Actions Speak Louder Than Words

by tondr

Summary

Saihara Shuichi has a difficult time connecting with people. His fear of talking out of embarrassment, and the following shame that discourages him from reaching out to others prevents him from a life of sun. However, an unfamiliar warmth finally lights the bridge between Shuichi and the rest of the world, as well as amending his cold body with seeping heat.

Small pushes of actions tip him over the invisible cliff, and he never even needed words to do it.
Chapter Summary

ok this is literally my first ever fic
ive had this idea for over a year and i just decided i was gonna try writing for once
ive always had a hard time talking to other people and it got to the point where it was
impossible for me to talk to anybody. really a lot of this fic is me just kind of describing
those times and how hard it was to live my daily life but surrounding yourself with the
right people can really help you break out of your shell
i used to push people away but all i ever wanted was friends
and sometimes these feelings can turn toxic and its just a never ending war with yourself

please remember to reach out to people, you deserve to be loved.
shuichi deserves to be loved ): 

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes
Summer was hot and balmy. Blistering heat that cuts away at your skin as you suffocate in its thick humidity. He hated it, he hated warmth. He hated how his summer uniform clung to his skin as he made his way towards school. He hated the sweat that secreted from his face as the morning sun beat down on him. Saihara Shuichi hated heat, hated how those who were summer, those who were the sun, could say what they want to say. The almost liquid fluidity of fire that let them warm other people as they gravitate towards their flames. He hated warmth... but it was always more of a feeling of jealousy. He envied how the stars in his class would light a room up just by smiling. He wanted to participate in everyday conversations, he wanted to be able to light a room just like that.

But he was ice.

His words trapped under a freezing lake, his feelings enwrapped under frozen layers of an iceberg. The layers consisting of "K" sounds and drawn out "Oooo's." He was smothered under his personal frozen sea. He was still, but he was content. He didn't mind being an observer, it was safer to remain still. Flames would often brush up against him and he wouldn't know what to do, so he remained still. Hot summer, liquid heat, and shining stars would try to melt his icy exterior, but to no avail. He would often think that they gave up on him, but in reality, he knew he gave up on himself.

He peered up at his school, a school for exceptional children to attend. Hordes of talented students walking towards the open gates, and he was one among them. He never really considered himself talented, however. He had good deduction and memorization, but he wasn't anything special compared to some of his peers. A student he secretly admires in his classroom is probably the world's most beautiful piano player. He would often attend her recitals, watching in amazement as soothing music fills the concert halls. Sometimes occasionally stopping for a few seconds by the music room to hear a wonderful piano melody muffled by the wooden door. It wasn't exactly a crush, but intense admiration for such a talented girl. Out of everyone in his class, he wished he could be friends with her.

Finally stepping inside the school, a feeling of relief hits Shuichi as cool air conditioning surrounds his hot skin. Walking slowly down the halls, still having lots of free time before class actually begins, 'I wonder if I should try eating breakfast today, I don't really know if I can go through with ordering, however...' His stomach rumbles in protest as his face slightly winces. 'Maybe if I try ordering something that won't give me a hard time... miso? No that won't work. How about... rice and eggs? That might be doable, but I'm really in the mood for miso soup...' He makes his way towards the school cafeteria as he sees a couple of other students eating their breakfasts, even recognizing a few from his class. Making his way towards the cafeteria line, he mentally prepares himself for the worst.

The students piled in front of him ordering without issue, he feels hazy as his body moves on his own through the progressing line, until it was his turn.

"What can I get for ya, love?" says the lunch lady working the counter, her hair grey and tied up into a fishnet cap.
"C-c-"

He quickly tries to change what he says, panic already starting to rise in his body.

"May I get misooou- soouup, please..."

His voice is barely audible, did she hear him?

"What was that? I didn't hear"

He could feel tears already starting to fill his eyes as his face burns in embarrassment, his throat growing tighter.

"Rice and eggs, please?" he tries to say louder, without breaking down into tears right then and there.

The lunch lady nods at him and smiles as she starts to pile rice and fried eggs onto his styrofoam tray. Taking out 350 yen from his wallet and quickly paying, he makes his way to an empty table in the far corner of the room, still trying to calm himself down. He looks at his food and doesn't feel anything but shame, why couldn't he just order miso soup? How come he can't even perform basic social interaction? *I should stop thinking about this and just focus on eating... I don't want to have another breakdown at school.* He picks up his chopsticks as he slowly picks parts of the fried egg into his mouth, soon getting to the rice as he tries to keep his mind on case files. Synapses firing away as his brain connects dots, taking out his notebook while still finishing his rice, he starts to write notes down.

*I wonder if Uncle has noticed this connection yet... this is really interesting!* Nothing excites Shuichi as much as unraveling a mystery. His childhood being absorbed in detective novels and helping his Uncle with small cases. He admired his Uncle, a true detective, and the only sun in his life that could break through his icy walls. Although he didn't come home much because of his work, Shuichi felt safe whenever he was in his presence. Indulging in sweet taiyaki as the TV is set to a low volume, his Uncle explaining his newest case, Shuichi has never been happier than in those moments.

When his train of thought was so deep, he was startled by enormous laughter coming from the middle of the cafeteria. The bellowing laugh probably coming from the dude with purple hair who always wears his uniform wrong. *'His name... is Momota-kun... I think?*’ he starts to observe the others at the table having so much fun. *'Amami-kun, Harukawa-san...’* his gaze drifts a little bit to the
left, ‘Akamatsu-san...’ He felt his heart sink into his stomach as the sadness of loneliness started to kick in. *They probably think I'm stuck up or weird.* It was fine though, it was okay. He knew he did this to himself, isolating himself on purpose. It would be better if no one talked to him, otherwise, they would get frustrated or annoyed. He wasn't repeating mistakes he made in middle school. But still, the buried layers of feelings were nabbing at him. Jealousy? Is it longing? ‘I want to talk with them so bad’ he thought, *I... really want friends*’

‘You don't, they'll get sick of you quickly’

Hatred?

‘Maybe they're really nice... Akamatsu-san seems really sweet.’

Hatred towards others?

‘People are always nice at first glance, but I wonder what kind of disgusting feelings she may have. I bet if you start talking to her now, she'll become fed up with you in a week.’

Self-hatred?

‘That may be true... I can't even form a basic sentence without screwing up, no one is that patient to deal with me.’

Self-hatred.

He almost didn't hear the bell ring as his mind was fighting against itself. He quickly wiped his face, he was crying without realizing. Stuffing his notebook into his backpack, he then picked up his tray and tossed it into the trash as he was leaving. The halls were semi-crowded with students all rushing to their first period classes. Sliding open his classroom door and making his way towards his seat, he arranges the textbook and notes he has taken for this class onto his desk. The room was half full with students coming in every now and then. He opened his phone to kill some time before class actually begins. *No notifications, kind of expected...* ‘His mood wasn't improving at all. *Today seems worse than usual... Probably because I was dumb and tried to actually order food.*'

Warmth.
Shuichi looked up to see a blonde haired girl staring back down on him, his anxiety levels are already off the charts today. 'Akamatsu...san? I can't deal with this today... Please make it quick, please don't force me into a conversation.' The familiar lump in his throat has started to crawl back as he braces himself for the worst.

"Yes?" His voice was shaky out of nervousness and his mind started to freak out even more. 'off to a great start' he thought.

"Uhmm..." The blonde started,

"I saw you eating in the cafeteria alone again and I just got kind of worried, I know it really isn't my place since I don't know you very well but..." she continued,

"I kind of thought you were... having a bad day? I don't know. I just wanted to let you know you can talk to me if you want." her soft lips lifted into a smile. "I'm actually quite the listener!"

She looked at Shuichi expectantly, his eye contact is lost a long time ago.

"Mhm." he nodded, hoping that she would leave.

Her mouth drops a little bit but doesn't lose its smile. "Well okay, I'm going back to my seat. Study hard!" she gives him a slight giggle and walks towards the other side of the room.

'She pities you'

Shuichi sighs as his mind starts to fight with itself. He hates this, why is he like this?

'I think she was just trying to be nice...' he honestly did feel much lighter than before, the heaviness in his heart disappeared for a few moments as she was talking. Was this a star's effect on him?
Before his thoughts can go any further, the school bell rings and his classroom teacher shushes the student's talking.

"We have a new student today" his teacher sighing, "Well, he has actually been a registered student since the beginning of the school year but... never mind."

The class waits in anticipation as the teacher calls out "Come I-

Not even finishing her sentence as a small boy with purple hair slams the door open, probably almost breaking it. His smile almost blinding, if Shuichi had to describe his classmates as Pollux or Rigel, this boy was Betelgeuse himself. A sun that entirely dwarfs the luminosity of everyone else in the classroom.

"Please tell us your name, young man." The teacher looked at the boy expectantly.

Taking a short breath before exclaiming, "Xx_Pussyslayer69_xX"

Only a few giggles were heard throughout the classroom, Iruma Miu's voice being the most prominent. Although Shuichi thought the joke was in bad taste, he still lightly smiled at the absurdity of it. The teacher glared at him, but not saying anything as he continued talking.

"Just kidding! But that is my PS4 ID! Totally not lying about that" he laughed at his own joke.

Shirogane Tsumugi quickly speaks up "Ohh! You play video games?" she starts "What are some of your favorite games?"

The new boy avoids her gaze and turns his eyes back to the classroom.

"Annyyywaayyyss, my name is Ouma Kokichi, the one and only Super High School Level Supreme Leader! Call me what you want though I don't really care."

Shuichi is stunned. He was entranced, but really... most of all, he was interested. Interested in seeing what kind of personality Kokichi possesses, his hopes and dreams, his hidden quirks and tell signs. He actually wanted to get to know somebody, he felt mysterious, and Shuichi loved solving mysteries. He wanted to talk to him, but he feels as if he is forgetting something. That something being dangerous to forget about, the reasons for his frozen walls and layered feelings. Kokichi
melted his iceberg once he slammed open the classroom sliding door. In the moments of Kokichi's banter, Shuichi forgot all about his struggles.

Chapter End Notes

is Xx_Pussyslayer69_xX really his PS4 ID tag? or was he really lying.
find out, never.
Chapter Summary

im really glad how supportive all of you were on my first chapter! really motivated me to get this out so i hope you guys enjoy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first period of class went by as soon as it started. When the bell rang, a few of the students in Shuichi's class started gathering around the new kid's desk. Shuichi rotates his head to observe his peers hammering Kokichi with questions. Shirogane Tsumugi, Iruma Miu, Kiibo, and even Akamatsu Kaede were clearly excited about the new student's arrival. Shuichi was also excited, but no matter how much his head pounded against itself to go and talk to him, he just couldn't. Not in front of everyone else, he can't ruin his reputation of the quiet kid or else everyone would start trying to talk to him. Talking is dangerous, it makes him vulnerable. The thing he hates most about himself is out for the world to hear whenever he tries to speak. Remaining quiet is the only way of fortifying himself. Shuichi continues to survey the student's banter in envy.

