the omega's calm exterior, Riku could tell that there was still an underlying hint of nervousness. It was understandable, though. Riku himself definitely still felt slightly nervous. He could only hope that Iori wasn't thinking about Music Festa again. In a firm voice, Riku said, "We'll surpass them."

Mitsuki let out a long sigh, draping his body onto the table. "Anyway, this arena is huge."

"It's our first time performing on this scale," Yamato agreed, looking over at Tamaki. "Your sister's probably watching."

Tamaki nodded. "Yeah. Hey, why did we become idols?"

"Didn't you do it to find your sister?"

"Well, yeah, but that's not what I meant," Tamaki replied. "The guys on stage say thank you all the time. I thought they just said it because it felt good."

Sougo stared blankly at the alpha, trying to figure out what Tamaki was trying to say. Then a smile made its way onto his face. "You're right," Sougo said. He was proud of Tamaki – the younger had come such a long way since before their debut. "It really does come welling up from your heart."

"It feels strange to make others happy just by doing what you want," Yamato added.

"It makes you want to make them even happier next time," Nagi said.

"And the next, and the next," Mitsuki continued. "More, and more, and more."
"The feeling bubbles over."

Something clicked in Riku's head. "It's like Douglas said," he told the other. "It's what Zero knew."
He exchanged a look with Iori and Mitsuki, and they nodded in unison. "We have to win!"

It was almost time for their performance. The seven boys stood up, each wearing a determined look on their faces. "Good luck," Tsumugi said, and they turned to look at her. The manager was already tearing up. "I'll be rooting for you."

"Manager..."

"You idiot," Iori chuckled. "It's too soon to cry. We're about to show you something even better."

"Yes!" Nagi exclaimed. "Smile! I promise we'll win tonight."

"It only makes up for a fraction of the worry we've caused," Sougo said.

Tamaki nodded in agreement. "But we'll do it."

"We'll make you glad you're our manager," Mitsuki assured.

"We promise we'll bring home the trophy."

Tsumugi wiped her tears away, her expression softening at their words. "Okay!"

---

"This isn't the finish line," Yamato said.

The group was holding their hands out together now, like they did before any important performance.

"In fact, we probably don't have a finish line. Cry or laugh, there's only one thing we can do. Let's give everything we've got, right now!"

"Yeah!"

The group headed out of the waiting room to go backstage, Iori following closely behind Mitsuki when Riku called out his name. "Iori."

For a fraction of a second, Iori panicked, wondering if Riku's nerves had gotten the better of him after all. He had faith in the alpha, his alpha, but he also understood how stressful it was to be the centre of the group. Before he could even get a word out, Riku continued, "Remember how you told me you'd make me a superstar?"

Iori nodded in mild confusion. "I remember."

"Do you still feel that way?"

"Of course," Iori replied easily. "You're our bomb. Now show us the strongest explosion you can muster."
Riku pouted, and Iori's heart skipped a beat. "That's cold, Iori."

The omega paid his cute boyfriend no heed. "It's okay if the blast faces our way. This time, I'll support you perfectly," Iori assured, watching as Riku's lips curved into a smile. More than anything, Iori was determined not to let a repeat of Music Festa happen.

"I'm counting on it!" Riku exclaimed. "Let's go."

"You know, I said I would support you, but please don't have an attack on stage," Iori pleaded as they caught up with the others. Riku pouted again, and Iori couldn't help but chuckle. It was too easy to tease Riku sometimes. "Really, though. Please don't."

They waited backstage for their cue, knowing that TRIGGER's performance had already ended. Riku had a good feeling about today; he was going to lead IDOLiSH7 to victory.

He had to.

"And now presenting the challengers, IDOLiSH7!"

Chapter End Notes

Phew filler-ish chapter done and next chapter is (officially) the last chapter!
"You guys had a big year!" Shimooka said, smiling widely at the group of seven.

Riku nodded, returning the smile easily. "Yeah. It's like my life flipped 180-degrees."

The Riku from before IDOLiSH7 would never have imagined that he would one day be able to stand on the grand stage of Black or White in a showdown against TRIGGER. He would never have thought that he would get himself a boyfriend, who happened to his fated omega of all people, or that said boyfriend would be standing right next to him on stage.

To say that his life had changed completely was a major understatement.

"What do you remember most?" Shimooka asked.

Mitsuki managed a sheepish smile. "Performing a concert in an empty arena."

The audience laughed, and one of them even shouted, "I was there!"

Iori continued, "After seeing how strong our members are, I realised this group is amazing."

He made sure to keep his eyes fixed on the crowd, willing his gaze not to flicker to the alpha standing on his right. There was an air of nervous excitement about Riku, more excited than nervous, really, and Iori couldn't help but be relieved by that.

Shimooka nodded in understanding. "I heard IDOLiSH7 has a new song, too."

"Yeah," Yamato replied. "It's like a compilation of everything we've done up till now."

All of the anger and frustration they'd experienced over the past few months, elation and joy, sadness and tears. They'd finally made it to Black or White after all their ups and downs, and their new song encompassed the entirety of the dream they shared. Yamato wouldn't consider himself a sentimental man, but even he felt that it was amazing, to have made it this far.

"Is there anything you want to tell TRIGGER?"

"They were amazing," Sougo said. He wasn't sure if he was being biased, since he was a fan of TRIGGER after all. But if even Tamaki had acknowledged their performance then, surely, they'd been truly amazing. Tamaki wasn't one to give half-hearted compliments. "I forgot about the contest and was captivated by their ultimate performance. That's why..."

"We want to beat you!" Tamaki cut in. Sougo turned to look at Tamaki with a smile on his face. He was glad to know that Tamaki was fired up for the performance. He had no reason not to be fired up, anyway, considering that this had been their goal for quite some time now.
From Sougo's other side, Nagi exclaimed, "I love you!", before blowing a kiss to the audience. They erupted into screams when Nagi winked, and Sougo turned to smile at the blond.

"This is IDOLiSH7 performing MEMORiES MELODiES!"

The seven got into position, and the song started to play.

MEMORiES MELODiES was, in more than one way, a song that encompassed IDOLiSH7's journey up till now. The lyrics perfectly described everything they'd experienced on their journey as a group, from before they'd debuted to when they'd allowed themselves to lose sight of what they'd been working towards. It was a song that showcased not only their growth as idols, but their personal growth as well.

I thought I couldn't do anything. But being in IDOLiSH7 had proved him wrong. Riku would never forget the day that Tsumugi announced he was the centre of the group, the strongest vocalist of the seven who'd be able to win over the hearts of their fans.

I thought I'd never experience excitement in my boring life. Being in IDOLiSH7 had brought forward many emotions that Iori had never felt with such intensity. It had also brought forward new emotions that Iori had never thought he was capable of experiencing.

I thought working hard was just a hassle. But over time, working hard came with its own sense of satisfaction, and Yamato learnt to look forward to it. After all, he had six younger brothers who supported him in whatever he did; he could consider them his biggest fans.

Even when I tried to change, I couldn't. Until he met Tamaki, who taught him that it was perfectly fine to be himself. That it was alright to rely on others, to be honest about his feelings, because they would be there to tell him that things were okay.

I had lots of unpleasant experiences I didn't have to have. After joining IDOLiSH7, Tamaki had even more pleasant experiences than unpleasant ones. They weren't only with Sougo; he had fond memories with each member of the group.

But I never stopped wishing for it. Mitsuki had once thought his dream unattainable, losing a little more hope with every failed audition. IDOLiSH7 had fulfilled those dreams he once thought he would never be able to achieve, and they continued to climb to greater heights with each passing day.

While holding hands with my friends, I dreamed. Nagi hadn't had many friends, and he'd come to Japan to look for the one who had been most important to him. He hadn't thought he would be able to find such an amazing group of people to work with, people who he could now consider as his best friends.

I wondered if there were things even guys as small as us could do. And there were. Each member of IDOLiSH7 had their own role to play, and the group as a whole had its role to play as well. They had fans supporting them now, fans that they couldn't let down.

They had to win.

The song slowly came to a close, and Riku looked around him at the people who were no longer just teammates, but family. An overwhelming sense of pride welled up in Riku's chest as the music faded out, and the crowd went wild with cheers.

"Let's hear a round of applause for IDOLiSH7!"
The two groups stood facing each other, wearing similar looks of determination as they waited for the results to be announced.

Riku was nervous – they all were. TRIGGER’s performance had been truly amazing, and even though Riku had had a good feeling about his condition today, that wasn’t to say that they would definitely triumph over TRIGGER. If anything, it would be a close fight. They both had equal chances of winning.

“The winner of the Black or White Music Fantasia Male Idol category is...”

Iori glanced at Riku, wishing that the alpha would stop being so nervous. It wasn’t helping much that he was standing right next to Riku, and the anxious anticipation was radiating off Riku in waves. Even if Iori wasn’t already nervous, he definitely would have become nervous because of Riku.

Before Shimooka even announced the winner, a bright spotlight shone on them, and Iori’s mouth fell open instantly as the tallied votes flashed on the screen.

“IDOLiSH7!”

“Yes!” Riku exclaimed, already turning around and grabbing Iori by the shoulders.

“We did it...”

“All right!”

“We won!”

“Wonderful!”

“No way. I don’t believe it.”

Yamato chuckled, turning to look at Tsumugi. “We kept our promise!”

Tears welled up in Tsumugi’s eyes, and she had to cover her face with her hands to hide her tears. The past months of hard work hadn’t been for nothing; everything had been for the sake of this moment, for the glory of winning the prestigious title at Black or White.

Behind IDOLiSH7, TRIGGER was still shrouded in darkness. Gaku wore a lost expression on his face, as if he didn’t know how he was supposed to react to their loss. TRIGGER had climbed steadily from the bottom since debut, had won over so many other more senior groups. And the leader had thought that this would be their chance to redeem themselves from the incident that was Natsu Shiyouze.

“Don’t look so down,” Tenn commented. “You’re ruining your good looks.”

“Tenn.”

There was nothing in Tenn’s expression that indicated he was upset. In fact, he seemed almost happy about the outcome of their showdown. “Their desire to win reached the people more than ours,” he explained simply. “Admit it.”
“You’re right,” Gaku agreed. A few months ago, Tenn would never have accepted defeat to a group who was less than a year into their debut. Before he could say anything else, the audience echoed with cheers of TRIGGER! TRIGGER! and the trio glanced up as light shone on them as well.

“The arena is full of cheers for the defeated TRIGGER!” Shimooka exclaimed. “What a moving sight.”

The centres of both groups met in the middle of the stage, shaking hands while smiling at each other. When Riku had watched Black or White at home an entire year ago, he never would have dreamt that he would be able to stand on the same stage as his twin. The thought of winning TRIGGER in the short span of just a few months had seemed almost ludicrous. And yet, here they were.

Being scouted by Otoharu had truly been a turning point in Riku’s life. Since young, he’d wondered how exactly he would find his brother when he didn’t even know where to begin looking. Then he’d seen posters promoting Yaotome Productions’ newest male idol group, and Riku began to wonder how he could possibly get to where Tenn was standing.

Meeting the members of IDOLiSH7 had been an added bonus, something completely unexpected that Riku would never trade for the world. Sure, he’d lost a brother, but Riku could say with confidence that he had gained so much more – in some ways, Riku was almost glad that Tenn had left. Not because he wanted to have a rival instead of a brother, but if Tenn had never gone with Kujo, Riku might never have met Iori.

“Last year, idol group TRIGGER took the throne with their overwhelming strength,” Shimooka said. “And now they’re making way for a new generation of champions, IDOLiSH7.”

“Congratulations, Riku.” There was no malice in Tenn’s voice, and the smile he wore was genuine.

Riku nodded, a similar smile on his face. “Thanks.”

“I had fun,” Tenn told him.

“Eh?”

“You showed me a good time,” the other explained. “Your singing, your dancing, your smile. I watched all of it with a smile.”

Riku felt his cheeks heat up from the praise – it wasn’t often that Tenn was this honest when it came to talking about his feelings. It’d been so long since Tenn last praised Riku like this.

Gaku came up from behind Tenn. “We lost. It’s really frustrating.”

“Your performance was superb,” Ryuu added.

“Next time, we’ll challenge you on an even larger stage and win.”

Riku nodded confidently. “You got it. We won’t be beat, either.”

TRIGGER’s leader offered them a smile. “IDOLiSH7 is a good group.”

The two groups walked past each other, IDOLiSH7 going to the centre of the stage and TRIGGER going to stand by the side. As Tenn passed by Riku, he said, “I’ll tell you.”

“Huh?”
“The reason why I left home.”

Riku’s eyes widened as Tenn walked away, and even as Shimooka was announcing the overall winner for this year’s Black or White, he couldn’t take his eyes off his brother. It was only until Yamato nudged him, “Let’s go, Riku,” and Tenn urged him to go on, that the redhead nodded and went to join the rest of his group where they were waiting for him.

He didn’t notice Tenn’s gaze on him as he received the trophy for the Male Idol Category, nor did he realise when TRIGGER walked off the stage.

The members of IDOLiSH7 stood in a row. “Thank you, everyone! We are IDOLiSH7!”

---

The moment the door to their waiting room closed, Iori found himself engulfed in a hug.

The omega was quick to shake Riku off him, cheeks burning in embarrassment. Being openly affectionate, even if only their friends were around, was still a foreign concept to Iori. He could already imagine Riku’s pout as he said, “Nanase-san, not here, please.”

“But only the others are around!” Riku protested, even as he untangled his arms from around Iori’s neck.

Yamato was giving them a sly smile from the side where he’d been putting their trophy away properly. Tsumugi was on the phone, presumably with either Banri or Otoharu, and the other two couples were lost in their own world as well.

Iori pursed his lips. “You never know if somebody will walk in to greet us,” the omega reasoned. There was something strange about the air around Riku; it seemed as if he was still nervous for some reason. “Is there something wrong, Nanase-san?”

“...Tenn-nii said he would tell me,” Riku replied hesitantly. “Why he left with Kujo.”

“Oh, Iori realised, that’s why.

“Didn’t you say before that you wouldn’t ask why he left?” Iori asked curiously. He didn’t intend for his words to come out harshly, although the way Riku’s brows knit into a frown said otherwise.

With a soft sigh, Riku nodded. “I did, but I wasn’t the one who asked him this time.”

"Oi, don’t argue right after we win,” Yamato scolded, cutting between the couple. He glanced over at the others, heaving a sigh when he saw that Nagi was draped over Mitsuki, and Tamaki was already eating pudding. “The President wants us back at the office to celebrate.”

Tamaki perked up immediately. “Will there be food?”

“Of course!” Tsumugi exclaimed, the bright smile on her face contradicting the redness of her eyes. “They’ve already placed an order for sushi platters and pizza! Let’s hurry back to the office once we’ve gathered our things.”

Iori glanced at his boyfriend, noting how his face fell instantly. “You can meet up with Kujo-san another day, right? We should go and celebrate with everyone at the office. They’ve been working
really hard for our sakes as well.”

“Okay...” Riku conceded.

They changed out of their costumes and, after gathering their belongings, left the waiting room to head back to the office. Riku was decidedly not in charge of carrying the trophy on the way back, because it was made of glass and they knew better than to entrust him with holding it. It ended up in Sougo’s hands on the drive back, and Nagi clamoured for a chance to hold the trophy too.

