Death Of A Bachelor

by Macbetha

Summary

Rin Matsuoka’s senior year of university is full of terrifyingly hysterical irony such as losing his swimming scholarship to a foot cramp and suddenly not having a way to pay for his last semester before graduation. He enlists himself in paid dating services on a desperate whim; he wasn’t supposed to fall in love with an orphaned billionaire, so naturally, that’s exactly what he does.

Notes

I’m gonna be real with y’all.

This fic has been on my mind for months, but in all sincerity, what kicked my ass into gear and made me write this story was this vine because I immediately thought of the guy as Sousuke making his Sugar Daddy profile online and I lose my shit every time I watch it.

So hello, lovelies! I am so very excited to finally share this fic. I want to say thank you to everyone on my Twitter | Tumblr who has supported this idea even before it’s release; I am forever grateful for your kind words!

Okay, so, a few things: there’s going to be a big social media element to this fic. If the photos or videos aren't showing up, I'll try my very best to fix them since they contain lots of
I've read a few fics that incorporated social media elements in the story and it just made everything so immersive and well, fun, so I was really excited to try my hand at it! Mind you, everything was made by me and I don't have photoshop, just a PicMonkey subscription, so it takes a long time to create the images and if there's any sort of mistakes, it's my bad lol.

Death of a Bachelor's Soundtrack can be found [here](#), it's a YouTube playlist since that's pretty easy. It started out with just a few tracks but I update it with the music I listen to as I write each chapter, so songs are added quite frequently!

[The Official Poster](#) if you will, ha, was done by the ever-talented Kash~ ([Tumblr](#) | [Twitter](#)) It's just. So good. Dreamy wow.

I think that's it! I really hope you enjoy and thank you so much for reading.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When a boy tell you he loves you - because a boy has never handed those words to you like crushed blackberries in the palms of his hands, firm. Young. Full. Waiting to taste, sweet with you. His arms, creeping vines begging to touch the sun in your face, saying, "Here. Take everything I have ever touched to be closer to you." His breath, waiting to be folded into a lovenote passed in between the nape of your neck and his front teeth. He will remember the time you told him that you feel safe in his mouth and he will never grow hungry.

When he tells you he loves you, you will hear music.

- Edwin Bodney

The years spent at university are a handful of time in which anything imaginable or seemingly
impossible can happen. Rin Matsuoka can prove this because he’s aced calculus exams he didn’t even study for, not to mention he fell in love with a billionaire that had more money than he knew what to do with, and he had a heart so hollow and hungry that it swallowed Rin whole, but he’ll get to that part later.

In hindsight, after he saw the light at the end of the tunnel – better known as graduation – the time at college was actually a rapid occurrence in the scheme of an average human lifespan. Yet he acknowledges that no other institution demands such a degree of reflection, consideration, and determination like college does. The foundation of his comfort zone crumbled beneath his feet the moment he stepped on campus for the first time, leaving him with the choice to fall or fly above the onslaught of opinions and pressures from his peers and professors.

College was the first taste of freedom writhing on his tongue, restless and singing at all hours of lectures, burning through the night with his first sting of vodka, so raw and hot it was like a living sensation in his mouth. University is a series of innocent firsts, and they are all innocent regardless of intent because he just wanted something better than the eighteen years of suffering through the same boring things. The sun hung over the campus with the same merciless heat as ever but suddenly the world was bright with possibilities, offering something new, something that promised Rin he would feel alive.

At university, every level of fuckery will surely be exceeded because somewhere, somehow, another student is surpassing your mistakes with flying colors; this is the one unwavering promise of college and on this present day, Rin is that one and only asshole.

It was all stacked up against him since this morning. He’d endured a six-hour study session of honors statistics the night before because that class will actually be the death of him. He spelt restlessly, jerking awake with nerves, so anxious that he jolted back to life each time he dozed off, but because the universe has a cruel and unrelenting sense of humor, when his cell phone alarm blared to life he wasn’t conscious enough to realize that hurdling the phone across the bedroom would result in the screen shattering – more like, exploding. At least the alarm didn’t go off again.

Haru is the one who woke Rin after tripping over his pile of highlighted textbooks and stumbling into the mountain of laundry Rin hasn’t had time to wash in weeks. Haru made a face at the unwashed protein shakers and yeah, sure, over the past few months Rin might have misplaced his neat-freak tendencies and every other part of himself that felt good, but who the fuck doesn’t lose themselves in the deadlines of university, right?

Right?

Haru looked unnerved when Rin asked him this, his eyes whispering, this isn’t like you, but Haru did not voice his concern; he did not give a placating nod or offer empty words of reassurance, though he did smirk in sorrowful fondness. “Well, at least you’re still a perfectionist.”

That was true. Rin’s drive was the only part of himself that wasn’t burned out just yet, but his education presented challenges that turned his motivation into a monster starved for perfection. He couldn’t just get good grades; he had to be the valedictorian. He couldn’t just be the best swimmer on the Tokyo University team; he had to be the best in the world.

Even as tired as Rin was, passion startled through him when Haru tossed his team jacket because swimming was what Rin could do at the very least. It was the one truth to the machine that school turned him into. Swimming didn’t just make him a person – in the water, he was Rin again.
He would prove himself no matter what, even though this was the biggest day of his life and he was scared shitless.

Some pre-race anxiety was fine because Rin never second-guessed his capabilities in the water. He believed in himself so stupidly much that he didn’t even apply for scholarships for next semester. He told himself that offers would come flooding in the moment his hand slapped the poolside and he won first place today at nationals. He could not have a Plan B for his dreams, could not even give failure a consideration. That was Rin’s formula for success and he doesn’t regret it because he really did have every faith in himself.

But he hadn’t expected a foot cramp to get thrown into the equation. Never in a hundred lifetimes could he have anticipated something so fucking fickle to even touch him. Rin can admit that he’s dramatic but when he’s swimming in the medley race and hurdling toward victory only for his left foot to lock up and clench in pain, it is literally the end of the world.

Feeling his dreams die was a physical sensation, far worse than anything he’s ever felt. Nothing could compare, not each and every college relationship that ended in heartbreak because Rin couldn’t put anyone before himself, not the impending doom of true adulthood, not even when the sunlight beat off his father’s gravestone and seared his vision red for a whole hour. His lifelong efforts vanished in a single breath. Swimming away his youth, all the parties and birthdays he missed for another lap, then another and just one more – none of it mattered.

Rin always took losing too personally, but this – this is all his fault, not the winner’s.

“Oh, stop,” Haru scoffs. “You act like you didn’t come in third place at nationals in your individual race.”

Rin puts down his bottle of vodka, coming up for air for the first time in three hours. He vaguely notices that he’s slumped on the couch in their dorm and he’s slightly drunk out of his mind. He doesn’t remember what he just said to Haru; he can’t even recall how he got back to the dorm, but all that matters is the cold weight of failure in his gut, which he needs to burn away with another drink –

“Stop.” Haru wrenches the bottle from him and stands in front of the television with one of his terrifying glares as he blocks Rin’s view of the porno on the screen. Rin doesn’t remember turning on porn and cannot see what’s happening on the screen, but he knows it’s porn just from hearing the cheese factory of dialogue between whiny moans and headache-piercing screams and squelching sounds, which don’t sound that appealing when Haru’s just standing there looking at him. His menacing expression doesn’t falter when a smack and a cry comes from the television and Rin can’t even dream of laughing at this mind-fuck of a situation because nobody can glare someone into a state of stone-cold sobriety like Nanase Haruka.

Idly, Rin wonders, “Is my dick out?” He can’t feel his hands or anything else in his body other than nausea.

“Not anymore,” Kisumi beams from beside Haru, which scares a shout of Rin because where in the hell did he come from?

His vision is blurry but Rin would know the rich smudge of Asahi’s hair any day, sitting a few feet away. Rin’s lashes stick together with eye crust before he rubs them clean and surely enough, Asahi’s sitting on the coffee table, offering him a cautious – no, scared – twitch of a smile.

Shame burns through Rin. He feels disgustingly sandy, every drop of moisture in his body sucked
dry by alcohol. Haru and Asahi are still wearing their swimming jackets and so is Hiyori, who’s sitting on the other end of the couch and studying Rin with grim understanding. His eyes are tripled in size behind his glasses and Rin confidently concludes that he’s reached that state of drunkenness where proportions are distorted.

Kisumi isn’t wearing a swimming jacket in this vodka-induced parallel universe, so that makes Rin feel a bit better. His DSLR hangs from the strap around his neck, confirming that yes, the boy is still a photographer and still has a smile free of judgement. It’s hard to wind Kisumi and it seems like everyone expected this from Rin; it’s well-known that he cannot handle failure but they probably didn’t think he would take it this far.

Someone thrusts a glass in his face. “Drink this. Now.”

Rin’s eyes roll up the outstretched arm and he blinks at himself in the reflection of Nao’s glasses. What’s left of Rin’s brain cells goes haywire because the Residential Assistant of the dorms is standing right in front of him and Haru’s holding Rin’s bottle of vodka, which he was not supposed to have in here. Nervously, Rin’s gaze skitters to the bottle, then the window, then back to the bottle –

“I’m not throwing the vodka out the window,” Haru drones.

Hiyori chuckles. “I think he was contemplating throwing himself out the window, actually.”

Nao looks closer to angry than anyone’s ever seen him, so the bickering quickly falls into tense silence. Nao nudges the glass into Rin’s hand and he takes a shaky drink of water. His sense flares awake, pores flooding with oxygen, and he downs the glass. Nao sighs as he looks him over. “He should be fine but I’m glad you called me, Asahi. Draining a bottle of vodka isn’t exactly the safest thing in the world, but I’m sure he’s built up a tolerance for it over these last few months.” Nao doesn’t sound condescending but the disappointment is all over his face. The graduate student has been this residence hall’s R.A. for about a year, so he had a chance to meet Rin before his rare episodes of mania started to become a normal occurrence.

Asahi twists his fingers together. “Will he get in trouble? Because I called you…”

“Not because you called me,” Nao is fast to reassure. “But because he’s the one who had the alcohol. I’ll have to write him up but it’s just a strike against Rin, not the rest of you.” Tears flood Rin’s wide eyes and Nao’s expression softens. “It usually takes three strikes for any repercussions when it comes to alcohol in the dorms. You’re not going to get kicked out because I’m never going to see you like this again, correct, Rin?”

“You won’t,” Rin promises, the relief so immense that it’s sickening.

Nao nods, satisfied. “Good.” He heads for the door, saying, “Just let him rest and keep him hydrated.” He shoots a stern look at Kisumi. “No spending the night. You need to head back to your own apartment soon – it’s getting dark and I don’t like the idea of you walking home alone.”

Hiyori snorts as he absently scrolls through his phone. “Don’t worry, I’ll definitely be the one to snitch if Kisumi and Asahi try shacking up and screaming the whole residence hall awake like last time.”

The offending couple merely smirks – Asahi slings an arm around Kisumi’s hip to squeeze it and he plants a big kiss on his cheek, making Nao shake his head with an understanding grin. “By the way,
I won’t be here this weekend,” Nao says. “So all of you stay safe.” He gives them a stern look before making his exit.

With a taunting amount of simpering, Kisumi coos, “If you wanted to watch, you could have just asked, Hiyori~” Asahi splutters and flails, making his boyfriend sing a laugh.

Hiyori scoffs, bristling and offended. “I don’t have a choice but to watch when I share a bedroom with Asahi! That shit haunts a person, you know.”

“Oh please,” Kisumi sighs with a grand roll of his eyes. He perks up with a thought. “Did any of you notice Nao’s sweater?”

Asahi scrunches his brows. “It was… white? With like, a black tiger on the sleeve?”

“Babe, it was Gucci. Clothes like that cost more than six months of my rental payments. Where the hell does a R.A. get that kind of money?”

Haru leaves the question hanging in the air and steps away to pour the last of the vodka down the kitchen sink, then he drops the bottle into the trash bin. He pauses, staring into the bin with an unreadable expression before he pulls Rin’s swimming jacket out and he returns the garment to the coat rack with finality. Haru’s changed a lot over the past few years at university, Rin muses; he carries himself better these days, holding his chin high instead of avoiding everyone’s gazes.

He and Rin have known each other their whole lives, or at least as long as they both can remember. They’re both from Iwatobi and started swimming together in elementary school. Ever since then, Haru has been the one fixed point in Rin’s life, an unwavering presence that’s motivated Rin and pissed him the fuck off with Haru’s broody vagueness and his borderline sexual obsession with water. That being said, Haru has no business being disgusted with Rin’s taste in porn, which shows on his face as he turns the television off. The judgement probably wouldn’t come if Rin didn’t watch porn in their common space in front of God and everyone else while he’s on a grief-binge, but still.

Rin’s no angel either and he can admit that much. He is dramatic and takes things too personally at times, so it takes someone as lowkey as Haru to handle him for as long as they’ve known each other. At the end of the day, they balance one another out – sometimes one of them feels too much and the other, not enough. It just works.

Rin was accepted to several universities in Australia upon graduating high school, but Haru never would have left Iwatobi if he and Rin hadn’t went to the same university, so that’s how they ended up in Tokyo. Rin would take Haru and all of his strangeness over Australia any day of the week, fuck whatever benefits that might have come with being all alone at a college in Sydney.

But Haru made sacrifices for Rin, too – he wasn’t exactly content with being lost to the blackhole that was their small hometown, but he didn’t have the courage to take off on his own either. Rin was ready to fight tooth-and-nail to get out of Iwatobi so Haru followed him, guided by the confidence Rin had in the both of them.

When they were freshmen in college, Haru never told Rin’s mother that he passed out at swimming practice due to swimming too many laps and not eating enough meals, but Haru never let it happen again either. He watches over Rin much like he is right now by tossing him a wet cloth to rub over his feverish face. He might actually throw it at Rin’s face, but there’s care behind it.

Rin’s gaze treks to his swimming jacket on the coat rack and he hears himself crying even though he
cannot feel the tears on his numb face. But he does feel the couch dip and he tries to lean into the person’s warmth until Haru wrenches away. “You’re covered in puke, don’t touch me.”

Hiyori’s voice curls with a smirk. “Harsh, Haru. You’re saying your love is limited to puke?”

“Yes.”

Rin’s sob pitches into a laugh and someone pushes his hair back. He looks up to meet the sweet warmth of Kisumi’s smile. “You’re going to be just fine, Rin.” Kisumi’s never had time for bullshit and he sounds firm in his confidence in Rin. “I know you’re devastated deep down, but we’re going to get you through this, I promise.”

His friends nod along and that steadies Rin. He lets Kisumi link arms with him and he guides Rin to the bathroom as if everything is normal, and Kisumi remains patient when Rin stumbles on their walk down the hallway. A headache spikes between Rin’s eyes as Kisumi flicks on the bathroom light, then he hears the shower splutter to life. He’s vaguely aware of Kisumi pressing some fluffy towels into his arms, and Kisumi leaves a clean set of sweats on the bathroom counter before pecking Rin’s forehead and leaving him to his shower.

Rin dips under the spray of water and the heat floods his body with relief even though he forgot to take off his clothes. He shimmies out of them, disgusted with himself, and the water runs over him in the lonely silence. He doesn’t wash his hair, doesn’t do anything but stand there until the water runs cold and he steps out. Rin drags on the sweatpants Kisumi left and gropes through the darkness of the hallway to his room, then he falls face-down on his bed and passes out.
It takes the rest of the next day for Rin to wake up and he comes to life with the worst hangover to ever exist, but his body hums with the satisfaction of having more than a mere four hours of sleep between studying and swimming practice. He watches the sunset melt down his bedroom walls, head pulsing, throat aching. Yesterday seems like a lifetime ago but the grief is still too fresh; he’s certain it will always feel like a wound that just can’t scar over.

Someone left him a glass of water and two aspirins on the nightstand so he takes them, chugging the glass before going through his cell phone. His thumb catches on the broken screen as he scrolls through the missed calls from his mother – she might be excited to hear the results of the swim meet or she’s already watched the stream online, depending on her work schedule. Either way, he doesn’t want to face her, so he scrolls to his next notification. Gou texted him a few hours ago but she’s probably already called Haru since her last message reads, *Love you, Onii-chan.*

His chest aches and he sends her a quick message letting her know that he’s fine but he doesn’t want to talk about the swim meet just yet. Almost instantly, Gou replies *ok,* and Rin sends her the black heart emoji, which is his favorite. She sends him back the pink heart as always, making him grin.

A series of rapid-fire knocks comes against the wall and Rin startles a frown. The noise came from Asahi and Hiyori’s bedroom and Kisumi’s laughing moan is all it takes to have Rin rolling his eyes.
into the back of his head. He’s personally screwed that fucking headboard back onto Asahi’s bed frame twice – do him and Kisumi really have to go at it so fast and hard that they wake up the whole dorm?

Apparently, the answer is hell yes because the knocks start coming again and Rin takes that as his cue to get out of bed, but not before throwing a shoe at the adjoining wall in annoyance. He puts on a shirt as he walks into the common space; like most dorms, the room lacks flare. There’s a couch right there, some chairs over here, and the floors are covered in that generic tile that’s too hard to clean, but the dorm is still well lived-in since Rin, Haru, Asahi, and Hiyori share the space. Their shoes are stacked up by the door with their bookbags and the coat rack sags under the weight of various club hoodies and swimming jackets. There’s always the faint aroma of fried fish in the air since someone was stupid enough to give Haru a portable stove-top for Christmas last year. Chlorine is a more comforting scent that lingers in the dorm since all four boys are on the university swim team.

Cell phone and laptop chargers tangle together from every outlet, prints left on the coffee table from frappuccinos spilt during study sessions. Asahi’s guitar is propped up in the corner beside Hiyori’s enormous locker of games, which is under lock and key because he takes gaming more seriously than most of his classes.

Hiyori hunches over the couch, sitting on the edge of his seat with his tongue pinched between his teeth as he uses his controller to fire at the zombies hurdling toward him on the television screen. He blasts one and yellow-purple ooze splatters the screen – Rin watches in vague fascination for a while, then he throws another stray shoe at Asahi’s bedroom door because Jesus Christ, they’re loud.

Hiyori’s wearing noise-cancelling headphones, which was one of the smartest investments of his life, living in this dorm. Rin wanders to the kitchen and the thick aroma of mackerel greets him, making his stomach churn. Haru whole-heartedly ignores Rin’s twisted face and continues frying his dinner, asking, “Feel better?”

Rin ducks his head with an embarrassed blush, his voice subdued. “Yeah.” They stand in heavy silence before Rin flops down on one of the island stools with a defeated sigh. “I’m sorry.” He fumbles with the strings of his sweatpants. “For makin’ everybody worry or whatever.”

Haru arches a brow. “That sounded painful.”

“Shut up,” Rin chuckles, and the familiarity of their bickering eases the tension.

The front door bursts open without so much of a knock and a tuft of blonde hair pops in. “Evening, ‘gents,” Nagisa greets as he saunters into the dorm, dragging two other people with him. “I come bearing lesbians.”

Nii lets go of Aki’s hand to swat at Nagisa’s head and Rin starts to smile, a real and true lift to his face as warmth blooms through everything cold inside of him. Nagisa exudes happiness like it’s first nature, and it’s contagious no matter what state Rin might be in. Nagisa looks him over, seeming satisfied with how well-rested he looks, then he hands Rin some carry out boxes. “These are from Uozumi and Tomo, they stopped me on the way here. Said to give this to you and make you eat.” He smirks. “Since they knew Haru would be cooking his weekly special of eau de stank fish.”

Haru merely chews his dinner loudly in response and Nagisa laughs as he opens Rin’s containers, grabbing some napkins and offering him a pair of chopsticks. Rin devours his food and addresses the trio of Nagisa, Aki, and Nii. “You guys headed somewhere?”
“We stopped by to see if any of you wanted to go out,” Aki says, shaking the snow from her ginger hair and quickly re-braiding it since the wind turned it into a tangled mess. “I know Asahi is supposed to sing at the Starbucks in Minato tonight, so we thought we’d hang out there and support him.”

Nii glances around the dorm as she lazes against Aki’s side. “Did Asahi already leave? Kisumi probably went with him, I guess.”

Nagisa throws a hand over his heart in distress. “My platonic life partner isn’t here?”

Rin snorts and nods at the nearest bedroom door, swirling his noodles around a chopstick. “Kisumi’s in there getting his sixth orgasm of the day.”

Nagisa rolls up his sleeves and marches toward Asahi’s bedroom, cursing when he finds the knob locked. “KISUMI!” He bangs his tiny fist against the door with more strength than expected. “LET’S GO, we got clubs to get kicked out of! All that sex will make you go blind, you know!”

The door swings open and everyone braces themselves but thankfully, Kisumi is half way through dressing, buttoning up his pastel shirt with half-lidded eyes, hair disheveled, smirk languid. “Actually, it’s masturbating that supposedly makes you go blind, Nagisa. But I don’t really have a need for it these days.”

“We know,” Rin and Haru drone.

Asahi strides into the common space as he tucks a backwards cap over his bedhead. Unlike Kisumi, he has a hard time meeting everyone’s gazes, blushing while he busies himself with lacing up his Converse, then he glances at his phone screen and hisses in distress. “I didn’t know it was that late!”

He makes quick work of putting his guitar in its case and it’s an unspoken rule that his friends are his crew of assistants, so they hurry to gather the rest of his equipment. Hiyori crams Asahi’s amp plugs and MacBook into a bookbag and when nobody can find the laptop charger, it results in frantically moving the couch, the chairs, and flinging stray laundry across the room. Rin sticks a hand between the couch cushions and wrenches back with a disgruntled shout. “What in the blue fuck is slimy down there?!”

“Check Rin and Haru’s room,” Asahi yells to the group, completely ignoring Rin’s disgusted state. “We were studying in there a few nights ago.”

Rin’s in the middle of burning the germs off his hand with the searing kitchen faucet when Aki’s frazzled cry comes from his room. “Rin, why are there handcuffs in your nightstand?!”

“Gee, I don’t know,” he yells back, whole-heartedly unbothered. Frantic whispering comes from his room and he snaps, “Nii, don’t you dare take them back to your dorm.”

“Goddamn it,” she whines, dragging her feet out of the bedroom as Aki follows with every drop of blood flooding her cheeks.

“Found it,” Haru calls from Asahi and Hiyori’s room, quickly handing the charger off to Hiyori to shove into the bookbag. At long last, all the equipment is packed and ready to go until everyone’s eyes fall to the amp in the corner. They stare down at it with haunted looks and Hiyori sighs, “Okay, how do we decide who’s gonna carry the amp this time?”
“Trial by combat,” Nagisa immediately suggests.

“I carried it last time,” Haru says.

Rin scoffs. “No you didn’t, idiot, I did.”

Aki stares at them flatly. “Actually, I think you were both just shoving the amp at each other like a hot potato on the train to Meguro last time.”

“Oh my God, I’ll carry it,” Kisumi groans as he heaves the amp into his arms, blowing his bangs out of his face. “Not like I haven’t burned enough calories today –”

“Shut up,” his friends synchronize on their race out the door and to the train station.

The trip to Minato is a welcome distraction from the onslaught of emotions Rin’s suffering through. Tokyo is a monochrome blur of neon from the train, but the coffee shop in Minato offers the comforting familiarity of brewing espresso and a warm, cozy atmosphere set apart from the city rush. Rin sits in a corner booth with his friends, their body heat and various perfumes washing over his restlessness. Through the windows, he watches snow fall like flecks of yellow diamonds in the streetlights as people gather in the shop to warm their fingers around mugs of hot chocolate, and they absently sway as Asahi strums from the cramped stage.

It’s easy to get his mind off his own problems when his friends are so open with their own lives; they’ve all known each other for years at this point. Kisumi shows them pictures from a wedding he shot last weekend but says he’s stumped with his freelance project for college. Rin blows his espresso to cool it before suggesting, “Take pictures of Asahi; that’s all you do anyway.”

“I’ve used him for my freelance projects for like, the last two years.” Kisumi deflates with a pout. “And this project has to include an ‘organic, natural element’.”

“Asahi at the ocean,” Haru tells him, tying another sailor’s knot in his straw rapper.

Kisumi throws himself over the table. “Perfect.”

They all erupt in laughter and conversation rolls through the group as easy as rainfall. Nii gushes about the drama department’s upcoming show – after being a theatre major for all these years, she’s finally landed a lead role, and Aki expresses her excitement that her choir group will be featured in some scenes of the play. She’s an early education major and has already started her internship at a local elementary school, but she’s been in choir since freshman year and sometimes she sings with Asahi when his venue calls for it.

Hiyori fills them in on just how monotonous yet challenging being an accounting major is. He used to enjoy the challenge that of crunching numbers, but Rin can tell that the grueling courses have worn him down over time. Not to mention that graduation is on the horizon and he still doesn’t have a job lined up, unlike many of his peers in accounting. That makes for a whole life’s worth of anxiety but Hiyori’s been worlds happier ever since he joined the swim team last year. He swam competitively in high school but he didn’t think there was anything he could do with the skill until he got roomed with Rin, Haru, and Asahi. They’re a strong medley team – at least they were until Rin’s mishap.

He swallows the burn of self-loathing with another sip of his espresso, but it boils back up as Kisumi
gently says, “So you’re feeling better, Rin?”

He mulls it over, rolling his lips into a bitter line. “Yeah, for now.” Rin takes a trembling breath and tightens his fingers around his cup. “But I didn’t get a swimming scholarship. I don’t have a way to pay for next semester.”

Hiyori’s brows crease. “Can’t you get a loan? My loan’s the only thing I’m surviving off of right now.”

“No,” Rin shakes his head. “I missed the financial aid registration date because…” He breathes a sharp, soundless laugh. “I didn’t think I’d need a loan.”

Aki looks at him mournfully, aching to take away his sorrow. “What are you doing to do? The payment deadline is only a week away.”

Nagisa nudges Kisumi urgently. “Who’s that guy Asahi buys weed from during the swimming off-season?”

Rin balks, slightly offended at the sudden change in topic. Kisumi’s eyes fall flat. “You mean Reo-senpai? It’s not very good weed. I get more baked off of all the perfume Rin wears.”

“Hey –”

“True,” Haru nods solemnly.

Nagisa glances around the shop suspiciously before popping his lips and lifting his brows at Rin. “Pretty sure Reo’s gonna be busy~ now that all the athletics are over.”

Rin stares. Then he snaps forward and hisses, “I’m not fucking selling weed, Nagisa!”

“You couldn’t make all the money you need, anyway,” Nii drones into her cup, and Aki shrugs with a thoughtful nod.

Rin deflates with a huff, surprised when Kisumi squeezes his hand. “I have every faith something will happen, Rin. But there’s nothing you can do about it tonight. Just chill for a while, yeah?”

Rin nods shakily, his smile a bitter twist. He doesn’t have any fucking faith that something will save him, but Kisumi’s right – there’s not a damn thing he can do about it tonight.

They groan over finals stress before the conversation turns to Nagisa. “Things at Tachibana Enterprises are so restless right now,” he whines, adjusting his lemon pea coat like he can barely get comfortable with the situation. Nagisa’s the Personal Assistant of one of the company’s CEOs, though Rin can’t picture Nagisa being in a corporate environment without causing gleeful chaos. “You wouldn’t believe how many higher-ups ring my office phone off the hook, trying to get an appointment with Makoto to reprimand his business decisions.”

Hiyori cranes back incredulously. “You call him Makoto at work? He’s like, your boss, isn’t he?”

“He’s everyone’s boss,” Nagisa smirks. “Well, him and Sousuke are, since they’re Co-CEOs, but I’m Makoto’s P.A. so I get away with a hilariouis amount of things, including calling him by his name when I’m off the clock.” He thumbs the lip of his coffee up in frustration. “Maybe it’s because I’m not some prestigious stockholder, but I don’t get what the problem is with the older officers.
Makoto’s the best boss I’ve ever had and I know the rest of the company agrees with me because Makoto’s also a really good man. Him and Sousuke took the company over just four months ago and everything’s improved… morale, finances… like, *everything*. But him and Sousuke are –” He crinkles his nose in thought. “The older officers call them ‘new money’.”

“Money is money,” Kisumi says, leaning back in the booth with a frown. “It shouldn’t matter what *kind* they are.”

“Right? But I think ‘new money’ is used as an umbrella term for everything that supposedly comes with young CEOs. It basically means inexperience and brash decisions that could cause the downfall of the company.” He shakes his head earnestly. “But neither Makoto or Sousuke is inexperienced; their father was the damn figurehead of the company and they started as interns when they were like, fourteen.”

“Yamazaki does seem a bit brash though,” Nii says, tucking her leg up in the booth so Aki can rest her arm on her knee. “Just from what I’ve seen about him in the news.”

Nagisa winces. “Okay, sure, Sousuke’s a little…” He snorts. “Quick to throw the first punch, both literally and figuratively –”

Rin bristles in shock. “He *hit* someone?”

“He didn’t –” Nagisa grimaces. “I mean, yeah, he kind of did, and I can’t clarify because I was at the office when it happened and court is tomorrow, but trust me, it’s not what the media is making it out to be. I would have hit that guy if Sousuke didn’t do it first, I’m not even kidding. That man said… *awful* things about Makoto.”

Kisumi purses his lips, cherry chapstick gleaming prettily on his mouth. “Didn’t something big happen with Tachibana a few weeks ago? It was all over Twitter.”

Haru stiffens. “He came out as gay, didn’t he? I saw it too.”

“He did,” Nagisa beams, folding his hands over his heart. “I was so proud of him.” He drops his hands slowly, shoulders sinking. “Not many of his colleagues felt the same.”

Haru’s thumb smooths over his straw wrapper more subdued. “He got a lot of hate for it.”

Nagisa clenches his fists. “That’s why he needs Sousuke and I know he’s got a reputation, but I’ve never felt safer than when I’m alone with him. Sousuke walks me home each and every night I’m at the office late; he’d never let anyone talk down to me or Ai-chan, his Personal Assistant. So everything will be fine.” He nods to himself. “It will be.”

Kisumi combs through his hair in frustration. “I hate that Tachibana’s going through so much; he’s so sweet when he comes down to the T.E. Starbucks. I’ve worked there for like, a year now and he’s never once taken out his frustration on a wrong order like all the other suits.” He tips his head, considering. “Yamazaki, on the other hand, says we can’t make his coffee the same way his P.A. does, so he normally just gets a scone or something and leaves. Impatience seems to be his default but he always fills up the tip jar, so I don’t think he’s *trying* to be a dick. I think he’s just awkward.”

Rin frowns to himself, having trouble painting a picture of the man Nagisa and Kisumi describe. He doesn’t pay much attention to the news, especially the drama in the corporate world because really, what could be more boring, but he’s seen glimpses of Tachibana and Yamazaki between magazine
pages and online articles. He’s passed by conversations about the Co-CEOs, and Tachibana might be facing backlash for coming out as gay, but Rin’s never heard anyone talk about this Sousuke with anything other than foul distaste. The fact that he got physical with someone only solidifies Rin’s impression of him.

Aki smiles to lift the mood, saying to Nagisa, “Well, I reckon that business trip to Paris this weekend will certainly make things better.”

“You’re such an ass, Nagisa,” Kisumi whines, locking arms with him pleadingly. “Why can’t you take me as your carry on? Tachibana follows Asahi on Instagram and I know he loves his music, tell him I’ll get him an autograph or two dozen.”

Nagisa laughs. “It’s not a business trip, it’s their mom’s fashion show. The only reason Ai-chan and I are even going is because the boys can’t make a pot of coffee without our help.”

Rin drowns out their bickering as his gaze wanders the coffee shop, recognizing some patrons as his classmates; he’s thankful there’s nobody from the swim team here other than the friends he’s sitting with. He wouldn’t even know what to say.

A head of lavender catches his eye and he looks over to see a couple sitting at a secluded booth at the other end of the shop. A man sits with his back to Rin, blazer hanging off the back of his chair with a pristine button-up rolled up an impressive set of forearms. He has unruly curls for a businessman and one glance of his profile tells Rin that he’s startlingly attractive, jaw cut sharp against the overhead lights – he’s a surprising contrast to the washed-out businessmen Rin’s used to seeing on the train.

He watches the man’s hand creep across the table to link with someone’s fingers, and Rin’s gaze climbs the person’s arm before freezing on their face.

“Nao’s getting laid?!” is what hisses through his teeth, which is a little blunt and a bit grandly stupid, but he’s suddenly so pissed off at the universe that the words just fly out of his mouth. Rin hasn’t been dicked down in months and now, right in front of him, literally right in front of him, his seemingly monk-like R.A. is getting each and every one of his fingers kissed by this stallion? What in the actual fuck –

His friends follow his gaze and tense as one. “Oh wow, that’s so sweet,” Aki coos. “I didn’t know he had a boyfriend!”

“I didn’t know he was gay,” Hiyori whispers, peeking over the booth with Nagisa.

“I didn’t know he was – anything, really,” Kisumi intones in a flat stupor.

Haru studies the pair. “Maybe they’re just friends.”

They watch the man reach over to tuck Nao’s hair behind his ear, teasing his thumb over Nao’s bottom lip and lulling it open with just enough dark promise before pulling away.

The group stares. “Goddamn,” Hiyori breathes. “I wish I had friends like that.”


Dryly, Rin blinks once, then again. “Can you explain in peasant-folk terms, please?”
“Kirishima Natsuya is the golden boy of the business world,” Nagisa explains, eyes still wide with disbelief at what he’s seeing. “His family is Tokyo royalty, they’ve been called the wolves of the corporate jungle for generations. But get this.” He leans forward with such an air of impending gossip that everyone else can’t help but lean forward as well. “Natsuya left his father’s company and started working for Tachibana Enterprises a few months ago.”

Nii leans back, disappointed. “That’s it?”

Nagisa shakes his head. “You can’t just do that when your family is as powerful as the Kirishimas. Leaving your own company to slave over someone else’s is like, unforgivable. You can never come back.” Nagisa emphasizes, “You can never come back to your family.”

“Jesus, that’s stupid,” Rin scoffs. “The man wanted to do his own thing, it’s that simple.”

“It should be,” Nagisa agrees. “Who’s the guy he’s with, do you know him?”

“… He’s a graduate student. Our R.A.,” Haru says slowly, not liking where this is going.

“Is he from here? Do you know anything about him? Or his family?”

Nii snaps, “He’s broke as hell like the rest of us, Nagisa, if that’s what you’re trying to get us to confirm.”

Nagisa laughs, breathlessly dazed. “Oh my god, then that rumor was true…” He whips his phone out and starts rapid-fire texting. “I have to tell Ai-chan—”

“Wait, what rumor?” Rin crosses his arms in concern. “Nao’s not in trouble or anything is he?”

“Quite the opposite~” Nagisa sings, eyes glued to his phone. He finishes his text and leans forward again, encouraging the others to begrudgingly do the same. “So there was this rumor around the office,” he whispers. “Every now and then when there’s a business dinner, me and the other P.A.’s see older – like, way older – businessmen getting in cars with either a pretty young girl or a boy. At first we thought they were prostitutes because in business, that’s more common than paper jams, but then I recognized one of the girls from college and I got – well, scared. I didn’t know if she was doing everything willing or if she was trapped because – because that’s common too, so… we’ve had classes together for the last few years, so I felt okay with asking her about it. And you’ll never guess what she said.”

Nagisa lets the tension build, drawing out the silence before his smirk nearly splits his face. “It’s a sugar daddy service.”

Rin chokes on his drink, spluttering as Haru pats his back. Rin splutters, “That’s real?”

“Man, fuck accounting.” Hiyori slaps his hands on the table with purpose. “Where do I sign up?”

Kisumi smirks. “That’s cute that you think you’d be qualified to get a sugar daddy, Hiyori.”

“Listen, for that kind of money?” His voice falls to an impassioned hiss, “I would become a tree. Emotionally, spiritually, physically, I would be a tree if my sugar daddy asked me to be one.”

“Yeah, but would you suck someone off?”
Hiyori scoffs, giving a sing-song stress to each syllable. “On eve-ry day that ends in Y.”

Rin waves away Kisumi’s cackling as he leans toward Nagisa. “That’s – it’s not legal, is it?”

“There’s nothing illegal about it,” Nagisa wheezes, smearing his tears away as he drags Kisumi, who is still weeping laughter, out from under the booth. “That girl told me there’s a website you have to get invited to but at that point, it’s just like regular online dating until your sugar daddy starts showering you in riches. At first, it was just decrepit old dudes on the site.” Nagisa wiggles his brows at the scene across the shop. “It seems that your pretty R.A. has proved otherwise. Looks like all the lonely billionaires are getting tired of sleeping alone.”

Rin’s eyes bore into the table, reeling, calculating, his jaw tightening with finality and a bit of panic. He breathes hard through his nose in silence, everyone oblivious to how loudly his ears are ringing. Acidic fear rolls up his throat, teeth pulsing hot with it.

He startles when applause erupts and he dazedly turns to the stage as Asahi bashfully rubs the back of his neck, blushing with a bow, and Rin’s friends rise to help pack up his equipment. Rin swallows, his decision already solidified in his heart as he wanders through the crowd toward the stage.

He’s having such an out-of-body experience that he’s oblivious to passing Nao in the sea of people, but the older boy tenses at the look on Rin’s face. Nao frowns to himself while Natsuya guides him outside with a hand on the small of his back, the touch roaming all across his shoulder blades, teasing firm, insistent pressure over his hip.

Once they’re outside, Natsuya faces him, the wind tumbling through his curls as snowflakes roll down his broad shoulders. Natsuya adjusts his blazer colored like red wine, the tan column of his throat flexing to situate the garment before he tenses at Nao’s expression. “Are you all right?”

Nao’s lashes flutter as he glances back at the shop with an odd sense of dread. “I’m fine.” Rin, on the other hand –

Natsuya pulls him into his firm chest and Nao sighs, tension unraveling as Natsuya hugs him close to fend off the cold. “You really should let me take you shopping again soon,” Natsuya murmurs against his hair. “It’s only going to get colder; you’ll need better clothes for the winter.”

Nao smiles in exasperation, tugging him by the hand toward their ride. “I already let you buy me this sweater and six others just last week.”

“Yes,” Natsuya concedes. “But it’s all about compromise, no?” He tip toes to the passenger’s side of Nao’s car as if one false move will make it collapse into a pile of rust. “You’ve allowed me to buy clothes for you and I have consented to letting you drive me around tonight in this soviet-era horror of a vehicle.”

“Tough shit,” Nao says and Natsuya throws his head back to laugh handsomely.

They step into the car and Nao turns the key in the ignition. Natsuya tenses when the engine turns over a few times, braced as if the car will explode. He might truly think it will since he’s never heard an engine splutter for life in his world of sportscars and limousines.

The car cranks and Nao turns the heater on only for icy air to blast them with such force that their
muscles tense rigidly. “Christ,” Natsuya startles, crossing his arms tightly to shield himself from the onslaught of vicious cold. “Nao, I really think you should let me –”

“You are not buying me a car, Natsuya,” Nao drones as he steers the car onto the road. “The heat will come on shortly.”

“But hypothermia takes hold in minutes,” he whines, rolling his head against the seat in distress. Nao ignores him but he can hear the pout in Natsuya’s voice. “Come on, just one car.”

“No car,” Nao breezes. He glances at Natsuya and grins at his big, simpering eyes. “I’m already letting you take me to Paris this weekend; that’s more than enough for now.”

Natsuya sighs wistfully. “You used to let me buy you things all the time. You never said no to anything.”

“I believe you were the one who changed our arrangement when you called me drunk and confessed your love to me.”

“But I do love you.” He whispers it with soft vulnerability and Nao knows he’s the only soul to ever hear such a tone come lulling from the corporate mongrel that is Kirishima Natsuya. He takes Nao’s hand with a smile that makes him look so young. “You’re the one who made me fall in love with you, so dare I say the blame for our ‘changed’ arrangement is entirely on your shoulders.”

Nao grins despite himself. He mulls Natsuya’s words over and keeps light pressure on the gas pedal as he maneuvers through the dusting of snow. At long last, his voice lulls through the darkness of the cab. “If you wanted to buy me a car when I was your toy as much as you were mine, then I would have said yes to you just like I would have said yes to any other man I was seeing through the website in which we met.” Natsuya remains silent and Nao doesn’t turn to gauge his expression even as his heartbeat pulses harder with emotion. “But now your feelings are involved and so are mine. I don’t want anyone else but you – but I want you. Fuck your money.”

He’s a little breathless by the end of his speech and he gathers the courage to finally meet Natsuya’s gaze. He merely watches Nao but when he finds his voice, Natsuya sounds as dazed as Nao feels. “I don’t know if you are the love of my life or fucking crazy.”

“Both.”

“Both,” Natsuya agrees, nodding to a gas station coming up on the left. “Pull over, I need to kiss you for a while.”

“The car might not crank back up,” Nao smirks, only half-joking.

Natsuya lets out an agonized groan. “I don’t want to wait,” he whines like the spoiled brat he truly is.

“Have you forgot that your brother is waiting for us back at your apartment? The poor boy’s probably been sitting in the lobby for an hour since his flight came in early and you forgot to leave him a key at the front desk like I told you to.”

Natsuya chuckles and squeezes the inside of Nao’s thigh, keeping his hand there, tucked comfortably. “I’m positive Ikuya will be just fine. This is his winter break; he’s worked hard this semester, so some time to relax in the lobby will do him good.” He gives Nao a knowing look. “And I’m sure he’s as nervous to meet you as you are him.”
Nao blushes in the darkness of the cab. “How did you and I meet again?”

Natsuya flies through the lie effortlessly. “You were at the Starbucks in Tachibana Enterprises and I spilled coffee all over myself because you were just so fucking beautiful. I even pretended to faint just so you would ride in the ambulance with me, and from there, I charmed my way into your pants and then your heart.”

Natsuya looks immensely proud of himself and Nao has to laugh. “That’s got just enough your flare to seem like it’s actually true.”

“Well, the truth isn’t nearly as prosy, is it?”

Nao pulls up to the apartment complex’s gate and opens his window to put in the passcode but then Natsuya slyly leans over to do it for him. Nao’s skin bristles hotly at the sudden and intimate closeness, saturating him in an aroma of sweet coffee and rosy cologne. Natsuya’s throat is inches from his mouth and Nao’s tongue dances behind his lips to taste the heat of his skin. Nao’s eyes linger on Natsuya’s lap before trailing the line of his abs to his pectorals and rounding up his shoulders, then Nao meets his gaze with a coy flutter of lashes. Nao’s eyes linger on Natsuya’s lap before trailing the line of his abs to his pectorals and rounding up his shoulders, then Nao meets his gaze with a coy flutter of lashes. Nao’s voice pitches into a high, thick whisper. “I’m sure you could find a way to make that first blowjob in the back of your daddy’s Rolls Royce sound romantic.”

A shudder rolls down the muscles of Natsuya’s chest, defining every plane, and his eyes pool darker. “Careful, moonlight. Or another blowjob might make us late.”

Nao rolls his lips around a satisfied smirk as he pulls the car through, then he stiffens with a sickening thought. “Natsuya… You did tell him that I’m a guy, right?”

Natsuya avoids his eyes by pretending to be fascinated with the apartment buildings before he clears his throat. “Didn’t even tell him I’m gay.”

Nao jerks the car to a stop and Natsuya yelps as he shoots into the dashboard. “You’re just dazzling, you know that?” Nao’s scoff pitches into a crazed laugh of disbelief. “You’re so grand and — and —” Natsuya takes his face in hand and Nao’s breath shuts away, eyes rolling closed with the rush of burning endorphins from his touch. Nao smiles, his head lost to his heart. “You’re just rich, aren’t you, Natsuya?”

Natsuya thumbs his bottom lip and Nao’s mouth is already parted for his kiss, frustration rolling in his gut, churning into a passion that threatens to set the very air aflame. “I am, baby,” Natsuya purrs, letting Nao guide his hand between his legs, teeth claiming Nao’s lip before his tongue indulgently glides over the soreness. Natsuya leans back to shrug off his blazer, eyes half-lidded in his mess of curls as he smirks breathlessly. “And so are you.”

Once they arrive back on campus, Rin, Haru, and Hiyori help Asahi carry his equipment since the rest of the group can’t enter the building due to visiting hours being over. Kisumi, Nagisa, Aki, and Nii wait outside for Asahi and Hiyori so they can all go check out a new nightclub in Shinjuku; Haru declines the offer by mumbling that he wants to catch up on sleep, but Rin knows that he’s exceeded his daily quota of socializing and desperately needs some time alone, impatient to take advantage of the rare bout of quiet in their dorm. Rin waves his friends goodbye with the excuse that he needs to call his mom but truthfully, that task is the furthest thing from his mind.
Rin and Haru enter the dorm and turn on the lights to take off their shoes and scarves at the door. Rin fumbles with his movements, Nagisa’s words from the coffee shop still echoing through his head, and he clenches his shoulders in stubborn determination.

With subtle grace, Haru slowly rises from crouching to take off his shoes and his eyes narrow on Rin’s expression, gaze reading every twitch of emotion. Rin faces him with his mouth parted to blurt something and Haru says, “No.”

Rin frowns, brows creasing with it. “You don’t even know what –”

Haru flops against the wall with an exhausted look, hood shadowing his piercing stare. “You are not getting a –” His face twists like his salvia just turned into lemon juice. “A sugar daddy to pay for next semester.”

“Please feel free to unveil my list of options at any time now.” Rin sits down on the couch and crosses his arms, lifting his chin in challenge. “Don’t worry, I’ll wait.”

Haru’s only response is fuming silence and Rin nods, but his voice cracks. “Thought so.” He bobs his ankle with restless energy. “Look, I think the concept of it is a lot worse than what it’ll actually be.” He fumes a sigh. “If I can even find a way to get on that website Nagisa was talking about.”

“It sounds like a scam,” Haru mumbles.

Rin shrugs. “It might be; there’s only one way to find out. But the sex-for-money thing is the last thing I’m worried about.” He’s fucked people that he should have got paid to sleep with during his college career.

Haru comes over to sit down on the couch, nervously fisting deeper into his pockets. “Couldn’t a rich person get sex way easier than having to get invited to some website? Maybe it’s all actually about companionship or something.” He lifts a hand to stop Rin from speaking. “I know I’ve never sounded more like a virgin than when I just said that, but seriously, think about it. Why else would there be a service set up specifically just to ‘shower someone in riches’, as Nagisa said?”

Rin strokes his chin. “You might have a point, but I gotta do it either way.”

“… Do you want to do it?”

A smirk twitches to life, his voice quiet in the empty apartment as if they’re sharing secrets like when they were children. “Well, it doesn’t sound awful, does it?”

Haru ties his hoodie strings into sailor knots – it’s a skill turned habit he learned from his grandmother. Haru does it when he’s anxious, bored, or in this case, thinking hard. “I guess not, but there are things I’d be worried about. What if the guy takes you somewhere you don’t know? You’re not going to have any back-up if things go wrong.”

Rin yawns and sleepily jokes, “What, like you’d come get me?”

Haru’s voice levels in the gravest seriousness. “Yes.”

Rin sobers up – Haru blindly followed him all the way to Tokyo, so why the hell wouldn’t he pummel a guy to get Rin out of a paid handjob he might not want to give? Rin says, “If this entire scheme is dedicated to millionaires… business people… there’ll probably be some level of safety in
the ordeal, since their reputations are on the line. Like you said, it can’t be all about fucking; that’s too easy for people like them.”

“You don’t think it’s a little twisted that someone wants to give a stranger lots of money for whatever reason?”

Rin scoffs. “If it’s me, then no.”

Haru kneads his brow, fighting an exasperated smile and utterly defeated with Rin’s antics, which he’s completely used to at this point in their friendship. He rises to stretch and sighs. “Just… just be careful.”

“Don’t tell anyone.”

“Duh,” Haru scoffs on his way to their bedroom.

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Chapter End Notes

Up next: We meet the Tachibana Enterprises Crew, including Dramasuke. And they go to Paris. ’Cuz I said so.

**Preview of Chapter 2:**
Makoto goes to say something to Sousuke when they notice someone approaching them – a younger guy with a mop of teal hair, his hands casually in his pockets, but his demeanor is downright frigid. Everything about him is diamond sharp – the angle of his cheekbones, the cut of his eyes, which seem to be set in a default glare. Seriously, Sousuke might lose his title of Reigning Champion of the Resting Bitch Face if this guy is competing. His suit is pristine ivory, but he just looks like someone who fights dirty.

Through Makoto and Sousuke's earpieces, Nagisa drones, “Well, isn’t this a goddamn bitch of an unsatisfactory situation.”

“You did not just quote Brokeback Mountain right now,” Makoto sing-songs with rising panic, mouth barely moving so he can keep his professional smile in tact.

“This is real life, Nagisa, not an excellent movie,” Sousuke snaps, bracing himself as the boy nears them. “Now who is this kid?”

From their earpieces, Nitori fills in, fast as lightning. “His name is Kirishima Ikuya.”

I won't be able to always include previews, sorry lol, it's just that I have a lot of Chapter 2 already finished this time around! Originally, I wrote Chapters 1 and 2 as one chapter, but the whole thing is about 21k at this point and yeah. I concluded that I liked how it flows as two chapters, but (hopefully) that means the next chapter will be posted soon!

Thank you for reading; I really hope you liked. My social medias are Twitter | Tumblr. On Twitter, I frequently post about updates, but on Tumblr, I tag questions, edits, all that good stuff under #doab. Thank you again!
Chapter Notes

hi all! happy spring. thank you so much for the response to this story, your comments have been so lovely to read as i push through finals!

there's no multimedia in this chapter yet; i might go back and add some cute lil tidbits later, but nothing with big plot will be added. also, haru and makoto do not know each other yet at all.

there isn't really any song for this chapter, but my favorite french song is forever and always la vie en rose by the OG edith piaf, and i've sang my niece to sleep with it, so it's fair to say everyone can appreciate such a lovely song~ i listened to dodie's utterly adorable cover of the song while writing, so feel free to listen while reading

thank you, i hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The main branch of Tachibana Enterprises rises from the heart of Tokyo, standing indifferent to the flurry of morning traffic. The sunrise bleeds through the glass structure, windows drinking in the purples and grays. Sousuke cranes his neck back to gaze at the building that exudes such untouchable wealth and power, feeling oddly small. Every time he looks up at the structure, it’s as if he is an outsider like everyone else on the street. The feeling has always frustrated him because such a thought has no place in his mind, or at least it shouldn’t. How can he feel like a stranger to Tachibana Enterprises when his office is at the top of the building – at the top of Tokyo, at the top of the world?

He exhales a swirl of frost, bracing his shoulders. His expression smooths over before he enters the building through the revolving door. Tachibana Enterprises is a world within itself, a colorless universe of marble and glass with a chandelier hanging at the center of it all, dazzling with teardrop citrines like stars. A palette of grays blends together as businessmen make their way up the two staircases behind the reception desk, which is the only fixed point in the rush. There’s the occasional smudge of red lipstick in the black-and-white space, darting by with smoldering charcoal eyes. Heels click across marble floors with the shuffle of Oxfords, chorused by the hum of conversation and calculated laughter.

There is only one thing that shatters the controlled chaos and that’s Sousuke.

He makes his way to the elevator and steps falter, voices lowering, cutting short like the scratch of a record player. The air floods with a tension that used to drown Sousuke but now he fights a smirk. The weight of a hateful stare bares down on him and he arches a taunting brow over his shoulder – that one look makes everyone jerk back to life, eyes snapping down to their phones, and the herd of people patter away like fretful little lambs.
The receptionist shakes her head with an exhausted roll of her eyes at the crowd. “Good morning, Yamazaki-san,” she sighs, giving him a knowing glance of sympathy.

“Morning, Eimi,” he greets on his way by, subtly smiling at her concern.

Sousuke steps into the elevator and when the door closes he lets out an immense breath, sagging against the wall while he ascends to the top floor. He shakes his head in bitter disbelief before the elevator chimes. He straightens up, rolling his shoulders as he composes his expression once more.

He steps out and this floor is a relieving breath of familiarity; the patrons of the cubicles are quick to offer him warm smiles since he’s worked closely with them for years. He’s known some employees since his first internship with T.E., which he started when he was fourteen. The long-term employees have worked with him for over ten years and while they know about his cut-throat attitude, they’ve seen other sides of him. The people on this floor have comforted him when he was fragile with anxiety before business mergers and they’ve even kicked him out of his own building after he’s pulled too many all-nighters. Sousuke has done the same for each and every one of them.

He makes his way through the maze of cubicles and scans his keycard at the door to enter a separate wing. He walks deeper into the building, passing by private offices occupied by higher-ups of the company. He reaches the end of the hallway and is greeted by a desk tucked cozily in the corner next to his own officer door. Nitori’s desk is organized and neatly personalized – his paperwork is tucked away in glinty, white folders and the thumbtacks on his bulletin board are shaped like yellow hearts. His work space smells like bright highlighters and those lemony drinks he loves getting at the Starbucks downstairs.

Nitori used to sit ram-road straight at his desk, keeping a tight, professional smile at all hours of the day, but he’s grown more relaxed in his environment with time; a blanket patterned with ducks lays over his legs, which are folded up in his chair – the building has a tendency to be cold in more ways than one. Nitori glances up from his computer and takes his earbuds out, sliding back into his shoes before standing with a beaming smile. “Good morning, Yamazaki-san,” he greets and comes bearing coffee. He hands it off to Sousuke with his planner at the ready. “How are you feeling?”

Nitori’s look tells Sousuke that he’s talking about court yesterday. “Never better.”

His assistant gives him an exasperated arch of a brow, but his laugh says that he is not surprised. “I’m happy to hear that.”

“How’re you?”

“Ready to go,” Nitori huffs, hugging himself around the middle. “It’s freezing in here.”

“It’s even colder outside,” Sousuke chuckles, holding the door open for Nitori to step into his office. The space is a stark contrast to the rest of Tachibana Enterprises, warm and dark where the rest of the building is pristinely white and sterile. A leather couch faces the wall of glass showing the Tokyo skyline, and next to it is a globe-stand painted red and gold – aged whiskey stays hidden inside the sphere until Sousuke opens it when something at work becomes blindingly irritating, which happens pretty frequently these days.

He bypasses the wall of certificates without so much of a glance, rounding his monstrous desk to sit in his chair with a sigh. He indulges in a long sip of coffee – it’s perfect as usual – then he nods. “All right, hit me.”
Nitori opens his planner to go over today’s schedule and clears his throat. “We’re leaving for the airport in thirty minutes. Where are your bags?”

“Already in the car.”

“You packed the Kiton suit like Nagisa said to? You have the tie, cuff links, everything?”

“Yes,” Sousuke says, crossing his ankle over his thigh to flex his foot and stretch out his Derbys – he can’t wait to get out of them. “I even remembered my toothbrush.”

Nitori grins and rolls his eyes at the joke before continuing. “We should land at Charles de Gaulle around 10 PM tonight.” He levels him with a knowing look. “Finish your work on the plane because your mother has already called and said that you and Tachibana-san are not allowed to even look at your phones during this trip.”

“Ren and Ran will be there, right?”

“Yes,” he smiles. “The fashion show isn’t until tomorrow evening, so you’ll be able to spend some time with them beforehand.”

“Good,” he sighs. Sousuke’s barely seen the twins over the last four months and his heart warms at the thought of indulging in them if only for a few hours. “Anything else?”

Nitori snorts. “Drag Tachibana-san out of his office so we can leave on time, if you please.”

“Can do.” Sousuke finishes his coffee in one go and hands the thermos off to Nitori so he can refill it for their trip to the airport. He rounds Nitori’s desk to reach another workspace tucked against the adjacent wall and a bouncy, obnoxious pop song spikes a headache between his eyes. Sousuke’s pretty sure Nagisa doesn’t even own a pair of headphones; he’s perfectly content to let his music flow freely through his computer speakers and make Sousuke’s ears bleed from such an overflow of generic, recycled chart-toppers. He thinks all the music sounds the same, which offended Nagisa to a surprising and hilarious degree.

Nagisa’s workspace is the exact opposite of Nitori’s – whereas Sousuke’s P.A. keeps important documents at the ready, Nagisa must dig through a mountain of paperwork to find anything Makoto needs. Yet Nagisa’s never lost anything and recites Makoto’s entire schedule from memory, so somehow, everything works out all right. But that doesn’t mean Sousuke can’t look at Nagisa’s cluttered desk without a mix of disgust and disbelief, to which the P.A. responds by turning up his music with a smug smile. “Morning, Yamazaki-san,” he coos.

Sousuke purses his lips with flat eyes and Nagisa giggles, cramming some files into his satchel and ignoring Sousuke’s horrified stare. “Tachibana-san’s in there,” Nagisa says, nodding to the nearest office door. “Please, feel free to tackle him if he tries to sneak any reports into his satchel.”

Sousuke snorts. “Only if you don’t record it like last time.”

“No promises~” Nagisa sings with a wink.

Sousuke steps through the door without even knocking, the warm aroma of lavender and cinnamon welcoming him. The door swings back against the wall and Makoto startles as he goes to take a sip of his drink, eyes blinking wide behind his glasses. He gives a perturbed pout, brows creasing. “Do you always have to barge in my office like a full-blown military invasion? I could have been doing
something important.”

Sousuke narrows his eyes on the back of Makoto’s monitor before his smirk twists cruelly. “Were you watching porn?”

“Ew, no,” Makoto whines, and Sousuke slams the door closed because he did not just hear this grown man say ew about porn.

Sousuke flops onto the lounge seat in the corner, the worn leather molding to his back since this is his usual spot to relax and annoy Makoto from afar. His gaze sweeps the office, glancing over the oak desk with honey-colored age flecks in the wood, the legs stout and carved with checkered patterns that make Sousuke’s head hurt. There are no windows in here, so the space is draped in warm gold from a few lamps. The furniture is an autumn palette of dark greens and mustard yellow, making the space feel homey instead of like a cage, which the office definitely feels like after pulling an all-nighter.

It seems like Makoto pulled one of those all-nighters – the signs are all there if one looks hard enough and Sousuke knows his brother like the back of his hand. Makoto’s creme blazer is thrown over the back of his chair and Sousuke knows that he only takes off his jacket when he’s been working for hours on end. His glasses hide the dark circles well but his movements are delicate, muscles sore with exhaustion.

Makoto frowns with a thought. “You didn’t have any work to catch up on, did you? You could have just met us at the airport.”

“Yeah, I could have,” Sousuke concedes, shrugging easily. “But I had a feeling you didn’t go home last night and it looks like I was right.”

Makoto huffs a laugh with bittersweet fondness. “I wish I worked as fast as you.”

Sousuke shakes his head because that’s so stupid – there’s a million different ways he wishes he were like Makoto.

Dryly, Makoto adds, “I also envy that you managed to go to sleep after yesterday.” He takes off his glasses and kneads the bridge of his nose. “I swear I’ve never seen so many cameras flashing like I did when we walked out of that court house.”

“You were just stressed out; there really weren’t a lot of reporters.”

“Again, I’m so envious! You can even alter the past to your liking – honestly, like, what the hell?”

Sousuke rolls his eyes with a chuckle. He glances at his watch. “We need to get going. I’m here to man-handle you into leaving per Nagisa’s orders.”

“That won’t be necessary this time,” Makoto laughs tiredly. “I’m ready to get out of here.” He eases out of his chair to stretch and Sousuke grimaces when he hears bones pop back into place. Makoto sighs as he shrugs on his blazer. “I wish my cats could come; they’d love Paris.”

Sousuke looks up at the heavens with a long-suffering glare. “You already sneak them into the office at least three times a week. They travel plenty.” The box of toys hidden underneath the lounge only proves his point.
“Yeah but Paris,” Makoto emphasizes as they exit the office. Nagisa and Nitori are already standing at the ready and follow behind the brothers to the elevator. “How many cats have actually been to Paris?”

“The ones that live there,” Nagisa intones, making Nitori elbow his fellow P.A. in the ribs.

The ride to the airport is a whole mess. The four of them cram into the SUV amongst their luggage and of course, Nagisa brought enough bags for a week’s worth of time in the City of Love when they’re only going to be there for a few days. The fact that he keeps talking about all the shopping he’s going to do sends actual shivers down Sousuke’s spine. On top of that, their driver is used to steering the Maserati and not this new model BMW, so he can’t figure out how the heater works and a cold Sousuke is a bitchy Sousuke. What’s worse is that the press is already lined up at the airport, eager to capture a flaw in Sousuke and Makoto’s demeanor, hungry for any flash of emotion they can use to break them in a single article.

Nitori hands out the black surgical masks and Sousuke puts on his Cartier sunglasses, the lenses dark azure mirrors, but he’s sure the reporters can feel the weight of his seething glare.

When they finally board the private plane, he’s exhausted from desperately trying to keep up a bulletproof appearance. He orders a Remy Martin and it’s in his hand in twenty seconds – he downs it, head spinning with the luxurious taste of citrus and honeysuckle. Tension seeps away only to come back full force when Makoto groans, “We’ve got so much work to finish before we land.”

Sousuke scoffs, “Like what?”

“There’s a conference going on with our Osaka branch regarding trade with –” Sousuke tunes him out with another deep swallow of his liquor. “Then we need to look over some paperwork from the harbor in Yokohama about –” Fuck, he’d commit murder to hear one of Nagisa’s pop songs right now; all this talk about work is that obnoxious. “And I think we need to go over the stats from Nagoya again, something just doesn’t seem to be adding up in the –”

Sousuke kneads his forehead with his glass. “God, my dick is losing inches with every word you say.”


Nitori snorts into his wine glass. “All three of them?”

The brothers ignore their banter as Makoto snorts at Sousuke. “You still have a dick at this point?”

“What, you don’t?”

“Lost to the void, brother,” Makoto sighs and Sousuke shakes his head amongst Nagisa’s howling laugh and Nitori’s subtle chuckle, hidden behind his hand.

Makoto tries to fly into another mile-a-minute speech and Sousuke stops him. “Mako, the Osaka branch can handle the conference call on their own and you know that. We’ve looked over that information from Yokohama at least three times and I see those fucking stats from Nagoya in my dreams, we’ve analyzed them so much. We’re not missing anything, trust me.”

Makoto glances down in frustration before Sousuke squeezes his shoulder, imploring him to look back up. “We’re doing well. The company will not burst into flames in the next few days – our hard
work has assured it.”

Makoto jerks a nod, appreciation heavy in his expression. He does not object Nagisa ordering him a drink and he swallows it blindly, not realizing that his little imp of a P.A. ordered him red wine because he knows it puts the man to sleep quicker than those stats from Nagoya.

But before Makoto passes out, he mumbles, “We also need to find a new CFO since our last one was… terminated.”

“Right,” Sousuke sighs. He’d hit the guy again in a heartbeat if he ever saw him.

Sousuke sleeps through most of the 12-hour flight, only stirring when they land, but he is hardly refreshed. When he moves to sit up properly, he finds that his right shoulder is clenched, muscles braced to fight a burning onslaught of pain. Sousuke hisses a curse and quickly looks to his left to make sure Makoto’s still sleeping and didn’t see him hurting.

“Nitori,” Sousuke grits. His P.A. flutters to life in an instant, quickly rubbing the sleep from his eyes, and one look at Sousuke’s tight jaw tells Nitori exactly what he needs. He hurries to take out an orange pill bottle from his bag and offers Sousuke two Vicodin with a bottle of water. Sousuke downs the pills with a hard swallow, nodding his head in reassurance when Nitori squeezes his hand.

Sousuke’s never seen anybody get off a 12-hour flight refreshed. He’s definitely relieved but he and the rest of the T.E. staff look like death warmed over as they fumble through baggage claim. When Sousuke, Makoto, Nitori and Nagisa are finally in an SUV on the way to their hotel, Sousuke doesn’t pay any mind to looking out the window – all that matters is that it’s cold and he’s exhausted – though he does distinguish the aroma of wet limestone, which is distinctively Parisian.

As tired as he is, he can admit that the hotel is impressive. He and Makoto normally stay at Hyatts all across the globe on business endeavors but they haven’t stayed at the Park Hyatt in Paris near State-Vendôme since they were teenagers and were in town for yet another one of their mother’s fashion shows. Everything about the hotel radiates classic elegance; even the lampposts outside are architectural masterpieces of lacy ironwork, flooding the cobblestone courtyard with artificial moonlight. The hotel itself is a revamped Parisian palace with a seamless blend of contemporary and historic design.

The staff is expecting their arrival and the service is beyond reproach; from the moment the SUV pulls up, it feels like every staff member is dedicated to pleasing them despite how late it is. At check in, Sousuke declines a complimentary espresso and requests a whiskey instead – the bellman dashes away to complete the order before Sousuke’s sentence is even completed, and it seems like he’s returned upon Sousuke’s next breath. The man says the liquor is a prestigious, aged spirit of France but at this point, Sousuke would chug sun-warmed beer just to relieve the tension in his right shoulder.

The receptionist offers them a tour of the hotel grounds and Makoto declines with endless grace while Sousuke grumpily stares in sleepy silence. The woman still runs through all the facilities offered, including a damn hair salon with “utilizing souvenirs,” and a “lavish outdoor terrace for hair appointments with complimentary juleps as you breathe in the scent of jasmine.”

Honestly, Sousuke hasn’t heard so much bullshit in one sentence since court yesterday.

Thankfully, Makoto’s too tired to notice how stiffly Sousuke holds himself and they bid each other
goodnight once they’re at the doors of their separate suites. Nagisa and Nitori clamor into their shared room down the hall, though Nitori gives Sousuke one more glance to make sure that his brows are no longer pinched together in pain.

He pays no mind to the luxury of the suite, does not bother with turning on the lights. He cannot move his right arm, pain burning all the way up his neck and pulsing hot under his fingernails, so he shrugs out of his blazer and kicks off his shoes instead of further irritating his shoulder by putting on some sweats to sleep in. Collapsing in his office clothes is too common of a habit these days, but he’s too tired to care.

Sousuke palms his shoulder before noticing the bed, which is fit for a king and empty as always. No matter where he travels, the newness of different cultures never keeps him from having this hollow feeling. Regardless of all his privileges, when he’s encased in the darkness of yet another grand suite, he looks at the hotel bed and his chest tightens and yawns like a hungry, gaping thing.

His mouth firms into a line and he swallows the rest of his whiskey. He stares down at the bed like a challenge but the bed does not move, remaining stoic with it’s monstrous headboard and untouched comforter waiting to be upturned.

Sousuke sighs long and heavy – weak. He does not bother pulling the covers back when he collapses on the bed, burying his face in a perfumed pillow that smells like lush cedar in reality, but it just smells like burning plastic and wood when all Sousuke wants to feel is someone else’s body heat.

He’s lost to dream world when his suite door clicks open; Sousuke’s oblivious to the giggles muffled behind little hands before tiny feet patter across the floor to lunge on his bed with war cries.

Sousuke startles to life, wheezing a grunt as he’s tackled. He frowns up at the ceiling in confusion before two heads pop into his line of sight with screaming laughs of, “Nii-chan!”

Happiness hits him like a bullet in the back, blinding like a face full of sunshine. “Ren, Ran,” he breathes, smiling genuinely for the first time in weeks and sitting up. The twins beam as he sweeps them up in both arms with a grunt. “You’re both so heavy,” he groans. “Look at you.” His voice warms with awe and bittersweet regret. “You’ve grown.”

Ren sticks his tongue out with his arms hugging Sousuke’s neck. “You haven’t seen us in forever ‘cause you and Mako-chan are always working.”

“Are not,” Makoto pouts from the doorway. He must have used his extra key to open Sousuke’s door for the twins; judging by his rumpled sweats and messy hair, the seven-year-old twins must have tackled him awake as well.

Ren giggles and jumps off the bed into Makoto’s arms while Ran touches Sousuke’s button-up collar. “Eh?” she breathes, voice high with confusion. “You slept in your clothes?” She gives a whine. “You really do work all the time.”

Sousuke sighs and kisses her forehead. “I know.” He cradles her small hand, thumb sweeping over her palm. “But we’re not working today.”

“That’s exactly right,” a new voice says from the doorway. “And if Mako tries to tell me anything else about those stats from Nagoya, I swear neither of you are going back to work for a week.”
Sousuke looks up and smiles wider. The woman in the doorway is his mother regardless that they’re of different blood, though she’s genuine to everyone she meets whether they are her family or not. Sara Tachibana is sincere in all she does, every piece of her clothing line designed with infinite thought and affection. In the fashion world, she’s known for her down-to-earth, humble personality and her rags-to-riches story of tailoring suits for businessmen until she met Makoto’s father. But as of four months ago, she gained the title of his widow.

Makoto hugs his mother and Sousuke rises to do the same, studying the creases in her face from frowns where laugh lines used to be. Softly, Makoto asks, “How are you?”

Her smile is heavy as she watches the twins play tug of war with Sousuke’s forgotten tie. “The twins keep me busy,” she nods. “So does work.” She arches a brow at the boys with stern fondness. “But we can’t keep at it all the time.”

Makoto blushing and Sousuke rubs the back of his neck, making her laugh. “I need to run by the gala to check over a few things and I was wondering if the two of you would like to spend the day with the twins so I can rest a little before tonight?”

“Yes of course,” Makoto says and Sousuke agrees.

Her shoulders drop with relief and she embraces them once more. “Thank you.” Using each arm to hug the both of them, she whispers, “I’m so proud of you. But today, just let yourself be boys – nothing else.”

Ren will go with Makoto for the day, so that leaves Sousuke with Ran, her tiny hand tucked in his grasp as the four of them head for the elevator. The older brothers are dressed in dark peacoats while Ren proudly sports a beret and Ran looks cozy in her Burberry scarf, though she’d rather skip than walk so Sousuke has to keep folding the scarf around her neck each time it falls loose to trail the floor behind her.

The elevator begins to close before an arm flies between the crack and the doors slide apart once more. Nagisa sashays inside with a dramatic sweep of his blush trench coat, dragging a fretful Nitori into the elevator with him. Nitori tries to back out, whining, “Nagisa, we’ve got too much to prepare for tonight to go out –”

“Ai-chan,” Nagisa hushes with an endearing pat to the boy’s bed head. While Nagisa is dressed to the nines, it looks like he literally yanked Nitori out of bed, his hoodie wrinkled from a late night of studying every inch of the gala on the internet. Nagisa clucks his tongue. “You’re as bad as our Tachibana-san, whom we all know and love and want to take a chill pill.”

The twins giggle while Makoto rolls his eyes with an exasperated grin.

Nagisa pats Nitori’s cheeks, saying, “We’ve been preparing for this gala for months; we’ve studied the guest list so many times that I could tell you the second cousin of everyone who will be there tonight.”

“Yes, but –”

He jars Nitori by the shoulders, hissing, “Boy, pull yourself together, it’s Fashion Week. Here we are, standing in the birth place of Haute Couture, défilés de mode – Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, oh God, my very soul is begging me to make a horrible financial decision –”
Another arm flies through the crack in the doors to hold the elevator and Sousuke stares in disbelief when he sees who it is.

Being the Co-CEO of an enormous cooperation means that Sousuke sees hundreds of colleagues per week, whether that be at T.E.’s central hub in Tokyo or any of the surrounding branches in other districts. Most people are unimpressive in terms of a lasting impression but Kirishima Natsuya stands out with his youth, aggressive perseverance, and snake-oil charm. He comes with prestigious stature being a Kirishima and most people would use such status to be a prick. Natsuya might do that in his off time – Sousuke really isn’t sure, but Kirishima’s family of wolves can’t be seen acting like humble little sheep. However, Kirishima keeps a stash of Toscano cigars in his office and lights a pair up whenever Sousuke comes to the Chuo Ward for business, so that’s enough for the man to be damn near pleasant in Sousuke’s book.

Therefore, he’s surprised when tension floods the air. Kirishima drains pale from shellshock, though he doesn’t seem angry for any reason. It’s more like, he’s mentally trying to conjure up a magical vanishing act without breaking their gazes. Sadly for him, it does not work, and that’s when Sousuke notices that Kirishima is not alone.

The boy who was laughing with Kirishima, their arms once linked, flies back like he’s been burned but his feet are rooted by Nagisa’s wide-eyed stare. Kirishima glances between his companion and the floor as the confusing, awkward silence beats on.

All at once, Kirishima comes back to life with effortless grace, which makes sense; having a corporate family riddled with scandals means that being quick on your feet is necessary for survival. “Tachibana-san, Yamazaki-san,” he greets with a formal bow and an amused smirk. “Happy Fashion Week.”

In that moment, Sousuke’s approval of Kirishima solidifies if only because he still regards Makoto with so much respect even after he’s come out. Most of their employees are still polite but some of them have started to hide disgust in their thin-lipped smiles.

“All right, Makoto-san,” Makoto beams, easily remembering his name and returning the bow politely. “What a pleasant surprise, I never dreamed we’d run into you here.”

Kirishima chuckles rather tightly with an absent nod and glances back at his companion, who’s still locked in a staring competition with Nagisa.

Sousuke purses his lips in suspicion but Makoto, as blissfully ignorant as ever, helps Kirishima keep the elevator doors open and says, “We have room. Are you two going down?”

Nobody but Sousuke hears Nagisa whisper lewdly under his breath, “Oh, trust and believe, they are.” Nitori hides Nagisa in the elevator’s front corner and not-so-accidently steps on his foot like a pile driver.

Kirishima works his jaw for a flash of a second before he composes his expression. “Wonderful, thank you.” He steps inside with his friend and they stand far apart without touching or so much as breathing in one another’s direction, keeping their gazes on the tile floor. The elevator music layers over the awkwardness on the ride down.

They continue to descend as a jittery flute plays from the overhead speakers. To break the strange tension, Makoto says, “How is your younger brother, Kirishima-san?”
“Ah, Ikuya’s doing well! He’s actually here but he’d rather play videogames in his suite than go out.” Kirishima chuckles to himself, shrugging. “I don’t really mind; let him be a kid while he still can.”

Sousuke glances between Kirishima and his friend and Kirishima’s spine snaps straight. “Oh, this is my...” He fumbles through a gesture. “This is Nao.”

Nao nods his head politely at the group, lavender strands swishing with the motion. Ran looks up at him in awe, breathing, “Your hair is so pretty...”

Nao startles a smile as the others chuckle at her reverence. “Thank you,” he says, tucking some strands behind his ear. “I was thinking about having it cut while I’m here.”

“Oh no,” Ran frets, grabbing Nao’s sleeve pleadingly.

The group laughs and Sousuke shakes his head at her with a small, fond smile.

Kirishima smirks at Nao. “See, even she wants you to keep it long.”

Nao chuckles, patting Ran’s hand where she’s still clinging to him. “I suppose I’ll have to keep it then.”

At long last, the elevator touches down on the ground floor and Kirishima gives one last bow to his superiors. “It was great to see you. I look forward to your mother’s new collection tonight.”

Sousuke and Makoto bid him goodbye and Nao goes to follow Kirishima out of the elevator before Nagisa calls, “Nice seeing you, Nao-senpai.”

Nao looks back at him with a guarded look but Nagisa’s smile is nothing but kind as he gives a subtle, reassuring nod. Nao breathes out in relief with a weak grin. “You too, Nagisa-kun.”

Once Kirishima and Nao are out of earshot, Makoto blinks down at Nagisa. “You know him?”

“Yeah, he goes to the university with me.”

“I thought he looked familiar,” Nitori breathes in realization. “He’s a tutor in the writing center.”

Sousuke lifts a brow at Kirishima and Nao’s retreating figures. “They’re together?”

“Like magnets,” Nagisa whispers, practically shaking with such exciting gossip. He sobers up, saying, “I think Nao-senpai was worried I was going to say something about it.”

Sousuke stares. “But you just did. You just told all of us they’re fu—” Makoto elbows him hard and glances down at the twins. “I mean. You just told us they’re... close.”

Nagisa scoffs and flaps his hand. “You don’t count.” He proceeds to drag Nitori out to the lobby with an extravagant wave back at the elevator. “Have fun, boys. Be a dear and say a prayer for my savings account, I should be bankrupt by about 3 PM.”

The twins race to see a parrot with rainbow feathers perched on a gold hoop near the central fountain. Sousuke and Makoto follow after them more subdued as a crowd takes their place in the
elevator, the lobby humming with conversations in a plethora of foreign languages. A musical quartet in the corner slinks through a relaxing piece, the saxophone purring along to the savoring beat.

Sousuke glances at Makoto, whose brows are creased in deep thought. “What’s wrong?”

Makoto blinks back to himself, shrugging. “I never guessed Kirishima-san was…”

“Really? You couldn’t tell?” Sousuke leans against a marble pillar to watch the quartet and keep an eye on the twins as they whistle at the parrot.

Makoto gives him an flat look and lowers his voice, hushed as though he’s telling a secret. “Just because I’m out doesn’t mean my gaydar is suddenly raging with accuracy.”

Sousuke chuckles but the laugh comes to an abrupt halt when Makoto curiously asks, “You figured it out, then? About Kirishima-san.”

Sousuke clears his throat with a wince, thoughts kicking faster. Worry chills his blood, which is beyond ridiculous because he doesn’t have a fucking thing to hide, especially from Makoto – Sousuke’s own brother, who surely knows that Sousuke’s gay by this point, though they’ve never actually talked about it.

The way Makoto hikes his brow with a sad sort of smirk says that he definitely knows but he won’t push the issue into a verbal conversation. Sousuke burns with guilt at that but all he does is shrug. “Kirishima just never talks about women.”

Makoto’s brow arches higher, his mischievous eyes saying, kind of like how you don’t talk about women?

Sousuke elbows him and Makoto grunts a laugh before they go to collect the twins.

It’s snowing outside, a light dusting rolling down the cobblestone road like silk. Ren drags Makoto in one direction, hurrying to see and do as much as possible, while Sousuke stands with Ran and watches her stick out her tongue for snowflakes. She giggles up at Sousuke and he smiles, heart fit to burst with adoration, then the girl asks him, “What do you wanna go do, Nii-chan?”

“Whatever you’d like.”

She swings their joined hands, clicking her heels thoughtfully. Ran pulls him to the left. “I want to go this way.”

“Then we’ll go this way,” he chuckles and his sister beams with all the glee in the world.

They spend most of the day walking without destination, which is good since Sousuke can barley remember directions in his own language, much less French. Ran isn’t interested in buying clothes, with her own mother being a fashion designer, but she spends at least an hour in a toy store big enough to be considered a warehouse, going down each mile-long aisle to choose the perfect stuffed animal.

After forty-five minutes of following her, Sousuke pants, “Ran, you know that you can get more than one toy.”

She looks back at him like she’s distressed at how clueless Sousuke is. “No, it has to be the toy.”
At long last, she picks out a stuffed pig of all things, one wearing cat-like sunglasses that are distinctlyively Paris couture. She snuggles it to her chest as they step back onto the crowded street and Sousuke asks, “What’s its name?”

She bounces with joy. “Pigsuke!”

His smile falls in a flat second. “No.”

Of course the toy remains Pigsuke in the end and Sousuke continues letting the girl drag him around the city wherever she pleases. The next thing they do is go on a horse-and-carriage ride and it’s the worst experience of Sousuke’s life. Maybe he’s picking up Nagisa’s dramatics, but really – it’s a nightmare.

Their tour guide looks back into the open carriage as he steers the horse toward the Arc de Triomphe. With a thick accident and far too much enthusiasm, he says, “Écoute ça – did you know that the term ‘nightmare’ was derived from an 18th Century oil painting of a beautiful woman in deep sleep, obviously in turmoil, and there was a horse in the painting who was actually the bearer of her horrid dreams? It was a nightmare!”

“Makes perfect sense,” Sousuke grunts as the carriage bounces along the cobblestone road. It’s like a never-ending car wreck – he can feel his spine jumping out of alignment. And his brain. And his sanity.

When it’s over, he stumbles off the carriage, woozy with nausea, while Ran skips over to the majestic black horse, Estelle, and feeds her a carrot with the tour guide’s help.

Ran wants to go to the Eiffel Tower and she uses the GPS on Sousuke’s phone to guide them there; he follows her sheepishly since he doesn’t really know how to use the digital mapping function himself. They arrive and both of them are swept up in awe as they crane their heads back to gaze up at the towering structure, and Sousuke can barely hide the dread in his voice as he says, “You want to climb that?”

Thankfully, Ran turns her attention to a nearby carousel and proclaims she’d rather do that, so Sousuke is quick to throw money at the attendant and help her onto the bejeweled saddle of a lion with a curly mane before stepping off to watch her go round and round. She beams with a wave each time the carousel turns and Sousuke waves back, far more subdued but just as happy to see her laugh so joyously.

His heart aches with the realization that neither of the twins get to be normal like this. Yes, they are absolutely spoiled and yes, not many children are chaperoned around Paris with an endless amount of funds, but the twins hardly ever get days where they can just be… kids. They don’t even go to school – they can’t with their mother’s hectic schedule of being a fashion designer. Instead they have tutors that travel with them around the world, which could be considered another privilege in itself, but the twins don’t even have friends.

Neither do Sousuke and Makoto, really.

He’s plagued by a grave, searing weight when Ran scampers over and hugs his leg, laughing up at him and ready to fly apart with joy. “That was so much fun, Nii-chan.”

His smiles through the grief as he strokes her windswept hair. “I’m so glad.”
They go to an alley café tucked between two quaint antique shops, quickly warming up in the cozy atmosphere. Ran eats some colorful macaroons and steals bites of Sousuke’s chocolate éclairs – she’s barely tall enough for her head to peak over the table, then she sits up on her knees and points at his coffee. “Can I have some?”

“No, it’s bad for you.”

She pouts. “But you’re drinking it.”

“I’m immune.” He raises his brows over his mug as he takes a drink.

Ran flops down with a whine. “But I’m sleepy and I gotta stay awake for the fashion show. You know they take for-ev-er.”

“That’s true,” Sousuke nods. “But you’ll be up for six days if you drink this.” He’s not even exaggerating; the twins already have an insane amount of energy. He’s sure that they’d shoot straight to the moon if they were fueled by caffeine.

She purses her lips in challenge, a habit she picked up from him. “One sip. One teeny-tiny sip.”

He knows he’s a doomed man when her eyes go big and round because those are the same Puppy Eyes she pulled on him when they were in Peru for yet another event and she wanted an alpaca. Their mother almost had a heart attack when they brought it to their vacation home and Makoto almost fell off the terrace from laughing so hard, but luckily there’s plenty of acreage at the Tachibana estate back in Japan, so the alpaca lives like a king and Ran says its her best friend, so everything worked out in the end.

But Sousuke still doesn’t make smart decisions under the pressure of Puppy Eyes, so he sighs and hands his coffee over. Ran beams and wraps her tiny hands around the mug to take a sip, then she swallows and her face twists so hard that Sousuke laughs loudly.

“Bleh,” she coughs, pushing the mug back over to him. “It tastes like mud.”

“Told you that you shouldn’t drink it.” Sousuke takes another sip and her face scrunches up. “You want some hot chocolate? That might help you stay awake.” He would rather her just take a nap, but she’s seven and practically allergic to naps. Sousuke can’t relate in the slightest.

She kicks her legs happily and nods. Once they’re both sipping on their respective drinks, Sousuke ventures, “Have you been sleeping well?”

She looks a bit confused, which is a relief. “Yeah, why?”

Sousuke shrugs, mentally trying to rephrase his question. He doesn’t want to outright ask how she’s dealing with the death of her father, fearful that the grief might bubble up and overflow.

She watches him curiously and leans forward. “Have you been sleeping good?”

He breathes a tired laugh. “Not really,” he mumbles. Normally he’d put up a front with anyone else but not with Ran.

She frowns. “Why?”
Sousuke parts his lips to answer but hesitates, and she leans back. “Oh,” she says, staring down into her mug. “It’s about Daddy, isn’t it?”

He takes a careful breath through his nose before twisting a sad smile with a nod.

Ran looks out the window, cheeks flooding red with the determination to hold back her tears, then she giggles. “He hated snow.”

“I remember,” Sousuke chuckles. “He used to wear at least three coats to the office every winter.”

“He looked like a grumpy marshmallow.” Ran smears her tears away with a sweater paw, her smile wobbling.

Her sorrow knifes Sousuke’s heart. He leans forward to hold her clammy, trembling hand. “I’m sorry, Ran. I just wanted to know if you’re… okay.” She’s obviously not – none of them are since it’s only been four months since their father died – but Sousuke just wanted to do something. “Have you… if you ever want to talk, just remember that you can call me or Makoto whenever you need to.”

“But you’re always working, I – I really don’t want to get you in trouble or bother you –”

“You’re never a bother Ran, I love you. We both do.” He levels their gazes firmly. “If you or Ren call us, nothing else in the world matters. I swear it.”

She gazes at him with such adoration that Sousuke’s eyes burn wetly.

Ran sniffs, “Me and Ren talk about it a lot. Mom got us a psychopath.”

He freezes. “Huh?”

Ran flaps her hand. “I mean a psycho – phiso…”

“A psychiatrist?”

“Yeah, or like, a therapist or something.” She huffs a sigh, blowing her bangs away. “I don’t know what she wants me to say. I mean, I’m just…” She curls her fists into her chest in frustration. “Sad. And she tries to make me tell her how sad feels.” She looks at him pleadingly. “You know what sad feels like, right, Nii-chan?”


“It’s so annoying,” Ran hisses and Sousuke chuckles with pride because great minds think alike. She sighs. “Mommy never even cries.”

Sousuke blinks in confusion. “She doesn’t?”

“No, not never.” Sousuke doesn’t bother correcting her since he’s sure her tutors are probably aggressive enough about her education if they are anything like the tutors he and Makoto grew up with. Ran says, “Mommy acts… mad about Daddy sometimes.”
He looks down at the table because he often shares that sentiment with their mother. “People deal with bad things differently. It doesn’t mean she didn’t love him.” His voice lowers. “But she’s alone now and that can be… upsetting.”

He’s lost in his thoughts when Ran asks, “Are you lonely too, Nii-chan?”

Sousuke blinks dazedly at her, not prepared for the question. She studies him knowingly. “I think Mako-chan is lonely too,” she whispers like a secret. “And real sad. But he was sad before Daddy…” Ran rolls her trembling lips in, biting down. “I hope he meets a cute boy soon.”

Sousuke startles a laugh. “A cute boy?”

“Yeah!” Ran nods her head fast with excitement, curls fluffing. “‘Cause he likes cute things.”

Sousuke smiles warmly into his mug. “I hope so, too.” He studies her. “How did you feel when he told us he’s gay?”

It’s a bold question but she isn’t fazed. “Gay,” Ran repeats to herself, opening and closing her jaw with the emphasized syllables. “Guh-ay.” She perks a shrug and eats a macaron happily. “It sounds fine to me.”

He smiles at her cheekiness, then she chews, “Do you want to find a cute boy too, Nii-chan?”

His very pulse stops and Ran pauses at the naked fear in his eyes. “It’s okay if you do, you know.” She says it like it’s the most obvious thing in the world. “Being alone is like…” Her gaze ventures to the window and she perks up with a burst of inspiration. “It’s like being outside without a jacket! It’s just all this snow and you’re cold and you look silly for not having a jacket.” She proudly nods to herself as she pops one of Sousuke’s éclairs into her mouth. “You and Mako-chan need to get jackets, Nii-chan.” Ran makes a face. “Even though boys are so smelly.”

He levels their gazes protectively. “Keep saying that until you’re forty.”

She giggles and hands him a teal macaroon, tapping it with her pink one like a champagne toast.

They say fashion and France go together like coffee and croissants, and Paris Fashion Week is a world within itself: 93 catwalks, thousands of models, and billions of dollars worth of business to be done. People might skip Fashion Week in London, Milan or New York, but nobody skips Paris because the champions of the industry both commercially and creatively come together. New brands debut while fashion legends work to hold their prestigious titles, and the competition of the catwalks brings in billions of dollars in revenue to Paris.

The last part is the most interesting fact to Sousuke, as well as the most baffling piece of information, because fashion can get downright frightening on the streets of Paris as evening falls.

He and Ran sit in the back of a limousine as they’re driven to the venue and the girl lets down her window to stare in awe at the crowds of fascinating people, waving and making pedestrians laugh in delight at her enthusiasm. Most people are dressed in a bizarre array of street clothes, sweaters and dresses shredded with tears since that bewildering trend seems to be in season. Sousuke can’t relate – when he buys expensive clothes, he wants them to look like it.

The roads are flooded with a sea of people headed to museums, nightclubs, gardens, or historical
monuments since fashion shows are held anywhere that’s aesthetically pleasing. Very few people on
the streets dress in suits or gowns, sticking to their eye-catching street fashion; they’re going to truck
shows or catwalks at Galeries LaFayette because that venue is generally open to the public. The
more iconic shows are attended by invite only, usually for well-known buyers, the press, or
celebrities.

Sara Tachibana’s venue is the Palais de Tokyo, a museum of modern and contemporary art, and the
building was designed to prove such. The moment the limousine driver opens the door for Sousuke,
cameras flash like explosions, and he keeps a protective hand on the back of Ran’s head, shielding
her from the cameras as guards lead them into the building. She’s shaken to tears by the aggressive
paparazzi and Sousuke picks her up, rocking her gently in his arms with quick whispers of I know, I
know, sweetie, it’s okay, baby. They go to the makeshift green room, where one of the twins’
nannies takes her with an appreciative smile.

Once Ran kisses his cheek and promises she’s okay now, Sousuke goes to find his name on one of
the chairs in the front row of the venue, the catwalk mere feet from where he sits. He adjusts his
discreet earpiece and he hears Nitori’s static-laced voice as he tests the volume. He asks if Sousuke
can hear him and he subtly hums an affirmative. In business, ear pieces are standard for important
events such as this because of the sheer number of people Sousuke will encounter tonight. He cannot
afford to stammer in front of anyone, so Nitori and Nagisa are set up in the green room with headsets
and their laptops and coffee with dozens of espresso shots, ready to search up anyone who
approaches Sousuke or Makoto. They have security camera feed on their laptops to keep track of
where the boys are, who’s around them or who they might need to approach or avoid.

Makoto breaks through the crowd and sits down beside Sousuke with a strained huff, eyes haggard
in the shadow cast by his bangs. Sousuke glances at him, painfully aware of the stares and whispers
around them – being who they are, they attract far too much attention more often than not, and at the
moment it’s difficult to tell if people are simply excited because of their status or their whispers are
guided by the negative media swirling around them.

Sousuke would bet his life it’s the latter, so he and Makoto are careful to keep their postures
nonchalant and their expressions even. “Just relax, Yamazaki-san,” Nitori tells him through the
earpiece. “We’re right here with you. Everything’s fine.”

Sousuke inwardly winces because if Nitori could tell he’s uncomfortable from the security cameras,
then everyone around him knows it, too. He takes a breath and turns to Makoto, plastering on a fake,
relaxed smile because he feels how many eyes are on them. “Okay?”

Makoto laughs handsomely even though nothing’s remotely funny – he knows how they both have
to look and he plays his part exceptionally. “Ren wanted to tour the catacombs today,” he says in
fake delight, smiling so hard that his eyes close into happy crescents. “And now I’m not going to
sleep for eight years!”

Nagisa snorts through their earpieces and Sousuke’s laugh is truly genuine. They talk about their day
with each twin, sometimes unbuttoning their blazers or adjusting their cufflinks; they learned from a
body language coach what actions seem absent when they’re actually trying to let out nervous
energy. Makoto brushes off his suit, which is dark olive and plaid, while Sousuke’s suit is a black
velvet, Kiton piece he picked up on their last business trip to the States for eight-thousand US dollars.

The lights dim, casting the audience in shadow – only then do the brothers let their shoulders drop to
take a few deep breaths. “I’m scared,” Makoto whispers frantically. “I’m scared that me being here –
after I’ve caused such an uproar… I don’t – Sousuke, I don’t want this to effect what Mom’s done,
she’s worked so hard, and I don’t want anyone judging you about that court case either –”

Quietly, Sousuke assures, “We’re old news, Mako.” He nudges their shoulders together firmly and Makoto leans on him in distress if only for a moment. “We get through this show,” Sousuke whispers. “And we show all these fucks that their opinions don’t matter; all that matters is Mom’s work. We have to get through this. It’s just a few hours and then we’ll go back to the hotel and get royally shit-faced, okay?” His voice raws as his emotions slip. “If anyone can get through this fucking nightmare, it’s you and me. Understand?”

Makoto breathes a laugh and nods, looking so tired but thankful.

The fashion show is beautiful, even Sousuke can admit that much with his limited fashion sense. Their mother looks fit to burst with joy as she follows the last model out, holding the twins’ hands and sending a teary-eyed, grateful smile to Sousuke and Makoto.

They don’t get to see her much as they head to the next venue, which is a romantic garden that hosted the debut of Chanel’s winter collection earlier today, but as of tonight, the space holds an after party for numerous shows. Though the sprawling grounds are crowded, Sousuke breathes easier in the crisp, night air, but he does not let his guard down.

Thankfully, Nagisa and Nitori were able to gain access to the security feed of this new venue because well, T.E. money can buy anything. They’re quick to let Sousuke or Makoto know who’s about to approach them, firing off names, net worths, scandals and occupations so the brothers can adjust their conversations accordingly. Most people offer Makoto condolences about the death of his father, but since Sousuke’s the residential black sheep of the family, they merely send him uncomfortable smiles, which he silently returns with a cold smirk.

He never imagined he’d be thankful to have an assault case under his belt, but because of that, not many people approach him boldly. He already had an intimidating demeanor, so Sousuke almost enjoys the night alone.

Almost.

Normally, he’d never care about being in a crowd of people that are talking, laughing, and deliberately leaving him out of conversations, but tonight, that tightness in his chest increases tenfold. He decides to drown the sensation in a flute of champagne, but the drink is so unbearably sweet that it tastes like a fucking candle.

“Never took you as a Rosé man, Yamazaki-san.”

Sousuke turns to see Kirishima Natsuya standing there, dressed in a high collar scarf and a frock coat of red velvet embroidery, looking like an aristocratic, Victorian vampire. He smirks at Sousuke and offers him a square glass of dark liquor. Sousuke all but dives for it and Kirishima chuckles, taking a deep swallow of his own scotch. “Too bad I don’t have cigars with me this time.”

“A damn shame,” Sousuke says, pleased by the rich, cedar taste of the alcohol.

“Makes me excited to get back to the Chuo Ward.”

Sousuke shakes his head in disbelief because that one sentence shows just how vigorous Kirishima is about his career. In the earpiece, Nagisa is translating Makoto’s conversation with a French
politician, so Sousuke assumes he’s safe to take this conversation into his own hands. “How’re things at the Chuo Ward?”

Kirishima pauses before huffing. “Not very impressive in terms of a challenge. I can admit that working at T.E.’s financial department was intimidating at first, but I’ve climbed to the rank of department head at the Chuo Ward branch within a year. I’m bored now.” All of a sudden, Kirishima winces, turning his head like someone just screamed in his left ear. Quickly, Kirishima says, “Not to sound ungrateful or anything of the sort. I’m just telling the truth.”

Sousuke’s brows race for his hairline at what his colleague says. Kirishima isn’t trying to insult Sousuke or the company, he’s merely being honest. Brutally honest. They don’t call him the wolf of the concrete jungle for nothing; wolves are restless when they’re hungry and Kirishima needs a challenge that he can chew on and swallow whole.

Sousuke shifts his weight to his hip. “I take it your father’s company didn’t offer you much, then?”

Kirishima stiffens and Nitori’s voice crackles to life in Sousuke’s earpiece. “Careful, Yamazaki-san.”

“Sorry,” Sousuke says firmly. “That was out of line.”