"You play video games? Right? You never told me your favorites!" exclaimed Tsumugi.

Shuichi saw a flicker of annoyance on Kokichi's face right before his mouth spreads into a devilish smile. "Hmmm, I would say Truck Simulator 4, Crazy Taxi... Oh oh! That one game series where you work as a minimum wage slave that serves stuff like milkshakes and chicken wings!" he huffed and crossed his arms, "Only the scoring system is totally unfair! How come a customer can just look at their food and say if it's right or not? I made the food, damnit! Don't they know how hard my job is?"

"A-Are you serious?" Tsumugi looks at him disapprovingly "I don't really regard stuff like that as real video games."

"I didn't know you were the official dictator for what is and isn't a game, buuuuut whatever you say smurf-scalp!" Kokichi's mouth twisted back into a sheepish smile.

"Smurf-scalp?" But before Tsumugi can argue further, Kaede nervously laughed and started to speak.
"So, Ouma-kun! Didn't Hakurei-sensei mention that you've been enrolled since the start of the school year? Why didn't you show up until today?"

"Nishishi! Isn't it obvious? My supersecret organization has been at war with the Russian government for the past two years! These last few months have been crazaaazy. Being the evil supreme leader that I am, I've just been super busy with things like planning assassinations, designing weapons of mass destruction, and manipulating members of the parliament. You know, the works." His grinning face doesn't falter as Kaede looks at him with confusion.

"If it's such a supersecret organization, why would you tell me all that?" she stated.

Kokichi's face turned expressionless and firm as he responded: "I was lying."

The cogs in Shuichi's head were turning rapidly, his interpretations of Kokichi constantly overlapping and changing. His brightness blinds Shuichi, rays shining so intensely that the rest of his classmates are stick matches compared to Kokichi. During the early days of the school year, Shuichi would try to solve the mysteries of his classmates. Listening in on conversations like these and figuring out their speaking patterns, tell signs, small quirks and behaviors. It was always exhilarating for him when he could solve the mystery of a person. Why they do the things they do and their hopes and dreams. But, the high came crashing down soon after the case is closed.

The detective still enjoyed listening in on conversations and enjoyed the company of the shining stars of his classroom. Although his anxiety twists and turns whenever a classmate tries to reach out to him, he still feels warm even after the shortest conversation. However, Shuichi hasn't felt this excited about a personality since middle school and that scared him to death.

"Lying?" remarked Kaede.

"Alright then you weird-ass gremlin" Miu cuts her off, "can you answer her fucking question already? You're startin' to really piss me off!" She crossed her arms over her chest in frustration.

"Ah, Iruma-san it's okay! He might not want to reveal something personal like that to his new classmates. You remember how long it took for you to open up to me?" Kaede grinned at Miu patiently.

"H-Hey... don't be so direct like that..." she whined in response.
Kokichi glanced between the two girls and made a sharp laugh. "Anyways," turning his body towards Kiibo "are you a robot? No way! I've always wanted to meet a robot, that's legitimately so awesome."

Kiibo's face lit up with pride. "Yes, I am a robot! I was built by the brilliant Professor Idabashi and my most revolutionary function is that my brain develops just like any other normal teenager! So please, treat me like you would any of your classm-

"Hey hey, do you have laser eyes? Ohh I bet you can lift an entire mountain! Oh my god. Can you fly? Like with a jetpack or something?" Kokichi was hovering over his desk with his hands propped up. His enthusiasm over Kiibo feeling very childlike, but Shuichi understood, Kiibo was pretty cool.

"I... don't have any of those functions." Kiibo's prideful face sagged into a small frown.

"Huh? Then how are you useful at all? A robot that doesn't have laser eyes is like having a cupcake without frosting." Kokichi finished with his excitement lost a while ago.

"Actually I prefer eating cupcakes without frosting," said Tsumugi "it's too sweet for me."

"What kind of sick masochist are you? I hear only sociopaths do that sort of thing." Kokichi said with a disgusted tone.

"Okay!" Kaede clapped her hands together, probably getting the idea that Kokichi and Tsumugi don't mix very well. "Iruma-san and I are going to head to our next period, do you need any help finding your next class, Ouma-kun?"

"Nope!" resting his arms behind his head, "I memorized this school like the back of my own hand!"

"I do hope you're not lying, it would be awful to make a bad first impression on your teachers!" exclaimed Kiibo.

"Yeah yeah, whatever. Don't worry Kiiboy! I'm actually a really responsible and hardworking student!" Kokichi grinning that blinding smile towards the robot's direction.
Kaede and Miu left and soon did Tsumugi and Kiibo. Shuichi decided to hide in the bathroom until a couple of minutes before the bell rang, he didn't like the hordes of students crushing him in the hallways. Quickly walking towards the men's room and hiding in a stall, he pulls out his phone and decides to text his uncle. 'Hey, how is work coming along? There was a new student today in my homeroom class that was kind of interesting. I can't wait for you to come home this weekend. -S.S' his fingers stopped tapping as he pressed send. He probably won't respond for a while since his uncle is a busy man. He checks the phone's clock, two minutes before the bell rings, the hallways should be nearly empty now.

Shuichi exits the bathroom and treads slowly towards his next class, not exactly worrying about being late. He turns a corner and recognizes a familiar mess of purple hair and checkered patterns framing it. 'Ouma-kun? He looks lost, he probably was lying...' Shuichi then gets a dangerous thought, a thought that would put him in a place of vulnerability. 'Should I... help him?' The halls were completely empty as the school bell rang. Kokichi kept looking up and down from his sheet of paper, expression full of worry. 'He's not going to find his class like this... I think' Shuichi took a shaky breath, 'I think, I should really help him.' He approached the new student and lightly tapped on his shoulder. Kokichi slightly jumps at the touch, quickly turning around to see his attacker, his expression of worry lingering until it shifts back into his warm mask.

"Oh hey! Are you skipping class too? You're in my homeroom right?" Kokichi tries to hide the sheet of paper he was holding behind his back. His grin not faltering as it shines onto Shuichi's face.

"Uhm... Are you lost?" said Shuichi, his throat dry and unused.

"Not at all! Like I said, I'm skipping class. Wanna join me?" he exclaimed.

"You're lying, c-c-" Shuichi drops his eye contact to the ground. 'Rephrase it, Shuichi. This is already going terribly' he scorns himself.

"May I see the paper you're hiding? Uhm... please?" says Shuichi, his voice becoming timider as the conversation progresses.

"Sure thing, pretty boy! Warning you now, these are some top-secret documents for my evil organization. Once you read this, you won't live to see tomorrow!" he laughed his stallion-like giggle as he handed over the sheet of paper.

Shuichi examines the paper. It's his class schedule. 'Oh, he actually shares this period with me, no wonder he's lost.'
"Advanced k-k-kanji was mooved upstairs bec-cauuse the oold room is being remooolded." His chest was in his throat, and he could feel the layers of sounds suffocating him as he struggles to breathe. *He probably thinks I'm stupid or weird...* 'he can already feel the tears in the back of his eye sockets. *I think I might cry again if I have to talk anymore, he thinks I'm annoying, no doubt.' His gaze rapidly looks around on the floor as he tries to prevent his eyes from flooding.

"Oh really? Jeez, they really should have told me that, the staff here really are suckers." his smile drops into an expressionless mask as he watches Shuichi's eyes dart around the ground. "Hey are you alright?" says Kokichi, his face remaining stiff and neutral.

"Mhm... We have the same periood, I can walk youu..." Shuichi didn't know how he was still keeping his composure, he wanted to run away and go home early.

"Totally!" Kokichi's face changes back into that blinding smile. "By the way, you have a bit of a stammer. It's cute, I dig it! Let's get going." Kokichi turns his back and takes the lead as they walk towards their class.

'Huh?' Shuichi didn't know how to react, his face lightly blushed pink as he thinks about Kokichi's statement more. *Cute... How can you think that the way I talk is cute? It's disgusting and frustrating to listen to.* Shuichi didn't really feel like crying anymore out of pure confusion, his mind at work distracting himself to figure out what Kokichi meant by cute. *Maybe he was just trying to cheer me up, I don't know. I feel like he noticed my emotional outburst... but then that would mean.* Shuichi's heart dropped into his stomach as a sudden realization hit. *He pities me. I just met him and he already pities me, he's just trying to be nice because he feels bad.* Shuichi's cold emotions start to arise. *He's just like the rest of the class, isn't he?* his mind swarming with toxic thoughts as his mood worsens.

They soon arrive at their second-period class, the teacher quickly scolding them for not being on time. Shuichi hurries to his assigned seat and takes out all his class supplies. *He pities me* his mind clanking against itself, *He pities me, he pities me, he pities me he-* Shuichi's breath starts to quicken as the world around him becomes numb and distant. He's floating under his own personal frozen sea again, emotions poking under the giant iceberg that forces his body still. He was cracking, and no amount of heat could calm the storming tundra in his mind.

Chapter End Notes

ouma plays coolmathgames and is totally valid.
Nothing existed except for Shuichi. His textbook and pencils, the students and teachers, they all faded into a dizzy black void where Shuichi can’t even see his own hands. All that existed was a glacial mass that floated on a frozen ocean. His mind was fuzzy, he couldn’t even think coherent thoughts, but the thoughts were all rushing through him at once. Left and right, above and below him, repetitions of ‘K’ sounds and drawn out ‘oooo’s’ were crashing against each other. Single words of ‘pity’ and ‘hate’ mixing with the stammering sounds he makes. All the heat focused in his throat and face as the rest of his body feels numb and cold. His heart was racing as questions began to form.

‘Why am I like this?’ a voice said.

‘Why can’t I calm down?’ Another one stated.

‘Nothing is wrong, nothing should be wrong.’

Are these really different people?

‘You’re pathetic, getting so emotional over someone just trying to be nice.’ A harsher person speaking this time, scolding Shuichi.

‘I am pathetic.’ Shuichi responded.

He spoke to all the voices resounding in his head, but all of the voices were his own. He could only feel the sensations of heat pooling with the combination of throbbing in his temples. His vision is hazy as he keeps his gaze towards his desk that is hundreds of miles away. ‘I can’t move… anything. I can’t move. I can’t, I can’t move, I’m pathetic and I can’t even move. I can’t move, I can’t mo-’

"Saihara-kun!" Shuichi’s vision snaps back to reality as his teacher yelled across the room. "Are you
dozing off? I've called on you twice. Read the passage on page 264.”

Shuichi swallowed the saliva resting in his mouth as he glances around the classroom, everyone was staring at him. He catches the gaze of purple neutrality, his face expressionless as he watched Shuichi scramble to get on the right page. He snapped out of his trance thanks to his teacher, however, anxiety still stabbed at his skin. ‘Reading is okay, it’s easier. I think I would have crumbled if he asked me a question about the lesson.’ Shuichi read over the passage once so he felt comfortable reading out loud.