When they stepped through the doors of the office, streamers were popped in their faces. “Congratulations!” the staff exclaimed. They’d set up banners all over the walls, decorated the office with balloons and posters. There was a cake with their names on it, as well as multiple boxes of food waiting for them.

“How did you guys set these up so quickly?” Mitsuki asked. It’d been less than two hours since their victory had been announced. “It’s as if they were already prepared beforehand.”

Otoharu simply smiled, and Mitsuki’s eyes widened. “Seriously?”

“Banri-kun said to have faith in you boys,” Otoharu said. “I didn’t see why we shouldn’t. You’ve all done a very good job in the recent months. We had faith that you would bring home the award. And you did!”

“That’s an awful lot of faith you needed,” Iori commented.

Sougo handed the trophy to Otoharu, visibly sighing in relief once it was off him. “I thought I was going to drop it,” Sougo breathed out, making a face when he was pulled against Tamaki.

Most of the staff in the office already knew about their relationships, so Tamaki didn’t mind them. “You wouldn’t have dropped it,” Tamaki rolled his eyes. “You’re not careless like me or Rikkun.”

“Hey!”

“He’s not wrong, Riku,” Yamato snorted.

“Let’s eat! I’m sure you boys are starving.”

Nagi beamed, already hungrily eyeing the pizza. “Yes please!”

---

“Of course,” Tamaki grumbled. “Of course there would be alcohol.”

“Taa-kun, stop moving,” Sougo whined, using Tamaki’s lap as a pillow, much like what he’d done with Riku when they’d gone on that barbecue trip all those months ago.

The office staff had already gone on home, having been picked up by family members or friends because they’d all had alcohol. The only ones left in the office were Otoharu, Banri, Tsumugi, and the seven members of IDOLiSH7.

Banri and Otoharu were both visibly drunk, as were Yamato, Mitsuki, and Sougo.
Nagi was busy holding Yamato away from his boyfriend, because for one reason or another, Yamato was trying to kiss Mitsuki again. “Yamato! Stop this!” Nagi cried, standing between the two betas and barely preventing Yamato from falling over by keeping a hand on his chest. “Why do you keep trying to kiss Mitsuki? He’s mine!”

“Eh?” Mitsuki asked in confusion. “I don’t belong to anybody. What are you saying?”

A shocked gasp escaped Nagi’s lips. “How could you, Mitsuki?”

“Nii-san’s just drunk,” Iori commented dryly. “Don’t take his words seriously. And stop Nikaidou-san!”

“Oh... Mitsuki...”

Iori sighed, turning to Riku for help but stopping when he saw the way Riku’s teeth were worrying at his lip. “Are you thinking about what Kujo-san said?” Iori asked, knowing fully well that that was definitely the case. Riku had been brooding over it for the entire evening, even though he did try to mask it with smiles that Iori easily saw through.

“I... guess?” Riku answered unsurely. “I just thought that I would be able to forget about it, but now that Tenn-nii brought it up again, I feel like I need to know. Is that so bad?”

“It isn’t,” Iori said honestly. He knew how much Riku wanted to know the truth, even if he said otherwise. “If it’s making you so antsy, then I’d rather you hear it from Kujo-san and get it off your mind. It’s much better than you stressing over it all the time.”

“Are you worried?” Riku asked, a teasing smile on his face.

“I am,” Iori replied, chuckling exasperatedly when Riku dropped his head onto his shoulder and nuzzled him fondly. He preferred when Riku was more like his usual self, and after the past few hours of seeing Riku being a little out of it, he didn’t mind the affection. “That’s why you should talk to Kujo-san quickly.”

“I don’t have his RabiChat, though,” Riku pouted.

“I can ask Gaku-san to arrange something for you!” Tsumugi offered. She eyed the two eldest men in the room, blinking as Banri walked into Otoharu and effectively knocked him over. The omega ended up on top of the beta, both sound asleep already, and Tsumugi sighed softly. “Oh, dad...”

“Banchan and President went overboard, huh,” Tamaki said, staring at the two on the ground. Banri had curled up against Otoharu’s chest, and he looked like he was in a pretty comfortable position. He absentmindedly patted Sougo’s hair, a soft smile making its way onto his face when Sougo snuggled closer to him. “They’re close, aren’t they.”

“Oogami-san has been working with the President for five years, after all,” Tsumugi explained. “In fact, he used to tutor me every now and then. He’s a really good person.”

“Would be better if he didn’t keep asking Souchan to drink,” Tamaki pointed out, and Tsumugi could only smile sheepishly. “What is it with adults and alcohol, anyway?”

“You’ll understand eventually, Tama,” Yamato slurred. He’d given up on getting to Mitsuki by now, and was leaning back against his chair with a new can of beer in his hand. Tamaki made a face; he didn’t ever want to become like any of the adults around him. “It’s a happy day! We won!”

“We won!” Mitsuki echoed from his place on Nagi’s lap.
“We won!” Nagi repeated, squeezing Mitsuki against his chest and eliciting laughter from the beta.

Riku laughed awkwardly with them. Then he turned to look at Iori and Tsumugi and Tamaki. “Should we be heading back to the dorm as well?” he asked.

The others nodded in agreement – Nagi was the only one who was entertaining himself by poking Mitsuki’s cheeks. Now that Yamato wasn’t attempting to steal a kiss from Mitsuki, Nagi didn’t mind the drunken state of the leader. “Nagicchi, let’s go back to the dorm,” Tamaki called out, jumping in his seat when a palm made contact with his face. “What the heck, Souchan, don’t hit me! Weren’t you asleep?”

Sougo giggled, reaching up to pat Tamaki’s cheeks. Except he was drunk, and he was using a lot more force than he intended to, so in reality he was slapping Tamaki. “Our Taa-kun is the cutest!”

“I won’t be cute if you hit me anymore, Souchan!” Tamaki exclaimed. “Let’s go already!”

“I agree,” Iori said. “We were planning on going to visit the shrine tomorrow, weren’t we?”

Nagi’s face lit up. “Oh! This will be my first New Year’s shrine visit!”

“Iori, what are you going to pray for?” Riku asked curiously.

The omega cleared his throat. “Firstly, we aren’t supposed to say it aloud. But if I had to wish for something now, it would be for nii-san and the others to stop getting themselves drunk.”

“Eh,” Riku pursed his lips. “You won’t pray for our relationship to go smoothly?”

Cheeks burning, Iori turned away from Riku. “Why would I need to pray for that? Things are going plenty well right now, aren’t they? Besides, we really should be getting back to the dorm.”

“Rikkun is so shameless,” Tamaki said, already getting up from his seat with Sougo in his arms. “Manager, will you be driving us back? Or do you need to take care of Banchan and President?”

Tsumugi shook her head. “I’ll pick them up after dropping you off. I’ll wait in the car!”

With that, Tsumugi left the office to get the car started. Tamaki followed closely behind her, and Nagi was coaxing Mitsuki into walking on his own. Expectedly, Mitsuki didn’t want to, instead draping himself over Nagi and insisting that he be carried. The blond looked at Riku and Iori apologetically. “I’ll leave Yamato to you two, then.”

Before Iori could even reply, Riku was nodding fiercely. “Leave it to me!”

As Nagi left the office, Iori turned to raise a brow at his boyfriend. “Leave it to you?”

“I’m not risking anything,” Riku huffed, walking over to Yamato’s side. Twice now, Yamato had tried to kiss Mitsuki while drunk. The thought of it happening with Iori was off-putting. “Yamato-san, let’s go.”

“Oh, it’s you, Riku,” Yamato said. “I never realised, but your lips are really nice. Like Mitsu’s.”

Iori could barely stifle his laughter. He knew that he should probably be annoyed at Yamato for trying to make a move on Riku, but the slight grimace that Riku wore was hilarious. The alpha inched away from Yamato slightly, and Yamato leaned in closer to Riku’s face. “Yamato-san, please.”

“Leave it to me,” Iori mimicked with a snort. He went to Riku, nudging the alpha out of the way.
before tugging on Yamato’s arm. “Nikaidou-san, It's late already. We need to go back.”

Yamato blinked at Iori. “Even Ichi is here? Do I get to drink more beer?”

“Only if you follow us.”

Sighing, Yamato nodded and stood up unsteadily, nearly falling onto Riku as he did so. He ended up managing to press his lips against Riku’s jaw, and Riku yelped in surprise. “Yamato-san! Iori, help me!”

Iori offered Riku a small smile. “What happened to the bossy alpha from two minutes ago?”

“Iori,” Riku whined. “Please?”

“I guess I can help a little,” Iori conceded, slinging Yamato’s arm over his shoulder and hoisting the beta up. “You're asking me so nicely, after all.”

Iori was glad that Yamato was at least making an attempt to support his own weight, although he'd prefer it if he didn’t keep leaning in towards him. Riku ended up trailing behind them, wearing a pout the entire way down to the car park.

After seating Yamato in the back, together with Nagi and Mitsuki, Iori climbed into the front passenger seat. Riku was behind him, and they finally started making their way back to the dorm.

---

“Nanase-san, are you still brooding over that?” Iori asked incredulously from his place on Riku’s bed.

They’d all showered, with the exception of the three who were drunk, and Riku had suggested spending the night in his room. It was New Year’s Eve, after all, and they were less than an hour away from ushering in the New Year. Riku’s room had a slightly better view of the outside, since Iori’s room was at the furthest end of the corridor and the view was blocked by walls.

Riku sat on his beanbag, hugging a pillow to his chest as he scrolled through congratulatory messages on Twitter. He was most decidedly not sulking, even as he replied, “What are you talking about? I’m not brooding over anything.”

Iori rolled his eyes. “Something about that Isn't convincing at all, Nanase-san. Worrying about Kujo-san is enough; don’t go worrying about something stupid like alpha masculinity,” Iori sighed. “I may be an omega, but I’m still a guy. I can handle carrying Nikaidou-san.”

“It’s not that,” Riku insisted, finally putting his phone down to look at Iori. The omega raised a brow, and Riku groaned in annoyance. “I’m not upset because you could carry Yamato-san. I’m upset because I couldn’t. If I can’t even do something like that, then how will I protect you next time?”

A chuckle escaped Iori’s lips before he could help it. “You did fine after, um, our first date.”

“Don’t remind me about it,” Riku huffed. “Talking about that makes my blood boil.”

“You’re ridiculous,” Iori laughed. No matter what he said, Riku wouldn’t be appeased. He was happy that Riku was thinking of a future where they would be together, but the alpha was
overthinking things. Sure, Riku would probably have to protect Iori from alphas at some point in
time, but apart from that, Iori was fairly certain that he could handle himself.

When Riku pouted again, Iori patted the empty space on the bed next to him. “Join me. We can wait
for the clock to strike midnight together,” Iori suggested. The curtains were drawn already, and they
had a decent view of the sky, save for the light pollution that was unavoidable in Tokyo. Riku had
wanted to open the doors, pull his beanbag over to the balcony, but naturally Iori had told him no.
He wasn’t about to risk Riku’s health for a better view of the fireworks.

“Okay,” Riku gave in, getting off his beanbag to climb into bed beside Iori. Once he was seated
comfortably, Iori drew his knees to his chest and dropped his head onto Riku’s shoulder, closing his
eyes as Riku nuzzled the top of his head gently. “You know, I still can’t believe we won.”

Iori hummed in agreement. “Me neither,” he murmured, a content smile settling on his face when
Riku put an arm over his shoulder. “Whatever Kujo-san tells you, just remember that I’ll be here if
you need someone to talk to, okay?”

“Oh,” Riku said again. “That means a lot to me.”

“It’s the least I can do, right?” Iori said, feeling his cheeks heat up. “Since we’re together, and all.”

Riku chuckled. “You’re not really honest, are y-”

The first burst of fireworks cut Riku off, and Iori’s eyes snapped open in time to see the next one
shoot into the sky. They hadn’t been keeping track of the time, hadn’t noticed that the clock had
already struck midnight, and the couple watched in awe as fireworks exploded in the night sky.

“It’s pretty,” Iori commented, oblivious to the fact that Riku was no longer looking at the fireworks
display, but at the omega seated next to him.

“Yeah, really pretty,” Riku agreed, watching the fireworks through the reflection in Iori’s eyes.

The omega blushed when he turned around, finally realising that Riku was staring at him. There was
no mistaking the fondness in Riku’s gaze, and it made Iori almost embarrassed to be at the receiving
end of such a look. “N-Nanase-san?”

“Can I kiss you?”

“What, a New Year’s kiss?” Iori breathed out, closing the distance between them easily and touching
his lips to Riku’s. Riku ran his fingers through Iori’s hair before settling on the base of Iori’s neck,
his other hand resting over Iori’s, and he pulled the omega to him to deepen the kiss further.

They broke the kiss a minute later, cheeks equally flushed as they looked at each other. The
fireworks had stopped by now, but the two could still vaguely hear the commotion from people on
the streets, all celebrating the new year. “That was my first New Year’s kiss.”

“Me too,” Riku laughed, ignoring Iori’s embarrassed groan when he pulled Iori onto his lap. “I’m
happy to be your first. It’d be nice if I could be your last, too.”

“Isn’t it too early to be saying things like that?” Iori muttered.

“It isn’t!” Riku beamed, bending down so that he could nuzzle Iori’s scent glands. Iori relaxed in his
hold, and Riku smiled. “One day, I’ll put a mark here. My mark. I promise.”

If Iori’s face wasn’t already red, it certainly would be now. “Huh. I didn’t realise
you actually planned ahead, Nanase-san,” Iori said, in an attempt to take his mind off the fact that Riku had literally just said that he would mate him. In the future, not now, but it was a pretty bold promise to be making. “I’ll hold you to that.”

It took some time before they were settled into bed, and when Riku was asleep, Iori let his mind wander.

He’d always hated being an omega, hated the weakness that it came with. Honestly, Iori had never thought of meeting an alpha that he would like enough to want to be mates with. And, of course, Riku came along and turned that all upside down. Something like fate was a concept that Iori had thought was for idealists, but back then he hadn’t known that he had a fated alpha of his own.

So maybe Iori had never thought that he would present as an omega, nor did Riku ever think that he would present as an alpha.

But, as they’d found out, everything happens for a reason.

Chapter End Notes

WE'RE DONE (not really) WITH UNEXPECTED!! Wow I can't believe I started this fic on a whim bc I wanted to write rikuio abo and look where we are now //laughs.

Thank you so much to everybody who's been supporting this fic! \o/ All your comments mean a lot bc sometimes I wonder if a chapter is up to standard or if the pacing is ok etcetc. So yes, thank you all for leaving comments and kudos! It's thanks to everyone that Unexpected made it to the 1st place in hits and kudos on the i7 tag :D

There's still the epilogue left (and it's pretty damn long by my standards oops) so please look forward to that! Then I'll take a break from uploading on ao3 while I work on part2 of this Very Long Thing.