“Not hardly,” Kirishima chuckles, clicking their glasses together. “You’re bold, Yamazaki-san, that’s a very important quality in our line of work.” He thinks for a moment, shrugging to himself. “My father’s business was challenging in different ways.” He smirks. “None of the reasons had much to do with the actual work, if you understand.”

Sousuke nods. Mixing business with family presents challenges at times, he’s learned that first hand.

“I wanted to work,” Kirishima says. “And I wanted to prove that I’m more than just my father’s son. I’m sure you can relate.”

“Possibly.”

Kirishima’s smirk widens. “Right. By the way, have you seen my brother? He’s ah, a bit shorter than me, we have similar eyes? I seem to have misplaced him.”

Nitori hurries to say something in Sousuke’s earpiece because he knows that Sousuke just can’t help himself when he asks, “Nao didn’t come with you?”

Kirishima bristles defensively. Good, because Sousuke wanted him to, if only so he could say, “You really think it matters, Kirishima-san?”

Maybe he says it because of his conversation with Ran. Maybe it’s due to what’s happened with Makoto or perhaps Sousuke just needs to let someone know that it’s all okay because he needs that kind of reassurance himself. Either way, Kirishima’s expression changes, opening with vulnerability. He looks so young in this moment and it reminds Sousuke that all of them, him, Kirishima, and Makoto are truly nothing but kids that sleep in suits and are in way over their heads. But maybe that’s all right.

Kirishima sizes Sousuke up, calculating how big of a lie he needs to craft until Sousuke gives him an exhausted look. “You’re not the only one, you know.”
Nagisa and Nitori fall dead silent in the earpiece, their rapt attention bleeding through the connection. Sousuke’s never let it slip into conversation that he’s gay, but a deeper, desperate need forced the words out of him. He’s tired of seeing Makoto suffer for such a small detail about who he is and Sousuke doesn’t want Kirishima to feel the self-loathing that’s consumed Makoto.

At long last, Kirishima smiles. “I knew it.”

The response is so surprising that Sousuke can’t help but scoff. “How?”

Kirishima shrugs as he takes a sip of his drink. “You never talk about women.”

“Right,” Sousuke says flatly.

Kirishima chuckles before he soberes up. “What’s happened with your brother… you’ve seen first hand at what happens when such news is left in the hands of this miserable world. The average person doesn’t accomplish much in their lives, Yamazaki-san, and their outlash is all they have to feel alive. Perhaps money is the only thing that separates me from them, but I do have a very homophobic father and an inheritance I can kiss goodbye if he finds out about me. It’s not only an inheritance of money – it’s the Kirishima name I will have to let go of the very moment anyone finds out. All status, all respect will be lost. I will be no better than the average person and I might sound like the most revolting of men when I say this, but I have simply worked too hard for that.”

“I get what you mean,” Sousuke admits. “But that’s bullshit. People will still respect you, Kirishima-san.”

Then why can’t Sousuke convince himself of that about his own crisis? He’s such a hypocrite.

Kirishima sighs. “I don’t want to live my life like this forever… I thought transferring to Tachibana Enterprise would start to break the ties with my family and it has. It’s fucked up, but I’m so very glad for it. I haven’t had a single independent thought in my twenty-nine years of life, but now I have that at your company.” He laughs sheepishly. “Though I’m still scared shitless. I need more time. But in all sincerity… I’d rather bring the secret to my grave than imagine what Nao will have to endure. It will be…” He works his jaw. “A thousand times worse that what I’m going to go through. I’m not brave enough to face that yet.” Natsuya’s eyes fall half-lidded with a sad smile as his head leans left, like someone’s whispering something sweet to him.

“Right,” Sousuke mumbles, subdued. “Well, I’ll let you get back to finding Ikuya, Kirishima-san.”

“You’re more than welcome to call me Natsuya from this point on, Yamazaki-san.” He smiles warmly.

“Sousuke,” he corrects.

“Marvelous.” Natsuya glances around in irritation, mumbling, “I really should have brought Nao with me, come to think of it. He could have kept an eye on Ikuya.”

“He really didn’t come?”

Natsuya smirks and taps to his left ear, fingering the wire behind it. “He’s right here. Well, physically at the hotel.”

Sousuke is surprised – Nao definitely isn’t Natsuya’s P.A. but working the earpiece for an event
such as this takes education and experience and –

“He’s in Mass Communications,” Natsuya says, then his smile turns bashful. “But he also cares for me.” He pats Sousuke on the shoulder as he passes. “You’d be surprised what love does to people, Sousuke. Have a good night with your scotch.”

“Well, wasn’t that vague as hell,” Nitori drones in Sousuke’s earpiece.

“Not really.” Nagisa chimes. “Sousuke could be right at home in a heartbroken, country music video holding that whiskey. Can’t you just hear the banjos playing?”

“I can hear you,” Sousuke snaps, wandering off to find Makoto. He finds him finishing up a conversation with a Japanese diplomat, and once that’s over, Makoto sags in relief at his brother’s presence. Sousuke glances him over, knowing how much exhaustion he’s hiding in that fake smile. “Just a bit longer,” Sousuke mumbles, handing him the liquid cotton candy that is tonight’s champagne. “Anything fun happen yet?”

“Most people just want to talk business with me.” Quieter, he huffs, “But I did get a few, ‘how do you think being gay will affect your work ethic,’ which kinda took ten years off my life.”

Nagisa snorts. “I love how nobody realizes you were gay before you came out.”

Sousuke bristles at his brother’s words, eyes already scanning the garden. “Who asked you that?”

“It doesn’t matter, really.” Makoto squeezes his forearm comfortingly, reminding him, “Fuck everyone else, right?” He smirks jokingly. “We really don’t need to pick up an assault case in every city we go to.”

Sousuke takes a drink of his whiskey with perfect serenity. “The day grown men stop acting like vicious cunts, you’ll see me become as much of a sitting flower as you, I swear it.”

Makoto goes to laugh something back when they notice someone approaching them – a younger guy with a mop of teal hair, his hands casually in his pockets, but his demeanor is downright _frigid_. Everything about him is diamond sharp – the angle of his cheekbones, the cut of his eyes, which seem to be set in a default glare. Seriously, Sousuke might lose his title of Champion of the Resting Bitch Face if this guy is competing. His suit is pristine ivory but he just looks like someone who fights dirty.

Nagisa drones, “Well, isn’t this a goddamn bitch of an unsatisfactory situation.”

“You did not just quote _Brokeback Mountain_ right now,” Makoto sing-songs with rising panic, mouth barely moving so he can keep his professional smile in tact.

“This is real life, Nagisa, not an excellent movie,” Sousuke says, bracing himself as the boy nears them. “Now who is this?”

Nitori fills in, fast as lightning. “Kirishima Ikuya, enrolled in Keio Business School but he’s transferring to Tokyo University next semester.” He pauses in confusion. “Yet he has no position at Kirishima International yet.”

Makoto and Sousuke glance at each other in surprise and the latter muses, “Then why’s he transferring to Tokyo?”
The hear Nagisa’s fingers flying over a keyboard through the earpiece. “Doesn’t matter, he likes swimming – Makoto, do your thing. Converse like hell. Backstroke for days and what not.”

“Got it.” Makoto straightens his tie and takes a deep breath.

Sousuke says, “You sure this kid’s fine?”

Nagisa’s voice falls flat. “Besides he looks at everyone like ‘eat shit and die’ and he’s the baby of the corporate slaughterhouse? Kid’s more boring than a saint. Record’s clean.”

Ikuya approaches them with the perfect bow, an exact ninety-degree angle down to the very millimeter, though his posture is relaxed and lanky when he resumes standing upright, his voice a lazy murmur. “Tachibana-san, Yamazaki-san – I’m Ikuya.”

Sousuke’s brow twitches up. He didn’t introduce himself as a Kirishima. Very interesting.

Makoto beams. “Ah, it’s so nice to finally meet you, Ikuya-san! Your older brother speaks very highly of you.”

Ikuya glances down to blush and Sousuke adds, “He went looking for you just now.”

“I’ll go find him,” Ikuya sighs – Natsuya and the rest of their family are surely over-protective about the youngest heir. “But…” Ikuya fists his pocket deeper, glancing away to clear his throat before he gathers the courage to meet Makoto’s gaze. “I just wanted to tell you how brave that was.” He flaps his elbows for the words. “Coming out. I look up to you a lot for that.”

Without breaking his surprised stare on Ikuya, Sousuke takes Makoto’s champagne flute before it can slip out of his lax grip. Makoto looks at Ikuya and vulnerability sinks into his features, emotion heavy in his smile. “That means the world, Ikuya. Truly.”

Ikuya offers him up the ghost of a smile. “Good.” He gives yet another sigh, blowing his bangs out of his face. “I’d better go find Nii-chan. Have a safe flight back home.”

Sousuke and Makoto stare after him and Nagisa huffs. “Well, that was anticlimactic.”

The brothers wince as the P.A. crunches down on something loudly.

Nitori gives a shrill cry. “You did not make popcorn just now! I thought you were going to get me some candy from the vending machine!”

“I thought the situation called for it,” Nagisa snaps. “Here, just eat some –”

“DON’T THROW IT AT ME –”

Sousuke grins at their antics and nudges Makoto. “Ready to go talk shit and drink ‘til we can see sounds?”

“I was born ready,” Makoto laughs, high with exasperation and so honest, and Sousuke joins in.

Chapter End Notes
up next: we get more into the sugar daddy aspect of the story. that's it, that's the preview. sorry love you

fun info! so the painting mentioned on sousuke and ran's carriage ride was one of the inspirations for mary shelley's *frankenstein*. def recommend if you've never read it but take it with a grain of salt because it's pretty dark obvs and mega philosophical in some parts, but i thought i'd mention it since there's a movie about mary shelley coming out and i'm pretty excited (sorry my english major is showing)

anyway, thank you for reading! i really appreciate it!
drinking is part of the corporate culture; if not for the stress-relief, then it’s a socializing measure to mingle with coworkers. Sousuke’s a casual drinker but he doesn’t trust anyone enough to get drunk around them – nobody but Makoto, and they both need it a little too much after the fashion show.

He’s a whiskey man through and through and he’s lucky the hotel had something foreign that hits like a train. Tennessee Honey isn’t what he’s used to – personally, he tends to lean toward Irish scotch when he’s in a mood like this – but he isn’t complaining and neither is Makoto, which shows just how shitty they both feel. Makoto likes Irish scotch too, but he doesn’t even read the label when Sousuke pours the liquor into two square glasses, and after that, it’s… blurry, jarring like his heart’s trapped in a martini shaker, but it’s good.

He knows they talk shit because that’s what they always do when they’re drunk; this time around it’s about politics and office gossip or anything else other than the fashion show. Putting up a bulletproof front to that degree is traumatic and unwinding is absolutely necessary. Sousuke’s muscles ache from being so tense and his throat is hoarse from using a precise, calculated voice that didn’t sound like his own.

After the first bottle, Makoto can’t stop touching his own face, like he’s trying to map out his features, trying to remember what he looks like without a mask, he’s had to wear one for so long.

But it’s okay. There’s laughing and crying and cussing, scoffing and stumbling, and there’s a lot of staring at the ceiling from their place on the floor. In the dark, Makoto sighs, his voice a raspy murmur. “I’m lonely. You know?”

“Yeah,” Sousuke croaks, vocal cords drenched in bourbon and utterly parched. “I know.”

Makoto rolls over onto his stomach to take another swig from the bottle and he winces, thumping his foot against the carpet at the taste. He wipes his mouth and sleepily rubs his bloodshot eyes as his phone plays from across the room – earlier, Makoto was showing him some song from a Tokyo local, some college kid, but now the rest of his playlist is on shuffle. Kehlani is singing about it’s okay to not be okay and it’s all good to not be all good. Normally, Sousuke doesn’t like this kind of music, but it’s just fucking hitting him right now in the way that some songs do when you’re drunk.

Makoto says, “It just sucks. Like, it really sucks, being alone.” He rests his chin against the lip of the bottle and like a secret, he whispers, “Sometimes it makes me feel like I came out but I don’t have anything to show for it.”
Sousuke gropes around and finds a stray suit jacket, stuffing it under his head to use it as a makeshift pillow. “What, you mean coming out doesn’t feel worth it when you’re alone?”

“… kinda,” he mumbles. “I mean, it does feel worth it, I just mean…” He gropes for the words with an embarrassed smile, fumbling to push his hair back. It’s a hot mess of crumpled gel. “I came out but I still don’t have anyone. I thought being in the closet was the only thing stopping me, I really did – but now it’s like, oh shit, maybe I’m just not… attractive or something, I don’t know. Or maybe the money makes it all too intimidating.”

Sousuke rolls his eyes. “Mako, you got in the Top 10 Most Handsome list during Esquire’s Business Month last year, and you said just last week that your DMs are full of dick pics, so please stop.” He snatches the bottle to take a drink with a daring look for his brother to protest his words. “And I hope you blocked all of them by the way, that shit isn’t cool.”

Makoto huffs and rests his chin on his fist. “That’s all different. Nobody approaches me even when I’m like, at the bar and people probably don’t recognize me.”

“Well, you’re pretty fuckin’ awkward if the conversation ain’t work related,” Sousuke tells him solemnly. “Shy, you know. It’s not a bad thing. You really don’t get approached at all?”

Makoto winces, cheeks red with the alcohol flush. “I do, but… guys just come on so strong sometimes. They never have the right vibe.”

Sousuke swallows the last of the liquor with an all-mighty shudder. “I think you’re just picky.”

He laughs, rolling onto his back to sigh up at the ceiling. “Yeah,” he says, eyes lulling shut with a sheepish grin. “I can admit that much.”

A new song comes on. He’s not to blame and he’ll never change, drinking the love that they pour in the cup ’cause it eases the pain –

“You listen to some depressing stuff,” Sousuke says.

Makoto startles another laugh, swatting his arm. “It’s pop music, this is mainstream. Everyone listens to it. And that’s off Bebe Rexha’s new album, don’t disrespect her like that.”

Sousuke rears back, scoffing, “Who?”

Makoto laughs louder and buries his face in his jacket-pillow with a groan. “Not everyone can appreciate an 1800s orchestra like you, sorry.”

“Not my fault everyone else’s got shit taste.”

“It sounds like a vampire funeral.”

“That’s ironic.”

“Thanks.”

They fall into comfortable silence, eyes closed as their heads swim, limbs feeling loose and numb. Makoto’s voice ventures hesitantly. “You feel lonely?”
Sousuke’s glazed eyes trace the ceiling beams. “Yeah. But I don’t know how to be anything else.”
It’s not like he can just find someone on Tinder for a quick fuck, not when the media is so hungry to
get dirt on him, and he’s not about to make a stranger sign a non-disclosure agreement before they
fall into bed. He just works too much to give someone all the love he’s got to give. “Lonely is just…
easier.”

“It’s really not.” But Makoto’s sad smile is understanding.

The phone sings him to sleep. Wish we could love, sober the buzz, but I’m just not steady.

The temperature drops the next morning and briskly pulls Sousuke out of his hangover. Makoto
helps the twins pack their things while Sousuke and his mother drink coffee on the hotel room’s
balcony – cappuccinos make the morning chill better, nostalgic in some poetic way. It’s one of those
moments that’s so meek but Sousuke knows he’ll remember it with fondness even in its simplicity.

They gaze out at the foggy skyline and his mother glances back into the room, watching the twins
throw themselves on Makoto’s back and demand piggy-back rides as he downs another alka seltzer
in a glass of water. She chuckles. “You two really hit it hard last night, didn’t you?”

“Eh,” Sousuke shrugs.

The woman smooths out her long dress. It should be odd to see someone wearing floral print in the
dead of winter, but she has such a sunshine personality that it just works. “It’s not always safe to
drink alone, you know.”

“I wasn’t alone, I was with Makoto.”

She gives him an exhausted look. “I mean emotionally alone.” She stares out at the city with a
forlorn expression, sadness coming off of her in such intense waves that distress rises in Sousuke. “I
wish I could see you two smile with someone, just once,” she mumbles, voice distant. “People smile
different when they’re in love. You can see it all over them.” She quickly rubs her eyes and cuts a
laugh. “Goodness, I’m sorry, Sou-chan, I shouldn’t have said that. Neither of you need that kind of
pressure right now, I just –”

It tumbles out of his mouth without his control. “I’m – I’m not alone.”

Wait, what?

Slowly, she turns to face him fully. “What?”

Shit.

Sousuke clears his throat, swallowing down the taste of his own heart. “I, um. I do have someone.”
His fingers clench tighter around his mug so they’ll stop shaking. What the shit, just stop talking – “I
just didn’t want to bring it up here, since there was so much going on with the fashion show and
stuff.”

Her entire expression freezes before she cries a laugh of delight, sounding brighter than ever before.
She puts her mug down and yanks Sousuke’s away to take his hands, staring at him with so much
earnest joy that the guilt eats Sousuke alive. “Sousuke, are you serious?” Her voice falls to an excited
whisper. “Truly?”
He nods and such a little motion sends waves of nausea through him. He relies on every body language tactic he knows to make his shy smile seem genuine. “Yeah.” His voice sounds muffled under the drum of blood in his ears.

She looks ready to fly apart with joy. “Oh my God, this is wonderful, that’s…” She gives him a once over, tipping her head. “It’s a man?”

Sousuke’s stomach drops but she doesn’t falter. He nods once, not finding the words.

Her smile never wavers. She envelops him in a warm embrace, swaying him back and forth in her delight. “I’m so, so proud of you.”

That hits him like a punch in the gut, breath leaving him in a rush. He blinks the sting out of his eyes, numbly returning her hug. She leans back to frame his face, thumbs sweeping across his cheeks, circling his temples. “Have you told Mako yet?”

He struggles to compose himself. “No, it’s still… new. Trying to take it slow and all that.” Fuck, fuck, he’s fucking this up –

His mother just smiles wider. “Well, I won’t tell him,” she whispers with a wink. “But you’ll think about bringing this lucky boy to Christmas, won’t you?”

Sousuke bites down on his tongue. Hard. “Yeah, sure. Maybe. We’ll see.”

She laughs and rises, brushing the wrinkles from her dress. “Well, I’ll be looking very forward to it. I’m going to go get the twins off your brother.”

“Kay,” he croaks, staring down at his shoes.

He hears the door slide closed, leaving him alone, and Sousuke staggers to the balcony railing before hurling his guts up.

He’s left heaving when it’s over, throat on fire, his eyes throbbing in time with his broken pulse. The door opens up again and someone pauses. Makoto sounds utterly smug. “Want one of my alka seltzers, big guy?”

“Give me six of them,” Sousuke croaks, clutching his stomach and resting his sweaty forehead against the frosty balcony railing.

He hurdles into Nitori and Nagisa’s hotel room like it’s a drug bust, tumbling over the suit cases by the door and hitting the floor so hard that his stomach churns dangerously again. “Please, no,” he groans to any god that will listen, curling up right where he fell.

Nitori’s hands are fretting over him while Nagisa stays laid back on his messy bed, sipping loudly at his strawberry refresher as he scrolls through his phone. Sousuke jumps up in a flurry, gasping, “Nagisa, you gotta help me right now.”

He perks up, eyes slowly roaming from his phone screen to Sousuke. “Oh?” He straights up against the headboard and crosses his dainty ankles, feet clad in a pair of Chanel slides. “Did you manage to find yourself a scandal in the last ten hours?”
“No.” He winces. “Well, yeah, kind of.”

“Oh no,” Nitori breathes, a hand over his heart as he falls back against the wall, eyes closing in dread. “Is it nudes? Just say it, Yamazaki-san, we’re not here to judge –”

“I am,” Nagisa beams.

“What? No, it’s not fucking nudes.” He shudders with the thought. “No, I told my mom that I have a boyfriend and she’s expecting him to come with me to the Christmas dinner.”

Silence drops like a brick. Sousuke gazes out at the balcony longingly.


“Nagisa, stop it!” Nitori throws a portable to-go wine cup at him but misses, aim thrown off by this curve ball Sousuke just slammed them with. He takes a deep breath, grabbing his head like he’s physically trying to wrap his mind around this clusterfuck of a situation. “How did you even – you know what, never mind, that’s not important right now.”

“Oh my god,” Nagisa whines, nearing a heart attack with this onslaught of delicious gossip. “Sou-chan, I’m sorry, but please understand that this is just too good.”

“Right,” Sousuke drones. “Yeah. I’m quaking, really.”

Nitori flops down on his bed, which is made to military precision with fluffed pillows, unlike Nagisa’s tornado of a bed. “Could you tell her at Christmas that you two broke up?” He nods to himself. “Yeah, that should work.”

Sousuke hesitates. “I don’t know if I could do that.”

Nitori gives a shrill cry, “Why?”

“She looked so happy when I told her, Nitori.” Sorrow knifes his chest. “I haven’t see her look that happy since Dad died, I can’t –” He swallows thickly. “I can’t take that away from her.”

Nitori kneads his forehead. “You realize that if you don’t say you two broke up – you and this person that doesn’t even exist – then we’re going to have to fabricate an entire relationship?”

Nagisa stands up with a flurry of his silk robe and Sousuke quickly looks away, eyes wide in disbelief. The damn thing barely brushes the tops of his thighs. Sousuke makes a note to give Nitori a bonus for having to room with him. “Leave this all to me.” Nagisa bends over to reach into his bookbag and Sousuke turns in the other direction, accidently meeting Nitori’s dead eyes. Make that a double bonus.

Nagisa takes his laptop out and sits back down on the bed, opening his computer before his fingers fly over the keys. “I’m going to take care of everything.”

That should be comforting – that’s all Sousuke wanted to hear – but when it’s coming from Nagisa, all he can feel is anxiety. “What are you going to do?”

“You remember Natsuya’s pretty little lilac?”
“… Nao?”

“Have you wondered how someone of Natsuya’s status was able to find a stunner who’s so willing to put a hand in his pants and his bank account and his heart?”

Nitori clutches his chest in horror. “Nao’s a dominatrix.”

Nagisa’s face twists in confusion. “No?” He pauses. “Well.” After a deep thought, he bounces a nod. “Actually yeah, probably, but not the point I’m trying to make.”

Sousuke reels.

“Point is, we’re not gonna be able to go out on the street and find you a friendly neighborhood gay and convince him to keep his lips sealed.” Nagisa turns the laptop screen around. “We’re gonna find him here.”

Sousuke and Nitori crowd around the screen before the PA cranes back so far that he nearly falls off the bed. “The Peach Pit!?” Nitori splutters, choking on his own words. “Nagisa, how do you even find these websites! Exit off that, you’re going to get a dozen viruses. Seriously, I already hear the FBI clambering down the hallway, I’m not kidding –”

Sousuke stares at the rows and rows of bio photos – some are just body shots, the picture cropped from the lips down. There are men in pink chokers and tight lingerie, plump lips sucked around lollipops or their own fingers. Others wear arrays of leather straps that look like a nightmare to untangle. “Jesus Christ,” he breathes in faint horror and confusing arousal.

Nagisa blinks down at the screen. “Oh wait, sorry, wrong tab.” He turns the laptop back around and types something else in. Nitori and Sousuke just stare.

Nagisa hums a little tune as he turns the laptop back around. “Here we go.”

Nervously, Sousuke scans the screen. This website doesn’t look nearly as tacky as the last one, all the fonts cursive and elegant with a clean, simple background. “Fortune Exotica,” he reads the banner, feeling a bit more sick.

“This is so trashy,” Nitori groans into his hands.

“Trust me, it’s not,” Nagisa assures. “You wouldn’t believe how many martinis I had to buy Nao at the hotel bar last night just to get the password for this bitch. It’s ‘triplet,’ by the way.”

Nitori runs his sweaty palms down his leggings, restless and frazzled out of his mind. “This looks fake. This whole site has to be a set up, like – like a bait car or something, I don’t like this.”

“Ai-chan,” Nagisa coos. “You’re more than welcome to go down to the lobby and get me a coffee for the flight so you’re not here when the FBI barges in.”

Nitori all but lunges toward the door. “You want anything, Yamazaki-san?”

“Liquor,” he whispers, voice small and faint as he stares at the computer screen.

“Iced black coffee, got it. I’ll be sure they make it right. Nagisa, what do you want? Choose
carefully, it’s the last nice thing you’re gonna drink before they send your ass to prison for being on the Dark Web.”

Nagisa purses his mouth, lips glistening with a sheen of glitter that smells like cherries even from across the bed where Sousuke sits. In his nauseas state, it just smells like cough syrup. “I’ll have a twenty ounce iced coconut-milk macchiato, sugar free syrup, triple shot of espresso, light ice – not no ice – no whip.” He pops his gum with a wink. “Thanks, babe.”

Nitori’s left eye twitches. He’s sure to slam the door on his way out.

Nagisa gives the laptop to Sousuke and Sousuke steadies it in his lap with awkward hands. These bio pictures have actual faces on them, but no names. Other than that, it looks like an average dating site. “Why are there no names?”

“Names are usually exchanged when you meet in person,” Nagisa says. “It’s a secret site, after all.”

Sousuke tenses. “So the FBI really might be on their way?”

“I mean. Probably not, I have a pretty strong fire wall. You can’t have my taste in porn without taking a few precautions.”

“Shocker,” Sousuke mumbles, running his finger over the mousepad to scroll down. He’s going to YouTube a hypnosis treatment for self brain washing when all this is over. He reads over the About Page and stiffens. “Wait, wait, this is a fucking –” His skin crawls. “This is a sugar daddy site?”

Nagisa snorts. “That’s what your worried about? Does blowing a little money on someone sound that bad to you?”

He grimaces. “It’s not that, it’s just… the premise of it all. The dynamic, I guess.”

Nagisa shakes his head. “Try not to stereotype it, Sou-chan. Think of it as just enticing someone a few levels deeper into the relationship without having to waste time for it.”

Sousuke worries his lip. “These aren’t prostitutes, right? I’m not doing any shit like that. I don’t want someone to think that they have to sleep with me just because I’m giving them money.”

“No, God, no,” Nagisa startles. “Everyone’s there by their own consent and they weren’t required to agree to any weird-ass terms and conditions before signing up. They’re not working under anyone; they’re not required to do anything with you if they don’t wanna.”

Sousuke nods firmly and goes back to scrolling. “Okay, good.”

Looking through the site is an out-of-body experience and he’s still too nerved-up to focus on any bios. “Uh, I think I need to mull this over a while longer.”

“Sure.” Nagisa leans back on his hands with a smirk. “You’re warming up to the idea pretty quickly, all things considering.”

Sousuke blushes and closes the laptop.

“Want me to try to find someone on the site for you?” At Sousuke’s hesitance, Nagisa sings a laugh. “Listen, Sou-chan, I know I’m pretty out there, but I know everyone else isn’t like that. Give me a
little credit; I think I could match you up with someone on your level if you tell me what you want.”

Sousuke considers, parting his lips but not finding the words. His mind is blank of a mental image. “I don’t really know what I want.”

Nagisa situates himself on his mountain of pillows as he opens Notes on his phone. “You want a tall or short guy?”

“Um. Shorter than me, I guess.”

Nagisa types away. “You like short hair? Buzzed, dyed?”

“Longer hair,” he blurs.

“Tattoos or piercings bother you?”

Sousuke makes a face. “Not really.”

“You want handsome or pretty?”

“Pretty,” he sighs without thinking.

Nagisa hides his grin behind his phone screen. “Education level?”

Sousuke rolls his eyes. “That’s not exactly what matters in this situation.”

“We’ll just say some college at the least.” Nagisa types some more. “What about personality wise?”

He considers. “Ambitious. Determined. I like a lot of strive.”

“Duly noted~ okay, this should be enough. I’ll go ahead and make your profile too, while I’m at it.” At Sousuke’s look of dread, Nagisa grins with an eye roll. “Don’t worry, I won’t make you sound like a creep because you’re not one.” He pats Sousuke’s leg. “We’ll make this work, all right? Me and Ai will handle it.”

“You and Ai?”

“Yeah,” Nagisa breezes, standing up to stretch, tiny robe straining and struggling. Sousuke’s gaze hits the furthest wall with a firm neck crack. “The Co-CEO of Tachibana Enterprises just gave me a rush solo-project and I’m gonna need an errand boy to get me fuckloads of iced coconut-milk macchiatos to make sure it’s successful. Oh, and a bonus would be quite peachy.”

Sousuke scoff as he stands up, rolling his aching shoulder. “If this works, I’ll give you a full pay raise.”

“Goddamn, I love corporate corruption,” Nagisa hisses with earnest. “Say no more. We’re gonna find you a hot little twink by the end of the night, my guy.” His smirk is positively wicked. “I already have someone in mind.”
To be frank, Rin’s a little surprised when he gets an abrupt call from Nagisa that evening. His cell phone rings and Hiyori looks up from licking a spliff closed but Rin waves him back to it as he answers the call. “Nagisa, you’re back already?”

Haru yanks the remote out of Rin’s hand and thumbs back to his own Netflix page, sighing happily when he finds a coral documentary. From the loveseat, Asahi groans into Kisumi’s neck and makes him giggle before peppering a few kisses against his hair. “It’s Haru’s turn to choose, babe.” They’re so pretzeld together that Rin can’t tell whose limbs are whose. It looks oppressive and maybe a little envy worthy.

“Don’t sound so chipper,” Nagisa laughs. Hiyori lights up and takes a pull before Haru pinches the joint between his fingers and goes for a drag, face flushing, limbs falling lax. “Listen, could you meet me at the campus coffee house in like, fifteen?”

Rin frowns, reaching for the spliff and pursing his lips against the end. He inhales, slow, indulgent – nothing like the first time he smoked freshmen year and nearly blacked out from coughing so hard. Smoke floods his mouth and rolls down his tongue, brimming all tight in his lungs before he exhales. “What for?” He passes off to Kisumi, who holds the joint to Asahi’s lips so he can take a pull.

“Just got a quick question is all,” Nagisa explains. “I’ll buy you something there, it won’t take any time.”

Rin’s half-lidded eyes blink dazedly, losing himself in the pasty color of the wall before he shakes himself. “You wanna just come to the dorm?” He rubs his face as sweet numbness prickles across his cheeks. “We’re smoking if you want some.” His voice pitches into a yawn.

“Nah, I’m good. So you’ll be there?”

He sounds oddly insistent. But maybe that’s just the weed talking. Thinking. Whatever. “Yeah, I’ll leave now.”
“Splendid,” Nagisa says, sounding pleased with himself. “Ciao.”

Rin hauls himself up from the couch, body feeling hollow and heavy all at once. “Nagisa wants me to meet him at the coffee shop for somethin’.”

Kisumi sighs out a haze of smoke. Asahi nuzzles into his neck, looking like he’s settling in for a nap, tucked into the crook of his boyfriend’s shoulder. Kisumi says, “What for? He must have just got off the plane like, thirty minutes ago.”

“Dunno.” Rin shuffles over to the shoe rack and puts on some flip flops.

Haru snorts. “You know it’s snowing.”

Rin stares down at his shoes for a full minute. “Oh.” He hasn’t smoked since before the start of the swimming season, so it’s hitting him harder than usual. He kicks the flip flops off and puts on his boots – no socks because it’s too much effort – then he grabs a wrinkled hoodie. “I’ll be back. Just goin’ to the coffee shop.”

Hiyori calls, “Oh, hey, while you’re there could you get me a –”

Rin shuts the door.

The coffee shop isn’t too crowded given that it’s late, but there are a few stragglers hunched over tables with a mess of textbooks and laptops strewn about since finals are going on. The moment Rin steps foot in the door, the aroma of pastries hits him like a freight train. Seriously, his knees almost buckle. Every sweet treat smells like pure heaven in his hazy state and his stomach yawns hungrily.

Nagisa finds him, looking tired from his flight but bubbly as ever. He goes up to the counter with Rin, who orders two blueberry muffins, a slice of lemon cake, and a couple of other pastries for his friends since he’s not heartless to a case of the munchies, but he’s not making any promises about if they’ll make it back to the dorm.

He and Nagisa shuffle into a booth, Rin with his armful of food and Nagisa with just a hot chocolate. “Sorry this all cost so much,” Rin chews, halfway through the second muffin. He ate the first one on their walk to the table.

“No worries,” Nagisa chuckles.

“Have a good trip?”

“Yes,” he smiles, fanning his hands out over the table. “Yeah, so listen, I wanted to talk about how your financial aid thing is going.”

Rin stills, his insides running cold. He’s suddenly not so high anymore. “I told you, I missed the date for all the scholarship sign ups.”

“Yeah, okay, good. I mean –” He grimaces, waving his tiny hands. “Not good-good, but I just wanted to tell you that I found a way into that website.” His eyes lower, all half-lidded and sly. “If you’re still looking.”

Rin stares before lurching across the table. “Yes, holy shit, yes. How the hell did you find it?”
Nagisa grins against the lid of his cup. “Let’s just say Nao-senpai is a talkative drunk when it comes to Parisian alcohol.” He makes a face. “And that Natsuya’s a possessive drunk. But like, definitely in a hot way. I think he growled at me once. I got chills.”

Rin’s jaw drops. “Nao was in Paris?”

“Yeah, yeah, but anyway.” He levels their gazes. “I can give you the site name and password if you wanna do it.”

Rin’s eyes flood with tears before he can stop himself. “Nagisa, thank you.” He wipes his face with a trembling hand. “I’m scared as fuck but I’m gonna do it.”

Nagisa’s smile is practically aching with genuineness. “Don’t be scared, Rin-chan. Nothing’s gonna happen to you, I promise. Well.” He snorts to himself as he drags his laptop out of his bag. “Nothing bad, that’s for sure.”

They make Rin’s profile and Nagisa gives him the link for the mobile site – *Fortune Exotica*, what in the fucking world – and tells him to use private browsing, which is questionable, but that’s kind of the lane Rin runs in anyway, so he has no qualms.

He’s pretty sober by the time he makes it back to the dorm with three pastries. His friends have lit another joint and there’s stray pizza boxes on the coffee table but the moment Rin drops off the pastries, everyone pounces on them like a pack of rabid dogs. Rin grabs the joint off Hiyori’s armrest before it can burn a hole in the fabric and he sneaks into his bedroom, closing the door firmly. He sits cross-legged on his mattress, puffing on the last dregs of the spliff as he checks over his sorry excuse of a security program, then he opens the website with the password Nagisa gave him. His profile isn’t much; his bio says that he’s a college student, he’s athletic, that sort of generic thing. He put *adventurous* on there because that’s something he’s seen on plenty of Grindr profiles but he didn’t object when Nagisa suggested *ambitious* and *determined*. It’s not a lie, he supposes.

They’re lucky Rin still had a few slutty pictures in his camera roll after he found out Gou follows him on Instagram and he deleted them. There’s some Snapchat screenshots from house parties that had good bathroom lighting and made his face look particularly alluring. A couple of photos are of him at the gym – shirtless of course because he works too hard to be modest – and there’s a few stills from his ex-boyfriend who wanted to be a videographer, but he really didn’t need that excuse to take shots of Rin twisted in the sheets, swallowed in an oversized sweater with a hint of black panties in the corner of the picture. He looks young. Impressionable. Naïve, maybe. It’s a look. He just hopes someone with a fat wallet likes it.

There’s already a few likes on his profile and a few DMs that seem polite enough – some are pretty gross, but only a few – and most of the men are older, which shouldn’t be a surprise. But now that Rin’s thinking about the mental image of what those men might want to do with him, he’s starting to feel anxious again. Plus, some of their occupations are things like owning mattress store chains or laundry mats. He’s seen the movies, he knows that means some shady shit. He decides to leave the messages in his inbox and smoke his worries away just a bit more.

He’s rising back to a *delicious* high when his phone buzzes. Rin fumbles for it and unlocks the screen, wincing when the brightness spikes a headache between his eyes in the dark room. He turns the brightness lower and thumbs open the text from Nagisa. There’s a link to a profile with the
message: was just headed to bed and saw this one! check it out,nighty night~ 🌿 ∙ 🌿

Rin chews his lip as he opens the link, taking the final pull on his joint. The page opens up and the smoke gets caught in his lungs because Rin isn’t breathing anymore. He’s just staring.

He lets the smoke out in a rush and frantically swats it away to get a clear view of his screen. The text is jumbled in his blurry vision but he isn’t interested in that in the least. All he cares about is the bio picture.

He has the faint thought that the man looks familiar, but in his cloudy state of mind, he can’t put a name to the face. All he knows is that he’d let this man call him whatever the hell he wants – do whatever he wants. Rin’s already rubbing his thighs together, restless with sexual frustration. Apparently he has a suit kink; this is news to him but it’s not an unwelcome realization.

This shit looks like a magazine shoot with impeccable quality and lighting. The setting is an office with a wall of glass and that gift of a man towers over a desk that looks sturdy, like it could hold at least two people’s weight from countless angles. He’s sitting in a chair, posture lax but exuding so much confidence it’s as though he’s daring the whole world to fight him, provoking with nothing more than the look in those cold eyes. His brows are strong, one of them hiked in such taunting challenge that hot chills roll down Rin’s legs all the way to his curled toes.

The man’s hands are big, fingers long where they’re curled loosely around the chair’s armrests. His Rolex is heavy and thick where it’s slung low over his wrist. The black blazer makes his wide shoulders look twice as broad and his white button-up strains across his chest, his firm pectorals swelled over the first two undone clasps. The muscled column of his throat looks so strong and unmarked that Rin licks his teeth. His dark hair contrasts his honeyed tan, melanin saturating every inch of his skin. His thighs are spread just a little, languidly, but his legs are so muscled that the pose can only be defined as devastating.

“I know his dick is big, I know his dick is big,” Rin chants as he zooms in on the picture closer and closer.

His heart lurches up his throat when there’s a knock on the door. He scrambles to slam his laptop closed, flinging a blanket over himself as he forcefully nuzzles into his pillow. “Yeah,” he calls, sounding way too breathless.

Haru opens the door and peeks his head in, pupils blown wide, his voice a low slur. “Hey, there’s some pizza left if you want any.” His frown is venturing dangerously close to pout territory. “Kisumi ate all the scones you brought.”

Rin licks his dry lips. “Ah, nah. I’m good.” He’s hungry for something else entirely right now.

“Okay. Me ‘n Hiyori are gonna play Fortnite for a while.”

Carefully, he clears his throat, but his voice still sounds dry. “Kay.”

Haru frowns. “You all right? I know that stuff was strong.”

Yeah, I’m stellar, I almost just came untouched by eye-fucking a picture of a stranger. “Just tired.”

Okay. Well, I’ll be out here.”
He shuts the door and Rin’s limbs sprawl out with a relieved exhale. He breathes hard, trying to calm his frantic heartbeat, but fantasies are already pulsing behind his eyelids.

His nose twitches at the smell of something burning. His head whips to the side and he hisses, “God fucking –” Rin scampers to the edge of the mattress and snatches the joint up, smothering the glowing pot ash with a textbook, which he’ll think was grandly stupid in the morning, but for now, it works.

The joint is nothing more than an inch long between the pinch of his fingers now, so he flushes it down the toilet before flinging himself back onto the mattress. He unlocks his phone and stares at the gorgeous man some more, considering. His youth is reassuring; he’s in his late twenties, early thirties at the most. Rin can work with that. He can definitely work with it. A wave of lust throbs hard in his core, hips lightly rolling against the mattress.

He throws caution to the wind and sends the man a like and a flirty DM that’s got him action in worst situations. Then he waits. Refreshing the page every ten seconds. Burning with some type of need that threatens to set the very air on fire.

Sousuke keys in the code to his gate and waits for the doors to part, leaning back in the driver’s seat of his Tesla as he waits. He lives far past downtown, so the night is dark without city lights and the glow of his dashboard screen is almost painfully bright. The air conditioner is on full blast, cooling the sweat on his exposed arms and drying his damp tank top. He worked out the frustration of the flight at the gym and he always has the most satisfying sleep after a hard workout, so he’s eager to shower and go to bed well into tomorrow afternoon since he’s got the day off. Then it’s back to the vicious circle of his nightmarish schedule.

He parted ways with Makoto at the airport since he was eager to get back to his legion of cats at home, but Sousuke sends him a text message to make sure he got in the door all right since he was almost too exhausted to walk straight. Makoto chimes back almost instantly and once that’s taken care of, Sousuke parks in the garage, towels off the driver’s seat, and puts in the eight digit code to his front door.

Upon stepping inside, he hears claws clicking across the hardwood and smiles wide. Sousuke flicks on the lights just in time to see a hulking shape lunge at him with an excited yip. He grunts as the pitbull lurches up on her back legs to stand against him but he laughs, rubbing all over her clipped ears and muzzle. “Hi, pretty girl,” he coos in a voice no other person is allowed to hear him use. “Did you have fun with your sitter? Yeah?”

Arena barks in his face and he grins, running his thumb over the scar dug into her snout with sad fondness. Her previous owners were the ones who inflicted such cruelty on her and Sousuke’s made it his life’s duty to spoil her rotten ever since – her plated-gold chain collar says as much.

After cuddling Arena on the couch for a little while, his exhaustion gets the best of him and Sousuke heads up stairs to shower. He stays under the warm spray just long enough to wash his hair and the rest of himself before dragging on some sweat pants and slipping under the covers. The sheets have a lavender scent, which should be soothing – his cleaners work hard – but they smell clean like all lonely people’s sheets do. Cold. Absent of a lover’s warmth.

He pushes those thoughts away before his chest can feel too tight, but he chases sleep in vain. Bored out of his mind, he reaches over to the nightstand and yanks his phone off the charger to scroll through his notifications. Most of them are work emails and that definitely tires him, but then he
notices something else. It’s an email from that hell-site Nagisa signed him up for. Apparently someone sent him a message.

He braces himself with a sigh and follows the link, opening the profile. There’s absolute stillness in the room for ten seconds.

Then Sousuke’s arm flies out toward the lamp, clutter falling off the nightstand and startling a bark out of Arena from downstairs. He scrambles to turn on the lamp and hurls himself into an upright position, clutching his phone in both hands. “Oh, fuck,” he breathes, pupils blown wide in a trance.

He stares down at the picture on his screen. It’s a guy sprawled out on a mattress, dragging the hem of his sweater between his closed legs, body arched sideways to show the swoop of his ass with a panty strap pulled high over the curve of his hip. He’s wearing knee-highs, toes pointed, and Sousuke’s eyes trace the planes of his shins, fingers twitching to dig into the muscled meat of those thighs. All that naked skin has such a pretty fairness, his legs shaved and looking so sweetly soft. He’s got the top of the sweater snagged between his teeth and Sousuke catches the edge of a teasing smirk over the collar, the guy’s eyes half-lidded, his face all peach and sex-flushed.

This boy is dangerous. And he sent Sousuke a message.

He’s never opened his inbox faster in his life.

It doesn’t take long for his nerves to catch up with him and he throws the covers off to pace his room. He takes a deep breath and opens the message.

**heyyy you’re cute lol**

Sousuke blinks. Okay, that doesn’t sound too intimidating. “Cute?” he mumbles, brows creased with his frown. His own mother doesn’t even call him cute.

All right, whatever, he can work with that. He opens the messenger and the keyboard pops up, his thumbs hovering over the screen. He shrugs to himself, deciding to be honest. **Thanks, but I don’t get that a lot.**

He immediately regrets it as soon as he sends it. Why, he isn’t sure, but now he’s suddenly reliving every embarrassing mistake of his life.

Sousuke jolts when his phone buzzes not ten seconds later. Was the boy waiting for him? That makes his heart startle a little quicker despite himself.

**ha it’s tru though, the boy writes. I like your eyes.**

Sousuke inhales sharply as warmth floods his cheeks. **Thanks, he responds, feeling out of his element, out of his body –**

**yw**

He chews his lip. **You’re really pretty.**

**aw thank you**

Sousuke sits on the edge of his bed, legs feeling like jelly. **This is kind of weird.** He considers. **Lol.**
The next few messages come fast. **IM SO HAPPY IM NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO THINKS THAT OMG.** Sousuke cracks a grin. **Yeah it’s definitely weird not like ur weird or anything but yeah i don’t even know what if i’m doing**

**Same,** Sousuke responds, overcome by immense relief.

**ur really fuckin hot tho, the boy types. and you look young & obvs have lots of money so it’s kinda weird seeing u on this site.**

He bristles. Does the boy recognize him from the news or somewhere else just as damning?

His phone buzzes. **Not tryin to judge u bro lol <3**

His pulse calms exceptionally fast.

**i’m just tryin 2 say that u wouldn’t even have to pay for it if I saw you anywhere else.**

Oh God. Sousuke rakes a hand through his hair, shocked that it’s damp from already breaking into a sweat. He responds, **it’s just hard to meet ppl when I work so much. Not a lie.**

**oh ok ya that makes sense. u def seem cooler than all the other dudes on here**

They’ve only been texting for a few minutes, so Sousuke isn’t sure how he could come up with that statement. But he supposes people outside of the business world don’t have to have their heckles raised about scamming and double-crossing so much. He responds, **I hope nobody’s weirded you out on here, because it’s the truth. “Uh…” Lol.**

**lmao just a few dicc pics nothing I ain’t used to**


**so you wanna meet up**

He takes a deep breath. **Yeah, I’d really like that.**

**me too~ when u free**

Sousuke thinks. **In two days, actually. But if that’s too soon and you just want to talk more, that’s fine.**

**bby i’m down trust and believe**

He’s sold quicker than the next heartbeat, but he has to make sure the boy knows, **I’m not expecting you to have sex with me, by the way. This isn’t about sex for money.**

It takes ten minutes for the next respond and Sousuke almost dies waiting so long. The boy says, **then what’s this about for you?**

He stares down at the screen, heart sinking and feeling a bit hopeless. **I don’t really know.**

The next message is quicker. **ok that’s cool <333**
Sousuke goes to type something out but then another message pings and his blood catches on fire. \textit{but what if i want u}

Well, he definitely wouldn’t be opposed, but – \textit{Lol we’ll see how you feel then.}

\textit{god ur so fckin sweet haha ok}

He smiles. \textit{Would you like to go to dinner with me?}

\textit{hellfuck ya}

They set up plans to meet tomorrow evening and the boy sends him the address of a restaurant he’s always wanted to go to. Sousuke knows the place; it’s out of this world expensive for college students like the boy is (Sousuke read his bio over a hundred times during the ten minutes it took for that one message), but Sousuke is more than happy to splurge.

He’s lying down and is heartbroken to be getting sleepy when his phone chimes. \textit{i’m rin btw}

\textit{That’s a pretty name.}

>.< \textit{thanks dude lol}

He says, \textit{I’m Sousuke.}

\textit{wtf i s2g you look familiar and that name sounds familiar but idek ha}

He tenses. \textit{Oh. Weird.}

Another message comes in. \textit{but lowkey im kinda high right now so}

\textit{Oh, he replies. I hope you get home safely.}

\textit{tnks im already at home. in bed.}

Sousuke tries hard not to think about that premise too much. \textit{I hope you sleep well then, pretty.}

\textit{you too baby}

After that, they say their goodbyes and Sousuke locks his phone, rolling onto his back to stare up at his ceiling. He numbly drops his phone off the side of the bed, thinking it was aimed for the nightstand when it really just shatters on the floor. “Wow,” he sighs without a care in the world, smiling bigger than he has in years.
Chapter End Notes

up next ssk & rin finally meet

come scream with me about S3 on twitter
Working at an Irish pub takes commitment: one must be reverent about the history of scotch, since plenty of customers ask about it, and you must have an abundance of tolerance for the color green. Haru has neither of these qualities, but he needed the job, so that’s why he’s been trapped in this hellspace since junior year of university.

Come to think of it, he’s the least qualified individual to be bartending since he really couldn’t care less about someone’s personal problems – not because he’s an asshole, but because those types of things quickly make him uncomfortable and he really doesn’t have the life experience to be giving advice on some situations. He doesn’t mind making small talk since it’s pretty easy to go on autopilot for things like that, but once certain people start drinking, their demons start talking, and Haru always hates that part.

He’s better adjusted to the job now that he’s been here a while and he’s managed to figure out which days are slower, what hours equal the least amount of drunks who might start cussing or crying depending on what they’re going through. Monday nights like this are steady but not overwhelming. It helps that the pub is located at a train station; most people come in for a quick shot and go while others are bored locals who just stop by for a draft and scroll through their phone before going about their way. It’s quiet, minus the constant stream of traditional Irish music from the overhead speakers. It’s far too jovial for Haru’s liking; he hears that shit in his sleep, but he counts his blessings because nobody at the bar is slurring about a cheating ex or the economy. It’s a good ambiance with the mounted televisions on a low murmur, the clank of dishes from the kitchen, the dull thud of darts as a group of guys sling them at the bullseye on the wall.

The door chimes and Haru hears a hostess call a greeting, followed by a happy response – sounds like a man, alone, and just as Haru expected, he hears someone sit down at one of his bar stools. Men visiting the pub by themselves are rarely there to sit in a booth and eat alone. Drinking alone is much more common.

Haru mumbles a hello but doesn’t look up from the sink, elbow-deep in warm, sudsy water as he washes off a few glasses, then he towels off his arms and ventures over. He silently braces himself before looking up and he pauses.

The guy smiles shyly. “Hi.”

Haru blinks. “Hey.” He’s a little confused that such a youthful person is dressed in a suit that nice. Not that the man looks particularly young – he’s a few years older than Haru but not by much. His green eyes are just so clear and he carries himself with genuinity, shoulders broad but not squared, his face all soft-jawed and kind. His glasses do nothing to make him look more stern or older.
Haru glances down to clear his head before meeting the man’s gaze once more. “What would you like?”

He’s gotten in trouble before about being so brisk with taking orders, but he feels a little tongue-tied for some reason. The man doesn’t seem to mind, his smile intact as he glances over the menu on the bar. “Um…” He mashes his cheek on his fist while he considers his options. “I guess a little scotch would be okay.”

“What kind?”

The man looks up at him, a rosy color blooming over his nose. He gives a bashful laugh and something flutters in Haru’s stomach. “Sorry, Jameson will be fine.”

Haru nods and turns around to grab the bottle off the mirrored back-shelf, bending on his tip toes to reach it. In the mirror’s reflection, he watches the man rubs furiously at his cheeks to try and rid his blush.

Haru twists the Jameson bottle open with one hand and grabs a square glass with the other. “On the rocks?”

“Ah, sure, thank you.”

He’s faintly surprised at the appreciation since most people tend to be impatient to get a drink in their hands. He dips the glass into the ice cooler before setting it down between the man’s open forearms on the counter. He’s wearing cologne, just a little – it’s subtle in an expensive way, fresh rather than overbearing. Why he’s feeling a little daring, Haru doesn’t know, but – “Your cologne smells nice.”

He says it as deadpan as ever while pouring the scotch and his gaze flickers up in time to see the man freeze, his eyes wide behind his glasses. The blush is definitely there this time. The man laughs again like a quick burst of sunshine, his grin sheepish. “Thanks, my mom bought it for me.”

Haru ducks his head to smile at that, because really, what the hell could be sweeter.

The man taps his fingers against his glass anxiously. “I’m Makoto, by the way.”

“Haru.”

“Nice to meet you,” Makoto beams, eyes closing and upturning into happy crescents. Haru’s chest might seize just a little.

“You too,” he replies, toweling a glass dry so his hands will stop shaking with such frantic energy. Makoto takes a deep swallow of his scotch and his shoulders drop with a sigh, his sunny disposition fading into something a bit more tired. “Rough day?” It’s one of the usual questions Haru asks customers, but he finds himself genuinely wanting to know. It’s not that he’s suddenly concerned for this stranger, but – he just wants to know.

Makoto’s smile strains with embarrassment. “It was long. I had a meeting in Kanda this morning and it took a little while longer than expected.”

His exhaustion makes sense now, if he traveled all the way to Kanda this morning and is just getting back to the Yaesu station now. “Sounds like a pain,” Haru answers honestly.
Makoto gives him a grand eye roll as he recalls it. “It really was.” He glances down at the counter, chewing his lip before seeming to find a bout of courage. His voice is quiet with shy curiosity. “How has your day been?”

Haru shrugs. “Not bad. I had a final this morning but then I went back to my dorm and slept until I got called to work.” Truthfully, he doesn’t think he did very well on the final, but it should have been enough to pass. It probably was. Hopefully.

“Oh,” Makoto straightens up. “What are you studying?” He blushes. “If that’s, um – okay to ask.”

“Marine biology.”

Makoto cranes back, impressed. Haru isn’t sure why he likes being looked at with such a shine in Makoto’s eyes. “That’s really cool,” he answers sincerely. “You mean like, marine animals and stuff?”

Haru considers, leaning on the bar with his forearms resting on the counter. He gets another whiff of Makoto’s cologne and crosses his ankles tightly to steady his stance. “Yeah. Dolphins and whales mostly, but I had to learn…” He breathes a quiet laugh, a tired one. “A lot. About the ocean in general.”

“Yeah, I bet.” Makoto sounds sympathetic. “What made you want to pursue it?”

Haru shrugs. “I like water. Wanted to learn more about it, I guess.” He hesitates, not used to saying so much at once. His throat already feels dry, nerves tingling a little too hard, but he likes Makoto’s sincerity. “I learned about how pollution kills marine life and really didn’t like it, so…” He swallows, trying to gather his racing thoughts, but Makoto seems entirely patient. “So I just wanted to try and fix that any way I can.” He leans back and continues toweling off a glass, but he stays in front of Makoto – he just needed some breathing room. “That’s why I didn’t offer you a straw. Sea turtles have a tendency to choke on them when trash is dumped into the ocean.”

Makoto bristles in alarm. “Really?”

Haru nods. “I see it all the time when my class goes to Tokyo Bay for clean-up. Sometimes straws get stuck in the turtles’ nostrils.” He winces with a shudder. “They usually have to be taken out with pliers, it’s awful.”

“That’s so sad,” Makoto breathes, his expression sunken in grief. “I had no idea. I mean, I knew that pollution was bad, but – hearing something like that is just… terrible.”

Haru nods solemnly. “They seem really happy once it’s out, though.” He smiles briefly, voice borne back in memory. “One time, we went out on a boat to clear some trash and there was a dolphin caught in a net. I’m the best swimmer in the group, so I dove in and cut her free, but she didn’t leave immediately. She swam around me for at least fifteen minutes.” It’s one of the best memories of his life, hands down.

Makoto looks entranced with the story, his face alight with excitement. “Sounds like she was thanking you.”

“She probably just thought I had food.”

Makoto chuckles, shaking his head. “No, I think it was deeper than that.” He takes another sip of his
scotch, face briefly twisting at the strong drink. “So you’re a good swimmer?” He grins as he quotes Haru. “‘The best?’”

Haru blushes. “Not like, ever, but I’m on the university team. I’d like to go pro if I could, but I’d be fine either way.” Of course he’d love to swim as much as he can and going professional would fulfill that desire, but he could still swim even if he wasn’t making money for it. He’d definitely go for it if he were given the opportunity, but the Olympics is Rin’s dream, not his.

Makoto lifts his brows. “Sounds like you’re really good, then.”

“Do you swim?” This is an important question he has to ask; it’s a staple of every relationship Haru has in his life.

“I used to do it a lot, but…” He runs his thumbs over his glass in deep thought. “My brother and I took over our dad’s company a few months ago and I haven’t had much time for it since then.”

Well, that’s sad – borderline devastating in Haru’s world, but he knows that not everyone admires swimming to his own degree of reverence. He looks Makoto over. “Backstroke?”

He appears surprised. “Yeah, how’d you know?”

Haru’s face floods with warmth all the way down to his neck. He can’t just casually say Makoto’s built like that.

“Just guessing.”

“Oh. Yeah, it was backstroke. You?”

“I only swim free.”

Makoto glances him over – Haru feels glued on the spot, like he can’t move his feet, can’t breathe, like the blood stalls in his veins. “Yeah, I can see that.”

Haru gives him a look and Makoto just grins, shy and timid but openly admiring. That’s the only word for the look on his face: admiring. Appreciating Haru so politely with such chivalrous pleasure in the sight of him. A man has never looked at Haru like that; if one ever hits on him, it’s usually lewd and terrifying.

His pulse startles quicker, face flushing. He’s never liked an abrupt feeling so much. “You run a company?”

Makoto rubs the back of his neck, grimacing through a smile. “Yeah, Tachibana Enterprises.” He’s quite humble in the fact, not boasting at all. He sounds rather embarrassed to admit such a feat. “We’re basically an international hub for trade. We have a lot of say in Japanese exports and the import of foreign goods.” He smirks, eyes half-lidded from the scotch. “And yes, it’s just as boring as it sounds.”

Wait – “Tachibana Enterprises?”

“Mmhmm.”

Holy shit. Tachibana Makoto. “You’re Nagisa’s boss, aren’t you?”

Makoto blinks, voice venturing slowly. “Do you go to school with him?”
Haru blushed at being so abrupt. “Yeah, we’re friends. He talks about you a lot.”

“Oh God,” Makoto startled a laugh, grinning wide with pretty white teeth, cheeks pushed up with it. “That’s scary.”

Haru finds himself laughing with him because yes, Nagisa is definitely a fiend at times. He shakes his head, bangs fluffing over his eyes. “He gossips about everyone, not just you.”

“Lord, don’t I know it,” Makoto sighs, taking another sip of his drink.

Haru straightens with a thought, remembering Nagisa’s business trip. “So you just came back from Paris and had another trip to Kanda today?” His brows crease – why he’s so concerned, he doesn’t know, but –

“It’s okay.” Makoto’s eyes flicker across his face, voice soft and so warm. “I’m glad it happened.”

Haru is too for some reason.

They end up talking a while longer, to the point that Haru’s coworkers send him glances because they’ve never heard his voice for such a consistent period of time. Haru ignores them, quietly wrapped up in every word Makoto breathes if only because he speaks with such positive sincerity about whatever topic they broach. It’s fascinating and different and – well, kind of perfect.

They talk about Nagisa of course; Makoto insists that he’s a hard worker and Haru agrees, but he says that he could do without the casual, cut-throat roasting Nagisa throws at anyone who doesn’t know what the fuck a dotted-Swiss pattern is. Makoto laughs loudly at that and the sound rings through Haru’s ears, buzzing in his head like a livewire. It feels kind of good.

They talk about Haru and Nagisa’s other friends and when Haru mentions Asahi – swimmer and singing YouTuber who just got verified on Twitter and tells it to anyone who will listen – Makoto looks faintly starstruck. Haru didn’t believe Makoto follows him on Instagram until Makoto showed him on his phone, which led to a slideshow of Makoto’s cats. Cats don’t really like Haru, but Makoto looks so vulnerable and cautious but excited when he talks about them that Haru can’t help but smile at every little piece of information about the cats’ personalities.

Haru’s shift comes to an end and he walks out of the pub with Makoto toward their train lines. He didn’t realize just how tall the man is until they were standing side by side, but Haru finds that it’s not intimidating at all. It’s… a little nice, oddly enough – having Makoto’s towering frame to block out the rest of the crowd.

They somehow get back on the topic of Asahi and Makoto says, “His covers are great but he’s so honest in his original lyrics; it’s hard to find singers like that.”

Haru nods. “He works hard at it.”

Makoto chews his lip, eyes distant. “He’s really… open, you know?”

Open – Haru knows what that stands for. He glances Makoto’s nervous expression over, suddenly remembering the fact that Makoto’s out – Twitter covered the story themselves, for Christ’s sake – but he doesn’t look very confident about it. Haru can’t exactly blame him; the internet isn’t a kind
place and not many people had understanding or even much sympathy for Makoto’s cause.

Haru considers his words carefully. “I think it helps that Asahi has Kisumi. He’s been in a few of his videos?”

Makoto perks up. “Yeah, he works at the Starbucks in the T.E. building, too.” He laughs bashfully. “I never made that connection until just now, wow.”

“Yeah. Kisumi helps Asahi feel better about… all the negativity, the bad comments.”

“Must be nice,” Makoto sighs, not sounding bitter, just really, really sad. Haru’s chest seizes with a bolt of anxiety because he wants to say something reassuring but he doesn’t know how. He’s shit at advice and even worse at comforting someone.

Quietly, Makoto asks, “Is it weird to you? When guys are…”

Haru lifts his brows, meeting Makoto’s stare. “When they like guys?” He shakes his head. “If it’s weird, then I’m weird, too.”

Makoto falters in his steps and Haru grabs his bicep to steady him, which is kind of jarring. It’s like closing his fingers around a rock. Haru pulls his hand back quickly, fingers tingling so hard that his nails burn. Makoto straightens up but he’s still flustered, and Haru recognizes the relief in every line of his body. “Nothing’s weird, Makoto-san. Don’t worry about it, all right?” He takes a breath, hoping that he’s not being too blunt because he has a tendency to be non-fragile when softness is needed. “I know lots of people are shit but that’s all they are – shit. Okay? It’s fine.”

Makoto just stares. “How did you deal with it?”

“… what, coming out?”

He nods, the motion faint and a little desperate.

Haru shrugs. “I didn’t deal with it for a while.” It wasn’t until college that he started acknowledging his feelings; the first week of freshmen year, he dared to venture into the LGBTQIA+ section of the library and a burly upperclassman cornered him, throwing slurs at Haru just for being in that section of the library. It was the most petrifying moment of his life – he wanted to fight, he wanted to cry, he wanted to run back home to Iwatobi and never see the light of day again.

That is until a blur flashed by and punched the guy square in the nose, knocking him right off his feet. Haru had depersonalized entirely by that point, shock screaming through him. The guy positively snarled at the upperclassman to leave and Haru glanced worriedly at the library desk, mortified at the prospect of someone getting in trouble for him.

But the boy at the help desk turned away from the spectacle, tucking a strand of lavender hair behind his ear, and he never once reprimanded the fight. But he did look up when the upperclassman demanded Haru’s savior be punished, and the boy at the help desk said with all the eerie calm in the world, “You deserved to be hit. Leave.” That’s how Haru met Nao.

Once the upperclassman was gone, Haru shrunk straight down to the floor, back hunched against the book cases. His savior knelt down beside him, rubbing Haru’s back with hushed reassurances of, “Hey, hey, shh, it’s all right, you’re okay.”
Haru croaked, “Why the hell did you do that?”

The boy craned back, pink hair fluffing with the motion. “Because it’s the right thing to do.” He’d smiled. “My name’s Kisumi. I’m headed to meet up with one of my classmates at the coffee shop. Wanna come?” He hadn’t waited for an answer before standing up and offering Haru a hand with a playfully stern look. “I’ve already called dibs on him so try not to faint when you see him, ‘cause he’s pretty damn cute.”

Haru blinks back to himself, the whirl of the subways distant to his ears. “You need to have people who support you. That was hard for me for a while.” His heart aches with fondness. “But friends are necessary.”

Makoto nods, seeming to be thinking hard. “Yeah, I can see that. That makes sense.”

They wander to Haru’s stop and he turns to face Makoto. The man fists the pockets of his peacoat – it’s dark green. It suits him, with his honey-brown hair and eyes that seem to glow, they’re so saturated in emerald. Makoto ducks his head and shuffles his feet, looking up through his lashes with a bashful smile. “Thank you a lot. You’ve been really nice, listening to me.”

Haru tenses with a blush, his skin so cold from winter but his chest so warm. “It’s – it’s no problem.”

Makoto smiles briefly at that, meeting his eyes more openly for a moment.

The subway doors hiss open and Makoto sighs. “I hope you have a good night, Haru-san.” He gives a polite little bow and heads into the train, about to be gone, just another person in the crowd Haru will never see again –

His voice flies out before he even realizes it. “I work afternoons usually.”

Slowly, Makoto looks over his shoulder.

Haru’s throat clicks as he swallows, fists clenching in his pockets. “If you ever want more – Jameson.”

Makoto pauses. And then he smiles, his whole face alight with it, eyes crinkled and overjoyed. Haru’s knees almost buckle and Makoto’s tone is teasing because he knows it. “I want more already.”

Haru smiles, feeling light-headed in the best way possible. “Okay.”

“Okay,” Makoto repeats like a vow and the doors slide closed.
hello all! hope you're enjoying your summer.

sometimes it's hard to find a chapter song that's consistent with the theme of whatever is going on, but this is what i had on repeat while writing and it specifically gives me asakisu feels, so feel free(!)~

quick edit: i'm trying to make the story flow chronologically at this point, so this chapter takes place after the previous chapter, meaning this is the morning after haru met makoto at the bar. sorry for any confusion. kiss emoji

warning: this chapter has a brief mention of homosexual slurs.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rin wakes up incredibly sated, his body languid as he snuggles deeper into his blankets. His pulse is calm and content, the air quiet with stillness in the dorm. He glances across the bedroom and sees Haru awake in the cocoon of his own sheets– they’re bubble printed, but Rin can’t judge since he’s currently got a ratty shark plushie tucked under his chin, the stitching frayed with a button-eye missing. He’ll need to ask his mom to stitch a new one on when he goes home for Christmas; his dad gave him the shark when he was little and it would take a pack of rabid dogs for Rin part ways with it. He and Haru named it Fang when they were children.

Haru nestles his cheek into a pillow as he scrolls through his phone. Rin yawns a mornin’ and Haru hums in response, eyes never leaving his phone screen while he types something out.

Rin frowns as he gropes for his cell on the nightstand. “Who’re you talkin’ to?”

Haru goes rigid as a new message chimes from his phone. “Just checking emails.”

Rin scratches at his belly through his skimpy tank top – he grabbed the shirt before his walk of shame after a one-night stand with some girl he met at a party during sophomore year. It’s Victoria’s Secret and probably one of the most expensive things his broke ass owns, not that he even paid for it. Rin grabs his phone with excitement brimming in his chest. Briefly, he worries that the man on that shady website last night was entirely conjured up by his own imagination and loneliness, but one tap on his notifications proves that everything was, in fact, true.

He’s weary that someone so gorgeous could be so damn sweet; chances are that Rin’s most likely being catfished, but he’s a sucker for dreaming. He’ll gladly take his chances, especially since they’re meeting somewhere public and he’ll have every right to leave if it turns out that he’s being lied to. But why does he even care about that when all he wants is money? What’s it matter if the man is lying to him when their “relationship” will clearly have a basis of cash and nothing else?

He reads over the messages a few times, pulse fluttering quicker with each text before he remembers he’s supposed to be getting hard about his bank account being full, not someone who makes him
want to open his legs and heart all at once. But it’s not like he can’t enjoy getting sweet-talked – being called pretty. That was always Rin’s weakness.

He eyes the messages, noting the man’s name – Sousuke – and goes back to his bio picture. Now that Rin’s not high as a kite, it only takes him seconds to make the connection with the face and name, and his insides run cold.

“Oh,” he breathes, frantic and scrambling to sit up with his phone. “Oh –” His stomach churns.

Why the fuck didn’t Rin recognize him from the news when that’s all everyone is talking about? When Nagisa says so much about him? When he’s a constant headliner because he’s in court for an assault case about hitting someone?

Okay, this is fine, it’s all fine. When Sousuke came up in conversation at that Starbucks Asahi was playing at a few days ago, Nagisa insisted that the media wasn’t giving the full story about the assault case. Maybe there’s a good reason behind the allegations. Hell, maybe he was defending someone’s honor –

He scoffs to himself because he’s clearly read way too many historical romances. Is he even a rational adult at this point? No, he decides, not when it comes to this.

Haru’s voice drifts across the room. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Rin gasps, struggling to catch his voice as it rushes out. “I just, uh –” Holy shit, he’s shaking. “There’s a dude from that sugar daddy website who wants to meet me.”

Haru blinks. “You got in?”

“Yeah, that’s why Nagisa wanted to meet me at the coffee shop the other night.”

Haru slowly sits up, hugging a pillow to his stomach as he looks Rin over. “Are you scared?”

He cards a hand through his hair before roughly pulling it back into a tie. “Yeah, a little.” He nods firmly to himself. “But I can handle it.”

Haru’s body strains with weariness. “Where are you meeting?”

“That real fancy restaurant in Akasaka? Aronia something.”

Haru lifts his brows because such an expensive place is Narnia to broke college kids like themselves. “Okay. Me and Nakagawa are going to the Minato library to find sources for that collaborative paper we have to write, so I’ll be close.”

The true meaning shines in his eyes. *I’ll come if you need me.*

Rin wishes he could just smother his friend in a hug right now, but abrupt physical contact always makes Haru clench up something fierce, so he settles for a grateful smile. “Thanks. You got any finals today?”

“No,” Haru sighs, eyes closing in relief. “I don’t have another one until Friday. You?”

“My next one is Thursday.” He was going to catch up on studying today, but he can already tell that
he’s not going to be able to focus on anything else but this stupid date… hook-up… meeting thing. The fact that Sousuke insisted their exchange isn’t about sex for money only serves to make Rin worry more. This situation is entirely unpredictable and he normally likes rising to the challenge when the odds aren’t in his favor, but he just – he really wants Sousuke to actually be this hot and sweet, as foolish as that sounds. But it’s so easy to like someone when you don’t truly know them.

God, his thoughts are running in circles and he knows it. He stares down at Sousuke’s picture and Rin sucks hard on his lip, tongue dancing over it restlessly. If it turns out that everything about Sousuke is true, Rin might not be able to stop himself from blowing the man right where he stands, in front of the whole restaurant – he’s that sexually frustrated from nothing more than a damn picture, and it doesn’t help that exhibitionism is one of his kinks. Sousuke would probably think Rin’s really pretty in that scenario, on the floor with bruised knees and a full mouth, preening under the gazes of so many strangers.

_You’re really pretty, I hope you sleep well, pretty –_

Rin shakes himself. He knows that infatuation is sometimes a part of bipolar disorder but he’s more inclined to think it’s just who he is. Maybe. He doesn’t really care about the specifics; he knows what he wants, knows whose hips and head he wants to wrap his thighs around –

“I’m gonna take a shower,” Rin blurs, scrambling out of his blankets and charging toward the bathroom so he can fling himself under an icy spray. But even after a rough jerk off session in the shower and coming so hard that the room burns black, Rin isn’t satisfied. And he knows that he won’t be until tonight.
Rin gets quite defensive and mean when he’s having a panic attack, but he’s got just enough of himself left in this shell of a body to remember common courtesy, so he picks up an iced americano for Kisumi on the way to his friend’s off-campus apartment. The building is a renovated factory, old but in a charming way. Industrial piping runs across the ceiling and there’s a towering window across one wall, so enormous that it can only be opened with a rope pulley. The apartment has exposed brick walls and blond hardwood, and Kisumi’s colorful mug collection is displayed in rows across the entirety of one kitchen wall. Of course, there’s pictures of his photography everywhere. Rin’s personal favorites are the underwater stills from when Kisumi and the rest of their friends go to Tokyo Bay with Haru to help clean-up efforts – one shot is of a dolphin but the image is tinted bright pink to give it a pop art vibe.

There’s also plants everywhere – green and purple succulents, racks of herbs, hanging ferns with vines that cascade from the ceiling. The apartment always smells like a candy factory because Kisumi has candles lit whenever he’s home; the peppermint aroma along with the air’s winter crispness is nice, especially when Kisumi gives Rin a mug of cinnamon hot chocolate. A lo-fi playlist
drifts through the air as the two of them sit on the love seat in the center of the home; the whole apartment is just one big room, so Rin feels content and not closed in.

Kisumi’s a great friend because he makes time for the people he loves even when he doesn’t have time – he sits with two laptops open, one small and compact for school assignments while the bigger one is more specific to his photography work and being Asahi’s videographer for his YouTube channel. He’s submitting a paper and editing a video as Rin explains the cringey story of how he found himself in this mess, and Kisumi interrupts with a voice flat as slate. “Nagisa signed you up for that website we were talking about at Starbucks, didn’t he?”

Rin bow his head like an embarrassed child. “Yeah.”

Kisumi snorts as his finger rolls over the laptop mouse. “He’s a hustler, you know?” His voice falls softer. “His family was struggling for a while; it made him really determined to find a way even when there wasn’t one. Guess that’s how he found a way to help you, since he knows what it’s like to be financially trapped.”

Rin frowns. “He didn’t fuck his way to the top did he?”

Kisumi scoffs a laugh. “This ain’t a Lana Del Rey song, Rin-chan, people can’t really get away with that sort of thing. No, not at all – he went for an interview at T.E. and got the job. Didn’t have much administrative work under his belt, but Makoto liked his strive, so he took a chance on him.” Kisumi lifts his brows. “When it comes down to it, Nagisa runs that whole building now, him and Ai-chan.” He rolls his eyes with a knowing grin. “Bet my ass that he had something to do with you and Sousuke finding each other on that site.”

“Actually, he sent me Sousuke’s profile.”

“Ah, I know my platonic life partner like the back of my hand~! You had firewalls up, right?”

“Yeah,” he sighs, folding his legs underneath himself and wiggling his toes in his fuzzy socks. “A few dozen of them.”

“So you’re all nerved-up about Sousuke and the allegations.” It isn’t a question but Rin nods anyway. Kisumi leans back from his work, grabbing a pillow to smooth his hands over the gold sequins as he thinks. “Well, I wasn’t in the room whenever he punched that guy, but if I’m just looking at the grand scope of the situation…” He purses his lips. “Sousuke and Makoto started interning at T.E. when they were like, really young. I don’t know if it was even legal, they were so young. So they’ve been in business a long time and they know that they can’t lose their cool no matter what happens.”

Rin studies his expression. “So you think there had to have been a good reason for Sousuke to… go all Smash Mouth?”

Kisumi briefly laughs before giving a solemn nod. “Yeah, I’ve never heard of him threatening anyone before.” He swings his head around, flipping his bangs. “I think I’m pretty good at reading people and trust me, I’ve never got any weird vibes from him. He’s a big dude so I guess that could be a little intimidating? But like I said at Starbucks: he just seems awkward. He’s way too aware of himself; little bit like Asahi in that way. And Sousuke might be bitchy about his coffee orders, but when I say he leaves tips –” Kisumi leans forward with emphasis. “I’m talkin’ like, half of my day’s check. He’s kind of a sweetheart, actually.”
Rin stiffens. “How do you mean?”

Kisumi shrugs, absently exchanging one camera lens for another. Rin makes sure to not even breathe in the wrong direction, they look so expensive and complicated. “One time he asked me if I was cold because the T.E. Starbucks heater was broken. I told him it was no problem, you know how you don’t wanna piss off your boss so you just smile and laugh through freezing your ass off? My manager already knew about the problem but she hadn’t got anything done, and Sousuke had the heater fixed within the hour. Another time, I was working past closing because I was doing stocks – a fucking nightmare, let me tell you – and Nagisa had been working late too, so Sousuke was gonna drive him home. Nagisa made me hitch a ride with him and I was pretty mortified, but Sousuke was totally cool with it. Asked me and Nagisa if we needed to stop for anything to eat, all that nice stuff. And his Lambo is a wet dream. Well, the one I was in anyway, I think him and Makoto have at least three between them.”

Rin’s stomach drops like a hot coal – he’s never heard anything so intimidating and arousing in his life. “Oh.”

“So I think he’s chill, all in all. I’m sure someone had to really upset him for him to lose his shit like that.” Kisumi finishes cleaning a lens and tucks it into his camera bag. “Probably hit a nerve somehow, it had to have been personal and pretty damn cruel.” Kisumi hikes a smirk. “I’m kind of surprised he was on a sugar daddy site, though.”

“I know,” Rin breathes with wide eyes. “He’s so fucking hot.”

“Yeah, and he’s got money, so what gives?” He shrugs. “Maybe he just wants to, but Nagisa probably had something to do with it. Either way, it works out for everyone, yeah?”

Rin nods, thumbing the lip of his mug. It’s glittery with painted mermaid scales. “He seems so intense, from what I’ve heard.”

“Well yeah, but so are you. Guarantee it’ll be explosive~”

Rin grins and bumps Kisumi’s knee. “He wasn’t anything like that when we were just texting, though.” His head rolls back on the couch, eyes glazed and half-lidded. “He called me pretty.”

“Ah, so that’s what did it.” Kisumi positively cackles. “God, you’re such a bottom.”

Rin shrugs, not denying it. “He seemed to like it enough.”

“I’m sure he’ll like it even more when he sees you.” Kisumi closes both laptops and fluffs his hair. “So I assume you’ve already taken a shower, but you still look tense as hell. I’ve got a bath bomb with your name on it if you want it.”

Rin falls forward to groan into Kisumi’s neck. “You’re my favorite, you know.”

“I know,” Kisumi laughs, petting Rin’s hair before swatting his ass so he’ll get up. “You can hang out here to get ready, if you want.”

Rin’s whole body sags with relief. “Really?”

“Sure.” Kisumi grins. “I haven’t been on a first date since freshman year, so it’ll be fun.”
Rin stands up with a shake of his head. “Man, freshman year? I can’t believe it’s been that long since you and Asahi got together.”

Kisumi folds both hands over his heart. “I know,” he sighs, swaying back and forth. “I took one look at him on our first date and thought, God, I’m gonna show him everything I know tonight.”

Rin laughs and swats a pillow at him. “No wonder you’ve had him wrapped around your finger for so many years.”

“He takes good care of me, I love him a little too much sometimes.” Kisumi grabs Rin’s empty hot chocolate mug to wash it out in the kitchen. “I’m gonna unthaw some frozen daiquiris real quick.”

“I’ll have a little, but I can’t show up to this date drunk.”

Kisumi snorts. “I showed up to my first date with Asahi damn near plastered, I was so nervous.” He smiles briefly. “He said I had a pretty laugh.”

Rin leans his hip on the counter with a judgmental brow raised. “Pretty, huh?”

Kisumi stares flatly before shooting him in the face with the sink sprayer.

One Sex Bomb jasmine soak later, Rin feels worlds better. He also used a shimmering melt that gives his skin a gleam, making him look all soft and supple and warm. Thank goodness Kisumi is indulgent when it comes to beauty products and welcomes anyone else using them, because Rin doesn’t have anything like this back in his dorm bathroom – all him and his roommates have is two-in-one shampoo and the most boring smelling body wash, since they’re all athletes and just want to get clean rather than pamper themselves.

He used to wear make-up during his underclassman years when he went to so many parties, but not so much anymore. Tonight feels like the time for it, so he dots some foundation under his eyes and wings them with just a bit of liner. The only lip gloss he has came from a late night drug store run like, two years ago, so Kisumi tosses him a tube of Glossier and says he can keep it. It feels expensive – there’s no gluey feeling or the gritty nastiness of glitter like his old gloss had. He knows from experience that glitter is not fun to kiss.

Rin wishes he could have bought lingerie for the date but it’s out of season for teaching swimming lessons, therefore he doesn’t have a lot of extra funds lying around. He hopes that changes after tonight but for now, he settles for the panties he wore in the picture he sent to Sousuke when they first started texting. He considers taking another picture in them but his nerves get the best of him, so he decides on a different shot – the lower half of his face and biting his smirking lip, showing the long stretch of his throat all the way down to the red silk under his dark button-up.

Rin sends the picture with a pretty basic line of can’t wait to see you (*´▽´*) , which he hopes is effective.

He’s unaware that across the city, Sousuke receives the message and promptly trips on the treadmill before shooting across the floor and crashing into the gym’s mirrored wall, all while his brother lets out the gayest banshee wail of fright and scrambles after him.

Rin shimmies into his jeans; they’re torn at the knees but even expensive jeans are ripped, right? Nobody should be able to tell the difference. He hasn’t worn earrings in a while, so he’s surprised
that he can still get a pair of mini-hoops through his lobes. There’s a tiny stud in his left cartilage at all times, but he switches it out for a little angel wing.

From the bathroom, he hears the front door open and Kisumi groans, “Come here, you Christmas Miracle.”

Rin shoulders his bag and steps into the living room in time to see Asahi smush Kisumi’s cheeks for a kiss. Rin arches a brow, prompting Kisumi to hold up a take-out bag. “He brought me food.”

“Ah,” he nods.

“Hey, Rin.” Asahi flops down on the couch beside his boyfriend. “I would have brought you something too if I’d known you were here.”

“Oh, I’m um, actually –”

“He’s going on a date~” Kisumi sings, dropping Rin a wink to let him know that he won’t spill the questionable details of the arrangement.

Asahi’s brows jump as he twists around to face Rin, voice booming. “Oi, really? Who?”

“Nagisa set him up on a blind date with some guy.” Goddamn, Kisumi lies smoother than Nagisa himself.

Asahi cringes through a smile. “You trust Nagisa for that?”

Rin swats him with his towel as he passes by toward the door. “Desperate times, desperate measures. Do you know how fuckin’ miserable it is to go without dick for months?”

“Nope,” Asahi smirks even though he’s blushing.

“Can’t relate,” Kisumi chews, happily spiraling his noodles around a chopstick.

Rin rolls his eyes. “I know. I’m sure this entire apartment block knows.”

Kisumi cackles, hand hovering in front of his mouth. “Asahi’s way louder than I am, he sounds like an opera singer –” He squeals and his arms fly out when Asahi swats a pillow at him.

“Anyway, liar,” Asahi says before turning back to Rin. “Hope it’s a good time.” He absently twirls his fingers through the waves of Kisumi’s hair. “Who knows, maybe the guy might be rich or something.”

Rin’s stomach drops. Kisumi chokes on his noodles and throws a hand over his face but he’s shaking with silent giggles.

Asahi pouts a frown. “What?”

Kisumi’s arm flies out in a blurry wave. “Have fun, Rin! Ride that dick like a Harley, as the poets say.”

Rin’s eyes fall flat. “That was Nicki Minaj.” Kisumi’s face tightens with impatience as he tips his head at Asahi, who’s still confused, so Rin grimaces and quickly makes his exit. “See you guys
later!"

Kisumi laughs and he’s still coughing through a fit after Rin leaves. “Sorry,” Kisumi wheezes as Asahi pats his back. “It’d just be – really hilarious if the guy was actually rich.”

“I don’t think Rin would stay even if the guy was rich,” Asahi sighs, folding his ankle over the opposite knee as he gets comfortable. Kisumi’s apartment has always been his sanctuary from the bustling city, the claustrophobic crowds.

“You don’t think so?”

Asahi shakes his head and tucks a hand under Kisumi’s thigh to warm his winter-bitten fingers. “Rin never stays in relationships. He’s always the first to leave, at least from what I’ve seen. He never brings anyone over to the dorm more than twice and he acts – I dunno, cagey – if someone calls him like, more than a few times. At first, he’s all about the person, but then he just drops them.” He plays with the frayed edges of Kisumi’s shorts – they’re denim and high-waisted, his pastel polo tucked into the front and spilling over the back. Asahi says, “Rin can’t expect everyone to be that patient with him.”

“Look at you, relationship expert,” Kisumi coos, wiggling a finger up Asahi’s head to tickle behind his ear. Asahi cringes at the light touch and Kisumi hums a laugh, eyes falling half-lidded. “Not everyone likes commitment. Relationships are time-consuming, you know that.”

Asahi pokes the side of Kisumi’s head. “Yeah, but that’s the fun part.”

“To us, sure, but not everyone else.”

“Mm. Too bad.”

Kisumi finishes up his dinner and tucks the empty to-go container back into the bag it came in. “That was yummy. Was that from your sister’s restaurant?”

“Course.”

“Thank you for bringing it~” He pecks Asahi’s mouth but lingers, just holding their lips together to savor the closeness. Arms hug around him, pressing him against a firm chest, and Kisumi’s exhale leaves him in a sigh. “You take good care of me.”

Asahi looks at him like he’s stupid. “I only brought you food.”

Kisumi just smiles because Asahi’s too sheltered to understand what a rarity he is in this world. “I appreciate it, though.” He nuzzles Asahi’s nose before kissing it, and he sinks into the cage of his arms, body falling supple. “I didn’t realize how hungry I was until I finally ate something.”

“Well, I knew you’d be working.” He snuggles his hands into the back pockets of Kisumi’s shorts, giving an indulgent squeeze.

Kisumi perks up with a thought and moves to get off his boyfriend, reaching for the laptop. “I finished editing your last vlog, if you wanna post it tonight –”

“Nope.” Asahi closes the laptop before Kisumi can grab it. “I don’t wanna mess with any of that tonight.”
Kisumi pouts a frown. “It’s already done though –”

“Later.” He yelps when Asahi grabs him by the knee and swings him over his lap. “You’re done working.”

Kisumi purses his lips into a smirk, liking how Asahi’s jeans bite into his inner-thighs. “You mean I’m done working on anything else but you.”

Asahi’s eyes blink wide, his voice flat with absolute seriousness. “Well, I mean, strawberry lube is kind of expensive and it shouldn’t go to waste –”

“What a dork,” Kisumi sighs against his mouth, so fond that warmth sings through his blood. He gets a sensory overload of teeth and wet and breaths of lemon gum. It’s amazing how their mouths taste the same because they don’t remember what it’s like to be separate after these last few years; their love is muscle memory at this point. He loses his hands in the softness of Asahi’s hair and after seeing such a bright color every day, the redness is a faint sear in the darkness behind Kisumi’s eyelids. He can picture how the strands swirl around his fingers, how Asahi’s brows sink and his shoulders roll at the touch. Asahi’s lips are always tense for the first few kisses, nervous little things, careful because he’s trying to measure the hitches in Kisumi’s breath, trying to remember what he likes, what makes him happiest. But Kisumi’s already trembling because Asahi’s personality is all over everything he does in love – hesitant but earnest and so emotional that Kisumi tastes it.

Asahi’s hands slip under Kisumi’s thighs and his legs scramble around Asahi’s middle as he’s lifted. “Fuck, don’t do that,” Kisumi gasps.

Asahi chuckles all smug and hitches Kisumi higher over his waist just to startle him. “Why, ‘cause it makes you hard?”

“Yes.” His torso is solid, unyielding to the squeeze of Kisumi’s thighs. His legs have pulled Asahi’s shirt taut and his stomach is textured with dips and grooves, his chest stout with muscle. For some reason, it’s moments like this that make Kisumi remember how protective Asahi is about people he loves; he’s an anxious little deer that would head-charge a bear if it meant putting an asshole in his place.

Kisumi’s back hits the mattress and his world becomes laughing moans in the dark and teeth snagged between lips, then a release like crashing waves, and falling asleep with Asahi’s head nestled into the arch of Kisumi’s back.
Naturally, Rin stalks Sousuke on social media before the date. He finds a generic Wikipedia article but there’s no section for Personal Life, which doesn’t help him at all. The news articles are brutal; he’s had sports media say bad things about his swimming before, but he can’t imagine what it would be like to have such an onslaught of people attacking him for who he is as a person, rather than who he is as a swimmer. It’s safe to assume that Sousuke might be defensive, but Rin really can’t blame him.

Sousuke’s Twitter is sparse – looks like making an account was just a PR move for his company, but he only posts a few times a month just to talk about stocks or the government. Rin needs a cup of coffee, his page is so boring. Sousuke’s Instagram makes him perk up, though; he doesn’t find anything particularly juicy other than the fact that the man is loaded to a ridiculous degree. It only serves to make Rin’s anxiety spike higher. At least Sousuke's dog is cute.

He does his best to compose himself as he steps off the bus, boots crunching onto the snowy pavement. Rin blinks up at the restaurant and takes a deep breath, then another and just one more. These don’t feel like normal pre-date jitters; so far, everything involving Sousuke is a dozen times more intense.

Aronia de Takazawa is so exclusive that the restaurant only serves eight guests per night. The décor is sparse in that upscale, minimalistic way and the hostess has a kind smile as she greets him. Rin fumbles through asking her if Yamazaki-san is here and she leads him to a set of doors before leaving him there with a wink.
Rin swears that he can feel a presence on the other side of the doorway, a heat that pulses in waves. He opens the doors and steps into a room with a single table in the center, the lights low, the air warm with the aroma of fresh roses and cologne.

Sousuke sits there like a storm, like summer rain that gives Rin’s skin a wet flush. Dark – everything about him is dark. Rin’s stumbling through a moonless night, naked and hot, searching. He just wants this man to keep looking at him. Sousuke’s open with how pleased he is in the sight of Rin; his gaze alone is like teeth and tongue licking hotly between Rin’s legs.

Softly, simply, Sousuke greets, “Hi.”

His tone is brisk, the voice of a businessman – a successful one. Not impatient at all, maybe even edged with caution. He doesn’t want to speak too loudly and startle Rin in any way; he knows his effect on people and he’s painfully in-tune with how he’s viewed. It must be exhausting.

“Hey.” Rin tries for casual in his tone of voice, in the slouch of his gait as he walks closer to sit down. He glances down to compose himself while he settles in his chair, then he flicks his bangs out of his face to smile. It’s a little weak but Sousuke seems to appreciate the honesty. Rin murmurs, “It’s nice to see you.”

He’s relieved that Sousuke’s expression opens up a bit more, his features softening. “You too.” His eyes flicker in thought for a moment, turning away, making distress climb up Rin’s throat before their gazes meet again. “You look beautiful.”

Rin’s grin turns cheeky. “Thanks.” He leans forward with his arms folded on the table, letting Sousuke’s gaze sweep his features.

The man seems surprised but impressed that Rin leaned closer – Sousuke also looks faintly amused. “Are you thirsty?”

Rin freezes before he looks down at the wine glass by his elbow. “Oh.” Shit, he shouldn’t have said that out loud.

“I didn’t know what you wanted.” Rin almost chokes until Sousuke adds, “To drink.”

He smirks before taking a long sip. “I don’t know any college student that’s picky about alcohol.” The wine is a little warm but that makes it all the more heady. The bottle says it’s “yellow” wine, which Rin’s never heard of, and the alcohol’s label tells him that it’s older than his own mother. The taste is apples and honey, refreshing and making his head swim all in one divine moment.

Sousuke got something different – his red wine looks almost black and a glance at the label tells Rin it tastes like blackberries with faint traces of tobacco, which is… different, at least from Rin’s own alcohol palette. He hopes Sousuke doesn’t taste like cigarettes later tonight.

He’s getting way ahead of himself as usual. It’s hard enough just to meet Sousuke’s intense stare; the thought of tasting the man has Rin’s thighs squeezing together. He says, “I like it. The drink, I mean.”

“Good.”

They look over their menus and someone comes to take their orders before leaving them in silence again. Because Rin’s a mess of excited nerves and doesn’t know what the fuck else to say, he
mumbles, “My best friend’s a bartender. He likes picking people out of crowds and telling me what he thinks their drink of choice is.”

Sousuke smiles a little, eyes crinkling just slightly. Rin’s knees fall open under the table. “I do that too, sometimes. But it’s easier to tell who needs a drink, rather than what they’d specifically prefer.” Sousuke’s hands are folded in his lap, his watch encrusted with black diamonds, his fingers so long –

“Yeah. What do you prefer?”

“Whiskey.” Sousuke looks fond just talking about it.

Ah, so he likes the hard stuff. Makes sense with how stressful his job probably is.

Sousuke arches a strong brow, manicured in that subtle, masculine way. “You?”

Rin shrugs. “Vodka, I guess.”

He chuckles. “You’re definitely a college student.” His tone isn’t condescending, just amused. Rin arches a brow back at him and Sousuke smiles. “It’s cheap and it gets the job done. Says that you know what you want and you’re quick to the point.”

“That I am.”

“I like that.”

It’s as if he just whispered something filthy in Rin’s ear, with the way his body reacts. He takes a careful breath through his nose but his blood still throbs. “Can I ask how old you are, or is that –” He grimaces. “Is that… weird?”

Sousuke shakes his head. “I’d be more concerned if you didn’t ask. I’m 26.”

“Oh –” Thank God. “I’m 21.”

“That’s a fun age.”

Yeah, it feels pretty damn fun right now. “What’s 26 like?”

Sousuke glances up in thought, tilting his head. It’s cute. “Kind of boring, it’s this… weird in-between, if that makes sense. People take you a little more seriously. And your car insurance goes down since you’re considered a lower risk for accidents, so that’s nice.”

Rin doesn’t even have a car, but – “Oh. Cool.”

Their food arrives and he’s used to larger portions – not tiny delicacies – but he savors every bite. He has mashed kabocha squash with jamon iberico, which the chef explains is actually acorn-fed ham from Spain, and that little piece of information lets Rin know just how out of his element he truly is. He’d never dream of asking about such details, but he’s a firm believer in fake it until you make it, so he just smiles and nods and enjoys the meal.

It looks like Sousuke only got sweets, which is adorable. He has a muffin with coconut meringue as well as salt-and-pepper chocolate. Sousuke forks at his little bowl of champagne grapes and asks, “What are you in school for?”
Rin pats his mouth with a napkin. “Sports administration. Administration of Amateur Athletics, technically.” Sousuke stares and Rin’s chest swells with how good it feels to impress someone. “Means I can coach youth up to the high school level. Intercollegiate stuff too, later on. And I’m minoring in English.”

Sousuke shudders. “I can’t stand English.”

Rin startles a laugh. “Why?”

He can’t stop grinning because Sousuke looks like he’s got a sour taste in his mouth. “The language changes constantly; I can never get ahead in it.”

Rin forks up another bite. “Well, you’re Nagisa’s boss, so I’m sure you get ahead in plenty of other things.”

They tense at the same time. Rin’s head snaps up and his gut twists. He quickly looks down, mumbling, “I remembered who you were this morning. Where I’ve seen –” He rubs his damp palms across his jeans. “Heard of you from.”

Sousuke doesn’t say anything. Waiting.

Rin glances away and hunches his shoulders, sick with guilt until he hears a gentle murmur of, “It’s all right.”

He looks up at Sousuke to see him poised as ever, though his posture is weighted like he’s preparing himself for defeat. He looks sad as he lifts his chin. “Don’t be scared to ask anything you need to know. I don’t want you to be uncomfortable.” Sousuke considers before leaning forward slightly, open to letting Rin read him. His features are sharp in the candlelight, a yellow glow playing in his ocean eyes. “Don’t feel like you have to stay, all right? This is all up to you.”

He’s giving Rin an out. Rin isn’t sure if he wants to leave yet, but he appreciates it. He scrutinizes Sousuke with a careful sweep of his eyes. “You don’t have to tell me your business.”

“I know.” Sousuke lifts his brows. “And I won’t mention some things. But you have to ask first.”

Your move.

Rin lifts his chin. “I heard you hit a guy.”

“I did.” Sousuke doesn’t hesitate.

And Rin doesn’t falter. “Why?”

The man studies him. “Your best friend that’s a bartender –” Rin stiffens. “I’m sure you care about him a lot.” Sousuke’s mouth shifts upward but it can’t be considered a smile; it’s far too heavy for such a sentiment. “I don’t have friends. I have my brother.” Sousuke’s chest expands and he lets out a deep breath, leaning back. He works his jaw but otherwise stays frighteningly composed. “So you tell me, if someone called your best friend an ass-licking faggot that’s going to die screaming in hell, what would you have done?”

Rin’s fork clings against the plate as his blood catches fire with rage. His breathing kicks up, body
flashing hot. Reality warps into a mental image of Haru in the place of Sousuke’s brother, frozen and mortified to a point that he may never come back from. Rin snarls, “Why didn’t you kill him?”

Sousuke blinks calmly, watching the angry flush of Rin’s throat. “Security showed up.”

Rin’s still breathing hard so he downs the rest of his wine, then he impatiently waves the glass for Sousuke to refill it. He swallows a few more gulps and wipes the back of his mouth, his pulse booming slower and slower. Rin regards Sousuke in a new light, dropping a tense nod. “Okay. I get that part.”

Sousuke’s shoulders relax. “Good, that’s –” He can’t help but let out a sigh of relief. “That’s good.” They lapse into an awkward silence as the tension fades and Sousuke chews his lip. “My family’s been through a lot these last few months.” His eyes fall half-lidded, distant. “We’re protective of one another. Business is supposed to be…” His laugh is nothing but bitter breath. “Cold. Emotionally detached.” He swivels his wine before taking a long swallow. Dazedly, Rin watches his throat work around the drink. Sousuke sets the glass back down and drags a finger over the stem in thought. “It’s difficult for people, when they see emotion caught in the middle of business.” He huffs. “Makes it ten times more dramatic.”