Shuichi stood from his seat and took a quick breath. He started reading, ”People are much like hedgehogs, they need each other for warmth and c-comfort, but if they get too close, their pointed spines will stab one another.” Shuichi’s voice going lower in volume with each stammer, ”This is frequently c-called the ‘Hedgehog’s dilemma’, a metaphooor used to describe human intimacy.” He finished.

"Okay thank you, next..." his teacher's voice fading out the moment Shuichi sits down. The class's eyes no longer followed him as the next student started reading, but Shuichi still felt those expressionless purple eyes lingering. Kokichi grinned as soon as Shuichi looked his way, with Shuichi looking back to his desk immediately in embarrassment. 'I want to go home, I don't think I'll be able to finish the school day, there’s no way.’ He stuck it out for the rest of the period, his teacher obviously avoiding calling on him, he was silently thankful for that.

The lunch bell rang and Shuichi was one of the first to leave, making a beeline for the school’s front office. Avoiding eye contact with the school staff and hurriedly checking out, he walked to the entrance of the school. Blasting heat scorching Shuichi when he steps outside, sweat already starting to cling to his forehead. He hated summer.

He woke up at 18:00. Collapsing onto his bed when he got home around noon, physically and emotionally exhausted. He just wanted to sleep. He wanted to abandon everything, even for just a couple of hours. He didn't want to feel. But he felt everything the moment he woke up. The burning soreness of his eyes, a loose sleepy feeling ingrained into the layers of his skin. His throat was lubricated but also dry at the same time. He felt sad. But sadness comforted him, he would take downcast over the shortness of breath and a rapid heartbeat any day. Melancholy over nervous sweating and swarming toxicity in his mind.

He checked his phone, one notification. Typing in his passcode as he opened his nearly empty
Shuichi closes his phone and smiles. He misses his uncle whenever he was away for a while, he was just glad he could spend some time with him before he went back to work. A pang of worry hit Shuichi as he realized he hasn't cleaned his room since the last time he came home. 'I was going to do it tomorrow but... shit.'

Shuichi moves his legs off the bed and stretches wide. His body moving on his own as he starts picking up dirty laundry and old dishes. He lets his muddled mind blend into thoughts of Ouma Kokichi, pale skin and big bright eyes. His appearance reminded him of someone he used to know, and the very thought of that scared him to death. 'I messed up bad didn't I? He probably thinks I'm slow or retarded, and he was even staring at me after I finished reading.' He pours leftover water cups into one bottle and dumps it out. 'I shouldn't have talked to him in the first place.' He hums silently, 'I need to start ignoring him before things get too dangerous, I don't want a repeat of middle school.' Finishing his train of thought with a sigh as he moved dirty clothes into the washing machine.

Shuichi finished cleaning his room around 23:00, he was hungry and exhausted. His stomach fighting against itself as he walked towards his apartment's small kitchen. He hasn't eaten anything since this morning so he decided on instant ramen because he isn't much of a chef. His uncle, however, is an amazing cook. Shuichi remembers always coming home to the aromatic smell of gyudon. The savory taste of beef mixing with the acidity of the green onions, his mouth was melting as the memory of the broth was sitting on his tongue. The ramen was finished, and Shuichi pretended he was eating his uncle's home cooking instead of crappy 70 yen soup.

Shuichi's phone started to buzz rapidly, which was extremely unusual for him. He opens his messenger app to find new messages flooding in.

'Yooooooooooooo!! Saihara-chan, right?'

'Hey hey! Answer me or perish!'

'It shouldn't take you longer than ten seconds to respond, are you ignoring me?'
'How cruel! Not even fifteen seconds have gone by, and Saihara-chan already hates me! :)

Shuichi stares down at his phone in confusion, who was texting him at this hour? His fingers started to glide across the keyboard to respond. 'You're slowing my phone down, who is this? -S.S'

'Me! Duh doy, have you already forgotten about me? Wow, you really are cruel!

Shuichi pauses for a moment as he puts two and two together. 'Ouma-kun...? How did you get my number? -S.S'

'I snuck into the school after hours and totally wrecked the teacher's lounge. I found a whole bunch of student documents and stole them all, came across yours and it had your phone number. Soooo here we are!

'He's a fast typer.' Shuichi noted, already typing his response away with a half smirk resting on his face. 'The school doesn't have my personal phone number, you're lying again. -S.S'

'Ah jeez, ya got me! I asked that piano chick for it since she mentioned something about having everyone's phone numbers.'

He knew he wasn't lying that time. Kaede was the class president so she decided it was necessary to have everyone's phone number. However, when Kaede asked Shuichi about his phone number, it was one of the worst experiences he had in the school year. Trying to tell Kaede the numbers in order as his nervousness and stutter were corrupting his speech, giving up halfway through to write his number on a piece of paper instead. Although, he is glad that Kaede has his number. She sometimes does class updates and reminds her peers about upcoming assignments, and it has helped Shuichi a lot.

'Oh... I see. Why did you ask for my number specifically? -S.S'

'Oh come on, I lost my own tour guide after second period! I got totally lost again, if only you were there to save me! My teachers got suuper pissed.' Kokichi responded. 'Man, do you have Watanabe-
sensei? I was only like 15 minutes late and his pruney face scrunched up like it was rotting! LMAO it was pretty hilarious.'

Shuichi let out a giggle as he finished reading Kokichi's second text. 'I don't have him but I always see him on my way to class. He always makes that face towards me because I tend to not head to class until two minutes before the bell rings. -S.S' The familiar feeling of warm fuzziness rising in his chest as he makes conversation with the supreme leader.

'Oh I used to do the same thing, people literally don't have any respect and whack into me! Don't they know I'm pretty much going to be their future ruler? How sad.' Shuichi can already see the dotted lines pop back up again with a new message quickly appearing. 'Hey you're the Super High School Level Detective, right? That's pretty kickass, I've always respected police officers, detectives, people who fight with pure justice in their hearts and stuff. It totally rocks! You must be like, supersmart too, right?'

Shuichi's smile turned into a small grin, he's never been one to handle compliments very well but he secretly appreciated them. 'Ah thanks... I'm really not all that. My uncle is a real detective, and he works for the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department and has a pretty high crime solve rate. I look up to him a lot. -S.S'

'Wowie! As long as he doesn't interfere with my plans of world domination, I'd think we'd get along great! :D'

Shuichi stayed up for the next two hours texting Kokichi. Messaging back and forth, branches of conversation topics stemming from their school and the students who attend. Feelings of numbness melted away with each new message, he didn't think about his anxiety or his stutter. His shields were down, the blasting sun that was Kokichi was drilling holes into Shuichi's iceberg. Shuichi knew this, but he didn't care. All that was on his mind was the liquid fire that was Ouma Kokichi.

"Saihara-chan!" Kokichi walked up to Shuichi's desk with his hands resting behind his head.
"What's up?"

Shuichi feels a lot more comfortable in Kokichi's presence now. Because of their endless banter the
previous night, Shuichi can even attempt to hold a conversation with him outside of texting. Although his anxiety is pooling in his stomach and throat, he ignores it with the newfound feelings of warmth. "Hello, Ooouma-k-kun." Shuichi’s eyes resting on the leader’s small face, inspecting the different features closely. "I'm well, hoow are yoou?" Shuichi finished.

"It's funny you ask! As I was walking to school, I saw an old lady that was about to be hit by a moving truck! I quickly pushed her out of the way to safety, but then-" he inhales sharply "Some muscular dude pushes ME out of the way, saving my life from the truck! Crazy, right? I hear he's in a coma now, how sad.' Kokichi finished with a wide grin on his face.

Shuichi's lips curl into a smile as he lets out a tiny giggle. "Did that really happen? I dooon't believe yooou, Oouma-k-kun."

"Wow, Saihara-chan! You were able to spot that lie from a mile away, you really are smart!" Kokichi let out a hearty laugh and rested his face into a calmer expression. "By the way... your smile could singlehandedly start the Third Impact! Careful not to destroy humanity, Saihara-chan!" he teased.

"What is that supposed to mean? I doon't get it." Shuichi looked puzzlingly at Kokichi.

"I've really been spending too much time around Shirogane-chan, her shitty references are rubbing off on me." his face pans into that expressionless mask again, "What I mean is, you should smile more. I think it suits you."

Shuichi shifts in his seat as a faint blush dusted his cheeks, "Ah... thanks..." his face still smiling slightly.

The bell rings and Kokichi heads back to his assigned seat. The layers of Shuichi's skin feeling light and warm, the distracting light that was Ouma Kokichi sinking into his body. He felt happy, and his inner tundra was clawing at him in warning.
Shuichi usually tries to find a quiet place in the school to eat his lunch, packing leftover rice and sometimes fish, but he forgot his packed lunch on the way to school today. 'Looks like it's cafeteria food for today... I really don't think I can go through with ordering after yesterday morning.' Fear creeping into his body as he plays out the worst possible scenarios. His second-period class becoming more and more empty as the minutes pass by. He finally stood up, examining the room and spotting that familiar mess of purple locks. Kokichi is sitting at his desk, all attention directed towards his phone. Shuichi walks up to Kokichi and lightly taps him on the shoulder, startling Kokichi in a much similar fashion from the previous day.

"Are you not eating lunch?" asked Shuichi.

Kokichi's flicker of paranoia fades into complete neutrality. "I don't feel like eating." Kokichi diverts his attention back to his phone.

"I foorgoot to bring my lunch today... Soo I will have to order from the c-c"

...

Shuichi feels that well-known lump in his throat. "c-c..."

...

"c-c-c..."

...

Shuichi's eyes start to dart around the ground in an attempt to stop the oncoming tears. He couldn't say it, no matter how many times his brain screamed 'cafeteria', his voice wouldn't let him. His own sounds asphyxiating him as he struggles to breathe into his own words. 'K' sounds were the worst, they were the most embarrassing. He hated them, and he hated himself for not being able to produce a simple noise.

"Hey hey," Kokichi peers up at Shuichi the moment he stopped talking. Kokichi pauses for a moment before the blinding smile comes again to melt Shuichi's ice. "I was lying about not being hungry! I'm actually starving! How 'bout we share something?" Kokichi puts his phone in his bookbag. "My treat!" he finishes.
"Mhm" hums Shuichi in response, his self-confidence being pushed back to nothing.

Kokichi takes the lead as Shuichi follows him to the school cafeteria. Stepping through the large open doors into the cool room, Kokichi turns to Shuichi. "Whadya want to eat, Saihara-chan?"

"May I have c-c-curry, please? Only if you like it though." Shuichi responded.

"Curry rules! I'll go order, can you find a seat for us?" Kokichi looks at Shuichi expectantly.

"Mhm" nodded Shuichi, analyzing the room looking for an empty table.

Kokichi went to order and Shuichi found a round table that was close to the wall. He set his book bag down and pulled out his case file notes, flipping over them and studying the neat handwriting. Kokichi soon returned with a styrofoam tray, setting it down in front of Shuichi. Savory, salty curry filled Shuichi's mouth as he shoveled rice and curry together. It wasn't the best curry he's ever had, but it does its job. "Mmm, Oouma-k-kun... Thank you. I appreciate you doing this for me." Shuichi continued, "Didn't you say we were going to share?"