P.S. On Monday I went to churn out a 7777word hoshimegu fic bc Coda has animal ears and a tail and I couldn’t resist orz. If anyone needs Erin/Coda pls check it out HAHAHA I PROMISE IT ISN'T ANGSTY.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

Here's the (Extremely Long) Epilogue to end off Unexpected! Please enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Does my hair look strange? Do you think I should change into another outfit? What about the gifts, will the kids like them? As expected, I should go on another day, shouldn’t I, Tamaki-kun?” Sougo fretted, brows knit into a frown as he stood in front of the mirror.

It'd been a good two hours since Sougo had started getting ready for the day – Tamaki was bringing him to the orphanage to visit the director and kids, and although Sougo had already been stressing over the outing for over a week now, he was clearly still worried that he wouldn’t make a good first impression.

Tamaki didn’t understand why Sougo was so concerned. The director may have had been the one who took care of him after his mother had passed away, but she wasn’t his mother. Although, Tamaki wasn’t sure when he’d ever be ready to bring Sougo to visit his mother’s grave. That was something that he had to prepare himself for, both mentally and emotionally.

It'd been a while since he’d last visited. In fact, after Aya was adopted, Tamaki had tried his best to avoid visiting his mother’s grave. It was all too lonely to go on his own, and he didn’t want to trouble the director to accompany him. He even missed her death anniversary sometimes, because it was too painful to remember the day that he and Aya had become orphans.

He stared blankly as Sougo attempted to fix his hair, doing absolutely nothing to change how it already looked before he combed through it for the nth time that morning. Theoretically, Tamaki could understand why Sougo was obsessing over his appearance; he was meeting the person who’d technically raised Tamaki, after all.

In reality, Tamaki wouldn’t be able to do the same if he was in Sougo’s shoes. Sougo’s father wasn’t someone who’d made any sort of good impression on Tamaki, and he hadn’t even met the man yet. Tamaki didn’t think he was capable of putting in this much effort to make a good first impression on a certain Ousaka Soushi.

Sougo turned around to look at Tamaki, pout evident on his face. “How do I look?” Sougo asked again.

“Perfectly fine,” Tamaki sighed. “Although it’d be better if you weren’t frowning so much. The kids might think that you’re angry at them. Stop worrying already; they’ll love you.”

With a frustrated groan, Sougo turned back to look in the mirror, trying futilely to find any stray hairs that were standing up weirdly. Tamaki wasn’t sure if it was because Sougo’s heat had just ended a couple of days ago that he was being more antsy than usual, but it was annoying him and he didn’t want Sougo to be a nervous wreck when they went to the orphanage.

Getting up from the bed, Tamaki walked over to grab hold of Sougo’s wrist, holding it in place so that he would stop fussing over his hair. “I told you already, you look perfectly fine,” Tamaki
repeated, bending down to nuzzle Sougo’s cheek fondly. “Yuuchan loves everyone, and since you love me, she’ll love you even more.”

He felt Sougo’s cheeks heat up, and Tamaki grinned before moving back. “She told me the kids keep asking to meet you, since she told them that I’m visiting with someone,” he explained, moving back to sit down on Sougo’s bed. “They wouldn’t even be expecting you to bring toys, I think. They have plenty of toys as it is. Besides, if Yuuchan sees the price tag on those things, she’ll bring them back for a refund.”

Sougo chuckled nervously. “You think so?”

“Souchan, that amount of money may seem like nothing to you, but remember, I didn’t even have a handphone before joining IDOLiSH7,” Tamaki reminded, and it was all Sougo could do to smile sheepishly in response. Tamaki hadn’t even known it was possible for children’s toys to cost that much, but he supposed Sougo did always shop at high-end stores.

When Sougo had brought the box of toys to Tamaki’s room a few days ago, the alpha had balked at the numbers on the receipt. He knew toys could be expensive, but there’d been no need for Sougo to go to such lengths to impress the kids. The sheer quantity of toys that Sougo had bought was terrifying enough. “I wasn’t sure what they would like, so I bought whatever the salesperson recommended,” was what Sougo had told Tamaki.

“You’re going to spoil them, and then they’d never want to be adopted anymore,” Tamaki sighed. “Trust me, all you have to do is be yourself. They’ll be able to see what a wonderful person you are, Souchan. If you fuss over your appearance anymore, we’ll be late. Do you want that?”

Sougo’s eyes widened as he looked at the time. “It’s this late already?! We still have to grab lunch!”

Tamaki held his phone up in front of Sougo. “Don’t worry, I told Yuuchan we’d be eating there. We could just order takeout if we have to, share some with the kids. Let’s go already.”

With one last glance to the mirror, Sougo nodded, slipping his hand into Tamaki’s. “Okay.”

They passed by Nagi on their way out, heading down to the car park where Tsumugi was waiting for them. Sougo had suggested cabbing to the orphanage, but the beta had been insistent on driving them there, saying that she was free in the afternoon anyway.

Riku was out with Iori celebrating his birthday, Mitsuki was helping out at Fonte Chocolat, and Nagi and Yamato were staying home – at least until Nagi decided to drop by Fonte Chocolat to visit his boyfriend. It was a rare day where they were all free, but even though Tsumugi should be using the time to take a breather, she clearly didn’t seem to want to.

Tamaki let Sougo board the car first, climbing in behind him and shutting the door. “Good afternoon, Manager,” he greeted. Tsumugi turned back to beam at them before starting the car and driving towards the orphanage.

“Have you eaten?” Sougo asked.

“Yamato-san invited me to go out for lunch with him later,” she replied easily. “His treat.”

“Wahhh, I’m jealous.”

Sougo chuckled. “Doesn’t Yamato-san treat you to food all the time, Tamaki-kun?”

Tamaki blinked slowly in realisation. “Oh. You’re right. Thanks for taking time on your off day to
drive us out. You don’t have to pick us up later. We can grab a cab back.”

“It’s no problem at all!” she assured brightly. “I can come by with Yamato-san after our lunch.”

“Is that really alright?” Sougo asked worriedly. “You’ve been working really hard too, Manager. You deserve to take a short break every now and then.”

“It’s fine,” she repeated. “I like spending time with you guys.”

The orphanage wasn’t far from the dorm by car, and they made it there in a little under twenty minutes. Tamaki grabbed the box of toys, refusing to let Sougo carry it, leaving the omega to wave to Tsumugi as she drove off with the promise to pick them up afterwards.

Once the car was out of sight, Tamaki turned to Sougo. “After you, Souchan.”

“Do I really look okay?”

“How many times are you going to ask?” Tamaki groaned. “Come on.”

Tamaki didn’t budge until Sougo started walking to the entrance of the building, where Sawamura Yuuko was already waiting for them. She had a sleeping infant in her arms, two young children on either side of her, and a warm smile on her face. “Tamaki.”

“Yuuchan,” Tamaki acknowledged. “Haruchan and Izumin came to welcome us too? Who’s the baby?”

“This is Kyoko,” Sawamura said, “her parents were in the middle of a divorce when she was born, and neither party was willing to take custody of her. She’s a really sweet baby, though. Sleeps through the night like I’ve never seen. So, is this the famed Souchan I’ve been hearing about?”

Sougo flushed all the way down to his chest. “I’m Ousaka Sougo, nice to meet you!”

“My name is Sasagawa Haruko! This is Watanabe Izumi!”

“Hello, Haruko-kun, Izumi-kun,” Sougo greeted awkwardly. Much like Iori, even though he was an omega and liked kids, Sougo had absolutely no idea how to interact with them. It was one of the reasons he’d opted to buy a bunch of toys for them. At least he would have a sort of back-up plan to win them over, if he didn’t manage to get over his awkwardness.

Izumi, the quieter of the two, walked over to Sougo and stared at the omega with wide eyes. “You’re really pretty,” he commented softly, causing Sougo’s cheeks to turn pink again. “Can I call you Souchan, like Tamaki-niichan calls you?”

“I don’t see why not,” Sougo chuckled, bending down to be at eye level with Izumi. “And how old might you be, Izumi-kun?”

“Izumi’s the same age as me!” Haruko piped up. “We’re seven!”

“Haruko, let Izumi answer,” Sawamura said.

Izumi’s eyes flickered between Sawamura, Haruko, and Sougo. “...I’m seven.”

“That’s nice,” Sougo smiled at the child. “Can you two lead the way in? I don’t think Kyoko-chan appreciates being out in the cold very much.”

The infant was very clearly still asleep, but the two boys nodded eagerly, each taking hold of one
of Sougo’s hands. Sougo turned back to look at Tamaki in alarm, but the alpha simply grinned, allowing Sawamura to head back indoors before following behind them.

They headed straight for the activity room where the others were waiting for them.

“Tamaki-niichan!”

“Whoa, slow down, don’t make me drop this on any of you,” Tamaki warned, setting the box of toys down by the side before allowing the kids to jump on him. He looked around, raising a brow in mild confusion. “Reichan isn’t here?”

“Reiji was adopted,” Rinka supplied. “His new parents seemed like nice people.”

“Is that so. I’m glad.”

One of the younger girls, Hikari, leaned in to Tamaki’s ear. “Tamaki-niichan, who’s that?”

Sougo was preoccupied with looking at a lego house that Haruko and Izumi had been building, only glancing up with Tamaki called him over. “Yes, Tamaki-kun?”

“Are you going to introduce yourself anytime soon, or do I have to do it for you?” Tamaki teased.

“Why don’t we let Izumi-kun tell everyone who I am?” Sougo suggested, waving the boy over.

Haruko was quick to follow behind his friend, watching with a grin as Izumi told the other kids that “This is, um, Ousaka Souchan.” Tamaki had to stifle his chuckle behind his hand when Sougo turned back to purse his lips at him disapprovingly.

“It’s because you always refer to me as Souchan, isn’t it?” Sougo chided exasperatedly before turning to bow politely to the kids. “I’m Ousaka Sougo. Nice to meet everyone. You can call me Sougo-san.”

“Are these toys?” Youichi asked, peering into the box curiously. “Whoa, a Power Ranger!”

Tamaki squinted at the toy before beckoning Sougo closer to him. “Isn’t that thing limited edition?”

“It looked really cool, so I bought it,” Sougo reasoned, pouting slightly. “No good?”

Rolling his eyes, Tamaki could only shake his head at the omega. “I don’t want to know what it cost.”

Sawamura cleared her throat abruptly. “What must you say to Sougo-san?”

The group of kids beamed happily at Sougo. “Thank you, Sougo-san!”

Smiling satisfactorily, Sawamura adjusting Kyoko slightly as the baby stirred. “I’ll be borrowing Sougo-san and Tamaki-niichan for a while, alright? They’ll come and play with you after we’re done,” she told them, waiting until they nodded in response before gesturing to the door.

The couple followed her to her office just a few doors down the activity room, and Tamaki closed the door behind him as Sougo took a seat on the chair. Before any of them could say anything, though, Kyoko began to fuss, eventually looking around in confusion and bursting into tears. “Oh dear,” Sawamura murmured, hushing her and trying to get her to calm down.

“Yuuchan, can Souchan try carrying her?” Tamaki asked.
Sougo’s eyes widened as he shook his head furiously. “Oh, no. No, I couldn’t.”

The blood drained from his face when Sawamura nodded easily. “I don’t see why not. Have you ever held a baby, Sougo-san?” she asked, chuckling when Sougo managed a stiff shake of the head. He didn’t have nieces or nephews – in fact, he didn’t have any relatives who had kids. She walked over to Sougo, patiently teaching him how to hold Kyoko even as she continued to cry. Once Sawamura was sure that Kyoko was safe in Sougo’s hold, she took a step back. “That wasn’t so hard, was it?”

Sougo didn’t respond, simply stared at the baby in his arms in a sort of wonder. Kyoko, too, took a break from her wailing, instead looking up at Sougo with curious eyes. She reached for his face, clearly not managing to reach it, and let out a watery giggle. “She’s so cute,” Sougo commented, and Tamaki heaved a sigh of relief when he saw a smile make its way onto Sougo’s face as well.

“Care to tell me who exactly Sougo-san is to you, Tamaki?” Sawamura asked smugly, in a low enough voice that Sougo wouldn’t hear. “I won’t tell.”

This time, it was Tamaki’s turn to blush, even if only slightly. “Souchan is very important to me,” Tamaki replied, groaning softly when Sawamura raised an unimpressed brow at him. “Okay, fine. We’re fated alpha and omega. Is that good enough of an answer?”

Sawamura nodded, her expression soft. “I’m so glad for you, Tamaki,” she said, her voice thick with emotion. Tamaki reluctantly let her pull him into a hug, looking away when Sougo turned to chuckle at his predicament. “Are you happy with him?”

“Of course,” Tamaki replied instantly. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Then that’s all I need to know,” Sawamura said, tenderly cupping Tamaki’s face and brushing a thumb across his cheek. Even though Tamaki would soon be in his third year of high school, in Sawamura’s eyes, he would always be the young child who’d been sent to the orphanage with his sister. She’d always hoped that Tamaki would find his own happiness one day, but she didn’t think that it would happen quite this soon.

“Ah, sorry to disturb you, but I think Kyoko-chan might be hungry,” Sougo said suddenly, smiling sheepishly with a finger in the baby’s mouth. “I tried to stroke her cheek, and it ended up like this.”

Sawamura blinked at Sougo before laughing heartily. “Of course. Come and prepare her formula with me, and you can try feeding her. It’ll be good practice, for the future,” Sawamura suggested.

Sougo’s smile faltered, for just a brief moment, and then he was nodding. “Tamaki-kun, would you like to follow us?” Sougo asked.

The fake smile he was now wearing was glaringly obvious to the alpha, and Tamaki pursed his lips. “I’ll go and play with the kids. Take care of Souchan, Yuuchan.”

“I will,” Sawamura assured. “This way, Sougo-san.”

The two omegas headed to the kitchen, and once they were there, Sawamura started boiling a pot of water to sterilise Kyoko’s bottle in. While waiting for that, the elder leaned against the counter, chuckling when Kyoko tried to stuff Sougo’s shirt into her mouth. “Tell me more about yourself, Sougo-san.”

“I’m 21 this year. I dropped out of university in order to join IDOLiSH7. Tamaki-kun says I nag too much, so I try my best not to. What else is there...” Sougo trailed off.
“Do you love Tamaki?”

“Absolutely,” Sougo replied. “But sometimes I wonder if he’s making the right choice by being with me.”

*After all, I might not be able to give him a family.*

“That child may be reckless, but he treats relationships very seriously,” Sawamura said, moving around to prepare Kyoko’s bottle. “If he didn’t truly want to be with you, then he wouldn’t have even entertained the possibility. Don’t doubt his feelings for you, Sougo-san. I’ve never seen Tamaki this happy since before Aya left.”

Sougo swallowed past the lump in his throat, willing his eyes not to fill with tears. “Yes. Thank you.”

With the same kind smile she always wore, Sawamura patted Sougo on the back gently. “The two of you will be alright, I know it,” she assured. She handed the bottle of formula milk to Sougo, teaching him how to hold it properly for Kyoko to drink from. “Shall we join the others?”

Nodding, Sougo followed her back to the activity room where Tamaki was with the kids. They’d poured out the toys from the box that the couple had brought, and were now playing with their new toys. There were a few board games, but Sougo had mostly bought dolls and figures because, as he’d told Tamaki, it was what the salesperson recommended to him.