“That’s all stupid.” Sousuke’s head jerks up but Rin doesn’t waver. “Nobody should talk to anyone like that. Doesn’t matter if they’re family or not. I would have done the same thing you did.”

Sousuke’s back to studying him in the quiet. “You seem brave.” At Rin’s confusion, the man tips him a smile. “Doing the right thing is always brave.”

Rin shrugs. “Then you’re brave, too.”

Sousuke smirks but it’s awfully self-depreciating.

Rin leans forward again, fingers gliding over the silk table cloth. His grin turns sly. “You never said why you wanna do –” Languidly, he sways his hand in a gesture toward himself, then Sousuke. “This.”

Sousuke properly smirks now, but his sigh is rather embarrassed. “I don’t know what I’m doing, really.” He blushes and it looks incredible against his tan. “I’m nervous as shit right now.”

“Me too,” Rin nods, pursing his lips around a cheeky grin. “Glad we’re on the same page.”

Sousuke chuckles. Openly, his gaze sweeps Rin’s body, lingering on his face and leaving him fresh with want. Rin looks him over just as slowly, murmuring, “I bet your job is hell.”

“You’re pretty damn bold, you know?”

“I know.”

Sousuke looks more pleased with every word Rin says, so he might never stop talking – if only to listen to Sousuke, who’s considering his thoughts. “The work is monotonous and challenging all at once. Never gets easier.” He gives up with a shrug. “But it’s mine – well, partly mine. And I love money, so.”

Rin smirks against the lip of his wine glass. “Same, obviously.”
“Obviously.” This will be easier if they can joke about the situation and Sousuke seems to appreciate the sentiment, relaxing more and more. He takes his locked hands apart and rolls his palms on the arm rests, posture slumped yet still, somehow, confident. “Charity events are nice, though. I like it when we can see the impact we’re making outside of numbers.”

Rin perks up. “That sounds cool. What do you like doing outside of work?”

Sousuke doesn’t hesitate. “Sleeping.”

Rin ducks his head to smile, unaware that the action is making Sousuke blush. “I mean hobbies and stuff.”

“Oh. Working out, I guess.”

Well, clearly, if the width of his shoulders is anything to go by. He’s athletic. Lots of stamina, probably.

Sousuke says, “I wash my cars all the time because it’s therapeutic to me, but my brother gives me hell for it. Tries to make me adopt a cat every single weekend, like that’s a healthy coping mechanism. I already have a dog.”

Cars. Plural. This man has multiple cars and why the fuck is that making Rin’s dick hard –

He jolts back to himself when Sousuke asks, “What about you?”

Rin crosses his legs tightly. “I coach a kids’ swimming team and teach lessons, but not right now since it’s the off-season and finals are going on.”

Sousuke tips his head, interested. “You swim?”

Grief knifes his heart and Rin’s smile fades a bit. “I used to.” At Sousuke’s questioning look, he sighs, “It’s just – complicated right now.” The man nods, not asking further, and Rin’s grateful for it. “I spend a lot of time with my friends.”

“Doing what?”

Rin shrugs. “Going to events for their majors, like plays or photography shows, or sharing our mutual hatred for chemistry –”

Sousuke crooks a grin. “Mutual hatred is actually a good basis for business relationships, as fucked up as that sounds. Complaining together breaks the ice, oddly enough.”

“So you like talking shit? Gossip-wise?”

Sousuke rubs his temple with an exasperated smile. “I need to keep some level of professionalism, but office gossip tends to reach everyone, including my brother and I.” He fumes a sigh. “Some of the stories are just so stupid.”

Rin sings a laugh and Sousuke looks a little hazy from the sound. “No wonder Nagisa loves it there so much.”

“Everyone in the upper-levels is a closeted gossip whore, I swear.” He re-buttons his sleeve cuffs,
clearing his throat. “Speaking of closets –”

“Yeah, I didn’t wanna ask, but…”

“It’s best if my personal life stays under the radar for now.” Briefly, Sousuke clenches his hand, then it falls lax. “I’d like to stay out of the press if I can.”

Rin says, “So this definitely needs to be a secret?”

Sousuke absently rubs the side of his finger against his lips and Rin’s gaze tracks the motion. “As much as possible, yeah.” He looks regretful. “But I don’t want you to feel trapped. If someone starts asking questions –”

Rin recognizes the fear in his eyes. “Baby, listen.” Sousuke stops dead in his tracks as Rin levels their gazes. “Most of my friends are gay.” He shrugs. “We just tend to find each other like that, but the point is, they’ll totally get it if I say I’m fooling around with someone who’s closeted. They won’t ask who you are. They get it, all right?” He doesn’t know what compels him to move, but he finds himself reaching across the table to run his fingers up the back of Sousuke’s hand. Sousuke opens his palm and Rin glides from wrist to fingertips like he’s working puppet strings, toying with the hot, dark tension that pulses between the two of them.

Sousuke meets his eyes as he opens Rin’s fingers to trace the lines of his palm, never straying from his gaze. Such a fleeting touch feels surprisingly intimate in the silence, their breathing amplified in the pressure. Sousuke runs a tight pinpoint trail of heat all the way to the tip of Rin’s index finger, hairs standing on end at the sensation, a shudder rolling up his arm. Sousuke’s gaze climbs Rin’s arm to watch chills tremble over his skin.

Sousuke’s saying it all with his eyes: he’s a man that knows what to do with his hands, his touch smooth and firm. He runs a swirl over the hollow of Rin’s wrist and glides over the ridge of a vein. Rin lets himself be touched, fluttering a blink as his mind warps into static; he’s restless and his very skin itches to be rid of his clothes. His voice is all gasp. “You’re a goddamn tease.”

Sousuke smirks and Rin crosses his legs tighter. “I’m patient.”

“Well, I’m not.”

Sousuke’s laugh is deep, a humble attempt at thunder, and he retracts his hand. “I see that.”

Rin’s drowsy with need and he’s not being touched anymore. He cannot handle it so he whines, “Can we leave now?”

This fuck genuinely looks shocked. “I told you, we don’t have to.”

“And I’m telling you I don’t do anything that I don’t want to.” Sousuke’s forearm is laid out on the table and Rin touches his wrist, fingers creeping past the cuff of Sousuke’s sleeve to roam over the hidden skin. Rin leans forward with strands of hair shadowing his eyes and his whisper is one of coy shyness. “I really want you.”

Tension hardens Sousuke’s chest. “You’ve been drinking.”

“Sweetie,” Rin drones, “I’ve only had one and a half glasses of wine and my metabolism runs just as hard as my sex-drive, I promise.” He lifts his brows. “I’m fine. I know what I’m saying and I also
know that I’m not the only one sitting here with a painful case of blue balls.”

Sousuke smiles indulgently, not ashamed in the slightest. “You aren’t wrong –” His voice is tighter, lower. “But I need you to be sure.”

“I’m about to scream I’m so sure.”

Sousuke smirks. “That doesn’t sound very discreet to me.”

He inhales sharply when Rin teases his nails down the mellow flesh of his arm. His breath startles quicker, heavier, and Rin’s voice is all purr. “I can be quiet. Let me prove it.”

Sousuke works his jaw, the strong outline of his cheeks defining with the motion. Just being looked at by this man – it’s fucking Rin harder than anything else ever has. He falls supple with want, into a sleepy-soft headspace that leaves him pliable to be taken care of. Their fingers tangle together as Rin whispers, “Please.”

Sousuke parts his lips, the pink of his tongue sliding behind his teeth. His eyes are half-lidded, irises dark as a bruise. Rin impatiently shakes his fingers like a proper brat and Sousuke chuckles, soothing him with a kiss to the back of the hand. “Whatever you want, pretty.”

Chapter End Notes

up next: i mean whatchu think lmao

come say heyo on twitter & i have a curious cat i get bored during lunch breaks so feel free to drop by :) thank you for reading, have an awesome day!
Chapter Notes

so this is 6k+ of pure filth. anyway

chapter song is doja cat - candy bc wow this is doab!rin's cherry aesthetic

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Sousuke calls the Grand Hyatt Tokyo to book a room as he and Rin walk out of the restaurant. Once they're in the parking deck, steps echoing through the yawning concrete aisles, Rin feels a hand brush his own. The action makes him blush if only because it’s so hesitant and sweet; he shyly tangles their fingers together but his breath hitches when Sousuke’s hand engulfs his own. He didn’t realize just how different their sizes were at first, but he likes the way Sousuke’s grip closes over his fingers, making Rin feel small and safe. He just hopes his hand isn’t shaking too badly in his hold.

Sousuke’s thumb glides across Rin’s knuckles as he guides him toward a car and Rin’s stomach *drops* at such a sight. The navy paint reflects his dumbstruck expression, pristine without so much as a dust fleck. It looks like a custom remodel of a much older car, the headlights rounded with a trident centered in the oval grill. He has no doubt it’s the insignia of a *stupidly* expensive brand.

Sousuke’s still on the phone with the hotel but he opens the passenger’s door for Rin, patiently waiting for him to shake himself out of his stupor. Rin ducks his head bashfully as he steps into the car and the interior is just as immaculate as the paint job. The seats are chestnut leather and conform to Rin’s back so nicely. He breathes in the smells of lingering cologne and car wax, peeking around at everything.

Sousuke’s done with the call when he rounds the other side of the car and steps inside. He pauses with the key in the ignition. “You’re still sure about this?”

Heart fluttering so hard that he trembles, Rin takes Sousuke’s chin to angle his head – he wants to dive for his lips but at the last second, he turns Sousuke’s jaw to kiss his cheek. His lips linger for a beat, pleasured by the warm firmness under his mouth before he leans back. Their noses brush when Sousuke faces him, eyes blinking wide as Rin smiles. “Yeah, I’m still sure.”

He hears Sousuke swallow in the dark cab. “All right.”

A thought strikes Rin and he grabs Sousuke’s fist around the ignition, guilt churning through him. “I – you want to, don’t you?” It’s clear that Sousuke wants him, but that doesn’t mean he’s *ready* for –

Sousuke tenses, his features hardened and incredulous as a breath punches out of him. Then Rin’s face is enveloped between two hands and his eyes roll closed with his mouth open and ready to swallow poison.

Sousuke’s lips close over his with bruising pressure and he muffles a hungry groan against Rin’s mouth. Stars implode, sucked up into the crust of Rin’s spine, white fire screaming through the darkness behind his eyelids. His tongue dips into the wet heat of Sousuke’s mouth, tasting spearmint and faint wine, and when their tongues roll together every sensation sharpens, his senses so overwhelmed that his very brain haywires. Sousuke’s got one hand cupped around the back of Rin’s head, tugging his hair to angle the kiss deeper, harder. The first dull spike of pain leaves Rin throbbing between the legs and he yanks Sousuke’s shirt out of his pants, where it was tucked. His hands claw at his naked back and Sousuke’s teeth snag Rin’s lower lip for it, but he soothes the bite with a hard suck and runs the flat of his tongue over Rin’s lip on his way back into his mouth.

Rin *whines*, so turned on that he wants to lash out and break something. He’s making a mess of Sousuke’s mouth, pecking at him in frantic wet jabs, sucking on his tongue and making Sousuke’s fingers clench into the muscled swell of Rin’s leg.

Their lips part with a smack and their foreheads rest together for only a moment before Rin’s trailing kisses down the line of Sousuke’s jaw to his throat. He loses his fingers in Sousuke’s hair, kneading his scalp so the man’s head tips back with a long sigh. Against his neck, Rin giggles, “Ever fucked in
Sousuke grins all slow and indulgent, his eyes rolling closed as Rin teases his tongue into the hollow of his throat. “I think you deserve a little better than that.” His voice is already so fucked-out. “Plus, there’s no back seat.”

Rin comes up for air, gasping with lips bruised swollen, his hair a disheveled mess from Sousuke’s hands. Smudged liner runs in his eyes but he’s never felt this good. “I can be creative.”

“Mm.” Sousuke sweeps Rin’s hair aside to cup the side of his face, thumb flicking the hoop in his ear, and his voice is honeyed with fondness as Rin leans into the touch. “I’m sure you could. But I don’t have any condoms with me; I need to stop somewhere and get some.”

Rin stops dotting kisses all over Sousuke’s palm. He leans back with his face twisted in disbelief. “You really didn’t think I was gonna fuck you tonight.”

Sousuke lifts his brows. “I told you, I’m not expecting anything like that out of you this soon.” He shrugs. “Didn’t want to assume.”

Rin inhales sharply as his heart threatens to burst its way out of his chest. He glances away and clears his throat. “Well, I brought some.”

Sousuke cranes back with an incredulous smirk and Rin turns away to blush. Amusement rings through Sousuke’s handsome voice. “Lube too?”

Rin swats him and hisses, “I’m not that much of a fuckin’ freak, of course I brought lube! Geeze.” He stays facing the window as he puts on the seatbelt and Sousuke chuckles before turning the key and letting the engine rumble to life. Rin works his jaw because he doesn’t know how the hell he’s supposed to survive this drive with the engine vibrations purring up his legs and the taste of Sousuke’s kisses still warm in his mouth.

They arrive at their skyscraper of a hotel and Rin’s about to snap in half, he’s so tense with sexual frustration. Sousuke parks at the corner of the building but doesn’t turn the car off; his hand tightens on the wheel with a regretful sigh. “We can’t go in together.”

Oh. Well, Rin supposes that’s how it has to be. “Okay. Um, do you wanna go in first, or…?”

“No, you go, it’s cold out here. Take the elevator to the 12th floor and find Room 129. The door code is 0914.”

Rin unbucksles his seatbelt with a cheeky smile. “I feel like a fuckin’ spy or something.”

“That’s one way to look at it. I’ll be up in a few, I just need to find a way to the parking deck.”

Rin frowns as he peers at the valet attendants standing at the hotel entrance, their uniforms doing nothing to keep them properly warm in the snow. “You don’t let them park for you?”

Sousuke looks gravely serious. “I don’t let anyone drive my cars.”

Rin snorts a laugh. “God, you’re such a guy.” Sousuke grins, not denying it as Rin steps into the cold. “See you in a bit.”
Sousuke grabs his wrist. “Where’s your coat?”

He blushes. “I didn’t – bring one? But my shirt is long-sleeved.” Sousuke scoffs and Rin snaps, “I’ve got a damn aesthetic to keep up.”

Sousuke reaches under his seat to toss Rin a wadded garment. “Just wear that and get inside, all right?”

Rin blinks after him as he drives toward the lurking mass of the parking deck. He glances inside the leather jacket to read the Burberry label before slinking his arms into the sleeves, the cuffs brushing the tips of his fingers. The side of his face nestles against the shawl collar and he breathes in a dark fragrance that makes his core melt just a little. There’s also the faint smell of ink; probably where a pen burst in an interior pocket.

He makes his way through the lobby to the elevator and that’s when his nerves catch up with him. His ankle bounces as the elevator climbs higher and he restlessly flaps his elbows, chewing his lower lip. His jaw aches, the inside of his mouth still faintly throbbing from the intensity of Sousuke’s kisses; the realization that the rest of Rin’s body is about to be just as sore makes sweat prickle his brow.

He finds the correct room and punches in the key code before swinging open the door. “Holy fuck,” he breathes.

In a stupor, he ventures over to the wall of glass and feels nauseas with vertigo. Below him is a neon sea of city lights as far as the eye can see, towering out in every direction. Airplanes blink through the smog and he looks down at the pool in the courtyard, dancing in rippling blue. Rin stares down at the water sadly before turning around to take in the rest of the suite. The recessed lights glow softly, relaxing the tense line of his body. The drag of his fingers across the California King is the only noise in the silent pressure of the room. He clenches the softness of the comforter and swallows.

Rin takes off his shoes and carefully lays Sousuke’s jacket over the desk in the corner. He hurries to the bathroom and when he flicks on the searing overhead lights, he groans at how washed out and crazy he looks, lips busted from kisses, pupils blown wide like an addict. He combs his fingers through his messy hair then rakes it back to blot his face and throat with some tissues. He smudges away the runny liner and stares at himself in the mirror before giving a firm nod.

The door clicks open and he startles. Rin ventures out of the bathroom to see Sousuke toeing off his loafers and shrugging off his blazer. He watches his shoulders roll with the motion and steps closer, noting the pinch between Sousuke’s brows. Rin frowns. “You okay?”

“It’s fucking cold,” he hisses, glaring at the snow tumbling down the wall of glass like it personally offends him.

Rin laughs and takes Sousuke’s hands – the man stiffens a bit but is otherwise entirely lax as Rin rubs his thumbs into his palms to warm them up. Sousuke glances sideways to try and hide that he’s flustered and something like affection curls happily in Rin’s chest. “Better?”

“Yeah,” Sousuke mumbles. Slowly, his gaze treks back to Rin, then drops to their joined hands. “Feels nice.” His voice falls softer. “To touch.”

Rin’s fingertips glide up his forearms, swirling over the inside of his elbows and falling back to his
wrist. All he’s doing is dancing his fingers up and down his arms but Sousuke’s features sink deeper with every brush. Rin walks his fingers up his biceps and starts to clench his shoulders, but he notices it when Sousuke subtly leans his right side away, embarrassed as he breaks the mood. “Sorry, my shoulder is kind of –” His gaze flickers away. “Tender.”

“Oh, my bad.” Instead, Rin slides his hands down Sousuke’s neck to trace the wings of his collarbones. His fingers meet at the hollow of his throat and tease into his shirt opening as he looks up at Sousuke, eyes half-lidded and lips parted. Waiting. Needing.

He’s gathered up in Sousuke’s big arms and pressed into a firm chest, feels hot skin, shifting muscles. Fingers splay across the small of Rin’s back, giving him stability in a moment where it feels like the room is tilting. Sousuke’s other hand finds the curve of his waist, dragging down to the flare of his hip and back up again. “You’re so slim,” the man says, marveling as his hand traces the shape of Rin’s body. “Pretty.”

At that, something jolts through Rin like primal fire in the dark and he leans up on his toes to fist Sousuke’s shirt and mesh their lips together. Rin trembles a hum, brows furrowing as Sousuke works his mouth open, giving it to him hard and warm and wet. Sousuke drags him upward and Rin doesn’t fight the urge to wrap his thighs around the man’s hips, legs squeezing him with urgency.

Rin’s back hits the mattress and Sousuke’s weight swoops over him, strong forearms braced around Rin’s head as he eats at his throat. Rin startles a moan, closed eyes screwing tighter when smooth teeth glide over his skin. Sousuke breathes heat into the shell of his ear. “You want marks, baby?”

Oh, that word makes Rin’s body seize as the wetness of precum floods his panties. “Yeah, yes –” His knees fall open when Sousuke licks a small stripe over his neck to mark a place for his teeth to squeeze into. Rin gasps with each quick flash of tongue, hands scrambling to Sousuke’s ass to yank him down between his legs. The man’s hips fuck friction against Rin’s cock in slow, deep rolls as he sucks sweet little bruises to life all over his throat.

Rin’s so delirious with sensation that he doesn’t realize Sousuke’s unbuttoning his shirt for him until the man gently nudges it off Rin’s shoulders. He arches and shimmies to get the garment off the rest of the way and Sousuke takes a moment to eye his newly exposed arms, the upper-half of his chest. Rin resists the urge to flex as he lies under Sousuke’s stares. Girls have called him skinny before, but he’s more inclined to consider himself lean-muscle. There’s only certain ways he’s allowed to bulk up as a swimmer and his bipolar medication fucked up his ability to gain more muscle so bad, but still, he’s never felt particularly inadequate about his body. However, he can’t help but feel a churn of nervousness when it’s Sousuke’s reaction he’s waiting for.

“Oh –” Rin’s breath hitches when Sousuke presses his lips into the supple flesh of his arm, leaving the skin damp with a starburst of tingles radiating from the spot. He brushes tender kisses all the way up Rin’s arm, lingering and savoring each touch, then he traces the V of Rin’s tank top with his mouth. When he runs his hand over Rin’s flat belly to feel the red silk, he works his jaw with a pleased hum. But then he stops and goes back to tracing the planes of Rin’s muscles with his lips.

Rin’s hips wind restlessly because he isn’t used to being kissed this much during sex – no, pampered. Sousuke is spoiling him with indulgence and patience, kissing both corners of his mouth and then the center.

Sousuke’s seducing him; treating him so well and arousing him so much that it’s pushing Rin into that strange somewhere between human and animal. It’s not like other people haven’t tried their best to make him want it, to make him feel good and come hard, but nobody has ever been this…
confident about it.

Sousuke can make Rin come and he knows it. The knowledge is right there on his face, as is the reassurance that he won’t make this ordeal feel lonely and slutty. He’ll *take* him, he’ll give it his all during the few minutes he lives inside of Rin’s body.

Rin surges up to collide with his lips and when their tongues flick together it unravels his very nerves. He rips Sousuke’s shirt open and buttons go flying; Sousuke startles a grunt but Rin just laughs into his mouth, taunting, toying with the idea of *punish me*. He feels Sousuke’s smirk – he knows what Rin wants. “I think you might be a brat.”

“No forget impatient,” Rin says and goes to tug Sousuke’s shirt off his shoulders –

He yelps as he’s pushed back down onto the mattress and his dick chubs up even more at the show of strength. His knees are bent and Sousuke meets his gaze as he spreads Rin’s thighs, fingers mapping the seam of his jeans and hovering over his cock. Rin lurches his hips up, fisting the sheets and chewing his lip through a whine of, “*Please.*”

He gasps when Sousuke palms his cock – his hand has weight to it but it’s not enough. Rin whimpers, “M-More,” and Sousuke squeezes hard between his legs. Rin grits a moan and hugs his own arms around his middle because he truly feels like he’s about to burst out of his own skin from the delicious pressure. Sousuke kneads Rin’s shaft with a firm press of his thumb, rubbing into the tight, swelled vein on the underside. His free hand rubs absent patterns into Rin’s ankle, but Rin likes the idea of the man holding him down from there even better.

Sousuke’s fingers slide under Rin’s tank top, bunching it up to his chest so he can see the tight plane of his stomach. He leans down to run the flat of his tongue over Rin’s navel, kissing up the line of his abs to his pectorals. Rin’s belly clenches more with every brush of lips and the ache in his cock makes him let out a soft mewl. Sousuke hushes him in the gold-dark and eases Rin out of his tank top by sitting him up, gently maneuvering him like he would a rag doll, Rin is so spaced-out. Sousuke lays him back down and runs his hands over the new wealth of naked flesh, shaking his head in a daze. “You’re fucking gorgeous.”

Rin gasps as his face flashes hot, toes curling. He pulls Sousuke over him and kisses his mouth swollen as the man opens Rin’s pants, unzipping him one breath at a time, but Sousuke has trouble peeling them down Rin’s legs. His chuckle is all rasp. “Are these painted on?”

“They’re not *that* tight,” Rin says, leaning back on his hands and putting all his weight on his palms as Sousuke effortlessly lift his lower-half to drag the jeans off. “They make my ass look bigger.”

“Your ass is fucking gorgeous too.” He finally yanks Rin’s legs free and looks a little winded from the effort. Rin just smiles at how handsome he is flushed, and Sousuke blushes. “Seriously, I haven’t – I haven’t thought about anything else for days.”

“Anything except my ass?”

Sousuke gives him a flat stare. “You’re annoying.” He gathers Rin up in his arms and snuggles him against his chest.

Rin crawls into his lap, likes that the man is still dressed in a suit and Rin’s only in panties. He hugs his arms around Sousuke’s neck and Rin presses his smile into Sousuke’s cheek, voice all slurred and sex-drunk. “You’re really sweet.” He holds his lips against Sousuke’s skin and lets himself be
held, eyes fluttering at the sweep of fingertips up and down the valley of his spine.

Sousuke gazes down at Rin’s body and his nostrils flare on an exhale of heat. “God, look at you.” His timbre hushes with reverence as he thumbs one of Rin’s dark nipples, making his spine snap straight with a harsh rut of his hips. He feels soft and cared for as Sousuke traces the contours of his ribs, eyes falling shut when the man kisses his neck.

But adrenaline and lust burn up Rin’s stomach when Sousuke bites down on the juncture of his shoulder and neck, and Rin’s slotting their lips harder together than ever before. Where all their kisses have been warm, this one is hotter in an instant with a startling flare-up. Sousuke palms Rin’s ass, rolling each cheek in his grip with a groan caught in his throat. He snaps one of the panty straps and Rin’s hips fuck against his stomach, thighs clenching his waist. “Fuck, just – I need –”

Sousuke understands somehow and lays Rin back down with a wild rush of breath. “Open your mouth,” Rin pleads, strained and starved, and Sousuke parts his lips for the burning slide of Rin’s tongue. His jeans are balled up on the side of the mattress and Rin reaches into the back pocket, leaning out of the kiss to present the foil square and little tube. He meets Sousuke’s stare without waverung and the man’s exhale falls out of him. He takes the lube, putting the condom aside for now, which is – um, different. He expected Sousuke to roll it on right then and there but it looks like he wants to focus on other things at the moment.

Rin arches when Sousuke rubs into his nipples again, his whisper shooting straight into Rin’s ear. “Like that?”

He wobbles an affirmative hum and sucks one of Sousuke’s thumbs into his mouth, rolling his tongue over the pad before pressing it against his nipple once more, and the wetness hits him like an electric shock. His eyes are closed in rapture when he feels something else brush his lips and he obediently opens wide for the stretch of two fingers, brow furrowing as he swallows around them. “Shit,” Sousuke breathes. He takes his fingers back and bends down to circle his tongue around Rin’s areola, breathing wet heat over his nipple. Then he sucks the firmness of Rin’s pec into his mouth, squeezing his teeth into it, and Rin chokes on a cry, the noise bolts out of his throat so fast. He snakes his thigh between Sousuke’s leg and jams it against his cock insistently, making him grit a curse. Rin wants to get fucked and fucked good, and his impatience is contagious.

Sousuke grabs his hips with large hands, powerful, the kind of sexual confidence that only comes from someone who knows how to wield it. He drags a single finger down Rin’s clothed cock then runs his hand back up to the hem of his panties where the pink head of his dick is peeking out. “Fuck, you’re wet,” Sousuke groans as precum wells over his thumb. He sucks it off the pad and finally pushes his hand into Rin’s underwear to grip his cock. He goes blind with white-hot ecstasy for the flash of a second and Sousuke lets him ride his hand, jaw hardening firmer with every mewl and croon Rin lets out. “You’re really receptive, you know that?”

Rin has to swallow three times but his voice is still all gasp. “Want you inside.” Sousuke’s throat clenches when Rin kneads the heel of his foot against his cock. “Want you in me so bad.” He’s never had any shame in begging but he’s ready to start crying for it at this point.

Rin tries to Shimmy out of his panties but Sousuke stops him with a hand tight around the strap. “Keep them on.” He leans closer and nuzzles into Rin’s neck before he licks a heavy tail of sensation all the way up to his ear, suckling at the lobe and making Rin thrash. “For me.”

“Yeah, yes, whatever, anything,” he babbles, an angry heat coiled in his groin and getting worse. He snatches up the lube and pours some into Sousuke’s palm, licking the excess fluid off the bottle cap
to let the cherry taste buzz through his mouth.

With one hand, Sousuke pushes Rin’s panties to the side and with the other, he slides his fingers up Rin’s asscheeks to find the place where he wants him the most. Fingertips swirl over his entrance, getting him wet and messy enough to take it when a finger slides into him in one smooth motion. “Ah –” Rin’s whole body arches, back shaping into a weak crescent. Sousuke’s fingers are knobby in the best way, thick and elegant and reaching deeper than Rin’s own do. “Fuck, that’s l-long.”

“Thanks. You good?”

“Yeah, more, do more –” Two fingers ram deep inside and Rin grimaces even as he rocks down into the feeling. “Move.” Sousuke does, his knuckles catching as he slides past the tight rim, then back out, figuring out a rhythm that leaves Rin shaking. The stretch aches but he chases after the feeling until his body seizes because of the rubbing back and forth against the muscular folds of his inner walls. Sousuke crooks his fingers into the velvety swell of his prostate and Rin clenches so tightly that Sousuke hisses, but Rin doesn’t give a shit because every exhale is leaving him in a cry and his eyes are wide open but his vision is burned black.

“You’re so soft inside,” Sousuke marvels and that’s a compliment Rin never thought he’d get, but it still makes him preen and curl into himself. “Shit, you’re fucking tight.”

A third finger sinks in with a lewd squelch that has Rin’s cock dripping and bobbing as he fucks his hips up into nothing. “God –” His face twists as Sousuke works him open, curling into the spot that makes his very teeth throb. “Stop, stop, fuck me, I’m ready.”

“Mm.” Sousuke plays with him a little while longer, leaving his insides sore but still clenching around the shape of his fingers. “You don’t wanna come real quick?”

Rin heaves for breath. “I’m gonna – fucking pass out when I come, just get in me, now, right now –”

“All right, easy.” He kisses up Rin’s thigh and his quivering subsides. “Easy, pretty, I got you.” Rin’s knees fall out, body open with his arms thrown over his head. Sousuke’s fingers glide out and he soothes him with a kiss but Rin’s mouth is so raw, the inside of his cheeks pulsing, jaw hurting as it stretches wider. Every fiber of him is dying for cock and Sousuke looks down at him like he wants him just as much.

Sousuke sits back on his haunches to shrug his shirt off and Rin’s cock drools at the sight, Sousuke’s shoulders broadening as they roll, his pectorals flexing with the motion. The contours of his ribs flex as he breathes, abdominals defining. Rin fists his own dick impatiently while Sousuke takes off his pants and he’s barely got them over the swell of his ass, Rin’s hardly got a look at his cock before he dives between Sousuke’s legs to swallow it down.

“Rin –” An earthquake rams through Sousuke’s muscles and he fists Rin’s hair before he can stop himself, but Rin doesn’t fucking care, he wants to see what it’s like to make Sousuke’s restraint crumble; he still holds up remarkably well for someone getting a spontaneous bout of head. Dick tastes awful in general but there’s always been something strangely addictive about it to Rin if only because there’s nothing else like it. He’s gone down on sweaty guys in club bathrooms and nearly retched; Sousuke tastes clean, his precum a tart salt that Rin laps up. He palms Sousuke’s swollen balls and they radiate heat, tight curls of pubic hair tickling Rin’s hand.

He wants to go down on Sousuke but he’s already so hard, his cock standing and twitching. When Rin moves to try and swallow him down anyway, Sousuke stops him. “Don’t hurt your throat.” Rin
blinks up at him and the man smirks breathlessly as he cradles his face, swiping away the precum on his cheek. “You’ve got a lot of screaming to do.”

Rin *whimpers*. He meets Sousuke’s eyes as he rubs his face all over his cock, dragging it over his lips with a moan. He suckles at the crown, pecking kisses all over the head and letting the precum spill off his tongue, drip off his chin and roll down his neck. The ridges of Sousuke’s dick are well-defined, shaft flushed purple to the line of tan discoloration near the tip. Rin finds a freckle near the base and licks a swirl around it before wedging his tongue into the sensitive space between shaft and balls. Sousuke *groans* like he’s never felt satisfaction, like Rin is giving him every bodily sensation all at once.

Rin sucks his red cockhead between his lips and it’s *hot* – he can feel every strike of Sousuke’s pulse through his dick. He dips the head between his lips over and over, mimicking the feeling of a shallow fuck and ramming his tongue into the slit. Sousuke’s body jolts and he forces Rin’s head down without his control and Rin gags loudly but he doesn’t come up, fists clenched as he works Sousuke’s cock into the tightness of his throat. He can only do it lightly, mouth stretched around the shaft so widely that his lips crack. He swallows a few frantic times before the fingers in his hair twist him up and Rin comes up gasping, mouth wide open and wet. His eyes are half-lidded and rolling back but he’s grinning, dazed and hazy.

Sousuke grabs his face and kisses him, a firm press that leaves Rin whining and gripping his biceps. “You’re incredible,” Sousuke whispers against his lips, voice so earnest that Rin can honestly believe he’s talking about more than just how well he does with a cock in his mouth.

Rin lets himself be maneuvered, relying entirely on Sousuke’s strength to lay him down. His arms sprawl around his head and there are hands at his knees. His breath catches at the feeling of his legs being spread for him. He isn’t afraid, he doesn’t feel the need to curl in on himself and hide. Sousuke pulls Rin’s panties to the side and stares between his legs like he can’t help but lean closer, ready to plunge into him and never come out –

“*Condom*, big guy,” Rin says, nudging him away with his knee and a playful smirk.

Sousuke snaps back to himself with a mortified blush. “Shit, sorry.” Rin’s smirk widens as Sousuke rips the foil open and anticipation swells through him as he rolls the condom on. Sousuke leans over him and Rin brings his legs up, knees pressed against his nipples as he scrunches in half. Sousuke kisses a wildfire up his thigh and nuzzles his nose against Rin’s cheek, lips moving against the skin. “Tell me if you need to stop.”

“Okay,” Rin whispers, his voice so loud in the quiet – but maybe it just feels that way because Sousuke’s *looking* at him, meeting his eyes as he pulls Rin’s panties back and gently flexes his hips, his cockhead dipping inside of Rin’s body. Rin gasps even though it doesn’t feel like much of anything, it’s just the realization that this is all actually happening makes his heart stutter.

Sousuke nudges about half-way inside when Rin clenches his biceps. “Hurts?”

“Just –” He swallows hard. “Hold on.” It’s not exactly *pain*, definitely not enough to make him want to stop, but it’s a stretch that makes it difficult to breathe around the pressure in his chest. Sousuke kisses him and Rin lets out a grateful hum, arms shaking as they hug Sousuke’s neck. Rin’s lips hang slack as Sousuke’s tongue fucks his mouth, lust burning away the discomfort enough to help him timidly roll down on the man’s cock. Rin’s eyes narrow at the pressure inside, brows pinching, then Sousuke reaches down to fist his cock and Rin’s expression unravels, legs falling wide open.
One final push and Sousuke’s there, buried so deep inside that Rin shakes. They pause to catch their breath, sweat gleaming at Sousuke’s temples and pooled in the hollow of Rin’s throat. Then Sousuke’s sitting on his haunches and pinning Rin’s thighs back before ramming into him so quick that Rin can’t even yell. “Baby,” Rin whines, shuddering hard. Sousuke falls into a rhythm without any hesitation, focusing all his attention on thrusting firm and smooth, bottoming out and pulling back to leave Rin gaping around nothing, cursing for it, feeling neglected and cold until Sousuke sinks back inside.

Rin pitches a cry with the next thrust, the headboard thunking against the wall as Sousuke fucks into him. Sousuke smiles into his shoulder and Rin feels more than hears him grit, “Tight little thing.” Rin clenches down on him even harder just to laugh a moan at how Sousuke swears. He smells like cologne and sex, like something Rin could get drunk off of. Sousuke thrusts in again but doesn’t pull out, just revels in the hot clench of Rin’s muscles and lets Rin spasm around him. Rin kind of stops working in the stillness, letting out little high-pitched mewls, oh, oh, oh.

Sousuke’s shuddering where he’s braced on his forearms, all of his weight pushed on his left side, and Rin gathers pretty quickly that his bad shoulder must be hurting. He sweeps Sousuke up in a kiss and rolls him onto his back, bodies never separating where they’re joined. Their lips part with a wet smack and Rin sits up, palms splayed across the firm plane of Sousuke’s belly as he rolls his hips with a wet, nasty noise. “Ah, fuck, fuck —” He throws his face to the ceiling and hisses when Sousuke sinks in, cock so hard where he’s buried in the softness of Rin’s body. Sousuke’s hands are everywhere, digging into Rin’s ass cheeks to spread him wide for a thrust that makes Rin’s fucking heart stop. His voice punches out of him, “Oh, oh my God.”

He bounces down desperately and Sousuke breathes, “Yeah, just like that —” He rumbles and grunts with every plunge into the wetness. “You’re so good, pretty, so pretty —”

Rin blindly scrambles for Sousuke’s hand and sucks his fingers into his mouth to muffle his whimpers. Sousuke stares up at him in a trance, his torso one fluid ripple of motion as he rocks up into him. He gazes up at him and Rin’s never felt this naked before for some reason. He’s wet down to his inner-thighs and his palms are slipping through the gleam of sweat on Sousuke’s belly, his cock the only steady thing inside of Rin. He needs Sousuke to take care of him in this moment, wants to submit to such a powerful force so he does, babbling, “Make me come, Sousuke, want you to make me come —”

Sousuke rolls them and he bows over him in the tangle of sheets, forearm braced beside Rin’s head, the other arm holding Rin’s thigh up so he can rut between his legs. Nothing’s ever felt so hot, like Sousuke’s pushing sweet fire into his body and building it with ever thrust. Rin reaches down to Sousuke’s ass, squeezing it hard, urging him deeper, and Rin mewls, “Close, ‘m close —”

“Baby,” Sousuke sighs right into his ear, his voice traveling through Rin’s body like a livewire, lighting up his very blood.

“More,” Rin hisses, tears spiking his lashes as he holds onto Sousuke for dear life, unshackled from reality itself. “More, say it again, need more —”

Sousuke muffles his whimpers with a kiss, hips working faster, deeper. “Pretty baby, wanna see you come —” His fist clenches in Rin’s hair as the friction of their bodies reaches something raw and overwhelming. “Sweetheart, wanna see you look at me —”

Rin opens his eyes, vision crystalline with tears, eyes seared with liner, and looking at Sousuke feels like a physical thing, another connection that makes people fuck like animals and sing in the pouring

Rin yanks him down into a hard kiss and comes.

His entire world whites out, organs twisting with the force of his wracking body, and Sousuke keeps fucking him, oh *God*, doesn’t stop kissing him, and he thinks he screams, he might yell Sousuke’s name, he’s *definitely* crying, but he can’t hear anything over the muffled roar in his ears. It crests into a high-pitched ring, his head throbbing with heady pressure as numbness shudders up his limbs, burying in the apex of his thighs.

He yelps when he’s rolled onto his stomach, hands yanking his hips off the bed as Sousuke sinks into his ass from behind. Rin’s body lurches with each frantic thrust, eyes glazed, mouth slack, and he doesn’t even care that he’s drooling, can’t think of anything other than the need to push back on Sousuke’s cock and make him come.

Sousuke drives into him deeper than ever before and Rin has a sensory overload, hands shaking, back bowing. Sousuke lets out a primal sound torn from the very core of his being and he shudders so hard that it trembles into Rin’s body. Then there’s stillness even as the room continues to shake at the corners of his vision. Hands brace on Rin’s back before Sousuke can crash over him and both of them pant for air, minds hazed over.

“Gonna pull out,” Sousuke croaks, and Rin winces, trying not to lock up as his cock slides out, but he still mewls. Sousuke tosses the condom at the wastebasket, motions slow like he’s moving through water. Arms grab Rin before he can fall and Sousuke lies on his back, starting to pull Rin closer, but he pauses at the last second, hesitating.

Rin’s too glazed to notice his nervousness and snuggles into Sousuke’s chest, weakly viceing his legs around his waist, Rin’s body slippery with sweat and lube and his own cum. Silently, Sousuke lets out a relieved breath and presses a gentle kiss against Rin’s damp hair. Sousuke rubs his back in the quiet, fingers splayed for broad strokes. “You all right?”

Rin preens happily and nuzzles into Sousuke’s throat, too tired to properly kiss him there – instead he just brushes his lips back and forth over his neck. “You ruined my panties.”

Sousuke snorts with an exasperated smile. “I’ll buy you more.”

Rin gathers the strength to lift his head and look at him, hair tumbling over his sleepy eyes with a languid grin. They share a chaste kiss that feels more intimate than it should and Rin yawns, “You care if I stay or you wan’ me to bounce?”

Sousuke’s still breathing faintly as his lips trace the line of Rin’s cheekbone. “Stay.” He blushes in the dark. “I mean – if you want, you can stay.” He pauses. “I’d… rather you stayed, anyway. It’s late.” Softer, maybe because he thinks Rin’s fell asleep, he mumbles, “You’re warm.”

Rin just hums, his cheek nestled against Sousuke’s chest to listen to his heart and hear the secrets of his core.
Fri 27 Jul, 22:30

Is Rin home?

No

I heard he had a date 🍫

Fr???? With who

Idk

Apparently Nagisa set him up with someone

Damn I didn't know he was that desperate

LMAO

I think it was just a spontaneous thing he was over at Kisumi's earlier

Wait he was??

Yeah I think Kisumi knows who it is but he wouldn't tell me who

Why?

He didn't tell me who it was

Oh

Damn that's cold
Damn that's cold

You and Rin have been bffs since you were like

Tadpoles or some shit

Shut the fuck up hiyori we all know it was you that said Rin's eyes were charming on Sarahah

WHAT

WAIT LET ME ADD KISUMI TO THE CHAT

Haru wth you can't prove that

Oooh he's defensive ••••

Go blow Kisumi plz stop talking

I can do two things at once hiyori I'm a man of many talents unlike urself

EW???

I just told Kisumi his eyes are charming and he told me to leave

Hiyori you don't even have your headphones plugged in when you're pretending to not listen to Asahi and Kisumi when they're at the dorms
haru means that he knows rin's on a date but he's lowkey hurt rin actually said the name of the person he went out on a date with instead of telling haru all will be revealed soon don't worry i promise he texted makoto after this and feels better now

up next: morning after-aftermath

twitter & curious cat

and i just wanted to say thank you for all the response to this story, please know that i read every single comment and i always stop what i'm doing and get the dumbest big grin whenever i get a comment notification, really y'all never fail to make my day. thank you for reading!
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

quick lil update, happy sunday~

chapter song is asbjørn - the love you have in you, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sousuke wakes to warmth on all sides, the muffled echo of traffic, and soft breaths at his cheek.

He blinks awake and stares up at the hotel room ceiling as the lilac-grey glow of a winter sunrise paints the walls. Slowly, he turns his head and his nose brushes another’s. Rin’s features are lax with dreams, swollen lips parted, his hair an endearing mess around his face. His arms hug Sousuke’s bicep and his naked body is tangled in the sheets, giving Sousuke a peek at the graceful curve of his bare back down to the swell of his ass. Rin must have flung his ruined panties off during the night –

He catches a dark blotch against the pretty fairness of Rin’s skin. Sousuke turns Rin onto his belly to stare at the tattoo on the rise of his asscheek, positioned close to the flare of his hip.

Rin stirs at the brush of fingers as Sousuke touches the ink. He sleepily lifts his head and Sousuke mumbles, “A cherry stem?”

Rin’s brows scrunch cutely before he follows Sousuke’s eyes to the tattoo. “Oh,” he huffs. “Yeah.” He stretches, sliding his arms under the pillows and wiggling his toes. Affectionate honey drips all through Sousuke’s chest. Rin yawns, “Me ‘n my friend Kisumi got matchin’ tattoos freshmen year. He has a peach.”

Sousuke observes the ink, the simple black lines with two dots of red to color the fruit. “It suits you.”

Rin playfully lifts his ass into Sousuke’s touch. “Thanks. It was just a spontaneous thing, did it the night finals ended. We were just real fuckin’ happy and wanted to do somethin’ crazy.”

Sousuke walks his fingers up Rin’s spine to his face so he can lull his bottom lip open. “You seem to have a habit of doing crazy things during finals.”

His breath hitches when Rin sucks the tip of his thumb into the wetness of his mouth, dragging it over his tongue and off his lip. “Obviously.”

Sousuke woke up hard but now his cock feels hot and heavy between his legs. He doesn’t act on it, content to just run his hand up and down Rin’s thigh when he hitches it over Sousuke’s waist. Rin studies him in half-lidded sleepiness, palm flat over Sousuke’s chest and tracing shapes against it. Rin mumbles, “Tell me something about you.”

Sousuke tries not to stiffen. “All right.”

“Something nobody knows.”
Rin’s testing him; maybe he’s just daring by nature. Sousuke doesn’t mind as much as he should. “I don’t like waking up by myself.”

Rin doesn’t tense, nor does he crane back because that really was too personal. He simply hums with a thoughtful nod. “Yeah, it’s pretty shitty sometimes.” Sousuke deflates more than he expected to but Rin’s face just scrunches up with a smile like Sousuke’s goddamn adorable. “It helps that I have a roommate. Just knowing someone’s there makes it a little easier.” He traces the line of Sousuke’s shoulder with a single finger, leaving chills in his wake. “I don’t think I could live by myself. It can be hell living with three other people but hearing them move around and stuff. It helps.”

“I couldn’t live with three people.” He shudders at the mere thought and Rin tips his head. Sousuke shrugs. “I hate people in general.”

Rin sings a laugh and Sousuke’s whole body lights up from the inside out. “You sound introverted.”

“To the extreme.”

Rin snuggles closer. He’s so fucking soft, smells like flowery body spray and sex and – and Sousuke. “I think I’m only an extrovert ’cause when I’m alone, I get kinda –” He hesitates.

Sousuke recognizes the look in his eyes. “Destructive?”

Rin’s mouth curls but it’s not a smile. “Yeah.”

“It happens,” Sousuke comforts, squeezing into the flesh of Rin’s thigh, hoping he’ll understand that he gets it. Rin meshes his lips against Sousuke’s chin and that’s enough of an answer. His lips pull over Sousuke’s, chaste and closed but still, somehow, too good for words. Rin sighs when they part, body falling pliant like the mere kiss was medicine to his heart, seeping through him like a pleasant aphrodisiac. Sousuke says, “You’re going through a lot just being in college. Difficult to find ways to cope.”

“Don’t I know it,” Rin snorts. His heel strokes up and down the back of Sousuke’s calf. “Where’d you go to college?”

“Did all of my schooling online.” He can’t even remember the name of the electronic university; just remembers that the business classes were a nightmare of a challenge. “It wasn’t home-schooling – I mean, kind of, I had tutors, but I did most of the studying on my own.”

Rin lifts his brows. “All of it? Like, high school, university – everything?”

“Yeah.” He glances down. “My brother and I started interning with the company when we were young, so we didn’t have time to go to a physical campus.”

“A real school, you mean.”

Sousuke looks back up at him and smiles sheepishly. “Yeah.”

“Sounds…” He chews his lip. “Isolating to me.” He shakes his head quickly, placating. “If I had gone through it.”

“Don’t worry, it was isolating. Trust me.” He remembers being eleven and seeing school buses drive
down the road; he was on fire with so much jealousy that all he could do was cry because there was no other release for such an onslaught of emotion. “But Makoto went through it too, so I wasn’t lonely through any of that.” He smirks. “Like I said, mutual hatred for something is a good basis for all relationships.”

Rin chuckles, hands playing across the grooves of Sousuke’s shoulder blades. “Tell me something else you hate, then.”

“Cold coffee. Ruins my whole goddamn day.”

“Can definitely agree with that,” Rin says with a solemn nod. He purses his mouth and Sousuke resist the urge to kiss the plump pout of his lips. “Cold weather doesn’t really bother me, but I like spring the best. That’s when the cherry blossoms bloom.”

“God, you’re perfect,” Sousuke groans on his way to Rin’s lips and Rin giggles into his mouth, winding his arms around Sousuke’s neck so easily, pulling him on top of him. Their hands are everywhere but they move with savoring leisure, fingers lost in hair, dragging across backs. Rin feels so good, parted legs welcoming Sousuke between them, giving him a hot, wet space to slide his dick against.

Sousuke gasps when their cocks brush under the sheets and Rin mewls, winding his hips up sluggishly. His face is still sex-flushed from last night but he’s quickly pulsing redder. "You can't fuck me again today," Rin says breathlessly. "I'm sore as hell."

“Sorry,” Sousuke smirks – it’s conflicting, flushing with satisfaction even when he feels guilty. “I think it’ll take me a while to build up the stamina for you, if that makes you feel any better.”

Rin drags his tongue over Sousuke’s teeth, gliding across the ticklish spot at the roof of his mouth, jaw opening wider for the fuck of Sousuke’s own tongue. “Mm, did I wear you out?” Rin’s voice is all coy-shy with playfulness. “I thought it was too early to start calling you an old man.”

Sousuke swats his ass and Rin yelps a laugh, twisting away. He pins Rin’s wrists over head and he’s grinning just as hard. “An old man couldn’t make you come screaming, now could he?”

Rin’s smirk is all fire. “You know what they say about age and experience –” Sousuke licks his palm to fist Rin’s cock and he chokes on his own voice. His body seizes, toes curling, and in an instant he’s back to an expression that’s preening and open with submission, his legs spreading. He whines, “You’re mean.”

“I can stop.”

“No?”

Sousuke chuckles and opens his mouth against Rin’s throat, sucking on one of last night’s bruises to hear him whimper. He kisses down the valley of Rin’s pecs, worshiping the alter of his flesh and salt. He sits up on the bed and pulls Rin upward, murmuring. “Come here.”

Rin’s thighs wrap around his hips, ass cushioned in his lap, nestled between Sousuke’s legs. He lets Rin tip his jaw open and he glides the very tips of his teeth across Sousuke’s lower lip – they’re not as sharp as he expected, pointed but dull, however he’s sure that he could get a furious burn of arousal if Rin bit down on him just once, just a quick little nip. Rin’s breath is heavy and damp against Sousuke’s chin when he laughs. “Surprised you let me go down on you so easily.”
He gives him a flat stare. “Head is head. I can take a little bite if it comes with your mouth.”

Rin grins, eyes crinkled with it. “I like a man who doesn’t discriminate.”

“Not when it’s you going down on me, no, definitely not.”

Rin slides a hand down Sousuke’s torso and all of his senses narrow into the touch; the rasp of his fingers, the warmth of them, the gentle weight and softness of his palm – the intent in the downward travel of his hand. “Had a guy tell me no, once. Told me to eat him out instead. I bit the shit out of his asscheek for it.”

A loud laugh jumps out of him. “Good.” He traces a finger over Rin’s lips to study the white in the pink-dark of his mouth. “They make you stand out. I feel like you’d be a different person without them.” Not that he even really knows Rin, but it’s a strong gut-feeling.

“They’re genetic; makes me look like my dad so I like them.” He goes to say something else, gaze darting over Sousuke’s features, but he stops short.

Sousuke just smiles, understanding what he wants to know. “The Tachibanas adopted me when I was nine but I kept my surname.” That’s an old wound firmly scarred over.

Rin blushes, eyes blinking a little wider. “Oh. Cool.”

That’s not what Sousuke expected to hear but it’s probably the kindest reaction he’s got out of anyone he’s ever told – casual, a little indifferent. It’s nice. Rin’s curiosity was sincere and he doesn’t care enough to dig any deeper. It’s really nice.

Rin’s voice pulls him from his thoughts. “Are you clean?” He pokes the underside of Sousuke’s naked cock and makes it twitch. “Probably should have asked that before I sucked your dick.”

“Yeah, I am.”

“Oh good, me too.” He gives an exasperated huff. “I got tested a few weeks ago but I haven’t had sex in like, two months, it’s been hell.”

“I bet.” He reminds himself to never mention it’s been three years since his last fuck. He’s really been working too hard.

Sousuke breaks into a sweat the moment Rin wraps a hand around his cock. His very brainwaves spindle into tangles, his mind hazing over with hot, black fog as embers prickle up his thighs and fester between his legs. His chest expands and collapses with his labored breath. Rin looks down between their bodies, watching Sousuke’s cockhead peek out of the circle of his fist. He sweeps his thumb through the wet mess at the tip and Sousuke’s spine snaps straight with a hiss that makes Rin coo. His cock is swollen in the tight clutch of Rin’s hand, shaft curved up into his grip, hips quivering with restraint until Rin looks him straight in the eye and purrs, “Ride my hand, baby.”

Sousuke does as he’s told, body weak and strained. He leans back on his palms to fuck up into Rin’s hand with a slick, nasty sound that makes a flush pulse down Rin’s throat. He’s not afraid to squeeze Sousuke while he works him in sporadic, punishing clenches of his fingers. It hurts, it hurts so fucking good that Sousuke’s overcome with the foreign need to beg.
“Fuck,” Rin breathes, thumb pressing on the underside of Sousuke’s cock to push it into a deeper curve, twisting the blood flow, making him ache. “You are so…” A forehead against his, a voice that’s nothing but growl. “Goddamn hot.”

Sousuke grabs between them, finds Rin’s cock standing rigid and presses it against his own. He folds his hand over Rin’s and when he pumps them together, a cry snaps out of Rin, frame bowing and hunching. There’s lewd squelches and sharp gasps, rumbling curses and whines; Rin’s hand trapped under Sousuke’s, wrist twisting on the upstroke, thumb carving down the vein on the underside with every downward glide. Sousuke’s body pulls so taut that he’s going to ache for a day but he doesn’t care; all that matters is the sound Rin makes when he comes, a high-pitched, wordless plea for Sousuke to fall over the edge with him, and Sousuke lets go quicker than anything else in his life.

Rin’s the one who makes sure he doesn’t crash off the side of the bed this time. He grabs at Sousuke’s biceps and yanks him straight against his mouth and it’s dizzying, listening to their lips catch between ragged breaths. They don’t stop kissing when Sousuke lets their cocks go, they don’t stop kissing when Rin’s hand is between their faces and he’s licking the cum off his fingers. Sousuke kisses the saltiness out of his mouth until Rin tastes only like Sousuke.

Rin looks down at the white mess on their bellies and makes a face. “Kay, we’re fuckin’ gross. I’m gonna take a shower.”

“Oh.” Sousuke blinks after him as he hops off the bed. He steps into the bathroom without so much of a glance back at him and Sousuke stares down at his empty hands.

He isn’t expecting it when Rin’s head pops around the corner with an impatient brow-raise. “You comin’ or what?”

He perks up so much that he ought to be mortified.

It’s different, being naked with someone in the shower rather than bed; it’s not as lustful, not as frantic and dire. In fact, it’s kind of awkward, at least for Sousuke – if he’s in the front he blocks the spray, if he’s behind Rin, he’s left dripping-cold and well, standing naked and not really knowing what to do.

But Rin takes to it so easily, knows how to maneuver Sousuke’s body so the shower spray hits his chest while Rin stands in front and washes his own hair with the bland-smelling hotel shampoo. This is one of those moments where their height difference comes in handy, since Rin only stands to Sousuke’s pectorals.

He was too nervous to say he’d wash Rin’s hair for him but Rin doesn’t seem to notice, humming absently as he combs through his drenched hair. Water drips off the little hoops in his ear but they don’t gleam right – they’re probably cheap. Rin’s head tips back with a dreamy grin, letting the water trickle down his throat. “This feels so good. The water pressure at the dorms is shit.”

Sousuke smiles, happy to see him so content. He’s not too cold anymore since the room is hazy with steam and it soothes his throbbing shoulder; he had no business fucking Rin in missionary and bracing all his weight on his forearms, but he doesn’t regret it even though he’s desperate for a pain pill right now.

Rin finishes washing up and links his arms around Sousuke’s neck to turn him into the spray. “Want me to wash your hair?”
He laughs to himself. “If you don’t mind.”

Sousuke almost falls over when Rin starts massaging the soap into his scalp. His shoulders drop, hands falling open with an immense sigh. Rin smiles at the reaction. “You haven’t been with anyone in a while, have you?” Sousuke’s eyes fly open but Rin doesn’t look critical, his gaze knowing. “You’re receptive like I’m receptive.”

“Maybe I just like you,” he taunts. It was supposed to come out stronger.

Rin hums a laugh and leans up on his toes to peck his lips. “I like you too,” he whispers like a playful secret. He pops back down to the flats of his feet and tips Sousuke’s head into the spray to wash the soap out. “I should have started fucking older guys years ago.”

Sousuke just sighs. Heavily. “You just have to find a way to be an ass, don’t you?”

“It’s a known staple of my personality, yeah.”

“Duly noted,” he says flatly. But he never stops smiling.

As they dress, Sousuke blurts the offer to drive Rin back to campus. He doesn’t know what precisely compels him to suggest it, but the temperature’s dropped a dozen degrees overnight and if Rin takes the bus, the highway will be dangerous and –

And Sousuke just… would rather hold off being alone for another hour. It’s a frustrating confliction; loneliness has been a solace for him, almost a vice with how manic he gets for it after a day of meetings. But he finds himself dreading the moment he’s back to emptiness. Another hour with company should tide him over, if Rin wants to.

Rin’s oblivious to his torment and accepts the invitation happily. For him, it might be as simple as not having to take the bus. Maybe he’s hoping he can blow Sousuke in the car and get more cash. Sousuke doesn’t know how his brain works yet and with the motivation of this whole arrangement being money, how could he not think that?

But why the fuck would Rin hug both arms around Sousuke’s elbow as he drives, if there weren’t a little more to it?

“I can hear you thinking,” Rin says, startling him from his reverie. He’s sitting in the passenger’s seat with his legs crossed, ankle rolling, shoe flexing. The picture of perfect contentment.

Sousuke turns back to the road. Traffic is backed up in every lane but there’s something mystical about how the snow dazzles in the strained sunlight. Rin’s rubbing a thumb over his forearm. Sousuke says, “I’d be really uncomfortable if you weren’t being honest with me.”

Slowly, Rin cranes back, which, yeah, that’s understandable. Rin doesn’t say anything and it’s awful. He lets Sousuke’s arm go and it’s even worse. Sousuke’s already checking this day off as one of his quickest fuck-ups when Rin says, “I get why you’d think I’m a liar.”

Alarm screams through him because that’s not what he meant at all. But that is what he said, in short.

Rin studies him for a minute. “I don’t know you.” He lifts his brows. “And you don’t know me yet.” He flattens a hand against his own chest, over his heart. “This whole idea scared me shitless. You
know?” Sousuke feels naked all over again under his stare. “The difference between us is that I’m assuming the best of you and you’re assuming the worst of me. Both of that is dangerous.”

Sousuke’s heartbeat falters because he wasn’t expecting such – honesty. Wisdom. He agrees with Rin more than ever now; they really don’t know a thing about each other.

Rin says, “Maybe it’s a side effect of your job, expecting the worst out of people. Waiting for them to double-cross you or make you sorry that you ever spoke to them.” He looks him over, expression unreadable but definitely not happy. “Or maybe that’s just who you are.”

Sousuke shakes his head hopelessly. “I don’t know. I couldn’t tell you.”

“All at once Sousuke feels awful, chest flooded with it. He opens his mouth –

“I’m not finished.”

He closes it.

“So yeah, I was willing to do just about anything to get a night with you, but you’re really giving my acting abilities too much credit.” He presses back into his seat. “I know what I deserve, but man,” he snorts, “I just don’t have it in me to put up a front.” His face sinks in exhausted dread at the thought. “I don’t know many people worth lying to. No offense.”

“It’s okay.”

“Just give me a little credit before you start making judgements.” He pats Sousuke’s arm. “If you think I turn out to be a gold-digger, then fine.” He’s startlingly unabashed about this. “If I’m just a twenty-something sleaze then –” He stops short. “Well, I can go ahead and tell you that one’s probably true.” Sousuke laughs despite himself and Rin smirks briefly. “Point is, I’m going to be straight up with you. Give me a chance to prove it, yeah?” He nudges Sousuke’s knee on his way to cross his legs in the seat with an exasperated huff. “Fuckin’ love guru.”

Sousuke chuckles but it’s still a little strained, a bit too faint. Tension pulses through the cab and he hears Rin take a slow breath through his nose. “I don’t ever kiss.”

Sousuke turns to him but Rin keeps his gaze set firmly on the road ahead. “I don’t kiss when I know the fuck isn’t going to mean anything.” He pushes his fists a little deeper into the leather jacket he’s still borrowing from Sousuke. “I’ve hooked-up some these last few months but I haven’t kissed anyone in over a year.” Finally, Rin swings his head around to give him a dry, half-lidded look. “I kissed you.”

Tenderness curls through him, features softening. “All right. I’ll try to do better.”

Rin nods and the traffic starts moving again. The silence is far more comfortable now but Rin isn’t afraid to break it. “You’re not very trusting.” It’s not accusing; just an observation, as simple as
talking about the weather.

“That is a side effect of business,” he sighs. “I can tell you that much.” He flicks on the blinker and turns the wheel.

“Where we going?”

“Starbucks.” He pulls up to the drive-thru speaker and rolls down the window. As much as he despises any coffee that isn’t made by Nitori, he’ll take anything at this point. “Get something.”

Rin shrugs. “Americano?”

Sousuke stares. “Can you not act like a college student for five seconds?”

“I dunno babe, can you not be a bitch for five seconds?”

“You know what –”

Rin flings himself over Sousuke, sprawled sideways to pop his head out of the window. The speaker crackles to life and Rin beams, “Hi, he’ll have a cold black coffee with a big order of shut the fu–”

Sousuke tries in vain to yank him back into the cab and resorts to tickling up his sides, making Rin thrash and kick the horn as he wheezes nonsense through screaming-laughs.

They arrive at the university and Sousuke parks in the visitors lot, which is settled in the heart of campus, but the lot is swarmed with exhausted student drivers who are too deep in finals week to care about the correct parking slots anymore. With a sigh, Rin watches his fellow classmates drag their feet from one building to the other, hunched over like the walking dead. “Gonna be a shitty week from this point on.”

“You’ll do well.”

Sousuke’s reassurance makes him perk a little smile but his voice is already tired, somber. “Thanks.” He thumbs the lid of his plastic to-go cup, the ends of his hair blurred at the corners of his vision. He silently damns himself for pouring caffeine over the anxiety of needing to study.

Sousuke clears his throat. “How do you, ah…” Rin looks up, watches the man tap his thumb against the steering wheel. His face is pinched with an embarrassed grimace while he pretends to be interested in the buildings around them. “How do you want the money? We didn’t talk about it. And you never said how much you need.”

“Oh. Right, shit.” His blush is so heavy that he’s nauseas with it. His hands shake around his phone as he thumbs to the browser to log into his student account, ankle bobbing. He finds the student services tab and scrolls to the fee payment button. He hovers over the screen before clicking it and he turns the phone to Sousuke without looking at him. He zeros in on a rip in his jeans, flinching when Sousuke gently takes the phone from his grip.

It’s dead quiet for a whole minute. Rin barely takes ten breaths in the silence, then Sousuke mumbles, “That’s it?”

His head whips around so fast that his neck cracks but Sousuke just blinks, expression neutral. Rin
has to quickly remind himself that they’re from different worlds, different universes of financial stability. That price amount threatened to ruin Rin’s life but it’s probably just pocket change to Sousuke. “Um.” His voice cracks. He swallows. “Y-Yeah, that’s it.”

“Do you want me to pay it through here, or…?”

He’s about to puke. He’s going to black the fuck out. Rin resists the urge to shake himself, blinking rapidly. “Uh, I can – I have a PayPal? I can just – wire it to my student account.”

“That’ll work,” Sousuke says, lowering the phone back into Rin’s slack hand. Numbly, Rin gives him the email to send it to and Sousuke briskly writes it down. “When do you need it?”

“Midnight. I get dropped from my classes at midnight, if I can’t…” He swallows the taste of his own heart. His entire existence, everything he’s worked for, is on the line right now, and he’s getting dizzy.

A lump swells in his throat when Sousuke touches his hand, not linking their fingers – it’s a timid show of compassion. Sousuke’s expression is so fucking lost, not knowing what to do about Rin’s distress. “You’ll have the money in your account before you make it back to your dorm.”

Rin takes a deep breath but it trembles out of him. “Then I really fuckin’ hope I can make it there.” He huffs a weak laugh.

Sousuke smiles, brows high and creased with endearment. He rubs Rin’s back in firm, grounding strokes. “You’re going to be fine.” Lips against his cheek.

Rin blindly turns and closes his lips over Sousuke’s, fingers shaking when they frame his face. He tastes like coffee and hotel toothpaste and underneath all that, warmth. “Thank you.” He blinks his eyes open to meet Sousuke’s gaze, vision blurry with tears that he’s struggling to hold back. “Thank you so much. So much.”

“It’s nothing,” Sousuke whispers. Rin closes his eyes again when Sousuke kisses his forehead. “Go on, don’t stay out in the cold too long.”

Rin sniffles, quivering a smile. “Kay.” He pecks Sousuke again, then just once more, holding their lips together with his fingers under Sousuke’s chin to keep him close for a moment longer. When they part, the winter chill feels more prominent. “Text you later?”

“I’m not going to bother you if you’re studying.”

Rin whines, “But I need a procrastinating distraction –”

Sousuke rolls his eyes and kisses his pout. “Then study something else.”

“Rude.” But he’s smiling as he steps out of the car. He pauses before closing the door, moving to shrug off his jacket. “Oh, do you want your –”

“No. Looks better on you anyway.” Rin just blinks, heat flooding his cheeks. Sousuke throws him a handsome grin that makes his heart flutter before he drives off. “Stay warm.”

When Rin makes it back to the dorm, every face in the room turns toward him. Hiyori looks up from
his videogame, Haru turns from the text on his phone, and for once, Asahi and Kisumi stop making out on the couch.

Hiyori lifts his brows. High. “Well that’s a walk of shame if I ever saw one.”

Rin looks down at himself, clothes wrinkled, love bites dotted all over his chest and throat. He flips his hair as he passes Hiyori on the way to his bedroom. “You’re wrong as usual. Walk of shame would mean I have regrets.”

“Typical Rin,” Asahi chuckles. Kisumi swats the back of his head, ignoring his boyfriend’s squawk and giving Rin a look. Rin nods, a silent reassurance that it went well, and Kisumi beams.

Haru follows him into the bedroom and closes the door. He stands with his back against it, hands behind him and around the knob. He watches Rin frantically unlock his phone and takes a deep breath. “How’d it go?”

Rin struggles to remember words in his haste to open the PayPal app. “He said he put the money in my account.” He moves to sit on the bed but his ass hits the floor instead. He doesn’t get up, too busy trying to work his shaking fingers against the screen.

“Yeah, I don’t –” He chews his lip to shit as he waits for the screen to load; campus wi-fi is slow as ever. He rakes a hand through his hair, ripping it through the wind-blown tangles, and the pain burns into his stress. “Fuck, I’m about to lose my mind –”

The screen pops up. Their eyes dart over the screen. Haru’s jaw falls open and Rin drops the phone. He doesn’t cry.

He fucking bawls.

His body caves with his sobs, loud like he’s dying, hyperventilating and racing toward a heart attack.

Because the amount he and Sousuke agreed on isn’t there. It’s doubled.

Haru scrambles for the phone, “Oh my god, oh my god –”

“Haru,” Rin weeps, heaving with his bones shaking from their joints, ears ringing at a fever pitch, vision darkening at the edges. “Haru, he –”

Haru’s face floods with emotion as he stares down at the screen. “Oh my god.” Rin pitches against his chest to muffle his sobs against Haru’s shirt. He feels lanky arms hug around him, rocking him back and forth. “You did it, Rin.” A chin rests against the top of his head and Haru’s voice is breathless with elation. “You really did it.”

Light floods the bedroom as the door flies open and Asahi’s voice is frayed like he’s ready to fight the world. “What the hell happened?! Why’s he crying?” Haru just shakes his head and Asahi yells, “Hiyori! You upset him!”

A cry from the living room, “No, I didn’t! I –” Feet scramble into the bedroom with a sharp intake of
breath. “Oh. Oh shit, Rin, I didn’t mean it like that!”

Asahi hisses, “You know he’s sensitive, what’s wrong with you?”

Hiyori babbles, “I just – I didn’t wanna make it weird, I just fuckin’ blurted something out, okay?! It was like – like a –” He thrashes a gesture. “A defense mechanism, I don’t know! I get awkward about sex –”

“We know,” Kisumi and Asahi drone.

“Fuck,” Haru groans, looking to the heavens for the strength to endure the stupidity he’s surrounded by. Rin just cries.

“Oh, Rin-chan,” Kisumi coos, sitting down on the floor to hug him from behind and pet his hair. “It’s okay, sweetie, it’s all okay.” Yeah, it really is, but Rin can’t even remember how to stop crying.

Eventually, he calms down. Hiyori brings him every means of comfort known to man kind, throwing a blanket at him, his shark plushie, leaving chamomile tea and smelly take-out containers at his feet like an offering. When he gives up his secret stash of gummy bears he hides from his dormmates, Rin finally laughs weakly and tells him that he’s fine. Hiyori looks drunk with relief even as Asahi and Kisumi drag him out of the bedroom and shut the door.

Haru eats Hiyori’s gummy bears and rubs Rin’s back as Rin’s breathing continues to hitch with every inhale. “Better?”

“Yeah,” he croaks. Haru forces the mug of tea into his hands and Rin takes a sip. It rolls down his aching throat soothingly. “Fuck, I’m about to faint.”

“I bet.” He pauses, hand stilling on Rin’s shoulder blades. His voice ventures hesitantly. “Why didn’t you tell me who the date was actually with? You told Kisumi.”

Haru’s expression is guarded and guilt floods Rin. “Because I knew you’d be scared for me. All I do is give you things to worry about and it’s finals week, it’s not fair to you.”

“Shut up,” Haru sighs, face twisted in tired frustration. “Look, I know I can’t control you. I know things that are scary to me –” He looks away, eyes darting across the floor. “Aren’t for you. But you’re way better than you were during freshman year, partying all weekend when nobody could find you.” Rin bows his head in shame but Haru just pats his back. “You’re better now. I know you’re better. And yeah, I was worried last night, but give me a break.” His whisper is tight with severity. “You had that manic episode about the swim tournament barely a week ago. You’ve gone up and down all semester, Rin, you haven’t even had a chance to bounce back.”

Rin wipes away a fresh wave of tears. “I’m sorry.”

Haru shakes his head gently. “I’ve said since we were kids that it’s not your fault. And I really think you’ll level out since swimming is over for now, but not having a way to pay for next semester…” He sighs. “We’ve lost you to way less before. I just…” His jaw hardens, eyes closing. “I didn’t want you to have an episode on that date and be alone. Because you’ve always been right there to talk me through a panic attack.”

“Of course I have,” Rin says, voice quiet with a lifetime’s worth of fondness. “You’re my best friend.” He pats Haru’s thigh, happy to see him not flinch away. “I know I say this every time, but
I’m okay. I actually had a lot of fun. He’s a sweetheart.”

Haru leans back to give him some breathing room but stays close, knees tucked against the floor, hands neatly in his lap. He’s trying really hard to not make assumptions, Rin can tell. “That’s good.”

“He’s not even kinky,” Rin pouts.

“What a shame,” Haru drones.

He chews his lips. “I – I wanna tell you who it is but I don’t want you to –”

“Rin, I’m not going to worry about you.” He arches a brow over flat eyes. “It’s not like you’re going to see him again now that next semester is paid for.”

Rin doesn’t say anything.

Haru stares. “You’re kidding.” He leans forward, forcing Rin to look at him. “You want to keep seeing him.”

His heart kicks at the thought, weak and warm. “Yeah, I think I do. Sorry.”

Haru sighs. He shakes his head before composing himself. “All right. Then I’ll have my way of dealing with him if he hurts you, but until then, I will be fine.”

“It’s, um. Yamazaki Sousuke.”

Haru pales. His eyes widen and dart as he connects the dots faster than Rin ever could, then he stiffens in realization. “Nagisa.”

“Yeah, I think he set us up. But I’m kind of happy about it.” At Haru’s disbelieving look, Rin blushes with a coy smile. “He’s so sweet, Haru, I felt really safe with him. He was so gentle and –”

He flushes at the memory. “God, he’s so hung I just wanna – ow, you fuck, don’t hit me!”

“Then don’t tell me all that.” Haru stands up and brushes himself off as he makes a face. “Asahi and Kisumi have been going at it all day, I’ve heard enough about sex for a lifetime.”

Haru freezes when his phone dings from his back pocket. Rin frowns in confusion but Haru’s already off the floor and marching toward the door when Rin calls, “Who the hell do you keep texting?”

“Nobody, God,” Haru snaps like a moody child. He pauses at the door, comes back to snatch up Hiyori’s gummy bears, then leaves Rin to smirk in the dark.

Sousuke drives back to his house in a daze, definitely not focusing on the road as much as he should – all he tastes is God-awful americano on his lips, his hand still tingling from Rin’s fingers.

He makes it back home in one piece and opens his front door before sinking against it. His head tips back with a long, contented sigh as he smiles like an idiot.

His face stiffens under the weight of a stare and he opens his eyes to see Nagisa sitting at a kitchen bar stool. Nagisa gives a low whistle as he looks at Sousuke over his mirrored shades. “Hello,
Sousuke knows that he looks properly debauched and thoroughly fucked. His shirt is clumsily tucked into his pants sans buttons, blazer askew, slacks wrinkled from getting bunched on the hotel floor.

Nagisa takes a judgemental sip of his drink – it’s one of Sousuke’s cokes, of course. “Safe to assume it went *smashingly*, then?”

“You set us up. You *know* Rin. He knew I’m your boss.”

Nagisa tips his head in feigned innocence just as the glass door leading to the yard slides open. Nitori steps inside the house, cooing at Arena as the dog runs around him in an excited circle. She zeroes in on Sousuke and greets him with a customary jump against his chest and he pats her ears. Nitori’s eyes widen as he takes in the state of Sousuke’s clothes but he doesn’t need to say anything – the surprise is written all over his face. He and Nagisa share a glance, Nitori’s brows high, Nagisa grinning like a maniac.

Sousuke walks over to the kitchen island to pin Nagisa with a stare and the P.A. fluffs his blonde hair. “Not my fault Rin met all of your requirements.” Nagisa meets his eyes without wavering, leaning even closer with his chin nestled in his palm. Lesser men wouldn’t dare such a move. “Rin needed that money and he could have done something reckless if he didn’t get it.” He pats Sousuke’s hand like Sousuke’s the one who needs to give an apology. “I knew you’d take care of him. That’s all that mattered to me.”

Sousuke’s expression softens at Nagisa’s sincerity. “He acted like he was about to cry when I said I’d help him.”

Nitori smiles warmly but Nagisa snorts. “Honey, that boy sobs five seconds into an animal rescue video. But with this? He’s gonna drown the whole dorm with his tears, I promise you.” He soberes up. “Rin’s a good kid. He deserved this.”

“He did,” Sousuke agrees. “He’s… not what I expected.”

Nagisa drops him a wink. “That’ll keep the old fire going.”

Nitori pinches the bridge of his nose. “Can you save your horniness for business hours, please? That way I’ll at least have my earbuds at my desk to tune you out.”

“Don’t act like I’m the only one you dirty little *saint*, you act like I didn’t see the Wattpad app on your phone the other day –”

“Anyway,” Nitori says with a brisk shove of his hand against Nagisa’s face. “We’re here for you to look over Kirishima-san’s transfer papers.”

Sousuke frowns. “Natsuya’s transferring? Where?”

Nitori blinks. “To the main branch of Tachibana Enterprises. He’s our new CFO. Didn’t Tachibana-san tell you?”

“Uh, *no*?”
“Doesn’t surprise me,” Nagisa simpers, flapping out his pink bomber to straighten it. He neatly tucks the jacket back in place around his middle with a conspiring glint in his eye. “He’s been texting someone all day; he literally forgot all of the emails I told him to respond to by this afternoon.”

“Yeah but he could be texting anyone,” Sousuke mumbles, dipping into the fridge for a coke.

Nagisa grins wickedly. “Have you ever seen Makoto smile at his phone?”

“Yeah,” Sousuke snorts. “His sitters send him pictures of his cats all the time.”

“No, I mean like –” His expression falls into one of dreamy bliss, hands folded over his heart. He falls sideways into Nitori with his starry-eyed swaying. “Like, oh my god, this boy is too cute for words, I wanna wrap him in a fluffy blanket and dick him down all at once.”

Sousuke pauses on his way to crack the soda open. “Who is it?”

Nagisa grins with all his teeth. “Thought I needed to stop meddling.”

“This is different –”

Nitori just pinches the bridge of his nose harder.

---

And then I opened the mailbox and THERE was the cat!

I'm glad you found her

Me too I was so worried 😞 I know she likes hiding in dark places but this is getting ridiculous

Hang on a minute

Ok

Sorry, had a thing

An annoying thing
There's this charity gala coming up - which is not the annoying thing - and the coordinators haven't found any musical talent for the event yet.

Oh

What kind of music were they looking for

I don't even know they're being really vague and honestly it's not my department because I don't know anyone who could perform.

I guess they just asked since it's a Tachibana Enterprises gala but still. So I think they're wanting me to coordinate the particulars because of that but I wasn't much help at all.

I don't know anyone who could do it on such short notice - the event is in a few weeks.

You like Asahi's music don't you

😊

You think he'd do it?

If I ask him

Haru

❤️

Yeah he'd be perfect for it actually

Ok. I'll tell him to dm you

Ok 😊
Uh what? Lol

FXLMCDENCR

WHO 68'cWh IS THIS!,($'

???

Give me a minute.

Sorry

My three roommates tackled me at once and tried to grab my phone

Oh 😊

Why?

They wanted to know who I was texting

Oh

I don't text a lot

So they're being weird

I really
Chapter End Notes

up next: nao gets the news that natsuya will be moving closer - we see more of the kirishima brothers; rin and sousuke have trouble focusing on work and studying bc of ahem other things

thank you so much for reading! have a lovely day~

twitter & curious cat
hi all! yesterday's episode was - a lot lol so i hope you enjoy!

for the natsunao scene, i listened to défiler (bande originale de la capsule no. 5 mosaert) by stromae and greedy instrumental just has a fun vibe for t.e. enterprises, as well as 134340 for the coffee shop. happy listening / reading!

**warning:** there's dom / sub undertones in the beginning of this chapter, so if that's not your thing, skip about 15 paragraphs.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nao says, “Did Tachibana-san say when you’re supposed to start working at the main branch?”

Natsuya muffles something, eyes closed. It was a weak attempt at speaking; lazy. He tips his head back into the pillows, the strong column of his throat painted in a hot gleam of sweat all the way down his naked torso. His pectorals flex and twitch with rough breaths, the noise of sexual starvation, but Nao’s voice is impeccably levelled as he asks the question again. When all he receives is another bored mumble, Nao reaches for the leather strap digging into Natsuya’s cheek and pulls the ball gag down, letting it sit in the hollow of his throat. Natsuya lets out a wordless vocalization without consciously meaning to if only because he’s been without the ability to speak for hours now. But he still doesn’t answer Nao’s question. And he’s smirking so, so faintly, because this is his favorite game and he and Nao both know it.

Nao’s fighting a grin as he hooks a finger through the metal hoop of Natsuya’s collar to yank him up. Natsuya’s whole body protests the motion with a guttural sound, boneless and strained all at once. The muscles of his arms tighten and flare when Nao forces him up because his wrists are still cuffed to the headboard, but he loves it, fuck, he loves it – Nao can feel it with every frantic throb of Natsuya’s cock buried deep in the softness of Nao’s body. Natsuya’s curls are a damp mess splayed across his forehead, posture slouched with exhaustion from being edged for hours, but Nao doesn’t even have a hair out of place. He’s icily composed even though he just wants to rock down and let go – but that’s not what Natsuya asked of him.

Nao pulls the collar this way and that to turn Natsuya’s face and observe him. He checks over his expression, making sure his features are lax and not tense with any sense of being too uncomfortable. Natsuya sways forward, mouth open for a kiss, but Nao leans back evenly. “Answer me.”

An irritated snarl builds in Natsuya’s throat even as he smirks wider. “I –” He licks his lips and swallows. “I don’t know. When I start at the main branch.”

“You didn’t ask?”

Natsuya shrugs as best he can with his arms bound, movements impatient. “Might’ve.”

His hips give a feeble lurch up into Nao, who is sitting on his lap while Natsuya’s on his back, and
Nao pins him down with a wild rush of breath. Natsuya groans in frustration, voice raw. Nao’s hands sweep up the man’s torso from pelvis to throat, brushing aside the cracked, dried candle wax on Natsuya’s skin as he goes. He leans down and hovers his mouth just inches from Natsuya’s. He holds his fingers loosely around Natsuya’s throat – he doesn’t understand the desire to be choked but Natsuya acts like it’s grounding; it’s definitely a profound action of trust. Nao’s lips glide up Natsuya’s chin to his mouth and retreats when Natsuya’s tongue tries to dart out for just one taste.

“All the money in the world,” Nao sighs. “And you still lack discipline.”

There’s something different about Natsuya’s smile in moments like these, when his penthouse is draped in red candlelight and the heat is thick and it’s only the two of them. His smile still has a taunting crook to it with a daring glint in his eye, yet it’s all softer. Moments like this give him a place to know that it’s okay not being the person of authority if only for a night at a time. This is where he feels safe, secure, and loved, all while he’s still grounded in the familiar ideals of protocols, regulations, and consequences. The world has humiliated him beyond his control in order to train him into a ruthless businessman; Nao is the only person he trusts enough to take away the control and stressful worries.

Nao gives a punishingly shallow roll of his hips and Natsuya hisses through gritted teeth. “Fuck,” he croaks. “Nao, please.”

Nao’s eyes fall half-lidded with endearment as he traces a single finger across the strong line of Natsuya’s cheekbone. “This isn’t about you being humbled enough to beg.” He squeezes one hand against the side of Natsuya’s throat, letting him know it’s there, making his cock burn inside Nao. He dips closer and sweeps to the side to breathe heat into the shell of Natsuya’s ear. “It’s about your ability to listen.”

Natsuya’s hands fall slack where they were clenched into fists as if Nao’s words flipped a switch inside of him. He gets it, finally. Nao sits up and rocks down, slow, deep, but Natsuya doesn’t say anything. He takes long inhales through his nose, throat clenched so hard that Nao can see the cording in his neck, and his hips tremble in restraint but never jump. His muscles relax and Nao can see it in Natsuya’s eyes when he falls into that blank, sleepy headspace where all he wants to do is please, where he stops having the desire to make anymore decisions. He gives all the power to Nao with one look, and that’s when Nao fucks down like he wants. “Good, Natsuya.” he breathes, voice hitching with every grind, heart fit to burst. He sweeps his hands all over Natsuya’s face and cradles his jaw tenderly. “You did so well.”

The pressure builds and builds between his legs as Natsuya falls more and more supple, bearing his throat in submission to the pleasure. “Let go,” Nao whispers, and Natsuya’s eyes fly open all-pupil. “You can let go, I’m right here, I’m here –”

He does as he’s told and Nao goes with him, the high cresting into something almost painful after building for hours. Then it breaks, and God, does it break. Natsuya comes back to reality like he’s waking up from a nightmare – not afraid, just fragile and desperate for touch. He gasps like he’s breaching the surface from nearly drowning and Nao uncuffs him before rolling onto his back so Natsuya can bury his face in his chest, and he doesn’t come back up. Nao cradles Natsuya, sweeps him up in his arms and holds him tight with gentle hushes to quell his trembling. Nao broke him like Natsuya asked him to and now it’s time to put him back together with kisses against his hair and soft reassurances in the dark.

At one point, Nao offers to fetch Natsuya some water but the man only holds him tighter with a possessive rumble, so Nao waits, running cool fingers over where the collar chaffed Natsuya’s throat a little – the collar’s been thrown off the side of the bed with the cuffs now. It’s bewildering, how
these types of nights become something more than just intense sensation; they help communication, give them a new way to bond and explore avenues of power. But as satisfying as the orgasms always are, Nao likes the aftermath especially, because there’s never a time he’s appreciated or needed as much. The responsibilities of the sexual dynamic can bring forth mental challenges due to the dire need for serious communication and a thorough discussion of boundaries, but there’s also emotional strains that both of them need comforting from in the aftermath.

Over the next hour, Natsuya falls in and out of a light slumber; Nao never lets him go, rubbing ceaseless patterns up and down his back. At long last, Natsuya braces his forearms on the bed to gather what little strength he has left and weakly lifts his head. His curls tumble over his eyes as he studies Nao, then he nuzzles closer and presses their foreheads together with a husky laugh, deep with absolute sexual satisfaction. “You take care of me so well.”

Nao smiles up at him and accepts his kiss, parting his lips for lazy, heavy strokes of tongue. Natsuya’s mouth is hot; he tastes like white wine and the peppery cigar he smoked at dinner. Natsuya leisurely scrapes his teeth across his neck, pecking him with a few breathy kisses as he goes. Nao says, “You need water.”

“Mm, and you need a bath.”

“I’m not walking to the bathroom.”

“Well of course not, moonlight.” Natsuya sweeps him up in his arms and carries him there.

Minutes later, Nao’s lying in the monstrous claw-foot tub with his ankles crossed over the side, the rest of himself submerged in steaming rose water. He’s nursing another glass of wine, this time red, and Natsuya sits on the edge of the tub with a pair of jeans rolled up his legs and a new cigar hanging between his lips – this one smells like grapes. The air between them is quiet and soft while Natsuya washes Nao’s hair, massaging the soap into his scalp with broad, caring strokes that make Nao’s shoulders tingle. Natsuya sighs, “God, I love your hair.”

He feels something close to bliss as warm water pours down his neck. Natsuya looks pleased at how Nao’s expression unravels and he murmurs, “I go in for my formal orientation with the main branch tomorrow afternoon.”

“So soon,” Nao muses, eyes rolling closed while Natsuya rubs sudsy fingers behind his ears. Amusement colors the man’s voice. “Disappointed?”

Nao steals his cigar for that, taking a long pull before setting it back between Natsuya’s smirking lips. “I’m just surprised; anything in business usually takes so long.” At least that’s what his past consorts told him. Natsuya’s younger than all of them, so perhaps they were just old men with a case of old-man-bitterness.

“Tachibana Enterprises has been without a CFO for a while now, ever since Yamazaki-san knocked the last one out.”

“Sounds like it’s up your alley, then.” Nao sighs as Natsuya massages his shoulders. “You’ll also be able to keep better watch of Ikuya when he transfers to Tokyo University.” He peeks an eye open and it crinkles. “You don’t hide your true intentions well.”

Natsuya chuckles. “It’s also an opportunity to keep my father away from him,” he corrects. He taps
Nao’s nose, making it scrunch. “The more freedom Ikuya has, the better. At least from the rest of the family.”

“But not you,” Nao says slyly.

Natsuya rolls his eyes. “I’m not going to be overbearing.” His touches become even more affectionate. “Am I not allowed to have other motives for wanting to be closer to the heart of Tokyo?” He cups Nao’s throat and slides up his jaw to level their gazes. “To you?”

“You’re moving very fast for someone who drunkenly confessed his love to his escort only a few weeks ago.”

Natsuya lifts a brow. “But?”

“But I like it, I suppose.” He glances out the window, where the world is black with skyscraper silhouettes and white snow. “Where is Ikuya right now? He shouldn’t be out in this storm.”

Natsuya snorts, smoke puffing with it. “He’s out with a friend from Keio who’s also transferring to Tokyo University next semester.” He combs Nao’s hair back. “I’m sure they’re fine; Rei isn’t the type of guy to stay out past 9 PM.”

“Mm.”

“Let’s get you out, I’m tired.”

Natsuya wraps Nao in a fluffy towel and dries him off while he sways on his feet, fighting sleep. Natsuya smiles, charmed by the sight, and picks one of his wrinkled t-shirts off the floor to dress him in. Natsuya really does lack discipline in his personal life; his penthouse is a mess of clutter because he’s lazy outside of work and he thinks maids will piddle through his stuff, so Nao will be the one washing the dishes in the sink and tidying up in the morning. But he isn’t too annoyed; he knew what he was getting into when he told Natsuya that he loved him back.

They curl up under the blankets and Natsuya kicks off his jeans before rolling onto his stomach. Nao props up on an elbow to observe him and his gaze traces the ink across Natsuya’s back. The wolf glares at him, spanning across the entirety of his back with red and yellow details. There’s a tattered banner across the wolf’s throat with the Kirishima name inked into Natsuya’s skin forever. Nao knows that he didn’t have a choice in getting the tattoo, but the man will make sure his little brother has a say in the matter.

Nao can’t stop himself from taking Natsuya’s hand and he stirs, blinking up at him. Nao’s very smile aches, his voice hushed. “You’re a good man.”

Natsuya smiles back sleepily and pulls him close. “If you say so, moonlight.”
You know that was more money than we talked about for tuition

Consider it tip.

Fuck Sousuke I don't know what to say I've been crying all night

😊 thank you

You're welcome. Please don't cry. How's studying?

I'm @ the library. I have a final in 2 hrs but I can't focus

Because you're texting.

No

Other reasons

Which are..?

Thinking

About what?

What do you think

😊

Oh

Have you thought about me too

Of course. But I'm at work.

Ew
“Kirishima-san is here.”

Sousuke startles up from his phone and it clatters on the desk. There’s a beat of silence as Nitori blinks from where he’s standing in the office doorway. “Should I ask him to wait?”

Sousuke clears his throat and pockets his phone. “No, tell him to come on in.”

Nitori watches him fumble with his cuff links and arches a brow, but he doesn’t comment.

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Ha

Study hard, all right? You'll do well.

K bye 😊

Bye.

You have to send the heart back

Why?

Which heart?

Pick one

Where are they at in the keyboard?

🤔 under the symbols tab!

Hang on

❤️

It looks like your hair.

Kisses for you 😘gement 🎀

😊
His door swings open a minute later and Natsuya steps in without knocking – the action speaks of confidence, the kind that’s boastful and therefore, irritating, but Sousuke refrains from judgement. Natsuya’s greeting is brisk and his handshake is firm, his suit a custom-tailored piece, but his button down is wrinkled and he isn’t wearing a tie. He’s not here to impress anyone with his looks; the proof of his worth is in the numbers he can crunch. But more importantly, he’s giving a clear statement that he hasn’t decided yet if Sousuke and Makoto are worth putting forth the effort to impress in terms of business. Sousuke doesn’t know how to feel about that.

They talk over light scotch and they do not discuss the company yet – Sousuke never starts interviews like that. Not that this is even a formal interview since Makoto already fucking hired Natsuya, but Sousuke’s going to have to get a proper read on him before they venture into business territory. He asks, “How’s your brother?”

Natsuya smiles from where he’s sitting in front of Sousuke’s desk, looking completely at ease in the leather guest chair. “He’s with me, actually – at the Starbucks downstairs with a friend from his old university who’s visiting the city for a few days.”

Sousuke raises his brows even though Nitori’s already dished this information. “Did Ikuya graduate early?”

“No, he’s transferring to Tokyo University next semester.”

“Oh.” Sousuke nods thoughtfully and takes a sip of his drink. The ice clicks in the silence as Natsuya watches him. “Did he decide to transfer so that he can be closer to your family?”

Natsuya stiffens just a little, just enough for Sousuke to tell. “Our father has a lot of influence at Keio Business School, so...” He chuckles to himself, a slight huff of dark humor as he crosses his ankle over the opposite knee. “Quite the opposite, actually.” His posture is far more stiff than it was moments ago, his expression composed but guarded.

Sousuke studies him. “You seem like you’re afraid I’m going to ask something.”

“I’m not,” Natsuya smirks, “Afraid.”

“Worried, then.”

Natsuya’s smirk widens as he glances out the window. He sighs, finger tapping the lip of his scotch glass in a frustrated pattern. “The particulars of my resignation with Kirishima International are not public knowledge.” He turns back around and levels his gaze with Sousuke, leaning forward with elbows braced on his knees. He’s not trying to intimidate him in a threatening manner, but he’s firm. “I intend to respectfully keep it that way, Yamazaki-san.”

Sousuke smiles. “I don’t give a fuck about the particulars, Kirishima-san.” Natsuya chuckles at that but he stops short when Sousuke adds, “You’re known for being… energetic, when it comes to challenges, to...” He gives him a knowing look as he takes another sip of his scotch. “To conflict. I’m the same way, but I need to know what level you’re on.”

Natsuya sits back with a dry, half-lidded look that dances on the edge of smug. “I’m not going to hit anyone if that’s what you’re thinking.”

Sousuke doesn’t waver and that makes Natsuya falter if only a minuscule inch. Kirishimas try to
intimidate others by nature, even on a subconscious level when they’re not truly meaning to. Sousuke watched his father interact with Natsuya’s father at city events enough times to know that first hand. Kirishimas are used to being the boss and that’s not going to happen here. While there’s a hierarchy of status on paper, Tachibana Enterprises wouldn’t be what it is if Sousuke and Makoto thought that their employees were lesser people. Kirishima International was built on other people’s backs and Natsuya simply might not know anything different, but that mentality won’t work here. Sousuke’s employees trust him to make good decisions for the company and thus, themselves, and he doesn’t take their trust lightly.

Natsuya looks down at his drink and frowns, his curls falling over the top half of his face and hiding his expression from Sousuke. Natsuya sighs long and hard. “My father is an aggressive man, therefore, so is his company.” He shrugs to himself. “He taught me everything I know about – everything. Business, life.” He huffs a bitter laugh. “There are some roots that cannot be pulled out, Yamazaki-san. Not those in your heart.” He lifts his face and looks far more open, far more human, than Sousuke’s ever seen him. He also looks tired. “I don’t want to be involved with business like that, nor do I want to lead such an influential life of corruption that my brother will have no choice but to follow.” His face hardens. “If you understand.”

Sousuke looks him over. “So you’re open to learning? Taking orders?”

Natsuya considers for a moment before nodding. “I am. You and Tachibana-san have a good set of corporate ethics that reached all the way to the Chuo Ward. It fascinates me, if I’m being honest.” He nods once more, firmer this time. “I’m interested.”

“Good.” Sousuke straightens with satisfaction and finishes his drink. “Then we’re glad to have you here.”

“So I’m sitting there this morning, tipsy as hell because I accidentally put Cuervo in my orange juice instead of sugar – don’t look at me like that, it was a happy accident – and I’m in that freezing lecture hall in Letters Building 3 – you know the one – on question #96 of my Philanthropy final with like, half a thing of lead left in my pencil, and my phone starts blaring.”

Kisumi gasps in dread. “No.”

“Yes,” Nagisa whines, head thunking against the counter. He’s sitting on a bar stool in the T.E. Starbucks while Kisumi swirls whip cream over the top of his strawberries and crème frap before handing it to his friend. Nagisa keeps his pout intact as he takes a sip. “And of course, you know Watanabe-sensei was more than happy to call me out in front of everyone just because I was the one to ask why all those Greek statues have such small dicks when we were covering the lack of humanitarianism in ancient civilizations.”

Kisumi scrunches his brows with a disbelieving grin. “How’d you get on the topic of statue wood?”

“Oh, we didn’t,” Nagisa says. “We were discussing Roman humanitarianism and the question popped in my head, so I asked.”

Kisumi leans his hip on the counter, absently fixing his hair around his uniform visor. Curiously, he asks, “Why are their dicks so small?”

Nagisa slaps his tiny hands on the counter in frustration and he barely makes a sound. “I never got to find out because Watanabe-sensei was like, that’s inappropriate, you need to stay focused on the
topic at hand, but –"

Kisumi glances at the counter as two guys approach the register. Ayumu’s busy cleaning strainers so she can’t help the customers and Kisumi opens his mouth to tell Nagisa to hold that thought, but he’s scrolling through his phone and still going on a tangent. Kisumi deems it safe to leave him be while he takes the orders.

He comes back just in time for Nagisa to look up from his phone triumphantly. “And that is how I ended up showing Watanabe-sensei the dirty snap from my last hook-up to prove that I wasn’t texting during the exam.”

Kisumi’s faintly winded; it’s a usual sensation when you hang out with Nagisa enough. He shakes his head as he makes the orders – one latte macchiato and an Earl Grey brew. “You’re a maniac, you know?”

“Heh, so I’ve been told.” Nagisa smirks as he slides his tongue all the way up the length of his straw and Kisumi knocks him with a gigantic laugh, his aching feet feeling worlds better with his best friend around.