"Oh... yeah..." says Kokichi, reluctantly picking up a plastic spoon as he picks at Shuichi's tray.

"Hey, guys! Saihara-kun, Ouma-kun! You two seem to get along well." Kaede appeared out of nowhere, startling Kokichi as soon she spoke. "Mind if I sit with you? Iruma-san is busy in the science lab." She smiled patiently at the two boys.

Shuichi quickly meets her eyes to nod once.

"Great!" Kaede quickly sits down and unwrapped her lunchbox. "So, Ouma-kun! How was your first day here? Did you find all your classes?" Kaede clapped her hands together once.

"Nope! I ditched after homeroom was over, I'm an important person y'know? I got things to do! Places to go! School just makes all of us dumber and I'm not waiting around in this sweaty cramped place to lose IQ points." Kokichi's face twisted into an evil grin as he observed Kaede's face.
"But... I thought I saw you in the hallways after third period?" she questioned. "And you know, our school is one of the best in the country." she pouts.

"Awww... You got me Akamatsu-chan! Yeah, my first day was alright. Is that all you wanted to ask me?" Kokichi's says with a disappointing look.

The rest of lunchtime had Kokichi, Kaede, and Shuichi talking sparsely about current school topics and teacher drama. Although Shuichi didn't participate much in the conversation, he still enjoyed the company of Kaede and Kokichi immensely. Things were looking okay today, and he wasn't going to let himself destroy that. Pushing away any negative thoughts to the back of his head. He was enjoying this. He felt good about it.

Chapter End Notes

**gyudon** is basically sliced beef with onions and soy sauce. It's usually served on top of rice and is a staple comfort food in Japan.
Shuichi comes home to the sight of old rusty keys on the table. Immediately, a heavenly scent fills his nose and the scent breaths within him. Shadows moving against the kitchen walls and Shuichi's heart jumps in excitement. He enters the kitchen to see his uncle with a pan of fried rice in one hand and cracking eggs with the other. Shuichi's uncle turns around as Shuichi sets his bookbag down.

"Hey, kid." His uncle says, smiling over his tired and strained face.

"Hi, how was work this week?" Shuichi states, his voice devoid of any fear or nervousness.

"Pretty interesting, I'm tired and trying to fix a quick dinner before I go to sleep. I've been up since four." He shifts to grab the salt and continues. "I'm making omelettes and fried rice, how much do you want?"

"Noot much... I had curry for lunch sooo I'm not very hungry. The rice smells fantastic, however."

"How was your week at school?" His uncle asked.

"It was good." Shuichi responded.

"Are you telling the truth?" His uncle's tone becoming grainy and piercing.

... 

'No' Shuichi thought. He just had a panic attack the previous day. He was oversleeping, but he still felt overwhelmingly tired throughout his days. He wanted to confide in his uncle, and he wanted to
"Yeah... Remember I texted you about that new student?" Shuichi says, trying to distract his uncle from an obvious lie.

"What's he like?" His uncle asked.

"He is... interesting? He says his talent is that he is a supreme leader of a big ooo.." Shuichi pauses as his brain was processing the word, this was a hard one. "ooorganizati...oon." He finished.

His uncle was silent for what felt like minutes, 'I... didn't annoy him, did I? I know he's really tired so... I think he wouldn't want to deal with deciphering my words..' Although he and his uncle were close, Shuichi always felt as if the gap between them was speech. Shuichi's uncle was always so confident in how he talked, the way he presented evidence and connected the dots to a culprit... he felt like a real detective. Shuichi loves his uncle, but in his admiration, he realizes he will never be a true detective. Compared to his uncle's cool tone of speech, Shuichi was a shuddering mess.

"Supreme leader? What kind of talent is that... what is that even supposed to mean?" His uncle finally responding.

"Ahaha." Shuichi laughs as his nervous thoughts were spiraling in his head. "I'm noot really sure, he's k-kind of childish and doe doesn't seem to treat oothers with much respect. But..." he continues. "I doon't think he has bad intentiooons... he's interesting." Shuichi finished as his uncle brought him a plate of layered fried rice and fluffy firm eggs.

His uncle sits down with his own plate across from Shuichi. "Well, you know there's always more to a person then what meets the eye. You can't ever truly know a person if you don't reach out to them. Otherwise, you keep your first impressions of them and other people's interpretations." He finishes, squeezing mayo onto his omelette.

"I knoow that..." Shuichi's volume becoming drastically lower.

..."
Shuichi decided it was a good idea to pass out early the previous night. Saturday was always the most taxing school day. It sucked the life out of him as he was waiting for the clock to tick by. His eyes were refusing to open as he kept trying to silence the alarm on his phone. He rubs the rheum away that was gathering in his eyes while making fluttering attempts to adjust to the morning light. He opens his phone to two new messages.

'Hey Saihara, are you awake?'

'Can you call me?'

Shuichi's tired eyes glaze over his phone's surface, the sender's name set to "Ouma-kun", and the last message was sent at 1:12. Everything about this seemed very out of character for Kokichi, and Shuichi's stomach turned over in worry as the worst scenarios played over and over in his head. Why didn't he use his normal honorific? Why was Kokichi trying to call Shuichi at 1:12 of all times? It didn't sit right with Shuichi as his fingers moved by itself. 'Sorry, I fell asleep early. Why did you want me to call you last night? -S.S'

Shuichi hurriedly dressed into his school uniform, quickly glancing at an old unused hat sitting by his desk. He made sure to turn vibrating notifications on as he left his room and walked downstairs into the apartment's kitchen area. He sees his uncle sitting at the table, reading a novel with a cup of coffee in his hand. He looks up from his book to greet Shuichi's entrance with a smile.

"Morning, there's toast on the counter. Sorry, it's not much but I made sure to pack a lunch for you." He nodded.

"Ah, thank you. G'morning... I'm gooing to leave a little early so I apoo..ogize." Shuichi responded.

"Don't apologize for being a good kid, I'll see you this afternoon. Be safe, okay?" Shuichi's uncle took a sip of his coffee as he went back to reading.
"Mhm." Shuichi hums in response. He grabs a piece of toast from the kitchen counter as he makes his way out the door. Although the walk to his school isn't too distant, he hated trekking in vitriolic heat. Every morning and every afternoon the same thought entered his head, 'I hate summer.' He breathes in the heavy morning air as he pulled his phone out from his pocket, feeling the phone's surface vibrate in his hands.

Kokichi's messages from 1:12 have been erased, with a new response following Shuichi's text. 'Hmmmmmm... I have no idea what you're talking about, Saihara-chan!' Shuichi felt an odd feeling of relief mixed with annoyance. 'You deleted the messages. -S.S' He responded. Shuichi didn't know how to exactly feel about the situation, he felt he was finally making a friend... But he worried that Kokichi didn't have the same feelings of platonic longing that Shuichi held. His stomach kept twisting as he threw away the uneaten toast in a nearby trash can, whispering a silent 'sorry' to his uncle.

'What messages?' Kokichi responded.

'The ones you just deleted. -S.S'

'Saihara-chan is suuuper weird! I bet you're one of those people that eats ketchup and peanut butter sandwiches. You bastards are ruining our great nation, how gross...'

'Okay, Ouma-kun. -S.S' Shuichi felt it was best to put away his phone for the rest of his walk, becoming tired of Kokichi's antics. Still, he felt the warmth of relief under his skin, and he let his body be calmed by the thought. He still can't process the reasons why Kokichi decided to text him at such an hour, so he chalks it up to a simple prank. His brain is too tired to click thoughts together, so he dismisses the issue for now. Before he knew it, he felt the coolness of air conditioning surround his skin as he made his way to homeroom.

Kokichi was one of the last to arrive for class, so Shuichi didn't have much of a chance to talk to him before class began. The bell rang and Shuichi decided to go to Kokichi's desk when most of the
students have already left. Kokichi was staring at his phone again with one leg propped up on his chair.

"Hey." Shuichi decides to start the conversation verbally this time. He noticed physical contact tended to scare the supreme leader.

Kokichi looks up from his phone and shoves his bright wide grin into Shuichi's vision. "Hewwo, Saihawa-chan!"

"Why are you talking like that... I feel uncomfooortable." Shuichi states.

"What awe youw tawking abouwt?" Kokichi's face melts into a starry-eyed smile he as giggled towards Shuichi's direction.

"Please. Stoop that." Shuichi firmly states. His eyes wander to Kokichi's desk, noticing a mess of purple pens and multiple erasers. His notebook was covered in various doodles ranging from sci-fi weaponry to child-like drawings of suns with sunglasses. "Oo..oouma-k-kun, why are you doodling instead of taking nootes?" Shuichi said.

"What do you mean? These are notes! Evil supreme leaders like myself should know how to encode their notes so no one else can read them!" Kokichi states.

Shuichi's eyes travel to the corner of Kokichi's notebook, a chibi-like drawing with something sticking out of the doodle's head catches his eye. "Is that suppoosed to be me?" Shuichi points to said corner.

With this action, Kokichi quickly shuts his notebook and shoves it into his book bag. "Hmmm, no idea." He hums.

Shuichi only groaned in response as he went back to his desk to collect his things before moving to second-period. 'I can't do this' Shuichi quickly thought. He hurriedly walks to his next class without Kokichi.
Lunchtime. A lunchtime he always spent on the rooftop, thirty minutes of peace. Shuichi sits here again in his usual spot, eating his uncle’s packaged lunch. He left as quickly as possible after second-period ended, avoiding any eye contact with Kokichi. He needed to start distancing himself, his hands and feet felt cold as his mind twists and turns against himself. The feelings he felt with Kokichi were so familiar, they felt so right. Making warm conversations as he let the sun's scorching flames brush up against his tundra, it felt good. This scared him, it reminded him so much... of Her. The brightest star in his life, burning his heart to ash. This left Shuichi with nothing other than fear, the fear of emotional intimacy.

'I... can't let myself get attached to him.' His mind pounded, 'I have to stop doing this, I have to cut contact.' His mind crashed, 'He will hurt me, and I'll let it happen.' The sickness he felt through his bones as terrible memories plagued his sight. 'I'm okay when I'm thinking clearly like this.' The toxicity of his thoughts rushing against each other. He knew it wasn't healthy, but all he saw was Her.

'I need to trust myself when I'm surrounded by my own solitude,
I can't trust myself when I feel the high of other people.'

Affirmation set into him, he was content.

Kokichi was just another sail to steer in the opposite direction.

'I'm okay with this.'

He avoided Kokichi’s gaze for the rest of the day.
The TV in Shuichi's apartment was set to a low volume, the local news show was going through the weekly weather. Papers and files splayed out on the coffee table as Shuichi wraps his hands around warm taiyaki. The sticky sweetness of the azuki beans and doughy bread filled his mouth and his heart, he felt at peace. His uncle likes the strawberry flavored cakes instead of bean paste, but he didn't mind buying Shuichi's favorite for this weekend. The scent of his uncle's cologne mixing with the sugary scents from the cake, he felt rushes of nostalgia.