Tamaki glanced up when Sougo entered the room, unable to help the smile that spread across his face at the sight of his omega with a baby in his arms. One day, Tamaki hoped that it could be *their* baby that Sougo would be holding. There wasn’t anyone else Tamaki would want to start a family with. “Souchan, come sit with me,” Tamaki said, patting the space on the floor beside him.

“Kids, remember to thank Sougo-san for the toys,” Sawamura reminded, and Sougo nearly jumped when he got attacked by Rinka and Haruko, the two kids attempting to jump on him to give him a grateful hug.

Tamaki held them back, raising a brow at the kids questioningly. “He’s holding Kyochan,” Tamaki scolded. “You might make her choke on the milk. You wouldn’t want that to happen, right?”

“No,” the two replied in unison.

Smiling satisfactorily, Tamaki waved them off. “Go and play. We’ll do something about lunch.”

“There’s no need to go to that expense, Tamaki,” Sawamura said, but the alpha was already looking through a list of food delivery services that they used often. With a resigned sigh, Sawamura shook her head. “Nothing too expensive, okay?”

Sougo hummed thoughtfully. “How does sushi sound? We can order a set, and some portions of ramen to go with,” he suggested, oblivious to the way Sawamura was looking at him incredulously. Sougo’s definition of what was expensive was vastly different from the average person’s.

He looked down when he felt Kyoko stop sucking on the milk bottle, removing the bottle and setting it on the floor since it looked like she was done. “What do I do now?”

“You have to burp her,” Tamaki sighed, holding his hands out. “Give her here.”

Sougo passed the baby over to his partner, watched intently as Tamaki burped her with practised
ease before laying her down on the floor. “You’re surprisingly good at taking care of babies, huh, Tamaki-kun?” Sougo commented. Something about it made Sougo’s inner omega feel secure – it was good to know that Tamaki was capable of taking care of children, not that they would be having kids of their own anytime soon.

Stupid omega instincts, Sougo sighed inwardly. Stop making me hope for things I might not have.

“Souchan?” Tamaki called out, waving a hand in front of Sougo’s face. “You’re thinking about something stupid again, aren’t you?” he asked knowingly. Sougo didn’t reply, simply pouted slightly, and Tamaki rolled his eyes. “I keep telling you, we’ll cross that bridge when we get there. Can you order the sushi? I don’t have a card to pay with, anyway.”

“Okay,” Sougo conceded, taking Tamaki’s phone and adding a few items into the order before settling the payment. He knew where Tamaki was coming from, knew that the alpha wasn’t as nonchalant about the situation as he appeared to be, that Tamaki was just as concerned for their future as he was. But he also knew that Tamaki was right, and they couldn’t quite do anything about his condition now.

And yet, it was so hard not to think about the what-ifs.

Izumi came over with a card game in hand, not one that Sougo had bought, and sat down in front of the omega. “S-Souchan, do you want to play with me?” he asked, and Sougo barely hesitated before nodding in response.

“I don’t see why I can’t,” he said. “Can you teach me, Izumi-kun?”

Tamaki watched as Izumi explained the rules of the game to Sougo, the omega responding with as much enthusiasm as he could. It was almost cute that Sougo was trying his best to keep up with the rules of the game, that he was genuinely absorbed in listening to Izumi’s explanation of how he should play in order to win the game.

It was refreshing to see Sougo interact with children; they only ever encountered adults when they were working, after all. Being around kids brought out Sougo’s omega instincts, and honestly, Tamaki felt that Sougo would really make a good mother in the future. He wasn’t entirely sure if he was being biased, but Sougo seemed like a natural with Izumi. It probably helped that Izumi was more of a quiet child compared to Haruko, so it was easy to match with his energy level.

Their lunch was delivered around forty minutes later, and Tamaki brought it in, leaving a sleeping Kyoko to Sawamura. Sougo had wanted to help, but he was in the middle of a game with Izumi, so Tamaki made him continue the game instead of helping him bring the food in.

At the sight of two sushi platters and multiple bowls of ramen, all the kids stopped playing, putting their toys down at the side in favour of going over to crowd around the food. “We get to eat sushi⁈!” Youichi asked in amazement. “And ramen!”

“There’s ebi tempura too,” Sougo chimed in, smiling sheepishly at Tamaki when the kids let out a shriek of excitement. He could understand why they were happy, though, since they didn’t get to eat out or order in very often. From what Tamaki had told Sougo, they mostly had some chicken or pork and vegetables with rice every other day.

“There’s more than enough food to go around for everyone.”

As they ate, the kids told Tamaki and Sougo about what they usually did at school, about the things they learnt and the friends they had in class. Then Hikari mentioned something about being in the
school choir, and suddenly they were all requesting Tamaki and Sougo to sing some songs for them.

After an impromptu MEZZO performance by the duo, it was about time for the kids’ naptime. Yamato had sent them a message as well, informing them that he and Tsumugi were almost done with their lunch and would be picking them up soon.

Expectedly, the kids were all reluctant for Tamaki and Sougo to leave. “I want to play again after our nap!” Haruko protested, even though he was already rubbing at his eyes tiredly.

“Will you come and play again?” Rinka asked, looking at Sougo hopefully.

“I’ll bring Souchan here with me when we’re free, alright?” Tamaki promised, grinning as he bent down to ruffle their hair. “Go and take your nap already. You guys won’t grow tall if you don’t get enough sleep, got it?”

All of them nodded in response, but didn’t leave, and Sougo chuckled before bending down and holding his arms out. “Will you go to sleep if I give each of you a hug?” Sougo asked. “I’ll see you guys again soon, I promise.”

They took their turns to hug Sougo, wishing him good luck at work and reminding him to come and play with them again soon. Sougo spent the longest amount of time hugging Izumi, the seven-year-old burying his face in Sougo’s shoulder. “Bye, Izumi-kun,” Sougo said, smiling fondly at the boy. Izumi reminded him a little of himself, when he was younger. Sougo had been just as quiet, if not more. At least Izumi had Haruko to balance him out, whereas Sougo hadn’t had any close friends during his childhood. The only people he could recall genuinely being kind to him were a handful of maids.

Izumi pulled back from the hug before nodding. “See you, Sougo-san.”

Sawamura herded the kids into their respective rooms, making sure to close their doors before joining Tamaki and Sougo again in the main hallway. “You’re always welcome to visit us, Sougo-san,” Sawamura said, giving Sougo a brief hug before moving to Tamaki. “Don’t cause any trouble for your friends, okay?”

“I don’t, though?” Tamaki grumbled, and Sougo barely managed to stifle a chuckle behind his hand.

“Thank you for today, Sawamura-san,” Sougo said, bowing to the elder. “I really enjoyed myself.”

“I did, too. Please take care of Tamaki from now on as well.”

Tamaki made an embarrassed noise. “I’m old enough to take care of myself, geez,” he muttered, glancing out the door to see the familiar car parked on the side of the road. Yamato stuck his head out the window, lazily waving at Tamaki. “Oh, Manager and Yamasan are here. See you soon, Yuuchan.”

They got into the car, waving to Sawamura as they drove off.

“So,” Yamato said, turning briefly to look at the couple in the backseat. “How was your date?”
Nagi had spent the majority of his morning not watching MagiKona, surprisingly, instead working on a homecooked meal to bring to Mitsuki for lunch.

If Nagi was to be honest with himself, he was pretty worried that he might give Mitsuki food poisoning. The beta would definitely swear not to ever eat any of Nagi’s cooking if he did end up falling sick from it, so Nagi had taken to the internet and settled on making something simple.

Like spaghetti.

Nagi was familiar enough with pasta – his home country of Northmeir brought in delicacies from all over Europe, coming up with their own rendition of each dish. Much unlike his boyfriend, however, Nagi could say with confidence that he had never cooked a single item in his entire life. Even though it’d been over a year since Nagi first came to Japan, he still had yet to step foot into a kitchen and make something.

Before moving into the dorm, Nagi ate mostly restaurant food. Money wasn’t an issue for him, had never been and probably would never be, so Nagi hadn’t seen the need to learn how to cook for himself. Besides, if he did want some homecooked food, he knew someone who would be more than willing to prepare it for him.

“How hard can it be to make Bolognese?” Nagi muttered to himself, pulling out the ingredients he’d bought earlier that morning and setting everything down on the kitchen counter.

He’d found a recipe online, and reviews had said that it was simple to make yet delicious. Nagi didn’t know whether his food would turn out as desired, considering as he had no experience at all in cooking, but he watched Mitsuki enough to know the basics. Nagi considered himself a rather quick learner, so how hard could cooking be?

The blond had all but chased Mitsuki out of the house in the morning, wishing him a good day at the bakery and telling him that they should have dinner together. Mitsuki had been suspicious, as he should have been, because Nagi was never so willing to see him off. Whining and complaining was what Mitsuki had grown accustomed to, so for Nagi to willingly send him off with a smile was rather odd.

Of course, Nagi had already sent a text to Mitsuki’s mother to inform her that he would be dropping by Fonte Chocolat in the afternoon. He’d told her to keep it a secret from Mitsuki, although she was more than welcome to tell her husband that their son’s boyfriend would be coming to visit, and Hiroko had replied with a very happy “Okay, see you later, Nagi-kun!” littered with various emoticons similar to those that Nagi liked to use.

Pulling up the recipe for Bolognese spaghetti on his phone, Nagi set to work.

The first thing he had to do was to wash the vegetables, which was easy enough even if Nagi didn’t know the proper ways to do so. The real challenge was to cut everything finely, and although Nagi had seen Mitsuki do it with ease, he wasn’t sure that he would be able to do so himself.

Mitsuki always handled the knife with practiced ease, no doubt because of the fact that he’d been helping out in the kitchen since before Iori was born. Cutting vegetables precisely and quickly never posed as a challenge to the beta, and honestly Nagi thought that it was impressive to be able to work so efficiently.

He tried to emulate the way Mitsuki held the knife, attempting to recall how it was that his boyfriend positioned his other hand when chopping foods. It seemed easy enough, and although Nagi’s cuts weren’t anywhere close to the precision that Mitsuki’s had, he managed to chop the vegetables into
similar sizes. They were clearly bigger than they should be, so Nagi attempted to cut them a little smaller, and eventually ended up cutting his own finger.

Grimacing at the clean cut on his thumb, Nagi sighed and went to rinse it under running water. “We have plasters in the kitchen, right?” Nagi mumbled, waiting for the blood to stop flowing before he rummaged one of the drawers for the first-aid kit.

After putting on a plaster, Nagi set right back to work, cutting the already-cut pieces of celery and onion and garlic as small as he could. They ended up being uneven, but it wasn’t as if Nagi could reverse what he’d already done, so he simply stared at his handiwork in dismay.

Suddenly, cooking for Mitsuki didn’t seem like such a good idea after all.

The main reason Nagi had wanted to cook for Mitsuki was because Mitsuki had done the same for him, but now he was beginning to doubt that Mitsuki would even want to eat something made by him. It wasn’t as if Mitsuki wasn’t capable of whipping up the exact same dish, except it would probably be at a restaurant’s standard and the beta would prepare it twice as fast as Nagi, if not faster.

Sighing again, Nagi put the knife down, already contemplating whether he should just throw everything away. But Mitsuki always says not to waste food, Nagi thought, the beta’s voice echoing in his head clearly. Before Nagi could decide on what to do, he heard somebody clear his throat from behind him.

“What’ve you got there?” Yamato asked curiously from behind the bar counter. “You’re cooking, Nagi? I didn’t know you could cook.”

Nagi’s shoulders deflated. “This is my first time cooking,” he admitted.

“Heh,” Yamato grinned cheekily. “Mitsu will be happy to know that you’re making something for him.”

“Not if it tastes bad.”

“Mitsu’s a sentimental guy,” Yamato pointed out, jumping off the bar stool and walking to stand beside Nagi. He looked over the ingredients that were separated into various bowls before his gaze landed on the plaster adorning Nagi’s finger. “Don’t you know that it’s the thought that counts? Mitsu would never say it, but he’ll be really touched to know that you put in this much effort. To the point of injuring yourself, even.”

“...so, I should make it after all?” Nagi asked dejectedly.

Yamato nodded firmly, patting Nagi on the back for good measure. “Onii-san will watch while you cook! If you’re doing anything wrong, I’ll tell you, just let me see the recipe for a minute,” Yamato said, taking Nagi’s phone and reading through the recipe. “Bolognese, huh. You can’t really go wrong with that.”

With Yamato’s encouragement and guidance, Nagi continued to cook the dish, managing to finish it without any further mishaps. He may have been burnt by splattering oil a couple of times, and his shirt now had tomato puree stains, and he nearly scalded himself while draining the water from the spaghetti, but all that mattered was that he now had a container of spaghetti Bolognese sitting in front of him.

Nagi was about to turn around and throw his arms around his leader in gratitude, but Yamato had already taken a step backwards. “I appreciate your thanks, Nagi, but it’d be nice if you don’t get
tomato puree on my shirt,” Yamato explained.

Smiling sheepishly, Nagi nodded. “Okay! I’ll go and take a shower now!”

Nagi went into his room to grab a fresh change of clothes, beaming at Tamaki and Sougo as he passed them by. It was always heart-warming to see his friends show affection to each other, because none of them were able to do something as mundane as holding hands while they were outdoors. “Tamaki, Sougo! Are you two going to the orphanage now?”

“Yeah,” Tamaki replied. “They’ve all been wanting to meet Souchan. He's really nervous, though. He combed his hair like, two hundred times. I’m not even kidding.”

Sougo made a face, eliciting a chuckle from his boyfriend. “That’s not nice, Tamaki-kun. I’m just worried that they won’t like me, that’s all,” Sougo defended.

“So, you’re nervous then,” Tamaki repeated teasingly. He didn’t give Sougo any time to retort, turning back to grin at Nagi. “Manager's waiting for us in the car, so we’ll get going first. See you tonight, Nagicchi. Enjoy your date. Souchan, let’s go.”

Nagi waved to them as they left, heading into the toilet to take a quick shower and change into clean clothes. He stared dismally at his dirtied shirt, not because Kokona’s face now had splotches of red on it, but because Mitsuki would likely see the mess he’d made in his attempt to cook. Nagi would’ve attempted to at least wash some of it off, but it wasn’t as if he knew what to do to remove such stains from clothing. *Mitsuki is going to kill me.*

By the time Nagi returned to the living area, Yamato had put a lid on the container of spaghetti, and was now watching a variety programme that TRIGGER had been on. “Yamato, do you want to come with me to grab something for lunch?” Nagi asked, looking for something to wrap his container in.

Yamato shook his head, grinning slyly as he looked at Nagi. “I’m having lunch with Manager.”

“That’s not fair!” Nagi whined. “Why do you get to go on a lunch date with Manager?”

“Because all of you are out dating, and poor me has nobody to go out with,” Yamato said dryly. “She’s taking pity on me. Just go and have your date with Mitsu already.”

At the mention of his boyfriend, a nervous smile made its way onto Nagi’s face. It wasn’t at all like Nagi to be this uptight over something, but this was the first time he was cooking something for Mitsuki and it was inevitable that he would worry whether the beta would like it or not.