Kisumi froths the milk for the macchiato and asks, “When’s your next final?”

“Tonight, international law. I took that humanitarianism final this morning and I only worked four hours today, but I am toasted. Like, I actually cried when I had to leave my bed this morning, I’m just –” His smile withers a little, strained. “Honestly, I’ve reached that point in finals week where I literally don’t have the mental capacity to care anymore. I just wanna get so fucked up that I forget my student log-in code.”

“Same,” Kisumi sighs, pouring sugar into the latte. Ayumu slides him the tea and he beams at her before topping off the latte with whip cream. “I’ve got my color fundamentals final at 5 and my online Adobe course – the one I just took for fun – expires in like, three days, so I need to finish it sometime before then.” His heart sinks. “Asahi’s got his music theory exam tomorrow morning and two after that in the evening, so I probably won’t be able to see him for at least – what are you looking at?”

Nagisa’s gaze pierces something over Kisumi’s shoulder. Kisumi starts to turn around but Nagisa seizes his arm with a hiss of, “Don’t look, who’s that?”

Kisumi deflates and gives him a look, whispering, “How am I supposed to know if I can’t see them?”

“The guy you just took the order for, who’s that?” Kisumi tries to sneak a glance over his shoulder but Nagisa grabs him harder. “Wait, why is he with Kirishima Ikuya?”

Kisumi frowns. “Who?”

“Oh wait, Ai-chan said that Natsuya went in to talk with Sousuke, so maybe –” He clenches Kisumi’s sleeve. “Look at that hair.”

Ayumu takes the latte from Kisumi with the tea and glances at the labels before calling, “Ikuya, Rei.”

Kisumi and Nagisa watch the two boys approach the counter, one with a sweep of teal hair and bored, half-lidded eyes, the other with red glasses and the most immaculate posture Kisumi’s ever
The second boy takes his tea from Ayumu with a polite smile. “Thank you.”

Nagisa nudges Kisumi with an insistent look and Kisumi slides over to lean on the counter with brows lifted at the blue-haired guy. He must be the one called Rei, since he ordered the Earl Grey. “Tea need anything?”

He blows on the steam before taking a sip. “No, it’s perfect.”

Kisumi beams. “Great!” To make him look busy and not like he’s playing the role of the best wingman to ever exist, he makes a blind grab for a blender in the sink and towels it off with a rag from his apron. “Never seen you two in here before; usually it’s just a bunch of suits.”

Ikuya speaks up, his voice a lazy mumble. “My brother’s upstairs.”

“Oh,” Kisumi breathes, understanding dawning on his face. “Does he work here?” He gives a soft, bright laugh. “I’ve probably made coffee for him before if he does.”

Ikuya’s eyes narrow slightly and he ducks to sip at his straw. “He’s just transferring here.”

“Ah, cool! Tokyo’s a fun place to be. Lots to do.”

Rei shares a hesitating glance with Ikuya before grimacing through a bashful laugh. Faintly, Kisumi hears Nagisa wheeze. Rei says, “We don’t, ah, actually live here. Well, we will – both of us are transferring to Tokyo University next semester.”

Kisumi can feel the waves of Nagisa vibrating in his chair. “Oh wow, I go there too!” Rei looks surprised but Ikuya’s still watching him suspiciously. “There’s lots of cool people there. I’m Kisumi, by the way.” He tips his head with a friendly smile. “Feel free to drop by if you ever need help with anything or just wanna say hi.”

Rei looks humbled. “Thank you, we appreciate that.” Kisumi almost doesn’t catch it when Rei nudges Ikuya into making him nod his thanks as well. “I think we’ll be going to wait for his brother in the lobby now.”

Kisumi flutters a little wave. “Bye, stay warm!” The boys start to make their exit, passing right behind Nagisa, and Kisumi gives him the nod to elbow a container of napkins off the counter. The container hits the floor louder than expected and napkins go flying, startling Rei and Ikuya backwards as Nagisa turns around with a theatrical gasp, hands thrown up.

Kisumi purses his lips to hide a grin while Nagisa flutters to the floor to cram the napkins back in the container. “Goodness, I’m sorry!” He’s made quite a mess and Ikuya just stares down at him, making Rei huff before he tells him to hold his tea and hands him the book that was under his arm. He kneels down to help Nagisa and the blonde rambles, “Finals week makes me such a zombie, I’m not even aware of what I’m doing.”

Rei looks up to hand him the napkins and inhales sharply when he notices how close their faces are. He gets redder by the second as his eyes dart over Nagisa’s features. Nagisa’s cute and everyone knows it, his features soft and round with enough charm to – well, enough to freeze an absolute stranger into mystified stillness.

Rei glances at Nagisa’s glossy lips before he snaps back to himself and clears his throat. “It’s – it’s no problem, we all get like that sometimes.”
“Yeah,” Nagisa smiles, voice dipped in honey-sweetness. Kisumi wishes he had his camera with him; they’re just looking at each other while the rest of the world spins on and Ikuya looks like he’s seconds away from kicking Rei’s ass into gear. This is definitely a Polaroid moment, not something to be captured with his DSLR since his Polaroid would look better with the sepia-pink undertones of the film and the snow falling down the windows and –

He shakes his head to clear it as both Nagisa and Rei stand up. Nagisa hugs the napkin container to his chest and he’s swaying on his toes in a subtle little dance like he’s about to burst. That makes Kisumi’s brow lift high because Nagisa only does that when he’s enamored with something, which is usually pink Hennessy or a fuck boy from the humanities department.

Nagisa chews on his plump lower lip and says, “I couldn’t help but hear that you’re transferring to Tokyo U.” He perks up, hair fluffing. “I’m a student there! I’m Nagisa.”

Rei flusters. Ikuya just looks bewildered, glancing around like he’s wondering if everyone in a square mile radius is also a student. Rei says, “Oh. Maybe we’ll see you.”

“Hopefully,” Nagisa giggles, and Rei blushes harder. Nagisa slides a card into Rei’s slack hand. “You can text me if you ever need help with anything! It’s a big campus, I still get lost sometimes.”

Rei blinks down at the card and finally smiles. “Oh. All right, thank you.”

He splutters when Ikuya grabs him by the back of his jacket and hauls him toward the lobby. Rei politely bows his head at Nagisa and stumbles after Ikuya, saying something like, “They’re really nice here, aren’t they?” Ikuya just groans and pulls him around the corner.

Nagisa sidles back over to his bar stool and sets the container on the counter. He crosses his legs, delicately brushing his jeans off with a smug little grin. Kisumi smirks. “That was forward even for you.”

“That’s how you gotta be with engineering majors, Kisu-chan,” Nagisa sighs, sipping on his drink and looking grandly satisfied. “They study so much that having conversations with real people becomes a foreign concept to them.”

“There’s no damn way you figured out his major just by looking at him.”

“That textbook he had was on isentropic efficiency and he was discussing polymers with Ikuya while you were making his drink. I don’t think Ikuya’s also an engineering major since he looked like he was falling asleep while standing.” Kisumi cranes back and Nagisa winks. “I read men very well.”

“Think he’ll text you?”

“Probably not, but you miss all the shots you don’t take.” He hops off the bar stool and shoulders his bag. “It’s finals week, I gotta feel lucky when I can. I’m gonna head out, I’ll say hey to Asahi for you since our finals are in the same building.”

“Give him a kiss for me,” Kisumi whines, hugging his arms around himself. “I miss him so much.”

“Kay, not that I don’t love tasting your dick on someone else’s mouth –”
“Wow.”

Chapter End Notes

up next: sousuke & rin reunite

twitter & curious cat
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

hi! i normally don't talk about this but my fibromyalgia is being particularly annoying tonight, so i apologize for any more mistakes than usual. i have a lovely cuppa & the day off tomorrow, so no need to worry :) 

chapter song is hazy - rosi golan feat. william fitzsimmons, 10/10 will make you cry

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

After his sports psychology final, Rin’s brain feels like a pulled muscle. His feet drag him across campus, walking entirely on autopilot, and he hopes that he’ll somehow end up back at his dorm, but his heart leads the way to the college’s indoor pool instead. He walks through the facility doors and his poor overworked heart is beating too fast from caffeine and stress, but peace washes over him at the thought of going to his locker for his swim suit and sinking to the bottom of the pool, letting the world fall away.

But then he actually sees the water and Rin’s struck with a sense of fear that feels violating and unnatural. That can’t be right – the water is always ready for a fight, welcoming the slice of his arms and the kick of his legs, but tonight Rin just stares at the pool. He can’t move an inch closer to where he wants to be; he lost that race at nationals but it doesn’t feel like the water won. That defeat was his fault alone and he’s ashamed of himself. He doesn’t deserve to be anywhere close to the water now.

He finds himself sitting up in the towering lifeguard’s chair, staring down at the world below with his chin tucked over his knees. He watches the water dance in the silver lights, scared shitless at the thought of even dipping a toe into the pool.

The doors open and Rin’s not surprised to see Haru pad over, shrugging off his hoodie and stepping out of his jeans as he goes. He still has a habit of wearing his swim suit wherever he goes, a habit from high school he never grew out of. Uncaringly, Haru tosses his clothes on the ground and pauses when he notices Rin. “Hey.”

“Hey. How was your physics final?”

“Hold that thought.” Haru dives into the pool and Rin chuckles.

He breaches the surface looking enraptured as he gives a bone-deep sigh. He rakes his hair back, arms working to keep himself upright in the water. “The test was about as ridiculous as I thought it’d be.”

Rin considers. “Kinda sad that’s a relief in it’s own way.”

Haru huffs. “I know. Then at the end we had to write three paragraphs on ways we think the course can be improved. Like, don’t make the questions so opinionated rather than factual? Don’t get so upset that everyone doesn’t have fuckloads of financial aid and can’t afford the textbook?” He flushes angrily. “That class was a nightmare.”
“But it’s over,” Rin reassures. “You made it through and it’s over. You never have to go back into that lecture hall again.”

“If I passed,” Haru snorts, swimming on his back and folding his arms over his belly like an otter.

Rin grins, tired eyes straining as the pool lights reflect off the water. “You passed, Haru. I know you did.”

“Thanks.” Rin watches him go under for a while, swimming back and forth from end to end. Subconsciously, he counts Haru’s time and grimaces to himself. He’s really too often competitive for his own good.

Haru comes up for air and asks, “How’d your sports pysch exam go?”

“It was fine,” Rin says, stretching his legs and wincing when his knees crack. “Hagiwara-sensei’s been understanding this semester and she even brought us cupcakes before the final. She was a good teacher; says some mind-blowing shit about athletic conspiracies on Facebook. Nice lady.” He’s lucky that exam was easy because he couldn’t concentrate worth hell. For one, he’s mentally exhausted – but the only thing he wanted to focus on was the thought of fingers digging bruises into his thigh, spreading it wide, a big, rough hand squeezing around his cock and –

Haru says, “Have you talked to Sousuke?”

Rin smiles with a blush. “We’ve just texted.” He folds his jacket tighter around his middle, the leather Burberry one Sousuke lent him. It still smells like the man’s cologne; that might be a better culprit as to why Rin feels so hazy, rather than blaming it on lack of sleep.

Haru studies him. “You should probably see him again after finals.” Rin cranes back but Haru just shrugs. “You smile like a dumbass whenever someone mentions him.” He dips underwater as Rin splutters.

Rin makes it exactly twelve hours before he’s ready to explode from stress.

He’s so tired that he’s nauseas with it. The left side of his face is throbbing with a headache and he’s delirious with exhaustion. When he and Haru got back to the dorm last night, they noticed it was colder than usual but they were too sleepy to care, plus Asahi and Hiyori were already dead to the world in their bedroom. However, by 1 AM, everyone was awake and shaking so hard that they almost rattled right off their beds. Turns out the heater in their dorm broke during the night, so they gathered around Haru’s stove-top to try and unthaw their fingers, but there was no way that they were going to be able to fall asleep like this.

They thought about going to Kisumi’s but it was the middle of the night and two blocks away, plus none of them wanted to trek through the snow. So they draped themselves in every blanket they owned and the four of them waddled down the hallway to crash in the lobby. Nao heard the commotion and peeked out of his dorm, eyes widening in an expression of concern. Rin was nearly crying, he was so tired as he rambled the situation, and Nao quickly ushered them into his dorm – it was so toasty warm that Rin wanted to fall in the floor with relief. Asahi actually did.

To deem who got the luxury of crashing in a bed, Nao asked who had finals in the morning, which was Rin and Asahi. Haru and Hiyori were forced to spoon on Nao’s couch and Rin would have
snapped a picture for his blackmail file if he weren’t dead on his feet. Nao made them each a cup of hot chocolate to unthaw their frozen insides before taking to his recliner. Rin might have woke up to Asahi dry humping him and giggling Kisumi’s name in his sleep, but he was in a bed and he was warm, so that’s all that mattered. Though he did end up shoving Asahi off the bed and hogging the blankets after that ordeal.

Three hours of restless sleep do not make for a sound mind, nor is it a proper basis to start one’s day. Rin’s currently at Aki and Nii’s dorm since Nao had his own finals to study for, and it was just respectful to get out of his hair after he saved their asses last night. Rin’s mind is blank and his nerves are strained; he’s stared at the same three sentences in his textbook for ten minutes now. He just wants this week to be over because he can’t handle the tension in the air everywhere he goes. The entire student body is on the edge of a breakdown, trying to cram as much information into their heads as possible. Coffee shop profit and campus drug use peaks around finals week; all forms of speed get handed around due to the need to skip sleeping and study through the night.

Even though Rin’s pretty much got his studies under control, he still wants to cry because he just doesn’t know what else to do. He can never grasp the material well enough to be confident for exams – there’s always a curveball question, something nobody in the class could have ever prepared for. All of life is like that, he knows nothing is supposed to be fair, but he’s just... frustrated.

He wants to be held for hours with no words exchanged in the cathartic silence of the embrace. He wants his face cradled and he wants to be kissed with tenderness like he’s adored. He wants to be touched like he’s fragile because he fucking is right now. All this stress needs to get fucked away and screamed out. His body needs to reek of sex-sweat and he needs the sense dicked out of him.

Rin lets out a breath of defeat and unlocks his phone.
How the hell did it break?

Idk old building

It's not fixed yet so I'm studying at my friend's dorm

But I feel sick. And I'm tired. And I still have two finals left.

When are your next finals?

I have one in 3 hours and the last one is tomorrow

Sorry I feel like I'm bothering you lol

You're the furthest thing from a bother.

Please don't cry

I can pick you up after your final if you want.

And you can just get away from campus for a while, if you need to

Yes please

You don't have to say please. I'd love to.

I don't like that you're cold and probably sick. Not to mention exhausted

I'm just being dramatic ha

You're really not.

I'm not taking u from work?

Not hardly. I'm ahead in everything I do.

Good to know 😊
Just get through this next test. And I know this goes against everything I've said but maybe you should stop studying for now and try to sleep a little. Sleep helps more than anything.

We love a man with character development

You did not just 😁

Take a nap, Rin.

Yes Sir

Don't

Do that

Why?

Because

...

OOOOOHMMMM

😭

shut up lol

Nighty night 😴

Meant 😞

No you didn't

❤️
Rin finishes the exam faster than intended but it can’t be helped because he’s running on fumes and his body is losing fuel by the minute. He checks over his answers on the multiple choice portion, then he glances over his short-essay responses before finally feeling satisfied enough to turn in the final. Oshima-sensei gives him a smile and thanks him for taking the course, which Rin responds to politely and hopefully not as impatient as he feels.

He steps out of the building and welcomes the bristling chill of outdoors. His exhale leaves him in a tumble of frost as he makes way for the parking lot – he almost gets hit by at least five sleep-deprived commuter students, but a part of him gets it.

Sousuke didn’t tell him which car he was driving but Rin picks out him out in the maze of vehicles easily. Parked between a sagging pick-up and an ’03 Honda is a classic Mercedes, the black paint so glossy that it looks wet. Rin approaches the car and hears the doorlatch click before he opens the door. He bends over to peek his head in shyly, bangs catching at the corner of his mouth. “Hey.”

“Hi, pretty.”

He almost melts into the snow, toes curling in his boots. Rin shoulders off his bag and steps inside, tucking his backpack into the floorboard. He turns to Sousuke insistently, lips pouted for a kiss. Impatience by nature is a damning trait, but added with the effects of longing and yearning for somebody so close – that leaves him feeling particularly bratty.

Sousuke chuckles before a hand cups the back of Rin’s neck, and the touch is startling if only because it feels so good. Sousuke plays with his hair, fingers running up the back of Rin’s head to comb out the wind-tossed strands. Then Sousuke’s leaning in and Rin is reminded that he will never be able to prepare himself for these sort of kisses, the catch of Sousuke’s mouth against his, the way Rin’s lip nestles perfectly between his two.

Rin’s mouth feels so much more plush when it’s under Sousuke’s; he’s never had such a full-body reaction to a chaste little peck. It’s almost unnerving, feeling his pulse drop. Sousuke kisses him again, lips parting only to close over Rin’s once more, firmer this time. Rin’s nose nestles into Sousuke’s cheek as he moves closer and he brings a hand up to Sousuke’s face – he’s pristine of stubble, skin dewy from this morning’s aftershave –

Sousuke rears back with a wide-eyed shudder. “You’re freezing.” Before Rin can react, Sousuke blasts the heat and takes both of his hands, fingers engulfing Rin’s own. Sousuke’s hands do feel nice – weighty and solid, palms textured with roughness. The rasp of his thumb is a comforting security and Rin happily lets this tiny part of himself be held.

Sousuke’s brows sink in concern, eyes narrowing as he looks him over. “Rin, you look awful.”

He smirks. “Thanks.” Not only is this the first time Sousuke’s seen him without make-up, but he’s also witnessing the physical personification of how exhausted Rin is. He’s too worn out to care.

Sousuke grimaces in apology but doesn’t take it back. “Your voice is hoarse. Do you want to go to a doctor?”

Rin almost laughs because he doesn’t know any millennial-era college student who goes to doctors, they just drink it off or rub two crystals together and hope for the best. However, he really could go to a doctor now that Sousuke’s money is sitting in his bank account.
Rin sobers up. “No, I think it’s just because I’ve literally had no sleep and it’s so cold.” His eyelids sink closed.

Sousuke makes an affectionate noise and cradles Rin’s face. Hesitation pressurizes in the air. “Do you, uh – want to come to my place?” He rushes to rephrase it. “Or I could – I could get another hotel room, whatever you’re comfortable with.” His thumbs circle the rise of Rin’s cheekbones. “I just want you to sleep somewhere warm.”

Rin smiles as his eyes laze open. “I wouldn’t mind seeing where you live.”

Sousuke studies him. “You’re sure? I don’t live in Central Tokyo, it’s in Suginami – it’ll be about a thirty minute drive with traffic.” Rin nods and pecks a reassuring kiss against his palm. “… All right, then.”

Rin settles back in his seat, gaze blankly set on the dull view of the parking lot. When the car doesn’t move for another few seconds, he looks up to see Sousuke glancing him over. “What?”

His smirk is one of unadulterated satisfaction. “That jacket just – swallows you.”

Rin yawns and sets Sousuke’s hand over his thigh, lacing their fingers together with a happy squeeze. “It’ll look good on your bedroom floor after my nap.”

“If you say so,” Sousuke chuckles, but he doesn’t let go of Rin’s hand as he puts the Mercedes into drive.

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Rin wakes up when the car pulls a tight curve and he sits up with a sharp inhale. “Sorry,” Sousuke says calmly, one hand keeping the wheel in a firm turn while the other is still cradling Rin’s fingers. “Exit ramp.”

Rin rubs the sleep from his eyes and blinks them hard to adjust. The Mercedes veers onto a two-lane highway with a wall of forest on either side. “Whoa,” he breathes, entranced by the greenery – the snowfall isn’t nearly as bad here as it is in Tokyo. “I’ve never been to Suginami.”

“It’s great. Lots of parks; aqueducts and shit.”

Rin rolls the window down just a crack since the temperature outside is freezing. The wind hits him like needles but he wanted to take a deep inhale of fresh air. He lets it out in a sigh and rolls the window back up. “Damn, that’s nice.”

Sousuke grins. “Can’t find anything like that in Tokyo. I come home and my clothes smell like smog, I can’t stand it.”

“Yeah, it was a shitty adjustment when I went there for school.” He never appreciated living in a beachside community until his world became nothing but concrete and the faint but ever-present stench of garbage. “I’m from Iwatobi.”

“Never heard of it.”

Rin chuckles, heart warm with childhood memories. “It’s a small town.” His voice grows soft with nostalgia. “Right by the ocean.”
“Sounds like a nice place to grow up,” Sousuke muses. “You miss it?”

“Sometimes. It was hell my freshman year but it got easier.” He misses the familiarity of the people and he didn’t realize what a comfort it was to have neighbors and shopkeepers greet him by name until he didn’t have that anymore. “Are you from Central Tokyo?”

Sousuke nods. “Yeah, but I never felt at home there, really. Maybe because I work there, I don’t know. Makoto’s the same way; he’s got a place about fifteen minutes from mine and he’s right on Wadabori Lake.” He huffs a laugh, seeming bashful. It’s cute. “My house is actually where we grew up. I had an apartment in Tokyo up until four months ago.” He falls into an odd sort of silence, something heavier and solemn. “Our mother’s on the road with the twins and Makoto didn’t want to live in the house but neither of us wanted to give the place up, so I moved in.”

“Oh.” He didn’t mention anything about a father. Rin broaches happier subjects, anxious to make him smile again. “You’ve got twin siblings?”

Sousuke chuckles and Rin tries not to sag with relief. “They’re seven. Pure devils.”

He smiles. “I remember when my sister was seven, she was still too cute to get mad at when she was annoying.”

“That basically sums it up,” Sousuke shrugs. “They love it out here, so I hope they can visit soon.”

“They’re with your mom?”

“Yeah, she’s a fashion designer. Travels everywhere, dragged me and Makoto all over the world until we were like – what, thirteen?” He sighs, absently rubbing across Rin’s knuckles. “It’s definitely not something I’m complaining about, but…” He drives up to a towering wooden wall between marble pillars and lets down the driver’s window to punch a code into the keypad. “I’d rather be at home.”

There’s a beep and the wall parts down the middle to reveal a private road. Sousuke pulls through and Rin admires the smaller willow trees draping the land in green shadow, eyes peeking over an arched, stone bridge as they drive over it. There’s a frozen brook below, a silver slate that carves through the black soil of the surrounding forest.

The car breaks through the trees and veers into a rounded drive with a fountain in the middle. Rin’s stomach drops at the sight of the house; it’s a relatively compact structure with varying square sides, but it’s enormous. It’s more tall than it is wide, with stone siding and black accents. The woodlands soften the appeal, making the dark architecture not as masculine, but every inch of the place screams of wealth.

“We’re here,” Sousuke says, parking the Mercedes at the front of the home.

Rin has to make a conscious effort to keep his eyes from staying wide. “Big,” he says lamely. Stupidly.

Sousuke crooks a handsome grin. “It was a family house, so it’s too much for one person, really.”

They step out of the car and Rin takes his bookbag with him just so he can wring his nervous fingers around the straps, but he gladly accepts Sousuke’s hand when he reaches for him. Sousuke guides
him through the garden path with white pebbles on either side, ferns swaying in the fresh air. The
man pauses with the key in the door and Rin hears the distinct sound of a muffled bark from
somewhere in the house. Sousuke says, “I can put my dog up before you come in if you’d rather not
deal with her.”

Rin laughs. “It’s okay, I like dogs.”

Sousuke still doesn’t look convinced. “She’s a pitbull. Some people are weird about that but she’s
not aggressive at all.”

He makes a face. “I’ve never really been around one, but I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

With that, Sousuke opens the door and leads Rin inside by the hand. And Rin, he kind of – blacks
out for half a second. Just half.

He cranes his head all the way back to look up at the ceilings, which climb at least 40 feet high. He
drops his gaze and dizzily takes in the rest of the space. The entire left side of the house is a wall of
glass showing the garden and a koi pond, draping the house in natural light. He assumes they’re in
the living room – there’s a sprawling sectional with dozens of pillows, along with a flat screen
mounted above an architectural masterpiece of a fireplace. The space transitions into the kitchen and
the island is an enormous slab of granite with captivating patterns.

Rin looks over to the staircase hugging the wall in time to see a white dog clambering down to greet
them. It’s a stout animal, muscled in the chest with front paws that walk a bit pigeon-toed. The dog
snuggles its bulky head into Sousuke’s knee and he rubs its muzzle before it notices Rin. He smiles,
not like it even matters, and he stays still while it sniffs his shoes. Then the dog trots away and
disappears around the corner. Rin blinks after it and Sousuke chuckles. “It takes a lot to impress her,
don’t be offended.”

Rin glances over the pristine tile floors and quickly takes off his shoes. Sousuke does the same before
grabbing his hand once more. “You wanted to nap?”

“Yes, please.”

Sousuke sighs, “I said you don’t have to –”

“Sorry.” Rin flips his hair and corrects, “Yes, Sir.”

The man’s flat stare only survives a few seconds before he shakes his head with an exasperated
smirk. He guides him upstairs and Rin glances over the family photos climbing the wall as they go.
Most of them look professionally done, no iPhone pictures with gritty quality or any Polaroids from
childhood. He can’t take in many details other than the aesthetics, but he knows that the photographs
don’t look natural or spontaneous. They’re poised, professional. He’s never thought about instilling
such a concept when it comes to family.

Sousuke leads him into a hallway with lacquered oil paintings of nature and looks over his shoulder.
“Do you want a guest room, or…”

Rin smirks. “Not used to having someone in your bed?”

Sousuke rolls his eyes, turning back around, but Rin caught his blush. “It’s whatever you want to
do.”
“I think I’d like waking up in your bed.”

The man’s hand feels a bit more damp at that, and he pushes a door open at the end of the hallway. The room is long and narrow but fairly boring – well, as boring as luxury can be. The reading nook looks hilariously under-used and there’s only a few books on the shelves; the rest of the ledges are cluttered with old charger cables, worn notebooks, and blueprint scrolls. The bed is unmade, a thin comforter pulled back and the sheets wrinkled, but the sight is a relief, somehow. It makes Sousuke look average at least in one sense.

Rin neatly tucks his bag into the corner and Sousuke asks, “Do you want something to wear?”

“Just a shirt,” Rin yawns, shimmying out of his jeans right where he stands. Sousuke blinks at him faintly, throat working before he dips into the bathroom. Rin chuckles and sheds his jacket with the hoodie underneath, then he slides under the covers to hide his faded boxers and mismatched socks. Every time someone’s fucked him while still wearing socks, he thought it was so tacky, but he’s not having sex and it’s freezing, so he can forgive the notion this time.

His arms hug a pillow to his belly and he sags into the mattress, his exhaustion no longer an ache but a contented drowsiness. Sousuke pads out of the bathroom wearing sweats, chest swelled with muscle and looking broader in his cotton shirt. He climbs onto the mattress and dips a hand beneath the sheet to caress Rin’s naked back. Sousuke’s eyes fall half-lidded with a smile as he teases a finger up the line of his spine, making it arch. “I might not give you a shirt now. You look good without one.”

“Too bad, it’s cold as balls,” Rin says, and Sousuke laughs as he hands the garment over. Rin puts the baggy thing on and it smells like lavender softener, which is slightly disappointing – he’d rather have a shirt that Sousuke hasn’t washed, one that still smells like his apple-spice body wash, but he supposes he can live with it.

Rin settles back down onto the mattress and Sousuke pulls the covers up to his shoulders before stroking his hair. “Warm?” Rin nods and lets himself be petted, leaning into it. Sousuke lies down properly and rubs Rin’s back, his touch soothing the ache in Rin’s bones. His eyes are shut when he feels lips against his hairline. “I’m sure you did well. I know you worked hard.” His voice is hushed in the dark, intimately close, and though Sousuke’s words could be considered meaningless given that he still doesn’t know the length of Rin’s struggles, the reassurance is everything he needs right now.

Rin leans up and doesn’t have to say anything – fingers prop his chin up and Sousuke kisses him, their mouths snug together with comforting pressure. When they part, he feels Sousuke’s confliction thick in the air, not knowing whether he’s supposed to leave Rin be or not. Rin hikes a thigh over Sousuke’s waist and embraces him without hesitation. After a moment of astonishment, Sousuke’s body falls lax and he adjusts in Rin’s hold. The man pulls him even closer and Rin pillows his head on Sousuke’s raised arm, nestling into his bicep. Rin pecks him there and sighs happily, unaware of how Sousuke stares at him as he falls asleep.
I've spoken with student housing and some other dorms lost heat as well; they won't make it to yours until around 9 tonight.

UGHHHHHHH

NINE?????

I know, I'm sorry.

Not your fault Nao

I'm tired now so I'll crash at Nagisa's

Fuckk kkkk 😞

I guess I'll be at Kisumi's tonight

Hiyori, you're welcome to stay at my dorm. But I know how miserable the couch is.
I can't sleep in your bed?

Not with me, nope.

😂😂😂

Hiyori, Kisumi said you can sleep at his place tonight since you already listen to us have sex

I should be offended but

You really shouldn't, Kisumi's being forgiving.

Can't relate

Same.

Same

but I ACCEPT THE OFFER geeze
this fool said geeze

Is Rin taking a final right now?

No, I think he went out

Out?

WITH WHOMST 🙄

Probably the same dude he went out with the other night

I guess so

I texted Nagisa and he said Rin can also stay at his place tonight so it's fine

He said we can sleep on his blow up mattress

Wipe that thing down before you sleep on it

Ｂｔｗ Nao who was that guy at your dorm when I was leaving?

Who?

That guy in the suit

Oh some idiot from the business department

Idiot?

Total dumbass. Wanted my notes from Journalism just because he was busy jerking off in the bathroom.
Oh

I am spitting

Anyway, I have to turn my phone off for my next final now. Ta.

Hiyori what the fuck

You know that was Natsuya from the coffee shop

WAIT SHIT IT WAS?? I wasn't there when the guy showed up!!

Just curious

No you got mad bc Nao pretty much called you a perv

Which you are

I AM NOT

OK BUT HIYORI WE STILL LOVE YOU?? WE BEEN KNEW

Thanks but I WAS genuinely curious

Why??

Maybe I'm tired of being a broke bitch???????

oh my god

You were gonna ask about how to get a sugar daddy

Yeah until u RUINED IT

HOW DID I RUIN IT????????
WAIT

Guys he's still in the chat

Oh

My go

FuckfuckFUCK

HOW DO WE DELETE HIM

I don't know.

HOW ARE YOU CALM RIGHT NOW

It's not my ass that's gonna get kicked across campus.

I'll probably be able to see it from Nagisa's.

Can you all shut up I'm trying to sleep

|^| | ^| |

RIN

RIN HELP HOW DO WE DELETE NAO FROM THIS CHAT BEFORE NAO TURNS HIS PHONE BACK ON

I don't?? Know??? Why do u need to delete him

Scroll up.

WAIT DONT

Oh.

😂😂😂😂😂

Rin please don't laugh I'm about to cry
You are all about to get bodied

Nao’s terrifying but when he sics Natsuya on you?

😂😂😂 oh my god ok been real I’m going to sleep now

You coming home tonight?

No

Ok

RIN DON’T GO WE NEED TO GET NAO OFF THE CHAT

SHIT ASAHI WHAT DO WE DO
and no hiyori didn't break his phone he was just frantically googling "how to delete someone from groupchat" and also "how to pray"

up next: rin's cute & ssk's having trouble surviving it (aka ssk pov)
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

happy tuesday!

chapter song is louis the child - the city (with quinn xcii).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sousuke isn’t one for sentiment; he can’t afford the time to daydream and his own family gets compartmentalized like every other aspect of his life. Though the Tachibanas are as loving as they were when they adopted Sousuke, there was a strict, unspoken rule that there was a place for emotion and a place to do business. It was a subconscious brain-washing not of malicious intent – it was a survival tactic, a rule that promised Sousuke success if only he followed it.

His mind doesn’t drift easily but as he stares down at Rin curled around him, his brain just – falls quiet like never before. Something tells Sousuke that in this bed, alone with Rin, is not a place for thinking or anticipating how every next move will be organized. Sousuke’s learning very quickly that anything involved with Rin is going to be unexpected. There’s no way Sousuke can prepare for him and he doesn’t mind that as much as he should.

Sousuke’s never been a spontaneous person; he isn’t allowed to be with a company on his shoulders and his family’s reputation on the line. But fuck, he is tired, and he didn’t realize just how exhausted he was until Rin first smiled at him, and gave him a resting place in the circle of his arms.

Maybe he’s reading into it too much, maybe not enough. It’s best if he doesn’t try to figure it all out at once because he couldn’t figure Rin out if he tried his best. But that’s okay – he’d like to think that they have time.

Sousuke dozes for a while, enjoying the embrace too much to fall asleep. He’s content to drift and feel his mind relax from where there’s always tension straining between his temples. His eyes laze open every few minutes and he can’t believe how peaceful Rin looks; he really needed the rest and Sousuke wonders how often Rin doesn’t take care of himself.

The notion can’t exactly be reprimanded because Sousuke knows college makes demands that can’t always be healthily met. School is an exhaustive effort like work is, but the thought that Rin’s gone four years of being this haggard is a little unsettling. Sousuke might not know much about him yet, but seeing anyone so tired makes his chest hurt.

He hopes Rin hasn’t had to face his troubles alone; he has the feeling that Rin uses sex to rid himself of pent-up frustrations, so that might have been his coping mechanism through college, but Sousuke knows from personal experience that sex alone isn’t enough. Sousuke’s shit at vocalizing his emotions but having Makoto with him just as an understanding presence changed everything for him. Rin mentioned he had a best friend and there’s no way he isn’t popular, not with that face and that passion behind every word he says. That makes Sousuke feel a little better.

He knows that Rin’s an adult and capable of taking care of himself, but Sousuke is a worrier by
nature as seldom as he speaks on it. Maybe that’s because he was saved by the Tachibanas, he doesn’t know. Maybe he wants to take care of someone because he’s been without human touch for so long – well, that might not be accurate because Rin’s touched him enough to last a lifetime and Sousuke only wants him more with every brush of his fingers. What he wants precisely, he isn’t sure.

But for now, he’s got all the contentment in the world just knowing he was able to help someone fall asleep, someone who deserves it so much. Sousuke knows what it’s like to be without. He knows what it’s like to be cold. It’s been so long that he almost forgot the feeling, but seeing it in Rin made memories come back full force, and Sousuke couldn’t stand it.

It’s over now, that’s all that matters. Sousuke’s good at forgetting, or at least he’d like to think so.

An hour later, Nitori texts him about some emails to reply to and Sousuke has to get up for that if only because Nitori will catch hell from correspondents if Sousuke doesn’t do his part. He makes sure every inch of Rin is tucked under the blankets, no toes peeking out or shoulder bared to the cold, then Sousuke goes to the study with a sigh.

He likes working hard because it makes the time go by quicker, but he isn’t aware of how many hours have passed until Rin’s standing at the library entrance and Sousuke glances at the corner of his computer monitor. It’s been six hours – evening falls on the house in plum-golden shades and Sousuke’s mouth is dry, his body stiff from sitting in the same position from so long.

Rin’s still got the comforter draped around him and he’s staring. “You wear glasses?”

Sousuke blinks. “At home, yeah.”

He moves to take them off but Rin gestures for him to stop as he makes his way across the study, blanket cape trailing behind him. He rounds the desk and makes a seat of Sousuke’s lap, shifting to get comfy. Sousuke sighs without meaning to, hands sliding up the back of Rin’s shirt to feel the warmth of his skin. He’s soft and supple after his nap, eyes still half-lidded but far more alert. Rin’s hands settle on his chest with a sleepy, happy little smile, his voice hushed if only because it’s late. “Hi.”

Sousuke smiles back. “How was your nap?”

“Mm, good.” He dips forward to breathe Sousuke in, brushing their noses together. “Why’d you get up?”

Sousuke squeezes his hips in apology. “Work.”

Rin pouts, brows creasing – he looks adorably perturbed. Sousuke leans into Rin’s throat, finding the juncture of his neck and shoulder to run his mouth across it. He presses his lips against different grooves of his throat, feels them twitch under every kiss. He suckles lightly at the ticklish edge of his jawline near his ear and Rin squirms, smiling through a whine of, “Ah, don’t.”

Sousuke chuckles and moves to his ear, tracing the curve of the lobe with a quick flick of his tongue. Heat flares off Rin’s body and Sousuke’s breath falls heavier. “Do you want me to come back to bed?”

“Not right now, I’m hungry.”
Sousuke leans back and it’s his turn to look perturbed. Rin grins and leans forward to suck his pouted lip, then he pecks both corners of Sousuke’s mouth before the center. He looks nervous all at once, ducking to watch his fingers play with the hem of Sousuke’s shirt. “My friends texted me a while ago and said the heat’s still not working at the dorms.”

Sousuke shakes his head in frustration. “What do they expect you to do when it’s snowing like this?”

Rin shrugs. “Everyone’s found somewhere to stay for the night, but um…” He takes a shaky breath and finally looks up at Sousuke. “I can – crash with a friend tonight, if you’d rather me not… be here. Tonight.” He blinks a few times. “With you.”

Sousuke’s blushing just as hard now. “Oh.” Rin is literally sitting on top of him yet they’re looking everywhere but each other’s faces. “It’s not any inconvenience.” Fuck, what the fuck? That sounded so professional and cryptic that he wants to throw something – preferably himself, right out the window. “I mean – I wouldn’t mind at all.”

Rin chews his lip, looking up shyly. “You’re sure?”

He’s surprised when Sousuke pulls him closer, hiking his knee further up his waist. Curiously, Sousuke asks, “Why do you think I wouldn’t want you here?”

Rin picks at the lint on Sousuke’s shirt. “I dunno, it’s something I’d be weird about, if it were my place.” His laugh is one of embarrassment.

Sousuke lifts a brow, grinning slowly. “But since it’s not yours…?”

Rin catches on and links his arms around Sousuke’s neck, thighs spreading to get even closer. “Since it’s not mine, and it’s you –” The strands of his hair tickle Sousuke’s face as he leans down, hovering his lips over him. “I think I can handle it.”

“Think so?” Sousuke’s hands travel down the small of his back to his ass.

Rin sighs, pretentious. “I guess so.” He laughs against Sousuke’s lips and kisses him back, mouth opening for him. They make out for a while, just rough enough that Sousuke has to set his glasses down when Rin’s hands get a little restless. A yawning noise from Rin’s stomach makes them stop short and Sousuke cranes back. Rin shrugs sheepishly. “I said I was hungry.”

“What do you want to stay here for dinner or go out?”

Rin blushes for some reason. “You can cook?”

“Yeah. I live by myself, after all.”

He ducks his eyes. “What do you wanna do?”

Sousuke considers, absently running his hands up from Rin’s knees and back down again. “I haven’t went out for groceries this week, so there’s not much here.”

Rin nods, pecking Sousuke one last time before rising. “Okay, I’ll go put clothes on.” He takes his blanket cape with him in a grand swish and Sousuke laughs, affection curling in his chest.
Sousuke hasn’t been on too many dates but he suspects barbeque take-out in a Maserati isn’t usual.

Rin didn’t want to dine in to eat because he was embarrassed about how he looked for whatever reason – Sousuke thought he looked lovely as ever, especially since he’s well-rested, come to find out Rin was talking about his clothes. He doesn’t look bad; he’s wearing the same ripped jeans from the night they met but they fit like a glove and that’s all Sousuke can think about.

Sousuke chews his kabayaki, enjoying the sweetness before he says, “I don’t have any fashion sense.”

Rin snorts, sliding a chicken bite off his skewer to plop it in his mouth. “Got more than me, anyway.”

“Not hardly.” He sucks soy sauce off the pad of his thumb and regards Rin. “Do things like that bother you? Clothes, I mean.”

Rin makes a face before reaching for his to-go cup of Coke. “No, not really.” He chews his straw a bit. “I don’t care what other people think, it’s just – with you, I feel…” He laughs shyly. “I guess I’m more aware of how I look, I don’t know.” Quickly, he rephrases, “Not that I think you’re judging me or whatever, I know you like me.”

“Good, because I do.”

Rin smirks. The silver interior lights sharpen his features as he tips his head back, highlighting the long line of his throat. He sits in silence for a minute, knee bobbing back and forth where it’s propped in the seat. “I’ve gone my whole life being okay with what I have. Getting to have more all at once is…” He sighs, but he’s wincing through a smile as he turns to Sousuke. “It’s kind of a lot.”

Sousuke nods, not knowing what comfort to offer. He doesn’t want to say relatable, or try to sway Rin any other way than his true feelings in the matter. This is new for Sousuke, too. He considers his words, glancing down at Rin’s legs. “Well, you probably shouldn’t wear ripped jeans while it’s snowing.”

Rin blinks down at himself – there’s gaping slashes across his thighs, torn at the knees and down his shins. But he laughs as he shoves Sousuke. “Don’t talk shit, these jeans are lucky. I lost my virginity in them.”

Sousuke lifts his brows. High. “Which was how long ago?”

He recites the memory without hesitation. “High school graduation. Literally, the night of.” He leans back with a nostalgic sigh, then he smiles bashfully. “I had the biggest crush on this brain-dead jock from the lacrosse team. There was a party, you know how it goes.” His smirk is smug. “He had never even looked at another dude before. I was his first guy.” He soberes up. “He was sweet, though. Told me right off the bat that we could never be anything, but he still went through with it.”

Sousuke gives him a look. “That’s your definition of sweet?”

Rin knocks him with his raised knee. “As far as closeted golden boys go, yeah.”

Sousuke shakes his head. “Well, my point was that you should probably get jeans that aren’t ripped since the weather’s only going to get worse.”
Rin considers, pursing his lips as he stares out the windshield. He accepts with a huff. “Okay. Got anywhere we can go together?”

“Yeah.” Sousuke puts the car into drive and pulls onto the road, headed toward Tokyo.

Rin fiddles with the radio and Sousuke would reprimand anyone else, but he finds himself curious about what Rin will choose. He settles for a station that reeks of Nagisa’s Top 40 playlist he blares at the office, but it’s not as annoying when Rin’s the one humming the tunes.

After a while, he feels Rin looking at him, hears the smirk in his voice. “You never shared your first time story.”

Sousuke groans and Rin cackles, nudging him insistently. He gives a defeated sigh, trying not to cringe at the memory. “I was fifteen –”

“Fifteen? How the hell did you even know what to do?”

“I didn’t, really,” Sousuke winces.

Rin groans a laugh into his hands. “God, that sounds terrible.”

“It was, everything about it was a shit show. Met a girl at a gala. She wanted to and I was like, sure, how hard can it be – stop laughing – we went in the bathroom. Both of us faked it, I’m pretty sure. Then I went home and that was it. Watched TV until 3 AM feeling real fucking weird and went to bed.”

“Was she fifteen too?”

Sousuke shrugs. “I didn’t ask and she didn’t ask me. She looked older than me, though.”

“That sounds shady as fuck, Sousuke.”

He snorts. “It happens all the time around… endeavors of wealth, if you will.”

Rin gives him an unimpressed look. “Fancy way of saying ‘around rich people’.”

“Yes, it wasn’t any sort of isolated incident. People with money are used to asking for what they want without having to worry about the consequences.” His hand tightens on the wheel. “Something about the experience told me that I didn’t like girls as much as I thought I would.” He’s never said that out loud before and he feels dazed as it comes out.

Rin tips his head with a frown. “As much as you thought you ‘would’? What do you mean?”

“I thought I hadn’t – caught on yet or something. To looking at women like the other interns did. I just didn’t see what they did.”

Rin hums with a nod. “I’ve been with both but I like guys more. I haven’t ever really sat down and thought about what to label myself, I just…” He shrugs. “Sleep with who I wanna sleep with.” He squints in thought. “But sometimes it’s weird. It doesn’t matter if the girl’s chill, it’s like I have this –” He fumbles through a gesture. “I start thinking I have to play some sort of role with them? Even if they haven’t hinted at anything like that at all. That’s probably just some internal thing, though. I don’t feel like that with guys.” Sousuke doesn’t respond and Rin leans forward, right in Sousuke’s
face as he sips his drink loudly. “First time with dick, fess up.”

“No,” he pouts.

Rin flops back into his seat with a groan. “Was it that bad?”

“It wasn’t bad at all. He was amazing.”

Something about his tone makes Rin freeze to the bone. “No way,” he breathes. Sousuke braces himself but he can’t help but grin as Rin pales. “No fucking way, you are straight bullshitting me right now, Sousuke –”

“No, I’m not. Sorry.”

Rin’s voice climbs a dozen octaves. “I took your virginity?”

“No, you were just my first guy.”

Disbelieving, he shoves Sousuke again. “That’s literally the definition of – why didn’t you say anything?!”

“Stop pushing me, I’m driving.”

“And I’m about to gag, what the fuck, what the fuck –”

Sousuke laughs louder than he can remember. “It’s not a big deal.” He takes Rin’s hand to press a reassuring kiss there, voice dropping without meaning to. “It couldn’t have been better, I promise.”

“I can’t believe you. How’ve you gone this long without hitting it once, not anything once?”

“You’re vulgar, you know?”

“Point?”

Sousuke rolls his eyes. “It’s not like I could find some faceless stranger that I could trust enough not to talk about it ever again. And I was telling you the truth when I said it’s hard to meet people with how much I work.”

Rin just stares, wide-eyed and reeling. “But you were so good, the first time…”

Sousuke shrugs, quietly flushing with pride. “It wasn’t that much different than a girl.” A lot tighter and worlds better, but relatively the same principle. Rin doesn’t say anything and Sousuke turns to see his eyes set flat as slate. He scrambles to backpedal his words. “Not like, you were like a girl, just the –”

Rin doesn’t waver. “So you’ve never took it up the ass?” He bats his lashes with another sip of his drink.

“Can’t say I have.”

Rin looks him over, mouth curling around his straw. “Hmm.” He sets his drink down and licks his lips. “Damn, I need to start makin’ a resume: here’s a list of all the gay cherries I’ve popped. Athletes
and business influencers fully disclosed.”

“You could probably write a book about it,” Sousuke nods thoughtfully.

“Specials, interviews. We’ll get Hideo Muraoka to play you in the TV adaption.”

“Who?”

Rin groans. “Was there nobody you’ve been lusting after in the closet? No celebrities or anything?”

He makes a face. “Not really.”

Rin shakes his head as he opens up his Instagram. “Kay, time for a crash course in thirsting.”

“I’m driving.”

“And I’m giving you a valuable life hack to having the most fun of your gay existence, so, we’ll start at the explore page –”

Rin likes shopping, always has even when he didn’t have any money to spend. He loves the atmosphere of Harajuku, and getting dragged to Shibuya with Nagisa and Kisumi makes for a fun time despite that they shop for hours – normally he tags along for Asahi, who spends many a night in “the boyfriend chair” outside the changing rooms, praising anything and everything Kisumi tries on and shows him.

Rin’s never set foot in Ginza, Tokyo’s mecca of glamour and high-fashion. Therefore, he’s a little intimidated when Sousuke says it’s the only place they can go in together. “They’re used to high-end clientele,” he explains. “So we don’t have to worry about the employees rushing to the press if they recognize me.”

Rin accepts that and also takes the mask Sousuke hands him, a black one that hooks around the ears and covers the lower half of his face. Plenty of other people are wearing them tonight to block the wind chill. Rin was already wearing a cap to hide his unruly nap-hair, and Sousuke grabs one from the backseat as well before they head into Ginza.

Rin finds an Abercrombie & Fitch, which probably wasn’t Sousuke’s location of choice, but he flocks to the familiar sight with a breath of relief. Rin says, “I’m gonna look for jeans here.”

Sousuke stares at the store in confusion, flat voice muffled behind his mask. “It sounds like a nightclub in there.”

Rin smiles and unlinks his arms from around Sousuke’s elbow. “You wanna wait out here?” But he’s tugging him insistently, bratty, not wanting to part. He blames it on the fact that Sousuke’s so damn warm and solid. “Maybe you’ll find something you like.”

Sousuke heaves a sigh, letting himself be dragged inside. “I guess I’ll look for socks or something.”

Rin kneels his ass and Sousuke chuckles as he’s pulled into a dark world of overwhelming cologne and shirtless posters.

Rin comes out of the ordeal with only two pairs of jeans, but he’s not used to spending that much
money at once. Sousuke seemed surprised that was all he was getting, but he didn’t encourage him to buy anything else since it was clear that Rin was still trying to create his own role in their unspoken and slowly shifting dynamic. Sousuke swiped his card without hesitation and now Rin’s currently having a crisis over why such a simple action was so attractive. Maybe it’s just because money itself is a security, he doesn’t fucking know, he’d rather not get philosophical about it at – least not right now.

Sousuke follows him around Dior though Rin’s too entranced to have a mission for purchases. For one, there’s a man standing at the store entrance who offers them champagne and Rin almost doesn’t accept it, his instincts bristling because if there’s anything he’s learned in college, it’s don’t blindly accept a drink from someone you don’t know. But it’s safe to assume that this alcohol isn’t laced with anything, so he happily sips his champagne with his mask bunched under his chin as Sousuke walks beside him far more subdued.

Rin’s eyes sear as he gazes down at jewelry counters with rows of tennis bracelets, the diamonds twinkling with rainbow prisms. There’s towering shelves of handbags made from every animal skin imaginable, keychains plated in gold, ties made of fucking silk feathers.

He bypasses all of that foolery and zeros in on another section of the store. Maybe it’s the champagne, but a plan starts forming in his mind, his stomach dropping into a hot pit. Rin chews his lip and glances around before turning to Sousuke. His palm flattens against the man’s hard stomach as he coos, “You’ll wait a minute?”

Sousuke’s brows crease before he nods slowly. Rin just smiles and runs a quick hand down his stomach, making it tense and shudder before he disappears around the corner.

He finds exactly what he was looking for and goes back to Sousuke, pushing a random blazer into his chest. Sousuke grunts as he catches it and Rin presses him against the wall. They’re hidden by clothing racks and the crowd is sparse, so he tugs Sousuke down by the back of the neck to brush his lips against the man’s red ear. “You wanna do something fun?”

Rin yanks down Sousuke’s mask and kisses him before he even has a chance to catch his breath. Being in such close proximity and not having the right to even brush hands nearly killed Rin. The kiss hits him like a shot, the wet warmth, the taste. Sousuke groans and roughly tips Rin’s jaw open wider, tongue sweeping his mouth in blind hunger. He bites into the plump swell of Rin’s lower lip and Rin grinds against the strong bulk of Sousuke’s thigh with a whimper. His hands dive under
Sousuke’s shirt to feel his naked skin, fingers sneaking into the back of his jeans to dig into the firmness of his ass.

Sousuke gives another impatient rumble and Rin leans back, flushed and shaking as he grins. “You gotta be quiet.”

The man goes to reply but he stops short, his entire body freezing with it. His eyes widen as he takes in the entire length of Rin’s body from head to toe, turned on so fast and hard that he wavers. “Fuck,” he whispers, sounding doomed, utterly destroyed.

Rin swivels back and forth in a bashful little dance, garter straps straining across his thighs. He looks up through his lashes all coy. “Like it?” He didn’t have time to grab stockings – he was looking for panties but could only find a cream babydoll. The straps are skimpy and the lacy hem tickles him mid-thigh; he’s never went this far with lingerie and worried that he’d look like an idiot, but this is one of the only situations where losing muscle mass this semester did him some aesthetic good.

The way Sousuke’s looking at him – he’s never felt so desirable as he does right now, in this dressing room stall, in this questionable predicament with this man who doesn’t feel so much like a stranger anymore.

Sousuke stares and Rin knows just how good he looks. He quickly finds himself now pinned to the wall, Sousuke’s teeth making a mess of his throat as he shoves a thigh between Rin’s legs. He gasps and startles up on his toes before rocking down, lips rolled in to cage a moan. His hands scramble to Sousuke’s pants, the clang of his belt buckle loud in the quiet. Rin’s world distorts, focus jumping from the rasp of Sousuke’s zipper to the murmur of conversation in the rest of the store. There’s music playing from the overhead speakers, a song that he’s heard but can’t recall – he knows he’ll remember the name the instant he hears it again somewhere else, and it will forever bring him back to this moment of earnest want and Sousuke looking at him like he’s the only good thing left in the world.

Rin’s hand dives into Sousuke’s underwear before finding his cock damp with heat and stiffening thicker by the second. Rin sinks into a crouch, not willing to deal with carpet burn on his knees. He pulls Sousuke’s cock out and gives an experimental squeeze, gauging how soft he is. Rin drags his tongue all the way up his length from the underside and Sousuke clenches a fist against the wall, bowing into himself with a hiss. Rin finds the sensitive place at the front of his cockhead and licks the spot raw, sucking little kisses against it. He licks his palm and fists the shaft in squelching pumps as he swallows the head and yep, now this definitely tastes like a sweaty club bathroom blowjob, but Rin finds himself greedy for the salt of Sousuke’s precum.

It looks like it’s kills Sousuke to keep quiet when Rin bobs down on him – his face twists, body flinching away even as he fists Rin’s hair. Rin sucks until his jaw aches and threatens to lock up, droll rolling down his chin. He pulls off and looks up from between Sousuke’s legs as he offers a condom and tube from his discarded jeans.

Sousuke looks conflicted for all of two seconds before Rin gives an insistent suck on his cockhead and he snaps into action. Sousuke pulls him upward and turns Rin’s front to the wall, pinning one arm behind his back, then laces their fingers together. Rin’s cock gets trapped between the wall and his belly, cheek shoved against the plaster, throat twisted sideways and straining his exhales. Sousuke bunches the babydoll up over his naked ass; precum rolls thick and slow down Rin’s dick when wet fingers slide between his cheeks.

A voice at his ear, low and authoritative. “Not a sound.”
Rin grins breathlessly as his eyes roll closed. “Yes Sir.”

He chokes on a gasp when two fingers ram inside him, jaw falling slack, eyes shooting open only to glaze over. He instantly breaks out in a sweat and has a sensory overload from the firm intrusion. Sousuke flicks his fingers into a teasing curve inside him, massaging into the softness of his walls. He pushes deeper, the tight rim seizing his knuckles, and Rin’s knees dip to rock down on his hand. He rolls his lips in and bites them closed as Sousuke works him open, throat clenching to stop from whimpering. He holds his breath with every fuck of Sousuke’s fingers, head prickling, lungs caught in vice grips.

He hears the crackle of the foil square ripping open. Sousuke’s breath is labored at Rin’s ear, chest heaving against his back. They both freeze at the click of high heels outside the stall and it takes everything in Rin not to mewl as Sousuke rubs his cock between his asscheeks, latex catching against his rim. He scrambles for Sousuke’s hand and presses it over his mouth, his body restless, the instincts of lust telling him to rock back and down. Sousuke pins him harder against the wall to keep him still and Rin breathes heat against the man’s palm, tension coiling in his thighs and festering between his legs.

Sousuke rocks into him, not properly thrusting, just dipping in to get Rin adjusted as quickly and quietly as possible. In any other situation Rin wouldn’t feel such bare motions, but this predicament alone – the fact that they could get caught – has him racing toward an orgasm faster than ever before. Sousuke’s cock drives in and the man cages a grunt behind clenched teeth, hand tightening around Rin’s wrist where he’s keeping his arms pinned behind his back.

It’s the most satisfying agony, not being able to move or make a sound as Sousuke fucks him. The silk of the babydoll sends chills down his body with each shift of it, toes curling into the carpet until they ache with tension. A new swarm of voices has them both stilling, sweat dripping off Rin’s chin in the quiet. They flinch when a stall opens a few doors down and it sounds like a group of women are chatting as they try on clothes.

Sousuke’s too gone to stop – Rin can hear it in his breathing, feels it in the quicker, shallow thrusts. Rin feels high, he feels nasty and wanted. Sousuke grabs both of Rin’s wrists in one hand and squeezes the other around his hip, digging bruises into the flesh. His breath hitches as he shoves in deep and he comes with his head bowed into Rin’s shoulder – the action is so startlingly intimate and sweet that Rin’s heart seizes.

Weakly, Sousuke grinds into him but he’s softening, so he has trouble pushing into the tightness of Rin’s body. His insides spasm, raw and sore, and he flinches away with tears prickling his eyes, hissing, “Ow, hurts, hurts –”

Sousuke kisses down the back of his neck to help Rin relax enough for him to slide out, but Rin’s face still twists. He lets Sousuke turn him around and his frame shakes, left alone on the edge of coming. Sousuke crouches and Rin’s face flies to the ceiling as the man swallows his cock while pumping him fast and hard. Rin fucks into the wet heat of his mouth, pressure coiling tighter with every flick of Sousuke’s tongue. His fingers tremble in Sousuke’s hair when fire climbs his spine and twists – he tries to warn Sousuke but the man swallows around him eagerly, brows furrowed over closed eyes as Rin comes.

He falls back against the wall, his very nerves curling in satisfaction. Sousuke stands back up in time to keep Rin from falling over and holds him up in an embrace, brushing kisses over his forehead.
Rin’s eyes laze open with a giddy smirk but Sousuke makes a sour face as he smacks his lips at the taste in his mouth. Rin snorts and shoves him before getting dressed.

Needless to say, they buy the babydoll.

They go back to Sousuke’s house but leave the bags in the car, too languid to care about hauling them upstairs. They crash on the couch with the fireplace blazing and Rin drinks a glass of chardonnay, his feet in Sousuke’s lap while the man finishes some work on his laptop, absently rubbing Rin’s ankle with his free hand. Arena naps on the loveseat and occasionally peeks an eye open to study Rin, but overall she seems content with his presence.

They take a shower together before bed and Rin climbs on the mattress in another one of Sousuke’s shirts, the one he wore during their outing. It’s not washed so it’s still warm from his skin, just how Rin wanted it. They make out lazily in the dark until Rin’s exhaustion gets the best of him and he turns to press his back against Sousuke’s chest, lacing their fingers together over his belly. Sousuke envelops him in a way Rin’s never allowed anyone else to before and half-asleep, he finds himself breathing a disbelieving laugh. “You’re so warm.”

He feels the curve of Sousuke’s smile against his cheek. “So are you,” he whispers back.

Chapter End Notes

up next: finals end and a well deserved turn-up ensues (makoharu scenes included)

twitter & curious.cat
hi all! hope you have a great start to your week.

**note:** in canon, takuya, toro, minami, + shouta are on the samezuka swim team.

chapter song is *powertrip by j. cole*, i wrote the makoharu scenes to *frank ocean's cover of strawberry swing originally by coldplay*.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Rin’s convinced that bars never make as much profit as they do the night after finals. He recognizes all kinds of people from campus, everyone joined together in the desperation to let loose as they flock to the oasis of alcohol. Booths are scattered with bottles, shots, nachos left abandoned and soggy from the humidity in the club. Rin’s stomach churns from sour martinis, stale rum and iced vodka, his mouth a landfill of tastes – heat and liquor and pineapple-smoke from a hookah bong because it was sitting on the table and Rin’s inhibitions are tucked neatly in his back pocket at the moment. One would have to be drunk to deal with the flashing lasers and the billowing spires from the fog machines, and Rin is definitely, pleasantly, plastered.

He can’t remember the last time he had this much fun, happy. Nagisa’s spraying champagne as usual and he’s always the most fun to dance with because he and Rin love the same club-bangers; they scream the nastiest lyrics in each other’s faces like they’ve acted out every filthy lyric, they laugh until they weep and get lost in the sea of people.

Kisumi and Asahi stay on the floor all night, wrinkled shirts halfway unbuttoned from wandering hands, faces gleaming with sweat and flushed from gin. They always get envious looks when they dance like this: Kisumi’s back pressed against Asahi’s chest, embraced in a grind that not even drunk strangers would be tipsy enough to try. Any onlooker can tell they’re in deep but Asahi falls sober terrifyingly fast if anyone saunters up to Kisumi, and he glares them into walking away before laughing all carefree with his boyfriend once more. He puts on the same intimidating act for any of his friends dancing with strangers who get too handsy; Asahi’s good at playing the role of fake-boyfriend to scare a creep away and he’s had to do it for Haru at least twice tonight, but Hiyori’s sitting with him at the bar now and Rin knows that Hiyori will happily mace any jackass with a smile, so he’s reassured.
He tosses back a round of Applejack shots with Nii and as always, Haru’s there to hold Rin’s hair back when he stumbles outside to puke his guts up. Rin comes back to reality after that and Kisumi sends Haru back inside, promising he’ll stay with Rin to catch a breather. Kisumi makes him drink a cup of nasty tap water and shoves sticks of gum into his mouth, then they sit in crouches in the alley behind the club and pass a joint back and forth. Kisumi smirks. “It’s only 11 PM and you’re already hurling. Club’s open ‘til 4, killer.”

Rin huffs, frost tumbling out of his mouth. He squints while taking a pull from the spliff, voice strained as he holds in the smoke. “Jus’ like that house party first week of freshman year.” He breathes out a gray haze and shakes his head at the memory.

Kisumi laughs, resting his head against the brick wall. “When you tried to act hard pretending you could do a kegstand and accidently deep-throated the hose?”

Rin chuckles, hand raking his damp hair back. “Yeah, that.”

Kisumi’s eyes fall half-lidded with nostalgia as he smokes. “I knew you’d be my brother right then and there. That was some stupid shit but ain’t nobody that brave.”

Rin’s eyes roll closed as he grins, swaying where he’s crouched. “You smoked weed the first time that night. Jus’ cause you wanted to act *cool* around Asahi.”

Kisumi groans at the memory. “I had no business taking my first smoke at a party with people I didn’t know. Asahi’s been doin’ pot since he was like, sixteen; I took that one puff and almost shit my pants.”

Rin cackles, falling over and curling next to Kisumi for warmth. “Didn’t he leave with you, though?”

Kisumi snorts, smoke tumbling out of his mouth. “*Yeah,* to make sure I didn’t hurt myself. We had only been on one date, I was fucking mortified, but he was so sweet. Took me to that 24/7 breakfast buffet off campus and let me eat whatever I want.”

Rin grins languidly. “And here we are.”

“Here we are,” Kisumi nods, gazing up at the night sky. “Can you believe we actually made it to senior year? Got one semester left and we still don’t know what the hell we’re doing.” Kisumi’s drunk too, so he probably doesn’t mean that too much. If anyone in the group has their shit together, Rin would vouch for Kisumi, hands down.

Contentment buzzes through his veins. “As long as nobody else knows what to do, I’m okay with it.”

“You’re a sentimental drunk, you know?”

Rin shrugs. “I’m real happy, Kisumi.” He really is in love with every moment of this night – the rasp of concrete grains under his boots, J. Cole’s *Powertrip* booming from the club, all the pretty neon dancing across brick walls that have questionable stains. He’s cold and drunk and so, so relieved. He licks his quivering lips with a tornado of emotions fisting his gut. “I forgot what it was like to breathe this semester.”

Kisumi looks at him but doesn’t call him out for having a voice thick with tears. He nudges their
shoulders together. “Well, I think you’re wakin’ up – from feeling like that, I mean.”

Rin stares at him, brows twitching together and creasing with a trembling breath. He’s not convinced; he’s scared.

Kisumi levels their gazes. “You always make a way for yourself, Rin. You take care of yourself even though you get lost sometimes – but hell, we all do.” He sighs and leans his cheek against the top of Rin’s head. “You were stressed beyond your limit this semester but you still figured out how to get through it, and –” He cackles, making Rin blink up at him. “And you fell in bed with a billionaire. Seriously, it’s iconic.”

Rin snorts, stretching his legs out and crossing his ankles. It takes him a minute since his body moves like jelly. “Guess not many people can say that, huh?” Hot chills rake his arms. “God, Kisumi, he’s so –”

“Sweet, rich, hung, I know – you mention it every time we text.” Kisumi smirks at Rin’s blush, voice pitching into a playful little coo. “You’re kinda hot for him, you know? More so than anyone else I’ve seen you with.” Kisumi studies him with a knowing look as he takes another pull on the withered spliff. “Shouta said that you didn’t even have condoms in your wallet when he asked for one earlier, and you’ve only been dancing with Nagisa tonight. Normally, you like picking people up at places like this. I was surprised.”

Rin’s tongue dances behind his lips. “I let Sousuke kiss me.”

“Damn, for real?” His brows shoot up with a disbelieving grin.

Rin fumbles through a sloppy gesture. “I dunno, he just – I wanted to kiss him.” He leans into Kisumi with a shocked whisper. “He had never even fucked a dude before, Kisumi.”

He giggles at Rin’s reverence. “Careful saying that out loud, Nagisa might sense there’s gossip out here and come running.” He sober up and pats his friend’s knee. “Just hang with him for a while, yeah? I mean, it’s not bad what you two have going on right now and I’d never knock your hustle, but I really think he’s a good guy. If he makes you happy, just see where it goes.” He crushes the tiny remaining pinch of the joint with his sneaker. “Best advice I ever gave myself, anyway.” Kisumi groans as he hauls to his feet and sticks out a hand for Rin. “All right, lover boy, let’s go back inside before we freeze our asses off. I think they’re playing a Taylor Swift song and you know how Hiyori gets.”

Rin snorts a laugh and lets Kisumi lift him up, then they link arms as they walk back inside. Sure enough, they find Hiyori at the bar, sitting with his eyes closed while he hums the tune from the blasting speakers. Kisumi throws an arm around him and snaps him out of his reverie, cooing, “Hiyori, it’s Taylor, this is your song!”

“Hey,” he snaps earnestly with a hand over his heart. “She gets me.” His glasses are fogged from the club’s humidity and he looks downright impassioned.

From the bar stool beside him, Haru rubs his aching forehead before regarding Rin. “I’m gonna head out.”

Rin blinks as he slides off his chair. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” he sighs. “I’m just tired from my exams, plus Nagisa made me dance with him, so I’m about
to fall dead.”

Kisumi’s mouth flies open and Hiyori reassures, “Don’t worry, I got footage.”

Rin nods at Haru. “Okay.” Because he’s an affectionate drunk and not thinking clearly, he hugs Haru goodbye, happily snuggling his face into his friend’s shoulder. Haru gives a long-suffering sigh and pats Rin’s back.
Well?

Around lots of people

Are you ok?

It was just hard. I mean I will be ok but it's just kinda creepy out here waiting for the bus and it's dark

Wait what

WHAT

??

Haru it's freezing out there!!! And you shouldn't be out by yourself right now???

Makoto I have my phone in one hand and pepper spray in the other. I'm fine

Ok I'm sorry, I'm sure that you can take care of yourself but like

You don't always have to

Just come here

... here?

I mean to the office. You know. The office

You mean your literal skyscraper

Ha ha said sarcastically

Wow I've never used that emoji before

You should be proud
For real, just come here, please. It's warm AND my cat is here

Just one of them?

You're being really cute tonight were you drinking?

I like raspberry Jell-O shots. A lot

Duly noted lol can you make it here?

I could send a car for you

I'm not getting in a random car

😊 you're literally going to freeze but ok be stubborn.

I'm just kidding

Please don't freeze to death

I really like you

I'm not going to freeze Makoto I interned with beluga whales at the aquarium and have swam in water that was 0 degrees Celsius

So this is fine

Ok. Please be careful

I will

I just stood up and I don't wanna walk so yeah send the car I'll wait here let me find the actual bus stop address online

😊😊😊
The driver pulls up to the front of Tachibana Enterprises and Haru goes to pay him but stops short when the man gives him a pitying, amused look. Haru shrugs it off and hesitantly knocks on the entrance doors, not knowing what else to do. A human wall of a security guard lets him in but his smile is kind as he gives Haru the directions to Makoto’s office – Makoto must have called ahead to let the man know Haru was coming.

He takes the elevator as instructed and gets off on the top floor only to wander through a maze of cubicles. He’s never been in a corporate building; it’s an ominous experience at night when there’s nobody at the computers, the halls stark with overhead florescents. He nods politely at a janitor wheeling his cart toward the elevator, then he finds what he hopes is the correct door and knocks. Haru’s hand quickly retreats back into his hoodie pocket as he chews his lip with a strange sort of nervousness.

The door opens and Haru finds himself face-to-face with a broad chest before his head snaps up to meet Makoto’s crinkled eyes. “Hi, Haru,” he greets shyly.

“Hi.”

They just stand there for a few seconds, Haru’s mind screaming at him to come up with something to say, and Makoto fumbles, “Do you, uh – wanna come in? It’s warmer in here.”

Haru nods, mortified that he can’t find his voice, and steps into the office. He inhales the aroma of cinnamon coming from a wax-burner, calmed by the soft acoustic music playing from one of the three computer monitors on Makoto’s desk. He glances around and his eyes gravitate to a wall of bookshelves, impressed with the rows and rows of business manuals, law references, and encyclopedias. There’s pet toys scattered across the floor and Haru notices a lounge in the corner, where the biggest cat he’s ever seen in his life is sprawled over a blanket. She stretches awake and meows at him, so Haru assumes that means it’s okay to sit down and pat her head. She leans into his touch instantly, eyes squinted in contentment. He smiles softly and glances up at Makoto. “Lemon?”

He looks overjoyed that Haru remembered the cat’s name from his picture messages. “Yeah, that’s her.” He tips his head, bangs sliding over his fond, half-lidded eyes. “She likes you.”

Haru shrugs off his jacket and regards Makoto. He appears far more relaxed in his familiar environment and he’s not wearing shoes, only grey socks. His blazer hangs abandoned on a chair along with his tie; his shirt sleeves are rolled up his thick forearms, a few buttons loose at his collar. He has a nice natural tan, his eyes saturated in the lamplight – eyes like summer, in bloom. Makoto smiles bashfully under his stare and glances away. “Do you want something to drink? Coffee, water?”

“Water.” Coffee would wake him up quicker since he’s still tipsy, but caffeine and alcohol have never mixed well in his stomach.

Makoto crouches in front of the mini-fridge in the corner and heat flares off Haru’s cheeks when his eyes fall to the man’s glorious ass without meaning to. He jerks away with a careful inhale, reeling at his own audacity. He’s a horny drunk, not like anyone else in the world knows since he’s never done anything about it or even wanted to – until now. Shit, what is with him?

He startles from his thoughts when Makoto presses a chilled water bottle against his hand. “Thanks,” he croaks, wanting to die. Makoto smiles but his mind looks preoccupied – conflicted. Stiffly, he sits down beside Haru like he’s never once sat down in his life, not-so-subtly gauging Haru’s reaction. Haru suppresses the urge to roll his eyes and pulls the blanket over his thighs, throwing some of it
over Makoto’s lap in an effort to make him fucking chill a little. Haru’s about to pass out from nervousness but he’s not delicate.

Being in an enclosed space with another person feels – raw, like everything embarrassing about Haru is bared and Makoto can see all of it every time he glances at him. It’s so weirdly intimate even though they’re not touching or saying anything; their breathing sounds amplified amongst the hum of the computer monitors and the music lulling from the speakers. Maybe the silence is what’s making the situation so overwhelming. Haru mumbles, “What were you working on?”

Makoto wiggles his toes a little and Haru’s features almost collapse because what the shit, that’s cute. “I was checking over some statistics from our new CFO.” He takes off his glasses to rub his eyes, which are swollen with exhaustion. “His work is flawless, I just…” He withers a smile. “Get a little anxious, I guess.”

Haru nods, absently combing his fingers through Lemon’s blonde fur. He glances at the wall clock and his expression sinks in concern. “Do you normally work this late?”

Makoto winces through a sheepish grin. “Yeah, but that’s my fault. I’m supposed to clock out at five but I normally hang around and go over stuff on my own time.”

Haru lifts his brows, glancing at the charts and graphs on the computers. “You work really hard.”

Makoto blushes at how impressed he sounds, shrugging. “It’s a big company; lots of people depend on me.”

Haru finds himself shaking his head. “I couldn’t handle all that.” At Makoto’s curiosity, he mutters, “I don’t like it when other people are my responsibility.” His voice is awkward and thick. “I start feeling… guilty, and kind of freak out.”

Makoto looks him over thoughtfully. “Is that why you like animals so much? You know, doing marine biology and all that?”

“Definitely. They’re way easier to deal with than people.”

The man laughs warmly and nods down at Lemon. “I agree.” He pets the cat in endearing strokes. “Animals are kind of like kids, they tend to see the best in us. Do you have any pets?”

He shakes his head. “No, we can’t have any at the dorms.”

“None at home with your parents?”

Haru snorts before he can stop himself. “My parents aren’t even home.” At Makoto’s worried look, he flusters. “Not like – it’s not like they don’t care or anything, my dad had to move closer to his job and my mom went with him, is all.”

Makoto doesn’t look relieved. “When you started college, or…?”

“No, high school.” He gives an easy shrug and goes back to petting Lemon. “It never bothered me. I like being by myself.”

Makoto appears dismayed at the mere thought. “I’d die if I didn’t have my brother here or if I couldn’t call my mom every day.”
He tips a smile at that. “You all sound close.” If Haru were feeling petty, he’d try to get more information on Sousuke, but he’s already got a headache from too much alcohol.

“Mm, well, we’re close in our own way. Mixing family with business isn’t always fun, but God, I need them.” He isn’t ashamed to admit it, voice falling softer. “I really do.”

Haru ventures carefully. “Does your dad help with the business?”

Makoto tenses, his expression suddenly unreadable. But then he smiles and it breaks Haru’s heart. “He did, yeah, but he passed away four months ago.” Haru almost drops his water bottle, mortified, but Makoto laughs gently. “It’s okay, someone tells me they’re sorry for me at least twice a day. And it’s nice, knowing that people respected him as much as I did.” Haru’s still mouthing for an apology but he freezes when Makoto squeezes his hand, leaning closer with that same sad smile. His whisper is one of affection. “It’s fine, Haru-chan. You can’t upset me.”

A foreign warmth curls in his chest. Slowly, he looks down at Makoto’s hand over his and the man starts to pull back but Haru blurts, “Keep it there.”

Makoto stiffens but does as he’s told. Haru stares down at their hands, curious and confused as to why such a simple touch feels this nice. Usually, he flinches away on instinct, but Makoto’s hand isn’t threatening even though it’s so bulky. His Rolex is a heavy weight on top of Haru’s forearm, the band twinkling in the light. Makoto is clearly exhilarated from the contact, though his voice is shy. “Your hands are really soft.” He huffs a laugh. “And kind of sticky.”

“Sorry, it’s just from the Jell-O shots.”

“Yeah, your breath smells like alcohol and raspberries.” At Haru’s offended pout, Makoto chuckles. “Trust me, I don’t mind.”

Haru turns away to blush. The silence is easier when they’re touching, oddly enough. He doesn’t know why the hell he’s telling Makoto this, but – “I’ve never held hands with someone.”

His eyes double in size as he breathes, “No way, really?”

Haru makes a face. “My best friend did it to me all the time when we were kids, but no, not anymore.” The only reason he’s still physically affectionate with Rin during a crisis is because Haru knows it’s one of the only ways comfort can resonate inside of Rin.

Makoto smiles for him and it’s piercing. Haru doesn’t feel like the only person in the room; he feels like the only person in the entire world. “Well, I’ve never held hands with a guy before.”

Haru arches a brow, voice smug with amusement. “What’s it feel like?”

The man laces their fingers together with infinite caution, eyes tracing the dark outlines of their hands. “It feels… right.” He looks faintly winded at the realization.

Haru doesn’t stop Makoto from maneuvering their tangled fingers this way and that, watching how they move together. Every brush of Makoto’s skin is a pleasant electric surge that makes his heart startle faster. There’s a foreign need rising inside of him, an instinct he’s never known; he’s hit with the urge to be even closer, but he doesn’t have the courage to act on it, nor does he really feel the need to change anything about this moment. He’s perfectly content just letting Makoto play with his
fingers; something deep tells Haru that Makoto needs this – a chance to timidly explore being in close proximity with another guy who isn’t going to judge him.

A little while later Haru gets hungry, so he and Makoto leave the office to raid the vending machines. They binge on piles of candy in one of the conference rooms and sit cross-legged on the table to gaze at the Tokyo skyline, talking about everything and nothing as they share hushed laughter between stories.

They spend hours on the skyscraper’s roof, drinking coffee and lying back to watch airplanes fly by in the night. Haru’s never felt such peace beside someone, smiling more than he ever has. He has a strong feeling that Makoto’s never laughed so freely as he does that night.

After sharing a few childhood memories, Makoto quietly asks, “Do you think we would have been friends, if we’d met back then?”

Haru purses his lips – they’re chapped from the wind but he’s never cared less. “I’m still not that enthusiastic about making friends, so you probably would have had to do all the work.” Makoto smirks at that. “But yeah, maybe.”

The man sighs. “That kind of reminds me of a quote my nanny used to say all the time when I was growing up.” His face shifts, borne back in memories that might not be so pleasant. His voice is hushed like he’s telling a secret and Haru listens with everything he is. “When my brother was adopted, he felt out of place, I think. He used to cry. He never cries anymore, but back then, I’m sure he was scared and upset with the whole situation.”

Haru turns over on his side to face him, resting his cheek on his propped arm. Makoto says, “Our nanny, Miho, taught the both of us so much, and I know that my younger siblings learn a lot from her too because she still watches over them.” He gives another one of those tired smiles that makes Haru almost falter in sorrow. “When Sousuke would cry, Miho would say: I do believe in fate and destiny, but I also believe we are only fated to do the things that we’d choose anyway. And I’d choose you; in a hundred lifetimes, in a hundred worlds, in any version of reality, I’d find you and I’d choose you. That always made Sousuke feel like he was loved. It helped him realize that he could make a home of people, you know?”

Haru smiles. “Do you do that? Make homes out of people?”

“Probably more than I should,” Makoto chuckles.

They go back to his office to unthaw and he takes Haru’s hand once more as they sit on the lounge with the blanket over their legs. They sit closer this time – Makoto’s sideways with a knee pressed against Haru’s thigh and the hard line of the man’s shin is parallel with Haru’s calf. He’s so warm and Haru doesn’t feel the need to move away, so he doesn’t. Makoto’s hand is still chilled from being outdoors, the rasp of his thumb the only sound in the easy quiet. It looks like there’s so much else that Makoto wants to say but Haru doesn’t need to hear it – he knows. He feels it, too.

Makoto yawns, “It’s pretty early. I can drive you home if you want.”

Haru snuggles his cheek into the lounge, letting his eyes fall closed. “In a minute.”

He hears the smile in Makoto’s whisper. “Okay.”

Haru drifts for all of two minutes before he’s out cold. He sleeps wonderfully even though he’s
sitting up and cramped on a couch; maybe the good rest is due to leaning into the unfamiliar sensation of someone else’s body heat. Haru doesn’t dream, he doesn’t drift – his mind is absolutely still with contentment as he sleeps.

All right whos alive this morning sound off

Present

Here!👋

Of course the ones who don't drink are chipper af

I feel like I've been shot

And hit by a car

Twice

I don't deserve this

Just admit you can't handle your liquor sweetie 😢

Is Nii ok, Aki?
I'm here I'm @ the pharmacy getting meds anyone need something

I need Jesus

And an Advil or eight

And he needs a frozen bag of peas to sit on 😊

Yeah the whole residence hall heard him, Nao called me and asked if we were slaughtering hogs

I'm here 😊

…………

😢😢😢😢

Wat

anyone know what train line to take to get out of Yamanote this poor guy's still passed out

😊 Who is he?

Hell idk Imao

Take the Chuo/Sobu Line, Nagisa

Thanks love 😘

Wait 😕

Where's Haru 🙄

Oh shit

I don't know

Didn't he say he was headed back home last night?
Yeah but he's not here this morning

Where the fuck is he

Rin don't freak out, he might have just went home with someone

Uh Nii idk if you've caught onto this or not but Haru doesn't really do that

She means a friend, Asahi.

Yeah gutter-brain

Haru's not answering his phone

Oh fuck

Ok but Takuya got arrested last night when Minami's ex showed up at the club and made an ass of himself, maybe Haru got caught up in it?

he WHAT

Haru had already left before Minami's ex showed up

he wouldn't have gone anywhere else but home

ok I'm scared now

Rin can you think of anything?

Hello?

Ok um
Rin's definitely freaking out right now

Like screaming

And threatening to kill any motherfucker that messed with Haru

no 😂😂😂

Ok Hiyori, Asahi, and Kisumi are with him at the dorms so maybe they can calm him down

But you know Rin gets the most upset when it comes to Haru

Shit they're taking forever to say something

Ok update

Thank god

Nao came in and was able to calm Rin down. He said it's possible that Haru was here last night but we were too drunk to realize it and he went out this morning without telling us because he didn't want to wake any of us up

That sounds logical

That makes me feel a lot better

Just in case though, me and Hiyori are gonna go look for him

Kisumi and Nao will stay with Rin

Be careful 😁

I will 😘
There’s a muffled voice somewhere and a prickle of awareness tingles down Haru’s back. His eyes blink open to the flooding light of a sunrise and he blearily glances around the office as his mind catches up with him.

Lemon’s knocked over a cup of pens on Makoto’s desk and she’s chewing on one, her tail swishing. Haru stretches, still not quite awake as he rests his cheek against the top of Makoto’s hair. Makoto’s forehead is nestled into Haru’s shoulder, his breath ghosting down his shirt. He loosely hugs Haru to him and the man is warm, solid, something that could pull Haru back to sleep so easily –

The doorknob wiggles and they snap awake in an instant. Makoto bolts up and Haru scramble to his feet not knowing what the fuck to do or where to hide. He dives behind the lounge and Makoto shoots into his desk chair just as the door swings open.

Nagisa doesn’t even look up from his iPad as he sashays into the office, dressed in uniform but looking every bit like he woke up in an alley and loved every minute of it. “All right, Mako-chan,” he yawns. “I’m gonna be real with you, I’m hungover as fuck and hella permastoned and no, I have not showered, so this schedule isn’t coordinated but here’s what’s gonna go down sometime today.”

“Great,” Makoto beams way too hard, his smile tight and his eyes wide. “You know you weren’t scheduled to come in this morning, Nagisa. You could have just emailed everything me.”

Nagisa scratches his neck, tucking his collar up higher to hide a brutal array of hickies. “It’s cool, I blew a lot of money last night so it’s not like the extra funds will kill me. Anyway, Sousuke knows that you didn’t go home last night, so most of the stuff that was on your schedule has been moved to his and you’ll only be here about two hours per his orders, but trust and believe I will delete all my nasty pics from last night if it means that I have to make storage to record him manhandling you out of the building.”

“How sweet of you,” Makoto drones. He glances at Haru, who’s still crouched behind the lounge and bristled with worry.

Nagisa leans his weight on a hip as he continues. “You’ve got a meeting with Mikoshiba-san from the marketing department of our Kyobashi branch.” He perks up. “You remember him, right?”

“Ah, yeah.” His eyes dart as his thoughts scramble. “Um, he’s enthusiastic I guess? But that’s not a bad thing.”
Nagisa lifts his brows insistently. “He’s also wearing tight slacks. You know, the ones that show off his –”

“Please don’t use one of your nasty synonyms for anatomy, it’s so early in the morning.”

“Eggplant, I was gonna say his iconic, trilingual eggplant.” Nagisa grins as he leans over the desk.

Uh, okay, that’s a big no. Haru flushes angrily with a roaring surge of possessiveness.


Nagisa rolls his eyes. “I’m not saying you should sleep with him Makoto, I actually have ethics.”

He stares flatly. “Your morals wouldn’t fill a teaspoon, Nagisa.”

“Be that as it may –” His face grows stricken. “I hate seeing you be here at night all alone.”

The man’s features soften in understanding. “Thanks, but I’m okay. Really.” He ducks his head and smiles to himself, making Haru’s heart flutter quicker. “You look really worried this morning, is something else going on?”

Nagisa chews his lip as he glances at his phone. “One of my friends left the club early last night but his roommates said he isn’t home.”

Haru frowns before stiffening.

Makoto gasps. “Oh no, is he okay?”

“Well, in my heart, I believe he is. We think he actually went home and his friends were too drunk to realize it, then he left this morning to go do something without saying anything.” Nagisa looks nauseous with uneasiness. “I’m sure he’s okay, but his best friend is a little… emotionally extreme sometimes, and he’s assuming the worst.”

Haru’s chest sets fire with guilt.

Nagisa says, “It’ll all be fine.” He nods to himself. “Rin’s got friends with him that know how to calm him down.” With a sigh, he glances back down at his iPad. “But anyway, Mikoshi-ba-san’s here with that nightmare of a woman with her side-ponytail-having-ass, I forget her name.” He snorts. “She’s given me dirty looks long before I came into work looking like I had more fun last night than her entire dry life, but whatever. Marketing meeting in thirty minutes, then you’re free to go.”

“Thanks, will do.”

Nagisa looks up at his brisk tone, studying Makoto curiously. He watches Lemon trot over behind the lounge and Makoto pipes, “Is that my coffee you’re holding?”

Nagisa frowns, looking offended. “No? Did you not hear the part about me being hungover and having to walk on my tip-toes from taking so much –”
“Never mind.” Makoto waves a hand before dragging it down his face. “Jesus.”

Nagisa cackles until he wheezes. “I’m kidding, Makoto. You want coffee, I’ll make you whatever you want.”

“Anything with enough espresso to make an elephant run on water should do.”

“Sure thing.” Nagisa winks before taking his leave and Makoto sags in his chair until he almost slides out of it.

Haru comes out from behind the lounge and hugs his arms around himself in nervousness. “What should we do?”

Hurriedly, Makoto puts on his shoes and blazer. “If you walk out of here and someone sees you, they’ll know you spent the night and they might –” He winces. “Assume something happened.”

Haru snorts. “Assume?”

Makoto cracks a grin and peeks through his door blinds. “People are still coming in so I should be able to get you to the stairwell.” He reaches for Haru’s hand. “Come on.”

By some miracle, they make it to the stairwell without getting caught and they don’t run into anyone on the way down since Makoto was right: employees are just starting to come in from the parking deck and they make their first stop at the T.E. Starbucks before they can even think about clocking in.

They walk down the dozens of flights of stairs before they reach the ground floor, huffing slightly. Haru can’t help but feel a newfound longing as Makoto gazes at him. “I guess I’ll be going.”

Makoto blesses him with another one of those handsome little smiles, bangs falling over his eyes. “Right.” Uncertainly, he blinks up at Haru with his head still bowed, lips parting.

Haru knows he’s supposed to kiss him now, but he’s never been more shy in his life. He’s never kissed anyone before and just because he suddenly wants to doesn’t mean he can follow through with it. He feels so much at once that it’s an emotional overload and he doesn’t move a muscle as Makoto nudges his chin up. Haru doesn’t blink, he doesn’t even breathe as Makoto studies him, then the man laughs quietly – endeared, embarrassed. “You act like I’m brave enough to actually kiss you, Haru-chan.”

Haru blushes, wondering if his feelings were showing on his face more than he intended. In a flash of courage, he whispers, “You could try.”

Makoto tenses, his demeanor shifting into something a little more intense. Carefully, he dips closer, thumb marveling at the upward curve of Haru’s cheekbone. He traces the side of his face with such genuine reverence, looking dazzled as he follows the line of Haru’s jaw to tip it up. Their eyes fall closed as Makoto’s lips touch Haru’s cheek and someone sighs – maybe it’s Haru, he doesn’t know. They’re so close that everything melts together into one sensation between two people.

Makoto pecks his cheek sweetly twice more before pulling back, looking flustered and exhilarated. Haru manages to stay composed even though his vision is tilting. Makoto beams, “I had a lot of fun with you.” His eyes crinkle shut with his smile. “I hope we can do it again soon.”
Haru’s belly fizzes, weightless. It’s not a bad feeling. “Me too.”

Makoto takes his hands to squeeze them happily and Haru gives him a smile – his smiles are always tiny and quick but he hopes Makoto feels his sincerity. The way he glances away to blush, Haru thinks he understands.
SHIT THEY DONE GOT HIS PHONE

Hi Haru, Asahi’s convinced you’ve been kidnapped

I have not been kidnapped

THATS SOMETHING A FUCKING KIDNAPPER WOULD SAY

LISTEN HERE IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR RANSOM I CAN TELL YOU I DONT HAVE MONEY BUT I DO HAVE A VERY PARTICULAR SET OF SKILLS

wtf is he talking about

SKILLS I HAVE ACQUIRED OVER A VERY LONG CAREER SKILLS THAT MAKE ME A NIGHTMARE FOR PEOPLE LIKE YOU

kissme-chan plz come collect your man

I WILL LOOK FOR YOU I WILL FIND YOU AND I WILL KILL YOU

...

This nerd did not just recite that entire speech from that movie Taken

that's ur baby thooo 😢

I know 😞

NOW SQUARE UP BOI
Asahi, I'm sorry, but I have not been kidnapped nor am I being held hostage. You can rest assured it's me because I know you have an entire hidden journal of lyrics about Kisumi (which you hide between your mattress and the box spring) and you licked Hiyori's earbuds on Tuesday (I know this bc I was there)

Oh damn it really is haru hey bro i missed u

ASAHI WHAT THE FUCK????????

It's not like you even use those earbuds Hiyori let's just keep it real at this point

Where's Rin?

Haru sweetie I'm not trying to worry you, but you should probably get home as fast as you can

I told Rin you're fine and you've responded but he's really been put through the ringer worrying about you

And I know he's put you through the exact same thing countless times but he's never really experienced this with you

I'll call him

Kisumi I thought u liked my threatening manly voice

he prob meant in bed not in a public chat

Asahi these lyrics are so sweet??? Why haven't you shown me them?

What
Oh my god you wrote these songs about me in that notebook I gave you freshman year when you told me you wanted to be a singer I'm SOBBING

OH NO THAT'S CUTE

KISUMI DONT READ THAT PLZ ITS BAD

Did you try to draw me in this journal?? 😂😂😂😂😂😂😂

oh SHIT

So Asahi just took off in a mad sprint back to the dorms

Haha well get back home safely, Hiyori!

Thanks Aki I will

Whoa jk

what now my poor heart you guys are gonna kill her

I was about to get on the bus but there's this guy waiting on the next one

Just a "guy"?

Not just a guy, this tall lanky guy wearing all black and he's got like this teal hair? fine af

He's listening to something really loud in his earbuds

What is it 👀
Makoto’s damn near walking on air as he steps out of the elevator. Nitori gives him a curious look as he passes by his work station, nodding politely and arching a brow at his boss’s back.

Makoto enters his office with a cheerful sigh but pauses when he notices someone at his desk. His desktop playlist rolls over to an ominous ballad of violins as the chair swivels around to reveal Sousuke, who’s stroking Lemon in his lap. “Where’d you go?”

Makoto feels pinned on the spot. “Just went downstairs for something.”

Sousuke doesn’t waver. “Why’s it smell like cheap Jell-O shots in here?”

“I don’t – know? Nagisa was in here earlier, maybe it was him.”

His brother tuts like he’s been disgraced. “Low of you to blame your subordinate.” He pets the cat’s ears. “Lemon and I don’t appreciate liars.”

Makoto balks, swiveling his head with indignation. “Why would I lie?”

“Who was in here? I’ve already checked your trashcan for condoms so this is getting more confusing for me by the second.”

“Oh my God,” Makoto groans, flopping against the wall in exasperation. “Nobody else was here, Sousuke.”

His brother sighs, shaking his head mournfully while rubbing Lemon’s chin. “You’ve disappointed the both of us.” She meows in agreement.

Makoto splutters when Sousuke marches to the door with Lemon in tow. “We’ll be leaving you to your deception and falsehood, oh and try not to say anything during the marketing meeting when Seijuro’s pants rip down the crotch, it’s a situation today.”

He shuts the door in Makoto’s face and he stares at it for all of five seconds before bowing into himself with a bewildered hiss of, “What?!”

Chapter End Notes
yes it was ikuya that hiyori saw and yes i am unashamed to admit that last scene was written while i listened to the godfather waltz it's a classic ok

The quote Makoto says is from Kiersten White's "The Chaos of Stars."

twitter & curious cat
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

hi everyone! happy first day of fall it's my fave season. <3

chapter songs are dear yessie by jessie reyez (i think of sousuke for the verses and rin for the chorus heh) and dysfunctional by satica ft. sakima.

ALSO! the lovely BakaPandy did this hot hot hot hot art of sourin in chapter six, it's so good like oh my goooood. thank you so much heart eyes for days

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rin might wake up at noon with a hangover, but classes are finally done so he can’t find it in him to get out of bed for a few more hours. He looks through his notifications with periodic glances at Haru, who is still asleep in his own bed across the room. Rin feels a knot of anxiety in his throat when he remembers how scary it was to wake up yesterday and realize that his best friend was missing. Rin made a fool of himself reacting so dramatically, but the thought of Haru lost in a city he only moved to because he trusted Rin to guide him through it – that just set him on fire with guilt.

But it’s all okay now; Haru’s back and there’s no more classes to stress over. Rin hasn’t been this bored in so long; he used to hate the feeling but now he basks in it as he scrolls through his phone. Sousuke sent him a good morning text at 6 AM and affection warms Rin’s chest to the point that he screenshots the message for rainy days.

Eventually, he wanders out of the bedroom and finds Hiyori sprawled on the couch, still wearing pajamas at 2 PM. His expression is far too pleasant for someone watching a gut-fest of a horror movie in broad daylight. Rin hears a chainsaw and a swell of violins from the television as he ventures into the kitchen. “What the hell are you watching?”

Hiyori blinks up at him with the innocence of a newborn lamb, voice chipper as ever over the muffled gunshots. “Brian De Palma’s controversial masterpiece, Scarface.”

Voice flat with sarcasm, Rin calls, “Decided on something a little vanilla today, did we?”

“Yeah,” Hiyori chews, grabbing some more shredded cheese from the packet in his lap. The chainsaw revs louder and Rin grimaces with a pain-stricken shudder, making Hiyori cackle. “Ah, the joys of not having a hangover.” He happily turns the volume up louder and crosses his ankles over the coffee table, snuggling the cheese packet to his heart. He’s the picture of perfect contentment as blood splatters the television screen.

Rin rolls his eyes and cracks open a bottle of iced coffee from the fridge, droning, “Shit like that is why you didn’t get laid at the club, yanno.”

“Oh no, that was my decision. I’m saving myself for Tiny, Dark, and Bitchy.”

Rin gives a puzzled frown before he barks a laugh. “You mean that dude that turned you down at the
bus stop when we were all looking for Haru the other day?”

“That’s the one~” Hiyori pipes. “The one with the teal hair that made me write poetry about Neptune when we got high last night.”

Rin blinks. “Why Neptune?”

“Isn’t Neptune teal?”

“I think it’s blue, actually.”

“Not in high world,” Hiyori says. “I think there were mermaids, too. And we went to the Garden of Eden together. There were swords of flames and all that shit. He was the apple.”

Such a visual makes his head hurt worse. “Were you the snake?”

Hiyori smirks, glasses flashing with wicked glee. “Of course.”

Rin chuckles and reaches into the cabinet to down some aspirin with his coffee. He flops down on the couch and tips his head back, basking in the quiet. Nobody’s scrambling to get to class, no papers flying as they’re shoved into backpacks. It’s so surreal and wonderful that it feels like a dream he never wants to wake up from.

Hiyori glances over at him, his default smirk a little kinder. “Nice, isn’t it?”

“Yeah,” Rin sighs, grabbing a handful of shredded cheese when Hiyori offers him the bag. He winces as he chews. “This is fuckin’ gross.”

“Mmhm,” Hiyori agrees as he takes another grab.