Shuichi already explored the many ideas of his uncle's case. Connecting dots and suggesting theories, all that was left was workplace drama. His uncle's deep voice filled the apartment as he was chatting about his many co-workers. "So I have this friend who's in the forensics department, she has a son that's a couple years younger than you."

Shuichi already feels impending ruin, and he knows exactly how this night is going to end. Anxiety starts to creep up his spine as he feels the blood draining from his face, he felt cold. 'Please, don't do this uncle... Not today.. Please not today, not today, not today-'

"Her son is like you, y'know? She told me that she started to take him to speech therapy and it's really helped him." His uncle looked at Shuichi for a response.

"..."

"Shuichi." His uncle's eyebrows slightly furrow.

"I doon't want to." Shuichi states.

"I'm just trying to help you."

"..."

"Your teachers keep calling me. You're not participating in group lessons, and they have no idea what's going on with you." His uncle's tone becoming harsher as the conversation progresses.
He felt cold, the one thing that was supposed to melt his ice, failed. He only felt the sweat dripping down his frozen face and the familiar trembling of his throat. "I doo..o."

Fuck.

"I d-doo..on't need it."

Shuichi quickly stands from the couch and makes his way up the apartment stairs, leaving behind unfinished taiyaki and his uncle's warm stare. His eyes immediately shedding stinging tears as his throat refuses to breathe any oxygen. He wasn't about to have a panic attack in his own house, he was going to bed.

"Shuichi!" His uncle yelled from the couch.

The response of Shuichi slamming his bedroom door stopped his uncle's attempts at pursuing him any further. Words and sentences and sounds repeating in his head, strangling each other for dominance as he maneuvers into bed. The deafening silence only being interrupted by the white noise of his bedroom fan, and soon being erupted by the strangling sobs his throat has been trying to force all week. 'I don't need it, I don't need it, I don-’ he lets out a particularly loud cry that interrupts his own thought process. His iceberg was finally cracked, and all that remains is flooding water leaking in with his cold wasteland.

'He thinks there's something wrong with me.' He shouted into his mind.

'But there is something wrong with you.' The same voice responding.

'I shouldn't even be blaming him... he's just trying to help me.'

'...'

'There really must be something wrong with me.'

His voice cracks into his pillow.
'He must be embarrassed, to have such a stupid nephew carrying on his legacy.'

'He wouldn't have to be embarrassed if you didn't exist.' The same voice returning, his own voice.

'I know.'

'You shouldn't exist.'

'I... can't.'

A dangerous thought. A familiar one resounded.

'You should just die.'

'...'

'I can't do that again. I deserve to live.'

His sobs grow quieter.
'Do I?'

'Why haven't you killed yourself yet?'

'Because I promised.'

'Do it right now.' His mind commanded.

'...'

'I'm not. Shut up.'

'...'

'I'm going to bed.' He pulls the blanket covers over himself as he tries to push away the toxicity staining his mind, his common sense kicking in at the right time. The tiredness of his body overtaking his brain as his cries stop completely. Missing the incoming messages that are buzzing away on his phone, his mind and body are finally agreeing to fall asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Are those who are kind, do they genuinely want to make other people feel clement? Are those who are kind, do they only want to feel cloudless themselves? Those who are kind, you can't deny they have layered intentions under steeps of malice. Can we really say it's malice in their hearts?
Are kind people, only kind for themselves?
I don't know, really.
I'm not kind.
So it doesn't matter.

\

srry just a lil poem i wrote while i was stuck writing this.
hi guys, sorry for bit of a wait.
i feel i can only really write this fic when i feel down because its a time where i can really put my thoughts into words.
as always, thank you for the support.
it really means a lot to me.
Shuichi woke up at 10'oclock Sunday morning. The sticky heat of the sun flooding through his window, beating off the rooms of his wall as Shuichi made an effort to retrieve his phone. He groaned at how disgusting he feels, the same words always repeating in his mind 'I hate summer.' Typing in his passcode a few times before he got it right, Shuichi opens his messenger app to a familiar name.

"Hey, Saihara-chan!"

"Are you awake?"

Messages sent at 22:00.

'Ouma-kun seems to be awake late at night a lot' Shuichi noted. He rubbed his eyes and felt the sweat coming off of his forehead. He desperately needs to take a shower. He was feeling frightened to text back Kokichi as his fears started to creep back up his skin, the rushing thoughts from yesterday starting to catch up with him. His hair was oily, his mind was oily. He felt his forehead secreting sweat, and he felt the clutches of anxiety secrete back into his heart. Shuichi's fear returned to his daily levels as he remembers he needs to confront his uncle this morning. Shuichi walks from his bed to his bathroom, he sighs and starts the shower.

Shuichi comes downstairs seeing his uncle putting out plates and organizing sausages, toast, and eggs onto them. The modest apartment smelled wonderful, and a part of Shuichi's anxiety crawled down from his heart as he sits down at the kitchen table.
"Hey." his uncle spoke first.

"Hey." Shuichi responds.

"..."

The air felt muggy with the scent of sausage, toast, eggs, and disappointment. Shuichi felt an imaginary prickling sensation in his hands and feet, fiddling with his shirt sleeve as he waits for his uncle to set a plate down for him. Shuichi's uncle sits across from him after handing Shuichi breakfast, eating his food with his standard cup of coffee.

"How'd you sleep last night?" His uncle asked.

"Goood." Shuichi responded.

"..."

Shuichi takes a small bite from his toast, filling in the awkward density that's plaguing the air.

"I'm going back to work today, around noon."

"Oh..."

"..."

"I thoought you weren't leaving until tomooroow?"

"My boss called me in, and I came home a day earlier anyways."
"Oh, okay." Shuichi finished.

More toast, eggs, sausage, and silence. Shuichi's heart tugged into his lungs, but it was a dull sensation. He didn't feel his anxiety toppling over his head and being stuffed down his throat. Shuichi's uncle is probably the sole person where Shuichi can feel other emotions with. Happiness, anger, disappointment, pride, but he never felt fear. The fear, anxiety being his dominant emotion when dealing with other people. He only felt fear, and any other emotion was buried deep.

His uncle downed his last sip of coffee and peered up at Shuichi.

"Do you want to do anything before I have to leave?"

"It's okay, you don't have to."

"Ah well, I didn't get to do much here anyway. I've been itching to get out, and even a quick trip to the bookstore would suffice. Why don't you come with me?"

"Okay, sure."

The pair finished the rest of their breakfast and soon headed out the door.

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'Heeeeeeeyy! Saihara-chan left me on read, how mean!' Sent at 15:00

Shuichi stares at his phone, not knowing what to do. A new message appearing right after the first one did, the familiar feeling of guilt mixed with fear lurching in his stomach.
'I know you're reading my texts! Stop gawking and start typing!'

'Hey. -S.S'

'Saihara-chan, you really are a player! Leaving me on read and waiting until now to respond!'

'I'm sorry. -S.S'

'Okay! If you say so. But I'm expecting you to grovel on your knees for forgiveness the next time you see me!'

Before Shuichi could respond to his absurd comment, another message cut off his text early.

'Are you busy? :3'

'Not really, my uncle left a little while ago. -S.S'

'Let's go somewhere then. x3'

'Why are you making those faces? -S.S'

'To persuade you! >:3c'

'It's not helping, really. -S.S'

'3:'

Shuichi laughs to himself at Kokichi's absurdness. The paranoia that Shuichi possessed for Ouma Kokichi gradually fading at this moment. He already felt the high of social interaction, and that high
leads to dangerous thinking.

'Where do you want to go? -S.S'

Shuichi arrives at the movie theater about two hours later, scanning around for Kokichi. It didn't take long for Shuichi to pick him out against the swarms of people near the ticket booth. Instantly spotting Kokichi, Shuichi whispers a strained "What." under his breath.

Kokichi is staring at his phone, assuming to be waiting for Shuichi. Sure, normal.

What he was wearing, however.

Shuichi approached Kokichi and slowly scanned him up and down. Kokichi is wearing a blue crop top with a long sleeve shirt underneath. An open vest with no sleeves contributed to the eyesore, with shorts that were a bit too short. High knee socks covered his spindly legs, and to finish it all off, a checkered scarf tied behind his neck. The uneven patterns and the clashing of colors hurt Shuichi's eyes, but he found Kokichi to be oddly charming this way.

"Saihara-chan!" Kokichi flashes his familiar ice-melting smile towards Shuichi's direction as he approached.

"Hey..." Shuichi looks Kokichi up and down once more, "What the hell are you wearing?"

"It's hot outside! Why are you even wearing jeans, huh?"

"I would think it would be hotter for you with all those layers." Shuichi slightly avoids Kokichi's daunting gaze.
"Hmmmmmn" Kokichi hums in response. "Do you like it, though? I wore it on purpose to aggravate you." His face shifted down to his usual expression of neutrality.

"I... guess." Shuichi replied.

Shuichi felt his steady apprehensiveness bubbling into his skin as both of them stand in line, waiting for tickets. There were a lot of people at the theater, mostly because it was a Sunday afternoon. Chills of concern shivered into his bones as he felt the suffocation of the hordes of people. He feels the eyes of random strangers, even if the looks are nonexistent. Shuichi's eyes start to dart around at the ground, trying to swallow his anxiety down. He feels a tug at his sleeve.

"Hey, are you listening?" Kokichi peered up into Shuichi's eyes.

Shuichi comes down from a large cliff before his mind went to an unreachable place. Kokichi practically is pulling him from his cluster of frozen ice.

"Huh?" Shuichi replied.

"Y'know, all the people here are probably staring at my terrible outfit. So why not look at me too, yeah?" Kokichi's light grip was still attached to Shuichi's shirt.

"Soorry."

Kokichi released his hand after observing Shuichi for a moment. "How about we see that American action movie that just came out last week? It looks superbad, and I really want to see it!"

"Americ-c-can? Is it subtitled...?" Shuichi asked.

"Duh, why would they show it if it wasn't? Doesn't matter too much to me though, I can speak ten different languages. I am the Super High School Level Supreme Leader, after all. Nishishi!"

Shuichi didn't really know if Kokichi was lying or not, but he didn't think it mattered at the moment.
They paid individually for their tickets and made their way to the concessionary stand. The smell of buttery popcorn and salted pretzels melted Shuichi's stomach.

"Doo you want anything? I brought enough mooney," Shuichi asked.

"I'm good, I ate earlier." Kokichi responded, his smile lifted into a small smile.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah." Kokichi's face turned into a beaming grin. "I might go buy a soda though. Let me order, Saihara-chan!" Kokichi swerved on the heels of his feet.

Shuichi tells Kokichi his order, and he gives him his remaining amount of cash. Waiting for what felt like a couple minutes, Kokichi returned with a medium popcorn, medium soda and a small soda. He hands the change back to Shuichi and they walk to their scheduled theater.