But Yamato was staring at him, gesturing to the main door, and Nagi picked up the container before walking out of the door. “Oi, wear a jacket!” Yamato called out, and Nagi hurried back in to grab his coat from his bed before disappearing out the door once more.

The weather wasn’t cold, per se, nothing that Nagi couldn’t handle. Northmeir had much colder winters, with harsh winds accompanied with a snowy landscape. During winter, Nagi always enjoyed looking at the vast expanse of land in his home country, something that he couldn’t experience in Tokyo because of how densely populated it was.

He made his way down the street, the container of food tucked away safely in his bag, and sent a text to Hiroko to inform her that he was on his way. Nagi tried to smile to as many fans as he could on his way to the bus stop, but since their win at Black or White, the number of fans who’d approached them seemed to have doubled. There simply wasn’t enough time to entertain all of them, if Nagi wanted to make it to the bakery before it was too late for lunch.
Just as Nagi stepped on the bus, his phone started ringing, and he pulled it out to see Hiroko’s name flashing across the screen. “Hello, Hiroko-san?”

“Go to our house,” Hiroko whispered. “I’ll tell Mitsuki that he has something to pick up. Have a nice lunch, okay? Keep Mitsuki for as long as you want. He deserves a proper rest.”

Wow, Nagi really loved his boyfriend’s mother. “Understood, ma’am! Thank you!”

Hiroko chuckled. “It’s no problem. If you want, you can even stay for dinner.”

Nagi really loved his boyfriend’s mother. “If that’s alright, I’d love to!”

“Then we’ll see you tonight. Ah, Mitsuki’s coming. Bye, Nagi-kun.”

“See you!” Nagi said, and Hiroko ended the call with a click.

He vaguely remembered the way to the Izumi family home from the last time he was there, getting off the bus and navigating through the streets as best as he could. At the very least, he had to reach before Mitsuki did, otherwise the beta would just leave the house immediately after picking up whatever it was that Hiroko would tell him to.

But, of course, Nagi had never been good at directions. He and Riku were both terrible when it came to finding their way around, and it didn’t help that Nagi wasn’t at all familiar with Mitsuki’s neighbourhood. He ended up wandering around, trying to see if there were any houses that looked remotely familiar, but everything looked the same to him.

He was about to give up and send a text to Hiroko to ask for directions, but as luck would have it, Nagi spotted a familiar head of orange hair not too far away from him.

Mitsuki was empty-handed, and dressed in a simple t-shirt with what appeared to be chef pants. He had a thin jacket pulled around his shoulders, and even from a distance, Nagi could tell that his boyfriend was shivering slightly. “What’s he thinking, coming out in this weather in nothing but that jacket,” Nagi sighed, taking long strides to get to where Mitsuki was.

Either the beta was too cold or too much in a rush to notice the footsteps trailing behind him, only jumping in shock when a thicker jacket, Nagi’s, was draped over his shoulders abruptly. “What the-!” Mitsuki exclaimed, whirling around and nearly punching Nagi in the cheek before he caught himself. Eyes wide, Mitsuki took a few moments to register that Nagi was standing in front of him, and he slowly lowered his hand. “Nagi? What the hell?”

“I should be asking you that, Mitsuki,” Nagi shook his head solemnly. “You know how cold it’s been recently. Don’t you think you should be wearing a warmer jacket than that?”

“Says the one who’s wearing a thin sweater,” Mitsuki mumbled. Nagi’s jacket smelled of the alpha’s room, of the soap that he used when he showered, and Mitsuki pulled the jacket closer to himself. “You hypocrite. Anyway, why’re you here?”

Nagi blinked, face lighting up as he remembered why he had come in the first place. “Oh! I wanted to have lunch with you!” he beamed and, before Mitsuki could retort, added, “Hiroko-san said that I could take as long as I want with you, so don’t tell me that you have to rush back to the bakery. You should give yourself some time to rest, too, Mitsuki.”

“I do, though,” Mitsuki grumbled. “Anyway, let’s go to my house first. It’s too cold out here.”

Mitsuki led the way to his family home, in the exact direction that Nagi had originally come from,
only that the blond had missed a turn and ended up wandering around in circles. They took their shoes off at the entrance, and Mitsuki told Nagi to wait in the living room while he boiled some water for tea. “Did you have lunch yet?” Mitsuki called out from the kitchen.

Nagi retrieved his container of spaghetti Bolognese, heading into the kitchen to join Mitsuki. “I made this,” Nagi said, setting the container down on the counter and watching Mitsuki’s face to observe his reaction. “It might not be good, but Yamato guided me! I hope it turned out okay.”

Gingerly opening the lid of the container, Mitsuki eyed its contents with a small smile on his face. “Well, I guess it could be better. Everything looks too mushed up, and there are some awkwardly large pieces of tomato and onion here and there,” Mitsuki pointed out, glancing up to see that Nagi’s face had fallen. Then, the beta chuckled, leaning up on his tiptoes to press a kiss to Nagi’s mouth. “But you tried your best, right? Isn’t this your first time cooking something?”

“It is...”

“I’ll heat it up, and we can eat together, alright?” Mitsuki suggested.

Nagi nodded, and after Mitsuki popped the container of spaghetti into the microwave, the beta leaned against his boyfriend’s chest with a contented sigh. “Your body is always so warm,” Mitsuki hummed appreciatively, glancing down when Nagi wrapped his hands around his waist. It wasn’t difficult to spot the plaster on Nagi’s thumb, its colour a stark contrast from the paleness of Nagi’s skin. “You cut yourself? And burnt yourself? Nagi.”

“It’s nothing,” Nagi assured, and Mitsuki resisted the urge to roll his eyes.

“If you want, I can teach you how to cook when we’re free.”

Mitsuki didn’t often like people messing up what he deemed as his kitchen, even though all of them shared the dorm, since he was the one who predominantly cooked for all of them. Nagi had made sure to clean up properly before he even considered taking a shower, because he knew that Mitsuki wouldn’t be pleased to see dried tomato stains on the kitchen counter.

But now Mitsuki was offering to teach him how to cook, and Nagi had always been interested in cooking. Mitsuki nodded. “Yeah, why not? It’s better than letting you injure yourself every time you want to cook something,” he shrugged. “My cooking certification isn’t for nothing, you know.”

“My Mitsuki is the best!”

Mitsuki chuckled, wriggling his way out of Nagi’s hold when the microwave dinged. “Help me set the table,” he said, pointing to the cupboard just next to them. “There’re some plates there. Cutleries are in the drawer beside the sink.”

Nagi brought his hand up in a salute. “Understood!”

“You’re crazy,” Mitsuki chuckled, removing the now steaming container of spaghetti from the microwave and bringing it to the dining table. He went back into the kitchen to grab a tablecloth, raising a brow when Nagi rummaged around all the drawers but the one that he was supposed to open. “It’s this one, dummy,” Mitsuki said, pulling out two sets of cutleries and rinsing them. “Come on, I’m hungry.”

The beta portioned out the spaghetti equally, leaving the extra in the container and passing a set of cutleries to Nagi. “Why’re you so nervous?” Mitsuki asked. “It’s not like you to be nervous about,
well, anything really. Are you worried I won’t like it?”

“I’m more worried it won’t taste edible,” Nagi mumbled. “Try it already!”

“That’s awfully demanding,” Mitsuki teased. “It smells fine. Here, I’ll eat it, okay?”

Nagi watched tensely as Mitsuki took a bite of spaghetti. “So? How is it?”

Mitsuki shrugged, taking another bite. “Not inedible, at least,” Mitsuki commented, doubling over in laughter when Nagi groaned dramatically. “I’m kidding! It’s not that bad, really. Here, try some.”

“Oh! Mitsuki is feeding me voluntarily?” Nagi asked in amazement. Mitsuki was a little awkward when it came to showing his affection for Nagi specifically – he didn’t seem to have any issues being affectionate with the other members. Perhaps with the exception of Yamato, but Nagi would rather the two not be too affectionate with each other. Yamato did enough of that whenever he got drunk.

“Oh, if you say anything else, I won’t feed you,” Mitsuki warned, grinning satisfactorily when Nagi quickly leaned forward to take a bite of the spaghetti he’d been holding out. “It’s decent for a first attempt. I’m almost jealous.”

Nagi made a face. “It doesn’t taste anything like what you make, though,” the alpha pouted.

“I’ve been cooking since I was four, Nagi,” Mitsuki reminded, with a knock on the head. “Should I turn the TV on while we eat? And no Kokona today, please.”

The alpha nodded, and Mitsuki flipped through the channels before settling on a food documentary that Re:vale was guesting in. They ate in relative silence, with Mitsuki watching the show intently to pick up on variety hosting skills. Re:vale was a senior group of five years, and had been the winner of the overall category at Black or White.

Normally, Nagi would’ve disturbed Mitsuki by now, clamour for his attention like the needy boyfriend that he was, but Nagi knew that Mitsuki had been trying his best to improve his hosting skills. Each member of IDOLiSH7 had a specialty, and Mitsuki was determined to make the most out of his own.

So, Nagi kept his gaze on Mitsuki as they ate, noticing how the beta repeated certain things that the duo used, running through it in his mind and nodding to himself. Nagi liked when Mitsuki was focused; it was attractive, and Nagi always did like how Mitsuki put in his best effort in whatever he did. Sure, the beta had his ups and downs, and he was insecure, but nobody was perfect. Nagi could embrace all of Mitsuki’s flaws, just as Mitsuki could accept his.

When an advertisement came on, Mitsuki turned to look at Nagi. “How long do you intend to stare at me like this?” Mitsuki asked, an amused smile on his face. There was no mistaking the slightly pink tinge of his cheeks. “I get self-conscious, you know.”

“But you’re so cute, Mitsuki!”


Nagi beamed. “I love you too!”

“How did you even interpret that as a confession of love...” the beta sighed, leaning over to Nagi and pressing a kiss to his cheek. “Really, though. Thanks for making the effort to cook for me. Think of what you want to cook next time, and we’ll make it together, okay? Come and do the dishes with me.”
“Okay!”

The duo made quick work of the dishes, and what was left of the spaghetti was put back into Nagi’s bag. “We can have it for dinner,” Mitsuki reasoned, and Nagi didn’t need him to complete the rest of the sentence to know what came next.

“Don’t waste food, am I right?” Nagi asked, laughing when Mitsuki rolled his eyes with a nod.

In spite of Mitsuki’s insistence that Nagi should head back to the dorm, since it was a rare off day after all, Nagi ended up walking Mitsuki back to Fonte Chocolat. Or, rather, he followed while Mitsuki led the way, since the blond was still completely at a loss as to how to get to the bakery.

They passed by a handful of people on their way there, some who recognised them and some who didn’t, but the two were stopped by one particular man who looked to be around Mitsuki’s age. “Izumi Mitsuki?” the guy asked. “I’m Ryouma! Nagasaki Ryouma, from high school! You’re famous now, aren’t you? Remember what happened in second year? I’m really sorry for that. It was wrong of me.”

Mitsuki narrowed his eyes at the man – a senpai of his, only one year older. He had no idea why Ryouma was asking him about something that happened that long ago, although admittedly Mitsuki did remember exactly what Ryouma was referring to.

Back then, Ryouma had been the captain of their school’s basketball team despite only being a second year. He’d been tall, charismatic, everything that one would envision an athletic alpha to be, and he’d been single. Mitsuki had spent the first half of that school year watching the elder, and after consulting Iori about it, had managed to muster the courage to confess.

It had ended badly, as things usually did. Ryouma had stared at Mitsuki incredulously, at the shorter-than-average beta, and chucked the confession letter in the bin. He hadn’t even offered any sort of explanation for rejecting Mitsuki, instead simply turning around and walking off. But not before waving the confession letter at his friends, laughing obnoxiously about how Mitsuki was delusional for thinking that he even had a chance.

Now, though, he was looking at Mitsuki with a hopeful gleam in his eyes, and Mitsuki almost wanted to scoff. “What about it?” Mitsuki retorted. He didn’t mean to be rude, considering Ryouma was older than him, but he felt like Ryouma was mocking him. He couldn’t believe the guy was approaching him again, five whole years later, just because now Mitsuki was famous. “Do you want to retract your rejection? There isn’t one to retract, though. You didn’t even give me a reply before walking off.”

“Like I said, that was wrong of me,” Ryouma apologised half-heartedly.

Mitsuki opened his mouth to speak again, but Nagi beat him to it. “Mr. Ryouma, was it? I’m sorry, but it seems that you’re misunderstanding something,” the blond said, earning a confused look from both males. “Our Mitsuki is terribly kind and there are many people who like him, so I’m sorry to say that he will have to reject your offer. He doesn’t feel the same as he did in high school.”

Ryouma stared blankly at Nagi. “And who might you be? His new boytoy? Did you know how many people he confessed to and was rejected by in high school? He jumps from person to person all the time, the little shit.”

There was no way Mitsuki could not laugh at that. “If you really like me, Nagasaki-senpai, you’d know that Nagi here is in IDOLiSH7 with me,” Mitsuki chuckled, shaking his head in disbelief. It felt good to be defended by Nagi, because in the past the only one who’d defended him was Iori.
With a tap to Nagi’s arm, Mitsuki gestured in the general direction of Fonte Chocolat. “Let’s go, Nagi.”

Nagi nodded, and the two walked off, leaving Ryouma to stare at their backs as they left.

It was only until they were in the bakery that Nagi pulled Mitsuki to the back, after briefly greeting the Izumi parents, and frowned down at his boyfriend. “What was with that?”

Mitsuki shrugged, already pulling his chef whites on. “I told you before, right? That people only dated me because they wanted to see what it was like with a beta, or because they were curious about whether they could be gay. Clearly, Nagasaki-senpai fit in neither of those categories,” Mitsuki said simply.

“He had no right saying all that to you,” Nagi huffed. “I could sue him.”

At that, Mitsuki laughed. “Please don’t. It isn’t worth your time. I got to get back to work now, so I’ll see you tonight, okay?” Mitsuki asked, glancing around before quickly throwing his arms around Nagi and squeezing the alpha. “Bye.”

Nagi sighed, accepting that Mitsuki didn’t want him to pursue the matter any further. He returned the hug, glad that they were in a corner of the kitchen, out of sight of the others working there. “See you. I love you.”

Mitsuki pulled back, cheeks burning as he shoved Nagi away in embarrassment. “Okay, you can go now.”

“Bye, Mitsuki!” Nagi exclaimed, for added effect, grinning when Mitsuki grumbled and turned away. The alpha stuck his hands in his pockets as he left, telling the Izumi parents that he would drop by again soon, and left the bakery to go back to the dorm.

---

Yamato glanced at the clock hanging on the wall, sighing and pushing himself off the couch. He turned the TV off, checking his RabiChat again to make sure that he hadn’t calculated wrongly. Tsumugi had dropped Tamaki and Sougo off at the orphanage some five to ten minutes ago, and while it was relatively nearby, Yamato doubted that Tsumugi would be back at the dorm quite so soon.

Still, it wasn’t nice to make a girl wait, even more so because Tsumugi was already always waiting for them before and after schedules. Switching the lights and heater off, Yamato grabbed his phone and wallet off the table, shutting the door behind him and heading down to the car park to wait for Tsumugi.