Rin finishes the movie with him and even stays for another one. It’s a low-budget thriller with shaky cameras that make his stomach churn but he’s too lazy to get up and stop watching. During another onscreen scream-fest, Hiyori turns to Rin, his features levelled in their natural sharpness. “When are you and Haru headed back to Iwatobi?”

“Probably a little closer to the holidays.” He stands and scratches his belly under his tank top, deciding to get up and move around since his legs are asleep. “I haven’t even looked at plane tickets yet, thanks for remindin’ me. When are you headed home?”

Hiyori snorts. “I’m not.”

“What?”

“I’ll probably just hang out around here, get an early start on moving into our new dorm for next semester.” He’s tense under Rin’s disbelieving stare, his shrug tighter than usual. “No big deal.”

Rin’s crossed arms fall slack. “What the hell, yeah it is. You’ll be all by yourself on Christmas.” He’d never get over it if he were alone on such an occasion.

Hiyori chuckles, short and quiet. “That doesn’t bother me. Really,” he insists at Rin’s shock. “I’ll have way more fun being by myself instead of having my family ask me if I have a job yet.” His voice strains with finality. “Trust me.”
Rin nods, feeling a little envious about Hiyori’s emotional control. Rin’s the type of person that needs to feel needed and wanted in every way – with verbal reassurance and gestures that prove his importance in someone’s life. Hiyori doesn’t require such; Rin can’t even comprehend such a concept, but he decides not to question it and wanders back to his room to flop on his bed and pull out his laptop.

Haru finally stirs, sitting up on his mattress with his hair askew, face swollen from sleep. He rubs his eyes and grumbles, “What time is it?”

“Like, four.”

“Shit,” he yawns before snuggling back into his pillow.

Rin rolls the mousepad to look through his options. His pulse spikes quicker with every airfare rate, dread running cold through his belly at the thought of having to call his mother to pay for his plane ticket. He looks over at Haru, who is scrolling through his phone as part of his customary wake-up routine. “Have you talked to your parents?”

“No,” Haru says.

 “… you don’t wanna call them?”

Haru stiffens, the shape of his eyes cutting tighter into cat-like razors, and Rin knows he’s overstepped way too much without meaning to. “Dad texted me a few days ago. They’re not coming home during my break.”

Rin kicks himself. Haru’s always been indifferent about his parents but that doesn’t mean the oncoming holidays don’t make the situation sting a bit more. Rin doesn’t understand how Haru never held any animosity towards them, not even when their jobs forced them to start leaving him by himself in middle school. Haru’s a natural born introvert to the strongest degree but he hasn’t seen his parents in so long. That would be hard for anyone.

Frustration burns in Rin’s temples. “They haven’t seen you in two years. They can’t take time off just for a few days?”

“Not when Mom thinks she’s about to get laid off and they’re paying my tuition, no.”

Rin blushes, quickly turning his gaze back to his laptop. “Right, sorry.”

He types gibberish to fill the awkward silence and Haru’s voice softens. “It’s okay. Dad said your mom called him the other day and said it was all right if I stayed with your family over the break.”

Rin’s head whips around with a scoff. “Of course it’s okay! You’ve stayed with us almost every Christmas since middle school.”

Haru fidgets with his blankets, embarrassed. “I know but it’s – different now. We’re adults.”

“Shut up,” Rin sighs, grinning when Haru throws a pillow at him and misses. He’s accepted defeat about plane tickets and reaches for his phone to call his mother but then he freezes, remembering that he’s got enough money in his bank account to pay for both his and Haru’s airfare, thanks to Sousuke. Though their initial payment agreement was doubled, half of it went to tuition fees and it’ll
be quite a chunk to pay for plane tickets, but Rin will still have enough left over to buy presents and help his mother out with groceries over the break.

Haru’s voice is low with a frown. “Rin, you’re crying.”

“It’s cool,” he wheezes through the tears. He purchases both the tickets, hears his phone ding with the confirmation email, and wipes his eyes with his shark plushie. “I bought your plane ticket, okay? Don’t look at me like that, I had the money so it’s fine, all right?”

Haru just stares, not knowing what to say until his eyes gradually roam back to his phone screen. “Thanks.”

“Yeah, no prob.” He takes a deep breath to compose himself but his face is still flushed from crying. Haru gets out of bed to go take a bath, leaving Rin alone with his thoughts, and Rin’s heart warms with happiness as he reaches for his phone.

Sousuke manages to keep himself composed as he walks out of the hospital – in fact, his gait could be considered breezy and wholly unbothered. His chin is leveled, posture tall and proud as ever on his walk to his car. He quietly steps into his icy-white Rover, closes the door, and tips his head back into the seat – only then could anyone notice how tightly his throat is clenched, or that he hasn’t took a breath in the minute it took to reach his vehicle.

At long last, he lets his exhale out in a fuming rush, body caving with it. The moment his frame sags, agony bleeds from his right shoulder and sets him on fire. He instantly breaks out in a sweat, vision wavering as he pants through gritted teeth. His forehead bows to the steering wheel, fingers gripping it white-knuckled. A sharp ache flares down his right arm and he can’t stop the broken cry that punches out of him, body seizing with it. With trembling fingers, he scrambles to tear open a fresh bottle of Valium, pills scattering into the floorboard in his desperation, and he spills half of his thermos down his shirt in his haste – it’s icy in the winter chill but it’s a welcome sensation against the fire of his skin. He swallows two pills and squeezes his eyes shut as he waits in clenched stillness for the medicine to kick in.

It takes an hour for him to gather the courage to even shift slightly. The ache is just dull enough to endure for now, if only because the rest of his muscles were forced lax by the Valium. He’s exhausted even while his blood courses with vigor – his doctor gave him a steroid shot and the shots always give Sousuke too much energy to sleep the night after, but fuck, he needed it. He can admit that much this time.

He glances down at the appointment slip in the passenger’s seat, the paper damp and the ink crying from when he spilled his thermos. He’s scheduled for surgery in just a few days. This will be his second procedure since the accident and he knows it’ll do fuckall; pain killers might be a temporary fix but it takes so long to see any improvement from surgeries and the recoveries are exhaustive. But he doesn’t have any choice because he can’t work like this, and if he lets the situation get any worse, then he won’t be able to hide the severity of his condition from Makoto much longer.

His cell phone shudders in his breast pocket and he grimaces as he pulls it out, glaring at the screen. His expression softens when he reads the ID and he answers the call. “Hi, pretty.”

Hearing the giddy little smile in Rin’s voice makes everything better somehow. “Hey. Are you too busy to talk?”
“Not to you, no.”

Rin’s shy hum sounds so warm. “Good.” His voice is a pleased purr, fulfilled by Sousuke’s answer. “How’re you?”

“Fine,” he lies. “I hope you’ve been able to rest since finals ended.”

“Yes, I have,” Rin sighs. He makes a noise like he’s in the throes of the most satisfying stretch. “I’ve got a killer hangover right now though, like, oh my god.”

“You poor thing.”

“I know,” Rin whines, making Sousuke duck his eyes to grin. Endearment works in the place of endorphins to take his pain away. “My head’s about to split open, this shit sucks.”

Sousuke tries to sit up better, his back muscles spasming in protest. “Want me to take your mind off it for a little while?”

“Yes, please.” He draws it out in a whisper of coy promise but his next words are sincere in their yearning. “I miss you.”

Sousuke freezes at that, suddenly feeling like he just took a shot of the sweetest, darkest whiskey – his very blood melts into warm honey. “I miss you too,” he murmurs. So much. After a flash of hesitancy, he adds, “I think about you a lot.”

Rin gives another one of those satisfied hums, this time stronger. “More than just in the shower, right?”

“On occasion,” Sousuke smirks.

Rin says, “You doin’ anything tonight?”

“You, hopefully,” he snorts, veins lighting up when Rin sings a laugh. “Glad we’re on the same page. Wanna pick me up at seven?”

“I’d love to.” Sousuke gathers the strength to turn the keys into the ignition, working his jaw as he does so.

There’s a weighted pause before Rin mumbles, “I’m uh – gonna bring a bag with me, okay?”

Sousuke rolls his eyes with a grin. “You’re the only one making this sleeping-over thing weird.”

“Shut up,” Rin says. “Or I won’t wear those new panties you bought me.”

Sousuke shrugs as he puts the car in reverse. “Or you could just not wear any at all.” Rin gives him flat silence and Sousuke grins wider, voice lowering like a secret. “Did that make you hard?”

“Yes,” Rin responds, voice high with fake pleasantries. “And all of my roommates are home so I can’t do shit about it.” His voice presses closer, shooting right into Sousuke’s ear. “You’re taking fucking responsibility when I see you, sir.” He hears Sousuke choke and cackles to the heavens. “Sure hope you didn’t just come in those cute little slacks. Ta.”
Rin naps the rest of the day and wakes up with butterflies of excitement fluttering in his belly. He scrubs himself down in the shower and steps into the living room with his overnight bag slung over his shoulder. Hiyori’s slumped on the couch the same way he left him while Haru’s entranced with

Thu 20 Sep, 14:35
Hey!! How'd the doctor visit go??
Went great. Recovering as expected.
Like I told you so.
Don't get sassy
But anyway thank goodness
I've been really worried about it
I know.
There's no reason to be worried about it. Doctor said everything is fine.
Okay
Thanks for being honest about it. I know you hate talking about it but I just want you to know that I'm here okay? Even though everything's going great with your shoulder.
You there?
Yeah. Sorry.
Thanks.
yet another mind-numbingly boring documentary about stingray migrations; Asahi and Kisumi are making out on the loveseat as usual. Rin pokes Kisumi and says, “Hey, does my ass look okay in this pants?”

Kisumi comes up for air to look him over with a whistle. “Wow. Legendary. Change your bio to *I dodge dick on the daily.*”

Rin smiles cheekily on his walk to the door. “Thanks. I’ll see you guys later.”

“Fuck it up, buttercup,” Kisumi calls.

Rin chuckles, feeling immensely confident just from a few words from his best hypeman. He waves everyone goodbye and Haru doesn’t even give him a silent look of caution when he leaves, which Rin considers progress.

He tries not to skip all the way down to the parking lot and once more has to play the game of picking out Sousuke’s car in the maze of vehicle. He spots a monstrous Range Rover and Rin’s heart dances faster with each step closer. He can’t see through the tinted windows, but he hears the doorknob click and that’s enough invitation for him to blindly lunge into the cab.

He dives in and Sousuke bristles under Rin’s hands with an adorably surprised noise against his mouth. Then he grunts a laugh and angles his head to slot their lips together more firmly, kissing him in sweet, quick pecks that make Rin light-headed with giddiness. He swings a leg over Sousuke to straddle him, head brushing the cab ceiling as his hair lifts with static. Sousuke welcomes him into his lap with a hungry pull on Rin’s hips, and Sousuke breathes in against his neck with a pleased, throaty sound. “You smell as good as you look.”

“Victoria’s Secret body spray in Moonlit Dahlia,” Rin grins.

“Maybe I should invest in them.”

“As long as I get perks,” he teases and pushes down on the door panel to lock it. He kneads Sousuke’s scalp before fisting his hair to force him into a hard kiss – Sousuke’s moan is perhaps the most gorgeous thing he’s ever heard, hips winding at the sound. “Missed you,” Rin whispers, jumping when Sousuke cups him with a strong hand between the legs. Rin’s smirk is positively wicked as he looks down. “You’re bolder than I remember.”

“I’m supposed to be taking responsibility for this, aren’t I?” He jostles Rin’s bulge possessively and Rin mewls, stars prickling up the sides of his neck. Sousuke nuzzles against his ear before sliding the hot-wet of his tongue up the curve of it, voice burning darker. “You really got this hard for me?” He kneads his thumb into Rin’s shaft. “Just from hearing my voice on the phone?”

Fuck, it’s degrading in the best way possible. “Yes,” Rin pants, baring his neck for Sousuke’s mouth. “It’s just for you.” Sousuke gives a satisfied purr at that, a noise rent with sexual hunger. Rin’s jacket slides off one shoulder and Sousuke pulls his low-cut tank top down further to see his chest. Rin arches straighter to let Sousuke lick between his pecs, then Rin locks fingers with the big hand between his legs. “It’s all for you.” He pushes Sousuke’s face harder into his chest, jolting with the shock of a lovebite. His stomach drops at a crushing realization. “Shit, Sousuke, I forgot condoms –”

Sousuke’s free hand comes up between them to show the foil square perched between two fingers. Rin stares at it before slowly mirroring the man’s grin. “You actually brought one this time.”
“I said I missed you, didn’t I?” Rin’s face flashes hot when Sousuke’s hand sinks into the back of his pants to knead his ass, gaze levelled in fevered determination. “Let me prove it.” Rin gasps when a lone finger tauntingly sweeps across his rim.

Gone in the brain and loving every moment of it, Rin twists around so that his back is to Sousuke’s chest. He pushes off the floorboard to lift up so the man can drag Rin’s pants down his legs, just far enough to get what he wants. At times like this, Rin loves feeling this slutty with silk panties twisted around his thighs and his ass out. Sousuke preps him rougher than usual and Rin feels himself quickly getting addicted to the confliction of feeling used and taken care of all at once. There’s a new impatience to Sousuke’s movements, to his frantic breath. Rin recognizes such desperation because he’s felt it with others before. He’s used bodies to forget instead of reveling in the intimacy. Though he still feels cared for in Sousuke’s arms, it’s clear that there’s something he needs to forget, something only Rin can take away from him.

Rin looks over his shoulder – he’s risking ruining the moment but it needs to be said. “Are you okay?” His tone is neutral, letting Sousuke know that they can stop or keep going. Rin’s ready to be whatever he needs right now, even if that means he’ll be left rock hard for the time being.

It’s pretty awkward, broaching such a serious question when Sousuke’s got two lube-coated fingers in his ass, but Sousuke says, “I’d rather not talk it out.”

So he wants to fuck it out, whatever he’s going through. Rin resonates with that even if it isn’t always considered the healthiest approach. Sex has been a borderline-medicinal outlet for situations he just can’t put words to, so he’s not about to judge – especially when Sousuke’s crooking his fingers into the place that makes Rin want to cry and sing in equal parts. His arms sprawl over the dashboard, the steering wheel digging into his chest as he rides Sousuke’s hand. His whimpers are high-pitched in a way that he only gets when he’s wet inside and he just gets louder with Sousuke’s fist knotted at the back of his hair, yanking him up to bite into his neck. Rin moans and Sousuke mirrors him, cupping the entirety of Rin’s cock in his large hand. Sousuke’s whisper is ragged against his ear. “What are you doing to me?” He sounds defeated and affectionate all at once. Then his cock slides into Rin in one smooth motion.

His hearing abandons him as a ringing sharpens in his ears, his whine muffled and distant. A tremble jars his bones as hollowness floats through his limbs. “Oh – oh, fuck…” He didn’t realize just how wet Sousuke got him until his cock glided in with no resistance, not even with the spiral of tightness inside. Maybe it’s the position, maybe it’s just because they’re fucking in a risky place, but Rin swears that he can feel Sousuke in his throat right now. “Fuck,” he sobs, because he didn’t know how much he missed this after only a few days. It’s already too good; he’s already got a coil squeezing between his hips and it’s ready to explode.

Sousuke hugs him to his chest and Rin’s face tips to the ceiling with closed eyes and parted lips as Sousuke bows his forehead to Rin’s shoulder blades with labored breath. “You feel so good,” the man says, voice light with the softness of someone speaking to themselves.

Sousuke hasn’t even given him a good thrust yet and Rin already knows that he never wants to fuck anybody else.

Far too impatiently to be safe, Rin circles down in a grind and Sousuke’s hand is there at his mouth to catch his shout against his palm. Rin feels a frantic pulse in the chest pressed against his back and the cock throbbing inside him. His eyes roll open to gaze out the windshield – it’s tinted dark enough that nobody meandering down the sidewalk notices all the movement in the SUV, but Rin can see
Sousuke follows his gaze out the windshield and Rin feels it when the man understands. “You like the thrill of getting caught, don’t you?” Rin’s body seizes and Sousuke hisses out a jet of air behind his ear. “Don’t you, baby?”

Rin uselessly mewls, “N-No…” He tries to wind down but Sousuke’s fingers lock his hips in place, cock snug and deep but not even twitching.

“You tightened up when I said it. You get off on it.” To prove his point further, he fists Rin’s dick and lets hot precum spill over his fingers.

Rin braces a forearm over the steering wheel, heaving to catch his breath. A bead of sweat drips off his nose as he snaps, “Your point?” He’s going to fucking die if Sousuke doesn’t move. Rin’s wet and swollen tight around the shape of his cock; that alone could make him come screaming with only a few thrusts. But Sousuke isn’t moving, waiting for him to fess up, and Rin scowls with childish impatience. He wants to kick and slam the horn and just bounce down and take what he wants.

“Yes, I like it, okay? Thought that shit was obvious at this poi –” His voice wheezes away when Sousuke braces his feet on the floorboard to slowly roll his hips up into Rin. It’s not even a thrust; it’s a fucking cruel tease that shows Rin the promise of sexual vigor if only he stops acting like a brat. Sousuke’s so strong that he easily lifts off the seat on the next grind even with him in his lap.

Rin feels deliciously nasty with Sousuke’s hands under his shirt, fingers climbing his waist to grope his pecs. Sousuke’s touch is rough but his murmur is black-velvet soft. “I’m not degrading you for it. I just want to know why you like it.” At long last, he braces a hand on Rin’s back to make him bow into the steering wheel, lazily pushing him up and down his cock. The man breathes, “Is it that you want people to see you like this?” He juts his hips sharply and Rin’s legs shake, his feet not even brushing the floorboard from where he’s perched high on Sousuke’s lap. He feels like a throne – makes Rin feel powerful even when he’s the one begging for it with chewed-lip whimpers. Yet Sousuke’s voice is the one rent with the devotion of worship. “Want them to see how pretty you look when you take it?”

Rin moans a guttural sound that he’s never even heard from himself because those words are pleasure like none other, making him feel validated and dirty in equal parts. He feels whole when Sousuke snarls, “You want them to see how fucking good you look when you bounce on my cock. When you beg for it.”

He breaks. “Yes,” Rin whines, riding every jolt of Sousuke’s hips. He grabs the handle over the door to pull up and down his cock with a wet noise gliding along the shaft. They grind in messy circles in the filthiest dance as Sousuke sucks bruises into Rin’s neck. The man winds into him harder and Rin lurches against the steering wheel with every plunge, babbling close, close, close.

Sousuke’s hands guide Rin’s hips into a deeper angle that stretches him tight and makes him spiral down on every inch of his cock. It’s too much, it’s not enough, it’s the raw intimacy Rin always ran away from but now he can’t get enough of it. The fire inside climbs higher and he hangs suspended, waiting to drop and fall, but Sousuke fucks him to an even higher point with every thrust of his cock. He isn’t going to let Rin reach the same peak others have given him; he’s fucking him to a height that his body can’t even comprehend.

He gasps as he’s yanked backward by the hand on his throat and he’s so small against the man’s chest, Sousuke’s heart beating war drums into the back of Rin’s head. His eyes roll closed with the
most satisfied grin at how good it feels to have fingers around his neck – every twitch of Sousuke’s hand makes Rin hiss, “God, yes, yes –” He probably can’t convince Sousuke to squeeze just a little, but he doesn’t mind how the man’s thumb runs over Rin’s frantic pulse point like he cherishes it.

“You feel so fucking good,” Sousuke pants, sinking into the hot wetness of him, and every inch deeper chases the logic from Rin’s mind. He pleads for Sousuke in drooling whines, bearing his throat for a firmer grip. He chokes on his own moan when Sousuke reaches between Rin’s legs to pump his dick, squeezing out precum with ruthless strokes.

Sweat stings Rin’s eyes, vision hazing over as he stares out the windshield and slurs, “Wan’ them to know ‘m yours.”

He’s never felt anyone freeze so fast, like their heart stopped in a single breath. And then Sousuke’s coming with a loud groan and he fists the back of Rin’s shirt to yank him down on his cock. Rin snaps into an arch, his mouth open in a silent scream that would have shattered windows if he were capable of making a sound. Sousuke doesn’t stop pumping Rin’s cock until he’s milked it for every drop of cum that he can lick off his own fingers.

Rin drifts through that surreal plane of reality that only exists after a mind-bending orgasm, where everything feels right even though he’s cramped up and the cab reeks of sex. His forehead stays bowed to the steering wheel while Sousuke cleans him up, not offering any help when the man shimmies Rin’s pants back up his legs. Sousuke pecks his hair when he’s finished and hugs his arms around him; Rin moans into the embrace, turning his head to nuzzle into the darkness at the crook of Sousuke’s neck. Lips brush his damp temple. “Feel okay?”

“Way okay,” Rin sighs, not bothering to open his eyes.

“I didn’t hurt you?”

Whether he means between the legs or around the throat, Rin isn’t sure, but he shakes his head. “You know I’ve wanted it hard.” He presses a weak kiss to the underside of Sousuke’s jaw, whispering through a smirk, “You gave me everything I fuckin’ wanted.”

Sousuke doesn’t respond but he quietly flushes with pride. Rin relishes in the strong arms wrapped around him, feeling secure and taken care of as he mumbles, “I’m never gonna move.”

Sousuke’s chuckle is still a low rasp from sex. “I can’t drive with you in my lap.” He squeezes Rin’s inner-thigh, almost too close to his spent cock. “Even though I like you here.”

“Five minutes,” Rin pouts, pulling Sousuke’s arms tighter around him, already knowing he’ll get what he wants. His eyes laze open after a few blessed minutes of just listening to their breaths. “Are you really okay, though?” He feels Sousuke stiffen and Rin twists his head around to study his cautious expression. “I’m not tryin’ to make you talk about it, but if you need to –” He shrugs, leaving it at that and busying himself by absently adjusting Sousuke’s wrinkled t-shirt. He’s already done his share of emotionally over-stepping today so he doesn’t want to push it, but he’s not going to leave Sousuke without the option of venting if he needs to.

Sousuke melts into him, his handsome smile one of adoration. “Thanks.” Rin closes his eyes against Sousuke’s kiss, their lips nestling together softly. The man sighs when they part, once again sitting up straight with refrained poise. “It’s just a personal issue. Nothing for you to worry about.”

Rin gives him a look. “Personal issues are the issues to be the most worried about.”
Sousuke’s chuckle is strained. “Yeah, well.” He glances around the cab, fingers tapping a pattern against the door handle. “I should be fine.”

Well, that wasn’t convincing. Rin purses his lips with a thought and gingerly crawls into the passenger’s seat. He crosses his legs and leans his weight on one thigh to ease the soreness between his legs, saying, “I know a good place to think, if you’re down. It’s my favorite spot in Tokyo.”

Sousuke lifts his brows with intrigue. “I can’t even imagine where that’d be.”

“Think flowers.”

“You like flowers?”

“Yes,” Rin grins, voice lifting with coyness. “And I like getting them just as much.” He snakes his fingers around Sousuke’s free hand as the man puts the car into drive to follow Rin’s directions.

They take the fifteen minute drive from Tokyo U in Bunkyo to Koto. As usual, they have to don face masks and caps as they walk to the Yumenoshima greenhouse complex. The glass domes glitter with rainbow prisms in the summer but during winter, they are a haunting enchantment bruised purple by the evening glow. Sousuke and Rin have to show their faces when Sousuke pays their way in at the entrance, but there aren’t many people at the gardens this hour; the employees don’t exhibit any particular curiosity in them, so Rin deems it safe to hug his arms around Sousuke’s elbow once their masks are back up and they’ve stepped into the greenhouse.

It’s a yawning space with towering ceilings, the humidity thick with a tropical aroma. In the controlled temperature, the hibiscus blooms are saturated with vibrance, and they walk through a trail of rainbow bushes on their way through the exhibits. “This is beautiful,” Sousuke comments as they wander into the cool shadow of palm trees.

“Yeah,” Rin beams. “It’s always like summer in here. I love it.” They glide through the exhibits slowly to drink it all in, walking by a glittering pond with lily pads bigger than beds. Rin keeps his hands around Sousuke’s arm, thumb circling the inside of his elbow, fingernail rasping over the nylon material of his jacket. “You should be here when the cherry blossom trees come back in the spring. They’re so pretty.” His very heart yearns for the sight.

Sousuke asks, “How’d you find this place?”

“Oh, I went on a date here.” His face flashes hot as soon as it comes out. Sousuke doesn’t have much of a reaction but that’s enough of a response. How could Rin just say that? He’d be all sorts of agitated if Sousuke ever admitted to taking him somewhere him and an ex went – then again, Rin’s a little (translated: a fuckton) jealous in general. Yes, most people have been on dates before, but it’s probably not the best idea to take your sugar daddy to a place you went with an ex-boyfriend from college. Fuck. Fucking, shitting hell.

Rin tries for nonchalance as he sighs. “That date was the best thing that came out of that relationship, anyway. I’m glad I at least got this place out of it.” Sousuke doesn’t reply and Rin internally screams for all the wrong reasons. He should just stop talking. Like, forever. But as previously exampled on numerous occasions, he’s the local dumbass, so, “Sorry, was that – that was weird. Didn’t mean to bring it up.”
Finally, Sousuke shifts his gaze from a towering banana tree and raises an amused brow. Rin swats him and hides his face against Sousuke’s left shoulder as the man chuckles. “It’s fine,” he says. “We probably couldn’t go anywhere in Tokyo if you dodged all the places you’ve been on dates.”

Rin’s more touched than offended by that, but he still heels Sousuke in the ass for it. “You act like I’ve had all these boyfriends and girlfriends,” Rin pouts, letting Sousuke guide him down the cobblestone path of mango trees and orange blossoms, the air fresh with sweetness.

Sousuke gives him an unconvinced look. “So you haven’t?”

“I mean – yeah, I guess, but not for long.” Two months at the most, maybe. But even then, he had only stayed in it that long because he didn’t know how to break it off. “I’m shit at relationships.”

Sousuke studies him with brief curiously before his eyes roam to an array of fountains. “You seem to be doing well with… ” He gestures his head to himself then Rin. “This.”

Rin perks up despite how much he’s wanted to avoid this particular subject. He chews his lip, eyes lifting with hesitance. “Really?”

He feels Sousuke’s warm hand engulf his fingers. “Yes.” It makes Rin happy to have a mask on to hide his blush.

They find a romantic bench with lacy ironwork tucked into a grove and they sit to watch the sunset pour golden light across the ponds. There’s not many people around – just a few teenage couples and a mother in scrubs, who probably just got off work to take her twin girls to the exhibit. But they’re alone on the path so it’s safe from them to tuck their masks under their chins. Rin pulls off his cap to shake his hair out, oblivious to Sousuke’s stare. Tropical birds sing from ambient speakers, lulling over the quiet between them.

It’s so peaceful that Rin’s eyes slip closed but they laze open when Sousuke’s hand brushes his own. He watches Sousuke’s fingers slide home in the spaces of his and Rin slots their palms together. He doesn’t feel giddy from the hand-holding; Sousuke is concentrated even in his affections, his touch one of firm reassurance. He’s a man that can provide and he knows it. So does Rin.

Rin looks up to find Sousuke already gazing at him. The evening light strengthens the planes of his face, painting his tan golden and saturating the teal of his eyes. His body is strong and warm at Rin’s side, making it impossible not to lean into him – making it impossible not to kiss him, but Rin can’t even move to do it, he’s so lost in those ocean eyes.

Rin’s lips part and Sousuke’s gaze darts to catch the motion; Rin’s voice is thick under such a stare. “I’m not seeing anyone else right now. But you.” Sousuke’s brows crease with rightful confusion and Rin just shakes his head hopelessly because he doesn’t understand this need to say it himself. “I just wanted you to know.”

He didn’t think it was possible for Sousuke to cradle his fingers more affectionally, yet he brings their joined hands up to rub the back of Rin’s against his cheek. He presses a kiss there, letting him feel his soft grin. “That makes me happy.” When Rin ducks his eyes shyly, Sousuke kisses his hand once more. “Very happy.” The expression slips away as his features fall heavy in thought. “But why? I already assumed you weren’t seeing anyone else, but… what made you say it like that?”

Rin’s heart slams up his throat but he’s motionless. Sousuke frowns at his stillness and it feels like the room’s tilting because all these feelings are terrifyingly new in Rin’s mind. In his heart. He’s never
been the chaser, never had to ask for it. But now he’s ready to beg for it.

He swallows. “Because I don’t want anybody else.”

Sousuke’s features are expressionless for a beat, then his breath stutters. Sentiment dawns in his eyes, his voice hollow. “You…” Rin closes his eyes against the earnest press of Sousuke’s mouth, their foreheads resting together. “Rin,” the man sighs like a prayer.

Rin hungrily leans into the palm that cups his cheek, lost to something he cannot dare name.

They settle to have exclusivity with one another and go back to the car, masks up, walking a respectable distance apart in the presence of strangers. Even such a small distance between their hands makes an ache knife Rin’s chest. He fantasizes about screaming at anyone who dared to stare at their locked hands in scandalized disgust. He thinks about kissing Sousuke more messily if anyone ever watched in horror as their lips met.

In reality, Rin didn’t have to deal with that often when he’s kissed boys in public, and even when judgement occurred he never gave a fuck because he doesn’t owe anyone his modesty. But it’s different with Sousuke; he’s clearly preparing for the worst if he ever comes out. Even if they both want to hold hands and kiss when they want to, Sousuke just isn’t ready to deal with public opinion whether it be positive or negative – none of it is wanted right now.

Rin doesn’t want him to feel pressured to come out in any way possible, so they don’t label what they have – even though Rin can readily admit that whatever’s going on between them is not as concrete as an exchange of money. There’s a tangible heat every time they lock eyes, especially when they arrive at Sousuke’s house. He cooks Rin a dinner of Moroccan chicken with courses of orange-spiced carrots and quinoa, and Rin’s never seen anyone prepare something so diligently just for him.

He’s sure to thank Sousuke after dinner when their skin is flushed from wine and Rin’s sitting on the kitchen counter, his tongue in Sousuke’s mouth and a hand down the man’s pants. The skimpy strap of Rin’s babydoll falls off a shoulder and he pulls the skirt up to open his thighs, watching Sousuke stare between his legs as his features go from intelligent to base instincts in a single breath. Rin yelps a victorious laugh when Sousuke whips him around to bend him over the counter, smacking his ass hard enough for Rin’s knees to drop and dig together. His world becomes white-knuckles, echoing mewls, and a burning streak of possessiveness that builds with each filthy praise Sousuke hisses. Rin’s clammy fingers slip uselessly on the granite before Sousuke cages his wrists behind his back and makes him scream his name like it’s the only word Rin knows.

Rin takes a shower by himself with work as Sousuke’s excuse. The irrational part of him feels neglected and cold while his logic goes haywire at the realization that he’s never felt so needy for someone’s presence alone. He passes it off as the thrill of the situation, not to mention that Sousuke’s such a caring lover despite Rin’s first impression of him. He’s never been so wrong in his life.

When he finishes his shower, Sousuke isn’t in his room and Rin’s too tired to retrace the way back to the study, so he puts on one of the man’s t-shirts and crawls into bed. He snuggles his face into Sousuke’s pillow and breathes deeply; the scent of him lulls Rin to sleep in minutes.

He wakes in the night, reaching for someone who still isn’t there. Rin pouts in the dark and huffs before sweeping a blanket around himself to make his way downstairs. Arena stirs on the couch when Rin flips the living room light on and she growls in sleepy annoyance as he rounds the corner.
to find the library.

Rin follows the soft glow from the furthest doorway and steps inside, reeling at the sight before him. Sousuke’s head is bowed to his desk but Rin doesn’t have to see his expression to know he’s in pain – his shirt is off and his muscles are clenched hard enough to contour his very bones. Sousuke’s pressing an ice pack against his right shoulder, which is dark as a bruise.

The blanket falls off Rin’s shoulders in a heap. “Sousuke, what the hell…?”

He looks up. His face is pale with sweat, eyes swollen with exhaustion, and he’s ashamed. Rin darts over and crouches in front of Sousuke to peer at his face, bracing one hand on the man’s forearm and the other against his damp cheek. He feels the tight set of Sousuke’s jaw, hears his teeth clenching, and it knifes Rin’s heart. “Hey, hey,” he coos, thumb sweeping over his face. “What happened, what’s wrong with your shoulder?”

Water drips from the ice pack. Sousuke fumes a sigh, not meeting Rin’s eyes. “Rotator cuff.”

He blinks calmly. “It’s torn?”

“Mmhmm.”

Carefully, Rin pulls the ice pack away so he can peer at his shoulder. It’s wet and red from the ice and looks like pure agony. Rin’s seen similar injuries with swimmers, so he scrambles his memory for ideas. “How long have you iced it?”

Sousuke swallows but his voice still heaves. “Forty-five minutes.”

“Forty-five – ?!” He fumes a sigh, ankle bobbing like mad. “If it hasn’t worked by now then that ain’t gonna fly, big guy.”

Sousuke huffs a laugh at the nickname and Rin smiles even as his insides run cold with worry. “Have you tried heat instead of ice?”

“Ice usually works better,” Sousuke grits. This stubborn fuck –

“Well, it’s not working right now. You got a heating pad? Anything?” Sousuke shakes his head and Rin takes a closer look at his shoulder, eyes narrowing. “It doesn’t look inflamed. Does it feel feverish or sore?”

“Sore like a bitch.”

“Then you need heat, not ice,” Rin says. He straightens with a thought and hurries to the door. “I’ll be right back. Don’t move.”

“Not like I can,” Sousuke calls dryly, voice muffled where his face is pressed against the desk.

Thankfully, Rin used his sports duffle as his overnight bag, so he has some heatwraps stuffed into the side pockets and half a tube of Tiger Balm. He grabs a towel from the bathroom and returns to the study to help Sousuke sit up, hushing his whimpers and pecking kisses against his damp hair. “Do you have any pain pills?”

“Valium, but I took some earlier today.”
Rin tries to not let his voice fray. “Sousuke, you need some now. Where are they at?”

Sousuke directs him yet again, back up the motherfucking stairs to the bathroom medicine cabinet and now it looks like Arena is enjoying seeing him wheeze every time he passes by the couch, her front paws crossed like an evil princess would fold her hands.

Rin rams his toe against the kitchen counter on his way to get Sousuke a glass of water and his swear echoes through the whole house before he limps back into the study to help Sousuke take a Valium. It’s obvious that the man’s embarrassed, so Rin glances at the medicine label with amusement as he pats Sousuke’s shoulder dry from the ice pack. “That’s a pretty high dosage. You dealing those things? Is that how you really make your money?”

Sousuke snorts. “It’d probably be more fun job.” He stretches his neck and grimaces with a hiss, body seizing.

“I know baby, I know,” Rin soothes, hushing him with ceaseless endearments. He pads behind Sousuke’s chair, observing the taut line of his shoulders. “Relax for me.” Sousuke has a hard time following the instruction since he’s wound tight with pain, so Rin massages his fingers through Sousuke’s hair, kneading his scalp to help the tension unravel. “That’s it. You’re doing good, yeah?” Rin grabs the Tiger Balm to pop the tube open. “This is pain-relieving cream a swimmer friend of mine used for his shoulder injury. It’s good shit.”

“I don’t care what kind of shit it is,” Sousuke croaks, voice lost to agony. “Use whatever. Please.”

Hearing him beg makes Rin’s eyes sting, heart breaking right down the middle. He slathers his hands in the cream to swipe back and forth over Sousuke’s tender shoulder. He starts with feather-light strokes before gently kneading his fingers into the tension, eyes piercing Sousuke’s face for any twitch of pain. Sousuke’s still panting but his features gradually fall lax under Rin’s touches. His eyes remain closed throughout the ministrations and his jaw hangs open in relief.

Rin massages the cream into his skin, putting infinite care into it. He gives Sousuke a knowing look and murmurs, “Was this what was bothering you in the car today?”

Sousuke’s eyes laze open half-lidded. “Yeah.” He swallows thickly and Rin gives him another sip of water. Sousuke isn’t used to being taken care of to this degree but his appreciation runs deeper than the task at hand – Rin can see it in his gaze. “I’m having another surgery in a few days.”

Fright claws down Rin’s spine. Sousuke’s already went under the knife for his shoulder? “How’d you hurt it?”

Sousuke’s quiet for a moment, eyes vacant on the wall. “Car wreck. Happened four months ago.” When Rin doesn’t say anything, Sousuke looks up at him only to crane back in shock. “Rin, why – why are you crying?”

“J-Just thinking about y-you enduring this on your own,” he sniffles, mortified that he couldn’t keep his composure long enough to finish patching Sousuke up, but it’s Sousuke. He can’t help but have endless tears for him. The man stares at him wide-eyed as Rin rips off the tape from the sticky side of the heatwrap and Sousuke lets Rin maneuver him like a ragdoll to situate his shoulder. “Does anyone else even know you’re having surgery?”

Rin’s granted the rare sight of seeing him blush. “No.”
His face twists in frustration, face gleaming wet in the lamplight as he molds the wrap’s sticky side to Sousuke’s shoulder. “You can’t do shit like this by yourself. I know you don’t want anybody to worry about you but they’re scared for you because they care.” Sousuke gapes and Rin snaps, “Hell yes, I fucking care about you. Of course I care about you!” And Sousuke cares for him. He wouldn’t have given Rin double his tuition or hold him like a treasure if it were otherwise.

All Sousuke can do is gaze up at him when Rin smooshes his cheeks to level their gazes. “I’m going to be there for you through this and there ain’t a damn thing you can do about it. I cannot stand seeing you hurt.” He drags Sousuke up and the man stumbles to his feet. “Now get your ass in bed, Jesus Christ, we’re going to bed.”

Sousuke follows him back to his room in a stupor and he keeps that dumbstruck look on his face as Rin tucks him into bed before snuggling into his side, forcefully nuzzling his face into Sousuke’s pec, pretending like he isn’t on fire with embarrassment due to his dramatics. The man is stiff for a few minutes and Rin prays Sousuke can’t feel his blushing cheek against his chest. He hopes he didn’t overstep with his reaction but god, he really can’t stand the thought of Sousuke dealing with this by himself, not when he’s been so good to him, not when he’s already admitted that he hates being alone –

Carefully, like he thinks Rin’s a bomb that’ll go off at the slightest touch, Sousuke snakes his arms around him. But he isn’t just holding Rin. His embrace is earnest as he snuggles Rin to his chest, and Rin’s heart soars at the realization that Sousuke is hugging him.

“Thank you,” the man whispers into his hair. He cards through the strands, playing with Rin’s earlobe before tracing the shape of it. He presses a line of kisses across Rin’s hairline to his forehead. “And I care about you, too. I really do.”

Rin resists the urge to kick his feet and scream into the nearest pillow. “I already knew that,” he mumbles, voice shy with embarrassment.

Sousuke’s chuckle sounds a dozen times more handsome in the dark. “I wanted to say it.” Rin inhales sharply at the playful nip to his lobe. “And I’ll say it again if it’ll get your ears this red.”

“I will literally bite your tit, don’t fuck with me.”
tokyohive Business Influencer and Co-CEO of Tachibana Enterprises Yamazaki Sousuke was spotted with a mystery boy at the Yumenoshima Tropical Greenhouse Dome this evening 😍
tokyohive UPDATE - Yamazaki Sousuke seems to have went to the Yumenoshima Gardens with the same boy a source spotted in Ginza recently.

tokyo_hive BREAKING NEWS After reviewing photos from our source, we can confirm that Yamazaki Sousuke’s mystery boy is Tokyo U’s Swim Team Captain: Matsuoka Rin
Chapter End Notes

up next: the fall out.
can y'all believe S3's last episode is tomorrow oh my heart anyway

so this is the beginning of doab's new arc, with some new song inspiration, i def recommend giving them a listen to get the vibe of the second arc:

- glass animals - lockdown
- jacob banks - be good to me
- jessie reyez - apple juice

songs for this chapter specifically are

- SYML feat. lily kershaw - where's my love (french version) (for sousuke's pov) and
- chase atlantic - right here (for rin's pov) and
- claire de lune (ethereal mix) for sousuke and makoto

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Want you to give this like you ain't never had nobody, but I am only human, so I don't know how to love you past my wrists. I am just myself. I don't know what my words will do if they aren't written in ink but slapped across your face by this tongue, built like a white glove, like a syringe, I could suck the life out of you."

- Edwin Bodney
Amara Japan @amara_japan • 13/12/2018
Kirishima Ikuya of the Kirishima Business Empire gets into heated Twitter debate in defense of Yamazaki Sousuke @notikuya https://twitter.com/usernotikuya/status828

Amara Japan @amara_japan • 13/12/2018
Matsuoka Rin @cherrycola ignored our requests for a statement regarding his confirmed relationship with Yamazaki Sousuke. What do you think he’s hiding? 😳😢

tokyohive @tokyo_hive • 13/12/2017
Yamazaki Sousuke showed signs of being gay all
tea spill • @teaspill_japan • 13/12/2018
Here's what we know about the party-going college socialite dating Yamazaki Sousuke
https://teaspilljapan.com/category/entertainment

Body Language Experts insist that the adoptive brothers turned CEOs of Tachibana Enterprises had sexual tension before they both came out as gay
https://teaspilljapan.com/category/entertainment..

Amara Japan • @amara_japan • 13/12/2018
An openly gay YouTuber based in Tokyo @asahishiina shows support and loyalty for fellow university swimmer Matsuoka Rin
https://twitter.com/userasahishiina/status7251..
Sousuke should have known that when the phone rings at 3 AM, it’s never good news.

The ringing yanks him from sleep and he groans, leaning up on an elbow. Rin sleepily lifts his head from Sousuke’s chest, croaking, “The fuck do they want?”

Sousuke makes a blind grab for his cell only to flick the silent switch. He rolls back over to pull Rin into his chest and the boy hums, hugging his arms and legs around Sousuke’s frame. Sousuke kisses his forehead and pulls the covers over them both. “Go back to sleep,” he whispers.

Rin’s supple warmth quickly lulls him back into dreamland, a place of unworldly contentment.

Good things are always over far too soon and cruel reality personifies itself in the frantic buzzing of the doorbell just a few hours later. Sousuke wakes in a storm, bolting upright in the dark as Arena barks her head off downstairs. “The hell,” he says, voice curling into a question. He doesn’t bother to check if Rin woke up, grabbing his phone along with a shirt before he hurries downstairs, flipping on lights as he goes. He opens the front door and a gust of wind knifes him; alarm shoots up his throat at the sight of Nagisa and Nitori standing on the porch. Hoodies are thrown over their pajamas, laptop bags on their shoulders, and their faces are apologetic. Ice claws down Sousuke’s back. “What happened?”

The two share a cautious glance and Nitori’s voice strains. “You don’t know?” Sousuke’s
dumbstruck stare is enough of a response and Nitori bows his head. “God,” he whispers, eyes closing in dread.

Sousuke numbly steps aside to let them in and closes the door, his stomach a mess of nerves. Nagisa glances around the living room and looks up at the interior second-floor balcony. “Rin here?”

Sousuke cranes back before he hears someone padding down the stairs, and Rin thankfully put a pair of shorts on. He stops short when he spots Nagisa and Nitori, freezing to the bone like he’s done something wrong. That’s the point that Sousuke starts hating himself.

Nagisa flashes a blinding smile of professionalism. “Hey, Rin-chan. Those shorts are cute.” It’s forced, it’s a useless attempt to bypass the tension that’s about to rip the air in two.

Slowly, Rin says, “Thanks?” His eyes dart from Sousuke to the P.A’s. “Uh, do I – need to go, or…?”

“No, we would actually appreciate it if you stayed,” Nitori answers. Rin looks him over nervously and Nitori’s eyes crinkle kindly. “I’m Yamazaki-san’s personal assistant. I’m here to assess a statement for his publicist. Nagisa is here for you.”

Rin pales. “Me?”

Sousuke crosses his arms, shoulder straining hotly with the motion. “Mikhail didn’t contact me about needing a statement for something.”

Nitori lifts his brows with a knowing look. “He tried to call you earlier. He’ll be here in a few hours; he took a flight from Shikoku as soon as – as soon as he heard, but he wanted me to gather some information so he can get to work on the plane.”

A subconscious awareness prickles up the back of his neck, fine hairs standing on end. “If it’s a company issue, H.R should be the one to release statements for Makoto and I, not my personal publicist.”

Nagisa worries his lip. “It’s not a company issue, Yamazaki-san.” Sousuke realizes the true gravity of the situation in that moment because Nagisa never addresses him so formally – only when he takes phone calls for Sousuke, or at his father’s funeral. “It’s about you. And Rin.”

His heartbeat goes off like a spray of machine gun bullets. He’s standing but it feels like floating, untethered from his own body. Sousuke wavers, pleading with his eyes, and Nagisa’s voice cracks in utter heartbreak. “I’m so sorry.”

Sousuke’s panting all at once like a child lost to a nightmare. He paces the floor, wanting to scream, but he doesn’t even have the capacity to breathe. He’s facing the wall when he takes out his phone, reeling at the hundreds of missed calls, the texts, the alerts that T.E stocks have took a nosedive. He’s oblivious of Rin’s stare, how realization is already dawning on his face without even needing to be told what horror awaits them – the knowledge is in the very air itself.

Sousuke blindly taps a single notification out of the hundreds, and his blood freezes.

Nobody even breathes in the silence. The world stops turning, taking on a foggy surrealism that Sousuke’s brain refuses to accept as reality. He’d kill to relive the past few seconds in which he lived in oblivion; he wishes that he welcomed every torment the universe ever threw his way because
nothing – *nothing* is worse than this.

*Yamazaki Sousuke spotted kissing a mystery boy at the Yumenoshima Tropical Greenhouse Dome. The same boy from Ginza.*

It feels like dying. It feels like a life that he’ll never get back.

Everyone jolts when the cell phone explodes against the wall and Sousuke’s still heaving from the throw when he jerks around to face them, on fire with such an emotional overload that he bursts at the seams. *“WHAT THE FUCK?”*

The windows shake with his roar and his throat aches with it – all of him, all over, aches to be held, to hit. There’s the physical sensation of his nerves fraying, his stomach churning in a tornado-spin. Nitori and Nagisa are stoic in meeting his wild gaze, professional to a fault even with grief in their eyes. It isn’t the same for Rin. He stumbles backward in the wake of Sousuke’s fury but the man doesn’t even notice, cannot comprehend anything but this feeling of violation to an unforgivable degree.

Nitori’s mouth firms into a line. *“All the news outlets are claiming the photos were taken from an outside source.”*

*“That’s bullshit,” Sousuke scoffs, breaking out in a sweat even as his insides run cold. “That’s a goddamn lie, Nitori –”*

*I know. That’s what all these drama pages say to dodge a lawsuit.”* He levels their gazes, not daring a step closer. *“They won’t get away with it this time. Mikhail already has his people on the case; he’s going to take care of this for you.”*

The exertion of his anger burns out at that moment. Darkness pulses at the edges of his vision and he finds himself on his knees before he even realized he collapsed.

*“Shit, shit –”*

*“Rin-san, it isn’t a good idea to –”*

Sousuke’s numb to the grip on his shoulders, the hands that maneuver him into sitting against the wall. He goes down in a heap, bowing his head to Rin’s shoulder. *“God,”* he croaks, voice lost to hopelessness. *“Oh, God…”*

*“Don’t puke,”* Rin says. *“Don’t pass out, just stay with me, it’s okay.”*

Pointless, meaningless words. Rin takes his hand and Sousuke holds onto him for dear life.

Time passes – how much, Sousuke isn’t sure, but when his gaze roams up to Rin, the boy is staring down at his own phone with a face washed-over in pale shock. Sousuke tenses. *“What is it?”*

Rin bears his teeth in a disgusted hiss as he reads. *“That shit isn’t true, the fuck?!”*

Sousuke’s voice startles louder. *“What isn’t true?”*

Rin flinches at his volume, curling into himself. Sousuke runs a tender hand down Rin’s back in apology. The boy scowls at his phone, rage building in the heat of his skin. *“They’re sayin’ I’m well-
known for being a fuckin’ sleaze. They’re callin’ me a gold-digger.”

Nitori inhales sharply at that, gaze widening on Sousuke like he’s waiting for him to blow.

“They even used arrest records from a party that got busted freshman year.” Rin shakes with fury. “I wasn’t even put in holding for that shit, I just got questioned, that’s it, I didn’t do anything they’re saying I did.” He might be yelling but his voice is frantic with tears. Sousuke jolts when Rin seizes him by the shoulders, his eyes red-rimmed, hands shaking. “Sousuke, you can’t believe any of that, I’m not like that, I swear –”

He stares up at him with pleading desperation and Sousuke might live in a morally gray area as a businessman, but his world has never burned black so fast. In that moment, he could kill without mercy and could go to his grave without qualms.

Nagisa comes over to take the phone from Rin, his brows creasing as he scrolls. “Some of these are from your Snapchat. I was at a lot of these parties; hell, I’m in the background of some of these pictures. They even took a lot of screenshots from the club a few nights ago.”

Rin grimaces, curling into himself. “Yeah, but they’re not – I’m not fuckin’ sexting anyone, it’s just some drinking and stuff.” He withers under everyone’s stares.

Nagisa sighs. “Well, at least they didn’t take anything from my snaps. We were smoking in those.”

Sousuke feels a faint bristle of surprise as he glances at Rin, who is too ashamed to even look up from the floor.

Nagisa goes back over to the couch and opens his laptop. “I’m gonna start a groupchat, Rin – let all our friends know to delete anything with you tagged in it.”

“They shouldn’t have to be involved in this,” Rin says, voice low with the effort not to cry.

“I know, sweetie, but they’ll do it for you. They won’t mind.”

Nitori muses, “We might have an angle on these companies legally since they used the pictures without your consent, not to mention they didn’t blur anyone else out of the photos.”

Rin goes to type something out on his phone and Nagisa stiffens. “Wait, what are you doing?”

Rin scoffs, “Saying that shit isn’t true –”

“Rin-san, you can’t do that.”

Slowly, he looks over at Nitori on the couch. The P.A has trouble meeting all the violation in Rin’s stare. “I’m sorry, but you can’t respond to any accusations personally. This isn’t that type of situation. You’ve got the whole world watching your every move now, not just physically but online as well. We need to wait until Mikhail gets here to plan the next move.”

Rin’s face twists, voice fraying. “They’re my photos and it’s me they’re bad-mouthing –”

“I know,” Nitori concedes gently. “But there’s more than one reputation on the line now.” His eyes flicker to Sousuke. Rin stares down at his phone before lowering his hand, looking entirely too small and defenseless.
Sousuke takes the phone from him and seeing Rin’s face in those articles is a thousand times worse than his own. His guilt is a physical pain threatening to choke him, and he deserves every bit of it.

Working his jaw, Sousuke rises with the phone in hand. Rin doesn’t follow, left on the floor and staring vacantly into nothing. Sousuke turns to the P.A’s with a voice leveled in the most terrifying severity. “Tell Mikhail to find out who put his face on there.” He feeds on the tension in the air, heating it in his muscles like lightning would charge to strike. To kill. “Track down every user that sent a death threat. Anyone that tagged him with slurs. Every one of them.” He speaks with the voice of God, his anger threatening to set the very room on fire. “And you tell Mikhail to ruin them.”

Rin blinks up, his voice defeated in acceptance. “You can’t just find everyone who –”

Sousuke whips around and Rin cranes back at the rigor in which he turns, his features sharp like never before. Sousuke shakes his head, to what, Rin isn’t sure. The man stands like a wall of clenched fists and jaw, his eyes so fierce with protection that it knocks the breath out of Rin. “You don’t know what kind of money I have.”

It pierces Rin through the heart like an arrow sinking in, burning. Money is the weapon in this world and Sousuke is the God that wields it. And Rin is his angel. Man has been swept apart before and Sousuke can do it with one twitch of his fingers, but he’s going to summon storms for Rin. The kind people can’t come back from.

With a sick feeling, Rin wobbles to his feet and ventures over to where Sousuke’s standing. The man watches his every move. Rin doesn’t know what to do with his hands under such a stare, so he laces his arms around Sousuke because if there was ever a time someone needed a hug, it’s right fucking now – for Sousuke as well as himself. The man’s arms don’t move from his sides but he accepts Rin’s embrace, letting him take what strength he needs.

Rin tries to make it a joke, but his voice shakes too much. “You’re not… you’re not gonna hurt anyone, are you?”

Sousuke lifts his brows in the worst kind of seriousness. “Do you want me to?”

Rin gasps. He sees Nitori and Nagisa share a glance, but it’s not a surprised one. This is wealth. These terrible questions are the ones asked in the wake of a scandal of the rich.

“No,” Rin rushes, gripping Sousuke’s t-shirt. “No, please don’t.”

His face softens just a fraction but his body stays rigid under Rin’s hands, a vessel of fury ready to blow but never when Rin’s this close. “You don’t have to say please,” Sousuke reminds him another countless time, and Rin smiles weakly at the irony of Sousuke being the one to attempt a joke.

Nagisa gets up in a flurry of his silk pajamas, shrugging on his Prada coat on the way to link arms with Rin. “C’mon, Rin-chan, let’s make some coffee, yeah? We can go sit on the back porch; it’s always so pretty out here at night.”

Rin’s thankful for the distraction and he makes Sousuke a cup of coffee too; the man accepts it but he doesn’t thank him for it. He can’t even look at Rin, his downcast eyes unreadable. It leaves Rin feeling confused and out of place once he and Nagisa are outside; he doesn’t feel like he has the right to wear one of Sousuke’s cotton hoodies, but it’s downright frigid outside so he doesn’t have much choice. Rin’s legs are bare to the cold, yet he’s thankful for any sensation that can distract him from
Nagisa sits up on the porch railing, swinging his legs with the nonchalance of a perfect night as he gazes out at the property. “Nice place, yeah?”

“Mmhmm.” The frost-bitten grass twinkles in the starlight. Rin takes a sip of his coffee, relishing in the warmth, clinging to it. To busy his mind, he asks, “You come here often?”

“Yeah,” Nagisa perks a shrug, crossing his ankles. “I like how quiet it is. I hop on any excuse to come out here with Ai-chan.”

Rin smirks tiredly. “Even this excuse?”

Nagisa looks him up and down with sly playfulness. “Well, it is a great view.”

“Loser,” he chuckles, tension easing at his friend’s antics.

They sip their coffee and Rin tenses every time he hears Nitori and Sousuke’s muffled voices from inside the house. Thankfully, there’s no more shouting, and Nagisa reads his expression with pity. “You’ve never seen him get like that before, have you?”

He tries to fight the sting in his eyes. “I feel like he’s mad at me.”

Nagisa rears back. “What? No, none of this is directed at you.” When Rin just closes his eyes to keep the tears at bay, he hears Nagisa sigh. With a shuffle of movement, he comes over to sit by Rin on the swing and cards a little hand through his hair. “Sou-chan isn’t blaming you for any of this. He’s mad at himself and he feels violated just like you do.” Rin opens his eyes to see Nagisa gazing out at the rolling hills, watching a family of deer graze in the distance. “This is the third time I’ve ever seen him react like this.” His short, chubby fingers circle his coffee mug a bit tighter. “When his dad died, when Makoto was facing his backlash, and now – with you.”

“This ain’t about me,” Rin says. “He’s the one that had to come out before he was ready.” For the first time in so long, he wishes he could hug his mother. “I didn’t even need to have that conversation with my mom. She always knew.”

“Well, you said your sister’s gay, so. She probably read the signs.”

Rin looks him over thoughtfully. “Do your parents know?”

Nagisa snorts. “Pretty hard for them not to know. I’ve been different since I was really young. My dad actually used the word ‘flamboyant’ like, Jesus Christ.” Rin rolls his eyes at that. “Not like it isn’t true, I guess. But he wasn’t like, ashamed or anything, my sisters are married to doctors and lawyers so they took a lot of pressure off me. My parents just accepted that I’m the wild card of the family and let me be, so that was enough.” He shrugs. “They knew pretty early on that I wasn’t going to be the son they expected. I’m proud of them for making the effort to love this version of me instead.”

Rin’s filled with nostalgia for memories he’ll never have. “I knew my dad well enough to know he’d support me.”

“I’m sure he would have. Sousuke’s the type of guy any father would like.”
Rin smiles but it quickly fades away. “I hope he doesn’t hate me over any of this.”

“Rin-chan, no –”

“Not because he’s blaming me but what if this Mikhail dude says it’d be better to say we broke up? Or if we staged a fight to make me look like a phase or something?”

“Mikhail’s not going to suggest anything like that when it’s clear neither of you want to do it; he might live for a good scandal but this is different. Not to mention that staging a break-up probably wouldn’t work when it’s clear that you care about Sousuke. And his reaction is enough to make me think he feels the same about you. *Plus* he drank that cup of coffee you made for him – that’s big in Sousuke World.” Nagisa gives him a cautious look before his gaze slips away. “He would have been able to handle this if you weren’t involved. If there’s one thing Sousuke can’t handle, it’s the people he loves getting hurt.” He holds up a hand before Rin can blanche. “I’m definitely not saying he loves you, Rin, I know you don’t like that word. I mean love like, he cares.”

Rin ducks his eyes to blush. “Well, yeah. He’s a good man.”

Nagisa smiles, thankful to hear such. “When someone goes through the trouble of fighting their way into his heart, he holds onto them, is what I’m saying. He protects them.”

Rin makes a face. “But it’s never felt like I was making a conscious effort to be close to him in all those ways. He just….” He crosses his legs, averting Nagisa’s sly grin as he rakes a hand through his hair. “He’s a good guy and I like him, so it feels natural, wanting to be close to him.”

“Not just because you want to fuck him?”

“No,” Rin responds quickly. “No, he makes me feel…” His heartbeat startles quicker. “Taken care of.” Nagisa’s grin widens and Rin swats him. “Not just sexually you gutter-minx, God! I swear, you and Kisumi think I’m such a sub.”

“No, not that word exactly.” Nagisa tips his head, hair fluffing with the motion. “You like what Sousuke provides. You like how he makes you feel; you’re in it for the chemistry. I haven’t seen you give in to those feelings with anyone else before, so I think that’s what makes Sousuke special, in this case.”

Rin huffs, tucking his knees to his chest. “You know I don’t do relationships.”

Nagisa makes a clear effort not to roll his eyes. “Right,” he drones. “Well then, don’t label what you have with Sousuke, since those sorts of things make you bolt – even if you have to label it for the public, just ride the wave, baby gay.”

Rin stares flatly but he has to fight a smirk. “Really?”

“Really, really. Now let’s go inside, my balls are actually freezing off.”

“You actually have balls with that high-ass voice – *ow, don’t slap my ass!*”

Nagisa shouts a laugh on his way to push Rin back into the house. “Don’t talk to me or my steel balls ever again.”
Around 5 AM, Rin drifts asleep on the couch under the rhythm of keystrokes, Arena’s claws clicking across the hardwood, and Sousuke’s pacing. He wakes to headlights flooding through the glass wall and there’s a blanket draped over him. An engine cuts off outside and Sousuke tensely rises from the couch – Rin didn’t realize he had sat down beside him, but now the absence of his warmth is far too apparent. Nitori says, “Isn’t that one of Tachibana-san’s cars?”

“Yeah,” Sousuke mumbles, glancing out the window with narrowed eyes. “But who’s the guy with him?”

Quiet in his approach of socked-feet, Sousuke opens the door for a man of equally towering height, his soft features apart from the intimidation that comes with a suit like his. Rin can’t assess much more of him, for another guy steps right into the house and straight into Sousuke with a hiss slewing in venom. “Where’s Rin?”

His stomach drops even as his heart soars. “Haru?”

“Haru-chan!” Nagisa beams.

Haru breaks away from his glaring match with Sousuke, eyes racing to find Rin. He deflates when he spots him, stepping past Sousuke and giving him one more up-and-down leer. Rin pushes off the couch, jaw hanging in shock. “What’re you doing here?”

“Checking on you,” Haru says firmly. “You look exhausted.”

Rin huffs a laugh even as Sousuke bristles. “I know, thanks.” He’s still barefoot in his pajama shorts and Sousuke’s hoodie, his bedhead tied back with a rubber band. Rin shakes his head in disbelief. “How’d you know where to find me?”

Haru slyly looks over his shoulder at the man in the suit, who rubs the back of his neck. “Ah…” Sousuke crosses his arms and the man withers. “Well, it’s kind of a long story –”

He stiffens. “Why?”

“They said it was just for a statement, but it’s better to be safe than sorry. They offered Nao-senpai a lot of money; he told them to fuck off. And Kisumi said that you’re welcome to hide out at his place if you’re uncomfortable –” His eyes cut to Sousuke. “Here.”
Rin glances between them as tension pressurizes in the air. “Thanks, but I want to stay here. With him.” Haru and Sousuke look surprised at that for completely different reasons, and Rin tries not to cower. “If that’s okay.”

“Of course it is,” Sousuke says with profuse reassurance. He looks winded.

Haru gives him another critical look before nodding in acceptance. He thrusts a drawstring bag at Rin. “Here. It’s just a few things from the dorm we thought you might want.”

Rin peeks in the bag, seeing his laptop, some clothes, as well as his shark plushie and a bottle of his antidepressants. His heart warms. “Haru…”

“Asahi put one of his self-help books in there; says he reads it when he gets shitty YouTube comments. And Hiyori’s letting you borrow his Tamagotchi. Since he’s a nerd.”

Rin’s smile wobbles. “Tell them I said thank you.”

Haru glances back at Makoto, who was smiling at the scene. He bows politely at Rin. “I wish we were meeting under better circumstances, Rin-san, but it’s a pleasure to meet you. I’m Tachibana Makoto, Sousuke’s brother.”

Rin desperately tries to not look like a young naïve thing in pajamas and hickies with no fucking sense. “N-Nice to meet you, too.”

Makoto glances at his brother. “Well, I’m going to run to the restroom and then I’m headed to work, after I take Haru back to his dorm.” Sousuke opens his mouth but Makoto lifts a hand. “You are staying here; I know Mikhail’s going to suggest you stay clear of the office a few days, anyway. Just take a break, please. You really need it.” Sousuke works his jaw but Makoto lifts his brows in a taunting act of sibling banter, daring for a fight. Sousuke sighs and nods once.

Nagisa’s already rising from the couch and headed toward the kitchen. “Want any coffee for the road, Mako-chan?”

“Yes, that’d be great Nagisa, thank you.”

Once Makoto’s slipped down the hallway, Rin pulls Sousuke aside. The man keeps a scowl set on Haru, but the expression fades at Rin’s gentle touch on his arm. “I think you should tell your brother about the surgery.”

“He’s got enough on his plate having to run the company by himself for a few days.”

“I know,” Rin says gently. “But it’s not like you’ll be able to go right back to work after the surgery, anyway. You thought about that?”

Sousuke rubs the back of his neck. “No, but…” Pleadingly, Rin cups his face with tender sweeps of his thumbs, and Sousuke sighs, bowing into Rin’s touch. “Yeah, all right. Not like this can get any worse.”

Rin lets him go at that, eyes cast to the floor as Sousuke wanders down the hallway. When Makoto steps out of the bathroom, Sousuke jerks his head toward one of the guest bedrooms and Makoto follows him. Sousuke closes the door behind them, briefly glancing around the room. There’s twin
beds dressed in pastel comforters, fit for a magazine shoot since there’s no personal touches to the room – no signs of well lived-in life, no familial warmth. This room was left abandoned along with the rest of the mansion until Sousuke moved back here. But one lonely man can’t make a house a home.

They sit on the edge of one of the twin beds and Makoto takes in the room with a nostalgic sigh. “Remember when we used to sleep down here when we were little, instead of in our own rooms upstairs?”

“Yeah,” Sousuke snorts, cutting his first brief grin of the day. “These beds are small as hell and you’d still climb in with me, you were so scared to sleep alone.”

“That’s your fault for telling me you saw gremlins in dad’s vegetable garden.”

“We were eleven. There’s no way you should have believed that at that age.”

“No way you should have said something like that at eleven, then,” Makoto says, upturning his nose and making Sousuke Chuckle. He gazes out the lone window between the beds. “It was so nice waking up here, back then. Especially on those Sundays that Mom didn’t make us go to church.”

“Don’t let her hear you say that,” Sousuke snorts.

Makoto grins. “I’d wake up at like, eleven. I’d hear Dad watching the news, smell Mom cooking breakfast. Those grilled banana-pear pancakes, you remember? I would smell the chocolate melting and I’d just die.”

“I remember,” Sousuke smiles.

“And I’d hear you playing Claire De Lune on the piano that used to be in the living room.” He nudges their shoulders together. “Whining at mom about how much you hated it even though you were better at it than I was.”

“She wouldn’t let me learn the drums,” he pouts. “Said boys like us needed classical training.”

Makoto’s voice softens. “I miss seeing that piano. I always knew I was home when I saw it.”

He turns when Sousuke doesn’t reply for a moment. “I haven’t even thought about it,” Sousuke mumbles.

Makoto’s brows twitch up before sinking. “I’m so sorry about all of this, Sousuke.”

Bitterness slices his mouth into an upturned curve. “Well, it was inevitable, wasn’t it?” His hand smooths down his the back of his neck, falling heavily on his shoulder. “I wish Rin hadn’t got involved.” Makoto looks away at that and Sousuke sighs. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you about him, it’s just – really complicated.”

“Seems like it,” Makoto says. “How’d you meet him?”

“Ah. Through Nagisa.”

Makoto studies his guarded expression before he snorts. Then he does it again. And now he’s full-on laughing at Sousuke’s expression. “Oh shit,” he wheezes. “Please don’t tell me he put you on that
virus-ridden sugar daddy site.”

Sousuke cranes back so fast that the back of his head slams the wall. “Fucking – wait, what? How’d you know about that?!”

“Because he tried to sign me up for it two years ago,” Makoto says. “And I said no. I swear, you’re like the antithesis of me just based off that alone.”

Sousuke blushes. “I only went through with it because I told mom I had someone to bring to Christmas. I needed someone fast, Nagisa knew Rin was on that site and that I could trust him, so it just worked.”

Makoto gives him a knowing look. “Nothing else about the concept appealed to you? Please. I know you better than anyone.” Sousuke tries to scowl but it comes off as a pout, and Makoto chuckles. “I’m not judging you, just saying that being honest would save us both a lot of time. I’m happy you met Rin, he looks like a nice guy.”

*Be honest.* Sousuke picks at the lint on his sweatpants. “Mako…” He closes his eyes in dread. “My shoulder, it’s…”

His voice is quiet but not surprised. “You lied?”

“Yeah. I’m having another surgery in a few days.”

At his silence, Sousuke opens his eyes. Makoto’s watching him in a mix of pity and frustration. “Well, I had a feeling. But I hope you realize that even though you’re keeping secrets because you don’t want people to worry, it comes off like you don’t trust them.”

“That’s not true,” he lurches.

“Yeah, for the most part, but try to see it from my point of view.” He pats Sousuke’s knee. “It’s not like I’m going to be upset with you on a day as awful as this, but we lost Dad to secrets like that, Sousuke. You’re not doing me any favors by keeping me in the dark.”

The reminder stings. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

The silence isn’t awkward, but it’s heavy. Sousuke chews his lip. “How’d you meet Haru?”

Makoto blushes shyly. “I stopped by that Irish pub at the Yaesu station. He works there and we started following each other on Instagram.”

“What a modern romance,” Sousuke drones.

His brother outright *giggles.* “Yeah, he’s really sweet.”

“Could’ve fooled me.”

Makoto swats him. “Oh stop, he’s just up in arms right now because of what Rin’s going through. He’s not like this all the time, I promise. Anyway, c’mom, I need to get to work.”
Sousuke huffs as they make their way through the hallway. He grabs Makoto’s blazer with a thought. “So there was someone in your office that morning I smelled cheap Jell-O shots.”

“Uh, I –”

“You rat-bastard, I knew it. Lemon owes me a drink.”

“Shut up,” Makoto whines, hiding his face in a hand.

On the drive back to Tokyo, Haru reaches for Makoto’s thigh and squeezes it briefly. “Thanks for taking me to see Rin.”

It’s a miracle that Makoto keeps the car on the road. And that he doesn’t burst into flames. “No problem.”

He glances at Haru out of the corner of his eye. The boy props his arm on the passenger’s window to watch the black tree line become chrome skyscrapers, the winter-bitten grass slating into the dull concrete of the city. Makoto thumbs the grooves of the steering wheel. “I’d be worried about you,” he starts. Haru blinks at him. “If you started getting harassed because we’re dating.”

Haru crosses his pretty legs, folding his delicate hands over them. Makoto tries not to drink in every detail of him, the dark smudge of his knuckles, the half-moons of his cuticles. “There’s no ‘if’ about it; I will get hate for it. I don’t care.”


Haru closes his eyes with a huff of laughter. “I’m an openly-gay swimmer. You think people online haven’t lashed out at me before?”

Makoto aches at that. They continue the drive in silence until he pulls into the campus, parking in front of the washed-out building he remembers as Haru’s dorm. He stares down at his lonely hands and whispers, “Is this really worth it to you?”

Fingers tuck under his chin to level their gazes and Haru’s face is close, his breath warm from coffee, and Makoto takes in the starlight of his pale freckles. “It’s not about you being worth the hate,” Haru says. “It’s about me having the right to be with who I want.” He shakes his head firmly. “Other people aren’t even part of the equation to me.”

Hope sings through him even as anxiety knots his throat. “This could damage you.”

“What, like my career?”

“It could damage you in a hundred different ways.” Makoto should leave. He should drop Haru off and never turn back, for the boy’s sake. But Makoto’s too selfish to even break their gazes.

Haru studies him. “You want me. Don’t you?” His chin lifts confidently even as he rolls his lips in to bite them.

“Yes,” Makoto rushes. In a hundred different ways. “But it’s not that simple.”

“It is if you want it to be.”
God, Makoto’s never wanted anything more. He’s trapped at a crossroads – there’s the predictable path with loneliness as his only companion, which is familiar in its monotony, and safe. Boring, never changing in the churn of days spent hunched over a desk with smiles of fake genuinity. And then there’s the other path, one of diamond-sharp gravel that must be passed over with bare feet, raw, with meaning in every step. They’ll sink up to their throats in the sludge of opinions, judgements, and outlash like lightning. It’ll be dark and so, so cold. But they’ll both be happy because they are walking that path together, and the sun will always be present in every smile they share.

Makoto closes his eyes against the hot sting. His breath quickens but stops entirely when Haru laces their fingers together. “You said this feels right,” the boy whispers. “That’s all that matters, Makoto.”

He stares into Haru’s eyes, which are naturally cold, but it’s such a gentle storm when he’s looking at Makoto. “Okay,” he whispers through a shy smile.

“Okay.” Haru leans forward but hesitates, lips parted for a kiss he isn’t ready to take as his first. Instead he shoots up to peck Makoto’s forehead and he’s out of the cab before the next breath.

Makoto blinks after him and Haru fidgets, tightening his grip on the door handle. “I’ll text you.”

Makoto tries very hard not to fly apart with joy. “Can’t wait.”

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[Images of characters: Rin, Haru, Hiyori, Asahi, Kisumi]
Which one of you put my handcuffs in this bag?

I thought Nii stole them

You kept handcuffs in our room?

Damn hey where'd you get them cause I've been too scared to look them up to buy a pair online with the gov and shit

God

Kisumi

I mean it ain't like you're not gonna get bored cooped up in a big house with a big man 🌹

Ok but have you fed my tamagotchi today
He’s very needy you have to play with him on the hour by the hour

You misspelled you're needy

Also Rin fair warning there's some polarizing Polaroids I forgot to take out of that book I left you in that bag

Kisumi said he needed a nude model and I'm a weak man

Uh but you're the one who suggested it babe

EXPOSE HIM

EXPOSE

I really love you guys

Chapter End Notes

up next: mikhail bang bangs into the room (i had to cut the chapter in half since the flow didn't feel right, so the next update should be soon, lots of it is already written :D)

twitter & curious cat
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Rin’s heart lodges in his throat like a hot coal. “Would you think about me, if I left?” The quiet is suffocating between them and Rin's voice thickens, echoing through that cold, lonely estate. "Or would you try to forget me?”

Sousuke breathes a laugh - he's a man embracing defeat with open arms, and there isn’t an ounce of shame in his confession. "I never want to forget you. I'll miss you every day." He cups the arch of Rin's back like he does when they fall asleep together. "Every night."

Chapter Notes

hi all! hope you enjoy. <3

chapter songs are stardust by artie shaw
stélouse - shivers n gold (ft. mascolo)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The rest of the morning is spent with useless cups of coffee and an equally inefficient sense of optimism, like trying to wish a diamond out of the cold stone in Rin’s gut. The air is crisp with hazelnut and winter as he watches the logs in the fireplace burn white with ash, embers pulsing in the cracks. Rin tucks himself into the corner of the couch, subconsciously trying to take up as little space as possible. He fidgets with guilt every time Sousuke comes out of the study to remind Nitori about meetings that now have to be postponed.

The P.A. watches Rin’s eyes trail after Sousuke as the man steps back into the library, closing the door behind him harder than he probably meant to.

Nitori glances between Rin and the study before his phone dings. He looks down at the screen and rises from the kitchen island to stretch. Nagisa glances up from his laptop with a brow arched insistently at the library, and Nitori subtly nods. “Rin-san,” he calls gently. Eerily smooth, Rin turns around on the couch and Nitori’s smile is sympathetic. “Is there anything specific you’d like to eat? Yamazaki-san’s publicist just landed in Hanedakuko and he’s offering to pick something up for us.”

“Oh.” Rin’s gaze slip away. “Um, I’m not really hungry.”

Nagisa rolls his eyes. “He’ll have anything with meat, Ai-chan. He and Sou-chan eat the same things.” Nagisa winks with a sip of his Vanilla Coke. “Pun absolutely intended.”

Rin huffs a laugh at that, which Nitori considers progress. He walks down the hallway, following the muffled bass of an orchestra to the study. It’s useless to knock since Sousuke clearly won’t be able to hear it, so Nitori steps inside as violins rail through the instrumental. He glances at the spiral staircase
leading to the loft where Sousuke’s father used to sneak in a cigar when business became exceptionally stressful. A towering window casts pale light through the study, velvet curtains standing like black trunks on either side of the glass. He can attest that the library is indeed like the wilderness in its unpredictability – these walls have housed great triumph and unspeakable loss.

Sousuke doesn’t look much different than his father as he sits hunched over in that same monstrous desk. Nitori represses a sigh as he walks across the Persian rug, which is red as blood with a twisting maze of thorny patterns. Sousuke bows his head to pinch the bridge of his nose, and Nitori knowingly pulls out a bottle of Advil from his pea coat. Sousuke looks up at the rattling pills, the blueness of his eyes nearly glowing in the shadows. He drags a hand across the desk to swipe up the bottle and Nitori smiles pityingly. “Mikhail landed. He should be here soon.” He absently drops some stray pens back into their jar on the desk, situating them by color. “We’re lucky he happened to travel to Kyoto from Moscow a few days ago.”

“What was he doing in Kyoto?”

“Shopping, of course.”

Sousuke snorts. “For man-meat or clothes?”

“Probably both, knowing him.”

Sousuke grunts, downing two pills with a swig of water. Nitori’s voice carries as a cello groans from the speakers. “Rin-san hasn’t said a word all morning.” He ventures pointedly, “I might not know him very well, but I take it he’s more talkative, usually.”

Sousuke sighs, leaning back in his colossal, pin-cushion seat that’s more like a throne than a standard office chair. The man gazes out the window as snowflakes sway down to the earth in a lonely dance. “I don’t know what to say to him.” The white light cuts his face even sharper. “There’s nothing I can say.”

Nitori makes a physical effort not to roll his eyes. “I think he’d appreciate your company right now, regardless. I know you feel guilty about all of this, but so does he.”

“He shouldn’t.”

Nitori crosses his arms, leaning his weight on a hip. “Then maybe you should tell him that.”

Sousuke’s jaw firms with a look of confliction and Nitori knows that his heart is in pain – sees it in his eyes, hears it in his breathing. “It’s not like he’s going to stay after this, Ai.”

Nitori blinks faintly, brow twitching up as his throat tightens. Of course that’s what Sousuke’s afraid of – that’s what he’s always afraid of. “He hasn’t left yet. He’s sitting right in the living room as alone as you are in here.”

Sousuke tenses in surprise, then he cowers with downcast eyes. “I’ll…” He lets out a quick breath before going back to his computer. “I’ll check on him after I go over a few things.”

Don’t do this. Please, don’t be like your father.

Nitori deflates, far too used to seeing this family bury themselves in their work, hiding behind computer monitors. It’s a heartbreaking sight, yet he leaves the study with at least a slight hint of
optimism, because Sousuke’s reaction made it clear that he isn’t used to feeling this much for one
person. He *does* care for Rin; it will just take time for the fool to catch up and realize it. Nitori hopes
that Rin will wait for him.

He steps back into the living room and pats his thigh for Arena, flashing a smile at Rin’s nervous
glance. “I’m going to take Arena outside for a bit. Want some fresh air?”

Rin gets off the couch as Arena trots over, and they head outside to let the white pitbull dive into
fresh snow in the yard, blending in with it completely save for the two black pin-points of her eyes.
They stand and watch her play before Nitori glances over with a soft voice. “How are you doing?”

Rin gives him a dry smirk. “Not exactly how I expected to spend my Saturday, but I guess there’s
worse things.”

Nitori chuckles. “I suppose so.” He chews the inside of his lip. “I know you feel out of place with us
here, enforcing all of these protocols, but I hope you can see that it’s to try and help the situation.”

Rin shrugs – he isn’t a people pleaser, clearly. “Yeah, I mean I get that, it’s just – I don’t see what
good any of it’ll do. People are gonna talk about this no matter how Sousuke’s publicist shapes the
story. Nothing’s gonna make everyone happy. I’d rather get to the part about trying not to give a
fuck, rather than worrying about all this.”

Nitori isn’t even slightly offended; in fact, he considers Rin’s response entirely refreshing. “I know,”
he concedes. “But Mikhail isn’t coming to try and make the world happy; he’s here to try and make
this easier for you.”

Rin’s expression softens in pleasant surprise. “You sure?”

“He’s my uncle, so yes.” He grins. “I think I know his motivations well enough.”

“Oh.” He cranes back. “Does – does your family like, work for Sousuke or something?”

“No, not precisely.” He watches Arena hop up on the ledge of the koi pond to watch the fish hover
under the sheet of ice on the surface. “Mikhail worked for the Tachibanas before I did. He was
writing statements for a few particularly scandalous fashion designers when he met Mrs. Tachibana,
and they hit it off. His goal was to create a wholesome image for the family since the public had a
hard time connecting with a designer from a corporate background such as her husband’s.” He
smiles briefly. “Mikhail said the work itself was boring; he was used to covering up pop star
embarrassments, so any instance of business misconduct wasn’t a challenge to him. But he loved the
Tachibanas and they gave him a very comfortable life, so he’s content to busy himself by covering
up his own scandals.”

Rin chuckles. “He sounds like an interesting guy.”

“Oh, he is. He’s the person I look most forward to seeing every holiday.” He smirks. “He’s still the
life of the party at every gathering even though he and my biological uncle divorced like, eight years
ago. Heck, he’s the one who introduced Uncle Eiji to the boyfriend he has now.”

Rin shudders. “I could *not* do anything like that, holy shit.”

Nitori laughs. “Yeah, same. Guess that’s just another reason why Mikhail’s special. But anyway, he
was working for the Tachibanas and I had sort of made a hobby out of keeping up with Mikhail’s
schedule for him. I had just moved to Tokyo for university and needed a job – like, I love Mikhail, but he’s pretty hard to live with. He’s really meticulous about the oddest things so crashing with him was kind of stressful. Yamazaki-san was steadily climbing the ranks at Tachibana Enterprises and needed a new personal assistant, so Mikhail recommended me.” Rin gives him a disbelieving look and Nitori winces through a smile. “I know, I definitely didn’t have the qualifications on paper but Yamazaki-san said he’d give me a week to see if I could keep up with his schedule, and I’ve been his P.A. ever since. That was three and a half years ago.”

Rin shakes his head in disbelief. “So you and Nagisa started working there at about the same time.”

“Yep.”

“God bless you,” he snorts.

Nitori laughs. “Nagisa’s definitely a handful, but –”

A muffled yell from the kitchen. “I heard that!”

“How?!” Rin cries back, whipping around to the glass door.

Nitori smiles with exasperation. “As he just demonstrated, Nagisa’s a handful, but we need someone like him in that office.” His eyes fall half-lidded as he gazes out at the lawn, distant. “It can get cold in there. In more ways than one.”

“… I can tell you care about him, though. Sousuke, I mean. And Nagisa talks about Makoto all the time.”

Nitori tucks his fists deeper into his coat as the wind picks up and Arena scampers after some tumbling leaves. “I think we make families out of places like that – working together so closely with so much money on the line.” He exhales a swirl of frost. “But – Arena, do not chew that pine cone! Drop it! – sorry, I just wanted to thank you for staying this long.”

Rin tenses with a frown. “What do you mean?”

He treads carefully. “Staying since you found out what happened – that you and Yamazaki-san got busted – the fact that you didn’t leave here in a storm says a lot about you.”

Rin flashes a little smile. “Good things, I hope.”

“The best things,” Nitori promises. “But just so you know…” He rolls his lips in, hesitating. “You can still go if this gets overwhelming, and it will, I’m sure.” He deflates even as the words come out, but it needed to be said. “And if you get uncomfortable at any point, you have a right to say so. It takes a special kind of person to not go crazy through situations like this, and you didn’t sign up for it.”

At Rin’s silence, Nitori faces him, and Rin stands tall in complete self-assurance. “I wouldn’t be here – with him – if I didn’t wanna be.”

Nitori lifts his chin, pleased, and they go back into the house with Arena. Rin pads upstairs to change into something warmer just as Sousuke exits the library, seeming like he’s finally found the balls to step up to the emotional plate, but he hesitates as he glances up the stairs. Nitori and Nagisa share a flat look before all but shoving him up the stairs, then they settle back down at the kitchen island with
an air of satisfaction.

Nagisa takes a break from work by scrolling through his phone. “How’d Rin-chan act?”

Nitori crosses his legs and leans his elbows on the counter. “He seems stubborn.”

Nagisa snorts, popping his gum. “Mikhail will definitely have fun with that attitude.”

“I mean stubborn in like, a good way.” He hushes his voice and nudges their shoulders together with a giddy smile. “He says he’s wants to stay.”

“Of course he does,” Nagisa uses his pinkie to delicately straighten out his bangs. “I’m the one who got them together; I don’t spend my off days binging on Millionaire Matchmaker for nothing.”

Nitori opens his mouth to say something else before his phone dings across the counter. It’s a different ringtone and Nagisa’s eyes snap over to the phone just as horror dawns inside Nitori. He lunges but Nagisa’s hand darts out to snag up the phone and he cries out victoriously before Nitori snatches the phone away. Nagisa rushes into Nitori’s space with manic glee. “Is that Muscle Twink?”

“His name is Momotarou, you crazy ass,” Nitori hisses, swatting Nagisa’s hand away.

“So it is him~”

“No, I didn’t – you –”

Nagisa judgmentally checks his nails and Nitori fumes, “You’re insufferable.”

“And you’re riding Carrot Top like the goddamn Kentucky Derby. Please tell me the carpet matches the drapes.”

“Gross,” Nitori hisses with a shove. “How do you even think of stuff like that?!”

“Uh,” Nagisa scoffs, “How can I not when Mikoshiba Seijuro walks around T.E. like he’s carrying a fucking bazooka between his thighs? He’s bow-legged his shit’s so big.”

“Momotarou isn’t like that ~”

Nagisa winces sympathetically. “Should I be calling him Skinny Penis instead of Muscle Twink?”

“Oh my God, I didn’t mean it that way!” He tries to rub the warmth out of his cheeks. “I mean he isn’t like Mikoshiba-san because he doesn’t do all that business stuff. He’s perfectly happy being a P.E. intern at that elementary school in Minato.” His blush heats up tenfold. “I – I like that he’s already settled in what he wants, that he isn’t looking for more than what he already has.” He glances away to make a face. “God, that sounds so cliché out loud.”

Nagisa’s grin is sly but his eyes crinkle. “It makes sense, though. We’re surrounded by greedy men on the daily in all those board meetings. Not to mention Momo-chan’s been pinning after you at every gala for like, ever. You’re lucky he’s still in good with his family and they want him to come to stuff like that.”

“Yeah,” Nitori smiles, shoulders hunching bashfully.
Nagisa cackles. “Holy shit, you got it bad. It’s too cute.” He nudges him playfully. “My friend Aki interns at that same elementary school; she said that Momo-chan’s a good guy.”

Nitori burns with mortification. “You told your friend about me and him?”

“No, I’m not that much of a gossip-sleaze, I just mentioned Momo-chan’s older brother works in T.E marketing and I subtly got the scoop on him.”

Nitori blinks. “Why?”

Nagisa shrugs as he goes back to his phone. “Just wanted to know. I get that it was kind of a dick move on my part, but –” He averts his eyes with a shrug.

Warmth floods Nitori’s chest. Nagisa’s really been there for him ever since that first morning Nitori stumbled into the T.E building on the verge of petrified tears; he was thirty minutes late on his first day, having took the wrong train line to central Tokyo, and he remembers turning the corner to see feet kicked up on the desk beside his. The person was wearing the exact same pair of cheap dress shoes down to the same tacky shade of brown. The boy looked up from his phone with a surprised blink, and he took in Nitori’s frazzled state just as Sousuke stormed out of his office with an intimidating air, hissing “Where the hell is –”

Nitori’s throat dried and he felt faint just before the blonde guy jumped up to throw an arm around his shoulder. “Ah, Sou-chan! Sorry, I got a little carried away showing the new meat around the building.” Nitori grunted as the boy gave him a hardy slap on the back, then he subtly rubbed it in comforting circles. “You know I could go on about the bomb-ass selfie lighting in the bathrooms for days.”

Sousuke stared and Nitori’s brain short-circuited. Then the man cleared his throat. “Right, well.” He shouldered open his office door with raised brows. “If you’re ready for your interview?”

Nitori comes back to himself as he blinks the sting from his eyes. Nagisa glances over at him, reading his expression and dropping him a wink. “I’d toss a drink in anyone’s face for you, Ai-chan.”

Nitori laughs because he knows better than anyone else that’s Nagisa Speak for I love you so fucking much.

“I’d throw a drink for you, too.”

Sousuke drags his feet down the hallway, approaching his bedroom with dread heavy in his bones. His stomach flutters in a rare fit of nervousness as he opens the door, pausing at the sight before him. Rin blinks with his arms raised over his naked torso, the lower-half of his face hidden by the collar of his turtleneck. Sousuke’s eyes sweep his pretty waist and the natural arch of his back before he meets Rin’s gaze, hoping the dark bedroom hides his blush. Rin glances away with wide eyes and rolls the sweater down his torso, hiking his skinny jeans up a bit higher. He looks so good like this, soft and warm with bare feet and a shy gaze. “Hey,” Rin mumbles, still looking at the floor.

“Hey,” he sighs, voice regretful for more reasons than he can name. Sousuke walks over to face him and Rin peeks up, watching how he moves, taking in his expression. Rin’s sweater is a creamy and slouchy, the sleeves swallowing his hands. “Are you cold?”
He fiddles with the little hoop in his cartilage. “Um, a little, but – I’m fine, it’s – it’s no big deal.”

“Oh.”

Holy fuck, this is awkward. Sousuke takes a deep breath and his mouth flies open at the same time Rin’s does –

The doorbell echoes through the house and Arena barks her head off before he deflates. “Mikhail’s here.” He rubs the back of his neck and Rin perks up with a nod, ankle bobbing. Sousuke heads toward the door, unaware of the way that Rin stares at Sousuke’s empty hands.

They walk downstairs and Sousuke braces himself, every fiber of him dying for a drink at this crisp hour of 10 AM. Mikhail turns around in a zealous sweep and Sousuke’s already fucking exhausted. “Ah, the man of the hour,” Mikhail greets, breezing up to him with a clack of his velvet loafers. He smells like Tom Ford and plane martinis. Mikhail frames Sousuke’s face to kiss both his cheeks, giving him an ardent shake. “Living well and raising hell, I see.”

“Oh,” Sousuke cringes. “Ah, thanks for coming on such short notice.”

“Oh please,” Mikhail snorts, untangling his scarf, and Nitori takes it with a smirk at Sousuke’s expense. “I wouldn’t miss this for the world. This is the hottest thing since the Sieff nude scandal with Saint Laurent in ’72. I knew you’d do me proud, boy.”

Sousuke chuckles briefly, ducking his head. “Thanks.”

Mikhail pats his cheek, reading him better than Sousuke gives him credit for. “Everything will be fine.” He goes to say something else before his gaze trails above Sousuke’s shoulder and he blinks. Sousuke follow his eyes to Rin, who smiles shyly in greeting and yelps when Mikhail all but tackles him with a delighted crow. “Oh, look at you!”

Rin stumbles to gain his footing as Mikhail holds him at arm’s length to take him in. Mikhail scoffs in disbelief before whipping around in utter distress. “Sousuke, he’s a darling!” He twirls Rin around again and again. “My God, your legs! Are you an athlete?!”

Rin startles a blush. “Oh, uh – yeah, I’m a swimmer.” He looks down, tucking a strand of hair behind his ear. “I used to be bigger….”

Mikhail shakes his head earnestly. “You’re absolutely lovely, perfectly proportioned! Oh, oh –” He gives Sousuke a look. “This all makes sense now.”

Sousuke almost dies but then Rin giggles and he thinks this shit might actually work; Rin’s positively beaming as shy as he looks. Sousuke never assumed Rin’s self-conscious about his body because he has no reason to be, at least in Sousuke’s eyes. He makes a mental note.

Mikhail swings their locked hands together. “I wish we were meeting under better circumstances, lovely Rin, but I hope I get to learn more about you once this situation is settled; I’ve known our Sousuke since he was a boy and Nagisa told me nothing but good things about you when we were texting on the plane.” He smiles and gives Rin’s fingers a warm squeeze, his whisper impassioned. “It is truly an honor to meet you.”

Rin looks winded, but touched. “Thank you.”
They all sit in the dining room with Mikhail’s notebook open on the table, and Rin blinks at it curiously. “You don’t have a computer?”

“No, dear, absolutely not.” Mikhail flaps out his coat tassels to sit down and Sousuke gets half-way through rolling his eyes before Nagisa catches it with a smirk. Mikhail says to Rin, “Computers can be hacked so easily and I started in this industry writing down everything I was told. And well, journals are a romantic notion, yes?” He nods at Nitori and Nagisa’s laptops. “Those are merely here to publish our story once we have it figured out.”

Sousuke’s insides run cold and Rin tenses. Nitori raises his brows at Sousuke and points his eyes at Rin’s empty hand, but Sousuke can’t move. He’s frozen in fear like never before as Mikhail clears his throat. “First thing’s first.” He levels his gazes with the both of them, but especially Rin. “No secrets told today will ever leave this room. You have my word as a professional, and you have Nagisa and Ai’s word as your friends. Nobody wants to confess uncomfortable things, so there is no judgement here. You’re both safe, all right?”

Rin nods but Sousuke can barely breathe. Mikhail sits back in his chair to cross his legs with a relaxing air, as if this is just a pleasant conversation over lunch. “First, I need to know the truth, and I won’t write that part down. There will be no evidence of what you tell me. So: how did you meet? How did this –” He gestures between them. “Actually start?”

Rin’s cheeks flood red with mortification and Sousuke tries to shake himself into focus. “Um.” His throat tightens and dries. He feels faint.

Nagisa glances between them. “I can tell him, if it’s cool with you two.”

Rin nods almost too fast and Sousuke bows his head in acceptance, swarmed with dread like none other. Nagisa says, “I signed them both up for a sugar daddy site – Sousuke on the money side and Rin on the receiving end.”

Sousuke’s surprised to hear the sheepish guilt in his voice.

“I knew Rin needed the money and I knew… what Sousuke needed,” Nagisa explains. “So it was like, a twisted blind date situation.”

Mikhail nods, almost clinical in his assessment of the situation. “We need to get rid of both of your profiles on that website, then. Aiichiro.”

“Oh, I –” Rin sits up straighter, worrying his lip. “I already deleted my profile.”

Mikhail’s brows jump at the same time Sousuke mutters, “You did?”

“Uh. Yeah.” Rin traces the hem of his sweater, not meeting Sousuke’s stunned gaze. “I didn’t really have a need for it anymore. I didn’t wanna…”

_I didn’t wanna be with anyone else._

Sousuke feels the physical sensation of his heart threatening to beat out of his chest.
Mikhail purses his lips. “So let’s say you met through a mutual friend, which isn’t far from the truth.” He jots this down in his notebook before clicking his pen closed to regard them both. “How many people know the truth about you two? About the whole –” He gives a vague, fickle wave of his fingers. “Sugar daddy situation?”

“Just Nagisa and Nitori on my end,” Sousuke confirms. “Mako figured it out on his own.”

Everyone turns to Rin at his silence. “Two of my friends knew.” He rushes, “But they’re my best friends, they’d never tell anyone.”

Mikhail arches an unconvinced brow. “The media would pay them enough money to live off of for a year if they gave an inside scoop.”

Rin cringes at how naïve he sounds, but he pushes on. “They wouldn’t rat me out like that.”

Nagisa looks up from his laptop. “I know Haru-chan and Kisu-chan; they’d knock out teeth for Rin. The story is safe with them.”

Mikhail shrugs. “All right, then. How long have you both been together?”

Together. “We –” We’re not like that, Sousuke starts to bolt out, but he doesn’t want to. This whole arrangement might have been fucking confusing from the start, but he knows that he doesn’t want to say that they aren’t together. “We haven’t seen each other long.”

Mikhail hums, brows pinched in thought. “We need to have a timeline that makes you look like an established couple.”

Rin stiffens so hard and fast that it gives Sousuke distress like none other. Mikhail studies him. “You do want it to look like you’re boyfriends, yes?”

Rin parts his lips for words he doesn’t have; it feels like his body is shutting down, his thoughts racing at such a speed that his mind goes blank. The pressure in the room bears down from all sides. Mikhail shakes his head in confusion. “Did you want to be something more? Fiancés, maybe –”

“No,” Rin hurls and he instantly regrets how disgruntled sounds. He didn’t mean to say it like that but he couldn’t stop the word from flying out of his mouth.

Mikhail leans back with a patient smile. “Why don’t you two talk about it privately? Take all the time you need; we’ll be waiting in here.”

He and Sousuke venture into the living room without speaking or even looking at each other. Rin sits down on the couch to wring his hands, but Sousuke just cradles his arms together where he stands in the center of the room, looking at a complete loss.

Rin mumbles, “Do you wanna talk?”

Sousuke moves like a walking light, a gray star wandering across the floor. He eases down beside Rin and the few feet between them feels like a canyon that promises a long and grueling journey if Rin tries to cross it.

He swears his chest is caving in. It takes such effort to hold back the tears that he shakes.
Sousuke’s brows sink together, a pinch of tension held between them that Rin would smooth out with his thumb if only he had the right to. “Baby,” Sousuke says softly, like the word escaped from the core of himself, and Rin fucking breaks.

The lone tear that drips off his chin is a victory against the flood he’s holding back inside. “I feel like you’re mad at me,” he croaks, voice tight with restraint.

Sousuke’s expression falls slack. “No. I’m not.” His firmness leaves no room for argument but it’s so naturally harsh that Rin flinches – he knows Sousuke didn’t mean it like that. He’s running on autopilot and lost to his own shock and he cannot afford to be tender at a time like this, but –

Sousuke realizes his error in a single breath and turns away to let out a jet of air through his nose. His gaze tracks the floor before wandering up to meet Rin’s timid eyes, and the man’s face softens with his voice. “Come here.”