 Darkness swallowed Shuichi as he stepped into the large, dim, room. He felt softened by this, no one could see his face, no one could hear his voice. His anxiety nulled to a stop as Shuichi and Kokichi took their seats. The theater was completely vacant, probably because as Kokichi explained, the movie was garbage. A brief conversation came over them as they waited for the movie to start playing. Soon, the remaining lights flickered off and the crashing soundtrack blasted through the room.

Kokichi was right, the movie was terrible. Shuichi constantly felt himself tensing up at certain lines and scenes. Shuichi admitted. It was quality garbage. About thirty minutes into the runtime, Shuichi felt warmth against his shoulder. Light inhales and exhales of oxygen touched his neck, and Shuichi looked down to see Kokichi's sleeping body. 'Wasn't he the one who wanted to see this? How was he able to even fall asleep with this much noise going on?' Shuichi thought. He assessed his situation. He could push Kokichi off and wake him up... 'But that would be mean.' He sighed within himself and lowered his head against Kokichi's, basking in the sun's warmth.

'You're burning.' His mind screamed.

But the movie's plethora of noise drowned out the thoughts. He only felt rays of heat strike into his body.
He didn't think.

He just felt.

Chapter End Notes

party rock is in the hou

discord: si#1718
Two weeks of Kokichi's adjustment have gone by extremely rocky for Shuichi's class. His rapid-fire lies and the pranks he pulled on other students quickly made him some enemies. He learned to never mess with Maki, and to never stick gum in her hair.

Shuichi packs up at the end of his last period, stuffing math notebooks and heavy textbooks into his bookbag. He sighs and feels the long Tuesday wash away from his body. He can't wait to get home and pass out. He makes his way to the entrance of the school and starts walking home, only to be immediately interrupted by quick footsteps and a loud, "Saihara-chan!"

Shuichi turns around to see a springy Kokichi right in front of him. Keeling on the balls of his feet, Kokichi smiles widely and says "Let's go to an arcade!"

"Uh? Right noow? What brought this oon all of a sudden?"

Kokichi pulls on one of the longer strands of his hair, "Akamatsu-chan asked me to go with her, Iruma-chan, and Amami-chan. But It would be so boooooring without you, so let's go!"

"Uhm... an arc-cade..." Shuichi has grown to enjoy time spent with Kokichi, even if he doesn't fully understand him. He's kind when he can be, and he doesn't make fun of Shuichi's speech patterns, and he sometimes orders food for Shuichi. There are times when Kokichi has pulled various pranks on him, but, considered to what he's done to some of the other people in Shuichi's class, they're harmless. However, going somewhere with other people in his class? That's something that normal highschoolers do, right?" He ponders. A steady feeling of wrongness burns in his gut, the same feeling he has felt for a continuous two weeks, his mind screams 'No.'

'I want friends.' Shuichi thought.
'You're being stupid,' His mind states, 'remember the last time this happened.'

"Saihara-chan?" Kokichi interrupted Shuichi's dissolving line of thought until it was nothing but a soupy broth. His feelings all mixed into a strange sense of affirmation and longing for that social high. He didn't know Rantaro; he didn't know Miu, and he didn't know Kaede, but, he wanted to.

"Yeah?" Shuichi responds.

"You don't have to come, I'm just saying I would be so bored, and they're practically dragging me to come along."

"Mmmm... I guess if it's alright with everyone else, I don't want to be an annoyance or burden on anyone anything..."

"That's right! Saihara-chan is soooo annoying! I can't stand being around you all the time, why do I even bother?"

"H-huh?" Shuichi's mind starts to kick into a swift panic.

"Pffft. You're so ridiculous, I was lying, obviously. I'm at least four-thousand times more annoying than you! Are you coming or not, pretty-boy?"

'Right.' Shuichi scolds himself. Kokichi constantly pulls small lies and jokes like this, constantly triggering his anxiety on and off. Shuichi feels himself being dangerous, his esophagus constantly feels like cold ash in other's presences. His mind clogs against a sharp icicle which churns into that familiar feeling of loneliness. He doesn't want to be alone, and that's dangerous for himself. It's dangerous for the people around him.

"Yeah..." Shuichi responds.

"Great! Let's head back inside, I told them I was going to the bathroom." Kokichi finishes.
The pair walked back into the school, Kokichi maneuvering his way through the students leaving, and Shuichi followed closely behind him. Conversational voices growing louder as the pair turned corners in the school's halls.

"Do you think he ditched us? What a brat." said a loud, pompous voice.

"Yoohoo!" Kokichi shouted into the practically empty hallway.

Shuichi's eyes quickly darted to the ground as he felt the stares of the other students. He doesn't belong here.

Kaede passes a warm smile towards Shuichi's direction, and Shuichi almost didn't catch it with his eyes glued to the floor.

'Pity' His mind quickly concludes.

"What the fuck took you so long, twink?" Miu shoots towards Kokichi's direction.

"How cruel..." Fake tears immediately pool in Kokichi's eyes, "I swear, I'm going to kill myself because of Iruma-chan's bullying! You'll be all over the news for being the bitch who drove me to suicide!" Kokichi intensely rubs his eyes and whales loudly.

Rantaro crosses his arms and lets out a long sigh, "You need to quit saying things like that, dumbass."

"Saying things like what? This could be my cry for help and you'd never even know!" Kokichi's tears are already gone and replaced with a small smile.

"Yeah, right. Can we get going now? Please?" Miu huffs.

"I guess." Rantaro says, "Hey, Saihara-kun. Are you coming with us?" He asks.

Shuichi freezes under the shift of conversation directed towards him, he can feel his hands clamor
and his heart rate speed to a racing heat.

"Mhm, I invited him. Deal with it" Kokichi sneers.

"You invited this kid? I don't think I've seen him talk to anyone other than Cockichi, I bet he's equally as fucked up. It's always the quiet ones that are the most perverted! I bet he reads Shindol doujins and enjoys them like the virgin he is!" Miu exclaims, "O-of course there is nothing w-wrong with liking that sort of thing... I don't blame you, Shittyhara." She giggles down to herself.

"Hey..." Shuichi hums. He knew that Miu was like that, and that she didn't know anything about Shuichi... But, he still had racing memories of middle school flood back into his mind. Images of ruined desks covered in profanity and countless whispers upon entering rooms. He suddenly felt, sick and he felt his knees quickly becoming wobbly. Memories of time spent treating bruises and evading his Uncle for months, the same feeling of grainy hopelessness filled his body to the brim. He felt as if he was going to dissolve into sand at any moment.

Kokichi laces his hand with Shuichi's, and he gently squeezes. Out of sight from the rest of the group, he strokes circles into Shuichi's palm. "Don't talk shit when your snatch smells like a combination of fish and mold, you dumb bitch!"

Miu lets out a sharp whine and presses her fingers together. "Hieee!"

Kaede sighs, "What am I going to do with the two of you?"

"Can we get going, please?" Rantaro says.

Kaede hums in agreement along with Rantaro. "I can't wait to play some Taiko! I love rhythm games."

"You seem like you'd be good at them." Rantaro responds.

Kaede giggled and the group walked their way out of the school. They headed in a direction that Shuichi wasn't entirely familiar with, with shops and cafés lining up against the bustling streets. Kokichi and Shuichi dragged behind the rest of the group, with Kokichi still loosely holding onto Shuichi's hand. Shuichi completely almost forgets about his hand laced with Kokichi's, until he speaks up.
"Are you okay now?" Kokichi firmly says, looking ahead.

"Huh? I guess, soorry." Shuichi releases his grip from Kokichi.

Kokichi only responds with an affirmative "Hmm."

The group arrived at a loud and colorful arcade. Flashing noises and spaceship noises drowned Shuichi's senses, with neon lights bouncing off his school uniform. Shuichi took the time to adjust to the over-stimulation, tuning into the conversation after his brain settled down.

"Okay, I'll be giving everyone 25 tokens, that should last everyone a few hours." Rantaro passed out plastic cups of plastic coins to each person.

"Hey stupid Amami-chan, you only gave me 15!" Kokichi shouted.

"What? No I didn't? Now that I think about it, I should of given you only 15." Rantaro huffed.

"How mean! It seems like it's bully Ouma day! What did I ever do to you guys?" Kokichi starts sobbing hysterically.

"I can give you an entire list that would fill the room, you little cockshit!" Miu exclaims. "Remember when you poured nail-polish all over my fucking desk? I had three days of detention y'know!"" She finishes.

"Oh come on! You're still mad about that?" Kokichi responds.

"It happened last week!" She shouts.

Kaede pats Miu's back and laughs, "What do you guys want to do first?"

"You guys can do whatever. I'm gonna go play Pacman!" Kokichi smiles with childlike excitement
and runs to the classic section of the arcade.

"Uhm..." Shuichi

"Just go have fun." Rantaro nods towards Shuichi.

Shuichi follows after Kokichi into the classic section of the arcade, already deep into a game of Pacman. Shuichi observes Kokichi breeze through the levels, not losing any of his lives.

"Yoou're really quite the gamer..." Shuichi comments.

"I swear to god if you ever say that in my presence ever again I will dropkick you into the sun." Kokichi responds. He quickly moves away from the standup console, "Here, you try!"

Shuichi stumbles to the controls and loses all of Kokichi's lives within 2 minutes. "Err... Soorry. I'm bad at this..." Shuichi says, staring at the GAME OVER screen.

Kokichi giggles and smiles sweetly, "Don't worry about it! You had fun right? That's all that matters then!"

"Yoou have a pooint." Shuichi says.

Kokichi's genuine smile melts Shuichi's anxiety, his ice being chipped away as his fear dissolves into relief. No one else was in the arcade, just Kokichi and Shuichi. The rest of the group was far away on another sail, and the other high-school students swarming the area didn't matter. From Space Invaders to Tapper, Frogger to Donkey Kong, each game cracked his cold skin. His time spent with Kokichi, shattering his fears into nothing.

'Huh?'

'Am I allowed to have this much fun?'

...
'Is it okay? It must be, right?'

Kokichi was talking about some movie he saw a long time ago, "And basically, everyone died at the end by turning into weird puddy! Except for the main character, he probably won't last long though with the world that screwed up." Kokichi looks down into his empty cup, "Hey, Saihara-chan, do you have any more tokens?"

Shuichi looks to his cup to find 4 left, "A c-couple, but I think we shoould wrap it up... Gooo and meet up with the oothers."

"Yeah we can always come back later! Let's go meet up with the stupid-heads." Kokichi snickers.

They walked back to the lobby and Kokichi signaled the others in another room to meet. Rantaro, Kaede, and Miu all returned with smiles on their faces, laughing about some kid who tried hitting on Kaede. "Pffft, did you see the look on his face when I told him you were my girlfriend?" Miu howls with laughter.

"Hey do you guys want to go get something to eat? It has to be cheap though, and I don't have much leftover from the tokens." Rantaro says.

"How about McDonalds? That is as cheap as you can get, I think." Kaede responds.

"Okay then, sounds good. Let's get going then." Rantaro finishes.