It was in the middle of January now, and winter was at its peak. Even though Yamato was making sure to stay within the shelter, not at all intentionally exposing himself to any of the harsh winter winds, the weather was still chilly. But Yamato had never been a big fan of the cold, and he rubbed his hands together in a pathetic attempt to warm them up as he waited for Tsumugi to arrive.

It was barely six minutes later that the familiar car, a minivan, really, came to a stop in front of the main entrance of the building, and Yamato heaved a sigh of relief as he quickly climbed into the car. Tsumugi glanced at the leader curiously. “Yamato-san, you were waiting outside?” she asked,
mildly confused.

“I didn’t want to keep you waiting,” he explained, still shivering slightly as his body tried to adapt to the significantly warmer interior of the vehicle. “Thanks for accompanying this poor, lonely soul.”

Tsumugi laughed, a demure sound that was not at all like Nagi’s boisterous laughter. “It’s no problem, Yamato-san,” she assured, waiting until the leader put his seatbelt on before reversing out of the driveway. “So, do you have a restaurant in mind?”

“I do, actually,” Yamato said, pulling his phone out and tapping on his bookmarks. “There’s a place in Ebisu that has good udon, apparently. It’s pretty popular, so I made a reservation just in case.”

“Then lead the way, Yamato-san!”

The udon restaurant was a little over a half hour away, mainly because Yamato read the map wrongly once and they ended up missing a turn. Compared to Nagi and Riku, though, Yamato’s sense of direction was considered above average, and they made it to the place with no further mishap.

The streets of Ebisu were considerably crowded, with it being a central shopping district. The cold didn’t appear to deter any of the people who carried bags upon bags of shopping with them, all decked in layers of winterwear to fight the chilly weather. Yamato and Tsumugi were no exception to this, both wearing at least three layers of clothing in order to keep themselves warm.

When they arrived at the restaurant, a fancy-looking place slotted between a few high-end clothing stores, there was still nearly twenty minutes until their reservation. “Do you want to go shopping while we wait, Manager?” Yamato suggested. They were surrounded by apparel stores all around, and Yamato doubted that Tsumugi had much free time outside of her work as a manager.

“Is that alright?” Tsumugi asked, pursing her lips thoughtfully. “I’ve been meaning to get a new dress.”

“Then go for it,” Yamato encouraged, pointing to a store just a few metres away from them. “I’ll tag along with you, if you need any help picking something out.”

Tsumugi smiled gratefully, and the duo headed into said store together. As expected, there were eyes on Yamato the entire time; he wasn’t the leader of IDOLiSH7 and lead actor of Nemesis for nothing. Tsumugi had long grown used to being noticed by random members of the public, something that they all experienced every day as part of IDOLiSH7, so she paid the curious gazes no heed as she picked out a few dresses to compare. “How do these look, Yamato-san?”

“I think the pink one is pretty cute,” he commented, glancing back when he heard a few women whispering amongst themselves. “Why don’t you try it on, Manager?”

Just as they had grown used to garnering attention wherever they went, they had also gotten used to inviting unsolicited gossip and baseless rumours. They understood why people would misunderstand the relationship between them, though – managers rarely showed their face in public, so fans generally didn’t recognise them, especially since IDOLiSH7 was still a relatively new group. Seeing a male idol alone with a girl, doing something as date-like as shopping together, was fodder for the fans’ imaginations.

The moment Yamato said the word ‘manager’, the whispering ceased, and Tsumugi smiled sweetly at Yamato. She shrugged her jacket off, handing it to Yamato before quickly disappearing into an empty changing room.
She re-emerged barely a minute later in the dress that Yamato had pointed out, standing in front of Yamato and looking down at the dress. “Do you think this looks okay?” she asked, doing a small twirl to show off the way the dress flowed.

“It does,” Yamato replied. “Maybe you should wear it now, so you can show it off to Tama and Sou when we pick them up later.”

Tsumugi chuckled as she nodded, and the two headed to the cashier together. Tsumugi had been in the middle of pulling her wallet out from her bag when Yamato stretched his hand out, passing his credit card to the cashier and grinning cheekily at Tsumugi. “Today’s on me,” Yamato said, leaving no room for argument. “A small token of appreciation from us to you.”

The corners of Tsumugi’s eyes crinkled as she smiled. “You mean from you to me?”

Yamato waved it off. “I’m the leader, after all. I’ll make the kids buy me some food or run some errands as payment,” he laughed, thanking the cashier and signing on the receipt. After pocketing his card, the beta glanced at his watch. “It’s almost time for our reservation. Let’s go.”

They were seated almost immediately upon stepping into the restaurant and confirming the reservation under Nikaidou Yamato, and they scanned through the menu items before quickly placing their orders.

“You know, Manager,” Yamato started, taking a sip of his water and leaning back. “You really should find some time to relax. I appreciate the company, don’t get me wrong, but you should be spending your off day doing something that isn’t related to IDOLiSH7.”

“I like spending time with you guys, though?” Tsumugi answered honestly, the exact same thing she’d said to Tamaki barely an hour ago.

Yamato blinked at her response, eventually letting out a chuckle. “If you say so. How’s the thing with TRIGGER going? Setting up the RabiChat, and whatnot?”

It had been something that was suggested after their win at Black or White – for the two groups to arrange some time and message each other in a group chat. Tsumugi had been put in charge of coordinating it, mainly due to the fact that it was rather disastrous trying to get the entire IDOLiSH7 to behave, and they’d rather not leave that sort of impression on Anesagi.

“I think we’ll be able to hold it soon!” Tsumugi replied cheerfully. She was rather excited about getting the chance to let the two groups interact with each other in a private chat room, where they wouldn’t have to worry about people overhearing their conversation. She was mildly worried that one of the boys would accidentally offend the TRIGGER members, so it was up to her and Yamato to ensure that things didn’t get out of hand.

Expectedly, Riku had been incredibly excited about the fact that he would be able to get to chat with Tenn, even if it wasn’t a private chat. He hadn’t gotten the chance to speak to Tenn privately since after Otoharu had temporarily disbanded the group.

“Honestly, I’m a little worried about Riku,” Yamato admitted. He had a soft spot for all the members, Tsumugi included, but more so for Riku. Maybe it was because Riku had such a childish innocence about, well, most things, or maybe it was because they’d seen him suffer an attack one too many times. “I hope Kujo doesn’t run his mouth.”

Tsumugi pursed her lips. “I do hope Kujo-san won’t be too blunt,” she agreed.

Iori aside, because he was Riku’s boyfriend and would naturally be worried for the redhead,
everyone worried most about Riku. It wasn’t only because they didn’t want to compromise any schedules if he ended up in the hospital; it hurt them to see Riku have an attack, and the members would do everything they could to ensure Riku’s condition wasn’t triggered.

“If Kujo even tries to say anything rude to Riku, I’m pulling him out of the chat,” Yamato warned. “I’ll make sure to be with him when we have the chat.”

“Yamato-san is really kind,” Tsumugi commented, a smile on her face once more.

Yamato simply smiled awkwardly at being called out. He wasn’t the best when it came to straightforward compliments like these, and it was even more embarrassing because he knew Tsumugi meant what she said, as she always did. “Is that so...”

The leader was almost glad that their food arrived right at that moment, the waiter setting the steaming bowls of udon in front of them. The topic was dropped, and the two fell into an easy conversation about the recent happenings in the dorm.

There was nothing new about Riku tripping over his own feet, although it was admittedly rare that he brought Tamaki down with him. Understandably, Tamaki hadn’t been pleased by that, because he’d been the cushion for Riku’s fall and ended up with a purplish bruise on his elbow.

Then Yamato told Tsumugi about how Nagi cooked for the first time in his entire life, although he was careful to leave out the fact that it was for Mitsuki. Tsumugi understood, even without Yamato explicitly stating it, because there wasn’t anyone else that Nagi would go to such lengths for.

Their conversation stopped abruptly when Yamato caught sight of a familiar face, leaning across the table to wave at the topic of their previous conversation. “Yo, Kujo. What're you doing here?”

“Nikaidou Yamato and IDOLiSH7’s manager,” Tenn greeted, taking a seat beside the two. The restaurant’s peak hour was over, and most of the diners who’d been having lunch had already left their seats. “What are you doing here together?”

“As pleasant as ever, huh. Eating, obviously.” Yamato raised a brow. “And you?”

Tenn shrugged, placing his order before turning back to the two. “We just ended a CM filming nearby, and Gaku was beginning to get on my nerves about the entire RabiChat thing,” Tenn said, dismissing the issue easily. “I came here to avoid him.”

“Can’t he just, I don’t know, follow you here?” Yamato asked.

Tenn snorted. “As if he would ever step foot into an udon restaurant. His body’s composed of 80% soba, I’m sure. That guy doesn’t eat anything else,” Tenn told them. When Tsumugi giggled, the alpha turned to look at her blankly. “What is it?”

“Oh, it’s just that the guy who delivers soba to the office looks a lot like Gaku-san,” she explained, not noticing the way Tenn’s mouth quirked upwards into a lopsided smile. Yamato noticed, though, but didn’t question it. Their manager was rather cute, after all. It made sense that Tenn would be amused by her cheerful nature.

“You guys don’t have anything on today?” Tenn asked, idly staring at his phone while waiting for his food to arrive. Both betas shook their heads, and Tenn sighed. “Must be nice to be so free. Our damn President’s been running us into the ground ever since Black or White.”

“I thought you liked working.”
“You wouldn’t understand,” Tenn sighed, “you’re both betas.”

“Ah,” Yamato said, suddenly realising what Tenn was referring to. He went closer to Tenn, whispering in his ear, “Was it your rut?”

He was surprised to see Tenn blushing, even if only slightly, as he nodded. “Yeah. It’s kind of suffering to have to jump right back into work once it ends, but you guys wouldn’t know that. Lucky you.”

*It’s even worse for Ichi and Sou, though*, Yamato wanted to retort. Their schedules had gotten busier, and it was getting increasingly harder to arrange recordings around their heats. They usually passed it off as the two being unwell, and would leave a one-day window after their heats ended to let them regain their energy properly. Now, though, they had to jump right back into work the following day, if not that very same evening.

But Yamato wasn’t about to risk letting Tenn find out that Iori and Sougo were omegas. Apart from the fact that Riku and Tamaki would be incredibly pissed off if he revealed their secondary genders, he also didn’t know what Tenn felt about omegas being idols. Instead, he offered a sympathetic pat on the back.

“It must be difficult,” Tsumugi chimed in.

Shrugging, Tenn replied, “I suppose I should be used to it by now, though. Today is the first time I’m having a lunch longer than twenty minutes since then. How’s Riku? He doesn’t cope well in the cold. Has he been taking care of himself?”

“We’re taking care of him,” Yamato corrected with a smile. “You don’t have to worry about him.”

“Is that so.”

Tsumugi nodded firmly. “We’ve been doing our best to make sure Riku-san is in the best of health,” she assured. Her phone vibrated on the table, and Tsumugi glanced at it briefly before looking over to Yamato. “It’s almost time to pick up Sougo-san and Tamaki-san. Shall we leave?”

Their bowls were mostly empty now, and Yamato downed the rest of his broth before standing up. “We’ll be heading off first, then,” he told Tenn. “Don’t push yourself too hard. We’ll see you soon.”

Tenn waved to the duo as they went to pay for their meal, Yamato raising an unimpressed brow as Tsumugi tried to pay for her own portion. Then they headed back to where they’d parked the car, and this time Yamato offered to take the wheel. “You drive us around every other day,” Yamato reasoned, and Tsumugi could only puff her cheeks up in feigned annoyance.

“Lead the way, Manager.”

---

The day had started ridiculously early for Riku and Iori.

Despite it being a day off, and a weekend at that, the two had woken up before seven in the morning.
Riku’s house wasn’t far from the dorm by any means; in fact, it was hardly a half hour ride by train. The Nanase parents were both at home, neither having to work on weekends, and apparently Riku’s mother was making her famous omurice, requested by none other than Riku himself. Riku had spent the entirety of the previous night telling Iori all about his parents – what they worked as, what kind of people they were, what they usually did when they were home together.

As Iori had found out, Riku’s father was a man by the name of Nanase Kaito, and his mother Nanase Rie. After their small club had closed down all those years ago, Kaito had begun to work in a finance company, doing basic admin work and earning just enough to get them by. His mother worked part-time at a cafe nearby their house, making use of her culinary skills to earn some spending money as well as to relieve some of the financial burden on her husband.

They were an alpha-beta couple, but Riku had always thought they were made for each other. Even after twenty over years of being together, they were just as loving towards each other as before. Of course, they had their fair share of arguments like every other couple did, but they never let it show, at least not when they were in front of Riku. It was their way of protecting him, just as Tenn had, not showing him anything other than the image of a perfect family.

In a way, Iori had realised, it was what had allowed Riku to preserve his pure outlook of the world. It wasn’t necessarily a bad thing, although admittedly the omega did wish that Riku was a little less naive about everything.

But that had been one of the reasons why Riku had found it all the more difficult to let Tenn go, why he hadn’t been able to accept the fact that his older twin had seemingly abandoned their family during a time of dire need. Even then, Riku had told him, his parents never cried in front of him, although occasionally he’d have a nightmare and head to their room only to hear the soft sobs of his mother and the quiet murmurs of his father.

If Iori was to be honest with himself, he was rather nervous about meeting them. He imagined it had been similar for Riku, considering the alpha hadn’t been expecting to go to Fonte Chocolat with Nagi two months ago. Still, Riku had had a buffer, while Iori had to fend for himself. He’d never been good with meeting strangers, although he often put up a front while he was working, and it didn’t help that these were Riku’s parents.

Before they were due to go over to the Nanase household, however, Riku had to pay a visit to the hospital near his home. He didn’t often have time to go home now, with their schedules getting increasingly more packed, so now was as good a time as any for his annual health check-up.

Iori had wanted to wait in a cafe somewhere, avoid drawing attention to himself while waiting for Riku, but the alpha had assured him that it would be fine. The pulmonary department of the hospital didn’t often see passers-by, anyway – most of the people there, as Riku called them, were regulars. There would be a handful of patients that Riku wouldn’t recognise, but he knew most of the nurses and doctors by name, having spent a good portion of his childhood at that same hospital.

And, also, Riku was beginning to learn how to get his way with Iori. Using his mouth, for one, had proved as an incredibly persuasive method to convince Iori to go along with his wishes. Iori’d rather Riku convince him like that rather than to use his alpha nature to influence him, so he wasn’t complaining. He could handle an hour or two of waiting.

The January air was at freezing point, and Iori had made sure to bundle Riku up in multiple layers of winterwear before they’d left the dorm that morning. He’d also thrown a scarf, earmuffs, gloves, and a knitted hat on Riku, and now the redhead looked mildly like an Eskimo, just that his coat didn’t have layer upon layer of fur rimming the hood.
Iori had a scarf wrapped around his own neck, courtesy of Riku. It’d been a Christmas present, one that Riku had bought on that day that he and Nagi first went to the Izumi family home. It wasn’t just an ordinary scarf – the staff at the store had told Riku that it helped to conceal scents. Iori didn’t think he particularly needed that function of it, considering that he would still wear scent neutraliser patches when he went out, but he’d been touched that Riku had thought to be considerate like that.