“I –”

“Come here, baby,” he says with all the affection he can muster, and Rin scoots over as if it isn’t a physical pain not to fling himself into Sousuke’s arms. Sousuke pulls Rin over his lap with a tug on the back of his knee and this is the first time Rin’s straddled anyone without his blood being damn near acidic with burning lust. This isn’t that kind of embrace – yes, the touching is a primitive comfort, yet it’s calculated on Sousuke’s part. He’s measuring Rin’s expression like a man desperate to fix the problems in which they both take blame; they’re fighting over that blame in a useless tug-of-war, and it all shows in the apologetic silence.

Rin stares down at the crux of his own parted thighs, looking at his empty hands with no courage to move them. His eyes close when Sousuke cups his face and though the touch is impossibly gentle, Rin feels the strength of his sweeping thumbs, buries his face in the nearest palm like a moth to flame.

Rin finds the bravery to look up as Sousuke’s thumbs smear his tears down to nothing but a gleam on his cheeks, and no man has ever looked as heartbroken as Sousuke does. “I’m so,” he murmurs, shifting his hands to cradle Rin’s face, “So, sorry.”

A sob punches out of Rin and he hates himself for it because he’s doing everything he shouldn’t – he’s supposed to be strong or at least pretend to be indifferent to the horror of what’s going on. “It’s not your fault.” He shakes his head pleadingly with it, begging Sousuke to let him shoulder this blame.

The side of Sousuke’s mouth crooks up and it’s everything a smile shouldn’t be; it’s an acceptance of defeat, like he’s felt all of this before, a hundred times, in so many different ways. How many times has this man been swallowed by a family scandal, left to choke on the cruelty of strangers? Was he a young boy the first time such darkness swarmed his gut and left him cold inside? Are children even children in the wake of wealth? Rin asks himself this question even though he readily knows that he could never bear the answer.

“I’m the one who kissed you in those gardens,” Sousuke says, and his tone might be considered playful at another time, in some other universe, but right now it’s just a bitter attempt at humor.

“Yeah, but I’m the one who suggested we go there.” Rin’s hands hover over Sousuke’s biceps just close enough to feel his heat and crave it like mad, but his fingers jumble together in his lap instead.
“I should have been more careful.”

Sousuke huffs and it’s short yet fond all at once. “Rin, you didn’t know to be careful.” Rin winces in shame but Sousuke smooths out his expression with warm brushes of his fingers. He sweeps Rin’s hair aside, taking a selfish moment to indulge as he tucks a strand behind his ear. Sousuke leans closer, speaking with gentleness. “I’m glad you didn’t know. It shows how different we are.”

Rin frowns, defensiveness brewing in his chest, and Sousuke’s smile might be brief but it’s one of endearment. “I need to be thinking… constantly. About how I look, where my eyes go. If I’m holding myself the right way.” He shakes his head in a daze. “You don’t give a fuck about any of that. You’re who you are and if people don’t like it, they just stop existing to you. I admire that.” He runs a hand over the side of Rin’s flushed throat to brush a secret against his ear. “I’m jealous of you.”

Rin blinks, lips parting before snapping shut. Sousuke keeps their cheeks tucked together, nuzzling into Rin’s hair with a long breath. “I’ll never be as carefree as you, but it’s not frustrating. I’m…” He swallows and Rin clenches Sousuke’s forearms at the noise. “I’m in awe of you, every time I see you smile like you think you could fight the world. I have every faith that you could.”

Sousuke’s mouth is closed, his stare as level as ever, but Rin feels him tense. “I don’t wanna leave,” Rin pleads. Such words have never left him before and his past-self of only two months ago would curse him for letting them slip out, but in this moment, Rin is exhausted and can’t smirk his way out of this. He’s washed-out from soul to skin in absolute surrender to the truth.

Sousuke’s hand sits heavily on his thigh. Then, slowly, as Rin’s words sink in, he feels Sousuke clench him with the tender reverence of a man who would fight tooth-and-nail to keep Rin as safe and warm as he is right now.

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Rin feels the burn of pure lightning when Sousuke surges up to kiss him. He almost tumbles backward off Sousuke’s lap but the man gathers him up in his arms, and Rin groans in satisfaction, loud and raw. He licks Sousuke’s lips clean of their frown, swiping away the evidence of his anguish. His world is a mess of shivers and gold, veins alight, and he feels recharged in a way he never knew he needed – no, in a way he never accepted from anyone else before Sousuke.
They part to heave and Sousuke rests their foreheads together. “I’m sorry I’ve been such a dick through this whole thing. It wasn’t because I blamed you for it, I was just…” His voice fades hopelessly small. “Waiting for you to go, and I didn’t want to be in the room when it happened.”

Rin shakes his head. “Why is everyone expecting me to bounce? Nitori said the same thing and Makoto looked at me like he was never going to see me again.”

Sousuke thumbs Rin’s waist. “Because this is going to get messy fast. You’re going to be faced with an onslaught of opinions you’re not asking for. It’s not healthy, it’s so much unnecessary negativity you don’t need in your life right now.”

Rin lifts his brows sharply. “You don’t know me, Sousuke. Even now, you’re still assuming a lot.”

He winces in apology. “I’m not insinuating you can’t handle it; I’m saying that nobody would willingly endure what’s about to happen to us.” Torment storms his eyes. “I can’t ask you to stay.”

He swallows and his voice raws. “But I wish to God that you would.”

Rin’s breath hitches as Sousuke sits up straighter, lips hovering close, and the air buzzes between their mouths like a hot, electric surge. “I want to make you happy. I want to provide for you.” He leans back and Rin chases after him, bracing a hand on Sousuke’s chest when he dips too fast. Sousuke cups his cheek, thumb sweeping Rin’s lips like he’s brushing a final kiss there. “I won’t judge you and I could never hate you, no matter what you decide. The choice is yours.”

Rin’s heart lodges in his throat like a hot coal. “Would you think about me, if I left?” The quiet is suffocating between them and his voice thickens, echoing through that cold, lonely estate. "Or would you try to forget me?"

Sousuke breathes a laugh - he’s a man embracing defeat with open arms, and there isn’t an ounce of shame in his confession. "I never want to forget you. I'll miss you every day.” He cups the arch of Rin's back like he does when they fall asleep together. "Every night.”

“I already said I want to be with you.” He touches Sousuke’s face, rasping down a sideburn. “I’ve already done a shit-ton of questionable things to be here and I don’t owe the world our – our truth. People like you shouldn’t be scared to come out, so I’m willing to be part of that statement.” He nods firmly. “I’ll do it.”

“You’re absolutely sure?”

“Wouldn’t hurt to convince me by kissing me stupid again, would it?”

A smile blooms on Sousuke’s face before he kisses Rin so adoringly that the very air shimmers.

They settle on a story with Mikhail for the public, and the man gives them instructions on how to proceed. “I’ll handle publishing the statement and I’ll take over the legality about Rin’s photos being used without his consent.” His energy is reassuring to Rin, plus having Sousuke’s hand back on his thigh makes him feel like he could take on the entire world. “In the meantime, you two are on house arrest until Sousuke’s surgery – leaving will be inevitable at that point, but the both of you need to stay under the radar while we paint a good picture for you.” He gives the two a pointed look. “If you’d like to help us further establish you as a couple, feel free to be cute on social media, but otherwise, I’d suggest that you stay off the internet for a few days. You have to give us time to shape public opinion, and seeing any backlash will tamper your patience and make you worried sick.”
Mikhail glances at Rin warily. “If you go out by yourself too soon, you’re going to get harassed by
the press – or maybe random people in general. I won’t tell you not to hit anyone because they can
get aggressive, but you need to be aware that everything you do is going to be watched from this
point on.”

Rin takes a deep breath, nodding faintly. “I don’t go out much on my own, anyway. Just around the
college and stuff.”

“That shouldn’t be too much of a problem; your campus police should take of any situation that
arises while you’re on school grounds.”

Sousuke’s brows crease with a very upset frown. “Rin, you shouldn’t have to feel isolated. You’ll go
crazy watching your back all the time.”

He shrugs. “It’s not like you can be with me all the time.” His voice softens as he plays with
Sousuke’s fingers. “Even though that’d be nice.”

Mikhail shares a smirk with Nagisa at the exchange. The man purses his lips and says, “What’s
Ryuuiji up to these days?”

The question seems innocent enough, but Sousuke gives Mikhail a look as the man absently checks
his nails. “I think he’s got a security gig at some club right now.”

“Adorable,” Mikhail snorts. “So he isn’t busy, then?”

Understanding dawns on Sousuke’s face and Rin feels nervous for some reason. “Who’s Ryuuiji?”

“He was my father’s body guard,” Sousuke explains. “He worked for my family for at least twenty
years before –” His mouth firms into a line. “I don’t know if he’s ready to come back or if he even
wants to.”

“Nonsense,” Mikhail scoffs. “You and Makoto were his world when you were boys. Rin needs
protection and so will that Haru fellow when he and Makoto get caught together next.”

Rin digs his feet together. “So I’d have to go everywhere with him?”

“Not necessarily,” Nitori perks up. “Ryuuiji retired from the special forces and he worked as a private
investigator before he was hired by the Tachibanas. He’s very discrete; you won’t even know he’s
there, if you don’t want to.”

“That’s not reassuring,” Sousuke drones.

“I think you need to consider re-hiring Ryuuiji, Sousuke,” Mikhail says. Nitori arches a knowing
brow at his uncle. “At least give Rin the option of being able to call Ryuuiji if he gets followed; he
can be there quicker than you, and he won’t cause a scene. But what do you think, lovely Rin?”

He thinks for a moment before he shrugs. “Guess it couldn’t hurt to try.”

“Excellent.” Mikhail rises and swings his bag over the crook of his elbow, fluffing his curls. “I’ll
drop by his place on the way to my hotel, I don’t mind.”
“I’m sure you don’t,” Nagisa smirks.

Mikhail winks. “We all have that one special Straight we’re hoping to converge, don’t we?” He takes his leave but not before embracing Rin fiercely. “I’ll be around; call me if you need anything, business or otherwise.”

Rin’s touched and smiles happily. Mikhail hugs Sousuke with an ardent clap on the back that makes him grunt. “You take care of him, you hear me?”

“I will,” he vows, one hand in his jean pocket and the other tangled with Rin’s fingers.

After that, Nitori and Nagisa depart as well, leaving Rin and Sousuke alone for the first time since their world imploded only hours ago. Rin feels like he’s been awake for days and rubs his eyes sleepily, going up on his toes with a yawn. Sousuke smiles all warm with endearment, letting Rin snuggle into his chest right where they stand. The man pecks his forehead. “Wanna go to bed?”

“Yeah,” Rin sighs, pulling himself up by wrapping his arms around Sousuke’s neck. Sousuke grabs his thighs with a chuckle and carries him upstairs. Rin’s fast asleep before they even make it to the bedroom, but Sousuke takes infinite care in nestling him under the blankets. He turns to go grab his forgotten cell phone from downstairs but a hand flashes out to seize his wrist. Rin peeks one eye open with a stern pout and Sousuke yelps as Rin yanks him into bed.
The world turns all eyes on Yamazaki Sousuke as he submits a public statement - and confirms that he is gay

Yamazaki Sousuke - Co-CEO of Tachibana Enterprises, based in Tokyo - had the rug swept out from under him after he was caught kissing another man (now confirmed to be Matsuoka Rin) and the images were published all across social media. Yamazaki announced his loyalty and support to his adopted brother, Tachibana Makoto, when Tachibana came out as gay, and he held his head high when he confirmed he was homosexual as well.

Yamazaki is dating Matsuoka Rin, who is a familiar face if you keep up with Japan's university swimming leagues. He is the captain of his team and lead them to nationals this year. Though Matsuoka did not place high in his own heats, he is known for being a passionate captain and a very supportive individual.

"His ambition was very attractive, and he's precious to me," Yamazaki stated.
Though the media attempted to portray Matsuoka as a parter with an arrest record, public opinion is slowly evolving as his professors and friends express what a hard-working student he is. A well known Tokyo-based YouTuber, @asahishiina, went to his channel on behalf of his swimming captain, vowing that Matsuoka is a good friend and that the world should uplift Matsuoka and praise Yamazaki’s bravery.

Shiina is openly gay and his boyfriend, Shigino Kisumi, often appears in his vlogs; the two are the internet’s sweethearts, and we predict that Shiina’s call to action will help sway public opinion in Matsuoka’s favor.

And of course, Matsuoka’s mother took to social media to praise her son through a heartfelt Facebook post on her crafting page. She shared a picture in which she appears along with her son and her daughter, who is also openly gay.

Matsuoka Miyako wrote, “It is truly a blessed day when a parent can admire their children to this degree. I have never been prouder or loved them more. Know that you have made me (and your father) very proud.”
cherrycola stay mad 💖
Y'all ready to report from fuckin homophobes

Ready! 😊

Born ready 😞

I'm armed with an americano & data

I just woke up but yeah let's do it

Hiyori it's 9 PM

WE DON'T JUDGE OUR SOLDIERS HARU WE THANK THEM FOR THEIR SERVICE

asahil & kisumi will report shitty youtube comments

aki and nii are taking instagram

We're on it 💖
I'll do Reddit I'm on there all the time anyway

I'm reporting stuff from Facebook right?

yes

What about all the actual news outlets

ai-chan will be reporting comments on the business pages and I'm going to the drama networks

Are you still with Rin?

i just left sou-chan's~! they were so cuddly & sleepy ✌️ 😴️ 😴️ and they're basically on house arrest for the next few days but it will do them some good
Yeah they need to rest. We'll take care of the assholes

I mean. I think Sousuke will be taking care of one too technically

WOW

I JUST SNORTED MY SODA HOLY SHIT

Can we vote him off the island

we need all the help we can get unfortunately 😳

Nagisa you know that was funny don't even. I heard you say like the exact same thing about Asahi and Kisumi the other day

Oh ok now it's funny 😇
Rin stirs in the night, still pleasantly full from dinner, when Sousuke made him the most perfect steak to ever exist. He'll forever be in mourning about finishing that steak, but he has no regrets. Eyes still closed, he reaches across the bed and gropes the first handful of flesh he can find, which he happily discovers is Sousuke's crotch. Rin curls a grin with all his teeth as Sousuke grunts, "Well, hey."

Rin chuckles and blinks his eyes open, crinkling them. Sousuke's sitting up against the headboard, his cell phone screen casting his face in a pale blue glow. Rin shimmies across the bed to hug his arms around one of Sousuke's thighs and nestles his head in his lap with a contented sigh. Sousuke smiles and plays with Rin's hair while scrolling through his phone. Rin meshes a few sleepy kisses against Sousuke's leg, just under the edge of his basketball shorts. "Thought we weren't supposed to look at all that shit."
"Yeah, I know. Morbid curiosity's a bitch." Rin rolls over onto his back to study Sousuke, but the man continues stroking his hair without falter. "We've actually got a lot of support."

"That's good." Relaxation lulls through him as Sousuke rubs Rin's belly under his shirt. "Anyone threatening to take you from me yet?"

Sousuke smirks down at him. "I'd love to see you jealous. I'd probably come right where I was standing."

"You would, but you'd also probably have to pay my bail. And then Mikhail would have to ship us off to a deserted island for like, a year." Sousuke just stares and Rin's eyes fall flat. "You do not own an island."

"I could if I wanted to," he taunts.

"Please don't make me hard right now. I just want to cuddle and pass out some more."

"You realize you hump me in your sleep though, right?"

Rin blows a raspberry against Sousuke's thigh and the man laughs. "Mean-ass," Rin muffles, snuggling back into Sousuke's thigh.

Sousuke scrolls some more. "People say we're cute. You know I don't like that word."

"It's true, though," Rin grins.

"Some of these comments are weird, though."

He tenses and looks up cautiously, but Sousuke's expression is one of deep concentration, mouth pouted, brows creased. Rin says, "What do you mean the comments are -"

"What's a 'SouRin'?"

Chapter End Notes

twitter & curious cat (btw, i post additional previews on twitter including lil snippets and aesthetic boards and update info for this fic + my other ones)
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Ikuya throws his head back to sing a laugh and Hiyori knows that he is wholeheartedly, absolutely fissed.

Chapter Notes

flash update whoo!

chapter songs are:
what i need by hayley kiyoko (ft. kehlani)
young dumb and broke by khalid (mood but anyway)
youngblood by 5SOS
down by sakima

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Let it be known that Hiyori Tono is fully aware of how lazy he is and that he’s wholly accepted it, therefore he doesn’t feel guilty about taking an entire two hours to convince himself to roll out of bed to go find something to eat. He feels a little guilty about not working out since the swimming season ended, so he settles to walk on his the journey for something greasy and regrettable. He deserves a food-coma; he just spent the last six hours reporting homophobes for Rin, and though Hiyori would have gone another six hours in the name of his friend, not even a veteran internet-addict like himself can keep searing his retinas with Reddit forums for the rest of the night.

He’s the only person out of his friend group with the confidence to walk around Tokyo alone at night, but Hiyori never minded. Not many people bother him on the street if only because he sends any weirdo a creepy smile that quickly sends them elsewhere. Hiyori likes fucking with people; sue him.

He takes the trainline to central Tokyo just because, even though it’s a little far from the university in Bunkyo. He’d go the distance for a deep-fried skewer, and he’s going to eat at least three of them. He takes the minute walk from the Takadanobaba station and heads for the intersection that’ll take him across the street to his restaurant of choice.

The night is damn near frigid as snow dust plasters the lenses of his glasses, giving the world a crystalline blur. As he walks toward the red-light, he pauses at the person waiting for the street to clear. He’d know that pretty little body anywhere, dressed in sinfully tight jeans like he’s looking for trouble. And that hair – God, that hair. Hiyori would call it teal at first glance but he spent the better half of an hour looking through Kisumi’s color swatch ring he uses for photography, trying to find the specific name for such a shade.
Hiyori admires the boy from afar because he did turn Hiyori down when he tried to get his number at the bus stop a few days ago, and Hiyori’s not about to make him uncomfortable by asking again. He knows how to accept a decline, however, the boy doesn’t look okay right now. He’s on the phone and even at this distance, Hiyori can tell that he’s crying, cheeks gleaming and flushed with distress. He’s angry, snapping at whoever’s on the line and quivering for reasons that have nothing to do with the cold. Hiyori’s conflicted but it’s none of his business. Maybe the guy’s just having a bad night.

But then the boy glances back and forth on either side of the road – the crosswalk light might confirm that it’s technically safe, but this is a big city full of reckless drivers and he’s impatient and emotional.

He’s not paying attention and Hiyori’s insides run cold when he hears an engine roaring closer by the second.

Headlights flood over the hill with the tires screaming and Hiyori just – leaves his body, abandoning sanity. An instinctual sense of moral obligation kicks his feet into a run. The boy turns toward the car, frozen in the middle of the street, and Hiyori throws all his weight into shoving the boy out of the way before he squeezes his eyes shut.

He hears the crash. Then he doesn’t hear anything else.

Pain is funny – it’s never wanted and that’s what makes it very selfish of all five of your senses. Hiyori stirs and instantly knows two things: that he’s on fire with agony and that he’s drugged out of his mind. There’s an ache deep in his muscles even as his skin prickles with numbness, and it doesn’t feel natural, it feels – almost violating. The pain-killers act as a trembling wall straining to keep the pain from flooding in, but Hiyori knows it’s there, feels the pressure of it tight in his core.

He hears beeping and what the fuck, what the fuck, beeping is not good. He knows exactly where he is because that beeping is very distinct and only hospitals smell so strongly of rubbing alcohol and pee all at once.

The very first conscious thought he has is that there’s no way he can pay any medical bills.

The second thought is that it’s bright with morning when he cracks his eyes open, vision smudged like watercolors without his glasses. And then someone’s crying out, “Oh my God, Hiyori!”

It’s Kisumi – he knows because the person smells like bubblegum when they crush Hiyori in a fierce embrace. “F*cking hell,” Kisumi sobs, and Hiyori reels from where Kisumi’s cradling his head and pressing all these teary smooches against his hair, which reeks of antiseptic.

“Goddamn it, Tono.” Hiyori winces as he creaks his neck to look at Asahi, who’s sitting on the edge of the bed with red-rimmed eyes and rubbing Hiyori’s back in frantic circles like spinning tires. “You scared the shit out of us.”

“Sorry,” he croaks, smiling because that’s all he knows to do in this moment.

There’s a rush of footsteps from outside before the door crashes open. “Hiyori,” Haru breathes, sagging in such relief that he almost collapses. “Fuck, thank —”

Nagisa barrels in from the hallway and flings himself into Hiyori’s arms with a banshee wail. “All
you bastards have given me three heart attacks in twelve hours, *I swear to high fucking hell! Shit,*” he bawls.

Hiyori pats Kisumi and Nagisa’s backs but he can only do it for nine seconds before his strength drains and he flops against the bed like a rag doll. Asahi chuckles before pulling Kisumi into his chest, and Nii slings an arm around Nagisa. Aki smiles at the display and holds Hiyori’s hand. “How do you feel, honey?”

“Um...” Hiyori looks down at himself, disoriented. He’s wearing a promiscuous hospital gown with all sorts of needles shoved into the crook of his elbow, and that heart monitor spikes a headache between his eyes with every beep, but he’s never been so content just to breathe. “I’m kinda hammered, but I’m okay.”

Cautiously, Aki glances down at his feet. Hiyori follows her gaze and inhales sharply at the cast on his leg from the knee down. It weighs down on him like a fucking cinderblock. “You broke your leg,” she grimaces.

“Oh,” he says, voice hollow.

“You’re x-rays look fuckin’ sick though,” Asahi beams. “You had surgery last night, but there were two bones sticking out in like, a triangle.”

“Illuminati reference,” Hiyori breathes, excitement dawning on his face.

Asahi throws his head back to laugh. “Yeah, I knew you’d say that. Kisumi’s gonna frame the x-ray for you.”

“Can’t wait.” Hiyori smiles, touched that his friends have surrounded him like this. “I’m sorry I scared you guys.”

Haru crosses his arms from where he’s leaning against the wall, away from everyone – crowds were never his thing, not even on a happy occasion. “That guy said you jumped in front of the car for him.” Haru fixes him with a stern look of concern. “Hiyori, that was insane.”

He bows his head. “Yeah, I know.” Nii pats his head, untangling his wild hair. “I just – fuck, I didn’t even think about it.”

Nagisa nudges him with insistent excitement. “I can’t believe you saved Kirishima Ikuya’s life.”

“Who?”


Hiyori struggles to fight through the fog in his brain. “Kirishima sounds so familiar.”

“Oh, yeah,” Nagisa scoffs. He leans in with a conspiring whisper. “Ikuya is Kirishima Natsuya’s little brother – the guy Nao’s seeing.”

Nii crosses her arms in a fidgety, worrisome manner. “Ain’t the Kirishimas rumored to be a mob family or whatever? Hope they don’t try to knight you, Hiyori.”
“Maybe they’ll give you a kick-ass dagger,” Asahi says. “With like, tigers on it or some shit.”

Hiyori smirks before he pales. “Wait, is he okay? Ikuya?”

Haru nods at the door toward the hallway. “He’s been waiting out there all night. He rode in the ambulance with you, and he gave me your phone when we all got here.”

Hiyori almost jumps out of his own skin when Asahi bursts into tears, rushing to embrace him again. “T-The hospital had to call t-the university for your e-emergency contact – why the hell didn’t you tell me you had put me down for it?!”

Hiyori swallows from where his face is mushed against Asahi’s chest. “I didn’t have anyone else,” he jokes, but that just sends everyone into another fit of tears and he’s suddenly got five people on his bed petting him like he’s the most precious kitten to ever grace this planet.

Haru smirks from his place still on the wall before the door opens. Nao breezes in as classy and quiet as ever, smiling at Hiyori with a bouquet of white lilies. “Hi, Hiyo-chan.”

Hiyori’s winded. “Hey,” he breathes, accepting Nao’s gentle hug.

Nao gives him a critical once over. “You look dreadful, but I’m glad you’re going to be all right.”

He barks a raspy laugh. “Yeah. Thanks for coming.”

Nao cuts one of those eerily serene smiles that he’d still wear if the world went up in flames, but it’s the exact type of steadfast reassurance that Hiyori needs right now. Nao glances back at the door, lips parting before he hesitates. Asahi and Kisumi glance at each other before Nao sighs in defeat. “I’m here for you but I was also supposed to drive Ikuya home. He’s – I know him.” Nagisa wiggles his brows behind his back and Nao turns sharply. Nagisa’s head snaps around to pretend that he’s fascinated by a tacky picture of fruit on the wall.

Nao regards Hiyori while Kisumi elbows Nagisa in the ribs. “Ikuya’s refusing to leave until he sees you – if you want to, of course. I think he wants to apologize.”

Hiyori’s brows furrow. “It was an accident, it’s not his fault.”

“Well.” Nao gives him a look. “He told me that he was distracted and on the phone when he crossed the street. You wouldn’t have had to jump in front of him if he were paying attention.”

Asahi’s face floods red and he works his jaw with a glance at the door, but Kisumi hugs both arms around his biceps to keep him in place. “Down boy,” he hushes.

His lips curl in vile, his teeth a white-hot flash. “Hiyori could have fucking died just because some asshole was being careless, Kisumi. He was unconscious and bleeding in the road, all alone.”

Kisumi’s eyes flicker with confliction and Asahi’s breath quickens with pent-up anguish boiling over. “That’s what could have happened if that dumbass –”

“Hitting him won’t change anything.” Kisumi’s voice falls lower in a soothing murmur. “What’s done is done.”

Asahi scoffs, rearing up to his full height, but Kisumi doesn’t flinch as his boyfriend towers over him – he squares his own shoulders and Hiyori’s stomach drops because Asahi and Kisumi might have
love like nobody else, but their arguments are just as passionate. “What needs to be done is knock some fuckin’ sense into him –”

His voice dies when Kisumi pinches Asahi’s chin to level their gazes in the firmest severity. “Enough people have got hurt. Don’t. For me.”

It’s like they’re the only people in the room, half from the intensity and partly because everyone wants to just melt away into the floor. Asahi’s breathing hard with his fists clenched, but slowly, his rigidness falls lax. He keeps his jaw set and his arms crossed too tightly, but he doesn’t leave Kisumi’s side.

A little wound-up from the exchange, Hiyori looks at Nao. “I’m the one who decided to push him out of the way. It’s on me.”

“Don’t say it like that,” Asahi whispers, face twisting hopelessly.

Hiyori shrugs. “It’s true, though.”

Nao blinks in awe before composing his expression. “You want to see him, then?”

He blushes for some reason. “Ah, sure.”

Kisumi gestures their friends out of the room. Hiyori shifts once he’s alone, carding his bangs straighter and adjusting his gown. It’s a useless attempt to make himself look presentable, least of all attractive.

The door peeks open and Hiyori holds Ikuya’s gaze as the boy cautiously steps into the room. He’s a mess, his eyes ringed with exhaustion, disheveled hair swept back into a tiny little ponytail at the base of his skull. His skin is washed-out, his clothes wrinkled, and he might be wearing all black but Hiyori can tell where dried blood blotches the fabric. That’s his blood. He represses a shudder and smiles as nicely as he can, tipping his head with his closed eyes crinkled. “Hi, Ikuya~”

“… hi,” he says numbly. He worries his lips, biting and sucking them nervously. “Um.” He looks faint. “I know this is useless to say, but I wanted you to know that I’m so – so sorry about this. You,” he rushes. “You, I mean.” He glances away, flustering.

He’s never heard a voice be so sweet yet low all at once, slurring along a murmur like waves in a storm. “It’s okay; it was an accident.” He snorts and hikes up his good leg to lean back against the bed. “I needed a good nap, anyway.”

Ikuya startles a disbelieving smile at that, their dark humor connecting for the flash of a second. Then he goes back to looking mournful and distress rises in Hiyori. “I should have been paying attention, I have these memory problems, and it makes it hard to concentrate.” He quickly waves his hands. “But that’s no excuse, I should have been paying attention –”

“Christ, Ikuya, it’s okay.” Hiyori keeps saying his name as if they’re friends, but his tongue and lips have to dance in so many fun directions to say it, so he doesn’t want to stop. He hesitates, wondering what the the proper etiquette is for a situation like this. “You looked upset on the phone.”

Ikuya scoffs angrily up at the ceiling. “Yeah, it was my dad. It’s complicated.”

Hiyori nods sympathetically. “I get that.”
Ikuya gives him a haunted look that says he really, really doesn’t get it, but he sobers up. “I’m really sorry, Hiyori.” He blushes down at his feet. “Your friend told me your name, the redheaded one. He seems pretty pissed at me.”

“Asahi’s protective of people; you should see him when someone threatens his boyfriend’s ‘honor’.”

Ikuya giggles and Hiyori just kind of – lights up from the inside out. He might be bruised to a pulp, but it feels like he’s glowing. He blurts, “Um, you don’t… you don’t remember me, do you?”

“You just got hit last night.”

His left eye twitches. “No I mean, I tried to talk to you before. At the bus stop a few days ago? I asked for your number and you walked away?”

Ikuya blinks without an ounce of recollection and something about it is disturbing. “I don’t…?” He rakes a hand through his hair. “I believe you but like I said, my memory is shit.” He smiles shyly. “But thanks for telling me. I wouldn’t have the balls to say something like that if I were you, but for the record, I was probably just having a bad day. I’ve been having those a lot recently.” He blushes as he gives Hiyori a once over. “It’d probably, uh. Go a little different this time if you asked now.”

Hiyori feels like a new man. “Well. You wanna hang out for a while?”

Ikuya ends up staying the rest of the day and all through the night. They battle on the Nintendo DS’ Hiyori’s friends left him in an overnight bag, and Hiyori hasn’t played Mario Cart in months but the way Ikuya hunches over the DS with his eyes ablaze, tongue pinched between his teeth – it’s too cute to say no to. Hiyori always judges someone’s personality on who they pick as their racing character (he’s held steadfast loyalty for Princess Peach since he was eight), and the fact that Ikuya, in all his tiny glory, chose Bowser, is just too precious for words.

They listen to music together, sharing earbuds with their shoulders tucked close. They go back and forth between choosing songs and they spent the better part of the day listening through the entirety of Taylor Swift’s discography, debating over each song.

They exchange numbers over bland hospital rice and Ikuya chews, “I’m gonna make Delicate your ringtone.”

“A man after my own heart,” Hiyori gushes, and Ikuya smiles in that way that makes his shoulders bunch up all coy. “I pick Wildest Dreams for yours.”

“That song is so fuckin’ dramatic.”

“That’s why it’s perfect.”

“Ass,” Ikuya chuckles. “It’s a good drinking song too, though. Alone, of course. When I was thirteen, I told myself I was gonna walk down the aisle to Enchanted.”

Hiyori scoffs, offended. “Then what am I supposed to walk down the aisle to?”

So that’s how they end up making their wedding playlist, and the task rolls on well through the night. With starlight dancing in his hair, Ikuya leans back from the laptop. “I think it’s solid now, but
there’s no song for our wedding night.”

Hiyori cranes back. “Are you kidding me, Ready for it. That’s common sense.”

“I have never once thought about fucking to that song. Don’t smirk at me like that, you’re literally in the hospital. In a gown.”

“Easy access~”

Ikuya laughs so hard that he wheezes and he shoves Hiyori. “God,” he coughs, smearing the tears from his eyes. “I haven’t laughed like this since I was little.” He’s alight – young and carefree and clinging to every moment of it.

Hiyori smiles, meeting his gaze easily. “I like your laugh. It’s higher than your regular voice; you sound like you’re eleven.” He’s expecting the next swat and chuckles.

They sit in comfortable silence, watching the muted news on the television in the corner. They have to squish together to fit on the bed and the backs of their hands are pressed together. Slowly, Ikuya looks down. “You’re so cold.”

“What a shame,” Hiyori sighs, arching a brow in playful challenge.

Ikuya rolls his eyes and laces their fingers together, resting their hands over his belly. His thumb traces a line of stitches on Hiyori’s palm with confliction. Hiyori nudges him, voice softening. “Hey, I said it’s no big deal.”

“It’s not that.” He licks his lips and Hiyori’s gaze doesn’t even track the motion – he’s more concerned about the grief brewing in Ikuya’s eyes. “This whole thing made me realize just how much my dad is fucking me up. Like, I knew it was bad? But now someone else got hurt because of how preoccupied my mind was.”

Hiyori gives a soothing hum and situates their hands to cradle Ikuya’s fingers better. Ikuya smiles in thanks, but it’s dim. Carefully, Hiyori ventures, “Do you live with your dad? Sorry, I know it’s not my business, feel free to tell me to fuck off, but things got a lot better for me when I moved for college.”

Ikuya shakes his head. “I’m staying with my brother right now and it’s helping, but…” He closes his eyes with a frustrated sigh.

Hiyori tugs on his hand for Ikuya to open his eyes, and he smiles in bitter sympathy. “Shit takes time. I know it sucks, but it gets better, as cliché as it sounds.”

“Thanks.”

Hiyori strokes the back of his hand for a moment, heart sinking. “Ikuya.” He takes a breath. “You weren’t… trying to walk out in front of the car, were you?”

Silence drops like a cinderblock, tension freezing the air. Then Ikuya sighs. “No, I wasn’t.” His voice falls quiet into a secret. “But I don’t know if I would have minded much if I got hit.”

Ikuya stiffens, waiting for Hiyori to lash out in distress, but Hiyori just plays with his fingers. “Not to tell you how to live your life, but thinking that way doesn’t sound very fun.”
“It’s not,” Ikuya snorts. He stares at Hiyori’s shoulder for a long minute before resting his head on it in defeat. Hiyori rubs his cheek into Ikuya’s hair as the boy whispers, “I think I might need help.”

“And that’s okay,” Hiyori promises, inhaling the scent of plum-and-blackberry shampoo. “Shit happens, there’s no shame in it.”

Ikuya leans back but doesn’t pull away. Their noses brush, his breath warm on Hiyori’s face, making him tingle all the way down to his throat. Ikuya’s eyes drop to his mouth and Hiyori parts his lips but doesn’t move an inch forward – not only out of decency but because his heartbeat is nearly audible in the silence. Ikuya tips his face and Hiyori’s shifts the other way, giving him the space to lean in and –

The door flies open and the lights flicker on, searing his vision. “Goddamn son of a bitch fucking –” Hiyori groans, sitting up with fire dancing on tongue. “What –” He stares and blinks. “Rin?”

“Hiyori!” Of course, he’s instantly bawling and instantly in Hiyori’s arms. His tears should be exasperating at this point, but he sounds so scared that Hiyori can only hold him tighter. “H-Haru called me, I – I’m so sorry I wasn’t here sooner, I –”

As he babbles, Ikuya gets off the bed flustered with his cheeks burning. He notices someone else in the doorway and his spine snaps straight. “Yamazaki-san.”

“Ikuya-san.” Sousuke’s leaning against the door with a cap low over his face, and he tucks his mask under his chin to give him a warm smile. “Glad you’re all right.”

Ikuya fumbles through a bow. “T-Thank you.” Then he bows again, putting all of his focus into making it as important as Sousuke deserves. “And thank you for coming out. You handled it gracefully.”

Sousuke chuckles. “Maybe in the public eye, but…” He bows gratefully. “Thank you.”

Rin sits on the bed on his knees, looking like a shell of himself as he takes in all the bruises and scrapes and IV tubes. “This looks so scary…”

Hiyori rubs the back of his neck, or tries to before the needle in his elbow protests. “I’m high as a kite right now, so I’m not in a lot of pain. Aren’t you supposed to be on house arrest?”

“Fuck that,” Rin fumes, bristling. “You’re my friend, you’re not getting hit by a damn car without me coming to see you.”

Appreciation floods Hiyori’s chest to the brim. “Thank you.”

He says, “Was the driver okay?”

“It was a hit-and-run,” Ikuya scowls, crossing his arms.

Rin cries, “What?”

“It’s all right, Rin.” Hiyori pats his hand. “I don’t wanna think about that right now. I’m just happy that me and Ikuya are fine.”
He subdues. “Yeah, okay. I’ll let you get some rest.” Before he and Sousuke take their leave, Rin gives Hiyori another hug that he feels in his bones, and Rin pauses at the door with a blush. “Love you.”

Hiyori smirks before his voice warms. “I love you, too.”

Once Rin and Sousuke are in the elevator with their caps low and their masks on, Sousuke frames Rin’s face with both hands. “You’re still crying.”

“I’m fuckin’ mad.” He uselessly smears at his eyes. “How could someone just leave another person unconscious, bleeding on the pavement like that?” He clutches his stomach at the mental image. “God, I’m gonna puke.”

Sousuke pulls him close and Rin nestles his cheek against his heart, fisting his jacket. He takes a deep breath to steel himself. “Sousuke. I need a favor.”

“Whatever you want.”

Rin looks up from the circle of his arms, his eyes telling all. Sousuke nods without falter. “I’ll ask Ryuuj to look into the case. He’s tracked down cars before; this isn’t anything new for him.”

Rin sags into him. “Thank you.”

Sousuke pecks his mouth, then his forehead. “Consider it done.”

As much as Hiyori would like to get back to the part where Ikuya almost kissed him, the boy looks exhausted after speaking just a handful of words about his personal life, so they go to sleep. It’s cramped with both of them on the bed but Ikuya hides his face in Hiyori’s shoulder and it’s kind of perfect. Ikuya’s warm and soft nestled into Hiyori’s side, and Hiyori wonders just how fucked up Ikuya’s life is for him to curl up with a stranger, hungry for any comfort that he can get in this cruel world.

He rearranges the hair strands splayed across Ikuya’s face, crisscrossing them over his nose before tucking them behind his ear. Hiyori props his head on a hand and watches him sleep, thinking. His chest expands with a swell of fierce protection and he cups the back of Ikuya’s neck before tucking his chin on top of the boy’s head.

Nobody gets proper sleep in the hospital, so they stir about five hours later. Hiyori wakes up with a start, feverish and trembly, his broken leg on fire. He’s ready to scream for more pain medication but he opens his eyes to find a very foreboding yet very attractive man gaping down at him.

Ikuya whines and the man’s breath punches out of him as Ikuya nuzzles deeper into Hiyori’s shoulder with a sweet little hum. Hiyori remains motionless but he feels something predatory rear up as he arches a mocking brow at this man who really doesn’t look like the type that Hiyori needs to be taunting, but he’s petty with a head injury. Bad combinations – entertaining, but bad. “Can I help you?”

The man jolts out of his stupor. “Yes, I’m – sorry?” His brows knit in utter confoundment at Hiyori’s bedmate. “I’m Kirishima Natsuya.”

Hiyori’s voice climbs at least eight octaves. “Oh.” Oh, shit. Now it makes perfect sense why Ikuya’s
goddamn mountain of a big brother is looking at Hiyori like he wants to shake his hand but also have a Victorian duel over Ikuya’s stolen honor. Which Hiyori hasn’t stolen (yet), but he supposes they do look rather guilty tangled together like so.

Hiyori sits up, clenching his teeth with the motion, which he probably needs to relish in since Natsuya looks three seconds away from punching said teeth out. Hiyori flashes his most disarming smile of snake-oil charm. “Ikuya told me about you.”

Natsuya looks conflicted at that. “Oh.” He clears his throat and composes himself. “I wanted to thank you personally for saving my brother’s life.” He holds a hand out, his gaze unwavering like nothing Hiyori’s ever witnessed. “I am indebted to you, Tono Hiyori. For as long as I live, consider your needs met from this day forward.”

His very blood stills under such a statement; a sudden display of such authority orders his very cells to pause in observance. Hiyori shakes Natsuya’s hand and he knows in an instant that the man could break his fingers in one clench – not to mention he’s wearing chunky rings with jewels of emerald and gold, and there’s a nugget ring on his middle finger; the metal is a rocky texture that could easily cut through skin – but he’s mindful of Hiyori’s stitches and cradles his hand in the most severe reverence. “I will never be able to repay you for your sacrifice.”

Hiyori’s brows jump. “I’m glad it was me that got hurt.”

Natsuya’s eyes widen but Hiyori doesn’t falter, and the man lifts his chin in surprised satisfaction. Hiyori can’t help but feel relieved to have his hand back – it was like holding it inside a wolf’s jaws, waiting for them to make a meal out of it.

They look down at Ikuya, who’s still snorting quietly. Natsuya blinks. “Did he – he slept through the night? With you?”

Hiyori instinctually braces for the punch. “Yes.”

But Natsuya just stares and at Hiyori’s confusion, he glances away. “Ikuya doesn’t sleep very well. I haven’t seen him sleep for more than two hours at a time in years.”

Hiyori’s having a hard time following through all these dramatic glances at the window. “He’s an insomniac?”

Natsuya’s smirk is like a knife – like one that would plunge into his own heart. “Something like that.” He clears his throat. “Anyway, I wanted to let you know that I’ve paid all your medical expenses as well as your rehabilitation fees. My card is on call at any pharmacy of your choosing, and if you need anything else, please don’t hesitate to ask.”

Hiyori almost pukes and comes in the same instant. Yes, it’s as horrible as it sounds. He nearly blacks out in a flash of heat and he almost hurls his guts all over Natsuya’s vintage flight jacket that probably costs the fourth of an actual plane. Hiyori swallows three times to find his voice. “Uh. Shit, okay, thank you.”

“My pleasure. I believe they’re releasing you today, so I have a car waiting at your discretion to take you back home whenever you’re ready.”

“Kay,” he croaks. Natsuya gives him a look like he knows something Hiyori really doesn’t want him to, but Hiyori holds his Poor Boy head high. “I’m going to keep seeing Ikuya after this, just to let
you know. He asked for my number and I think it’s safe to say that he needs a friend right now, whatever the hell is going on with your family.”

Natsuya looks more like a wolf than a human in that moment. “What makes you think I have anything to do with that?”

“Nothing,” Hiyori breezes. “I know that Ikuya’s staying with you and I think you got him out of a shitty situation, but why was he out in the middle of the night, in the snow, crying his eyes out?”

Hiyori hit a nerve with that one. “I didn’t know he had left when he was out there. He snuck out.” Natsuya fumes a sigh. “But I should have been more aware; if this is anyone’s fault, it’s mine.”

Hiyori feels slightly guilty, but his humor is still bitter. “Well really, it’s the fault of the driver that almost hit Ikuya. It was a hit-and-run.”

“Oh, that’s fine,” Natsuya says in a drawn out hiss. His expression is peaceful in the most terrifying way, and Hiyori instantly knows that this man belongs to Nao. “I’ll find them myself.”

He doesn’t know what to say to that, just watches as Natsuya breezes to the door. “I’ll be in my car waiting for Ikuya when he’s ready. But please, let him sleep if you don’t mind. I’ll wait outside for as long as I need to.”

“Sure thing.”

He lets out the biggest breath of his life when Natsuya exits. He rubs a hand over Ikuya’s cheek with a bewildered whisper. “What damn world are you even from?”

Ikuya continues sleeping without a care, and Hiyori tucks the bedsheets higher over his shoulder.

Ikuya sleeps the rest of the day until it’s time for Hiyori to be released. He’s already dressed, wearing his duct-taped glasses and waiting patiently in his discharge wheelchair when Ikuya stirs so endearingly with his sleepy eyes and bedhead. He croaks, “Wh’ time is it?”

“2 PM,” Hiyori beams.

“Fuck.” Ikuya stretches and wobbles to his feet, nudging Hiyori’s wheelchair. “Nice ride.”

“Thanks, cutie. Wanna spin these wheels?”

“Is that what they’re calling it nowadays,” Ikuya drones, and Hiyori laughs as the boy steers him into the elevator.

Once they’re inside and there’s creepily cheerful jazz music overhead, Hiyori says, “Your brother stopped by earlier. He said there’s a car I can use?”

Ikuya reels. “What the hell, Nii-chan came? I slept through all of that?”

Hiyori pats his hand, giving it a brief squeeze. “You looked like you needed it.”

“Yeah, I guess so,” he sighs. “I feel better.” The elevator doors open and Ikuya weaves Hiyori through the crowded lobby. “I hope he didn’t scare you, I know he’s intimidating.”
“Ah. Yeah.” He pops his lips. “That’s one word for it.”

“Knock it off,” Ikuya chuckles, swatting the back of his head. “I’m way hotter than Natsuya.”

“Don’t worry babbe, I like my men tiny, dark, and bitchy.”

“Good.” He lifts his chin with satisfaction. Ikuya wheels him out into the cold and up to a black SUV that could probably bust through concrete; Hiyori doesn’t need to be told that it’s bulletproof. This shit is getting weirder by the minute.

Ikuya swings open the back door and greets their redwood of a driver. “Yo, Chujo.”

“Afternoon, Kirishima-san,” he booms like thunder incarnate. Christ, Hiyori needs a Xanax for so many reasons.

Ikuya helps him wobble into the cab and tucks his new set of crutches into the floorboard. Hiyori looks across the street at a car that sits on the curb like an absolute wet dream. He instantly recognizes it as a 60’s Jaguar, a lowrider that’s purring like a sex growl. “I’ll be right back,” Ikuya says, heading over to it.

Ikuya braces himself as the tinted passenger’s window rolls down, and Nao sits there with a patient smile. “Have a nice nap?”

“Yeah, thanks.” Ikuya regards his brother, who’s got an elbow propped on the steering wheel, his eyes half-lidded with laziness. “I’m going to ride with Hiyori.”

Natsuya’s eyes flare awake at that. “He’s got a driver that’ll take him where ever he wants.”

Ikuya doesn’t know how to get the point of it all through Natsuya’s thick skull, but Nao does it with a mere sigh. “You’re so dense, Natsuya.” He drops Ikuya a wink as he rolls up the window. “Have fun.”

“He’s got a broken leg, so I don’t know how much fun it’ll be.”

“You’ll find a way.”

Ikuya’s puzzled by that and he’s halfway across the street when he realizes they were talking about two completely different things.

Back in Natsuya’s car, he’s staring after Ikuya with hurt. “Does he resent me over all of this? Do you think he’s still mad?”

Nao kicks his feet up on the dash with another long-suffering sigh. “I think he’s far from mad right now.”

Nao mentally ticks off the seconds as Natsuya stares down at his lap for a full minute. Then he surges with enlightenment, “Oh! Oh, he just wants to spend time with Hiyori!”

Nao winces sympathetically at his stupidity. “Stick to finances, darling.”
The drive back to campus is a total fever dream. Hiyori stares at his reflection in the dark partition between the front and back seat, giving an inconspicuous glance around the cab. Ikuya snorts but doesn’t turn his eyes from the window. “Yeah, it’s weird, sorry.”

Okay, maybe that wasn’t so inconspicuous.

Ikuya explains, “Nii-chan’s just a little… overly-cautious sometimes.”

“Right.”

Hiyori chews his lip in the odd silence. “I hope you’ll be okay.” The boy turns from the window and Hiyori smiles.

Ikuya sizes him up, considering. “My...” He swallows, closing his eyes to steel himself. "When I was on the phone with my dad, he was upset because I defended someone online that came out as gay." He shakes his head firmly. "I never regretted it, but meeting you made me feel even better about doing it."

“I’m glad, Ikuya. I’m staying on campus during the holidays, so if you ever want to hang out, just text me.”

The boy tenses with cautious hope. “I don’t wanna bother you…”

“Ikuya, I like you. We listened to Taylor Swift and held hands. That’s at least third base in my world.”

Ikuya ducks his head with another one of those sweet giggles. “I like you, too,” he admits, eyes darting shyly, but he’s grinning. “This is so weird. Can’t believe I thought about blowing a dude in a hospital gown that jumped in front of a car for me.”

“Trust me, that dude in the hospital gown would’ve had no qualms.”

“Damn, missed opportunity,” Ikuya sighs. He pouts and Hiyori can tell that Ikuya knows such cuteness is lethal.

“There’s a partition up, you know.” Hiyori gives him a very specific look.

Ikuya makes a face. “But there’s cameras in here.”

“…”

“Yeah, I know. Sorry.” They pull up to the campus and Hiyori looks down at the crutches in the floorboard with dread. Ikuya grimaces. “Want me to walk with you to your dorm?”

“Nah,” Hiyori sighs, bending to haul the crutches up. “I’ll just text one of my friends to –”

Ikuya seizes his wrist before Hiyori can grab the crutches to go. Slowly, Hiyori’s gaze climbs up Ikuya’s outstretched arm to his face. Ikuya’s breaths are silent through parted lips, but his chest is rising faster in the exciting anticipation. Hiyori’s happy under Ikuya’s gaze and he flushes with a breathless grin. “Go for it.”

Ikuya unlatches his seatbelt and in a single heartbeat, he’s in Hiyori’s lap with their mouths slammed
together. Hiyori startles a groan, head tipped all the way back as Ikuya sits tall in his lap and cups his face to kiss him harder. Hiyori closes their lips together again and again in frantic pecks, hugging the boy to him. His hands are hungry all over Ikuya’s back, squeezing his shoulders and cupping his waist. Ikuya gives a triumphant huff, dazedly shaking his head to drag the shape of his smile back and forth across Hiyori’s lips.

He loses his hands in Hiyori’s hair and chases after his tongue like it’s the last thing he’ll ever taste, and Hiyori realizes that Ikuya’s got a lot of pent-up emotion that he hasn’t been allowed to feel. Hiyori offers himself up as a willing vessel for those feelings, letting Ikuya make a mess of his mouth and hold him as tightly as he wants, no matter how sore Hiyori is.

Ikuya breaks away to pant, trembling and flushed under Hiyori’s strokes. “Holy shit, that felt good,” Ikuya gasps. “You feel so good.”

Hiyori offers up his own ragged smile, glasses and hair askew. “Good, it’s – it’s good that you feel good.” He’s never been so incoherent from only making out.

Ikuya’s eyes laze open, lips bruised from kisses as he smirks. “I’ll definitely be texting you.”

“Don’t look at me like that, you know I can’t stand up for a good sexting angle with this cast on.”

Ikuya throws his head back to sing a laugh and Hiyori knows that he is whole-heartedly, absolutely fucked.

He still remembers the sound of Ikuya’s laugh when he’s standing alone on the sidewalk, waving the SUV goodbye. Hiyori sighs out frost and adjusts his crutches under his armpits. It takes him a minute to figure out how to balance with his cast being so heavy, but he gets the hang of it and goes a few feet before his mind hazes over. He thinks about Ikuya’s earnest kisses, how he tangled his fingers in Hiyori’s hair and the way he rocked against him when their tongues touched the first time –

His feet go over his head when he slips on the ice and his breath punches out of him as he hits the concrete. Hiyori wheezes, lurching onto his side to cough up his lungs. “Shit,” he rasps, flopping back on the sidewalk. He sighs and taps out a number on his phone before the caller picks up. “Hey, Haru. Yeah, I got released. Mmhmm, I’m on campus, I just need some help getting up the stairs to the dorm. I’m in that parking lot by one of the chemistry buildings – which one? Ah… oh! You know, the one where I dared you to snort lycopodium powder freshmen year. Yeah! Okay, great. I’ll wait here.”

He locks his phone and folds an arm behind his head to smile up at the clouds. There’s a scuffle at his left and he turns to see a squirrel standing up on its hind-legs in the leaves. It twitches its head this way and that as it blinks at Hiyori. “Sup,” he greets. “I just got tongued down by a mobster baby.”

Chapter End Notes
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Rin pauses, his hair hiding his expression. This is a whole new level of intimacy and he’ll have to consciously accept that Sousuke is different from the rest if they do this.

Unaware of his confliction, Sousuke cradles Rin’s face to gaze up at him in awe. Sousuke stares, looking like there’s so much sensation that he wants to speak on, but Rin’s left him with no choice but to talk with his eyes.

Rin’s brow twitches up, face awash in disbelief - but then Sousuke hugs him, bowing his forehead against Rin’s heart with such devotion that Rin gasps at the ceiling.

He stares upward before closing his eyes in acceptance.

Chapter Notes

hi all! happy tuesday. : )

i need to address something. i want to apologize for the usage of many korean celebs as visual references for the fic; back when i was planning doab, i was just looking for people who had certain features and lots of pictures that i could use, but i understand how that was an ignorant decision. i’m sorry and i’d like to thank the readers as well as the friends who called me out on it. so, i'll be changing all the visual references, but i do ask that you please be patient with the changes because the social media elements sometimes take longer than writing a chapter, and every bit of them will be changed because i want to do this right.

thank you for reading and i hope you enjoy the chapter.

song is high by whethan & dua lipa ((mega fire emoji))

Just as Rin suspected, he nearly goes insane without social media for the next few days, but he’s never bored. Whenever Sousuke is working in the library and isn’t around to entertain Rin, he wanders the mansion grounds to his heart’s content. Sometimes he sits with Arena at the koi pond (translated: her koi pond), but she doesn’t express any interest in playing with him; she’s content to allow Rin to sit beside her, so that’s some form of progress.

He enjoys finding a random book in the study and reading on the back porch since there’s a firepit and plenty of blankets to make the experience more cozy and romantic, even if he’s by himself. On those evenings, Sousuke drops by to give Rin spiked hot chocolate made of sweet liqueur with peppermint schnapps before slipping back into the library.
Rin worries; it doesn’t feel like his place to interfere with Sousuke’s job, but he works all the time. Rin doesn’t know the balance between how much of Sousuke’s workload is necessary and how much of it is just a mess of anxiety and pressure. Even though Sousuke checks on him every few hours, well. Rin’s greedy in more ways than one and he’s about to fucking throw a fit, he’s so horny.

He’s not about to watch porn; just the thought of it feels boring because he’s positive that Yamazaki Sousuke has ruined him from wanting any other dick in any form. But it gets so bad that he resorts to his shameful collection of trashy eBooks on his cell phone – the kind that have descriptions of “love rods” and “moist” and “spillage like a fountain.” Sometimes Rin reads such books just to get a laugh out of them, but in times like these, the shit is so bad that it’s good, and he bores into every passage of bouncing mattresses and things “wet as a waterslide” until his eyes cross.

He locks his phone and rises from his chair with purpose. He marches to the study, ready to storm in and take what he wants, but he pauses at the door. Rin just breathes for a minute, desperate to compose himself. Even if he needs a good quick fuck, Sousuke needs to relax and going down on him won’t exactly make him chill.

Rin goes upstairs to shimmy out of his pants, rolling off his socks and shedding his many layers of jackets. He’s worn a different pair of panties for days hoping to get lucky (all to no avail), but that’s going to change if Rin plays his cards right – slowly. He’s wearing one of Sousuke’s shirts and he knows that’ll work just as good as the most expensive lingerie. He takes a minute to rub something heady and alluring into the sides of his neck and across his inner-thighs, then he pads back downstairs with excitement jumping in his pulse.

When he finally enters the study, he’s carrying two glasses of wine and wearing a coy smile. Sousuke looks up from his computer and his eyes sweep Rin, lingering on his mouth and darting between his legs. Rin’s breath hitches at such a look but he remains composed, supple in the most inviting way as he sits sideways on Sousuke’s lap. “Hey,” Rin smiles, voice soft with a playful lit.

Sousuke falls lax with Rin on top of him – he pulls away from the computer mouse, abandoning his work without falter, and perhaps Rin should have given the man more credit; Rin might be more important to Sousuke than his jealously first presumed. “You look mighty pretty tonight.” Sousuke’s voice is rough after a day on the phone for conference calls, a natural rumble that makes Rin want to wreck his voice even further.

He clinks their glasses together before hiding his shy grin in the wine. “Thought I was always pretty.”

“Mm, you are.” Sousuke splays his fingers open to grab a handful of Rin’s thigh with a possessive squeeze. “But you look even better after a day like this.”

Rin pouts, brows creasing with sympathy. “What happened?”

Sousuke takes his time in considering, drinking his wine and glancing around the library. Rin recognizes the hesitance – he doesn’t want Rin to worry. Subtly, he traces a lone finger down the muscled cording of Sousuke’s throat, and he marvels at watching the tension unclench. Sousuke’s chest rises a little faster when Rin slides a finger into the opening of his button-up, dancing over the valley of Sousuke’s chest in a teasing sweep. He’s breaking his walls down and Rin’s half-lidded gaze is sly with the knowledge.

Sousuke’s eyes narrow. “You play dirty.”
“I play to win, baby.”

The man smirks, pleased by such a taunt. “I’ve been trying to translate a document that I need to send to another company in America, but as I’ve said, my English is shit and I don’t want to call Nagisa this late to translate for me.”

Rin blinks. “What document?” His fingers rasp along one of Sousuke’s sideburns as the man pulls it up on his computer. Rin glances the PDF over – it’s some trade agreement about exports from Silicon Valley going to Tokyo Bay, and it’s boring yet intimidating all at once. Rin mentally swaps words around by sentence structure and how he’d have to change the grammar to fit another language. “I can translate that.”

Sousuke cranes back. “Oh, that’s right – you’re an English minor, aren’t you?”

“Yes, but I lived abroad when I was younger, too.” He tucks some hair behind his ear, feeling a little shy. “I mean, I don’t have my degree yet, so I don’t have like, the qualifications on paper or whatever, but…”

“Please,” Sousuke rolls his eyes. “I’ve used Google Translate for documents way more important than this.”

Rin laughs before situating himself in Sousuke’s lap to edit the file, and Rin is so small in comparison that he can cross his legs in Sousuke’s lap without losing his balance. As he works, the man rubs his back in long, patient strokes, sneaking his hand under Rin’s shirt to feel his skin. Rin wanted to be touched all along, but this doesn’t feel sexual like he expected – it’s definitely nice and makes him relax, but it’s more comforting than anything else.

Sousuke glances over Rin’s shoulder to watch him type. “You’re really smart.”

His face flashes hot, eyes blinking wide. He looks at Sousuke, touched, but the man seems confused. “You know that you’re smart.”

Rin blushes harder. “Yeah, but...” He turns back to the computer, fidgeting through a mess of butterflies in his stomach. His smile is bashful. “You’ve never said something like that before, is all.”

He feels Sousuke’s thighs tense under his ass. Rin’s toes curl with worrisome energy. “I’m not mad or anything.”

Sousuke’s legs are shifting and he leans into Rin’s back to nuzzle against his hair. Rin sighs, instinctively tipping his head to expose his neck for slow kisses. He arches his back at the feeling of hands roaming down his waist to his hips, and Sousuke breathes heat behind his ear, making Rin’s skin prickle with intense awareness. He can’t keep his mouth closed or his eyes open under such a sensation. Sousuke murmurs, “You’re incredible. You really, really are, and it’s obvious in everything that you do.” He rests his lips against the back of Rin’s neck, thinking. “Sometimes I can’t imagine how you might not always see it.”

“Everyone gets that way,” Rin sighs, rolling his neck to give Sousuke more room to kiss him there.

He feels Sousuke smirk against him, his voice warm with fondness. “True, but I’m a little biased when it comes to you.”

“You’d better be.”
He chuckles, a hand running up from Rin’s knee to squeeze his hip, dragging chills all the way up the length of his leg. The only sound in the entire house is the rasp of Sousuke’s fingers over his skin – the war drums of Rin’s own pulse in his ears. He swears the very path of his blood moves to follow Sousuke’s touch as he whispers, “You’re the most beautiful person I’ve ever seen.” He punctuates every word with another kiss, and Rin’s falling apart under each one, but he rolls his eyes at such a statement. Sousuke’s smirk only widens, echoing, “Everyone gets that way. Don’t they? When they’re happy with someone.”

Rin’s heart twists so violently that his chest hunches – it doesn’t hurt, but it’s startling. There’s a faint prickle of confliction but he hardly comprehends it because it feels like he’s going 90 on the highway, charging toward the unknown. He likes things fast, he likes them quick and brief before hurdling to the next challenge – whether that be another goal, a different skill. Another bed with no strings attached. He’s never been so settled in anything like he is in Sousuke’s arms. There’s a stillness to the experience; there’s no goal to focus on when he’s with the man, but his presence demands all of Rin’s attention, ordering his mind to a stand-still. He can’t prepare himself for Sousuke, all tongue-tied under his stare.

What is it about him that makes him different? Lovers have doted on Rin before, given him confidence and made him feel powerful. But Sousuke’s compliments are never a blind attempt at making Rin like him; at the core of himself, Sousuke isn’t desperate for Rin’s attention, though he’d like to have it, and he cherishes it when he gets it.

With him, Rin feels appreciated as a person, rather than just a good fuck. It’s conflicting because that title never bothered Rin – or maybe he just didn’t know how hungry he was for something more until he got a taste of Sousuke’s affection. Now it feels like he’s been starving for years and that realization is jarring because he isn’t used to giving anyone that kind of power.

He licks his lips, voice lost to a shy whisper. “You make me happy, too.”

It shouldn’t be so hard to admit it, but saying something like that for the first time in such an intense context knocks the breath out of him. Sousuke’s eyes widen just slightly enough for their color to flare in the lamplight, and Rin feels like he could fucking rocket to the moon. Sousuke murmurs, “I’m glad. I’ve felt shitty about working so much.”

Rin blinks dazedly, coming back to earth just a little. He gets back to the document, chuckling, “I was wondering what you’ve been doing in here all by yourself.”

“Trust me, I’ve hated every minute of it, but Makoto can’t handle all this work on his own. He’s took on more than he lets on to, for the record. He was already struggling with the workload he had.”

Rin arches a sly brow. “Even though he told you to take a break?” He gasps a laugh when Sousuke tickles up his inner-thigh.

The man pouts, “I’m going to be useless for days after surgery; it’s the least I can do for him.”

Rin breezes through the rest of the document, saves it, then turns around in Sousuke’s arms to snuggle against his chest. He pecks his lips sweetly, running a hand through his hair. “Are you scared?”

Sousuke lets out a sigh. “Yeah,” he admits quietly. “I don’t like being put to sleep.” He shudders at the thought. “I fucking hate it.”
Rin isn’t used to seeing Sousuke wear such a nervous expression, so he holds him tighter. “Well, I’ll be there, so you’ll be fine.”

Cautiously, Sousuke ducks his eyes, his voice subdued. “I don’t know if I want you to see me like that.”

“You think I can’t take it?”

Sousuke snorts, glancing away. “I don’t think I can take it.” He shakes his head to himself. “I’m already nervous and I’m not going to be in control when they start drugging me.”

Rin’s eyes narrow. “Are you that worried about me seeing you scared?” Sousuke doesn’t respond and Rin frames his face for their gazes to meet. “It’s surgery, for Christ’s sake. Everyone’s scared of that sort of thing.”

At Sousuke’s silence, Rin’s thumbs sweep up the rise of his cheekbones. He sighs. “I’m sorry, Sousuke, but I think you got a real problem with just being a fuckin’ person.” Rin blushes at his own audacity, but he barrels on. “It scares me that you think you can’t show weakness even at a time like this.”

Sousuke cranes back, body rigid and locked off, but Rin meets his gaze without falter. He knows that Sousuke isn’t used to anyone laying down the law with him, but that’s the reason why he thinks it’s okay to act like a robot. It’s not healthy, it’s not okay, and Rin’s already admitted to himself that he cares about the man.

His chest burns at saying this but, “You can be whoever you gotta be when you’re at work, but that shit isn’t gonna fly with me.” Rin’s expression softens as he places a hand over Sousuke’s heart. “What kind of a dick would I be if I thought any less of you just because you’re scared?” He clenches the man’s shirt insistently. “I’m not like that. You haven’t looked at me the same way ever since I found out about your shoulder, like I know this terrible secret but that’s just – baby, it’s stupid.” His hand trembles when he cups Sousuke’s face, but he touches him all the same. “I’m not just here for show and you know it. I’m here, in your fucking house, going to bed all by myself, walking around with blue balls because I care about you.”

Sousuke startles a laugh and God, Rin could melt like red wax. Sousuke grabs him by the backs of the thighs to hike Rin over his hips, smiling in exasperation all the way. “I’m sorry about that,” he chuckles, voice fading into something more solemn. “I’m sorry,” he whispers, tone rent with guilt in a dozen different ways. Rin closes his eyes and arches when the man hugs him, something deep and instinctual preening in satisfaction. “It…”

Rin’s eyes fly open when he feels Sousuke’s hands quiver on his back.

“It hurts, letting you in – or anyone, really, but you…” Sousuke sighs. “I can’t stop letting you in. You’re completely out of my control, and that fucks me up inside.” He grips Rin tighter, voice raw with earnest. “But I still want it. I want you.”

Rin breathes a laugh despite himself. “Trust me, I know the feeling.” He sounds miserable and his smirk is defeated, but he never lets Sousuke go. With infinite care, Rin presses an apologetic kiss to his bad shoulder. “I know you’re trying, okay? I’m just as lost as you are.”

Sousuke studies him in awe, expression opening up in a way that it never has before. “The hospital
I’m going to, it’s… the one my dad was at, when he…”

Oh. Understanding dawns on Rin’s face. Fierce protection surges through him and his voice is equally as impassioned. “I’ll be right there with you.” He smiles and shoots up to peck Sousuke’s nose. “I’ll keep you safe.”

He doesn’t know why the hell he said that, but it seems like it was everything Sousuke needed to hear in that moment – he blinks and there’s a sharp shift in his demeanor. He’s not just looking at Rin anymore; he’s spellbound, every fiber of him focused on Rin alone. Sousuke cradles his jaw and his thumb lulls Rin’s bottom lip open with dark promise. Heat festers between Rin’s parted legs, his hands clammy and desperate for something to grab. Without a word, Sousuke nudges him to stand up and takes Rin’s hand to lead him out of the library.

Rin rolls his lips in to keep from panting as a wild rush of anticipation bears down on his lungs. His legs wobble; he feels faint and hot. Sousuke probably notices the needy quiver of Rin’s fingers as he leads him upstairs and into the bedroom.

The air thickens as they stand together in the middle of the floor. Heat pulses between them in the silence and Rin swears that he’s going to come right where he stands if Sousuke looks at him like that a moment longer – everything inside of him bristles on the edge, his skin ticklish with a shudder that he can barely resist. He wants to scream but he cannot even breathe.

Sousuke steps into him and Rin gasps, welcoming the need to be obedient as Sousuke cradles his jaw to tip his face up. The distance between their mouths is a goddamn force of nature that has absolute control over Rin – he sways around the space like it’s the wrong side of a magnet, not letting him push closer. Sousuke’s hands are on his face, the tips of his fingers pressed against Rin’s temples and lost in the crown of his hair, ten pinpoints of energy that charge Rin up like a lightning strike. His stomach clenches with the pressure in his core, cock twitching between his aching hips.

Sousuke parts Rin’s lips with his own and with one indulgent sweep of his tongue, Rin’s consciousness shoots into that space between human and animal. His mind blanks as if he’s never been kissed before and he forgets every sensation that wasn’t brought to him by Sousuke’s hands or mouth. His whimper is lost in the space where their lips are meshed together and Sousuke’s moan rolls under Rin’s palm on his chest.

His nails tear down Sousuke’s stomach to yank him closer by his belt and Sousuke grabs Rin’s ass to pull him up on his toes. Rin licks into him, need knifing between his legs at the filthy sounds of their kisses – it’s ragged and frantic, everything that Rin’s been dying for.

He shoves Sousuke down on the mattress and climbs on top of him, riding the shape of his cock, grinding up and down the curve of it. Sousuke’s hands shoot under Rin’s panties to grope his asscheeks, jeans chafing Rin’s inner-thighs. A hand pulls his hair from its tie and Sousuke fists the strands to yank him down into a kiss, tongue spilling over Rin’s chin on the way to his mouth.

Rin starts to pull Sousuke’s shirt off but the man yelps a curse, his right arm locking where it’s bent in the air. Gently, Rin lays Sousuke’s arm back down and pulls his shirt collar aside to look at his shoulder, which is swollen with fever. Rin’s on the verge of tears, he’s so fucking close to getting a cock inside him, but he backs off. “You need to stop?”

“No,” Sousuke spews in horror, cock twitching under Rin’s ass. Absently, Rin winds back on it to get him hard. “I don’t think I can do this on top of you, though.”
Rin makes a show of slipping out of his shirt and he leans down to pin Sousuke’s good arm over his head. With a coy smirk, his tongue follows the path of Sousuke’s jawline to his ear. “You like your cherries on top?”

He chuckles, already hoarse. He slaps Rin’s ass with an impatient tug on his panties. “I like this cherry on top.”

“Nerd.” Rin does the work of tugging Sousuke’s jeans off and realizes fairly quickly how immobile the man’s going to be through this ordeal – his right side is rigid to keep from jostling his shoulder. Rin kneads Sousuke’s cock through his black briefs, leaning down to lick the shape of it. Sousuke radiates heat between the legs and Rin can’t keep his tongue in his mouth, tasting the salty fire of his skin and licking a spot on Sousuke’s thigh to tease his teeth against.

Sousuke’s knees startle up and Rin’s glad he at least pushed the man’s shirt up over his chest to watch his stomach clench. Each oval of his abdominal muscles is thick and defined, grooved with deep valleys between each row. Rin wants to come all over them, wants to smear the mess into Sousuke’s pecs and lick cum off his nipples.

The thought makes his teeth squeeze into Sousuke’s thigh and the man groans from where he’s watching Rin between his legs. Slowly, his head tips back with closed eyes and parted lips; the sight seizes Rin’s heart in a vice-grip, entrancing him. His voice shoots out. “Sousuke.”

He’s panting when his head bows to look at him and Rin swallows, eyes pulsing with his frantic heartbeat. “I don’t want to use a condom this time.”

Silence – thick, nauseating silence.

Sousuke blinks, confused, and Rin would consider it an adorable expression if his stomach weren’t churning. “I got tested the last time I was with someone else. I’m clean.” He hides a hand under Sousuke’s leg to fist the bedsheets. “I want to feel you.”

Sousuke stares, gaze falling down Rin’s body and landing between his legs. Then his eyes climb back up to Rin’s face with a smirk of boyish excitement. “All right.”

Rin shoves him, blushing like mad as he yanks off Sousuke’s briefs. “Ever came inside someone before?”

“Nope.” He hikes up on his elbows, damn near giddy.

Rin laughs at his eagerness and shimmies out of his panties. “Scoot over, I need to prep – don’t pout at me, you can’t do it with your right side all clenched up. Yes, you can watch. Don’t smile like that, it’s creepy.”

It’s the hottest experience of Rin’s life, lying on his back with three fingers buried between his open legs while Sousuke’s hand roams his body, moving down to cup Rin’s dick, climbing up to cup his throat – watching him. All of Rin’s senses narrow into sound: the wet, nasty noise of his lube-coated fingers ramming inside himself, the filthy encouragements Sousuke whispers into his skin. Every dirty endearment of baby, my pretty baby, leaves Rin crying out breathlessly, hips winding down on his hand in a restless twist. His eyes are rolling back and he’s losing his fucking mind under Sousuke’s voice, clinging to every word.
The man drags just the tips of his fingers across Rin’s cock and the faint touch has him tearing up, his nerve-endings are so raw with want. “P-Please.” He feels the physical sensation of his sanity falling apart when Sousuke fists his dick in a slow, tight drag, up and down, up and down until Rin’s very center of balance melts away. “Oh -” He bites down on his lips to keep them shut.

He screams when Sousuke slaps his inner-thigh, mouth bursting open. “Keep going,” the man growls against Rin’s throat, bending to lick hotly over his nipple. “Let me hear you.”

“Shit…” Rin can’t even imagine what he looks like, fucking himself open for Sousuke, sprawled out on his sheets in his bed, preening under every nasty thing he says.

Rin makes a face as he slides his fingers out and he flops his head back on the bed, heaving. He smiles when Sousuke nuzzles sweetly into the juncture of his neck and shoulder. Rin looks down at them both, his own nakedness with his legs sprawled open and wet between the thighs, Sousuke with his shirt twisted over his pecs and his goddamn socks. They’re both a ridiculous sight and the room smells like lube, yet it’s so comfortable, the air soft between them. Rin sways his bent knee and smiles up at him, voice hushed. “We’re quite the pair, ain’t we?”

“I’d like to think so.”

Rin accepts his kiss with a hum, one hand cupping the back of Sousuke’s neck while the other sneaks down to grope his ass. He tugs Sousuke harder into him and the man’s right arm flies out to brace against the bed with a curse. “Shit, sorry, sorry,” Rin babbles, scrambling to help him sit up. His hands hover over Sousuke fretfully, trying to figure out how to maneuver him. “Uh – yeah, okay, sit back against the headboard.”

Sousuke does as he’s told and Rin straddles him, pulling the sheet up over the small of his back. Sousuke smirks at the action. “Shy?”

“No,” Rin snaps, face flashing hot. “I’m naked and my ass is wet so it’s fucking cold, okay?”

His breath hitches when Sousuke spreads Rin’s asscheeks to rub his cock through the slick, and Sousuke’s smirk widens. “Better?”

“God, you fucking little –” Rin fumes and reaches back to grab Sousuke’s cock, giving it a punishing squeeze before sliding the head under his rim. Rin squints up at the ceiling as he gropes around and his spine snaps straight when Sousuke’s cock dips in.

“Oh,” Sousuke startles, hands scrambling to Rin’s hips. Both of them already feel a difference without a condom, no buffer between the heat, wetness, and texture as Rin’s body wraps around him. Sousuke’s jaw hangs slack, his mouth gaping. “Oh…”

Rin pauses, eyes narrowed between their bodies, and his hair hides his expression. They’ve had sex before but trusting someone without a condom is different; it’s a whole new level of intimacy and he’ll have to consciously accept that Sousuke is different from the rest if they do this.

Unaware of his confliction, Sousuke cradles Rin’s face to gaze up at him in awe. Sousuke stares, looking like there’s so much sensation that he wants to speak on, but Rin’s left him with no choice but to talk with his eyes.

Rin’s brow twitches up, face awash in disbelief. He loses his grip and slides down Sousuke’s cock
an inch more, face twisting at the stretch. But then Sousuke hugs him, bowing his forehead against
Rin’s heart with such devotion that Rin gasps at the ceiling. He stares upward before closing his eyes
in acceptance. He wraps his arms around Sousuke’s neck, resting his lips against the top of his head
as he sinks down on his cock the rest of the way.

Moans startle out of them, pitched high and curling with shock. It feels good, it feels so fucking good
that everything instinctual and primitive demands them to move. Rin braces a hand on the headboard
to grind as fast and hard as he can and Sousuke’s fingers slip through the sweat on Rin’s thighs,
frantic for purchase. He digs his nails into Rin’s hips to yank him down and Rin shouts against every
thrust, the ring in his ears muffling with each throbbing pulse.

Sousuke’s cock stretches him open and Rin clenches down, giving it to him warm and wet. Rin
bounces down, bracing his hands on Sousuke’s thighs as his head tips back with a groan. There’s simply no world outside the cage of Sousuke’s arms; the room blurs away and Rin’s senses are only alive to taste him, to touch him.

“God,” Sousuke breathes, gaze trained on his face. “You’re so –” His hands guide Rin’s hips into an
angle that forces him to take every inch of his cock, and the sensory overload blows Rin’s brain right
out the back of his skull. His mind erupts into static and he wraps around the man in every way
possible, fucking down on his cock until he loses all sense of direction.

Sousuke’s hold is the only thing keeping Rin stable and he’s seconds from blacking out, but
something territorial rears up inside of him – it possesses Rin, making him shove Sousuke’s hand
against where they’re joined, letting him feel the hot slide of his cock into Rin’s body. His greedy
hiss shoots into Sousuke’s ear. “Come in me, want your cum, want it, give it –”

Sousuke lets out the most gorgeous moan when he lets go, cock jammed so deep that Rin shakes. He
thrashes at the hot gush inside, clenching and spiraling to take Sousuke for everything he’s got. Rin’s
too full, it’s all too much, and he finds himself on his back, not knowing how to even fucking
breathe. He trembles in a cold-sweat until a hand slides up one of his open thighs. Rin mewls and
fists the sheets when Sousuke’s fingers ram his cum back inside, massaging it into the velvety folds
of Rin’s walls.

Mindless, Rin whines, “Mine.”

His belly quivers under Sousuke’s tongue as he licks through the mess of Rin’s cum. Before he
passes out, Rin feels a kiss against his forehead and Sousuke whispers, “Yours.”

Chapter End Notes

twitter & curious cat
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

hi all! sorry for the hiatus; i just finished my makoharu mermaid au coral and bone, so for now, i'll just be working on doab and ikigai (sourin supernatural au) until january, when i'm posting the sequel to my first free! fanfic, eyes wide open all the time. i like to work on around two fics at a time, so my goal is to finish doab by january - that way i'll just be writing ikigai (trailer here) and chasing the dragon (trailer here)

i hope you enjoy! chapter song is ooh by jon bellion.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Haru’s spent his life being content alone. In fact, he prefers it; he has no shame in choosing a night-in over a party and he is perfectly fine with walking back and forth to his classes alone.

All day. Every day. Taking the same boring route with the same boring trees, trying to stay out of the same peoples’ way when they won’t look up from their phones and watch where they’re going. Even though the semester is over, Haru dreads the monotony that will repeat itself come spring time.

He used to appreciate the predictability of a routine, where the expectations were safe. The only routine he can count on in college is stress, recycling one subject into another work shift where nothing remarkably wonderful ever happens.

Well – rarely happens. But oh, when it does.

Haru watches Makoto from the lounge in his office, running his teeth over his lower lip without meaning to. He ponders why Makoto looks completely at odds with his suit – is it because his laugh lines are nothing like the stiff angles of his collar? Could it be the foreboding shade of his blazer that’s gray as winter? Even as unapproachable as Makoto looks with his haggard frown aimed at the computer screen, he doesn’t intimidate Haru. He knows that he could say absolutely anything in this moment and Makoto would look at him like he hung the moon. It’s gratifying. It’s addictive.

Haru situates the blanket over his lap to get more comfortable, settling in for another long night of making sure Makoto’s head doesn’t explode from stress. He rests his chin on the back of the lounge with a pout. “Come sit with me.”

Makoto laughs but his voice dies out when he looks over at Haru’s expression. Haru’s destroyed the will of many people with his pout; he has no shame in its evil tendencies. Why should he? It gets him what he wants and right now, he wants Makoto closer.

Makoto shuffles over, flopping down beside Haru to close his eyes, and it’s good that Makoto isn’t looking at him when he laces their fingers together because the awe shows on Haru face. Why is it that he feels the loneliest when Makoto touches him? Like there’s something missing, a place inside of him that needs to be filled?

He stares down at their hands, observing the differences. Haru’s fingers are visibly delicate, his skin naturally pale. Makoto’s palms are harsh but warm, his fingers short and thick. His nails are smooth
when Haru sweeps a thumb over them. “You’re tired; you should stop.”

Makoto rakes a hand through his hair and Haru’s gaze tracks the motion. “Yeah, you’re right.”

Haru arches a sly brow. “I am?”

“Mmhmm,” Makoto smiles, eyes crinkling. “You’re cute, too.” Haru’s brows pinch and Makoto chuckles through a yawn. “Guess I’ll log off and we can go.” Haru’s breath hitches when the man cradles his hand more affectionately. “May I drive you home?”

Haru nods, not trusting his voice.

The pressure in his chest does not recede on the ride back to campus; he keeps his fingers intertwined with Makoto’s, which feels perfectly fine, but Haru’s heart startles quicker with each fond brush of Makoto’s thumb over his hand, like it’s a reminder of how close they are – or how close they could be.

“Thanks for sitting with me at the office.”

Haru looks over at him but Makoto keeps his gaze on the road, his cheeks dusted pink. Haru thinks about reaching out to feel the warmth of his face, wonders what it would be like to run his lips over Makoto’s blush. The man mutters, “I really appreciate it.” His eyes flicker for a moment and he sighs. “I needed it.”

Haru shrugs, then he nods. “It’s no problem. Not like I have anything else to do. But even if I did –”

He chews his lip and the silence says enough.

Makoto gives him a handsome smile that could move mountains in all its glory. “Thanks.” He looks different in the soft darkness of the cab and the dashboard lights trace his profile in all the right ways – the softness of his brow, the blunt cut of his jaw. He wore glasses tonight, said he forgot his contacts in his haste to get to work this morning. Makoto’s glasses, much like his suit, are at odds with his features – the frames are dark wood, the lenses narrowed like the stern squint of someone more impatient and tired. Makoto wears those glasses like a mask but Haru knows that he has to.

Haru just can’t stop looking at him – sneaking breathless glances and working his free hand between his knees to keep his fingers from shaking. The rolling hills of Makoto’s biceps brings to life a hollow, yawning sensation in Haru’s core; he smells fresh in the way that certain men do, exuding their very own atmosphere of cologne that makes Haru feel dizzy and hot.

Makoto takes care of himself. He could take care of Haru, too.

He chews the side of his tongue and keeps a firm line of sight out the window, turning to hide his blush. Little does he know, Makoto sneaks a long look at him while Haru’s eyes are turned, and Makoto’s cheeks burn just as much.

His hand tightens on the wheel with a careful breath, struggling to inhale around the pressure in his chest. His heart feels like it’s swelled twice its normal size and his pulse echoes through his ribcage.

They don’t talk the rest of the drive but neither of them have to voice what they’re feeling – what they don’t have the courage to speak on. There’s a tangible fluster between them as Makoto pulls up to Haruka’s dorm building, trying for a polite smile. Yet he can’t help but let emotion slip over his features when Haruka looks at him and his toes clench in his shoes. “See you later?” He pretends
like his voice didn’t crack.

Haru blesses him with the ghost of a smile, tipping his head as his expression softens. “Yeah.”

He looks at Makoto’s hands. Looks at his lips. Swallows.

It’s customary for Haru to depart after Makoto kisses him on the cheek, but tonight, that just doesn’t feel right with how conflicted Haru looks. Makoto dares to brush a swirl across the back of his hand, drawing lines in the seams between his fingers. “Are you okay?”

Haru winces. “Yeah, I’m fine.” He closes his eyes before they open with determination and Makoto doesn’t move as Haru braces his hands on the console between them. He lifts up to Makoto’s eye level, moving with a tight inhale, slow release – the car hums, the night ticks on, and something fast and heavy rolls through Makoto’s veins.

Haru dips closer and when his breath fans over Makoto’s chin, his pores tighten, hairs stiffening upright as chills tease his skin. Haru angles his face to the side, nose tracing a slow line up the curve of Makoto’s cheekbone to his ear. Makoto’s gasping, hand bearing down on his armrest because he can hear it in Haru’s breathing – how much he wants.

Haru firmly presses his lips against Makoto’s cheek, his lashes tickling Makoto’s brow. It’s such a satisfying pressure both ways; Haru’s never crept this close, Makoto thinks, and the boy relaxes when Makoto runs a hand down his back.

Haru pecks him twice more, quick with playfulness, and Makoto ducks his head with a shy laugh. He kisses the back of Haru’s hand, murmuring against the skin. “You’re actually – really sweet, Haru.”

He snorts. “Don’t tell anyone; they’ll never believe you.”

I don’t want to share you, Makoto thinks, and his throat clenches hard to stave off the words. He flusters at his own audacity, squeezing Haru’s fingers, pale-cold. “Keep warm.”

“You too.” With that, Haru’s disappeared up the stairs to his dorm and Makoto is left in his car in the throes of a fucking crisis.

“I’m gonna die,” he muffles against the steering wheel, where his face is mushed. His hand brushes his cheek, fingertips buzzing, and he sighs down at his lap. How pathetic is it to get raging hard just from hand-holding? Christ.

Makoto rakes through his hair in defeat and begins the shameful drive to find the nearest gas station with a bathroom.

Haru takes his time climbing the steps to his dorm, vision unfocused. His fingers dance up the stair rail and frost sparks a chill through his arm. He walks like a ghost, reality warped in a blushing haze of memories; it feels as if he left himself in that car with Makoto and he wants nothing more than to call him back, to text him and say just stay a while longer –

A soft noise brings his steps and thoughts to a pause. Haru looks down to see a cardboard box in the shadows of the exterior hallway and he frowns as he wanders over. There’s a ratty towel dusted with snow and the fabric shifts with another broken noise. A shape wiggles to the edge of the box and
watery black eyes peer up at him, a little claw gnarled in the frayed towel.

“*Oh.*” Haru doesn’t even think before he picks the kitten up, cradling its underbelly to bring it against his chest. The kitten cries, shivering as the wind tears through her gritty fur. She nuzzles under his chin and his brows crease in distress, whispering, “*What are you doing out here?!*”

She pushes harder against his throat, desperate for his warmth, and he uses his jacket to shield her from the wind before unlocking his phone screen.

Makoto’s there in fifteen minutes but Haru’s trembling almost as much as the kitten by the time he pulls up to the curb. Makoto pushes open the passenger’s door from the inside and the cab lights drape him in gold; there’s a question in his concerned expression before his features crumble. “*Oh, you poor thing!*”

Whether he’s talking about the cat or Haru, Haru isn’t sure, but he climbs in the car either way. Makoto blasts the heat and Haru rubs a thumb over the kitten’s bony skull. “She was just lying in this box by the dorms outside, I don’t know how long she’s been out in the cold.”

“Someone must have dumped her.” Makoto bends to coo at her, gently turning her face this way and that. He runs a hand over her fur. “*Well,*” he sighs. “She already feels warmer, so I don’t think she’s in shock or anything. But she’s probably hungry.” He flicks his wrist to glance at his watch. “*I don’t know of any pet stores that would be open right now; she’s so little, I don’t think she can eat cat food yet.*”

Haru looks up in a brilliant moment of inspiration. “*You have cats. Do you have formula at your house?*”

Makoto blinks before realization dawns on his face. “*Oh wait, yeah, I do! I nursed one of my cats a few months ago; she was a stray, too.*”

Haru pretends like his heart isn’t palpitating from such sweetness. “*Okay then, let’s go.*”

The air isn’t awkward on the way to Makoto’s house, at least until Haru looks him over with a confused frown. “*Why are you all sweaty?*”

Makoto freezes, eyes wide and unblinking as his fingers vice the steering wheel. “*Oh, I – I was at a gas station when you called.*”

Haru scrunches his brows and Makoto winces because he also realizes how that makes no sense. He sniffs and glances out the window. “*The ah, gas cap got stuck. Had to – pry it open. Or whatever.*”

“*Oh.*”

Haru turns his attention back to the kitten and Makoto tries not to deflate in relief.

Makoto’s place in Suginami is… not what Haru expected.

Truly, he hadn’t given it much thought, but seeing where Makoto works brought forth the imagery of modern architecture with glass and steel – some foreboding and intimidating fortress.

Haru isn’t sure if Makoto’s cottage is big enough to even have two bedrooms.
They park on the side of the one-lane road and Haru steps out of the car, the forest air is coated in a sappy-honey aroma as the humming of crickets spikes to a dull roar. Makoto seems oblivious to all the noise – frogs croaking from the lake, their footsteps crunching through the frosty grass as Makoto guides him through a rickety gate that’s obviously there for aesthetic rather than protection.

Haru keeps the kitten zipped up in his coat as he marvels at everything around them. Vines twirl across the short fence on their way up the gravel path with natural overgrowth hugging them from all sides; the place is manicured but not by professional gardeners.

The cottage is pale stone with three window spaces protruding from the roof; the home is compact and square, humble, rather than boastful. Makoto keys open the door – no high-tech security system – and shoulders it open with a bashful sort of grin. “Welcome,” he says like he doesn’t know what to do. It’s a little too endearing.

Haru steps in as politely as he can, ducking under the porch light as gnats tinkle against the bulb. Warmth envelops him and he can’t hold in a sigh, tension rolling off him like water. The walls, ceilings, and floors are wooden; the space itself is cozy as he regards the living room and the tiny kitchen beyond. The home is decorated similarly to Makoto’s office in a warm autumn palette that makes Haru crave the aroma of cinnamon.

He recognizes Lemon stretched over the back of the couch with another skinnier cat who’s black as night. Another one hops off the window seat and the three of them meow at Makoto, slinking between his ankles and dragging their tails across his calves. He chuckles, shooting a blush at Haru before he scratches their ears. “They’re a bit friendly,” he mumbles. Haru’s breath hitches as Makoto steps up to him, Makoto’s jaw moving in a subtle way that tells Haru he’s biting the inside of his lip. “Can I take your coat?”

“Oh – yeah.” It’s a struggle to hold the cat and shrug out of his sleeves all at once, but Makoto stands behind him to help – the weight of his hands is gentle as he pulls the coat off Haru’s shoulders, running a trail of heat down his arms. Haru nods in thanks, not trusting his voice, and tries to line his shoes up perfectly when he toes them off beside Makoto’s loafers by the door. Makoto’s wearing sunshine-yellow socks; he shouldn’t be this intimidating or at the very least, churn up such a reaction in Haru.

He pretends that he doesn’t feel it in the air as Makoto moves, crouching to the fireplace. Haru sits on the couch to let the kitten stretch in his lap. The other cats hop up to sniff her and Haru loses track of how many cats he’s seen before. “Makoto –” He has to take a second when he looks over at the man, eyes falling to his ass where he’s crouched, still preoccupied with building a fire. Haru shakes himself. “How many cats do you own?”

“Just –” Haru laughs before he can stop himself and Makoto’s eyes light up at the sound, crinkling. “There’s a story behind all that,” Makoto says, grabbing some logs from their basket to stack them up in the fireplace. His biceps bulge with the action and Haru tries not to trace the planes of his back muscles with his eyes – diamond-shaped crevices, shirt stretching taut as cords of strength swell.

Haru watches the back of his hands flex as Makoto situates the logs, saying, “All my cats are strays – either I got them from someone who didn’t want them or I found them abandoned.” He starts the fire, body illuminated in a silver lining before he rises, brushing his hands off on his slacks. He shrugs
with a grin as he heads to the kitchen. “I have the money to take care of them and I like the company, so it just worked out.”

Haru listens to him rummaging around in the kitchen and looks at the world of green-darkness through the window. “It’s quiet here.”

“Yeah,” Makoto smiles. Haru glances at the kitchen, which is more like a nook than a comfortable place to make a meal in – the one counter wraps around in three sides of a tiny square but Makoto maneuvers through the space well, using the sink to fill up a bottle with warm water. “I like being away from everything,” Makoto sighs as he mixes the formula, putting it in the microwave for a minute. “Tokyo can be a lot, sometimes.”

Haru lifts his brows in amusement as he watches him. “You do that well.” He nods at the formula powder.

Makoto’s handsome laugh is bashful while he takes the bottle out of the microwave to shake it up. “Don’t let me fool you, I can’t make anything else this well.” He comes over and shoos the cats away to sit beside Haru, crooking a leg sideways, his knee pressing against Haru’s thigh. Haru tries to keep his breathing even as he hands the kitten over but Makoto cradles her against his chest and all hope is lost.

She latches onto the bottle instantly, eyes crinkling closed, and Haru can’t help but smile. Makoto is far more vocal with his endearment, cooing encouragements as she drinks up. “I’m relieved she made it,” Makoto says, resting deeper into the cushions. Haru does the same, not shying away when their shoulders press together. “I don’t like to think about what kind of person would leave an animal out in the cold like that.”

“Yeah.” Haru rubs her ears until she finishes the bottle and he glances up at Makoto. “Are you going to keep her?”

“Of course.” Their fingers brush as they pet her together. “You found her.” Haru ducks his head and lifts his brows with a blush, making Makoto chuckle. He nudges Haru’s shoulder, his arm solid against him. “You should name her.”

“I’m not that creative.” What a lie, he was the favorite among all his art teachers in grade school.

Makoto rolls his eyes with another grin and a nudge. “Humor me.”

Haru shifts, subtly leaning more into Makoto’s side. He looks at the kitten as he thinks, finding personality in her gnarled ear and copper fur. Her name comes to him in an instant. “Jameson.”

Makoto blinks with a slow, pleased grin. “That was fast.” He picks some dirt from her fur. “I don’t think she’ll mind a boy’s name; it suits her, somehow.”

Haru shrugs, petting the kitten to help her sleep. “It was the drink you got, when…” When we met.

Makoto’s demeanor shifts – it’s slow as heaviness sinks between them. Haru knows that they’ve turned a corner, breaching a new chapter of something unknown and exciting. Something that he wants.

Makoto looks at Haru’s lips as he rolls in his own, jaw shifting – he’s licking his lips but trying to hide it. He gives Haru a look of chivalrous caution but his eyes warm up in silent passion, and
Haru’s swallow is audible.

Makoto turns away only to settle the kitten in some blankets a safe distance from the fireplace screen, where the other cats are lounging. When he flops back on the couch, he pulls Haru into his chest with a delighted brand of finality. “Come here.”

Haru laughs, the foreign sound growing more familiar with every passing minute between them. He rests his cheek against Makoto’s shoulder, hovering a hand over his chest before he lowers it carefully. Haru breathes in against his shirt, the smell of him lulling his eyes closed as Makoto rubs a hand up and down his back; Makoto nuzzles against his ear to whisper in awe, “You’re wonderful, you know?”

Haru hugs an arm around his solid middle, feeling the muscled ridges of his waist. Makoto is bulky and firm but Haru truly thinks that he could fall asleep right here, sprawled half-way on top of him. “I’ve just been nice to you.”

Makoto says, “Yeah, you have.” He pauses and Haru wonders what his expression looks like, gazing into the fire. He can picture it from the vulnerability in his words alone. “When no one else has.”

Haru opens his eyes and leans up, daring to frame Makoto’s cheek. His thumb moves in awkward brushes, trying to learn his way around the angles of Makoto’s face, but his cheek fits so well against Haru’s palm and that’s all that matters. “You’ve been nice to me, too,” Haru says quietly.

Makoto’s eyes talk; his gaze speaks of tenderness but also, something that burns a little hotter than affection. Makoto leans in and pressure tightens between Haru’s eyes, awareness prickling off his skin in a ticklish buzz. Makoto kisses his cheek, lips warm and soft and so, so careful. Haru never considered himself particularly broken but in this moment, he’s as fragile as glass: not daring to move or offer resistance against each of Makoto’s lingering pecks.

He trails a few more up the path to his forehead and sighs against him. Haru steels himself and takes Makoto’s wrists to guide his arms around him; Makoto lets himself be maneuvered, caging Haru against him as the boy gives him a look of conviction.

Makoto combs through Haru’s bangs, dragging tingles wherever his fingers go; he slides a hand behind Haru’s ear to cup his jaw, tracing a heart over his chin. When Makoto leans in, Haru feels faint with an overwhelmed rush, and he turns his face, not even trying to lie his way out of Makoto’s confusion. He stumbles, “I’ve never…” He closes his eyes. *Fuck.*

When he opens them, Makoto breathes, “Oh.” He sees how mortified Haru is and thinks for a moment before straightening. He finds Haru’s hand to link their fingers over his thigh; Makoto lets himself be maneuvered, getting Haru used to the closeness with reassuring caresses, and he patiently watches Haru’s features lose their tension.

This time when Makoto leans in, it’s not to take his mouth. He kisses his cheek as he has a dozen times by now, but his mouth lingers there and Haru holds his breath in suspended pause. He exhales in a rush, all the sensation in his body rising to wherever Makoto’s lips brush him – he kisses one cheek then the other, stroking the back of Haru’s neck and climbing through his hair. Haru’s back
arches under his hand, eyes fluttering closed; he clenches Makoto’s shirt when he kisses his forehead, the bridge of his nose, skipping his mouth to peck his chin.

Haru’s lips buzz, pursing into a new shape as Makoto’s hands cradle his face. Haru stares in borderline delirium, shaken under such adoration. Makoto kisses one corner of Haru’s mouth then the other before pressing a kiss right to the center.