Heading towards the closest location, Kokichi and Shuichi lag behind the rest. Kokichi remains quiet during the walk, but Shuichi doesn't matter the silence. He's taking in the smell of asphalt and comfortable warmness of upcoming dusk. His eyes feel tired and heavy, but rested and satisfied at the same time. They eventually arrive at a corner McDonalds and get in the medium-sized line.

"Hey, Saihara-chan, what do you want?"

"Uhm... Hamburger... If that's ook-kay."
"No problemo! I'll pay too."

"Ah you doon't have to."

Kokichi ignores Shuichi and walks to the counter after Rantaro and the others made their orders. Shuichi decides to follow them to their seats with Kokichi returning a minute later. Light discussion casted over the group as they waited for their food. The group's numbers were called and Rantaro went to get it. He returned with everyone's meals, a hamburger and soda for Shuichi, a happy meal for Miu, chicken nuggets for Rantaro, and a Big Mac for Kaede. 'Huh?'

Shuichi looked to his left to see Kokichi without food. 'Did he not have enough money? Is it my fault? Or...

'...

"Oouma-k... Ouma" He hopes Kokichi will forgive him for dropping the honorific, but he didn't feel like dealing with 'K' sounds around the others. "Why didn't you get anything?"

"I'm not hungry, duh. I had a biiiiig lunch! Why is Saihara-chan being so nosey?" Kokichi's eyebrows furrowed a little bit.

Rantaro chimes in, "That's not true, I ate lunch with you and you also didn't eat anything, then." Rantaro takes a small breath, "Why are you lying?"

"Is your memory screwed up or something? Stupid Amami-chan has amnesia or something!" Kokichi exclaims. "Even if I didn't eat lunch, it's none of your business!

"Noow that I think abouut it... I doon't think I've ever seen you eat properly." Shuichi's voice rises in concern. Shuichi's heart drops into his stomach and his words feel like vomit. Memories flood his insides as a wretched feeling stirs beneath his diaphragm.

Kokichi plays with one of the purple tendrils attached to his head, "Jeez, you too Saihara-chan? Did
"Ouma-kun, what's wrong? Let me order you something. I know that this place isn't the healthiest of food, but you still need to eat." Kaede worryingly addresses. Her eyes filled with great concern with a sad smile plastered to her face.

Shuichi takes Kokichi's hand to feel an uneven shaking. Shuichi's cold hands meets with even colder hands. "Ouma...?" Shuichi says softly. Kokichi's face turns to a blank state of emotion, like Shuichi has seen countless times. However, this blankness is different. It's uncomfortable and cold, and the shaking doesn't pause once.

Kokichi pulls away from Shuichi's hand. A downcast of expression falls over Kokichi's face as he leaves a short "I'm leaving." He stands up to make his leave out. Stopping before the exit, to turn around with a big smile to shout "Bye, losers!"

"Ouma-kun!" Rantaro shouts.

No one tried to go after him, leaving a heavy air over the group. The rest of the meal was silent, and Shuichi's safety net was gone, leaving him anxious and worried again. Was he worried for himself? It wasn't the same anxiety and fear that commonly overtakes him, but one of hurting and confusion. 'Ouma-kun...' he ponders.

'does it hurt for you too?'

Chapter End Notes

birds be like beheo bewo bwo bweoe ebwo bwo
hey guys! school has started for me and honestly, yo girl aint doin so well.
im at a new school and im having a really hard time talking to people. i havent really made any friends and i keep having panic attacks during class. so here i am to vent write!!!!!!! yay!!!

and for all of you poor souls who are also starting school and suffering with this eternal shit, please stay safe and I hope you have a great year!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Wednesday's following guilt mixed with panic stirred in Shuichi's gut as he looked around his first period classroom. 'No Ouma today... and he is usually here before I am...' Shuichi draws a short breath and sits in his assigned seat. He recalled last night's frantic texts and lack of responses, staying up late filled with worry, and eventually crashing after his body couldn't handle the stress anymore. His stomach hurt from the lack of breakfast due to feeling of sickness that plagued him in the morning.

His vision blurs even more with Rantaro in his peripheral vision, who is walking to his desk. Shuichi doesn't feel like talking to Rantaro with the stress of Kokichi stacked up in his head. Although his fear of Rantaro slightly evaporated with the events the took place the previous day, he wasn't as frightening to talk to as he first thought. "Hey." Rantaro starts with a smile.

"Hey." Shuichi says softly, eyes glued to his desk.

"How are you doing?"

"I'm goood." Shuichi responds.

"Have you heard anything from Ouma?" Rantaro's small smile dissipated.

"Noo..."

"The guy is a real pain in the ass, but I can't help but worry about the situation." Rantaro crosses his
arms, "I'm sensitive to that sort of thing, having twelve younger sisters, and all." He huffs.

Shuichi hums slightly in response.

Rantaro continues, "I think you're one of the only people that can get through to him. What happened yesterday evening seemed very personal to him, and I don't think Akamatsu-san, Iruma-san, or myself, would feel right talking to him about it." Rantaro uncrosses his arms and places his hands into his pockets, "But, I feel like you two have some sort of mutual understanding of something, even if I don't know what it is." He sighs, "I know we don't talk a lot, but I think both of you care about each-other in some way."

"I just don't like seeing people in that sort of pain, even if they are rat bastards." Rantaro hums, "and I guess I'm also asking how you're doing, not as a pleasantry, but as an actual question."

Shuichi forces himself to connect his eyes with Rantaro's stare. His brain shakes in the heat of eye contact, but he has to be convincing. "I'm dooing alright... thank youu." He forces a smile to get Rantaro to leave him alone.

"I'm sorry if I'm overstepping some boundaries, but you seem like a pretty cool guy. Let's hang out sometime, okay?" Rantaro's smile returned to his face.

"Soounds nice..." Shuichi ripped his eyes away from him, giving Rantaro his cue to leave. Anxiety washing away from Shuichi's body as Rantaro walks back to his seat. The bell soon rang, and Shuichi let his mind be filled with information that probably won't benefit him in the long run.

__________________________________________________________________________________________

[SENT TUESDAY, 11:32PM]

'Hey, are you okay? -S.S'

'Ouma-kun, you're always up late. Please respond. -S.S'
Shuichi's eyes glazed onto his phone's screen over yesterday's text messages, and noticing that Kokichi finally decided to open his texts, he felt a lump of relief settle in his body. Laying in his dark bedroom infusing with the warmth of a Wednesday afternoon, he tests his luck texting Kokichi.

'How are you? -S.S'

...

'Oh!' His phone buzzed with an incoming text.

'Hey, Saihara-chan! I'm doing absolutely fantastic! I've been suuuper busy with supreme leader duties. We just won a secret war between my organization and the Russian government, how exciting!'

'Is that really the reason you weren't at school today? -S.S'
Shuichi feels like he shouldn't press his luck with this conversation too far, at least he knows that Kokichi is safe, and not caught up in any of the worst situations that his thoughts decided to engrain into Shuichi's head. But...

'I don't mean to pry, but... Can you tell me what happened yesterday evening? -S.S'

'You guys were being losers, so I ditched. Akamatsu-chan, Amami-chan, and the whore were all boring. I was practically falling asleep in my seat!'

'That's not what I'm talking about, and you know it. -S.S'

'Ugh, now Saihara-chan is being lame, too? If you don't mean to pry, then don't, dumbass.'

'I'm just worried about you... -S.S'

'Then stop being so kind.'

'Stop worrying about me.'

'I'm sorry. -S.S'
Tears, again. Shuichi's body fills with a sleepy dread, and he lets his mind dissociate into the fuzziness of nothingness.

He'll deal with everything,

later.

Kokichi didn't show up to class for the rest of the week, leaving Shuichi without his social security blanket and a shifting loneliness in his throat and chest. He felt lonely before meeting Kokichi, sure, but the abyss of isolation feels even more suffocating without his friend.

He wakes up on his day off, with the morning sun pushing through his window, spilling light all over Shuichi's usually dark room. His head is full of fuzz and the feeling of familiar confusion that's a common occurrence for mornings like these. His heart hurts, and his eyes feel like stinging sulfur when he tries to open them. He does his bare minimum of a morning routine, pertaining to a quick shower, and a single slice of toast and butter. Shuichi's uncle wouldn't be home until the next weekend, so his room is still a mess from lack of motivation to clean.

Hours of doing nothing and wasting away in bed pass by.
Shuichi's phone receives a text, and he quickly reaches to his desk to retrieve it.

'It's from Ouma.'

'Hey, Saihara-chan! Can I come over to your place? I'm sooooo bored.'

'Um, sure... I guess? Do you know my address? -S.S'

'Yep! Open your door.'

'Wait, what?' he thought.

"Saihara-chan!" Shuichi opens his front door to find a smiling Ouma in front of him. He's not dressed nearly as badly from the last time they spent time together on the weekend. Kokichi is dressed in a pair of simple jeans and a blue sweater, with a hairband pulling his bangs back, 'Cute' Shuichi notes.

Wait, 'cute'?

Shuichi forces the thought away and focuses on the bigger issue presented, "Um... hi, hoow doo youo knoow my address?" Shuichi questioned.

"Akamatsu-chan gave me it when she gave me your phone number." Kokichi giggled.

Shuichi stands puzzled for a while, until Kokichi whines, "Sooooooo.... can I come in? I'm melting out here!"

"O-ooh, yeah. Please c-coome in." Shuichi nods. He leads Kokichi into his disaster of a room, quickly picking up what he can and moving dirty laundry on the bed into his hampers. "I'm soorry
foor the mess... I just doon't have much mootivatioo...on to clean."

"This is nothing compared to the state of my room! I don't think I've cleaned mine in a year," Kokichi exclaims.

"A year? Are youu serious? Doon't youour parents get mad?"

Kokichi adverts his gaze from Shuichi for a couple seconds before returning it with an expression Shuichi can't entirely figure out. "I'm a supreme leader! I can do whatever I feel like doing, how cool! Am I right?"

"I guess... Youo shoould still c-clean yoour room soome time." Shuichi smiles, feeling the warmth of Kokichi's personality rubbing into his soul.

Shuichi finishes making his bed, and offering a seat to Kokichi. Shuichi doesn't really know what to do with himself, and he doesn't want to freak Kokichi out by sitting with him, so he stands. Kokichi plops himself down on Shuichi's bed, letting out a sigh, and closing his eyes for a couple seconds. Sitting comfortably and basking in the afternoon sun mixed with Shuichi's scent.

"Why did yoou ask to c-coome oover? I thoought yoou were mad at me." Shuichi says sadly.

Ouma opens his eyes and starts to giggle, making Shuichi's face heat up slightly, not entirely understanding why. "I could never be mad at my dear Saihara-chan!" Kokichi leans back into his hands, "I just haven't seen you in a while... and I felt lonely."

"Loonely?" Shuichi questions.

Kokichi's expression snaps, "That's a lie, of course! I have all of my servants and comrades to keep me company, y'know? Nishishishi~" Kokichi's face changes into a warm neutrality, one that Shuichi is comfortable with seeing. "I thought Saihara-chan wanted to see me, since he's such a worry-butt."