The sweater that Riku was wearing under his multiple layers of jackets had been Iori’s Christmas present to him, with a design not at all unlike one of the shirts Iori often wore, grey with a cat emblem printed smack in the middle. It’d felt sorely lacking in thoughtfulness, but Riku had liked it plenty enough, going to the extent of calling it couple wear and causing Iori’s cheeks to burst into flames.

Riku was leading the way now, strolling leisurely beside Iori as he pointed out familiar shops that they passed by. “That’s Saionji-san's fruit stall,” Riku said, waving briefly at the older man manning the store. “And this ramen shop is run by Miyano-jiichan! It was handed down by his husband’s family, but Sasaki-jiichan injured his back a while ago and Miyano-jiichan is really protective. Sometimes it makes me question who the alpha in their relationship really is.”

“Fated pair?” Iori guessed.

Riku chuckled, shaking his head. “Nah. Just a normal mated couple. I heard Miyano-jiichan was quite hard to win over,” he said, smiling fondly at the memories of sitting down at the ramen shop and listening to the elderly couple’s story. It was close enough to his home that his parents didn’t mind letting him go alone, and the young Riku had visited whenever he could, asking the two about how they met and what they did in the past.

Usually, Riku only wandered around the local shops while waiting for Tenn to get home from school, but all their neighbours were more than willing to entertain Riku while he tried to pass the time by. Their town was fairly quiet, anyway, and most shops were rather empty in the middle of the day.

“Oh!” Riku suddenly exclaimed, causing Iori to flinch at the sound and turn around in shock. “Let’s buy fruits from Saionji-san before going to my house,” the alpha suggested. “You said you didn’t want to go empty-handed, right? Strawberries are in season now!”

Iori blinked at his boyfriend, an amused chuckle escaping his lips. “I don’t see why not, although I had been hoping to get something more... well thought out.”

Riku pouted indignantly. “It’s fine, they like strawberries. The hospital’s right up ahead,” Riku said, pointing at the building just two streets down from where they currently were. It wasn’t a big hospital, considering that it was located in the suburban area, but its pulmonary department was well-known. It was the main reason why Riku had gone to that particular hospital since young; they’d moved when Tenn and Riku were barely a year old, out of the busy streets of Harajuku and to this area, for the purpose of being closer to the hospital.

The moment they stepped through the doors of Yamanaka Hospital, Riku wrinkled his nose distastefully. “Geh, I hate the smell of this place,” he muttered, shrugging his outermost coat off and draping it over his arm. Iori did the same, following closely behind Riku as the alpha rounded corners to get to the pulmonary department of the hospital.

He greeted doctors and nurses that he recognised with the same bright smile that he wore, and Iori wasn’t surprised to see that quite a number of people had their eyes on the two idols. He supposed it wasn’t all that often that they got to see members of one of the rising male groups in Japan strolling through the corridors of a hospital.
Eventually, they made it to the pulmonary wing, and Iori pursed his lips as the receptionist visibly 
brightened at the sight of a familiar face. “Riku-kun, here for your annual check-up, are you?” she 
asked.

Riku nodded easily, leading Iori over to the counter as well. “This is my groupmate, Izumi Iori,” 
Riku introduced, turning to look at Iori and gesturing toward the receptionist. “This is Mai-san. She’s 
been here for as long as I can remember.”

“I’ve seen your performances, Riku-kun,” Mai said, simultaneously entering something into her 
computer system that Iori couldn’t quite see. “I was surprised to see that you boys performed even in 
the middle of a typhoon. Pretty reckless, don’t you think?”

Iori’s initial reaction to seeing Riku interact with someone he was familiar with had been a sort of 
nonsensical jealousy, because that was a part of Riku’s life in which Iori hadn’t entered yet. Mai was 
easily fifteen years older than them, and Iori could tell from the ring on her left hand that she was a 
married woman, and yet he’d had to consciously stamp down any bit of jealousy that rose in his 
chest.

Seeing how she was telling Riku off, though, gently but firmly, made Iori feel like he could 
sympathise with her. God knew how often he was nagging at the alpha to take better care of himself. 
“It truly was,” Iori agreed wholeheartedly, raising a brow when Riku turned to frown at him. “What? 
You know that was a stupid stunt to pull.”

“It’s nice to see that you have friends who try to talk some sense into you,” Mai chuckled, hitting the 
enter button and turning to retrieve a printout. She handed it to Riku. “These are from your last trip to 
the hospital. You know, the one in Shibuya?”

Riku smiled sheepishly as he took the sheets of paper from her. It hadn’t been all that long ago that 
Riku had landed himself in the hospital, of course due to pushing himself too hard. It didn’t help that 
the air chilled his lungs, making it harder to breathe than it normally was.

It had been a short stay, barely a few hours before he’d been discharged in the evening, but Iori had 
given his boyfriend a stern warning about pushing himself past his limits. He understood that Riku 
felt slightly pressured – being the winners of the Black or White Male Idol Award was no small feat. 
He just wished that Riku would be more honest about whether or not he was having an attack, 
instead of waiting until it was too late for just an inhaler to stop it.

“Shizuka-sensei is in today, right?” Riku asked, earning a nod from Mai. “I’ll be going then! Iori, 
you can wait out here for me. It shouldn’t take too long, as long as nothing is wrong with me.”

Iori snorted. “I wouldn’t be surprised if something was wrong, with how poorly you look after 
yourself.”

Riku rolled his eyes, thanking Mai again and walking towards Shizuka’s office. “You’ll be worried 
if something is wrong, though,” Riku pointed out cheekily, grinning when Iori gave an annoyed 
huff. “I’ll be fine! Just, sit here and wait for me.”

“I got it already,” Iori laughed exasperatedly, intentionally making a show of sitting down on one of 
the waiting chairs and making himself comfortable. “Now go, so I don’t have to wait even longer.”

Nodding, Riku turned and walked into the doctor’s office just a couple of doors down, and Iori heard 
him greet Shizuka cheerfully before the door closed with a click.

Sighing softly, Iori pulled his phone out of his pocket, opening up his search window and looking
through the recently searched items. The top few were ‘how to stop being nervous when meeting the parents’, ‘how to make a good impression on alpha’s parents’, and ‘good gifts to buy when visiting someone’s house for the first time’.

Iori didn’t even know why his nerves felt so frayed. He wanted to blame it on the lack of sleep and ever-increasing workload from both school and managerial duties, but he knew that those weren’t the causes for his inexplicable nervousness. Riku had assured him multiple times that his parents would love him, that there was absolutely no way they would oppose to their relationship, but he still worried.

He was snapped out of his train of thoughts when a feminine voice exclaimed, “Ah! Izumi Iori from IDOLiSH7!?”, and Iori glanced up to see a girl looking at his with a look of shock adorning her features. She looked to be around Riku’s age, and Iori briefly wondered if Riku knew who she was, too.

“Yes, that would be me,” Iori responded with a small smile.

“I’m a huge fan,” the girl gushed, before tilting her head slightly to the side. “By any chance, are you here with Nanase Riku-kun?”

Iori nodded slowly. So she does know Nanase-san. “He’s having a check-up now, actually.”

She nodded in understanding, gesturing to the empty seat beside Iori. “Can I sit here?” she asked, smiling when Iori nodded again. “My name is Sawada Riko. I used to share a hospital room with Riku-kun when we were younger. Only once, though we became friends after that through our frequent visits to the hospital.”

“What was Nanase-san like when he was younger?” Iori asked, curiosity getting the better of him. Riku would never tell him much about his childhood, not so much because he wanted to avoid accidentally mentioning Tenn, but more because he felt like it’d make him seem weak, and alphas ‘weren’t meant to be weak’. It was utter nonsense, but Riku firmly believed in that, so Iori had figured that he would have to slowly knock some sense into his boyfriend.

He definitely hadn’t been expecting to run into one of Riku’s childhood friends, and now that he was sitting with Riko like this, Iori didn’t see why he couldn’t seize the chance to ask more about the alpha.

Riko hummed thoughtfully, leaning back in her seat as she thought of how to begin. “For starters, he was always smiling whenever he wasn’t having an attack. Whenever his condition was good, he’d be talking to a nurse or doodling in a colouring book. Don’t tell him I said this, but he wasn’t very good at colouring within the lines,” Riko snickered, and Iori let his own lips curve into a smile.

“Most days that I played with him, his brother would be there,” Riko leaned in towards Iori suddenly. “Kujo Tenn from TRIGGER is his brother, isn’t he? I’d recognise his face anywhere. He always came to visit Riku-kun when he was free.”

“That’s right,” Iori sighed.

Riko sighed as well. “He was kind of a mess after his brother left. Who could blame him? He’d only been thirteen. He landed himself in the hospital at least a dozen times in those following months. Whenever I came here after an attack or to get more medicine, he’d be here too. I mean, I guess it was nice to have a familiar face around, but I’d wished he’d get better soon.”

“That does sound a lot like what Nanase-san would have done.”
“Yeah. We kind of stopped being friends back in my final year of middle school, though,” Riko said, now wearing a wistful smile on her face. “I presented as an omega in second year, and a few months later we heard that he presented as an alpha. I wasn’t surprised, not really, but my parents wanted me to stop coming into contact with him after that. They knew Riku-kun would never do anything to hurt me intentionally, but my health was still rather bad and they were just worried. Riku-kun understood, and if he saw me with my parents in the hospital walkways, he’d make sure to avoid me.”

Iori frowned – that seemed like an awful way to treat their child’s friend. “But you’re alone today?”

“My parents are both busy, so I told them I’d be fine alone,” Riko explained. “Good thing I did, too. Maybe I’ll finally get a chance to talk to Riku-kun after all these years.”

Iori felt the irrational jealousy begin to bubble up within him once more, now worse than compared to Mai. It was likely because of the fact that Riko was an omega as well, and she had nice facial features. It didn’t help that Iori could already imagine how excited Riku would be to see an old friend. “Maybe,” Iori agreed, keeping the smile on his face as pleasant as possible.

They both glanced up when a door opened, and Riku stepped out of the office before immediately turning to where he knew his boyfriend was waiting. He stopped in his tracks, staring at Riko before a grin spread across his face. “Riko-chan? Is that you?”

“Who else could it be?” Riko chuckled, giving Riku a small wave. “It’s been a while, hasn’t it?”

“It has!” Riku agreed, coming over to sit down beside them. Iori sighed inwardly in relief when Riku decided to sit beside him instead of beside Riko. He really had to get a grip on this whole jealousy thing. “You’re in university now, right? What’re you studying?”

“Business management,” she grimaced. “My parents have been pushing that on me since high school.”

“Iori wants to go into business management too!” Riku said, grinning brightly and casually throwing an arm over Iori’s shoulders. The omega felt his face heat up; does Nanase-san not think before he acts?!

He was mildly worried that Riko might suspect something going on between them, but the other simply chuckled in amusement. “Really? I mean, he does give off that kind of impression,” Riko said. “No offense, Iori-kun.”

“None taken,” Iori assured.

“I don’t think I’ve ever apologised for how my parents treated you when you presented as an alpha,” Riko said, bowing her head slightly. “I’m sorry they went to such extreme lengths.”

“I got over it a long time ago,” Riku told her. “They were just worried.”

“Speaking of worrying,” Riko sighed, pulling her phone out of her pocket and staring at the screen. She got up, slinging her bag over her shoulder. “I’d better get going before they begin to think that I was kidnapped. It was nice meeting you, Iori-kun. I hope we get to see each other again.”

They watched as Riko left, and then Iori stood up as well. “Should we go?”

“I’ll go and pay first,” Riku said, “I’ll be quick.”

Iori stood at the side while Riku went back to the counter, striking up a quick conversation with Mai.
about IDOLiSH7’s activities and asking her to support them. Then Riku was walking back to him, and together the two left the hospital, heading back in the same direction they came from to pick up some fruits before going to Riku’s place.

Saionji, a man who looked like he would be around their parents’ age, raised a brow as the couple neared his stall. “Well if it isn’t Riku-kun! I haven’t seen you in months! How’s the busy city life going for you?”

Riku laughed. “Not too bad. How’ve you been? I heard from mum that you adopted a dog recently?”

“Bah, my wife is spoiling the little thing so much, it’s driving me crazy,” Saionji snorted. “This is your friend, right? From that group you’re in? My daughter loves your songs by the way, says she can’t believe that she used to play with you.”

“I’m Izumi Iori,” the omega introduced himself.

Saionji looked Iori over before reaching out to clap him on the back, and Iori could barely keep himself from breaking out into a smile when he noticed Riku stiffen slightly.

Good to know that I’m not the only possessive one around here.

“You look like a good kid,” Saionji grinned. “I don’t believe you came just to catch up, did you?”

Smiling sheepishly, Riku nodded. “We were thinking of getting strawberries for my parents, since I haven’t been back in a while,” the alpha explained. It wasn’t exactly the truth, but it wasn’t a lie either. The only difference was that Iori was the one who needed to buy the strawberries, as a greeting gift, and not because Riku wanted to.

Luckily for them, Saionji didn’t question why Iori was going to Riku’s house with him, simply picked out the freshest strawberries he had and packed them into a box. Iori was already in the process of taking his wallet out to pay when Saionji frowned and shook his head. “No need for that,” he said.

“I can’t take it for free,” Iori frowned. “At least let me do something to pay you for those, Saionji-san. You’re running a business, after all.”

“In that case...” Saionji trailed off. “Can I take a picture with you two, then? My daughter will be so jealous that I got to see you in person.”

Riku glanced at Iori, and the omega chuckled before nodding. “As long as it isn’t circulated online, sure.”

They took a selfie, thanked Saionji for the strawberries, and left for Riku’s family home.

It wasn’t a far walk from where the shops were, barely five minutes away, and then they were standing in front of a house that Riku was all too familiar with. He unlocked the gates, letting Iori enter before closing the door behind him. “I’ll tell you this again: my mum can be a little crazy,” Riku warned.

Iori raised a brow at Riku, a teasing smile already present on his face. “More than you?”

“Iori,” Riku grumbled. “But yes, even more than me.”

Iori shrugged, and Riku sighed before he slotted his key into the main door. He pushed it open, glancing around warily and calling out, “I’m home.”
Riku loved his parents, he truly did, but sometimes he wondered how it was possible for his mother to be as excitable as she was. Considering that she was in her mid-forties already, he’d thought that some of her personality would have mellowed out, but clearly that wasn’t the case.

They heard Rie before they saw her, her footsteps pattering quickly across the wooden floors as she exited the kitchen. “Is that Riku?” she called out, as if she couldn’t recognise her own son’s voice. Then she caught sight of Iori, and the beta broke out into a grin. “And you must be Iori-kun! It’s so nice to finally meet the boy of my son’s dreams!”

“I should have known,” Riku muttered under his breath, cheeks heating up from her choice of words.

Iori wasn’t faring much better, blinking in surprise even as he felt his cheeks burn. He couldn’t see his own face, but he was relatively certain that he was red as a beet. “Y-yes. Nice to meet you, Nanase-san,” Iori greeted, bowing as politely as humanly possible.