It’s not just the kiss that makes the room tilt – it’s the way Makoto holds him, how his breath changes with emotion. Haru’s lip nestles perfectly between his two, his brain fizzling at the new sensation. The pit of his core opens up with a yawning ache and the touch of Makoto’s mouth snaps something inside of him – Haru realizes that he has been starving.

He parts Makoto’s lips with his own and Makoto lets Haru pull him down on top of him, offering his mouth, **ravage, eat, open** –

Haru makes a home in the space between the couch and Makoto’s body, nestled between his parted thighs, their chests and mouths heaving, their hands tangled somewhere over Haru’s head. His tongue learns the texture of Makoto’s teeth and his knee goes up just as Makoto grabs it to pull it over his hip. Haru makes a noise he’s never heard from himself when Makoto sucks his lower lip, and Makoto’s fingers quiver as they hover over Haru’s thigh in a frantic sweep of restraint. Haru pulls Makoto harder against him, kissing him messy, ragged. His reality devolves into **hot** and **wet** until something hard presses against his thigh and Haru **whines**, rocking up before he can stop himself.

Makoto goes rigid and buries a hiss against Haru’s throat, clenching his hair, and Haru’s eyes fly open in mortification. He wonders if he could hold his breath and just die right here, but beyond that, he’s stunned that a little motion brought forth such a reaction out of them both.

Makoto’s cock lies against Haru’s thigh, so close to **where it could be**; Haru’s about eight seconds from spilling in his boxers but he cannot move his hands to take control of what’s going on.

Makoto braces his weight on his forearms and pants, his breath fanning hot over Haru’s mouth. The man opens his eyes, which are clouded over before he comes back to himself with a blush. “Sorry,” he rushes, moving to get off of Haru, but Haru locks his arms around him. Makoto falls on his chest and grunts a laugh, nuzzling their foreheads together happily. He pecks Haru’s swollen upper lip. “We can wait,” he whispers. “It doesn’t have to be tonight.”

Haru looks him over; he wonders if Makoto’s willing to take that leap tonight, if Haru said that he wanted to. Getting his first kiss and losing his virginity all in one night – neither the likes of Rin or Kisumi could compete with such a story. But he shakes his head. “I’m not even a good kisser yet.”


Haru licks his lips and Makoto’s eyes track the motion. He runs his hands under Makoto’s shirt to taste through touch, drinking in the warmth of his naked back, and Haru is honey-drunk on the sweetness of Makoto’s affection.

Shaking for it, Haru gasps. **“Again.”**

Chapter End Notes
up next: sousuke's surgery

twitter & curious cat
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Hello! I hope you are well. I'm very relieved to be on fall break so I plan on relaxing and hopefully, I'll be able to write to my heart's content. :)

Chapter song is happier by Marshmello and Bastille.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

On the morning of Sousuke's surgery, Rin is woken up at 3 AM by a very bright, very rude glow across his eyelids.

He blinks awake, his mind stirring to consciousness. The bathroom light is on but too far away to cause any discomfort; he rolls over in bed to find Sousuke lying on his side and scrolling through his cell phone.

Rin squints, voice rough with sleepiness. "What're you doin'?"

Sousuke doesn't even look up at him, tension lining his shoulders. "Couldn't sleep." Scroll. Faster scroll. Jerky scroll.

Rin shifts onto his back, leaning up on his elbows as the blankets slide down his belly. A grimace pulls at his features when he rolls his stiff neck this way and that — nobody gets proper sleep the night before a surgery.

He pulls the covers up to fight the night's chill and faces Sousuke, mushing his cheek against his fist. Rin watches him scroll a minute longer, the silence pressurizing. "You could talk to me about it."

Sousuke pauses. His eyes flicker up before casting down and Rin walks his fingers up Sousuke's arm to touch the cell phone. Sousuke sighs and clicks the side button; the locking sound has an air of finality before he lets Rin pull him close.

Sousuke nuzzles into his chest, flopping an arm over Rin's waist as Rin hugs a thigh around him, stroking a comforting rhythm across his back. Rin kisses his hair in slow pecks. "You feel scared to me."

"Feel scared?"

Rin smiles, the sheets moving with his caresses. "You're stiff."

"Oh." Sousuke rests his cheek against Rin's heart with a sigh. "Yeah, I guess I'm getting kind of worried."

That's quite the understatement but Rin doesn't call him out on it. "Have you been asleep at all?"

"Mmm," Sousuke whines, pressing his face into Rin's chest all flustered. "Don't, I can't help it."
Rin laughs and traces the shape of his ear, rubbing his lobe. He runs a hand across Sousuke’s arm and plays under his t-shirt sleeve. “Maybe you’ll sleep better during surgery, then.”

Sousuke snorts. “That anesthesia could tranquilize a rhino; won’t matter how sleepy I am, going into it.” Under Rin’s touches, his back loses its rigid posture.

Rin smirks. “Okay, I think it’s safe to say that you’re bein’ a little dramatic at this point.”

Sousuke huffs a laugh but it softens into a vulnerable noise. “Yeah, I know.”

They hold each other for a time, comforted but nowhere close to losing consciousness. Rin accepts that he’s going to face the day with only four hours of sleep and focuses his tiny bout of energy on rubbing Sousuke, giving him a safe place to hide his face in. Rin finds himself rocking the man back and forth; Sousuke doesn’t stop him.

Rin buries his lips against Sousuke’s forehead, whispering, “You’ll be fine.” As soon as he says it, he knows how inadequate the words are.

Sousuke squeezes him closer, brows furrowing over eyes tightly closed, and something fierce rears up in Rin’s chest. He frames Sousuke’s face to level their gazes. “I won’t let anything happen to you.”

Perhaps those words are pointless sympathies, but Rin means them and Sousuke knows it – Rin can tell in the dawning of Sousuke’s features, feels it in the way Sousuke embraces him.

In that moment, Rin might finally understand just how much he is needed.

Sousuke is an ass that day but Rin didn’t expect any less, what with how tired the man is – tired, bitter, and scared shitless. Rin is nauseous with exhaustion himself, cold and sickened by hospital fumes.

Sousuke does everything begrudgingly: from getting in the car, getting out of the car, scribbling through three hours worth of pre-op paperwork, and especially when he’s in his hospital gown.

The nurses cram him in a tiny hospital bed that threatens to sag under his weight, and he tries to cross his arms around the needles shoved in the crooks of his elbows. He focuses his scowl on the wall, looking worlds of immature, and Rin chuckles. He pats Sousuke’s thigh over the stale bedsheets. “How do you feel?”

“Like I’m about to get fucked,” Sousuke drones – fucked in the sense of screwed, violated; about to waste my life and my money on fuckall.

Rin hides his laugh behind a sweater paw and Sousuke’s expression softens, as much as his sour mood tries to fight it. The right sleeve of his gown is unbuttoned to show a big, clumsy circle that the surgeon drew with Sharpie; Sousuke’s shoulder is swollen red with feverish stress and Rin sobered up, aching with sympathy.

He takes Sousuke’s hand to kiss his wrist, careful not to hurt his pricked fingers or disturb the pulse meter pinched around his middle finger. “Baby, you’re strong. This is nothing.”

Sousuke faces him, brows twitching together in a flash of panic. His mouth firms into a line,
breathing hard through his nose, and Rin recognizes that expression – he’s seen Haru wear that same look before he flies into an uncontrollable state of turmoil.

Oh – shitshitshit, Rin thinks, hurrying to sit on the bed and cup Sousuke’s face. “Look, this is –”

“I don’t want to,” Sousuke whispers, voice breaking like Rin’s never heard before, and it springs tears into his eyes. Sousuke’s heart monitor beeps faster with his racing breath. “Rin, don’t make me do this –”

They startle when the doors creak open and the surgeon flounces in, waving his clipboard in one hand and lifting his Styrofoam coffee cup with the other in a show of disgusting morning enthusiasm. He pulls the curtain back in a zealous sweep and Rin honestly cannot even –

The surgeon greets them with a smile like neon, “All right, Yamazaki-san~! We’re all ready to –”

“Hey, um,” Rin blurts, lifting a hand. Leaves it up, not knowing what to say under the surgeon’s innocent blink. Rin clears his throat around a flustered laugh. “Could we have like, five minutes? Just five. If that’s cool.”

The man lifts his brows at Sousuke, who looks twice as small, curled into himself like so. “Oh,” the surgeon breathes almost silently, sending an understanding look Rin’s way. “May I offer a sedative that might help, Yamazaki-san?”

“Liquor would work better,” Sousuke mumbles, forehead pressed to Rin’s shoulder. The surgeon laughs like that’s the most delightful thing he ever heard and Sousuke rolls his eyes in defeat. “Yeah, sure, just – lay me out, please.”

It’s a good thing they already went through the fight of sticking an IV in; the surgeon slips the sedative into the drip briskly. Rin sends him a tight-lipped smile, pleading with his eyes, and the man bobs through a nod before slinking out the door. Rin deflates in relief; that guy had so much energy that it exhausted him.

He composes himself and runs his hands over Sousuke’s tense legs, the only part of him that looks safe to touch, lest Rin get tangled in all the intimidating wires. His mind comes up with a whole dictionary’s worth of sweet nothings but the truth comes out instead. “You’re… Sousuke.” He cups the man’s cheek and he leans into the touch with greedy desperation, sweat creasing in the lines of his scrunched forehead. Rin’s voice breaks. “You’ve been in a lot of pain. You’ve suffered. This is your chance to feel better.”

“You don’t know that,” he croaks. “This shit –” He swallows hard, struggling to level his breathing. “This shit might not even work and it was all for nothing.”

“You don’t know that.” Rin’s thumb traces Sousuke’s furrowed brow to smooth it out. “This could change your life.”

Sousuke looks at him hopelessly before burying his face against Rin’s throat and emotion shudders through Rin, his wide gaze snapping to the ceiling. He closes his eyes with a tight rush in his core and he runs both hands into Sousuke’s hair to squeeze through the strands.

He whispers against Sousuke’s flushed ear. “I know you’re used to hurting alone and dealing with things like this by yourself. I’m not gonna let that happen anymore. I won’t let it.” His heart knives. “I want you to be happy.”
All at once, Sousuke stills.

Rin feels the tickle of Sousuke’s blinking lashes against his neck and slowly, the man looks up at him. He still appears so afraid but for different reasons this time – a fear of hope.

His whisper is rent with utter helplessness. “Will you be here when I wake up?”

A sharp warmth bursts from his heart and a laugh startles out of Rin as tears scatter down his cheeks. He uses his sleeve to clumsily smear them away and he sniffs, nodding. “Yeah, I’ll be here.” He kisses Sousuke’s forehead before resting his own against it. “I got you.”

Sousuke gives a long breath before nodding to himself. He takes both of Rin’s hands to kiss all over his fingers and Rin tries his best not to preen. Sousuke pecks each of his knuckles before intertwining their fingers hard. “I don’t deserve you.”

“Yeah, you do.” Rin smiles, ruffling his hair affectionately, and Sousuke chuckles.

When the nurses are ready to wheel him through that long, ominous hallway, Rin ignores their conspiring glances and kisses Sousuke. His breath is hot with panic until Rin meshes their lips together more firmly.

Rin leans back, adjusting Sousuke’s haircap a little more straight, a bit cuter. “See you in a bit.”

Sousuke’s smile doesn’t quiver. “Can’t wait.” He taps Rin’s fist when he offers it, and with that, he’s whisked away.

Rin drifts to the waiting room in a stupor with a lot to think about.

Rin flies out of his chair the moment Dr. Sunshine breezes into the waiting room; the man talks all the way through the journey from the elevator to another floor, thoroughly reassuring that Sousuke pulled through with flying colors.

Rin’s initial worries weren’t even about the surgery – his turmoil was over Sousuke’s state of mind but the surgeon laughs that Sousuke is feeling nothing short of marvelous right now.

Rin’s faintly confused at that before the surgeon sobers up, rocking back on his heels as they go up another elevator to yet another floor. Rin’s ears pop in the upward rush and the man mutters, “I was glad to see him again.” He shrugs through a gesture and whispers, “What with his father, you know.”

Rin blinks. “You knew him?”

“Yes, yes,” he nods profusely. “He was such a successful man – a shame, what happened.” He scratches at the strings of the mask hanging from his throat. “We don’t tend to have good nights in the E.R. when there’s a full moon – there was one that night.” He waves his fingers near his head. “Messes with people.” He sighs. “But the night only got worse when Sousuke was admitted a few hours after his father.”

Rin’s stomach twists.
The elevator doors *ping* open and the surgeon breezes out with a jovial nod in the corridor’s direction. “If you’ll follow me.”

He leaves Rin at one of many recovery rooms; the hallway smells like pee and sterilizer but he pushes all discomforts aside as he steps into Sousuke’s room.

A nurse smiles politely from where she’s standing at a computer and Rin barely manages a nod before he mushes Sousuke’s cheeks, cooing, “Hey, wake up.”

Sousuke’s brows crease, nose twitching around his oxygen tubes, then his eyes squint open. His features move in syrupy languidness before he frowns, grumbling, “Hmmnph?”

Rin giggles, he’s so relieved to see that bitchy expression, and Sousuke’s eyes blink wider, though he’s still not alert. The nurse chuckles as she types away. “He’s still a little out of it, sweetie; it’ll take a few more hours for the anesthesia to wear off.”

The way Sousuke’s just *staring* at him is odd, though not unnerving. His eyes never leave Rin, not even when another nurse comes in to check over his monitors, and the women share endeared grins at Sousuke’s drunken bliss.

Sousuke reaches out like he’s moving through water and drags his fingers back and forth through Rin’s hair. He slurs, “Who’re—”

Oh.

Rin’s wide eyes pierce the floor as the nurses chuckle, and he blushes. He tucks some hair behind his ear, trying for a smile. “I’m —” He’s all too aware of the women now. “Um. I’m your boyfriend. Duh.” That last word comes out weak.

Sousuke’s jaw falls slack with boyish excitement. “Fer… fo’real?”

Affection shudders through Rin, all warm and buzzing. “Yeah,” he beams.

Sousuke keeps making a mess of Rin’s hair with the hand of his good arm. “Wow,” he breathes, drawing the word out for a good ten seconds. Awkwardly, he purses his lips in challenge and Rin can’t help but laugh.

He gives Sousuke a shy peck under the nurses’ glances, and Rin yelps when Sousuke pulls him in harder with a hand on the back of his neck. Rin muffles a giggle against Sousuke’s mouth and kisses him twice more before gently pushing him away.

Sousuke’s red all the way down to his throat and his voice is firmer this time, embarrassingly loud. “Wow.”

Butterflies swarm Rin’s belly and he threatens to float away. He ducks his eyes to Sousuke’s lap and plays with his fingers, straightening them, curling them, trying not to fluster under his stare. Sousuke pulls at Rin’s shirt in uncoordinated motions. “One – one more,” he slurs.

Never in his life has Rin seen someone so plastered. He nestles Sousuke’s lip between his own, sweeping it with a quick flick of tongue that will hopefully quell him for the time being. Sousuke inhales sharply and Rin’s heart *sings.*
He leans back and Sousuke doesn’t try to yank him in again; he smiles like Rin’s never seen, looking so young and – “I love you.”

In love.

Rin’s stomach drops, drops, drops. His vision spins, brain hay wiring.

But the nurses are watching him as the silence ticks on, the IV dripping with each passing moment, and Sousuke looks afraid all over again.

Rin swallows once, twice more, his voice nothing but a husk. “I… I love you, too.”

This time when Sousuke smiles all drunk and faded, it’s like pure sunshine.

Hours later, Rin is still internally screaming with a manic smile twitching on his face. Sousuke is infuriatingly oblivious on the ride home, gazing out the passenger’s window with peaceful sighs that make Rin want to jerk the wheel, slam the break, and cuss unintelligible nonsense in his face until Rin faints.

Sousuke’s just so fucking sweet in the aftermath of the surgery – he keeps a hand on Rin’s thigh while Rin drives, murmuring his profuse thanks the entire way home. Rin’s polite responses are clipped but Sousuke is too starry-eyed to notice.

He tries not to fret every time Sousuke shifts gingerly in his sling, his features pinching, but Sousuke vows that he feels nothing but relief.

And happiness, with Rin there.

Rin punches the keycode into the gate as well as the front door, then he helps Sousuke into the house and up the stairs to the bedroom. He does the work of getting Sousuke’s shoes and pants off. Briskly, Rin sighs, “You want a shower?”

Sousuke shakes his head, wincing when his shoulder strains with the motion. “Nah, just wanna sleep.”

Rin nods and lies him down, maneuvering Sousuke under the blankets with tender care. Finally, Sousuke gives him a once-over. “Hey.” He holds Rin’s wrist, rubbing over a vein. “Are you okay?”

Rin parts his lips before closing them. He busies himself with tucking the covers under Sousuke’s thighs to thoroughly wrap him up, then Rin flops on the bed. He worries his lip. “You don’t – remember anything, do you?”

Sousuke frowns. “What? Yeah, of course I do.”

Rin’s left eye twitches. “Y-You do?”

His smile is so handsome in the flush of evening light. “Yeah.” He takes Rin hair down to knead his scalp and Rin’s eyes roll back, tension dropping from his shoulders. Sousuke murmurs, “I remember everything you said to me before I went under.” Rin’s mouth hitches open in a gasp when lips brush his throat. Sousuke kisses him all the way up his jaw to his lips, oblivious that Rin’s mouth is slack in the kiss. “I’ll never forget it, Rin.”
Rin opens his eyes, stomach churning. “But you don’t remember anything afterwards.”

Sousuke makes a face. “Not really; I felt hammered. Why, did I say something shitty?”

His anti-depressants are calling his name. “No, I was just… wondering what it felt like, you know?”

“Oh.” He sweeps Rin’s hair to one side. “I’m sorry I was such a dick today.”

Rin’s voice is hollow. “Right.” He glances away to clear his throat and manages a smile. “Well, I’m happy you made it through.” He means that.

Sousuke shakes his head. “It was only because of you.”

_I know_, Rin almost says. He kisses Sousuke’s forehead instead, then eases him back to the pillows. “Get some rest. Holler if you need me.”

“Okay,” Sousuke mumbles. His gaze falls to Rin’s lips before roaming back up to his eyes.

This time when Rin kisses him, he pours all his frustration into it – opening his jaw, tongue spilling into Sousuke’s mouth and earning a groan from the man. His touch is so weak on Rin’s thigh but he never seizes it in a bolt of realization, so Rin departs, his nerves frying from the lingering taste of Sousuke’s mouth.

The second Rin’s feet touch the bottom of the stairs, he unlocks his phone.

It takes Kisumi the better half of an hour to get to Suginami and Rin waits on the mansion’s front steps the entire time, shaking like a leaf for more reasons than the cold. At long last, a silver Focus curves around the driveway’s fountain and Kisumi steps out, spinning with disbelief. His gaze finds Rin and he laughs, “I thought lasers were going to pop out of that gate at the front when –”

Rin dives into his chest and starts to cry.

Kisumi startles, arms flying out and frazzled with distress. “Rin?! Rin, what happened?” He cradles him, rocking him back and forth as his voice hardens. “Did he hurt you?”

“He –”

Kisumi digs through his pockets. “Asahi gave me bear mace, move, I’ll –”

“K-Kisumi, no, he –”

“I’ve never taken it out of its holster but I’ll fucking use it! It can’t be that hard!”

“He said he loves me.”


Rin gives a raspy laugh and Kisumi mushes his cheeks to wipe at his tears. “Let’s go inside, yeah?”
He lifts his brows at the mansion. “I’m sure there’s plenty of space for us to talk by ourselves.”

Rin sniffs and nods. “Yeah, okay.”

He lets Kisumi guide him up the steps by swinging Rin’s hand and his friend marvels, “Damn, I bet there’s a nuke shelter in here and everything.”

“There’s a wine cellar.”

“Same difference.”

They sneak down to said wine cellar partly because Kisumi doesn’t believe there’s really one there, but mostly because Rin needs a drink. He worried that the cellar would be cold but it’s heated like the rest of the home, and they sit on the floor as they pass a bottle of ’92 Screaming Eagle Cabernet back and forth. It tastes stout, like oak.

Rin gazes at the rows of bottles in the towering chrome racks, and he glances at the cellar’s other hallways feeling impossibly small. Lost. He leans his knee against Kisumi’s, flopping his head on his shoulder. “He was drugged up when he said it, but. He still said it.”

Kisumi wipes his mouth after tagging a swig and props his elbows up on his bent legs, thinking. “Did you say it back?”

Rin hides his face in Kisumi’s shoulder, curling into himself, and Kisumi chuckles because that was enough of an answer. “I didn’t know what to do,” Rin tries. “These nurses were watching me and I couldn’t just not say something.”

Kisumi gives him a sly look but doesn’t speak on it. He hugs Rin’s arm and carefully words his thoughts. “I think you’re more worried about the fact that you said it back, rather than what Sousuke said.”

Rin doesn’t respond and Kisumi looks away in a moment of hesitance before addressing him bluntly. “What’re you scared of, Rin? You love a lot of people; you love me and Haru, Asahi, Hiyori. All of us.” His voice echoes through the lonesome cellar, all through Rin’s bones. “Is it because you’ve never felt this way before?”

His toes curl with nervous energy before he crosses his ankles together. “Partly,” he admits like a secret. “It just feels so – final.”

Kisumi’s brows scrunch. “Whatcha mean? Like, you feel like you’re trapped?”

He makes a face. “Not really, it’s… I don’t know, just _final._” He sags with inadequacy, a headache tugging at the backs of his eyes.

Kisumi reads his face, trying to find an explanation in his eyes. He tries, “You mean the commitment part feels final?”

“No, I wouldn’t cheat on someone.” He never stays long enough for anything like that to happen.

Rin hugs himself around the middle, his stomach a mess of nerves. He takes a few minutes to find the words and Kisumi is patient, stroking his arm, stroking his hair. Rin knows that he is safe from judgement with Kisumi, and slowly, his voice drifts out. “I’m about to sound like an ass.”
“Mm, well, I’m used to it.” Kisumi grins to let him know it’s a joke and Rin smiles back.

He swallows. “I’ve never met anyone that didn’t feel like I was settling.” Rin grimaces, waiting for a scoff, but Kisumi doesn’t give much of a reaction other than lifting his brows. “Someone else better always comes along and I never feel sorry about wanting better for myself.” He takes a deep breath, vision hazing over with faintness. “But now, with him, I know that I’m not gonna find someone better. I don’t want anybody else, and that’s —” He wipes his eyes; they burn from the day’s wind chill and too many tears. “Like, I know it was shitty of me to be that way, but being shitty is still like, familiar. You know?”

Kisumi shrugs through a nod. “You were used to living your life a certain way and now you don’t feel that way anymore. I guess such a change can be kind of alarming, but honestly, it sounds like a good thing – at least from an outside perspective.” He cringes through an apologetic smile. “Rin, you weren’t ever really happy with anyone. None of your flings even knew that you’re bipolar or what your family is like. Asahi never saw you in the dorms with the same person more than twice.”

Kisumi’s sigh is one of wistful amusement. “I’m not judging you; you know what I was like before I got with Asahi, so trust me when I say that I get that lifestyle is a hell of a lot of fun, but you get burned out on it pretty quick.” He puts a hand over his heart for emphasis. “Asahi made me stable; Asahi is the only reason I have my shit together.” He nudges Rin’s shoulder. “Love is a good thing, babe. Not just from your friends but from someone who can really know you.”

Rin mulls it over, eyelids sinking from the wine’s headiness. His tongue is dry, his voice thick. “How’d you know? With Asahi, I mean.”

Kisumi’s eyes light up. “I knew that I wanted him but not in like a ‘make-him-fall-in-love-with-me’ type of way at first. He was cute and I’m easy to talk to, so it just started out with a really nice vibe.” He tips his head up to think, rolling his lips around. “I mean, we were messing around or whatever, but even that was –” He ducks his head, blushing. “This sounds so weird out loud but we would talk while we were… yeah.” Rin laughs and Kisumi rolls his eyes with a smirk. “We’d talk about anything. I didn’t feel like I had to act a certain way around him, is what I’m getting at. We’d text and check up on each other like friends do but Asahi starting getting really worried if I didn’t tell him I had got home safe, and I didn’t like it when Asahi got flirted with at parties.”

Kisumi picks at his jeans, expression becoming unreadable. “That was a bad time. I couldn’t stop thinking about him, wondering what the hell we were because I knew that I was special to him but I didn’t know if that meant I could ask him to be exclusive with me. There’s this weird stigma about getting cuffed in college; most people would rather die.”

“So what’d you do?”

Kisumi lets his breath out in a rush. “Went to his dorm, said I’d literally be the happiest person in the world if he would be my boyfriend, and he blew me right where I stood.”

Rin startles a laugh and throws his head back with it, slapping Kisumi’s arm. “Are you serious?!”

“It was the scariest moment of my life –” Kisumi chuckles, looking winded at the memory. “— when I finally grew the balls to just ask him to be with me. But he was so relieved that he started crying, it was really sweet. He had felt the same way about me. We had sex, changed our Facebook statuses, and that was that.”
Rin beams. “That’s such a good story.”

“Thanks, I still can’t believe it all worked out, but it did.” He sobered up. “Asahi was special to me, is what I’m saying. He was different than the rest. When I eventually told him that I loved him, I knew that he would say it back. I saw how he felt in everything that he did for me.”

Rin moves his jaw around in a nervous gesture. “Sousuke might not have even meant it –”

Kisumi scoffs a laugh, “Rin, honey.” He pats his leg in pitying sympathy. “Okay, think what you want but give it some thought. You don’t have to do or say anything you aren’t ready to, but –” He shoots a knowing look at the floor before smiling at him. “Just think it over.”

Rin’s gaze darts across his face before he embraces him hard. Kisumi snuggles his cheek against Rin’s hair and Rin sighs, “You’re really great, Kisumi.”

His smirk is kind. “Yeah, I know.” He pecks Rin’s hair. “So are you. I’m not out here getting a peach tattooed on my ass for just anyone.”

Rin laughs and thinks that he might actually be okay. His whisper is coy. “Me ‘n Sousuke fucked without a condom.”

Kisumi groans, thunking his head against the wall. “You damn fool, have I taught you nothing?! Now he’s gonna want to hit it raw forever.”

Rin happily snuggles into Kisumi’s warmth; he voices a secret with his cheeks flushed. “It felt so good. I liked being close to him.”

Kisumi rolls his eyes and scratches through Rin’s hair. “God, you’re a mess.”

He finds himself grinning as his heart swells. “Yeah. I really am.”

When Kisumi makes it home to his apartment, he gives a mighty stretch to release the day’s tension. He rolls his neck with a sigh, tossing his keys at the couch as he toes his shoes off, then he heads over to the bed.

Asahi is in the middle of a nap, his hair unkept with slack features as he hugs Kisumi’s pillow. The lower half of his face is hidden behind his bicep and Kisumi admires the rolling hills of his arms. The blankets are askew, twisting around Asahi’s hips to reveal that he isn’t wearing a shirt, but he still looks so pure in his slumber.

Kisumi’s entire body sinks in fondness before he flops on Asahi’s back. He squawks to life, wheezing under Kisumi’s weight until recognition dawns on his features. “Oh, hey,” he gasps through a chuckle.

“Hi, Monkey,” he coos, hiding his face in the back of Asahi’s neck, his arms wrapping around his chest from behind. Kisumi just revels in him for a minute – his warmth, how solid yet supple he is under Kisumi’s touch.

Eventually, Asahi rolls over so Kisumi can lie across his chest, and Asahi brings his knees up to better adjust Kisumi between his legs. Kisumi feels hardness dig into his navel and he leans up with a slow grin. “You’re only wearing boxers. You trying to get laid?”
Asahi gropes his ass more playfully than anything else, his freckles scrunching and his cheeks full from his smile. “Is it working?”

Kisumi laughs and kisses a line from chin to lips to nose. “Yeah, we can in a little bit.” He snuggles back into Asahi’s chest. “Just cuddle me right now.”

Asahi does so, absently rubbing knots of tension from his back. He loses his fingers in the waves of Kisumi’s hair and mumbles, “You good?”

“Yes, I’m fine.” Kisumi slides down to mesh his cheek against Asahi’s belly, hugging him around the waist with a grateful squeeze.

A frown lowers Asahi’s voice. “You’re suddenly clingy.”

Kisumi gently bites him around the navel. “You love it when I’m clingy.”

“Yes, but…” He pets Kisumi’s hair and flusters. “I mean I like it but I just wanna make sure you’re okay.”

Kisumi chews his lip. “I’m not trying to talk bad about anyone –”

“Course not,” Asahi blinks, knowing that’s exactly what he’s about to do.

Kisumi chews the inside of his cheek before sagging into his boyfriend in defeat. Loudly, he groans, “I just wanna thank fuck that we don’t have drama.”

Chapter End Notes

up next: time for the fabled gala in all of its dramatic grandeur (shit and ships pop off)

thank you again to everyone who reads and drops kudos and leaves a comment; it really makes my day and it makes the hard work worth it ten times over. tysm for the support.<3

twitter & curious cat
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

hi all! i just finished my semester. :) sorry i had to cut this chapter in half, there's just so much that happens in the second half that i needed a little break in between.

i've fixed all the multimedia but please ignore the time stamps, those aren't accurate tysm

chapter song is honey whiskey by satica. hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Things get easier with Sousuke, somehow. Rin doesn’t think about the incident at the hospital as much as he thinks about what Kisumi told him to consider. He doesn’t sit down and have a crisis over it, but he considers as the days roll by.

He thinks about how cold weather makes him crave being held and how Sousuke always puts an arm around him once Rin starts shivering. Loneliness is harder in the winter – at least it used to be.

But Sousuke’s next few days of recovery are nothing short of heavenly.

Rin wakes up like a dream each morning, the sheets so luxurious twisted around his legs, and there’s a comfortable imprint of his body in Sousuke’s mattress now – Rin snuggles deeper into the spot, hugs Sousuke’s arms tighter around him and just drifts through bleary-eyed ecstasy until he nudges Sousuke awake. The man is nothing short of adorable as he grumbles and stubbornly nuzzles his face into Rin’s shoulder. Rin laughs like he never has before – brief and quiet, but soft with emotion. It’s a delicate noise that he does not mind sharing.

Other days, Sousuke wakes up first and tickles him awake from behind, cramming his fingers against Rin’s ribs to make him scream awake. He kicks the sheets and jolts, breathless with laughter, and Sousuke pins him down for dozens of sloppy pecks all over his face until Rin fears that his heart might burst.

Rin makes coffee with Sousuke hanging over his back; they’re barefoot with unkept hair and greedy for each others warmth since winter is a good excuse to be climgy. They always bring their coffee back to bed and hide under blankets, letting the hours tick by without a care. Their voices stay hushed despite that there’s no one around to listen to them sharing secrets and sweet nothings.

Rin’s never been more comfortable being so close to someone, the sheets pulled all the way over their heads as they make a world of their own. Sunlight breaks through the fabric and gives their skin a dull glow that entrances Rin – he never wants to let go of those moments. They lie on their sides with Rin’s thigh hugging Sousuke’s hip, and he runs both hands down Sousuke’s lips just to touch him. Rin watches his own fingers move, watches Sousuke’s lower lip roll open under his thumb, and Rin can never breathe at times like this, when resolve prickles in the back of his mind.

He meets Sousuke’s eyes and feels hopeless in the best way possible.
Though Rin spends a lot of time doling out medication and keeping Sousuke comfortable, he gets all the attention in the world and he almost dies from it. He makes a seat of Sousuke’s lap whenever they sit on the porch when housekeepers come every few evenings and Rin gets his hair played with at all hours of the day. He wakes and falls asleep under kisses like rain, pouring over him with refreshing affection. Sousuke watches him when Rin speaks, not just hearing his words but listening to Rin’s voice. It’s a bit intimidating at first, makes Rin want to clear his throat each time he goes to say something, but Sousuke watches him with the same half-lidded endearment whether Rin’s voice is rough from sleep or dry in the winter air.

*He really cares about you,* something in Rin’s heart whispers. He cares about all of it – every fleeting little thought Rin mentions, each complaint Rin lets out when he comes down with a brutal migraine. He looks at Rin differently than everyone else and Rin knows that now.

He likes it.

Even boredom turns fun. One night they stuff themselves with carbs before flopping in bed to get drunk for the hell of it, and *that’s* how Rin ends up going to one of his favorite little websites on Sousuke’s laptop.

Sousuke’s sitting up with a hand around Rin’s ankle to keep him from sliding right off the mattress – expensive alcohol packs a punch, apparently. Rin isn’t complaining.

He sluggishly rolls onto his belly and pushes the laptop at Sousuke. “Here,” he slurs. “I gotta game.”

Sousuke arches an amused brow and glances at the screen. “Oh fuck,” he jerks.

Rin scoffs – nearly accidently spits, but he manages. “C’mon, you’ve seen that stuff before.”

“Uh.” Sousuke’s eyes drop down the screen. “No? What is – that, that, and that?” He squints.

“Fleshlight. Is that misspelled?”

Rin giggles and hugs his belly, lest the butterflies in his stomach escape. He takes out his phone to go to the same webpage after unlocking his home screen – it’s a picture of him and Sousuke in the bathroom mirror, brushing their teeth in the candlelight when the power went out a few nights ago. Sousuke looked too done with life for Rin not to commemorate it.

Rin logs onto the website and points his phone at Sousuke. “I pick a toy, you pick a toy.”

He blushes even as his breath deepens. “What if it’s something… weird?”

Excitement flutters down his torso, between his legs. “You got something in mind already?”

“No.” He glances down, flusterling. “But I don’t know what’ll make you feel good.”

He takes Sousuke’s hand to kiss the back of it, then props it on his belly to intertwine their fingers. “Just keep looking until you find something that looks fun.”

“No, I can suck you off again.”

“What if it’s something… weird?”

“Is this a trick just to tell me that you’re horny right now? I know my libido is shit from all this medication but I can suck you off again.”

Rin’s thoughts shoot to last night, when Sousuke was looking up at him from between his naked
thighs, his tongue sweeping Rin’s cock in long hot strokes. He goes stiff in more ways than one before clearing his throat. “I mean, you can. If you want.”

Sousuke smirks and it is devastating.

Rin smacks his ass – well, his hip, since coordination and chardonnay don’t mix. “Find somethin’ first.” Coy, he runs a hand all the way up Sousuke’s leg to tug at the hem of his sweatpants. “I can wash your hair later, if you wanna.”

Sousuke’s features harden in determination and he gets to looking because if Rin has learned one thing over this recovery period, it’s that Sousuke secretly lives for being babied.

Rin says, “Don’t tell me what you get. We’ll make it a surprise.”

They scroll in silence for a time before Sousuke huffs. “The bank is going to think my credit card was stolen.”

“Just use it as a tax write-off. File it under ‘performance expense’; ‘leisure-outlay’; ‘keeping my sleazy boyfriend happy’.”

Sousuke gives a handsome laugh and Rin smiles, feeling a little more drunk all at once.

The days stop running together the next morning.

Rin wakes up alone, fingers crawling across the bed to find someone that isn’t there. He yawns and glances around the empty bedroom as afternoon light paints the walls, then he flops back into the pillows. Pulling the covers around himself, he notices an ache between his hips from riding Sousuke’s fingers all night, and a hangover has left his mouth dry.

Rin peeks an eye open at the sound of footsteps and blinks awake when a warm aroma hits him. His stomach tightens and he sits up, the sheets pooling around his hips as Sousuke puts a tray in his lap.

Affection curls happily in his chest. “What’s this?”

Sousuke sits on the mattress and kisses his forehead in greeting. He shrugs, though there’s hopefulness hidden in his smile. “Thought you might not feel like getting out of bed since you were sleeping so well.”

Rin can only balk at the spread – there’s small bowls with a fried egg on rice, another with miso soup. He notices a porcelain tray holding fried pork with ginger as well as some yogurt with precision-cut banana slices. And of course, the coffee has a perfect swirl of whipped cream that’s all kinds of Insta-worthy.

Rin looks up at him with the lurking threat of tears, but at this point he knows that he’d run out of tears if he cried each time Sousuke did something sweet for him. Rin smiles and frames the man’s face to kiss his lips, then his nose. “It looks yummy.”

“Good.”

Rin digs in, not even trying to hide a moan as flavor saturates his mouth. Sousuke gives a pleased chuckle and rests his head on Rin’s outstretched leg to trace shapes across the blankets, and it’s so
nice – Rin wishes he could live his entire life in this quiet morning, naked with breakfast in bed, a gourmet spread that a fucking incredible man cooked just for him.

Rin relishes in chewing before he pulls Sousuke’s tank top strap to peek at his scar. The bandages slipped off in the shower last night like the surgeon said they would. “How’s your shoulder?”

“Not as stiff,” Sousuke sighs, rolling it with a grimace. “I’m lucky they gave me the equipment to do rehabilitation exercises here instead of at the hospital.” He pauses. “I’ve liked… being at home with you.”

Rin beams in his own shy way. “Same.”

Sousuke picks at the blanket lint a bit longer, his motions laced with odd tension. Rin nudges him, “What’s up?”

He taps his teeth together as he thinks, then meets Rin’s gaze with an apologetic wince. “There’s a, uh. Company thing tomorrow night.”

Rin frowns at the gravity of such simple words. “Okay. Do you need me to drive you down to the office or…?”

“No, it’s –” He waves a hand before raking it through his hair. “It’s nothing like that.” He traces the planes of Rin’s thigh over the covers and sags in defeat. “It’s a gala.”

Rin’s arms chill for some reason. “Oh.” He takes a sip of coffee to buy a minute. “Sounds fancy.”

“Unfortunately.” Sousuke tries for a smirk and Rin chuckles despite himself. “It’s a charity event but it’s this exaggerated thing. Lots of people and cameras.” He licks his bottom lip. “I kind of have to be there.”

Rin’s brows crease as he glances at his shoulder. “Do you even feel up to it?”

Sousuke huffs a laugh. “I’ve used some pretty shitty excuses to get out of it before, so I need to tough this one out.”

He thinks, nods slowly. “I’ll have to rub some more of that cream on you tonight, then.”

Sousuke stares like Rin just isn’t getting something. He lifts his brows in slow exaggeration, his grin crooked. “I’m asking if you want to go, Rin.”

His face flashes hot. “Oh. I –” He looks down at himself. He’s still sticky between the thighs at 3 in the fucking afternoon and he’s sure that there’s bruises of dark circles around his eyes. Without a doubt, he looks every bit like he’s been holed up in the same spot for a week. “Shit, Sousuke, I’m gross.”

“Just take a shower.”

“It’s not –” *That simple.* He leans over to the nightstand to chug the glass of water there. He wipes his mouth with his knee bouncing. “You said there’ll be… cameras?”

“Mikhail will find something for you to wear,” Sousuke promises, thumbing Rin’s hip to make it supple. He hesitates before confessing, “I already wanted to go with you, but he brought it up on the
phone – the gala would be like, our first public appearance together.” He’s quick to shake his head firmly. “But it’ll be taxing and I don’t want you to come with me if you’re not up to it. You’ve changed the world for me by helping me through this surgery; you’ve done more than enough. I can go to the gala perfectly fine alone, knowing you’re here and happy by yourself if you think it’ll be too much.”

Christ, this man.

Rin ducks his eyes to mull it over. Well, he doesn’t want Sousuke going alone since nobody else will recognize it or care if his shoulder starts giving him hell. Rin knows for a fact that he’s the only one who could make Sousuke leave if the pain got bad. Rin almost rolls his eyes to himself; he knows that he’s babying Sousuke, but nobody else is around to do it and everything in Rin knows that the man needs it.

Sousuke doesn’t need to be alone when he faces the backlash of coming out, either.

Rin steels himself and nods. “Yeah, I’ll go.”

Sousuke gives him a cautious once-over. “You sure?” He tucks his thumb in the crook of Rin’s knee and props his chin on Rin’s leg. “It’s no big deal. You aren’t used to these types of things like I am.”

No, Sousuke isn’t used to them, Rin thinks. Not really.

Rin cradles the back of Sousuke’s head to peck his hair. “It’s cool. Maybe it’ll be fun.”

Sousuke risks a relieved smile and takes Rin’s chin to kiss him sweetly. “I’m sure you’ll make it fun.” He pecks both corners of his mouth before rolling off the bed to take the tray back downstairs. He calls over his shoulder, “You should ask Nagisa about it – he’s had to go to these things every year.”
Nagisa: what's this gala thing about

Rin: well well

Rin: look whos awakey

Rin: dick appointment last all week huh

Rin: Stfu

Rin: hahahaha

Rin: did sou-chan ask you to come to the gala?

Nagisa: Yeah but he wasn't like insistent about it

Nagisa: He ASKED but it was almost like he wanted me to say no

Nagisa: aw what a sweetie

Rin: yeah they're kind of tense

Rin: It's not just tachibana enterprises at the gala. like we're hosting it but it's a charity auction so all the big companies will be there

Rin: kirishima international, mikoshiba inc

Rin: basically anyone with a fat corporate inheritance and a big fucking name will be there

Rin: so obvs there's a LOT of paparazzi there too and that's what makes it kind of not fun

Nagisa: Ew

Rin: yuh
tbh the day before the gala is not enough time to get you prepared for it

but i think sou-chan was holding off telling you because they are hecka stressful

mikhail has been on his ass all week to tell you about it 😧

Wait fr??? I had no idea

mmhmm •

but imo this will be the best time for you two to have your first public appearance

it's an official event, it's for a good cause, and nobody will be able to bash you outright bc it's such a high-profile event or w/e

you WILL get some looks but nobody is gonna say something with all those cameras around

How are you so sure

because the press is good for nothing if not catching that shit

times are changing and the business world knows it. they won't risk their company just to slander you in public

or they'll catch these pretty little hands 😂

Lmao

Thanks
i don't have a business on the line so I'm basically free to do whatever i want at these things

aka make tea

seriously me and isuzu live our gay fantasies at these things making suits uncomfortable is the best life

Who is that

omg isuzu my lil firecracker 😅

she's a mikoshiba and gets dragged to these things every year i promise you'll love her

wait did you not know that asahi is the opening for cocktail hour??

Uh NO?? How tf did that happen

a little birdie (mako-chan's emails winkwonk) told me that haru-chan suggested it a while back 😊

so it's not like you'll be alone - ill be there, asahi, and everyone's coming to help with his equipment it'll be so fun!!

That makes me feel a lot better wow

you'll be absolutely fine 💕

i'll be with mikhail tomorrow & ai to help with you n sou-chan at the hotel

Help? At what hotel?

oh

dear
ok nvm don't worry!! just get some
good rest and exfoliate

Ok...

((alexa play honor to us all))

(((but the gay version)))

AKFHAKWNSSJ

Babe weren't u supposed to get off
at 4

I did but my uncle called me and
needed help showing a listing so
I'm in Otsuka m:

Wtffff 😂😂😂

U gotta be exhausted

I'm ok they're taking forever
deciding on the place so I'm outside
sitting down

Good let your feet rest

My poor baby

I know 😞

But I'm ok promise!! I feel worse
about not being home yet for you

Are you nervous about the gala
tomorrow?

I'm sorry

I've done big shows before but this
is like

Somehow more intimidating
alfhakadhja

How come you think?

ldk?? And that's what's weird
about it
I guess bc it's a different environment? Like with business ppl

Ah yeah that might be it

You're not there to impress anyone ok?

I know that's like.. lame of me to say lolol but it's true

You already have so many ppl that love you and your music

😊😊 AND YOU HAVE ME😊😊

💖forever💖

I love you so much like oh my god

😊😊

Nagisa told me Rin is coming tomorrow

Oh sweet I've missed him

I heard he went to see Hiyori when he was in the hospital but that was after we'd left

I haven't see him since?? Like before all that shit went down online

And you said he was a hot mess when he asked you to come see him the other day

I didn't say "hot mess"😭
I’m coming to the gala tomorrow and I’m a lil worried.

Oh shit why

Obvs I’ve never been to one of these things but Nagisa always talks about how crazy they are.

There’s a lot of general tension since there’s competing businesses there but it’s also kind of a celebrity event.

With a bunch of press and stuff. And ppl trying to stir things up.

U worried someone will try to start something with Rin?

That’s not gonna happen while I’m there.

I know 😊

But it’s not even that I’m WORRIED about someone being weird and petty.

Rin is weird and petty so that won’t really be a problem aksfhjaak.

I mean •••••• it’s true lmaoo not a bad thing.

I’m more anxious about that general atmosphere for him.

Basically I’m scared he’s gonna lose it under all that stress ok.

Oh
Maybe? But maybe not

He's gone a while since all that acted up

That's what I mean tho

It's been months since anything happened and he's doing better fr but that gala is gonna be Rough

I don't really see him freaking out in the middle of it

No he won't

It never happens like that

He'll be perfect at the gala. But I'm scared when all those emotions catch up with him in a few days he might derail again

You there?

Yeah sorry I was thinking

Well he really might derail Kisumi

But that's ok

If he's got to have an episode so his brain can get all that out, I mean it's better than him bottling it up right?

Nvm that sounds shitty

No I get what you mean

Point is Rin has been SO much better since he met that rich guy

Sousuke Imao
Right ha

And if they're pretty much dating anyway then shouldn't it be ok for Sousuke to see him like that?

I mean I was scared to death the first time you saw me have a panic attack but you got me through it and that's how I knew you were the one

YOU CAN'T JUST SAY STUFF LIKE THAT

IM LITERALLY OUT HERE CRYING DUCK

😭😭 OK WHAT IM SAYING is that Rin can handle it. Sousuke can prob handle it

U can't keep worrying about Rin and everyone else

Like I love how much u care and it's not a bad thing but ur exhausted

I'm not putting you down for anything ok?

I wouldn't be here if you didn't care so much about me

But you have literally done all you can and more

I know ur tired so please come home when u can and let me just take mf care of u
The gala is to be held at the InterContinental hotel on Tokyo Bay. Rin hasn’t seen the ballroom yet but he can only imagine how grand it must be, given that his room is nothing short of luxurious. He’s afraid to touch anything – all the cushions are angled just so and the glass wall is flawlessly clear with a heart-stopping view of the bay, which is right across the street. He watches catering vans and musicians break free from traffic to park at the hotel and nervousness flutters up his throat.

Rin flops on the edge of the bed, careful not to wrinkle the silk, and he worries his lip. He applies another layer of chapstick and considers taking another shower. Sousuke left him alone a while ago to go do something; Rin assumed he was just mingling with people downstairs but then he looked out the window and saw Sousuke’s Tesla leave. He’s positive that he noticed Nitori’s bright hair from the passenger’s seat. Sousuke told him that he would be in Nitori’s room to get dressed and wired with an ear piece, but –

Rin shakes his head to stop himself. Everything will be fine. He should take advantage of the boredom and watch some television or maybe take a nap –

The door flies open with a startling bang and Nagisa saunters in, fabrics hanging off his elbows as he curtsies. “Ready to scare some nightmare tramps and turn them on at the same time?”

Rin chuckles and looks at the suits once Nagisa tosses them on the bed. He runs a careful hand over them and takes a breath. “I should probably be used to how expensive all this stuff looks.”

Nagisa tuts and holds his pinkie out to take a delicate sip of his latte, which reeks of bitter espresso. “Don’t be such a detached Aquarius, you’re worth every bit of this stuff.” Nagisa mushes Rin’s cheeks and coos, “I’ve already got one little guinea pig with anxiety, I can’t hold all of you at once.”

“Who, Asahi?”

He snorts. “I meant Sousuke, but yeah, him too.” Rin blinks at that before Nagisa flops beside him to
smack a messy peck against his cheek. “You’re gonna be fine. You’ll drive everyone wild tonight like you always do.” He sways into him playfully. “Sousuke won’t be able to keep his hands off you once we’re through. I mean, he already can’t, but money makes everyone look ten times hotter.”

“I get it,” Rin laughs. Nagisa rubs his forehead against Rin’s shoulder and they get to work.

Nagisa makes the ordeal tolerable and maybe even a little fun; putting on facemasks and talking shit with him over champagne makes Rin laugh until he can’t even remember how to worry.

Mikhail shows up and brings a stylist with him, a woman who’s clearly done her job well for years; she doesn’t ask if Rin agrees with the array of suits she chose, but Rin happens to like the outfit she picks out for him. It’s a Gucci piece, wine-red with plum undertones, and the blazer isn’t bulky. The pants are tight in all the right places; Rin looks at his ass in the bathroom mirror and his jaw drops because he is not doing anything else before he fucks with Sousuke.

He tries for the best angle possible, switching between the mirror lights and the overhead fluorescents before snapping a picture of himself from behind in the mirror. He sends it but makes a face, thinking that Sousuke will probably just say he looks nice –

Sousuke sends back a dozen peach emojis with drooling faces and Rin startles a laugh, flooded with confidence. He may or may not screenshot the message five times.

The stylist pairs the suit with a black button-up for the undershirt, rather than a standard white one, and she gives him some shiny oxfords. She crisscrosses his skinny tie into a fishbone knot and gives him a knowing smile when he nods appreciatively.

Once she’s finished and leaves, a man shows up to do Rin’s hair; he’s dressed in sleek grey and he strokes his impressive mustache as he looks Rin’s hair over. “Do you wear it up or down?”

“Um. It’s down, usually.”

He perks a shrug. “We will go up, then.”

Half-way through the ordeal of sitting ram-rod straight and not moving, Nagisa gives Rin a pitying smirk and pours him a shot of Hibiki from the minibar. Rin swallows the liquid fire and grumbles, “Is Sousuke having to do all this too?”

“Oh, of course,” Mikhail reassures, trading an emerald tie for a blue one with silver embroidery. He sighs at himself in the mirror and flings the tie away; it flutters onto Nagisa’s shoulder, who doesn’t look up from patting foundation across his nose. Mikhail says, “All this prep is standard for events such as this, lovely Rin.”

Rin slumps in his chair, spine bolting straight when the hairdresser nudges him. The man chuckles while using a comb to carefully draw some of Rin’s bangs out from his hair tie. “You’ll be able to do all of this yourself once you’ve been to a few more of these events.”

Rin blushes and arches a brow at the floor.

Once his hair is finally done and Nagisa’s smashed a make-up sponge across Rin’s face, Rin is ready for a fucking nap, but he forces himself to focus as Mikhail wires him – he tucks a cord under the back of Rin’s shirt before hooking an earpiece around his lobe. “You’ll be able to hear us through that,” the man explains. “We’ll all be present at the event, so we won’t be able to help you as much
as we usually do at things like this.” He smooths his hands over the shoulders of Rin’s blazer and gives him a warm smile. “But I have every faith that you’ll be able to handle yourself tonight.”

The reassurance is wonderful up until Mikhail clears his throat. “A few things you should know – if anyone asks what you do for a living, don’t introduce yourself as a student.” He inclines his head, picking his words carefully. “Though you’ve been out of the loop, I’m sure you can imagine what types of things people are saying about… your predicament with Sousuke.”

Rin snorts, straightening his cuff links – they’re chrome squares with a cushion of black diamonds in each center. “They think I’m a gold digger.” Technically, he is. At least he was in the beginning, wasn’t he? It doesn’t help that he checked his bank app a few days ago and realized that Sousuke’s still paying him. It makes Rin feel dirty, but he doesn’t know how to bring it up and tell Sousuke to stop.

It would make all of this feel too real, even if Rin is slowly beginning to like such a thought.

“You’re not a gold digger,” Nagisa reprimands as he straightens Rin’s tie. Nagisa’s suit is pastel, showing his status as a free man that isn’t bound to the constraints of corporate expectations. “You didn’t stay for the money and that’s all that matters.” Rin opens his mouth and Nagisa’s voice raises sharply. “I don’t care how it started, right now is what matters.” He perks a softer smile. “Okay?”

Determination steadies him and Rin nods.

Mikhail continues. “When someone asks what you do, tell them you work in athletics.”

Rin’s eye twitches. “But I don’t – work anywhere.”

“I told Mikhail about the swimming lessons you give to kids during the summer,” Nagisa says. “That’s enough for you to get away with.”

He rolls his neck with a sigh. “Why can’t I just say I’m a student? That’ll bore people into leaving me alone.”

“You’ll have a better chance of people thinking better of you if you say that you have a job.” Mikhail lifts his brows. “I know you don’t have anything to prove, but you’ll do it for Sousuke, yes?”

That sobers Rin up and he quickly accepts the terms.

Mikhail says, “Be aware that there’s going to be a camera on you at all times until the afterparty. Even if you’re just sitting down and not talking to anyone, I promise someone will be watching, so be mindful of your expressions tonight – especially around Sousuke. If you look displeased, it’ll just fuel their fire.”

Instantly, Rin can’t remember how to control his facial muscles. He glances in the mirror and moves his lips around, trying to relax his brows. “I’ll do my best,” he shrugs, and Mikhail gives a pleased nod.

There’s a knock on the door and Rin’s heart shoots up his throat. Mikhail turns the knob for Nitori to peek in with a grand smile. “Evening! Can we come in?”

“Of course,” Mikhail beams. Rin just nods in a stupor and his head keeps bobbing when Sousuke steps in behind Nitori, carrying something red that stands out in passionate contrast to his dark suit.
Rin sees him wearing suits all the time, this shouldn’t be any different yet he can’t catch his breath. The collar has strong angles with wide lapels that broaden his chest; he smells fresh with aftershave. When Rin takes an inhale, he just wants to shake and take his clothes off. His cologne is heavier tonight, davana oil and suede; his hair is slicked back but tastefully, devastatingly, disheveled. Rin’s fingers twitch to fist the mess and drag it between his legs.

He didn’t realize that Sousuke’s been looking at him this entire time, his gaze trailing up from Rin’s shoes to savor every inch of him. Heat pressurizes in Rin’s cheeks and he looks down, turning into a shy, blushy mess.

He composes himself and steps forward to squeeze Sousuke’s warm hands, letting the man’s broad fingers envelop him. “You look cute,” Rin smirks, pretending like he isn’t moments from a heart attack.

Sousuke breaks out of his stupor to roll his eyes, but he chuckles. “So do you.” He swings their hands a little and Rin tries to keep his knees from going boneless.

Mikhail hikes a knowing grin as he glances between them and Nagisa pops his hip out with crossed arms, regarding Nitori. “What took you two so long?”

“I was ambushed downstairs,” Sousuke drones, and he nods back at the door just as someone else peeks in.

Rin startles a smile. “Kisumi?”

“Oh my god,” he whines, bursting in to grab Rin by the shoulders and spin him around. He sounds destroyed. “You look so handsome, like, god. Wow. You’re gonna have so many gays begging to be your pool boy by tomorrow.”

Rin laughs, alight with so much happiness that his insides get fuzzy. “Shut up, you look nice too.”

Kisumi scoffs and flips his hair. “Please, I’ll be lucky if I get laid by my own boyfriend in this rent-a-suit. Asahi’s finished since cocktail hour is over, but Makoto-san was nice enough to let us stay for the rest of the gala. Hiyori’s pretty tired from hopping around on his crutches, so we’ll probably just be sitting down and hanging out.”

“What’s it like down there?”

He hesitates, letting out a breath through his teeth. “Lots of fancy people, but it seems like a bunch of small talk from what I’ve noticed.” He gives Rin an odd look. “You feel okay?”

Rin glances in Sousuke’s direction before trying for a smile. “I’m kind of nervous, but I’ll be fine.”

Kisumi doesn’t look hardly convinced. “Did you take your…? Stuff?”

Confusion pulses through the room and Rin stiffens. “Uh, yeah. Yeah, I’m cool.”

Kisumi beams like everything is suddenly right in the world. “Okay, great,” he sighs, looking relieved as he steps away. With exaggerated gestures, he goads, “It’ll all be fine, you’re doing the most, serving face, it’s gonna be great.”

Rin laughs before Kisumi blows him a kiss and departs. Mikhail, Nagisa, and Nitori step out as well,
leaving Rin alone with Sousuke. Though the man has such a flooding presence, the cage of his arms is familiar as he embraces Rin. Rin leans up on his toes to hug his arms around Sousuke’s neck, and he takes an indulgent inhale against his throat. Sousuke speaks quietly against his hair. “Thank you for doing this.” He squeezes him gratefully.

Rin hops back down on the soles of his feet and smiles, running his hands across Sousuke’s blazer. “Is your shoulder okay?”

His palms shape to Rin’s hips so comfortably. “Don’t worry about me tonight.” He holds his lips against Rin’s forehead, trailing them across his hairline. His voice falls to a vulnerable whisper, a tone that Rin will be the only person to ever hear. “It’s all fine with you here.”

It takes physical restraint for Rin not to fling himself on the bed to scream into a pillow. “Well, just let me know,” he smiles, voice a little breathless as he struggles to hold back his giddiness. He nods at the red box that Sousuke left on the corridor table. “What’s that?”

Sousuke tenses with a wide-eyed blush. “Uh.” Slowly, he retrieves the box, his motions loud and awkward in the quiet. “Well. I wanted to – I thought I would get you something for, you know, doing all of this.”

Rin lifts his brows with an encouraging smile that just makes Sousuke blush harder. He looks down at the box before gathering the courage to meet Rin’s eyes once more. “I didn’t really know what you would want, so I brought Ai with me, since he knows more about… stuff like this. And he texted Nagisa pictures of things to see if he thought you would like anything at the jewelers.”

Oh god. Ohgodohgodohgod –

Rin’s stomach evaporates into a hollow space. “Oh. Really?”

“Well, um.” Sousuke rubs his thumbs across the box to buy time. He clears his throat once, twice. “You don’t have to wear it or anything, I just wanted to do it, is all.”

Warmth floods him so hard and fast that Rin threatens to simply float away. He steps forward not with dread – not with the impending familiarity of having to let someone down easy. This time, he’s excited and his grin shows it.

Gently, he takes the box from Sousuke, admiring it for a moment; it’s red leather with gold script on the top that reads Cartier. Rin pries it open and the white-velvet cushion blinds him until his vision focuses. His heart tightens up before a gasp lodges in his throat. “Sousuke…”

It’s a bracelet, a diamond-paved band of gold. There’s bold screws in between the rows of dazzling white, and it’s so beautiful that the pressure of crying swells behind Rin’s eyes. He looks up at Sousuke with a stunned laugh and throws his arms around him. “Thank you, oh my god!”

Sousuke is tense before he unravels with relief, hugging Rin as he lets out a breath. His voice warms with affection. “Do you like it?”

“Yes, holy shit! It’s so pretty.” He leans back to admire it, blinking at the mini-screwdriver underneath the bracelet. “Why’s it come with a solid gold screwdriver?” Is that standard for things like this? Rich people are so unnecessarily confusing.

Sousuke looks just as puzzled. He takes the box, squinting between the screwdriver and the bracelet
before he understands. “Oh, I think that’s how you put it on. If you want to.”

“Yeah, hell yeah, of course I do.” Impatiently, he pulls his sleeve up before pouting. “I wish I had got something for you.”

Sousuke rubs the back of his neck as he grimaces through an embarrassed smile. “Yeah, about that.” He takes a silk pouch out of his breast pocket. “The bracelets come in pairs, but I didn’t want to make it weird.”

Rin kicks his ankle. “It’s not weird, you’re weird.” He pulls the bracelet out of the pouch and admires Sousuke’s bracelet; it’s thicker to fit him, plain silver that suits him.

Rin figures out how to unwind two of the screws with the little screwdriver, but when he opens the bracelet around Sousuke’s wrist, Rin realizes that he’ll have to lock it. Sousuke won’t be able to take it off unless he uses a screwdriver. Every day, he’ll be showing the world something that he shares with Rin.

It was only weeks ago that such a commitment would make Rin recoil, but now, utter satisfaction rolls all the way down his body.

Sousuke doesn’t falter while Rin twists the screws into place, then he flips his wrist over to inspect the bracelet. He looks pleased though he mumbles, “It’s heavy.”

“Good,” Rin says before he can think about it.

Sousuke’s irises flare, darkening. Rin grins and keeps their gazes locked as he holds out his wrist. Sousuke is gentle with the process, cradling Rin’s arm as he winds the screws out and slips the bracelet around Rin’s wrist. The cold brush makes him gasp in the quiet and his heart thuds for the shackle he aches to wear.

Sousuke tightens the last screw and drops Rin’s hand. Rin brings it up into the light to watch the rainbow prisms dance, something firming deep in his chest.

He leans into the man and takes his mouth with a greedy hum, licking into the taste of mint and heat. Rin’s back finds the wall and the corridor chandelier sings; he lifts a thigh to Sousuke’s hip, rolling into the hard plane of his stomach.

“We have to go,” Sousuke whispers even as he dots messy pecks all over Rin’s throat.

They break apart to straighten each others suits even though Rin is still shaking for him. Sousuke indulges in one last kiss, their mouths closed but damp, just begging for the glide of tongue. Sousuke leans back all flushed and irritated. “This better go by quickly.”

“Yeah,” Rin snorts. Sousuke takes his hand to lead him out but Rin stops him to snap a picture of their joined hands, pushing their sleeves up to show their bracelets.

Sousuke watches him flatly as the shutter sound continues from different angles. “You could do this later, you know.”

Rin doesn’t look up from his concentrated squint on the screen. “You could blow me later, too.”

“Not at this rate,” Sousuke chuckles, tuging his hand and blurring the last shot. Rin’s thumb
scrambles across the screen to type out a caption and he yelps a laugh when Sousuke swats his ass on the way out the door.

just to give you an idea of how loaded sousuke is, one cartier love bracelet (with diamond plates) is around 4538220 yen / 40000 dollars. and he bought two on the fly.

up next: the real deal gala! lots of separate scenes with different couples! makoharu! hiyoiku! remember sourin didn't buy those toys just for me to never mention them again! WINKWONK

twitter & curious cat
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

"You're so good when you listen," Sousuke breathes. Satisfaction knives his grin wide. "And you're even better when you don't."

Chapter Notes

comin back late and loud ayy

seriously, i wanna apologize for how long this took. i've had the worst three months of my absolute life - tragedy after tragedy and i'm honestly still trying to navigate my new normal, but thank you so much for being patient with me, the support has really kept me going. things are slowly but surely looking up. i cannot thank yall enough for reading these stories. <3 i'm sorry for any odd mistakes, i'm getting back into the swing of things. tysm

new doab trailer (nsfw) | watch here

the events in this chapter were what inspired me to write doab, so some of these songs are my faves~

general jams:
  - chanel by frank ocean (nick leon atmosphere edit)
  - almost love by sabrina carpenter
  - natsunao: pretty little fears by 6lack / dante's creek by they
  - hiyoiku: trigger by anne-marie
sr nsfw scenes:
  - candy by doja cat
  - maniac by jhéné aiko
  - high by dua lipa
this song is for the final scene: cuz i love you by lizzo

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rin doesn’t know what he was expecting for the gala. He assumed fancy events would be stereotypical like movie scenes, with women wearing fur shawls over evening gowns, or maybe faces would be covered, but that theory was probably born from a fever dream about vampire masquerades. He imagined cameras, he was told there would be fucking cameras, but the mental image is nothing compared to dozens of them shoved in his face like he’s getting flashed by God Almighty.

He keeps his expression composed the best that he can, though he’s sure his features are strained tight. He and Sousuke make a careful descent on the grand staircase to the ballroom, and Rin maintains a smile that hopefully looks relaxed rather than batshit crazy. His hand is tucked in the
crook of Sousuke’s folded elbow and if Rin squeezes his blazer in a vice-grip, Sousuke doesn’t call him out on it – he looks understanding.

Rin’s gaze travels from the press set up to the ballroom, where every set of eyes turns to look up at him – it’s a mass of suits and scowls hidden behind champagne glasses. He’s taken aback by the severity of it all and it pisses him off; pettiness is a familiar, dark tease in his chest. Rin lifts his chin and meets the room’s stare with a taunting brow arched, breezing down the staircase with his man in tow and purpose in his gait.

Eventually, people glance away, and the ruckus of fake laughter continues. Rin blinks back to himself, realizing that his breath is a little shallow, and there’s sweat weighing the back of his neck.

His head cranes all the way back to take in the grandeur of the ballroom – a chandelier hangs from the domed ceiling with layers of crystals so dazzling that their twinkle is blinding. The ceiling is too high for the chandelier to cast a proper shadow and it’s weird. The marble floor has dozens of tables lined up and they hold towering flower arrangements.

He picks out the waiters in the crowd not because of their stiff uniforms but because they move freely, gliding through the maze of people like war flags. The orchestra pit is a black sea of suits and gowns; their music is soft and boring to Rin, but Sousuke glances at them like he recognizes the monotone classic. Rin smiles because he likes the way Sousuke’s eyes light up, however briefly.

Everyone in the ballroom looks the same to Rin; maybe that’s just his mind blurred over in muted panic, but he really can’t see a difference from one artificial smile to another. Then his eyes gravitate to a table in the back, where Kisumi is fluttering a cute little wave from his spot beside Asahi and the rest of Rin’s friends. His heart soars at the sight. They look itchy in their cheap formal ware, but their laughter echoes through the space like a fresh gust of wind, and Rin knows that he can do this.

Sousuke drops his folded arm to casually lace his fingers through Rin’s. The man’s palm is damp with stress-sweat, but his voice doesn’t give it away. “Do you want to go talk to them?” He nods at Rin’s friends.

Hell yes, more than anything Rin wants to race over there and hide from the duty he’s agreed to, but he shakes his head. “Maybe in a little while.” He can’t abandon Sousuke when they’ve just walked into the wolf den, and Sousuke dips his head in momentary relief. Rin understands – not only does it feel like they’re being watched, they’re being calculated.

They don’t have enough time to even sit down before Sousuke is swarmed by colleagues – at least, Rin thinks that’s who they are. They talk business and Rin doesn’t understand that language. He smiles politely whenever someone briefly acknowledges him with a nod. Nobody really asks who he is, and Rin supposes that was expected, but he doesn’t like being ignored when people are talking to Sousuke like Rin isn’t holding hands with him. It’s such a rude dismissal that Rin leans even more into Sousuke’s side just to watch their jaws tick in frustration. Sousuke doesn’t address any of it but Rin notices how he flushes with pride.

They spend the next hour standing up, letting people talk to Sousuke about nothing Rin can understand. He’s not all that nervous anymore; in fact, he’s bored, but he’s thankful to feel that way instead of anxious. He can hear quick bursts of Nitori’s voice through the earpiece, telling Sousuke who he’s speaking too and what not to say. There are whispers around them, scandalized glances being sent their way, but Rin’s content to think about nothing as Sousuke plays with his fingers and talks, talks, talks.
The most interesting thing that happens over the course of that hour is when a couple strides up to Sousuke, an older man with a young girl hanging off his arm, and their age difference makes it obvious as to what’s going on with that. Rin clearly has no room to judge, but he does so when she openly gives him an up-and-down once over of distaste. His eyes sharpen to tell her yes, he and Sousuke have done all sorts of nasty things together and loved every second of it.

The girl blushes. She doesn’t look at him again.

Sousuke’s right side is clenched up from standing too long, so Rin tugs the crook of his elbow to lead him to a table before someone else can pounce. Sousuke follows in a stupor and looks back at the retreating couple, particularly the girl. “Were you being mean?” He sounds playful.

“Yes,” Rin answers. Sousuke nudges him in thanks.

It’s hardly a relief once they sit down because people keep coming over. Rin feels faint from the rush of it all and Sousuke gives his fingers a subtle squeeze, a reassurance that he can handle the crowd on his own, so Rin heads off to find something strong to drink.

Rin takes a deep breath as his vision prickles with flashes; even though this situation is the furthest from ideal, he wants to make the best out of it for so many reasons. He finds a waiter that’ll give him champagne and the guy looks pleased after Rin acknowledges him with a thank you. The drink is irritatingly delicious, addictive like most expensive things are.

He turns around to head back to the table, but he rounds right into someone. “Shit,” he startles, mouth burning hot as sin when he realizes what just flew out. “Sorry, uh – sorry.”

It’s a man, younger with an iced-out watch that just screams he’s compensating. His hair and eyes are a murky color, his scowl unabashed. “No, it’s my fault,” he says, though his tone makes it clear that he’s not apologizing. His face is swollen and flushed from drinking as he regards Rin. “You’re Matsuoka Rin, yes?”

Oh, Rin knows this type. He takes a long sip of his drink just to make the guy wait for an answer. “Yeah.” Maybe he should have said yes sir, but Rin would have hated himself for it.

“Oh, I thought so.” He gives a pitying wince that makes Rin bristle. People are looking at them, anticipating. “I was wondering when I’d get the chance to speak with you! You and Yamazaki-san have been attached like magnets all night.”

His ear flexes when there’s a crackle up the earpiece. “Careful, Rin,” Mikhail warns through the earpiece. “That’s Tanaka. He’s the son of Tachibana Enterprises ex-CFO. The man that Sousuke punched.”

Rin can only blink, once and slow, because the universe just loves fucking him, doesn’t it?

His gaze wishes to seek out Mikhail, but he refrains. Rin straightens up, rests his weight on one hip before the other. There’s no point in trying to placate Tanaka, so he just stands there and waits. Tanaka looks worlds of offended that Rin refuses to play his game, but his expression quickly smooths over. “Sorry, I’ve forgotten what it is exactly that you do? For work?”

“I work in athletics.”

“Doing what, specifically?”
“Coaching.”

“Mm.” He lifts his brows in a mockery of being impressed and salutes Rin with his champagne flute. “Well, we all have to start somewhere.”

Fire builds under Rin’s skin. Mikhail hurries to say something else in the earpiece but Rin talks over him. “And what do you do?”

Tanaka scoffs a laugh. “I’m not measuring dicks with the likes of you, Matsuoka.” He looks Rin up and down, slow, violating. “Though I hear you like that sort of thing.”

“Yeah, I do.” He breezes closer and every ligament defines in Tanaka’s face. Rin smiles with burning satisfaction deep in his gut. “Do I scare you that much?”

This look flashes across Tanaka’s face and Rin swears that the guy is actually about to slap him.

A voice breaks through the tension. “Go sit on one, Tanaka.”

The guy whips around like someone just frisked him, revealing a girl. She’s tall in her suit and she’s the first girl Rin’s seen tonight dressed in a suit; it looks like she’s itching to kick one of her loafers between Tanaka’s legs, and she lifts her chin like she really might do it.

Tanaka seethes. “Mikoshiba Isuzu. Surprised your parents still allow you to come to events like this.”

Rin reels at how bold that drag was, but the girl – Isuzu – scoffs an unimpressed laugh. “Yeah, hell, and I’m surprised your daddy still recognizes you after Sou-chan knocked his brains out.” Rin blinks as she links arms with him, and she winks. “Rin-chan and I don’t have time for your angst. Go circle jerk in the corner with the rest of the undercover straights.”

His voice cracks on a higher octave. “You little bitch –”

That turns more than a few heads, and one of them is a towering man with Isuzu’s hair. He cuts around with absolute fire in his eyes and Tanaka’s face goes whiter than any shade Rin’s ever witnessed. Isuzu smirks.

Isuzu’s brother nods for two men to shoulder up to Tanaka and they subtly nudge him away, but her brother follows them out with dark promise. Rin knows not to ask questions and instead turns his attention to the girl on his arm. “Thanks,” he gushes, relief pouring out.

“No worries, might as well get the drama started early tonight. I’m Isuzu, I’m from Mikoshiba Incorporated.”


Isuzu laughs. “Yeah, I know. Congrats. He never brings anyone to stuff like this.” At Rin’s curiosity, she adds, “My big brother – Sei – does the marketing for T.E. sometimes, but we grew up with Sou-chan and Mako-chan.” She makes a face. “Kind of how it works when your parents collaborate their businesses sometimes. That’s my little brother over there, Momotarou.”

He follows her pointed finger to see Nitori sitting with another bright-haired Mikoshiba, one who seems unbothered by his crooked bow tie, and he’s animatedly telling a story to Nitori. Isuzu grins.
“They’re a thing.”

They walk around for a time, Isuzu verbally dragging anyone who stands out in the crowd. She and Rin get pleasantly tipsy with hushed laughter. Nobody bothers him with Isuzu close, and Rin finds that he’s enjoying himself at long last.

Isuzu glances in the direction of Sousuke’s table and cackles. “He looks stiff as hell, you know.”

“Yeah, I should probably head back over there in a bit. Nobody gives him a break.”

She grins at how ardent his indignation is. “I like the bracelet he got you.” When he blinks, she says, “I stalked your Instagram. Your sister is cute. She single?”

He chuckles at how blunt she is. “Yeah, she’s thinking about starting college somewhere in Tokyo next semester, actually. She took a break for a few years to help out with the swim club at her old high school.”

“Interesting.” Isuzu guides him back over to his table and pats his shoulder. “Well, I’m around if you need me to throw a drink in anyone’s face. I already got a reputation with these folks.”

Sousuke stands to shake hands with yet another colleague before flopping in his chair. Gratefully, he laces fingers with Rin and throws the girl a smile. “Thanks, Isu-chan.”

“It’s all good. You know where Mako-chan is? I just saw him like, a minute ago but he’s ran off somewhere.”

Sousuke shrugs. “Might’ve just went to get some air. Maybe he’s talking to someone. Might be crying into a shot glass or all of the above.”


Rin watches her disappear into the crowd – more like the sea of people parts for her – and her words confuse him. Sousuke props their joined hands over his thigh. “Having basic manners is considered sweet to Isuzu, obviously.” He nods at the parting crowd.

“Why are they so damn rude to her?”

“That’s how it is for all of us,” Sousuke mumbles. “We’re new money. Young. You don’t exactly have a lot of people thinking you’ll be successful when you inherit a corporation in your twenties; people think you’re impulsive and shoot from the hip.” He snorts into his whiskey glass. “It’ll take you until you’re forty to prove that you’re not like that.”

Rin guesses that makes sense, and he’s noticed glimpses of those traits from Sousuke, but not to such an unapologetic extent.

Sousuke points his eyes to another group as they make their way over, and the look on his face makes Rin brace himself. There’s a man and woman, clearly the parents of the boy between them; his mop of hair is tied back, bangs curtaining the side of his face. It takes a minute for Rin to recognize him as the boy that was at the hospital with Hiyori. He startles at Ikuya’s eyes – they’re cast down in disturbing submission as he sits between his parents.

Rin knows that he should be worried when he notices this family comes with their own bodyguards;
it’s not obvious, but Rin’s seen enough movies to know what it means when there’s a bunch of meaty guys hanging out by the wall.

The woman adjusts her pearls, delicately fluffing her hair; she looks straight out of a glamorous forties movie, and she flashes a smile like she’s in a damn toothpaste commercial. “So nice to see you, Yamazaki-san.” The woman glances at her husband before sending a tense nod at Rin.

Sousuke bows politely even as he grips Rin’s hand tighter under the table.

His earpiece crackles to life. “You’re sitting across from the Kirishimas,” Nitori explains, low and curt. “A rival business. Someone must have messed with the seating chart.” He fumes a noise of stress. “Where the hell is Nagisa?”

Mikhail’s voice chimes in, a sarcastic drawl. “He’s attempting to sink his little claws in Ikuya’s friend over there by the bar.”

Subtly, Rin glances above the crowd to see Nagisa, who is three glasses deep in the chardonnay and fawning over a guy with red glasses.

Nitori frazzles, “Where are you, Mikhail?”

“Oh, just catching up with someone.”

Flat silence. “Ryuji’s here, isn’t he.”

Mikhail tuts. “I’m a social butterfly, nephew, this is hardly—”

“I can’t have you and Nagisa on the hunt at an event like this!” Nitori groans like he’s buried his face in his hands. “Someone go find Tachibana-san so Yamazaki-san isn’t just waiting there like a sitting duck!”

Nagisa’s drawl startles Rin. “And what have you been up to, my angelic little Ai-chan? Don’t act like you didn’t just get out of the elevator all hot and bothered with Mikoshiba Momotarou stumbling out like he just saw God. It’s not the Mile High Club if it happens in an elevator, sweetie.”

Ikuya straightens up and his mother tenses. She moves to grab his wrist, but he shrugs her off and gazes across the table with determination. “Hey, Sousuke-san.”

Ikuya’s father looks up from his phone like his son just did something scandalous. Unforgiving.

Sousuke holds protective eye contact with the boy. “Good to see you, Ikuya-san. How’s it going?”

“It’s okay,” he sighs, trying to smirk but it’s like his expression can’t reach its full potential when he’s caged between his parents. Ikuya’s voice is unnerving in its weakness. He looks like he hasn’t slept in a year. “It’s nice to see you again, Rin-san.”

“You too,” he responds, smiling in what he hopes is a comforting manner. Rin doesn’t know what the hell is going on but Ikuya’s father shouldn’t be looking at him like that; it makes all sorts of anxieties run through Rin’s brain.

The man fumes a sigh, his round belly heaving with the motion. He’s fat and short and leathery, but nothing short of intimidating. He snaps, “Where’s Natsuya?”
“He just went to fetch a drink,” the woman soothes, patting her husband’s hand. He pulls away with an irritated scowl and Rin tries so, so hard not to let the bewilderment show on his face.

He waits patiently for a drink, standing at the corner of the bar and out of the way, utterly invisible to those talking around him. Their conversations rise and fall like waves, dull words that are still, somehow, so sharp – voices like hidden knives just waiting to strike.

Someone strides up to him, closer than acceptable, too purposeful to be an accident. His honey cologne is familiar, just like the way he fiddles with his cuff links, twisting them, winding them up like toys.

Their voice is low and rushed. “What are you doing here?”

Nao turns, his braid tumbling off his shoulder as he regards Natsuya. He looks like he belongs here and Nao’s heart breaks at that. “Don’t mind me.” He nods his thanks at the bartender and takes a long sip of bubbly fizz that’s spiked with lime alcohol. Nao keeps his eyes down on the glass. “As far as these people are concerned, I’m only here to help Asahi.”

Natsuya rakes a hand through his curls; they don’t sit right when they’re gelled and Natsuya looks like a mess. Nao’s mess.

Natsuya dares to hold eye contact, a blush rising as his gaze climbs Nao’s body. “You’re goddamn gorgeous,” he whispers like a secret, because it is.

“Thank you. I see you’re with your parents tonight.”

Natsuya waves the bartender over and waits for a beer. He casts a quick scowl over his shoulder. “Yeah, well. Someone needed to be here for Ikuya.”

Nao rolls his eyes because Natsuya’s excuses aren’t even fanciful anymore. But he keeps smiling because he doesn’t know what else to do. “He brought Rei with him. You’re here tonight for the same reason I haven’t seen you in a week.” Nao’s features sharpen just a fraction, the hurt cracking up his chest to split across his face. “Why did you go back to him, Natsuya?”

His father, Nao means. Natsuya knows – the shame weighing him down says as much, and he’s voiceless.

Nao barrels on with a pleading whisper. “You were doing so well, only for me to find out—”

“You weren’t supposed to see that email.” Natsuya’s fists clench on the bar, his watch glittering like a wicked little fairy. “You weren’t supposed to read it.”

“Please,” Nao scoffs, his irritation finally getting the best of him. They stop talking for a minute, long enough for people to think that they’re just passing casual conversation back and forth when in reality, Nao’s chest is burning. He listens to Natsuya chugging one beer, then another. Nao says, “Why are you thinking about going back to Kirishima International?”

He expected some sort of reaction, maybe tensed shoulders or an ardent denial, but Natsuya just looks tired as all Kirishima children do. “I don’t know,” he admits. “Dad just started being nice again; nicer than ever.” He chews his lip, eyes lost to confusing memories. “When I gave in and had
dinner with him last week, he didn’t say a word about me leaving the family business. He asked about me, how I was doing —”

Panic screams through Nao. “That’s what all abusive people do. They pretend that they care until you’re trapped again.” Or maybe it’s cult leaders who do that specifically; the Kirishimas pride themselves in having that type of vibe. “He suddenly starts asking you about your opinion on stocks? Tachibana Enterprise stocks? He’s just using you to get information.” Nao dares to grab the edge of Natsuya’s sleeve. “Natsuya. My love,” he whispers, dipping closer, begging the man to lean on him. “I’m scared for you.”

Natsuya’s eyes sink closed, maybe in acceptance but probably defeat. “I know, moonlight.” He takes a moment to breathe and pretend this is all normal. “I want to go home. With you.”

“Then just come,” Nao insists, properly tugging Natsuya with no fucks left to unearth. He steps closer to Natsuya, protectiveness hardening his voice. “Don’t even tell them goodbye. Forget all these people. Just come with me and we’ll go home.”

“But Ikuya —”

“Take him, too.” Natsuya’s eyes dart for an excuse but Nao doesn’t feel the least bit of exasperation. He knows that family is familiar, even if they’re monsters, but Nao won’t let the Kirishima’s touch Natsuya again. He’s tired of worrying, pacing Natsuya’s empty penthouse for nights on end and praying that his father hasn’t dragged him back into the real family business. Natsuya might be a Kirishima but he wasn’t made for that life – Nao will prove it to him.

Nao says, “You can’t wait until the start of the semester to get Ikuya out of that house; this isn’t that type of situation anymore.” He levels their gazes and Natsuya bores into his eyes, clinging to Nao’s steadiness. “Go get your brother.”

Natsuya swallows. He glances down at his beer and chugs it; Natsuya takes a deep breath, then another, before heading for his table.

Something happens before Natsuya can reach his parents. Nao isn’t sure what precisely makes Ikuya snap, but it surely didn’t take much. His parents won’t even let him hold a conversation at the table and pretend like his life has a semblance of normalcy. Sousuke and Rin aren’t his friends – they can’t be, all because of Ikuya’s father.

Nao is proud of Ikuya before he even rises from his seat. The action alone causes his father to halt mid-sentence. People steal glances, others bristle. Natsuya’s head angles hard like he’s entered a dreamscape.

His mother asks Ikuya what he’s doing; his father tells him to sit down. Ikuya just stares into his distorted reflection on the table’s glossy wood.

His eyes close, a sway rustling through him as he basks in momentary darkness, a fleeting little pinch of stillness. Then he opens his eyes, gaze blazing a trail across the ballroom.

Nao follows Ikuya’s eyes and his stomach drops because he knows what Ikuya is about to do.

Natsuya is already moving, seizing his brother’s elbow to hiss, “Don’t, Ikuya.”

“Fuck you, Natsuya,” he scoffs, wrenching his arm back to storm across the ballroom. It’s possible
that he could truly explode from pent-up emotion, and Natsuya is too afraid to chase him.

Hiyori is laughing with Kisumi, oblivious and aware all at once: he knows how people look at him in his rented suit, slouched against a crutch, though something about him is so mocking, as always. He and Ikuya haven’t spent enough time together for Hiyori to feel it in his heart as the boy approaches, but they’ll get there, Nao thinks.

Hiyori turns faster than Nao expected, perking up at the sight of Ikuya. His smirk is warm, cheeks scrunching up with crinkled eyes behind his glasses, and the reaction makes Ikuya soften hopelessly. It drives him forward with even more resolve, and Nao braces himself right before Ikuya slots around Hiyori’s thigh, yanks into his hair, and pulls him down into a filthy kiss that will end Ikuya’s life as he knows it.

Cameras go off like explosions from every direction, shutters jamming, quickening. Hundreds of photos are snapped in moments; it would only take one to ruin the Kirishima name, but Ikuya makes sure there’s enough to last forever.

Hiyori is crooked down into Ikuya, arms splayed out and frozen. Ikuya keeps their lips mashed and when he opens his eyes, tears scatter down his cheeks, but his smile has never looked so overjoyed.

Hiyori blinks the glassiness from his eyes and his gaze shifts to Ikuya’s father, understanding it all when the man spews a wordless cry of fury.

Hiyori’s brows cut south, expression sharpening. He meets the man’s eyes as Hiyori cups the back of Ikuya’s neck, and even when he parts Ikuya’s mouth with his own, he never breaks their stare.

The man takes a step forward and Rin stands up, not needing to say a word of threat – his expression tells all. Asahi stands up too, rolling up his blazer sleeves up like a fucking idiot before Kisumi pins him down in a chair. Nao is surprised when Ikuya’s mother braces a firm hand on her husband’s chest. She gives Natsuya a look of defeat – she is accepting that she must let her baby go, and that she might never see him again once Natsuyawhisks him to safety.

What a fucked up woman, Nao thinks. All the more reason to get Ikuya out of here, and Natsuya does so gently, once he and Hiyori have parted. Natsuya steps up to his brother with frantic glances about, and he ducks his head to breathe low: “Let’s go home, Ikuya.”

Ikuya can’t get his face out of Hiyori’s hands; he’s utterly slumped in his palms, letting Hiyori search his expression. Something passes between their eyes and Hiyori’s arms fall slack, though Ikuya just smiles. Tired, but free. “Thanks,” he mutters.

Hiyori’s brows crease and his smile is just as sad. Ikuya doesn’t fight it when Natsuya takes his elbow once more, and Nao slips away with them.

Makoto lets out the most beautiful moan when Haru crushes him against the bathroom counter. They scramble into a stall and one of them kicks the door closed, but all that matters is how good it feels to be pinned between the wall and Makoto’s frame – Haru can’t tell which sensation is more unyielding.

Their teeth knock so hard that Haru’s ears ring. It feels like there’s lead in his gut, threatening to sink him to his knees with an open mouth. Their lips roll together; it’s all wet and ragged and Haru feels downright possessed. Energy beats through him until he could scream with it, and every brush of
Makoto’s fingers nearly slices his skin because Haru is so tender with sensitivity. He likes it a little too much.

Haru rakes through Makoto’s hair and twists, hanging on for dear fucking life when Makoto’s hand pumps slick and loud from Haru’s flayed-open zipper. Haru works his own hand more aggressively inside of Makoto’s trousers, struggling to bend his aching wrist, but he must be doing something right because Makoto looks on the verge of fainting. He buries his damp forehead against Haru’s temple, whispering groans into his ear.

Haru has just enough coherency left to huff a laugh. “You feel good.” It doesn’t make any sense, he’ll hide in his bed in mortification for days after this orgasm, but Makoto falls so supple against the words.

Haru runs his free hand under Makoto’s blazer to smear his palm up his taut stomach, rasping over a nipple on his way to yank Makoto in by the collar. The man whines into the kiss and his lips tremble all across Haru’s chin.

“We need to hurry,” Makoto grits, though his hand doesn’t move any faster. He is determined to savor this to a careless degree.

His thumb rasps fast under Haru’s cockhead, making his thighs kick. “It’s miserable with all those people,” Haru responds, breath hitching on every syllable.

Makoto smiles, looking validated and delirious. “I – hah – I know.” A tremor rolls all the way down to his calves like he can hardly withstand the power of it, and his lips fall against Haru’s ear. “You’re my favorite person, you know?”

Haru doesn’t mean to arch and preen. The action speaks what he is too embarrassed to say, and Makoto nips little kisses across his neck. The man says, “I told you Sousuke wasn’t going to hit anyone tonight.”

Haru scoffs but the noise ends high as he jerks up on his toes. “There’s still hours left for him to – oh. Oh, right there.”

“Yeah, but – shiiit, c’mon, we need to hurry –”

“You had no qualms when I dragged you in here by your crotch.”

“Well no, but there will definitely be a fist-fight when I’m caught in here with my literal pants d- down.”

Haru offers him a private smile, his voice just as sweet. “I’d punch someone for you.”

His voice rushes out. “Haruka, I –” Makoto hides his face with an embarrassed whine. “You’re gonna make me say something that’s not socially appropriate for a bathroom hand job.”

“Could I guess what it is?”

Makoto fists his shaft heavy and slow. His voice drifts. “Yeah, probably.”

Haru will never tell anyone that the realization alone makes him come.
Rin doesn’t say a fucking word as Sousuke pulls him through the balking crowd, their attention distracted by the Kirishimas exit. He follows the man into the elevator and Rin keeps his arms crossed on the walk into their hotel room, where Sousuke’s composure frays. “You shouldn’t have done that.”

He’s talking about when Rin stood up in defense of Ikuya, and Rin is the furthest thing from regretful. “What, not let a man hit his own son?”

Sousuke fumes an exhale and drops onto the side of the bed. “It was the right thing to do, and I’m proud of you.” He palms his shoulder and sympathy breaks through Rin, but Sousuke’s next words churn up a strong sense of retribution. “I wish I had been the one to do something, you shouldn’t put yourself in danger with the Kirishimas.”

Rin scoffs, exasperation shredding his mental equilibrium. “He was a fucking asshole, Sousuke.”

The man opens his mouth and Rin slices out a hand. “I don’t care if he’s got shady shit going on.”

He shakes his head in building fury and snatches open the ice box to scoop some into a plastic cup. He chews the ice angrily, too got off with the even fetch water from the sink. “You can’t just be so fucking scared of these people forever.”

Sousuke jerks back like he’s been slapped. He wears a newfound expression of hurt, but not one of surprise because he knows that Rin speaks the truth.

Still, sharp guilt bites into Rin, and he approaches Sousuke hesitantly. He sits on the bed a foot apart from the man. It’s miserable. The air has never been so thick between them, not able to meet gazes.

Rin fiddles with his bracelet and says, “I know there’s a lot riding on… status, or whatever, but this gala is so stressful because everyone’s on edge, trying to act perfect.” He dares to scoot nearer and nudge Sousuke’s arm, yet the man doesn’t look at him. Rin glances down at their hands, which are both braced on the mattress, and he feels an aura of heat from Sousuke’s fingers – a magnetization that demands them closer, but Rin refrains. “You’re too good for their games and so am I. It’s not fair of you to ask me to play them.”

“I’m not,” Sousuke rushes, turning with alarm. “I’m not trying to – change you, or make you think that what you did was wrong.”

Rin tips his head. “You’re scared.” He says it kinder this time.

“I’m not,” Sousuke tries, though his expression proves that he knows how weak it came out. Sousuke flops an arm over Rin’s lap and hides his fingers behind Rin’s knee; it seems as though Sousuke takes more comfort from the touch than Rin does. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry I keep fucking up.”

Rin frowns, stiffening. “We’re not even having a real argument, it’s okay.” Sousuke squeezes him closer until Rin understands.

He takes the man’s hand and pulls his fingers around Rin’s bracelet, making him tug it. Sousuke blinks up as Rin grins playfully. “You know I’m not going anywhere.”

Sousuke looks at Rin’s wrist, drawing a lone finger around the diamond rows. “I want to be more like you. It’s just taking too long.”

Rin rolls his eyes before pecking the man’s forehead. “You don’t have to be like me, just loosen up a little.” He rises and offers his hand but Sousuke just sulks until Rin straddles him on the bed. He runs
his hands up Sousuke’s throat to drag his fingers across firm skin, sharp jaw, and a thought barrels to
life. Rin gets a little dazed from it, but he can’t dare explain his sudden blush out loud.

“What is it?” Sousuke’s voice perks with interest. His hands glide up Rin’s thighs, unaware that his
palms rake tingles across his legs.

Rin’s hands fall down Sousuke’s shirt opening and he pauses there, brain alight with memories of
naked skin – how it feels, how it burns, how it tastes. He fantasizes about what hasn’t happened yet – what could.

He’s restless and hot, fingers giving the barest tremble of anticipation, and his whisper is all rasp.
“Punish me.”

Sousuke’s expression blanks. “But you… didn’t do anything wrong?”

“Not the point.” Rin chews his lip and gives him a look.

Sousuke’s hands pause midway up Rin’s legs; he sets little fires where ever his fingers travel, leaving
Rin pliable as hot wax. Rin quirks his brow hopefully, sitting up higher on Sousuke’s lap so the man
is looking up to him now. Rin’s hips give a coy sway. “You know I’d like it.” He leans down to
hover in that delicious fraction of space between a kiss. “I think you would, too.”

“I wouldn’t like hurting you,” Sousuke says, brows lifting into a firm expression which promises that
stance will never change.

Rin’s heart swells – among other things, but anyway. “It’s nothing crazy.”

“Sounds like you already have something in mind.”

He drifts closer to Sousuke’s ear, brushing his lips all over it. “Since we’re gonna need to wind down
when all this over, we could do a little something…” Sousuke’s breath catches when Rin suckles his
lobe. “Different.” He brims with delight when he leans back and Sousuke’s face is red. “I brought
that toy for you.”

“Cool.” Sousuke is unfazed, though he twitches a smirk. “I brought the one for you, too.”

His eyes widen and Sousuke’s smirk kicks higher. Rin demands, “Tell me what it is.”

The man chuckles before kissing at Rin’s impatient pout. “I could just give it to you,” he murmurs,
pecking at the corner of his lips to trail across to the other side. Rin doesn’t open up for him and he
feels Sousuke drag a grin across his jaw. “Or I could put it in you.”

“Cool.” Sousuke is unfazed, though he twitches a smirk. “I brought the one for you, too.”

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pecking at the corner of his lips to trail across to the other side. Rin doesn’t open up for him and he
feels Sousuke drag a grin across his jaw. “Or I could put it in you.”

Rin’s hips rock without control and Sousuke gives them a warning squeeze, which only spikes Rin’s
arousal. “Do it,” he taunts, spreading his thighs wider over Sousuke’s. “Put it in me.”

His silence is considering, so responsible. “Later,” he vows, but there’s an excited crack to his
words.

Rin jumps on the falter. “Now,” he whines, body losing stability as Sousuke kisses him with closed-
mouth firmness. Sousuke’s hand swoops to catch Rin’s back and simply right him, but even such
miniscule contact throws a crack in his impassiveness. A hungry rumble vibrates against Rin’s mouth
as Sousuke drops a bold hand to his ass, hiking Rin up against his torso. Rin hooks his teeth under
Sousuke’s bottom lip and tugs. “Please, sir.”

“Fuck,” Sousuke exhales, a shudder flowing through him. His hands scramble to yank open Rin’s trousers, and his nails dig hard into Rin’s asscheek. Tingles cluster and burst apart under the touch. His cock aches but Sousuke won’t grip him; the man gives him a hot onceover. “You trust me?” Heady promise gravels over his voice.

Rin nods because he’s too breathless to speak, and Sousuke runs his damp mouth across his chin. “Close your eyes.”

Rin does as he’s told with enthusiasm, gripping Sousuke’s biceps for stability – anticipation leaves him swaying with vertigo. There’s a shuffle of movement, Sousuke’s thighs stretching as he reaches for something. A weighty thumb presses into the cushion of Rin’s lip. “Open your mouth for me.”

Rin sticks out his tongue with it, and something brushes inside. The taste is obviously rubber and he timidly licks across the shape of it. The thickness is the width of three fingers, but not as long. Rin purses his lips around the tip and inches down, realizing that the object widens the further he goes. It’s not long enough to choke him and doesn’t give under his teeth.

Rin sucks wetly, letting Sousuke turn it around so it’s coated. The object warms in Rin’s mouth and the sound of his own lewd slurps has his navel pulling taut. Sousuke’s breath falls heavier, shallowing as he watches. He pulls the thing out of Rin’s mouth and hands sneak into the back of Rin’s pants. Fingers knead against his asshole. “Relax,” Sousuke whispers, licking a sweet little kiss beneath Rin’s ear.

His thighs open and something unyielding presses against his entrance, then it splits his body open in one smooth motion.

Rin’s eyes bulge open without control. “Hah –” He arches, hips shimmying to adjust the intrusion. It crooks in tight and hard, not big and not hurting, but the fact that Sousuke isn’t thrusting has Rin’s body confused. “Did you just put a fuckin’ buttplug in me?” He’s grinning as he croaks it.

“You said you’ve used stuff like that before.”

Those were dildos and most certainly larger to an obscene degree, but Rin won’t go into that right now. Sousuke re-tucks Rin’s button-up and zips his pants like an act of finality. Rin babbles, “Wait, what’re – what’re you doing?”

“Punishing you.” Sousuke smiles and pats Rin’s ass before lifting him by the armpits to make him stand.

Sousuke takes his hand on the way back to the elevator, Rin hobbling along. He grumbles, “So I’m supposed to just sit on this thing all night?”

“It does a little more than that.”

That’s all the response Rin gets until they’re in the elevator and descending. He huffs his bangs out of his face, too busy scowling at the wall to notice Sousuke fiddling with his phone.

He scrolls as innocent as ever before vibrations flutter to life in Rin’s core.

His brain scatters apart. Colors blotch his vision. Rin almost blasts out of his own skin and his arm
flails out to catch himself against the wall. “Oh, you mother –” He holds his breath and just
writhe.

It stops before Rin’s exhale spews out, body flushed and trembly.

Sousuke’s eyes are hooded with a faint smirk before he presses a kiss to Rin’s hand and guides him
out of the elevator. Rin just might fall in love with him in that moment. Hypothetically. Just as a
figure of speech, of course.

The mood improves after Ikuya’s incident, oddly enough. Rin keeps Sousuke’s hand cradled in his
lap and forces his eyes down in a show of nonchalance – he can’t feel the buttplug if he sits still, but
there’s an obvious weight inside of him, and the fact that Sousuke could push one button and have
Rin coming all over himself in the floor does nothing to keep him from sweating. Still, he knows that
Sousuke isn’t bally enough to try anything when there’s important people around – Rin doesn’t
know if that’s a relief or a disappointment.

The Kirishima parents left in a dramatic show, so he and Sousuke are alone at their table until
Makoto comes out of nowhere and plops into a chair, looking embarrassed by his own languidness.
He quickly straightens up and rakes his hair back into place. “Where’d the Kirishimas go?”


Makoto flutters a blink with wide-eyed innocence. “I don’t know.”

Rin scoffs into his drink and turns away when the brothers look at him. Sousuke razors a devastating
grin and lifts his ankle up onto his knee. “Hope nobody saw you,” he says, sounding the exact
opposite.

“Shut up,” Makoto whines, burying his face inside a palm.

Sousuke looks like he’s never had more fun. “You could say you were jerking off alone in the
bathroom.”

“The hicky kind of ruins that,” Rin sighs. Makoto looks up miserably and Sousuke chuckles, fingers
playing with Rin’s bracelet.

There is an award ceremony next, which subdues the room. Clear plaques are handed out to those
who donated the most to charities over the course of the year, and Sousuke stands on stage with
Makoto as his brother announces each person. He looks stiff to Rin, though he pleasures in being the
only one that can notice such a miniscule trait. Sousuke fidgets more the longer they’re up there. Rin
lifts his chin, reminding the man to stand taller and prouder.

Once they finish handing out awards, they step to the side and allow the founder of the charity circuit
to say a few words. Sousuke keeps his hands behind his back, nodding thoughtfully at the floor until
the woman glances back at him. She turns her smile to the microphone. “I’d also like to thank
Tachibana Enterprises for sponsoring tonight’s gala, and I am especially grateful for the donations
they have made themselves.”

Rin claps along with the rest of the crowd before the woman continues. “Makoto-san has worked
close with us for years and Sousuke-san is just as passionate in supporting our organization.” She
gives the crowd a brief but pointed look at that. “It is a joy to publicly thank the ones that offer their
aid with a desire to understand and help our circuit, so –” She takes the last frosted slate off the
podium. “It is with great honor that we award Yamazaki Sousuke as our top sponsor of the year.”
Sousuke’s arms fall slack and Rin gasps. Makoto leads the applause this time around as Nagisa whistles from somewhere in the room; Isuzu gives a standing ovation and the rest of the room follows. Makoto nudges his brother toward the podium and Sousuke resists with an adorable case of stage fright before stepping up. He gives the woman a bow before taking the award in a stupor. She gestures at the podium and Sousuke shuffles up to the microphone, eyes darting for something to say.

He bends down to the mic and clears his throat with a grimace. “Uh, I’m – really grateful to Aina-san for the award.” He nods and shrugs back at the woman before glancing at the plaque. “It wasn’t necessary for me to be thanked, but I appreciate it.”

He thinks for a moment, gathering the courage to meet the crowd’s stare. “It’s been a hard year.” His tone is one of tired vulnerability, and his genuity brings a shift to the air. “My father loved these events, he started planning them at least half a year in advance.”

His exasperation brings laughter through the crowd and Rin hears someone’s breath catch, a few sniffles. Solemnness weighs down on the room as Sousuke continues. “He won this award every year, so this is –” He sighs down at the plaque. “An honor, for sure.” Sousuke runs his thumb over it, back and forth like he’s scraping dust from the happiest photograph. Makoto wipes his eye with the side of his hand and everyone else suddenly looks more human, sharing an expression of grief.

Sousuke exhales to compose himself. “I’d like to thank everyone else who donated, and – and everyone that helped Makoto and I through this year. Our mother, coworkers and personal assistants.” He chews his bottom lip before nodding to himself. “I need to thank my boyfriend, too.”

Rin doesn’t even feel the urge to curl into himself when glances come from every direction. He’s only looking at Sousuke, and the man bows his head with the severity of his words. “Rin, I am so –” He closes his eyes to swallow and Rin’s pulse kicks. “You make me happy and I know that my father would have loved you.”

Rin knows that he’s gone because he can’t even cry – he feels too much to even render tears.

Sousuke’s voice warms with naked affection, unafraid of any distaste left in the room. “I’m proud to call you mine; proud to be yours.”

When the fanfare has ended and he’s beside Rin at the table, Sousuke doesn’t flinch when Rin cups the back of his neck. Rin sweeps his thumb across the man’s cheek, sharing conversations with their gazes alone. He pecks Sousuke’s lips, once and firm, smiling into it even though all the lines are blurring.

The older people exit after the awards, which leaves the young, rich masses with an open bar and plenty to talk about. The twenty-somethings with trust funds are kinder than their parents, but Rin sits at a table with his own friends instead. He’s grateful to be in a familiar space without judgement; he feels dazed from all the tension he’s carried all night.

Kisumi flops an arm over Rin’s shoulder while Asahi drinks as much champagne as he can, since it’s the priciest thing he’ll ever be drunk on. “Can you believe Haru’s actually holding hands with someone,” he whispers. “I think the simulation is glitching.”

They share giggles and peek over at the couple across the table. Makoto flung off his blazer and
wears his button-up with the sleeves bunched; his bangs are honey-toned, drooped over his eyes with disheveled relaxation. He faces Haru and props his elbows on his knees to lean in and listen to his every murmur. One of Haru’s small hands is clasped in both of Makoto’s own. “Man, they are gone,” Rin laughs, flushed with tipsiness.

“They’re still in the clingy stage,” Kisumi nods from Asahi’s lap. Rin gives him a judgmental stare.

Hiyori hasn’t stopped texting since Ikuya left, so it’s easy to assume who he’s chatting with. It seems like Ikuya’s friend was standard once he left, but he slipped into the elevator with Nagisa some time ago. Nitori is the most relaxed Rin’s ever seen him, his bowtie loose with his earpiece wire left astray, and Momotarou gets on well with Asahi after they do shots. Isuzu is having the time of her life talking with Aki and Nii – she shouted in victory and tackle-hugged them the moment she realized they were a couple.

Rin can’t be bothered to jump into any conversations because he’d rather put in work to get his guts scrambled later tonight. He turns to Sousuke and pouts his lips for a kiss; the man chuckles before obliging, quick but sweet. Sousuke hasn’t said much since the main event ended, and he nurses his second whiskey haggardly. Rin knows that he’s exhausted from talking all night, so he massages Sousuke’s scalp in languid circles. “You sleepy?”

He rolls his neck with an appreciative sigh. “Nah, I’m all right.” He taps a finger against Rin’s empty glass. “Want some more?”

“If you don’t mind.” Sousuke shakes his head and goes, leaving Rin alone with his friends.

His eyes lull closed and he’s half-way toward a tipsy snooze when someone flops into Sousuke’s chair. Rin startles and Nagisa cackles, “Boy, I still got it.”

“Are you such a liar,” Kisumi wheezes, knocking heads with Rin when they can’t control their laughter.

Rin’s laugh stops dead when vibrations shutter between his legs.

He fists the table cloth, wanting to snare his teeth in it. Sousuke is still at the bar, his back to Rin as he scrolls through his phone with an air of nonchalance, and he looks so infuriatingly attractive with all that muscle packed into his suit and he’s smirking –

Oh no.

Rin tenses to brace himself for the next wave of vibrations; they kick up to a higher setting, fluttering a rhythm that Rin could scream the glories of. He closes off his throat, not even breathing to cage in the whimpers. His thighs open under the table and it takes every ounce of determination to stop
himself from bouncing down like a fucking freak.

Even if he did, Rin knows that his body would refuse to come because it’s not Sousuke’s cock inside of him.

The rattling inside halts and Rin reels with dizziness, thankful to get a few breaths in before the vibrator shakes back to life. His body claps down tight around the shape of it and his thighs clench. He bows his head to the table before Kisumi gasps, “Oi, Rin, you all right?”

“Mmhmm,” he whines, voice pitched at an octave that would make dogs cry.

Hiyori pipes, “You feel sick?”

“N-No –”

A murmur from Haru. “You’re shaking.”

“Uh, yeah –”

“Sousuke oughta put you to bed.” Rin looks up at Nagisa, who wears a smirk that is faint but dreadful. Nagisa ducks close to whisper, “You know you ‘n Sou-chan left your earpieces in when you went upstairs, right?”

Rin’s tipsy brain takes a minute, then he muffles a groan against his arm. Nagisa swings his head back to cackle and pats Rin’s shoulder. “Mako-chan did the same thing when he was in the bathroom with Haru-chan so trust me, you two weren’t nearly as entertaining.”

The vibrations stop, knocking the wind out of Rin. He croaks, “Can’t you get fired for listening to stuff like that?”

“Probably should,” Nagisa nods, grabbing a champagne bottle from the table to take it back up to his room. “Anyway, I’m out. Rei-chan was still passed out when I left but he’ll probably be mighty thirsty when he wakes up.”

Kisumi drones, “You really knocked him out?”

“I didn’t.” Nagisa sweeps an arm across his crotch in a grand gesture. “We shorties carry quality pipe, don’t get it twisted.” He shoots his best friend with a finger gun. “Catcha later. None of y’all message me.”

Naturally, everyone blows up the group chat after he’s gone. Rin is still twitching from his vibrations-assault when Sousuke returns, handing him his refreshed drink. Through his teeth, Rin smiles, “Hey, you.”

“Hi, baby.”

Rin gives him a stubborn pout and keeps it going as he takes the vodka, hands trembling around the glass. Rin says, “Ready to go?”

“Mmm.” Sousuke stretches out his sigh for a good ten seconds. “I don’t know, maybe in a while.”

Rin’s left eye twitches. Okay, he wants to play coy, Rin invited that shit. He snuggles up to Sousuke,
hugging his arms around a bicep. “That’s fine.” He whispers behind the shell of Sousuke’s ear: “If you do not get me out of here right fucking now, I will get on my knees right here in front of everyone and suck your cock back so far in my throat that I start blacking out.”

Sousuke chokes on an inhale.

“I won’t let you pull out, baby. I’ll gag and cry and thank you for it over and over.”

The man’s expression falters before he clears his throat. It’s a mangled sound. Rin’s hand slips under the table, teasing the inside of Sousuke’s thigh. “And when you’re right there –” The man grunts when Rin’s fingers dig into his cock. “I’ll leave and never finish you off.”

His fingers grope for Sousuke’s shaft and when he finds it, Rin runs up the full shape of it. Rin’s voice falls to a whiny grumble. “Do you really want that, sir? I don’t.” Sousuke’s teeth slam together when Rin jostles his bulge. “But you know I’ll do it.”

Their exit is brisk and probably rude, but when Sousuke pins him against the elevator wall, it feels like Rin is the only person in the world. Sousuke lets him pull at his shirt and lick into his mouth, doesn’t hush Rin for whimpering aloud because he finally has Sousuke in his arms, away from all other people. He is truly Rin’s for the taking, and his greedy tendencies flourish.

Sousuke takes care of him always, cupping Rin’s face in the warm dark. Their hotel room is lit by the singular fluorescent on the balcony, casting a white glow in the snow fall, and it’s like fucking magic. They are safe here, away from the brutal winter, hidden from prying eyes. Being looked at by this man feels so good that Rin wouldn’t care if they were surrounded by cameras; he’d strip naked if only Sousuke’s gaze asked him to.

“You did so well tonight,” he tells Rin, moaning it. Rin opens his mouth for a kiss and Sousuke gives it to him passionately, hands sweeping from Rin’s face to his throat, all the way down to his ass. The vibrator shifts, bolting electricity through Rin’s knees. He shoves the man’s blazer off, rips all the buttons he can find; Sousuke’s shirt hangs off his chest in a gorgeous silhouette, muscles shadowed and gleaming, but Rin didn’t even know that he was sweating with want. Now Sousuke embodies desire as his voice lets loose. “You were the classiest person at the gala, did you know?”

Rin laughs out loud and Sousuke blushes because he loves the sound so much. Rin subdues with a shy giggle. “I wouldn’t use that word.”

“But you were classy.” Sousuke takes his time losing his fingers in Rin’s hair, dragging it from its tie. He ruffles the strands out affectionately. “You didn’t put on a show for anyone. You impressed people.”

The man embraces him without an inch of space between them, bodies flush like he’s a wall Rin is melting into. He nuzzles Rin’s face and rests his lips there. “I meant it when I said I was proud. You make me so fucking proud I don’t know what to do with it.”

Endearment has Rin up on his toes. “You make me proud, too.” It’s so lame because Rin is near dead with arousal, but Sousuke still chuckles bashfully. It’s the most addictive sound Rin’s ever been blessed to hear, and he begs, “Punish me.”

Sousuke leans back with a faint smile that says how gone he is for Rin, though his words are humored. “I thought I already did.” He cups Rin between the asscheeks and jostles, making the vibrator knock him in all the devastating ways.
Rin’s hips *throb.* “More,” he whispers, tugging at Sousuke’s collar.

“You want punishment as a reward?”

He chews his lip with a nod, subtly pushing a leg against Sousuke’s crotch. His cock hangs over Rin’s thigh, promisingly heavy. Rin nudges upwards into it. “Please.”

Sousuke doesn’t hold back a groan and he turns his gaze to the ceiling. Rin can see the hesitance breaking in his expression, making way for consideration and *excitement.* Sousuke says, “All right. But I’m stopping if you ever look uncomfortable.”

“We can use a safeword.”

“We’re not even going that far, just tell me to stop and I will.”

Rin grumbles behind closed lips and Sousuke grabs his jaw a little harder than usual, making the noise die in Rin’s throat. Pressure builds in his forehead as Sousuke leans close; he smells like cedar cologne and heat when he whispers, “You know I’ll give you what you want, pretty.”

In that moment, nothing in the world could frighten Rin. He sobers up with empowerment and waits for instruction as Sousuke sits on the bed. Rin doesn’t follow him, allowing Sousuke to stare in the nasty way he’s wanted to all night. His eyes pool darker everywhere they move – between Rin’s legs, across his slender hands and up to his throat. His mouth. Rin lifts his chin and subtly bends his neck, letting Sousuke appraise all the soft curves that are ready to be bitten raw.

Sousuke tells him to take off his clothes.

The man is still dressed in his suit, though Rin mangled his shirt. He looked so put together just minutes ago, but now he sits on the bed in dishevelment that has not yet reached fulfillment. Rin will be the one to tear him up when the time comes, and Sousuke’s expression promises it, but before that, he’ll give Rin what he’s dying for – and he’ll do it slowly.

Rin does as he’s told, wanting to be frantic about it but not having the energy under Sousuke’s stare. Rin feels shy, though not embarrassed – Sousuke watches him with such silent intensity that Rin can hardly remember how to get his belt off. He manages that and his jacket too, rolling the blazer off his shoulders and turning to his best angles. He’s stripped in the mirror before, when he was bored and drunk; he did it for a boyfriend on Snapchat once, but both situations felt corny and nerve-wracking.

He doesn’t feel the need to put on a show for Sousuke, dancing to music that isn’t there. Nothing else is needed but Rin’s naked skin and the way Sousuke looks at him.

Rin’s shirt flutters to the carpet and he bends down with straight knees to let his trousers pool at his bare feet. He’s left standing in white lace and Sousuke groans out his appreciation. Rin rolls his lips in to hide a smirk, toying with the thong strap before Sousuke grunts, “Keep it on.”

“Okay,” Rin shrugs like he didn’t plan this.

Sousuke nods him closer and Rin steps over. He smiles when the man flattens his palm against his stomach, covering the scope of his belly. It’s a reverent touch, intimate in the way that Sousuke drinks in his softness. The man’s hand starts to twitch as it lowers to where Rin’s cock is straining against the silk, standing fat and swollen. “Looks like it hurts,” Sousuke pouts, eyeing where Rin’s
cockhead peeks out of the underwear’s hem.

“Yeah,” Rin breathes, voice lost because he’s faint with anticipation.

Sousuke gathers him into his lap and sighs at how Rin’s body looks in the glowing strips of white from outside. He loses track of time as he caresses the length of Rin’s arms, but Rin keeps them slack, palms open in submission. He tips his face to the ceiling and breathes; a hand runs down his stretched throat with a fleeting squeeze and Rin gasps, cock twitching where it’s meshed against Sousuke’s abdomen. He clenches the vibrator harder.

Sousuke sweeps him into a kiss and Rin quivers against it, not having the brain to do anything but let their lips slide wetly. Impatience destroys his logic and his hand darts down to palm Sousuke’s cock.

The man grabs Rin’s wrist in one hand, his throat in the other. Rin doesn’t move, eyes frozen wide as he pants in the silence. Sousuke leans into his ear. “You’re so good when you listen,” he breathes. He lets Rin’s hand go and splays his fingers through long hair, playing, tangling, yanking. Satisfaction knives Sousuke’s grin wide. “And you’re even better when you don’t.”

Faster than the next heartbeat, Rin is bent over the man’s lap with both wrists pinned behind his back.

“You’re okay,” Sousuke soothes as Rin instinctually tries to gather some footing. He pushes Rin back down, making him arch with his ass lifted. Slowly, Rin trembles slack and melts into compliancy. Sousuke just touches him for a while, tracing his tattoo, keeping Rin’s wrists pinned with one hand and using the other to rub Rin’s shoulders. He pets his hair. “All right?”

Rin nods.

“You have to tell me.”

“Yes sir.”

He doesn’t hear Sousuke balk like he assumed would happen – the man’s voice flows with satisfaction. “Good.”

Rin cries out when the first slap cracks down on his ass.

Sousuke immediately soothes the burn with a gentle touch, but Rin is oblivious. His mouth hangs open in shock, pulse thick and fast in his ears. It feels like he’s flying. “Oh my god.”

“How many do you want?”

Rin’s cock fell out of his panties when he was maneuvered and it’s caught between Sousuke’s open thighs, dripping. Rin lifts his head, throat stretching and aching so painfully good. “Until I come.”

A noise of disbelief muffles in Sousuke’s chest. “You can get off on me just spanking you?”

“Positive,” Rin scoffs, lifting his ass in a sway.

“Hmm.” Sousuke reaches into his pocket, props his elbow on Rin’s back as he looks through his phone. The vibrator kicks on at the lowest setting, but Rin still convulses because he’s so sensitive at this point. “Relax, baby,” Sousuke orders softly. “This is all about you.”
Everything in him preens.

Rin closes his eyes with his cheek buried against the unyielding plane of Sousuke’s thigh. He winds back against the vibrator, against Sousuke’s hand, and he’s cold when the touch leaves him. It comes back faster than Rin can brace himself for and the sound is more alarming than the slap, but Rin still moans.

Gruffly, Sousuke tugs Rin’s thong strap to hike his ass up. Rin waits in suspended pause, pulse throbbing up his shaft until Sousuke gives him a series of quick little slaps, experimenting, making Rin’s bones shake for it, and he lifts his head to demand more –

Another hit splits across his asscheek and Rin wheezes, eyes narrowing, bulging. He gasps for air. “Fuck, don’t stop.”

Sousuke turns the vibrator onto a higher setting and that’s all the warning Rin gets before Sousuke’s palm slides sideways to crack down on tender flesh. Red heat blooms across his skin, endorphins leaving him drunk. Rin can’t stay still, writhing and squirming, desperate for some friction against his cock, but Sousuke won’t let him have it. He cards Rin’s hair back and fists it one-handed, stretching Rin’s head up to make sure he’s getting proper airflow. “Breathe, sweetheart.” He waits until Rin takes enough gulps to stop panting, then continues.

The slaps from straight down bring more sting; every spank comes from a different angle and Rin’s hands fly open, gripping nothing. The man lets his wrists go and Rin gets offered some of Sousuke’s fingers to whimper around. Rin holds that hand to his mouth with both of his own, worshiping Sousuke’s fingers like a cock, drooling around them with lewd swallows. He mewls a little thank you, sir after each slap, and Sousuke’s cock is damp where it digs into Rin’s hip.

His whole ass is tender when Sousuke grabs one of Rin’s hands and pulls it down. “Spread open for me.”

Rin’s body flushes. He reaches around and cups one of his asscheeks, pulling it back for Sousuke’s gaze. Rin prickles with awareness; he’s swollen tight around the toy, his insides taking the vibrations at full force. He’s over-sensitive, sore and flinching, but the discomfort falls away when Sousuke’s palm runs between his asscheeks. “You’re pretty everywhere,” he rumbles.

That’s when he slaps right over Rin’s asshole, and Rin bolts up onto his toes with a scream. His knees dig together on the next slap and Rin grabs Sousuke’s hand so he can bury a yell against his palm. “Thank you, sir,” he cries, smearing trembly kisses over his fingers, licking his palm, he’s so deranged with lust. The spanking doesn’t hurt like the noise of it would conceive; the vibrator is too high to allow Rin to feel anything but pleasure.

Rin drags Sousuke’s hand from his mouth to his neck, kneeing when the man finally closes a hand around his throat. It’ll never be as tight as Rin wants it, but the quick squeezes are enough to leave him feeling high.

Sousuke’s hand claps down on his asshole, the vibrator shakes him apart from the inside out, and Rin comes so hard that his very cells catch fire. A wail dies in his throat; he curls over Sousuke’s lap as the man fucks the vibrator in and out of him, and Rin’s cock gushes.

The feeling won’t leave him – he’s lost in a rise and fall of pleasure that crests with his arching back, rocketing down his spine. It feels so good that he cries and he can’t stop. Sousuke drags Rin’s full
weight onto the mattress and Rin’s arms scramble for sheets to clench, feet flat on the bed with his legs spread wide. The vibrator is gone, leaving him neglected and empty. His gape clenches on nothing and irritation chokes Rin. He lurches up with open lips, holding Sousuke’s head down so he can keep the man’s tongue in his mouth. “In me,” Rin croaks into the wet heat of their kiss. Translucent strings hang between their lips. “In me.”

Sousuke does as he’s told, too frantic to worry about his socks or blazer or anything other than pulling his cock from his trousers, but he pauses when he looks down at Rin’s entrance. His eyes shift to the nightstand and Rin babbles, “No don’t, please, just do it –”

His vision burns black when Sousuke buries his face between his legs.

Rin thrashes off the bed, nearly bucks straight through the ceiling. “God, god, god –” The man pins his hips to the mattress. The flat of Sousuke’s tongue runs over Rin’s asshole and he licks across his pucker, rolling it between his lips. Rin can’t fucking believe it. “Oh, shit –” He throws an arm over his face and sobs.

It feels like his body is shutting down, too overwhelmed with sensation. “Sousuke, fuck...” He gulps, brain spinning, the room spinning. “Please, please, fuck me.”

Sousuke works his tongue into him, pulls back to swirl around Rin’s entrance and leave it sopping. Sousuke leans up on his haunches and wipes his mouth, then he catches himself on his arms, dazed with want.

He breaks out of his clothes and when his cock rams in, slick and tight, Rin throws his head back with a strangled yell. His arms fly to the pillows to claw at them; a new orgasm builds in his stomach, thighs cracking as they stretch wide. “Oh,” he cries, tearing fresh streaks into Sousuke’s back. “You feel s-so good –”

Sousuke’s laugh is haggard against Rin’s throat. “You feel better.” He’s buried where Rin is hot and wet, his insides dragging friction up Sousuke’s shaft. Rin clenches him hard, making Sousuke have to work into him with vigor, and they both jolt when his cock hits somewhere deep and fucking mind-blowing.

They’re sliding together with sweat and there’s so much panic to reach their peak, but Rin still closes his trembly hands around Sousuke’s face. He makes the man look into his eyes, their bodies still moving while their gazes are locked together. “Wanna feel you come,” Rin whispers, voice breaking with delicateness. The game is over; the fun has been taken greedily, and now all that’s left is naked admiration.

Sousuke’s cock squelches so loud inside of him, and when Rin squeezes his teeth into Sousuke’s throat, the man hunches over to whine. His cock surges and Rin’s body closes around him, milking the heat that floods his insides. The sensation has Rin coming, falling somewhere dark – a place in which Sousuke’s embrace is his only tether to the earth.

He never lets Rin go.

Even when Sousuke’s lying on top of him and panting for breath, Rin still feels high. The mattress is damp with sweat, their bodies sliding with it. He’s afraid of the moment when Sousuke’s cock will slip from him, but the man keeps himself buried deep, just as fervent to cling to the feeling.

Sousuke props up on his left elbow, hair a mess with his eyes hooded in satisfaction. He just looks
down at Rin for a minute and Rin thinks he’s about to get ravaged all over again.

That’s when Sousuke leans down and nuzzles into his throat sweetly, dragging his cheek across Rin’s skin.

Affection fizzes through Rin’s chest and he whispers a laugh, cuddling against Sousuke’s face. The man’s lips quiver with aftershocks when he presses a kiss to Rin’s collarbone. “Did I hurt you?”

“No.” Rin’s legs straighten on the mattress and he winces as they pop. He opens his hips to wiggle Sousuke in more comfortably. “I’ve never felt that good in my whole fuckin’ life, god.”

Sousuke drops his chin on a forearm, chuckling, “You’re very strange to me.”

Rin rolls his eyes even though he can’t keep the stupid grin off his face. “What, like you weren’t hard while you were spanking me?” He boops Sousuke’s nose. “You don’t have to be nervous about sexy stuff.”

The man grins with his teeth. “Eloquent.”

“Thanks. So, I’m starving.”

That’s Rin’s way of asking for room service, and Sousuke obliges. They’re happily dazed, but they’re borderline zombies after binging on carbs. Even so, Sousuke’s built a fire in Rin that will probably never go out – at least not before sunrise. It might be two in the morning, not to mention that his ass is raw, and he is so fucking spent mentally, physically, and emotionally, but he’s still got the nerve to push Sousuke down on the mattress.

The man jerks when Rin palms his cock. “Think I can get one more out of you?” Rin is getting almost too aroused seeing Sousuke naked, laid out with his thighs lazed open. His suit is left stained and ruined on the floor.

“Fuck,” Sousuke sighs, rolling up into Rin’s hand even as he scrubs his face tiredly. “Aren’t you sleepy?”

“You’re clearly not.” It’s taking longer strokes to pump Sousuke’s shaft as it swells through Rin’s fingers. “Just one more time.” He kisses right above Sousuke’s pelvis, making the skin twitch. “You never used your toy.”

Sousuke grunts. “Yeah. All right.” He folds his arms behind his head and sighs a grin. “Okay, you’re turn. Do whatever you want.”

This fool doesn’t realize that he shouldn’t be saying that to people like Rin. He straddles the man, knees throbbing where they dig into the mattress. He reaches back and presses Sousuke’s cock between his asscheeks, letting him slip around all wet and hot. Sousuke’s brows crease with a gravelly hum, eyes slipping closed. Rin grinds back on him and whispers, “Just relax. I’ll blow your damn mind.”

“You already do,” Sousuke mumbles, keeping his eyes shut as Rin reaches for the nightstand. He rips something out of plastic wrap – it’s not a condom, doesn’t crackle like that packaging does. Rin slips down his body and Sousuke’s gut tenses when his thighs are pushed open. A hand goes back to his cock and something slips over the tip. Sousuke frowns as Rin pushes an impossibly tight ring down his shaft.
It snaps behind his balls and Sousuke jolts upright. “Ow, shit –!”

Rin cackles and wiggles a finger under the thin little cuff. “It’s just a cock ring, chill.”

“A what?” It’s a glittery pink thing with no boning – it’s sort of like a hair tie, but too small on purpose, and his cock starts flushing purple. “Are you castrating me?”

“I’d rather die.” He pushes at Sousuke’s good shoulder. “It’ll feel good in a minute, lay back down.”

“It hurts.” Sousuke pouts and miserably pokes his cock.

Rin nudges him onto his back more insistently, then straddles him once more. “Not my fault you’re big.”

That shuts Sousuke up quite nicely and his hands settle on Rin’s thighs. Rin reaches back, bracelet chiming. He nudges Sousuke’s cock inside, hissing through his teeth as it pries him open. “So big,” Rin teases, mouth hiking into a sly expression.

Sousuke massages his hips with low coos, scraping Rin’s nipples and playing with his cock. His body sucks him in and Sousuke’s eyes go wider with every inch – his cock was already sensitized by the ring, but now his shaft is so swollen that it’s too fat for Rin’s body. His insides quiver, struggling around his girth, and Sousuke lets out a flat, “Oh.”

Rin laughs with his eyes closed, lashes fanning in shadows. “Yeah, oh.” He rocks his hips in small twitches before flattening his hands on Sousuke’s belly. Rin takes deep breaths through his nose as his abdomenals relax, and his eyes slip open with parted lips.

Something happens in that moment: Sousuke always knew that Rin was beautiful, particularly at times like this, but the way that Rin is watching him, not letting Sousuke look away as he rocks down – Sousuke couldn’t turn away if the world depended on it. Rin won’t let him.

Rin holds his stare as he rides Sousuke, taking it so well that Sousuke doesn’t know what to do with himself. He holds onto Rin’s hips for dear life, all of his senses drawn down into his cock. He swears that Rin’s body controls his very heartbeat. “Ah –”

Rin bounces with a filthy sound. He grabs Sousuke’s jaw to make him look down between their legs, and Sousuke watches his cock disappear into Rin’s body, dipping out slick, squeezing in tight. Sousuke can’t even remember to help out and thrust on his own.

Rin opens his damp thighs and just rolls, no poise needed when confidence is guiding his motions. Rin is fucking Sousuke and the man can only croak, “Don’t stop.”

Rin smirks and reaches back.

When his thumb presses down on the ring, vibrations shriek up Sousuke’s cock.

“What –” His body overloads. Air itself bleeds into wet heat. His pulse bangs against his skull from all sides. “Rin.”

Rin spasms on top of him when the vibrations rush into his body; both of them are boneless, mindless as their skin slaps at a bruising force. They chase their orgasm with tooth and nail. Rin’s
face scrunches, looking like he’s in pain even though he keeps working for more. “Sousuke,” he whines, cock smearing a mess over his belly. “I meant… I meant it when — ah — when I said y-you felt g-good.” His eyes are open so wide with naked emotion. “I mean it.”

Sousuke’s feet flatten on the bed and he jerks up into him. Rin rasps a long cry and curls into Sousuke’s chest, his strength defeated. Sousuke gathers him up in his arms and sits up, voice hopeless because he feels so much. “Rin.”

“Fuck,” Rin whispers, brows creased with it. He moans when Sousuke simply frames his face, watching his features twist around each thrust. “God — shit, that’s good.” His mouth falls open and a cry spirals out of him. “Fuck, Sousuke, be my boyfriend.”

Sousuke’s gut swoop but even then, he can’t stop moving. “Huh?”

Rin’s groan crests into a laugh. “Be my boyfriend.”

That does nothing to sober Sousuke up – tension floods his core. “For real? Like —” He rolls them over because Rin looks exhausted, and he plunges more gently into the softness of his body. It’s so wet between their thighs, the vibrations nearly making Sousuke’s cock slip out. He pushes in deep and they can only shake. “Like, in — in real life?” He sounds so fucking stupid, but he doesn’t have the mind to care.

Rin claws at Sousuke’s ass for him to go harder, and his head lolls when Sousuke cups the sides of his throat. “Yeah. In r-real — real life?” His back jolts and he squeals. “God, there, right there —”

Sousuke frowns as he brutalizes Rin’s prostate. “Are you serious?”

Fingers dig into his biceps, raking red over them. Rin’s cock pours cum as he screams, “Yes, yes —”

“Oh my god.” Sousuke comes so hard that he’s blind as he passes out.

Snow pelts the balcony doors, blocking the afternoon sun and all its warmth. Shadows glow all dull and fuzzy when Rin blinks awake. The first sensation that registers is his bruised asscheeks, and the teeth marks on his neck throb in spirals. His guts ache. A headache knocks all around his skull. He’s afraid to move because he is soaked between the legs.

But beyond everything physical, Rin feels satisfaction that will rest in his bones for weeks. His heart feels double the size and it lurches to find Sousuke. Gingerly, Rin rolls over, sheets twisting around his calves as he flops one of Sousuke’s arms over him. Even in sleep, the man pulls him into the safety of his chest, breath falling into a sigh.

Rin doesn’t go back asleep, though he definitely could. He lifts his wrist to watch how his bracelet gleams in the weak light, then Rin pillows his head on Sousuke’s bicep to think. Gradually, he starts tracing something into Sousuke’s skin: initials, dicks, smiley faces. Hearts.

His finger rounds the top of the invisible heart, and he closes it off. Rin exhales shakily before gathering Sousuke up in his arms – timid, but resolved.

About an hour later, Sousuke stirs. He stretches gloriously and his muscles elongate, swelling out of their seams. “Morning,” he greets, voice rough from last night.
Rin tries for a smile, now lying on his stomach because his ass is not having it any other way. “Hi.” He accepts Sousuke’s closed-mouth peck, hesitancies forgotten as the man strokes all the way down the length of his body.

His fingers knead between Rin’s shoulder blades. “How do you feel?”

“How’s your shoulder?”

“Sore,” he giggles, lifting his calf to sway it under the sheets. “But real happy.” He walks his fingers up Sousuke’s arm. “How’s your shoulder?”

“Pretty damn good. Orgasms help.”

Rin nods and ducks his head, picking at the covers. Sousuke sweeps his hair back to see his face, tucking the strands behind his ear. His grin is one of surprised affection. “Are you getting shy?”

“No,” Rin pouts shyly. He flops on top of Sousuke, humming at how wonderful it is to be in his arms. “I don’t wanna get up. I love how you feel.”

Sousuke’s hands pause in rubbing him, then resume with deeper vigor. He whispers into Rin’s hair. “I love how you feel, too.”

They pet each other for a while, though there’s an obvious weight in the air. It’s not awkward, but it feels like every touch is dancing around something that needs to be said. Sousuke braves it first. “Rin.”

He keeps his eyes firm on the wall. “Mm?”

Sousuke buys time by lifting his knees, adjusting Rin between them. “I want you to know that you don’t have to stand by what you said last night. It was during sex, so that’s a free pass if I ever saw one. It’s no big deal.”

The man’s disappoint hangs thick around them, but he cradles Rin fondly as ever.

Rin braces his forearms on Sousuke’s chest, gaze climbing to his face. “I did mean it,” he confesses in the quiet. His thumb circles Sousuke’s chin so he can break their stare. “I’m willing to try.” He swallows. “For real.” His eyes flicker up.

Sousuke’s lips part but no breath comes out. His brows jump. “Why?”

He cranes back. “I –” Rin flutters, raking his hair back as he glances away. “I dunno, I like you.” He winces at how lame that sounds and Sousuke gives a handsome chuckle. Rin blushes at the noise and he swats Sousuke’s pec for it. “You’re sweet sometimes, dick, I don’t know. You’re warm and I like talking to you. God.”

He yelps when Sousuke sits up with him in his arms. The man brushes their noses together, practically glowing in the gloom. “I’m just messing with you, I’m sorry. I’d love to be your boyfriend.” He laces their fingers together, their bracelets clanging. “I’d love that more than anything.”

Rin inhales. “Okay.” He sighs it out and glances away. “Uh, I think I’m gonna take a bath.” He keeps his gaze on his hands, fiddling with the sheet until Sousuke brushes his cheek. He kisses all over his face and Rin’s eyes roll shut with a smirk, but he accepts the affection with a nuzzle of his own.
When Sousuke has left to meet Makoto at the hotel restaurant and talk business, Rin turns the bath dial as far as it will go. He sits on the tile floor while the water roars out; he’s naked and stares at the faucet for minutes, arms folded over his knees, mouth hidden behind them. His body goes rigid to hold back the swell of emotion, but he still flinches when the first tear rolls off his nose. Another one drips, three more fall.

Then he covers his mouth to catch the sobs because his heart is no longer his own and Rin doesn’t know what the fuck to do.

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Chapter End Notes

we're winding down and headed for the final chapters, so thank you for reading! i hope to update sooner. ly ly ly

twitter & curious cat
Sousuke’s first week back at work is shit – more like slapping on a condom full of fire ants, to put it lightly – though he hadn’t anticipated leaving his bed for a freezing office would be a pleasant affair. He’s grown accustomed to Rin’s presence, bodily and internally addicted. Sousuke needs him like sleep, a requirement for rest and fulfillment; the way he buries his cheek against Sousuke’s chest in the night, god, the fucking stars can’t compare to such fire.

Being around Rin is secure and rebellious all at once. Justified. The reliver and the fever. There’s a panic to it all, waiting for this good thing to explode and come crashing down – but Sousuke likes the feeling. It’s powder, fuse, and friction. He and Rin are maneuvering a delicate space as they figure out the balance of public image and authentic emotion, but at least Sousuke knows which way Rin might be leaning.

Sousuke can most certainly confirm what his own heart is singing.

Needless to say, he is a bit addicted to being around Rin, and it was in no one’s best interest for Sousuke to part from him and spend days in a conference so infuriating that it ices his goddamn blood over. To quote Makoto, Sousuke is positively lemon-sour and intimidates potential investors; to quote Nagisa, his personally drops to that of the Wicked Witch of the T.E. West Wing.

“What in the risen fuck was that meeting,” Sousuke hisses on the walk out of the conference room.

Nitori scurries after him, peeking over the tower of files in his arms. “Sir, I know you need a break, but you have a call from the Chou Ward waiting on Line 3 –”

Sousuke throws a hand up. “I don’t have time to ignore Isana-san, tell him I’ll call him in the morning.” He shudders at the dreadful thought. “Put Baileys in my coffee tomorrow.”

Nagisa bounces to Nitori’s side, scribbling on a clipboard before handing it off to Makoto. Nagisa takes a primp sip of his latte, swinging his hips with the demeanor of someone absolutely content while the building goes up in figurative flames. Nagisa says, “Sou-chan shouldn’t have any irritants while he’s recovering, Ai-chan.”

“You’re an irritant,” Nitori pouts.
The rest of Sousuke’s people follow him to the elevator, but he’s too frazzled to recall which floor he’s on. Not remembering directions is a staple of his character at the office, but that doesn’t make his grumble any less embarrassed. “Up or down?”

Natsuya raises his brows as he scrolls through his phone and Makoto sighs, “It’s a miracle you have a driver’s license.” He pushes the button to take them to the appropriate level and everyone hunkers down in Makoto’s office with the door locked. Sousuke pours square glasses of whiskey for himself and his brother, Natsuya pulls out a Cameroon cigar, and Seijuro haggardly smokes a cigarette.

The redhead hisses grey through his teeth. “Well, that could have gone better.”

“A root canal would have gone better,” Sousuke fumes.

Seijuro flicks ashes into the tray he always keeps in his breast pocket. “Amazing that you have to call in every department to the main branch just to make an executive decision of shareholders.” Seijuro isn’t even full-time on T.E.’s payroll, but as their prime freelancing marketing consultant, it was necessary for Mikoshiba Incorporated to witness the meeting.

Natsuya yanks his tie loose and flops in the nearest chair. “It’s democracy, one of the two greatest contributions to society.” His face slates over as he takes a pull from his cigar. “That and getting fucked up the ass.”

“I’ve tried both and they’re overrated,” Nagisa says, tossing his empty coffee cup over his shoulder and into the trashcan. He spreads his notes across Makoto’s desk, organizing in a way that only the P.A. can understand.

Nitori comes over to view the conference transcript and braces his hands on his hips, grim-browed. “What was that one gentleman’s name that wanted to buy half your stocks?”

Sousuke snorts into his glass. “Which one? The guy that looked like he should be underground worshiping rats?”

“No,” Nagisa says, leafing through some folders. “The one with the personality of a sentient enema.”

“Ito-san,” Makoto supplies, half-asleep on the lounge. Lemon is his office-cat of the day and she cuddles his shoulder.

Nitori nods. “Right, him.” His eyes skim through the appropriate folder and he sighs over at Sousuke. “If you aren’t comfortable with Ito-san being a shareholder, you’ll have to do what he can’t.”

Seijuro scoffs, “What, drive sober?”

“That and prove Tachibana Enterprises is still a mom-and-pop business.” Nitori crosses his arms. “Yamazaki-san, you and Tachibana-san are still the figureheads of this company. You don’t have to blindly grab anyone’s money just because there’s a lot of it.” He hesitates. “But you’ll have to make a choice. You’re at a crossroads of identity as a company.”

Natsuya says, “Ito-san is a shareholder at Kirishima International as well, my father said that man is so radioactive that he can read newspapers in the bathroom from the light of his own shit.”
Sousuke stares in disbelief before kneading his forehead, which pulses to the touch. “Even if we omit Ito-san, none of the investors were good candidates. The youngest prospect talked like he had never seen the world outside a limo with a hot tub; he doesn’t understand how decisions can affect our individual employees.”

“If he’s absent-minded, then he won’t pull out if the stocks drop,” Makoto tries.

Sousuke balks. “Kinjou Kaede is a goddamn animal. No one thinks rationally when they’re nineteen and just inherited a fortune.” He takes a drink and holds the whiskey in his mouth, letting it burn his insides and fuel his indignation. “Kid prowled into the building like a fucking Bengal tiger.”

Nagisa makes a face. “It was a little hot, though.”

“– and he watched us like he was waiting for us to pour honey on his cock and suck it.”

“Mm, it was too forward,” Nitori nods solemnly.

“There’s no way I’m answering to some smug teenager.” Sousuke takes another angry drink. Having a bad shareholder, especially one to the caliber that Kinjou wants, is like being declawed, defanged, and neutered. Not a good equation for a productive work environment – Sousuke is too stubborn to try and improve such a fate.

Nagisa considers. “Kinjou might not be that bad, he’s cute. But like, kind of how lions are cute: from a distance with an electric fence between you.”

“Kinjou told his P.A. that you’re too busy cutting eff-holes in peaches to do your job right,” Nitori drones, not glancing up from his paperwork.

Nagisa looks stunned in the most pleased way. “Do I radiate that much Top Energy? I better keep wearing this Calvin Klein shit I snagged from Haru-chan’s bedroom.”

Makoto startles an excited blush with eyes tripled in size before Sousuke cuts everyone off. “If we go with Ito-san, we’re playing it safe and this company won’t be ours anymore. He’ll get all the credit for any forthcoming success because he took a chance on two young CEOs, and everyone will think our profits are due to his wisdom.”

Makoto’s frame tightens and he heaves a defeated breath, shaking his head. He looks as trapped as Sousuke feels. Sousuke continues, “If we go with Kinjou, we are going to catch hell from any other long-standing corporations, not to mention the media.”

Seijuro nods, lifting his brows. “You’re new money.” He says it with a smirk. “At Mikoshiba Incorporated, my father actually likes that. New money is all cash – it’s no bullshit.” He shrugs as he takes another pull, seeming hopeful. “We’re the next era of business. If the older people can’t evolve, that’s their problem. Money is money and cash is king. That’s all that matters.”

His speech invigorates something deep in Sousuke – a reckoning. He sits up straighter as he regards his brother, who considers. Makoto casts a miserable look at the floor before giving in to the determination pouring through his veins. His gaze hardens before he nods at Sousuke with grim consent. “All right. We give Kinjou some shares, but not as many as he wanted. Start him out small, see what he does with it. Let the media get used to the idea of him before he’s got the chance to do anything irrational.”
Sousuke nods in response, petrified to move forward, but as satisfied as he can be with their circumstance.

Everyone slips out to leave the brothers alone and after a while of sharing miserable silence, Sousuke hauls himself to his feet. “Well, I’m headed to take a swan dive off the roof. Care to join me?”

“Maybe later.” Makoto keeps scrolling through his phone, inspired. “Are loofas a decent Christmas gift?”

Sousuke’s expression dries with disappointment. “You’re rich.”

“They make nice loofas.”

“Who the fuck thinks about fiber count when they’re washing their ass, Mako?”

Makoto grimaces with a shudder. “It’s for Haru.” He takes his glasses off to rub his eyes in frustration. “He likes baths, I don’t know. I just want to get him something he’d like.”

Lemon wanders over and Sousuke picks her up to cuddle the cat against his chest. “Taking baths is a staple of his character? He doesn’t sound that interesting.”

“He’s very interesting,” Makoto pouts. “I’m just bad at gifts. What are you getting Rin for Christmas?”

Sousuke shrugs, though it’s a confidant motion. “Whatever he wants.”

“That’s not interesting,” his brother scoffs. “Or personal.”

Sousuke leans against the wall, careful how he angles his shoulder. “I don’t know, I need to think about it. I don’t want to freak him out or anything.”

Makoto glances up from his phone to shoot him a flat look. “I don’t think you could freak him out if you tried, and I mean that nicely. Haru told me that Rin’s obsessed with you.”

“Mm.” He doesn’t say more, though he flushes with pride, and he smirks when Makoto rolls his eyes.

His brother sighs, “Well, I need to hurry up and choose something since he and Rin are taking a flight back home tomorrow.”

Sousuke’s smirk drops and his arms fall slack. Lemon squawks in the air before landing on her feet. “Huh?”

“Did you forget?”

“Rin never told me.”

Makoto stiffens, features stalling. “Oh.” He glances away. “Ah, yeah. I think their flight is early in the morning, that’s why Haru and I are going to dinner tonight.”

Sousuke’s face sinks with foreign heaviness as his heart contracts, and Makoto flies to his feet with waving hands. “Maybe he just forgot to tell you! There was probably just some miscommunication, I
mean——” He winces, trying to come up with something to say. “I don’t know but please don’t look so sad, I can’t stand it.” He gives Sousuke a gentle shake, voice softened and pleading. “It’s probably nothing.”

Sousuke’s too hurt to come up with words, and Makoto’s office line dings before Nagisa’s voice crackles through. “Mako-chan, be a dear and let Sou-chan know he’s got a visitor waiting in his office, pretty please.”

He rolls his eyes to the floor, a headache sucking his temples inward. He brushes fur sheddings from his suit and adjusts his blazer. “Is it someone from the conference?”

“Would you really show up if I confirmed that?”

Nitori snorts in the background.

Sousuke thanks his brother for the concern with his love life but assures that he’s fine. Actually, he’s rent with internal confusion, and annoyed that he can’t just clock out, run to Rin and beg to know what the problem is, if there is one. Sousuke supposes that it’s possible to forget a flight, especially if you don’t want to go, but Rin hasn’t told him the first thing about his family. That only fuels Sousuke’s self-loathing. Why hasn’t he asked Rin about them yet? Granted, he wasn’t sure if it was appropriate, but he hasn’t had much time to see Rin since they became official in that hotel bed after the gala.

Perhaps Makoto is right – this is merely a case of foreboding on Rin’s part, he just dreads the trip home, so he didn’t even want to bring it up in conversation with Sousuke. He stops walking in the middle of the hallway, stalled with horrible realization. By some special chance that Christmas anxiety is the only reason why Rin didn’t tell him about the trip, shouldn’t Sousuke be there to shoulder such worry? Why wouldn’t Rin trust him with that?

Sousuke takes his sweet time back to the office, thoughts spiraling through a nauseating rollercoaster of emotion. He dodges the elevator and walks downstairs to Starbucks; thankfully, the line is long, and this gives him an extra fifteen minutes to overanalyze.

He drags his feet back upstairs with a wave of fatigue pressing down on him. Wearily, he opens his office door and braces himself; his greeting falls back down his throat as enthusiasm bolts through his gut. “What –?”

Rin’s gaze turns from the wall of glass. He’s leaning against Sousuke’s desk with amusement and his windblown hair is tied back, damp with melted snow. “That for me?” He nods at Sousuke’s coffee.

He’s never blushed faster in his life. “Shit, I’m so sorry.” He closes the door and puts his coffee aside to take Rin’s face in both hands, pressing in with closed-lip firmness.

Rin braces a palm on the desk with a hum; he tastes like mango chapstick and winter. Sousuke startles when Rin fists his shirt to yank him between his thighs, licking into Sousuke with hungry rasps. It’s like Rin tries to tell him something with his mouth but no voice – it’s insistent and pleading, then Rin leans back like nothing happened.

Sousuke pets through his tangles with a prickle of bewilderment, adjusting Rin’s hoodie since it’s too cold in the building to be without it. “Christ, did you walk all the way here?” A red chill stains Rin’s hands so Sousuke takes them in both his own with comforting rubs.
“Just bored,” Rin says, voice a bit higher than usual. He clears his throat, eyes scanning the office. “It’s so cold in here,” he mutters, dumbstruck by the intimidating plaques and metal architecture.

Sousuke can tell that Rin isn’t talking about how cold the weather is, but rather the room itself. “I’ve been told it suits me.”

“Bleh, no.” Rin looks him over, hesitation twitching at his smile. “You busy?” His eyes sadden like he already knows the answer.

Sousuke’s never been swarmed by such regret, he can barely voice it. “Unfortunately.” His office phone is flashing because Isana is still waiting, and they listen to Sousuke’s computer ding every few seconds with new emails. Sickening pressure weighs down on him and he traces the lean curves of Rin’s forearms to comfort himself. “How are you?”


“I miss you more,” Sousuke swears. Guilt fevers his affection. “These last few days have been hell.” He hasn’t had time to even call Rin, much less pamper him as Sousuke wishes to do. Come to think of it, Rin hasn’t responded to the last few text messages Sousuke sends him every night.

Rin tries, “When do you get off? Or…” He glances around the glaciered office, nearly scoffing with fluster. “Does it not… work like that for you, I don’t know.”

Sousuke curves his first smile of the day. “It does, actually – but I probably won’t be out of here until eight.”

Rin’s features strain tighter than what Sousuke could have anticipated. Apprehension eats at him. “Is everything okay?” He reaches for Rin only for him to twitch away, and they both turn to stone – Sousuke with disbelief and Rin with his bloodshot eyes wide on the floor.

Rin gives a shaky breath before lifting his chin, and his smile can only be described as delicate – near shattering. “It’s fine,” he insists, more breath than voice. “Think you could handle dinner tonight?”

Sousuke blinks in a stupor. “Yeah, of course. I’d love to. Do you…” His body aches to offer comfort. “Is there something specific you need before then? Anything.”

Rin reaches under Sousuke’s sleeve to find his bracelet, and he plays with it for a moment. He breathes a laugh to himself. “I don’t know.” Rin’s smile fades as he presses cold lips to Sousuke’s cheek, and Rin pats him over the heart before slipping out of the office in dead silence.

Love is an opening.

It’s a fresh wound that bleeds for years, a cavity of sweet infection. It tastes good, delicious even when it sours. The long-distance horror of loving Yamazaki Sousuke nearly killed Rin when he finally realized it. He doesn’t know how to exist outside the isolated world of that man’s embrace, yet somehow, he’s doing it, walking back to his dorm all damp and numb with winter.

He lies in his bed for hours, barefoot in his underwear and a tank top as he lights up. He braces his heels on the wall as he stares up at the ceiling, knees bruised from the times he sank down on Sousuke’s kitchen floor, his shower. He holds the joint between two fingers and watches the smoke
dance, taking pulls until it feels like he’s dissolving. His bracelet chimes with every motion and it is a constant reminder, a fruition of love if Rin’s ever seen one.

It feels like he’s never been quiet for so long. It feels like he’s screaming, and no one can hear. He marvels at how terrifying the single emotion of love can be.

How can something intangible have Rin in a chokehold that he never wants to break free of?

Haru comes in at some point, showers and changes into tighter jeans than usual. “Hey,” he grunts while shrugging a button-up on.

Rin’s eyes flutter as the stillness of his thoughts ripples. He blinks over at Haru, voice subdued. “Hey.”

Haru arches a brow as he towels his hair. “You been in here all day?”

Rin’s eyes roam away to nothing before venturing back to him. “Most of the day.” His gaze drifts to watch the winter sunset burn white and blue.

“You look preoccupied.”

He just has to smile at that, and it’s one of defeat. “I think I’m having an episode.”

Haru sits on the bed in the next breath, lithe and silent even as distress beats off him. “What’s wrong?”

“I mean, like, I’m okay.” He’s played possum in his bed for the last few days, but really, he’s fine. “I didn’t get how absent I’ve been until now.” His body is like stone even as his blood races; he is stiff with numbness but doesn’t want to move – can’t, really. Something about forcing himself to just feel has made him accept this episode with bitter humor. He doesn’t know how to balance any aspect of his life into steady levels, much less his emotions. In this state of muddled retrospect, its as if he’s either been laughing or crying, up or down his whole life, and right now, it feels like he’s falling.

Rin talks up at the ceiling. “It’s like there’s knots in my stomach. It feels bruised.”

“You mean anxious?”

“I guess. It feels like something’s chasing me. I’m just paranoid as hell, waiting for everything to fall apart. And I think it’s gonna be my fault when it does.” He swallows, bracing his feet firmer against the wall. “But I’m trying to fight it.” Over the last few days, this bed has been his battleground: a place to face hundreds of depressing mental scenarios and ride the waves of misplaced defeat. His brain is a pulled muscle and it doesn’t feel like he’s winning, but he doesn’t know what else to fucking do.

He went to Sousuke with the hope that the man would just know what kind of comfort to offer. Rin shouldn’t be angry that Sousuke didn’t understand, but now there’s something in Rin’s head telling him to not only be upset, but devastated. He is mortified that he caved and went into that office; he is frustrated because Sousuke is the one making Rin go through this storm of emotions and he’s not taking accountability for it –

Rin stops himself right there. He can’t blame Sousuke for making him fall in love; it’s irrational, but
Rin’s been fucking irrational his whole goddamn life and now he’s feeling all of this, and he doesn’t know what to do with it and –

Haru grabs Rin’s stuffed shark, Fang, and puts it on Rin’s chest for him to hug. Haru looks him over piercingly. “You’ve stayed in here all day? Didn’t drink?” Rin doesn’t fight him when Haru takes the joint to flush it down the toilet.

Rin rubs his hand over his tense forehead, calling, “You’re gonna smell like weed on your date.”

“Makoto doesn’t know what weed smells like.” Haru plops back on the bed. “I’m proud of you for not hurting yourself this time, but you shouldn’t have to deal with this alone. I’m sorry I’ve had to work so much this week.”

“This ain’t your fault.” Haru just watches him and Rin’s eyes burn, voice lowering to a frail whisper. “I’m thinkin’ mean things, Haru. I’m just so mad and hurt that Sousuke doesn’t get it.”

“Get what?”

“This,” Rin scoffs, gesturing to the miserable state of himself. He sits up, hunkered with exhaustion. “I don’t wanna have to tell him – show him – that I get like this. And like, I know this ain’t his fault, it’s not.” Rin’s eyes sink closed as he folds both trembling hands over his heart, tormented to find the words. “He makes me feel so good. I know he loves me, a part of me has always fuckin’ known, and I think I always have too, but now that it’s become so much and I have to face it –”

He sniffs hard and wipes his eyes, staring into the blurry white of the world outside. “Like, I know none of this is really a big deal. People fall in love all the time, it’s natural. But I’m –” His breath hitches. “I’m just –”

“You’ve given up control.”

The words hit Rin like lightning. He falters and Haru’s face is steely with grim understanding. “You’re used to preforming for people – flirting or whatever. He sees through that and you can’t hide from it. You don’t know what to do if someone can really see you.”

“But I’ve been with people before –”

“You used them. Now you’re with someone who won’t let you do that.”

That burns Rin, but it’s also cleansing, a baptism by fire – acceptance. “I told Kisumi about it. He asked me if telling Sousuke how I feel makes it seem like I’m losing something or gaining something.”

“Well?”

“Gaining.” Resolve steadies him. “Gaining, definitely.” He gnaws the inside of his cheek. “I think I’d feel better if I told him, but I didn’t even let him know me ‘n you are leavin’ tomorrow.” He trembles with stress. “I don’t know what to do, I can’t keep all this inside.” He shakes his head and pulls his knees to his chest, hiding his cheek against them. “I can’t do it anymore.” His tongue thickens, dries, tangled on words his mind can’t comprehend in this state. “I’m sorry, Haru.”

“You’re fine. I can hang out here tonight.”
Rin flies to his knees. “No.” He braces his hands on Haru’s shoulders. “No, Haru, please don’t. I’d feel so bad if you put me first right now.” Haru’s stunned and Rin looks down, eyes creasing to hold back horrible tears. “It isn’t anyone’s fault that I’m like this. You guys shouldn’t have to stop the world just to listen to me cry for a few hours.”

Haru grabs Rin’s wrist to shake it. “This isn’t your fault, either.” He levels their gazes, features soft with empathy.

Rin lets his hands fall into his lap; he watches his fingers move before his voice ventures, hoarse in the quiet. “Please don’t miss this date for me. I’ll feel so shitty about it.”

“Then you better be able to handle Asahi and Kisumi going at it until sunrise, cause I’m not leaving you here alone.”

Rin gives a tired laugh. “Okay.”

“Text Kisumi. I’ll wait until they get here.”

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Read the Chapter Text Messages Here

Chapter End Notes

gonna do a quick little pondersesh, but i’d just like to talk about rin's state in the end of this chapter. as far as my own personal experience with bipolar disorder, i have been in haru's situation many times - not knowing what to do or say, but understanding how vulnerable someone is during an episode.

as for how rin acted and thought while we were reading from his pov, i tried my best to put what i know into words - what i have learned through research (both as an academic and on my own) and talking to people around me who are bipolar. what i gathered from both the research as well as people around me is that there's a lot of ups and downs, depending on why the individual is upset. rin is supposed to be an unreliable narrator in this scene because it's not a linear state - you don't organize all your issues mentally and then have a standard path of resolve. according to firsthand accounts of this disorder, there's a lot of back and forth with yourself internally, a lot of repetition that often worsens.

i am trying my best to depict this situation with the upmost respect, and i hope that translates. it's just a sensitive topic for me because i've seen how people with bipolar disorder are often categorized, stereotyped, and shamed, and the fictional depictions tend to upset me. while i like my stories to be about survival / overcoming things, i think it's realistic to show that path is not linear; there's unhealthy coping mechanisms before the character learns how to change that, and it's normal to be distressed and not know what to do.

one little piece of beef I've always had with free! is that any presumed mental disorders that a character has are instantly erased by the power of friendship or swimming, and they never show up again. even if you don't want to take it that far and call it that, i think we can somewhat agree that characterizations are warped to show the importance of
swimming in the show. with all due respect for a show that has brought me such
comfort, i don't think that's realistic or fair. in doab, rin should not have to change to that
measure in order to be loved or show love, and that is what i am trying to depict.

thank you for reading, i do hope you enjoyed and would like to know what you think; i
haven't had the opportunity to write creatively in what feels like a long time. i'm grateful
for your support. <3

twitter & curious cat
There is nothing more romantic than a storm. Winter sweetens the atmosphere and the moon raises her curtain, a sparkling voyeur that peeks into bedroom windows. Rin goes to the dorm building’s steps to wait for his candle in the dark, anticipating the salvation of burning; he needs the fire of Sousuke’s kisses, the hearth of his embrace. He agreed to meet Rin on campus, and it’s 8 PM now, but Sousuke was regretful to inform him that it would be a bit longer before he could escape the office.

Rin waits in the dorm’s exterior hallway and watches the campus drown in snow. Trees bow to the wind, leaves shredded, and the sea of white grass ripples. The overhead balcony keeps Rin dry as the night weeps crystalline snowflakes, and they make mirrors out of the distant ponds. The campus falls dead with a rare bout of silence, hanging in the air with bittersweet nostalgia. The café and library signs creak in glassy lullabies, and the snow is its own world, holding you in a snowball pit like mother’s belly.

What the *fuck* was in that weed. Still, it’s pretty fucking profound thought, so he jots it down on his Wattpad app before he continues to miserably wait. He lacks the courage to check the time, doesn’t realize that he’s holding his breath until his vision doubles. The wind picks up, joining winter’s choir of haunting evergreen. His heart gallops; his thoughts ice over with dread as he stares at the empty parking lot.

Kisumi steps out of the dorm and checks on Rin a few times; Asahi makes hot chocolate and forces Rin to drink some. The couple allows him another fifteen minutes in the cold before they gently insist he come inside, that freezing to death won’t make Sousuke show up any quicker.

Rin feels like he deserves this numbness, the quivering. He wants to argue that it doesn’t matter how cold he is, Sousuke is warm, all-around warm, and he’ll save Rin with one touch.

Kisumi looks heartbroken when Rin cries this at him, so he takes Rin to his bedroom and tucks him in. Kisumi cradles his head in his lap, fingers brushing through Rin’s damp tangles. “Sweet summer child,” he whispers with a sad sort of humor. The nightlight throws darkness into his bubblegum hair. “An angel among us. I know it’s scary right now, what’s going on in your head, but me ‘n Asahi are here to catch you. You’ll feel better in the morning and you can endure anything for one
night.”

“Wanna see him,” Rin sniffles. “Miss him.”

Kisumi hushes him, carding through his bangs. He breathes a laugh. “It’s awful, isn’t it? The yearning. It hurts so good to be in love.”

Rin wipes his eyes with a trembling hand, buries his cheek against Kisumi’s thigh. His voice is frail with child-like curiosity. “What’d it feel like when Asahi told you how he felt?”

Kisumi glows. His affection is sage, nurtured by love songs and tan fingers that hold his heart so dearly. “He read me a poem. Edwin Bodney. It was the most intense moment of my life, and I remember every word.” His eyes fall half-lidded as he pets Rin’s hair. “Young. Full,” Kisumi whispers, watching Rin’s eyes flutter shut. “Waiting to taste, sweet with you. His arms, creeping vines begging to touch the sun in your face, saying, ‘Here. Take everything I have ever touched to be closer to you.’ His breath, waiting to be folded into a love note passed in between the nape of your neck and his front teeth.”

In the darkness behind Rin’s eyes, he puts a face to all those intangible scenarios, knows what such touches and teeth would feel like when they’re all over him.

“He will remember the time you told him that you feel safe in his mouth and he will never grow hungry.” Kisumi smiles as Rin drifts off.

“When he tells you he loves you, you will hear music.”

Rin bolts awake to a proper blizzard; hail slams the roof like bullets, and he stares out his window into the nightmare outside. Disbelief rolls through him – then a creeping intuition, a dark, staining syrup. Like oil. Blood.

The only time storms are romantic is when you do not have to face them by yourself. Rin is all alone, lost in his own mind, cold, so cold.

He tumbles into the living room, where candles dot the shelves, the coffee table. They were not lit for sentiment – the power is out, and Asahi and Kisumi are asleep in Asahi’s bedroom.

Rin can’t stand the silence, the disorienting flickers from the candles. He grabs a flashlight and opens the front door to be lashed by icy rain. Even the weather is just as confused as him, not knowing what form to take, who to be.

He slides across the hallway and leans over the railing, squinting against lashing white. Rin wants to scream into the storm; he just wants to melt into nothing, somewhere safe; he wants to bloom and feel the sun on his face and take Sousuke to the ocean. He’s so fucking tired of the cold.

The longer he lets the storm beat at his face, the faster his heart pounds. His pulse aches in his fingertips, knuckles white on the railing. He’s alone and ready to split down the middle. He falls to his knees, his heart so desperate for something unspeakable.
A clang of footsteps ushers up the stairs, fighting against slick metal. Rin inhales sharply and all noise fades, his own breaths echoing in surreal distortion. He doesn’t need to look at the stairs; he and Sousuke are too connected to not realize when the other is near.

How many times have they made love without knowing it?

Rin lunges into him, loses his face in the magnitude of Sousuke’s chest. “Hey, hey,” the man coos, voice frantic, soft. Rain drips off his jaw, his eyelashes and strong brows – those gorgeous eyes burn with emotion. “Baby, what’s wrong?”

He holds Rin like a child, something adored and treasured and broken. Rin can’t stop crying as he looks upon such a face, and he takes Sousuke’s cheeks in trembling hand. “You’re just so – beautiful.” Rin laughs, delighted to witness such features. “I think you’re magic. I think you’re mine.”

Sousuke is winded, looking Rin over with bewilderment. Even so, he just must promise, “I am yours.”

Rin’s eyes roll closed as he inhales against the man’s throat – tiger lily spice, masculine sweetness. “God, you’re warm.”

Rain droplets slide off the balcony to kiss them with ice. His blue hands flutter over Sousuke, sweeping his chest, running down his soaked arms; he dances up his belly to loosely cup his throat, and Rin rests their foreheads together. “You’re warm.”

He isn’t; not physically. But Sousuke understands. “Let’s go inside.”

They navigate the dorm’s murky dark and Rin guides him through the flickering candles to the bathroom. Asahi gives Sousuke some sweats to wear. There’s one tea light on the sink as they shower the winter grime away, and the hollow echoes of water bounce off the tiles. The moment holds a tenderness that Rin will weep over for the rest of his life – how precious it is to be rained on, naked in the dark with this man. The shower is a world of their own, where Sousuke can just hold him as he cries over nothing, and Rin doesn’t yet have to whisper his shameful truth.

“You have to tell him,” Kisumi ordered gently. “Tell him you’re bipolar, tell him you love him. Holding all that love inside, not speaking on it, it – it can kill people, Rin.”

Rin’s very soul knows this as real.

They towel off in Rin’s room, where candlelight rolls across the ceiling, orbiting him and Sousuke as they stand on the carpet. How poetic, Rin thinks. Sousuke stands there as his own personal sun, and the light dances for him. Rin is jealous of the sensuous gold that gets to paint the man’s chest; he touches the light, glazed eyes watching it ripple across his fingers. Sousuke’s brows crease in concern, but he doesn’t know what to say.

Rin is too mentally frail to find arousal in the situation, but he wants to stay naked with him a while longer. He likes how Sousuke towels his hair, using broad strokes, bunching the strands up in the fabric and inhaling against it. It’s a primitive act of adoration, smelling him. Sousuke pets his fingertips over Rin’s damp shoulder, following the water lines that hide in the valley of his chest. Sousuke kisses him there, moans at the salt of him – not with sexual urge, but with relief in tasting him.
Rin moves the towel across Sousuke’s arms, journeying down his torso to between his thighs. He pats his public hair dry, runs the towel up his happy trail until his navel dips. Rin looks down, then up. “Sorry,” Sousuke whispers, cupping Rin’s elbows just to feel him. “We shouldn’t do anything right now.”

Rin agrees. He leads Sousuke to the bed and watches him sprawl out, thighs open, trusting. The worry all tight in his face makes it feel like Rin’s heart is bleeding. For eyes so cold, they are so sweet for Rin.

Rin accepts Sousuke’s hand and slides onto the bed, over the covers, and they lie sideways to face each other – just touching, watching. Dancing around the tension. Rin’s finger chases a stray water trail as it carves the outline of Sousuke’s jaw; the man sneaks a kiss against that finger and Rin curls back, smiling shyly. “You lied to me,” Sousuke murmurs.

Rin opens his hand against the man’s chest, closes it into a fist. “Bout what?”

“You’re not fine, Rin.” He whispers it apologetically, as if it’s his fault.

A knot builds in Rin’s throat, but he doesn’t respond. Sousuke hooks an ankle around Rin’s and tangles their legs together; his calves are weighty, a secure comfort. He runs a hand down Rin’s arm, fast but soft, worried. “What’s wrong, Rin?”

_Everything, nothing at fucking all._ Rin’s mind aches and he hides his face against Sousuke’s neck. “Baby,” the man sighs, hugging Rin to the full of him. He presses firm kisses into his hair. “My baby.” His eyes close in grief as he nuzzles Rin’s forehead. “Was it the gala?”

“No,” Rin rasps without thinking. Guilt freezes his thoughts. “I mean. No, not l-like…” His breathing kicks, nails digging into tan flesh. “Sousuke, it’s like I’m – I’m just so scared and it’s t-too much and –”

“What are you scared of?”

**Losing you. Keeping you.**

Sousuke leans in as emotion deepens his voice. “Nothing’s going to hurt you. I’ll keep you safe.”

But he can’t keep Rin safe from himself, and he cries. “I just – oh, _god._” Rin sits up, nausea lurching. He curls into himself and hugs his knees, urging Sousuke to sit behind him and lock him in an embrace. Hungrily, Rin breathes in his damp smell, his masculine heat.

The wind picks up outside and the window creaks. “I like storms,” Rin whispers, twitching a dazed smile.

Sousuke hugs his middle, pecking his shoulder. “Suits you.”

“They’re so romantic. The isolation, the dark.”

“You must like spooky things, too.”

Rin turns to let Sousuke hold him sideways, and the man carries his weight so easily, rocking him. He rasps up one of Sousuke’s sideburns with a bittersweet whisper. “We’re not that much alike.”
A twitch of hurt on his face. “That’s not important to me. I like everything about you.”

Rin’s vision blurs. “And what about the things you don’t know about me? Would you love those, too?”

“Without question.” Sousuke draws caresses up his belly. He pauses. “You’re slimmer.”

Stress eats at Rin’s temples. Sousuke’s jaw slacks as he traces Rin’s ribs, circling their underside. “Why haven’t you been eating? Please.”

Instinct. “I’m fine.” He sits up, crawls away. Wishes the shadows to pull over him like a blanket. They abandon him.

“You’re not fine,” Sousuke says, voice strengthened with passion. He comes over to touch Rin’s waist “This hurts, Rin,” he whispers. “It hurts to be hungry. Why, why the hell, what’s going on? You’re pale and jittery and you can’t stop crying.” He takes both of Rin’s hands with a pleading squeeze. “I’m begging you, please, tell me what’s wrong.”

Rin swallows hard, mouth opened with no sound. He snatches his hands back with a bristle of misplaced agitation, and he slides on some boxers with a shirt. “It’s not your fault.”

Sousuke cranes back, brows pinching together. Horrible embarrassment gnaws at Rin, and he walks out of the room. The man calls, “It doesn’t matter who’s fault it is –” He hops around on a foot to pull on Asahi’s sweats before he follows Rin into the kitchen. “It doesn’t matter, they won’t do it ever again if you just tell me who –”

“It’s me,” Rin laughs, high on manic exasperation, turning around with such flourish that he stumbles into the wall. “It’s me,” he proclaims in grand gesture. “It’s me, I’m the one making myself shrivel away because my brain doesn’t fucking no how to be a brain. I’m mean about it, I blame it on everyone else, but really, really –” He’s winded. He’s done. “This is who I am.” Tears, rage, fire, drowning. “But at least I can say I’ve found myself. Didn’t really like what was there, but I found some balls and I’m trying to hang onto them. I’m trying to be an adult about this.”

Sousuke looks faint with confusion. “What?”

“I have bipolar disorder, Sousuke.” The room is fading. His peripheral blurs, twists like a sick kaleidoscope. He braces his hands on the kitchen counter and just fucking feels it all.

Sousuke stiffens with a blank expression. “Oh.” He looks away and rubs his wrist, something like embarrassment caught in his gut. He clears his throat. “I’m sorry if I – if I ever said anything insensitive, or –”

“’S okay. You didn’t know.” Rin drags himself around the counter to grab a bottle of soda from the fridge, but he doesn’t open it. He just watches the candlelight bounce of the glass container. “You’re the first man I’ve ever told. Besides, you know, all my friends.”

“’S okay. You didn’t know.” Rin drags himself around the counter to grab a bottle of soda from the fridge, but he doesn’t open it. He just watches the candlelight bounce of the glass container. “You’re the first man I’ve ever told. Besides, you know, all my friends.”

“Oh.” He creeps over to stand beside Rin, a polite and terrible distance away. “I’m sorry… that you have to endure that.” He gnaws the inside of his cheek. “Is there anything I can do?”

“No,” Rin sighs. “Just go.”
Hurt slaps him across the face. “You – you want me to?”

Rin flops in to an island stool, picking at his soda label. “Nothing can fix this. It’s not your problem.”

“No, that’s not the point.” He crouches in front of Rin, hesitantly touching his knees and trying to catch his gaze. “Just let me sit with you, I want to stay.”

“No. Go.”

His apprehension sharpens. “I’m trying to be here for you.”

“But you can’t,” Rin laughs, eyes bloodshot with tears. “You can’t.” He cups Sousuke’s face. “You’ve found something money can’t fix.”

Sousuke’s expression doesn’t twist. He can tell that there is no heart behind Rin’s words – only the fear of judgement. Even so, simply hearing him talk like this makes Sousuke’s own eyes burn, and his voice cracks. “If you ask me, this isn’t worth breaking up over, Rin.”

“I didn’t ask you,” Rin snaps with indignation. He twists the soda cap to no avail and slams the bottle on the table. “Just go. Leave me alone.”

“But you don’t want to be alone, you don’t even need to be –”

“You don’t want to be alone, you don’t even need to be –”

“Sousuke.” Never has his voice been so firm, his eyes so cold. “I wanna be yours. I don’t wanna be this. But I don’t have a choice.”

“You do,” Sousuke insists, hugging Rin’s calves like a foolish child. A stray tear flashes down his cheek and pleading raws his voice. “I want you, all of you. This doesn’t matter to me.”

Rin looks at him like he’s an idiot, one that he pitys. “It matters to me, and I want you to go.”

Rejection knives his heart. The room tilts. “Please, don’t do this. Please.”

“Go, Sousuke.”

Sousuke can barely gather the strength to stand. He wavers with a hand on the counter and closes his eyes. “I don’t get it.”

“Exactly,” Rin whispers.

Sousuke looks at him, his chest burning. Numbly, he puts on his shoes, aware of Rin’s piercing stare. He grabs his soaked jacket and shoulders it on, breath hitching, throat working. When he walks out the door, he can’t bear to look at Rin. If he does, Sousuke will break down in the floor and never get up.

Sousuke gets three steps away before he hears glass shatter, and there’s a scream. He’s never heard such a noise – pulled from the gut, stretching out with defeat. A howl of loneliness.

Sousuke’s mouth firms into a line and he braces his hands on his hips, gazing out into the storm. He takes a deep breath, swallows his feelings down and pushes open the door to find Rin collapsed on his knees, the soda bottle shattered all around him. Rin’s sobs urge Sousuke across the floor and he
crouches as if handling a tiger in a trap, then he envelops Rin in his arms.

Rin struggles weakly, instinctually, before he falls into Sousuke. He muffles tormented wails against his heart, nails cutting into Sousuke’s throat, terrified that he’ll leave. Sousuke holds his lips against Rin’s hair, rocking him back and forth with closed eyes.

Maybe it’s hours that they sit like that. Rin cries himself to sleep with his precious little body slumped in Sousuke’s arms, and the man carries him to bed, curling around him protectively.

Emotional exhaustion throws Sousuke into darkness and when he wakes to the pale morning, Rin is gone.

Chapter End Notes

twitter & curious cat
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Makoto flings off his glasses and slams his fist on the table. “We are dead on our feet, we are not doing our employees or our family any favors by being corporate robots, the universe has been power fapping in my face for at least two years, and I am going to do something about it.” He straightens, gesturing to his brother. “We matter. Not as businessmen, but as human beings who are good people and deserve a chance at being happy when it doesn’t correspond with numbers.”

Makoto pants with exertion, then sheepishly wanders off to find his glasses.

Chapter Notes

moon river covered by frank ocean, trampoline by shaed, and (fuck a) silver lining by panic! at the disco for our trolling businessmen!brotps. not to mention the lyrics about cherries and rin symbolism ayy double-hitter

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rin sits in the warm belly of the plane, feeling like he’s left his heart somewhere on the earth below, between two broken hands. Guilt eats him alive; exhaustion has chewed him up, spit him out, and set his remains ablaze.

He doubts Sousuke would even care enough about him to wash his bones in wine, to eulogize any part of him in cherishment. He’d probably scatter Rin’s ashes on a freeway so he could return the favor of running him over, flattening his heart.

With a damp tissue balled to his chest, he miserably rests his temple against the window. His toy shark, Fang, sits depleted in his lap. Rin has always been comfortable flying, but it’s never felt lonelier. The cab is quiet, amplifying every sniffle he gives; the engines pump out a muffled drone and the dry air makes his lungs sick.

Rin sits with his knees pulled up, listening to Frank Ocean’s Moon River as he stares into the sky. He marvels at how still the world can look from a distance, like time can’t manipulate the higher atmosphere. How Rin would love to be so untouchable, so unaware of everything but the weather. It’d be fucked up if he turned to Haru and casually told him that he’d found kinship with a cloud, but Rin too, knows what it’s like to be touched by the sun and dissolve in sweet heat. He lifts his chin at the little cloud in bittersweet salute before it tumbles away, off to see the world.

This winter has taught him how to taste summer rain in a kiss, how to bloom and wilt and drown. Now his empty hands are so fucking cold.
Rin turns his bracelet for a few minutes, bordering an hour as he thoughts slug along. His eyes are swollen from crying and reliving last night gives him no peace. Opting for mind-numbing boredom, he scrolls through his phone after paying too much for Wi-Fi. He sees that Asahi and Kisumi are off to Canada for a YouTuber Meet-and-Greet, while Aki is in London so Nii can visit the Globe theatre.

Because he’s vain, he keeps up with his follower count religiously, and he notices that it’s down – but so is his following count. Frowning, he scrolls through his following list on Twitter and goes through it twice in confusion before he realizes.

He checks his Instagram and finds it the same.

The realization strips the protective skin of anger, leaves him just bleeding. “Sousuke blocked me.”

Haru blinks, eyes wide as he looks up from his own cell phone. “For real?”

Rin doesn’t reply – a hollow breath punches out of his gut. “I didn’t think he’d –” His heart contracts around the knife in it.

Haru gives him a careful once over. “Guess he accepted your terms.”

“I didn’t tell him to –” Rin shakes out his clammy hands. “Fuck, fuck.” He wipes his sweaty palms on his jeans but his whole body is hot, panicked. “I just – this isn’t good for him, Haru, he can’t handle me like this.”

Haru drops into a flat expression, arching his brow, but he lets Rin carry on with grieve-stricken drama. “It had to be done. Sousuke deserves someone with stability, with – with fuckin’ emotional submissiveness, I don’t goddamn know. I should have made it all easier for him.”

Haru gives a twitch of bewildered confusion. “Uh. No? I mean, not really. Which part are you talking about?”

“Like, the gala. I should have been so happy, and I was, but I just –” Sunlight breaks through the clouds and gives him a headache. “I shouldn’t have let the pressure get to me. I took it out on him.”

“… but you were trying to uphold his image, so…” Haru makes a face, crossing his legs with a wince. “Yeah, I don’t know. This is too complicated. Celebrity life isn’t for everyone, that’s not your fault.”

Sousuke deserves someone with regular issues, who has the mental firmness to handle those galas and the articles. Yet when Rin visualizes it – the nightmare of someone else riding shotgun in Sousuke’s car, walking into his house, slipping into his bed – Rin’s blood catches fire.

No one can love you more than I do, a wicked possessiveness gripes. Rin can read Sousuke’s skin, feel it all out like brail on his lips – can measure redness and chill by how much Sousuke is hurting, or by how much he wants. Rin’s felt the ricochet of the man’s pulse, knows his taste and has cried with him in a hospital bed.

Rin is addicted to how normal he is in Sousuke’s eyes. He’s just a lovestruck kid – sly and naïve, too, but normal. An equal. They recognize one another. At least they used to.

If thinking about Sousuke with someone else made Rin burn, envisioning himself with someone else
makes him recoil. Even if Rin never gets to touch Sousuke again, the man showed Rin that he can’t just let anyone crawl between his legs. He deserves better than sloppy kisses and getting slapped around just for a dry orgasm and no call back, even though that’s what he liked for so long.

Even if Rin deserves better, Sousuke deserves heaven, and Rin can’t give him that. He’s just a broke undergrad that’s fire in bed and has a fucking trainload of baggage. Men like Sousuke don’t have time for that, not really. Rin was probably just Sousuke’s mid-twenties crisis.

But why did he say that Rin was warm, too? Why did he cry on his knees for him, why did he give him the bracelet – and why, why in this piece of shit world, did he block Rin online?

“I’m so goddamn confused,” he cries, slumped and just ready to die where he sits.

Haru sighs and flops an arm around his shoulders, giving him a little shake. “We’ll be home soon.”

Not for the first time in his pitifully stressful life, Makoto watches Sousuke brood out of the conference hall’s tallest window. The meeting is over, but Kinjou was the only one to exit with his entourage of lawyers, who did most of the talking for him. Kinjou is young, he doesn’t yet know the vocabulary of business and the language of signing a deal, but that really doesn’t matter when you have the money to do all these things.

Natsuya’s curls are now haggard and depleted. “That boy has the social adequacy of someone who sat in his mother’s womb for fifteen years. Or a gloryhole greeter.”

“At least he didn’t waste time polishing everyone’s dick,” Nagisa says from the computer, logging out of Power Point and closing graphs since Sousuke is being too dramatic to do it himself.

“That’s what you’re supposed to do during a shareholder meeting,” Natsuya pouts. “That’s my favorite part. When you detonate a grenade, you pull the pin, you don’t shove it up your boss’s ass. He looked so excited to dance on all our nuts.”

“He didn’t say that,” Nitori whines, organizing files.

“His eyes did.” Natsuya reaches into his breast pocket and pulls out a flask before dropping some rum into his coffee cup. “Look, all I’m saying is that he and I aren’t on the same –”

“Diet?” Seijuro blinks up from tapping away at Candy Crush.

Natsuya glances down at his biceps, adjusting his blazer. “Page. I was going to say page.”

“Oh.” The redhead goes back to blasting away at peppermints.

Makoto sighs and turns to his P.A. “Nagisa, were you able to upload Kinjou-san’s contact information into my database?”

“Righto, just search for King of the Undead and it’ll pop up.”

“Thanks.”

Nagisa glances at his fellow P.A. “What’d you save him as in Sou-chan’s contacts, Ai?”
Nitori blinks rather sweetly. “Kinjou Kaede, shareholder.”

Nagisa isn’t convinced. “What’d you save him as in your own contacts?”

“The world’s biggest single-celled organism.”

Makoto rolls his pencil back and forth across the table, but his eyes are too tired to track the motion. “We’ll need to be in contact with his resources team to figure out how we’re going to let the public know about this…” He shudders. “Collaboration.”

Mikhail is checking his nails at the end of the table like they’re his own personal crystal ball. He straightens his fingers and waves them delicately to admire all his gold rings, which would put a coke dealer’s to shame. “I would hope that Kinjou-san does not bring this matter public on his own Twitter account; you’re in a salad spinner of horseshit if that happens.”

Ryuujii spent most of the meeting leaning on the wall and nursing a black coffee that smells like diesel, but now he perks up with mean amusement. “What’s on his account?”

Mikhail gives him a look. “He’s extremely political, spends most of his time livestreaming Dark Souls 3, and his likes consist of some brunette swimmer’s gym pics and My Little Pony fanart.”

“Christ,” Makoto whines in distress, burying his face in his hands. “He’s just a kid.”

“Yo, who’s his man though?” Seijuro shows them a Twitter profile. “The dude’s jacked. His jawline could cut cheese. Oh, and he likes My Little Pony too.”

Nagisa looks elated as he skips over to brush some non-existent dust off Seijuro’s 4x4 of a shoulder. “Sei-chan~ I thought you were straight.”

The man says, “Honestly, I can see myself binging Legend of Everfree over some protein shakes with this guy. I might DM him. I wanna know his leg-day sets.”

Nagisa drops the act and drags his feet back to the podium computer. “Never mind.”

Nitori lifts his brows. “Mikoshiba-san, with all due respect, I’m sure Kinjou-san would use your face as a scratching post if you messaged his thirst trap.”

Ryuujii tosses his coffee away, not bothering to drain it, and Makoto closes his eyes as he accepts his fate of being trapped in a room that will smell like a keg of soiled espresso for days. Ryuujii sighs, “Well, all of this being pleasant is fucking exhausting, so I’m gonna split.”

Makoto blinks after him because Ryuujii has never summoned the energy to be pleasant in his life, though he does pat Sousuke on the arm and grunts, “Feel better, kid.” At least he did what Makoto asked of him and Mikhail by being at today’s meeting: giving Sousuke some form of comfort.

Mikhail perks up, hurrying to pack up his folders. “Oh Ryuujii, where are you going? Lunch? I know of a dandy little salad bar in Setagaya, it’s positively sublime.” Behind Ryuujii’s back, Naigsa mimes jerking off at least four dicks and Mikhail flips him off.

They compose themselves as Ryuujii pauses at the door, flicking the sparkwheel on his cigarette lighter, eager for a smoke. “I might go bowling or something.”
Mikhail’s left eye twitches. “All alone?”

Ryuji gives him a lazy once-over before shouldering open the door. “You can watch if you want.”

Mikhail blushes, frozen at a crossroads as the man slips out into the hallway. Nagisa licks his own palm, miming slapping an ass before he ushers Mikhail out the door with enthusiasm.

Makoto scrolls through his phone, desperate for some mind-numbing monotony before a text comes through. The sender makes his heart soar, but the message itself is regarding Rin, and it leaves him fretful.

He waits until everyone leaves for lunch, save for his brother, and Makoto prepares himself by flocking to the wet bar in the corner of the room. He makes himself a cup of rosehip tea with a dash of honey, then adds more because absolutely no part of this confrontation is going to be sweet.

Makoto drags himself over to Sousuke but not before giving the wall a stare of longing because he’s ready to crash through it and take a well-deserved slumber in a blanket of insulation. He composes himself, heartily deciding that this is the one time to take Sousuke’s dramatics seriously.

Makoto steps up to him, clearing his throat all delicate and polite. Totally not exasperated. “Hey.”

No answer, as expected. Makoto takes a sip of his tea before giving a refreshed sigh. “It must be getting warmer. It’s been storming for hours and the rain hasn’t turned to snow.”

Sousuke’s posture remains steely – rigid, not open, very unhuman of him. His complexion is more grey than tan. Must be the rain casting him in shadow – or more like, Sousuke’s own hysterics are seeping into the existential realm.

Sousuke watches the courtyard flood, his juice glass sweating all over the marble floor, and he finally speaks. “Haven’t you ever wondered why it floods here every time it rains?” He looks solemn for each drenched grass blade like he knows all of them by name and they’re screaming for his mercy. “Why does that one little patch of land always have to get hit so hard?”

“Because this complex is at the bottom of a hill,” Makoto drones. “And gravity is a thing.”

Sousuke looks all the more devastated and Makoto patiently lifts his chin. “I agree, it’s very sad,” Makoto nods. “That grass did nothing in its life to deserve becoming a pond. It didn’t agree to it.”

“That’s stupid,” Sousuke scoffs into his juice, and Makoto resists the dire urge to tackle him and wail about the importance of embracing one’s hubris.

He puts his best smile on blast. “Nagisa is going to help me bake a blueberry cake after work today. Would you like to join us?”

Sousuke throws him an unimpressed look. “You don’t know how to cook.”

Makoto’s smile pulls tighter. “No, but I’m going to supervise.”

“What, making sure the icing dries?”

Makoto isn’t exactly sure what his expression turns into, but his smile cuts into something that makes a timid wave quiver down Sousuke’s legs. With rising hysteria, Makoto clips, “I am learning how to
bake because I *acknowledge* that I am bad at it, and I want to learn because I am *acknowledging* that I should try to *impress* my boyfriend who also *acknowledges* how bad I am at being around a microwave or a stove or anything else with a dial."

Sousuke blinks. “Huh?”

Makoto’s tea cup flies off somewhere to meet its tragic end as he frazzles through a wild gesture. “Why did you block Rin, Sousuke?! Why! Why in the name of all that is good would you think that was a smart –”

A custodian peeks his head out of the conference hall’s restroom, lifting his brows, and Makoto nods politely with a blush. The man slips away and Makoto hisses with fervor, “Look, I know my guts couldn’t fill a teaspoon, and I know you’ve spent so much of your life being romantically stunted and that’s fine, it’s all *fine*, but you blocked Rin as if you didn’t realize that you were going to become a dumpster fire of Y.A. angst and pining and –” He trashes through a confusing shrug. “— and *gazing longingly* out a window for thirty minutes while I am doing everything but hiring a marching band to just make you *look at me*, and *look at yourself*, and accept your own feelings!”

Sousuke is winded. “I don’t –”

“You love him!” Makoto laughs, high on all the fuckery that is his world. “You love him and you’re a mess, you haven’t showered in, like, *way* too long, Mom is asking questions – I promised her you aren’t actually bankrupt, but it was hard to convince her because it’s gotten to that point – you’re just standing here, blocking people, then going back to standing as if you don’t actually care!”

Sousuke’s confusion sobered up. His eyes flicker downward. “I’m –”

Sousuke jerks back when Makoto frails, “*But you do care!* That’s what is so… *mindboggling* about all this! You’re actually *heartbroken*, but you don’t wanna talk to me about it, you won’t talk to Rin about it, and now you’re pretending to be a statue and your juice is watered down.” Makoto stares, not blinking. “Who is winning here?”

Sousuke’s expression sharpens. “You realize that Rin broke up with me, right?”

Makoto cants his hip and Sousuke’s brow arches with amusement, but Makoto doesn’t falter. “You realize that you still have feelings and Rin probably does too, since, you know, all of this went down when he wasn’t exactly the most stable?” Makoto pants in the quiet, voice finally softening. “Right?”

Sousuke works his jaw, emotion struggling across his features. His nostrils flare on a breath and he lifts his chin. “I just want to give him space.”

“That’s wonderful,” Makoto preens with genuineness. “Sousuke, that’s so good of you, but you could have just left him alone for a while. You didn’t have to…” He rolls his lips around, shrugging for the words. “Like, cut him off from you. That’s harsh. I get that he was mean to you, and honestly, I’d like to know what’s going on in his own words myself, but we’ll save my pettiness for later.” He braces his hands on Sousuke’s shoulders. “If Rin was standing here right now, what would you say to him?”

Sincerity creeps through his eyes, and his scoff is weak. “I’d probably run.”

“Okay, yeah, but pretend that you can’t.”
His gaze slips to the window, watching the rain build a lake, and his voice falls softer than Makoto has ever heard. “I’d beg him to ruin my life.”

Makoto blinks. “Poetic. Would you tell him that you love him?”

“I wouldn’t be able to stop myself.”

“Wonderful!” Makoto rips off his tie, balls up his jacket and tosses it somewhere out of his sight. He slings his briefcase over his shoulder and presses a button on the conference phone.


“Nagisa, clear my schedule for the rest of the year.”

Silence.

“Sousuke’s too, if it’s convenient at the moment.”

After a minute, Nagisa finds his voice, and it’s strangled. “Uh. Pray tell, why?”

“Because we need a fucking break. If you please.”

Sousuke visibly reels. After a few moments of dumbstruck quiet on the line, Makoto says, “Will that be an issue?”

Nagisa coughs. “Ah, nope, nope, I am – pleased to trumpet, I am fully convinced that we can probably do this. People take shots in the dark all the time, right? Figuratively? It’s possible to bewitch and castrate a temporary CEO in minutes flat, right?” Nagisa wheezes in stress. “Hold please.”

Makoto takes a blissful stroll about the conference hall, admiring the bleak contracts and blueprints framed on the wall. Nagisa comes back on the line and clears his throat. “All right, you’re good to go.”

“You’re sure?”

“It’s definitely a definitely. Natsuya’s running things until New Years. He readily accepted the burden and the pay raise.”

“Splendid. You and Nitori enjoy the PTO and have a Merry Christmas.” Makoto hangs up the phone and gathers up the rest of his things on the table, then waits primly by the door.

Sousuke stares. “Are you distantly orbiting the realm of an aneurism?”

“I’m taking you to Iwatobi.” He points a finger at his own chest. “And I’m taking myself to Iwatobi, because I’m having a mental breakdown from running this company and if someone doesn’t hold my hand in the next twelve hours, I’m gonna lose it.” He smiles.

Sousuke swallows, bracing a hand on the table. “Okay, Mako, let’s just – think about this and –”

“Nope! No more thinking! No more running from our feelings, it’s high time you and I put ourselves
first for once in this moldy chicken tetrazzini of a career.”

“… I don’t, um – don’t really get what you mean.”

Makoto flings off his glasses and slams his fist on the table. “We are dead on our feet, we are not doing our employees or our family any favors by being corporate robots, the universe has been power fapping in my face for at least two years, and I am going to do something about it.” He straightens, gesturing to his brother. “We matter. Not as businessmen, but as human beings who are good people and deserve a chance at being happy when it doesn’t correspond with numbers.” Makoto pants with exertion, then sheepishly wanders off to find his glasses.

When he finds them under the table and puts them on, Sousuke looks more sober, muttering, “You don’t think we’re a little late for all of that? I love Rin, god, I do, but maybe he would do better on his own. He might be content to go back to who he was before he met me.” He looks stricken at the thought of such, restlessly crossing his arms. To himself, he sighs, “No, that’s not it. I know that’s not it.”

“That’s not what you want, either.” Makoto shakes Sousuke’s wrists. “You’re _good_ for each other. You’ve given him stability and he makes you happier than I’ve ever seen.” He leans down to catch Sousuke’s eyes under the protective shield of his hair. “It’s common knowledge that Rin’s a little scared of things like this.” He winces in apology. “I mean, even I know that. From Haru, at least. But what he hasn’t done is put someone else first in a situation like this, and I think that’s what he was trying to do by pushing you away. He knows how busy you are, there’s no way he couldn’t feel some sort of… misplaced guilt about it, I don’t know. Just tell him that it’s okay.”

Sousuke shakes his head hopelessly. “All of this has just made me rethink everything. I’m –” He works his jaw, swallows. “I’m scared I won’t be enough for him in the long run. He’s so much,” Sousuke whispers, eyes closing with emotion. “And I’m…” He fumbles through a gesture at his suit. “I’m this. This is all I am, all I know. I don’t even have hobbies, Mako, I don’t know how to – how to just _be_. ”

“Then _learn_. None of us know how to do this, not really.” Because he’s always expressed himself best through comfort, Makoto hugs him, and Sousuke rests his head on his brother’s shoulder miserably. Makoto pats his hair. “Let’s go work hard at something that actually matters.”

Once they’re in the elevator on the way to the garage, Sousuke shrugs off his blazer with vigor. He looks up at the mirrored ceiling with a long breath, then his eyes fall to his bracelet. He turns it a few times, excitement building in his heart before he regards his brother. “Did things go bad with Haru last night?”

“No at all.” Makoto lifts his brows to himself, both hands folded over his briefcase handle. “Not to me, anyway. He ended up getting embarrassed over nothing.”

“Ah.” Sousuke loosens his tie while the elevator descends low enough to make their ears pop. “What happened?”

“Oh, well he wanted to have sex, but he came on my face and ran out all mortified before anything could happen.” Makoto scoffs. “As if it wasn’t the hottest moment of my life.”

The elevator dings and he breezes out of the elevator on the search for his olive Aston Martin. Sousuke stares, leaving his jaw somewhere on the floor before stumbling after him.
Chapter End Notes

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