“You’re so cute!” Rie gushed, and Iori turned impossibly redder. Maybe he should’ve taken Riku’s warning a little more seriously, but he honestly hadn’t thought that Riku had been being serious. “You’re in your third year of high school, aren’t you, Iori-kun? Oh, and just call me obasan if you want. Can’t be having too many Nanase-sans in one house, can we?”

“I’ll be graduating in April,” Iori confirmed, clearing his throat in an attempt to mask his embarrassment. He looked at Riku for help, but the alpha was already shrugging his coat and jacket off, hanging it on the coat rack in the hallway. “Is Na-ojisan home as well? Oh, and these strawberries are for you.”

Rie nodded, gesturing in the direction of the living room and taking the bag of strawberries from Iori gratefully. “He’s watching music shows on TV. You can go and greet him. I’ll be finishing up lunch soon, and then we can eat, alright? You didn’t have to go to the trouble of buying these, but thank you.”

“It’s no problem,” Iori assured, waiting until Rie disappeared back into the kitchen before heading to the living room. He didn’t know the layout of the house, not at all, but it was easy enough to locate where the music was coming from. That, and Riku’s scent was easy enough to identify.

The omega peeked into the living room to see that a familiar program was playing on TV, one that IDOLiSH7 had once been guests for. Riku was talking animatedly to Nanase Kaito about said program and what they’d done during that filming, although the alpha responded with amused chuckles, telling Riku that yes, he’d watched that episode as well.

Riku looked up when Iori’s scent got stronger, waving the omega over to the couch that he was on.

Iori complied, removing his jacket before moving over to where Riku was. He bowed to Kaito, the same way he had to Rie. “Nice to meet you, ojisan. I’m Izumi Iori.”

Having met Riku’s parents, Iori could see where the twins got their looks from. Tenn’s graceful beauty had obviously come from Rie, something that Riku had just a hint of, while the determined set of their brows was from Kaito. When Kaito smiled, the harshness of his expression gave way to something softer, kind and welcoming. “If it isn’t the famed Iori-kun,” Kaito said, laughing when Iori went red once more. “I was wondering what kind of person had managed to wrap our Riku around his little finger.”

“My Dad,” Riku sighed, an exasperated chuckle leaving his lips. “You and mum are so embarrassing.”
“We try,” Kaito said. “Are you ready to try Rie’s omurice? That stuff is amazing, if I do say so myself.”

“So I’ve heard,” Iori replied. The smell of egg and ketchup was already wafting through the air, and it did smell pretty good. Iori didn’t mean to be biased, but he couldn’t help comparing everything to that of Fonte Chocolat, but this had to be at least on the same level.

Iori glanced at his boyfriend. “Say... would it be possible if you show me Nanase-san’s baby photos, ojisan?” he asked, snickering when Riku’s eyes doubled in size.

“No, please, no;” the alpha pleaded, but Kaito’s smile only widened.

“Rie-chan! Iori-kun wants to see Riku’s baby photos!”

“Eh? Definitely! I’ll bring them out after lunch!”

Riku let out a defeated groan, pulling his legs up to his chest and hiding his face in his knees. Iori went over to the alpha, poking his arm to get his attention, and Riku swatted it away. “I didn’t ask your mum for your baby photos,” he mumbled.

“Aww, poor you,” Iori teased, freezing when he remembered that Riku’s father was just a metre away from them, and most definitely watching their interaction with an amused smile on his face. The omega cleared his throat awkwardly. “You can ask for them next time you come over, alright? Although this time, at least let me know that you’re going.”


Riku glanced up, a pout visible on his face, and if Kaito wasn’t staring at them, Iori would’ve kissed him. He was ridiculously adorable when he was sulking – that, and Iori was just soft for the alpha.

“Really?” Riku asked, sounding a little like a child who’d been scolded.

Iori nodded. “It’s embarrassing, but I’ll deal with it.”

“Food’s ready!” Rie called out suddenly.

Riku visibly perked up, and Iori chuckled as he jumped off the couch, dashing to the dining table as if anyone of them would take his omurice away from him. Iori and Kaito followed behind, and Iori took his seat beside Riku. The alpha’s portion of omurice had more meat and vegetables in it, but Iori wasn’t complaining. The omurice looked amazing for a homecooked meal.

Iori didn’t notice that the Nanases were looking at him until he glanced up, startling slightly when he saw the three pairs of eyes on him. “T-thank you for the food,” he said, taking a tentative bite of his lunch. It tasted better than he thought it would, and for the first time, Iori could understand why Riku spoke so highly of his mother’s omurice. Apart from being delicious, it also tasted like home. Iori took another bite, and another. “This is... really good.”

Rie heaved a sigh of relief, as if she’d been expecting Iori not to like it. “I’m glad it is. Let’s eat, boys.”

Riku immediately dug into his food, humming appreciatively at the taste of his favourite omurice. “It tastes just like I remember it!” Riku exclaimed, eliciting a soft chuckle from his mother. “I wish I could eat it at the dorm. I mean, Iori and Mitsuki’s omurice is good too, but mum’s is the best!”

“I would teach you, but you always make a mess of my kitchen,” Rie sighed. “What a clumsy
“child.”

“Hey!”

“Then why don’t you teach Iori-kun?” Kaito suggested.

Iori shook his head quickly. “No, I couldn’t possibly—”

But then Riku had turned to look at him, that familiar hopeful gleam in his eyes, and Iori felt his resolve slowly crumble away. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to learn, nor was it that he couldn’t, but he felt like he didn’t have the right to learn the recipe. It was kind of a family recipe, after all.

Rie was smiling at him, though, looking excited at the prospect of being able to hand her recipe down to someone else. “Why not?” she asked. “You’re Riku’s boyfriend, and that makes you family! Wouldn’t it be good to cook for him now and then? One day you’ll be part of the family too, right?”

“...if you put it that way,” Iori conceded, cheeks tinged pink. *Part of the family...*

“Great!” Rie beamed, clapping her hands together satisfactorily. “Next time you come over, then?”

Iori nodded, and they continued with their lunch. They asked Iori a number of generic questions about Riku’s life in the dorm, how he behaved around the other members and whether he was causing trouble for anyone. Then they asked Riku about his doctor’s appointment, Rie chiding her son about recklessly pushing himself too hard and landing himself in the hospital.

After they were done eating, Iori insisted on doing the dishes, and Rie sent Riku to help him out. “Kaito-san, help me get the albums out,” Rie said, and the couple disappeared into the storeroom to retrieve Riku, as well as Tenn’s, baby photos.

“They’re nice people,” Iori commented, sponging the plates and handing them to Riku to rinse off. They were used to doing the dishes together in the dorm, so they worked efficiently – the couples often took rotated duties between the three of them. Yamato did his fair share of the chores as well, of course.

“I told you they’d like you,” Riku reminded with a playful smile. His mother, especially, seemed to have fallen in love with Iori. “I look forward to your rendition of mum’s omurice, Iori.”

Iori elbowed Riku in the side, albeit only gently. “Maybe you should learn with me.”

“You heard what she said,” Riku grimaced. “I’ve lost count of how many times I turned the kitchen into a battlefield. Tenn-nii knows how to make it, though. Maybe one day I’ll learn, okay? So that you won’t have to be the only one making it for me. One day.”

“Sure, make your omega do the house duties,” Iori grumbled, though he didn’t mean it maliciously. It wasn’t a bad feeling to be relied on, and to have somebody to rely on. It was almost flattering that Riku thought he would be able to eventually replicate Rie’s omurice; Mitsuki had always been better in the kitchen than Iori, even if Iori wasn’t half-bad himself.

Riku bit his lip to prevent himself from full-out grinning. Iori was surprisingly honest sometimes, and completely dishonest other times. *My omega?*

“Yes, whose else could I be?” Iori countered, knowing fully well that Riku could see him blushing. “Hurry up with the dishes. I want to look at your baby photos. Oh, and maybe I’ll have blackmail material of Kujo-san, too.”
“Fine, I got it already,” Riku chuckled.

They washed the rest of the dishes, pots and pans included, before drying their hands and heading back out into the living room. By then, Kaito and Rie had brought a pile of albums out, and the couple was already looking through them together. Rie glanced up when the two boys came into her line of sight, waving them over excitedly. “Look at how cute our Riku was!”

Iori sat on the floor beside Rie, looking at the picture she was pointing at before chuckling. Riku had been only a toddler in that particular picture, and for whatever reason, had a pair of pants on his head. He looked incredibly proud of himself, though, if the haughty expression he’d worn was any sort of indicator. He looked utterly ridiculous, but it was also incredibly adorable.

“There’re pictures of Kujo-san too, right?” Iori asked, his amused smile warping into a sly one when he caught sight of a picture of Tenn and Riku together. Despite being the same age, Tenn had Riku on his back, and the gentle smile he’d worn was nothing at all like what Iori had seen before. “He was cute back then, huh.”

“Tenn-nii is always cute, though? Praise me too, Iori!” Riku whined.

“What, praise your ability to wear your pants on your head?” Iori snickered.

“I was three!”

“Oh, and over here they were...”

An hour passed them by, just looking through old photos of the twins and talking about the story behind each one. Iori noticed the resigned smile that Rie wore whenever she talked about Tenn, and he hoped for her sake that she would one day be able to talk to her elder son again. He still didn’t know the reason why Tenn had left the family, but no mother deserved to have their thirteen-year-old son walk out from the family like that.

When Riku looked at the time, realising that they’d spent so much time looking at photos of him and Tenn, Riku grimaced. They were free for the rest of the evening, but the group had been planning on holding a small celebration for Iori in the dorm. It was ten days before Iori’s actual birthday, but their schedules that day would be packed. “Ah, mum, can I take Iori upstairs now?”

“Oh my, look at the time. We’ll continue this another time, alright? Iori-kun, here’s a small present from us to you, for your birthday,” Rie said, pulling out a neatly wrapped present from behind her. Iori took it from her gratefully, a small smile gracing his face. “Thank you. I’ll treasure it.”

“Don’t go doing anything strange in this house, got it?” Kaito warned, bursting into laughter when both boys went red in the face. “Off with you two now. Let us know if you need anything!”

“This way,” Riku said, getting up and leading the way up to his bedroom.

There was a messily made wooden plate hanging in front of Riku’s door, the illegible handwriting on it clearly that of a younger Riku. There was one on the door right next to Riku’s room, as well, clearly made by the same person.

Tenn’s room.

“Iori?” Riku called out in confusion, glancing back at the omega to see him staring intently at the door to Tenn’s room. “Oh, we didn’t really touch anything in Tenn-nii’s room. For the first few years, I went inside every now and then, hoping that he’d come back. After that, we didn’t see a
point in removing his things. It's still his room after all, if he ever wants to come back.”

“I see,” Iori said in understanding, tearing his gaze away from the door to a room that no longer had an owner. He followed Riku into his room, shutting the door behind him and sitting down on the floor. Riku’s room was simple, well-kept, and there wasn’t a single stuffed toy on his bed. Iori supposed it made sense for Riku not to own any stuffed toys. Those could trigger an attack. There were, however, quite a number of books lining the shelves. “It’s not much different from your room in the dorm.”

Riku shrugged, plopping down on his bed and reaching over to the nightstand. He retrieved a small wrapped gift, not at all unlike the one Iori had just received from Rie and Kaito. “I guess. You don’t mind me giving your present to you now, do you? Or should I keep it till the actual day?” Riku asked.

“You can’t just ask me that!” Iori groaned. Riku truly had no sense of delicacy. Isn’t something like this supposed to be a surprise? “Just give it to me now, then.”

Riku’s face lit up, and he handed the present over to Iori. “Open it now! I want to see your reaction!”

Iori raised a brow, but did as Riku told him to, gingerly tearing the wrapping paper away to reveal a gift box. Riku looked both excited and anxious, and Iori decided to save his boyfriend the agony of waiting, quickly lifting the lid of the box to see what exactly Riku had given him. Upon recognising the item, Iori’s eyes widened. “Isn’t this... that limited edition Loppu-chan!? From the Christmas chocolates? How did you get this!? No, never mind that, how did you even know about this, Nanase-san?”

“You were always looking at the one Manager has,” Riku explained, scratching his cheek sheepishly. “You’re not the most discreet person, Iori. I asked Tamaki about it, then he told me all about how you’d been the one who gave it to Manager. You obviously still wanted it, so I tried my best to find it online!”

“It couldn’t have been cheap...” Iori mumbled, feeling warmth spread throughout his body. “Thank you.”

Riku smiled, cupping Iori’s cheek gently, his smile widening when Iori leaned into his touch. “Anything for you,” he said, closing the gap between them to capture Iori’s lips in a kiss. When they pulled apart, Iori was blushing furiously, gaze fixed on anywhere but Riku’s face. “Use it well, okay?”

“Are you kidding?” Iori snapped, shocking Riku for a brief moment. “I... can’t possibly use it. I’ll keep it properly, I promise. Something this rare shouldn’t be used carelessly after all.”

“If you say so,” Riku chuckled. “It’s a little early but, happy birthday, Iori. I love you.”

“You’re embarrassing,” Iori grumbled. He didn’t resist when Riku pulled him to his chest, instead opting to hide his face in the alpha’s shoulder. Riku’s room still carried faint traces of his scent, even though it’d been months since Riku last came home, but nothing beat the scent of the real thing.

Iori smiled against Riku’s chest when he felt the alpha nuzzle the top of his head before planting a kiss there, arms moving to wrap around the omega’s torso. “You like when I’m embarrassing,” Riku mumbled smugly, moving so that he was nuzzling Iori’s scent glands. “I’m really glad you like it.”

“Of course I like it, dummy,” Iori huffed. “I-I love you, too. I guess.”
Riku felt like his face was going to split in half from how hard he was smiling. “That’s the first time you’re saying that to me, Iori! I’m happy! I love you!”

“Okay! Don’t keep repeating it!”

“I love Iori!”

“Please stop.”

“Say it again!”

“...I love you too.”

“Ehehe!”

Chapter End Notes

It's been 7(?)ish months since I first uploaded this fic and I can't say this enough, but thank you all for the support and comments and kudos! It means a lot to me to see that people are enjoying reading this fic as much as I'm enjoying writing it!

I'm not sure how long Unexpected will be able to stay at the top in kudos and hits in the i7 tag but hey I can hope //laughs.

I really hope this fic has done i7 some justice (even though a lot of the dialogues are taken directly from translations, so thank you i7-translations @ tumblr!) and honestly I do have quite a bit planned out for this entire series. Part 2 is already in the works so I'll get around to uploading it hopefully around mid-Nov! It looks like it might end up being longer than Unexpected, I don't really know anymore. But it'll also be sticking to the canon storyline so, again, a lot of the dialogue is taken from translations (thanks seigyokus @ tumblr in advance wwww)

That's all from me for now (I think) so I'll see you guys again in about a month's time!

P.S. I'm not sure how the word count for this epilogue is like on ao3, but on MS word it was 17,777 words HAHAHA yes I need to stop with making word counts like this...

P.P.S. For those who liked hoshimegu and haven't checked out my Erin/Coda fic pls do!! I really like how it turned out although the starting and ending seems a little unsatisfactory. It's called Assassin and the Beast!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!