"I was woorried, Oouma."

"That's dangerous~! What if I were to die, Saihara-chan? You're a kind person, so I think it'd hurt
you lots! I'm just telling you to stop worrying about me."

'Die?'

'Die, die... Die, die ... die?'

'Die? Ouma-kun, dying?'

'What is he talking about? What is he talking about? Dying?'

Shuichi feels a different kind of anxiety fill his lungs and throat, "Die? Huh? Oouma... Please don't say that. I really don't want you to die." Shuichi's hands start sweating as various chills run down his body.

"It's just a hypothetical situation, stop stressing about it." Kokichi says.

'Hypothetical?'

Kokichi continues, "I just don't want to hurt you, and I guess... if something were to happen to me, you wouldn't be sad about it! Because Saihara-chan doesn't deserve to be sad. I want you to stop caring, so I can't do that." Kokichi finishes.

'Stop caring...?'

'Stop caring.'
"Stop caring, stop caring, stop caring, stop caring, stop caring..."

"I'm gooing to care!" Shuichi starts, "I...I think you're one of the only I've felt... I've felt..." Tears burn in his eyes as Shuichi choke on his own words, the feeling of word vomit spewing out, burning his heart, "c-comfortable around... I don't feel bad around you, I don't feel bad..." His cheeks are wet, "I forget everything bad... I don't want to stoop c-c-caring about you!"

He hics, "I was soo afraid oof you... I was afraid oof letting myself bec-come attached to soomeone. I was... afraid of saying the wrong things and embarrassing myself." His sobs resounded throughout his dark bedroom. Kokichi is sitting still and taking in every word of Shuichi. "B-but noow thaa-" Shuichi's hics mix in with his words, his wet voice grossly lacing into his speech. "Noow that I c-c-c...are, I c-can't stoop... And I think I'm oonly... realizing it n-noow... but, I-I just appreciate you sooo much, K-k-kook-kiichi..."

"Please don't tell me to stoop caring..."

Kokichi let's out a shaky breath and hurries to his feet to pull Shuichi into an embrace. He wasn't sure who he was comforting, him or Shuichi, he just wanted to feel warm. Shuichi sobs deeply into Kokichi's soft hair and wrapping his arms around the smaller boy.

"Please don't stop caring about me, then..." Kokichi concludes.

Chapter End Notes

again, thanks for all the support for this fic.

love you guys <3

discord: si#1718

instagram: @cowmaeda
forget me.

Chapter Notes

happy birthday, shuichi!
I wanted to write something for him but I'm still in the middle of writing a rough draft ):)
so here we have it!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Forget-me-nots are probably my favorite flower!

I can't exactly put my finger as on to why, but, I've been thinking about them a lot lately.
How strange, right?

Lets see...

Their color?

The brilliant blues with the cacophony of gold tinge in the centers?
Absolutely captivating.

Their scent?

Sweet, but not overly sweet. It's a smell I can smell all day and be comfortable wrapping myself in.

Are forget-me-nots insecure? Is that where they get their names from?

A fear of being forgotten? I think most flowers would feel that sort of insecurity, but...

The forget-me-nots that I know would not prefer the name, and to keep only the "forget me" part.
Is it the same sort of insecurity that other forget-me-nots have?

I don't think it is,

But that's the kind of forget-me-nots that I've happened to fall in love with.

Chapter End Notes

I wonder who's perspective this is from...
hmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm....

discord: si#1718
sister.

Chapter Notes

hi guys its been a while, I know.

ive had the first half of this chapter written for over a month but I decided to finish it up today

school is going better than last time I updated . still sucks tho

thank you so much for everyone's kind words and support about it

I love you all and please enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was the last week before his summer break, and a boring Monday morning droned into Shuichi's head when he woke. Anxious to get through the week, and to spend an entire month sitting in his room with the AC on full blast. Although the Monday mornings he experiences are irritating, he doesn't feel so much irritation this time around. He feels well-rested, and comfortable. He feels as all the ice in his body has melted into pure light. He recalls the previous afternoon spent with Kokichi, talking and joking around, just enjoying each other's warm presence.

Shuichi felt a crescendo of motivation spread throughout his body, trumpets and percussion filling his heart. He takes more consideration into his appearance while he's dressing himself for school, and decides to pack himself lunch. He's not entirely sure if it's his place, but, he makes sure to pack extra food.

"Hey, doo yooou want to eat together?" Shuichi hovers over Kokichi's desk, the lunch bell just ringing as a nervousness shakes him.

"Hmm? Sure!" Kokichi places his phone into his bag, "Do you need me to order food for you again?" he patiently smiles.

"Oh, uh... No. I brouught my lunch tooday. I just wanted to spend time with youu, I guess."
"How sweet! My beloved Saihara-chan is so adorable!" Kokichi stands.

Heat rises to Shuichi's face, and he doesn't exactly know what to do with his hands. "Uh, thanks? Um... Err..." It's a different feeling of nervousness, not a feeling that makes his heart sink and his soul shrink. This feeling is one of squirming embarrassment, but not exactly the bad kind. Shuichi can't exactly process this new emotion, with him mostly worrying about the conversation moving along.

"Let's head to the cafeteria, then!" Kokichi's beaming smile melting into Shuichi's anxiety.

"Oh, I, uh... prefer eating in another area... if it's fine with you."

"That's a-okay with me! Wherever you feel like eating."

Shuichi nods and leads Kokichi through the busy halls and up to the school roof. The only other person on the roof was the school's legendary tennis player, Hoishi Ryoma. He was sitting on a bench, far away from the entrance, but he briefly made eye contact with Shuichi and nodded. Shuichi takes Kokichi to his usual seat.

"He's usually here when I come to sit up here, but we don't talk." Shuichi says, as he sits on his preferred bench.

Kokichi hums as he sits down, his arms supporting his leaning. "So, what's the special occasion? You don't usually pack lunch, and you always bother me to order lunch for you."

"Bother? I'm sorry if I bo-

"That's a lie! You really think that you bother me?" A warm smile shifts onto Kokichi's small face, "I don't think that Saihara-chan could ever, truly, bother me. In fact, I would think the complete opposite." Kokichi slips a tiny laugh.

"What do you mean by that, exactly?" Shuichi asks.

"I mean... Like..." Kokichi hums, "Most people on this god forsaken earth bother the hell out of me. People always do the same dumb things over, and over, and over again. It's so predictable, and so..."
"I think you're genuinely, a good person, and that's defiantly not a lie. It feels like... you're real, y'know? If we sat in silence for hours and hours, I'd feel happy, just because you're there."

"I'm a liar, but... I find it hard to lie to you. If that makes any sense."

"Oh..."

"But seriously, what's the special occasion?" Kokichi giggles.

"Nothing really... I just had some extra time today."

"Extra time? Is that why you're extra handsome today?" Kokichi's smile turns into a sheepish grin.

"I-I guess... I did pay a little more attention to my hair... this... morning." He felt lumps in his throat from Kokichi's constant compliments.

"Hey Oouma... do you want any of this?" Shuichi points a chopstick towards his lunch, "I think I packed too much and I'm already full."

"No." Kokichi blatantly states.

"Are you sure?"

"Not hungry." Kokichi mutters.

"I think... that's a lie."
"Jeez, I just said I find it hard lying to you. You're going to disregard my feelings just like that? How cruel, Saihara-chan!"

"I'm definitely not disregarding your feelings! I'm just... c-concerned... aboout youu."

"I don't feel like eating, that's all."

"But youu never do."

"I know... I just, don't have much an appetite now-a-days. It's hard for me to eat, okay?"

"I'm noot going to foorce youo to eat... I'm just, so woorried, K-k-k-ko-k-k-"

"Hey, hey... You don't have to..." his hand drops to his lap, "force yourself..."

They sit in an uncomfortable silence for what feels like hours.

"If Saihara-chan really wants me to eat, then I will!" Kokichi steals the bento from Shuichi's lap and picks up his used chopsticks. He picks up a lump of rice, and hesitates for a moment. He lifts the clump of rice before settling it in his mouth, chewing painfully slowly, before eventually picking up pace and lifting more clumps to his face. Shuichi is delighted, and it feels like a huge weight has been lifted off of him.

"Would you like some water?" Shuichi asks.

"Mhm." Kokichi thrums through his rice-stuffed face.

Kokichi finishes Shuichi's half-lunch within a few minutes, "You cooked this yourself, right?" he wipes his mouth with his sleeve, "I can't cook to save my life. The last time I tried to make something, was spaghetti."
"I burnt the spaghetti, and the butter."

"And the water."

Shuichi chokes out a laugh, "Hoow do yooou even burn water?"

"I don't know what I did wrong, but I did." Kokichi's eyes become half-lidded as he targets his gaze towards the rooftop. "My sister and I were throwing up for days."

"Yoo... Have a sister?" Shuichi turns his head to Kokichi.

Kokichi doesn't return the gesture, "Yeah..." he mumbles.

"What's her name?"

"...

"Keiko."

"K-keik-koo? That's a pretty name, if I was able to say it c-coorectly."

"Mhm. Don't worry about that so much, Saihara. I think you said it perfectly." he gives a sad smile.

The lunch bells rings, preventing Shuichi from asking anymore questions.

Shuichi feels his mind tossing and turning against itself, with the added weight of world history filling his head to a boiling point of over stimulation. His teacher called for partners for a portion of class, and Shuichi felt his bones vibrate and his heart racing.
He'd most likely be the last one to be picked.

'No one would want to work with me.'

A tap on the shoulder rips him from the tundra curdling in his head. The real world comes into his view again.

"Saihara-kun, would you like to partner up?" asks Kaede. Her pleasant smile is always present, and her body language is open and expressive. Shuichi admired that sort of charisma.

"Uhm... Sure." he nods.

The rest of the class shuffles seats and Kaede takes her place in the desk next to Shuichi.

"So," she pulls out sparkly pens from her pencil holder, "do you have the answers for the Roman empire area?"

Shuichi nods, "Yeah, I have most of them..." he slides his paper to Kaede's desk, "Here."

"Ah, this is perfect!" she un-caps a blue pen, "Here, I did the Byzantine part so it's a perfect exchange!" she hands the paper to Shuichi.

The pair took a couple minutes to write down each other's answers, and Shuichi felt comfortable in the laid back atmosphere of the classroom and Kaede's personality.

"So Saihara-kun," she starts talking while writing, "how is Ouma-kun doing?" she asks.

"Oh... uh..." he wasn't really expecting any other conversation, "He's alright."

"I had class with him this morning, he seemed to be in a better mood but he was quieter than usual..." she sighs, "I don't think he likes showing what he's feeling. I think a lot of guys are like that,
She looks up at Shuichi, "Even though he can be trouble sometimes, I'm glad to see you coming out of your shell a little bit, Saihara-kun." she continues writing.

"Yeah... I agree." Shuichi looks to Kaede's paper and back to his.

“So, what do you like to do in your free time?”

“Huh?”

“Oh sorry! I just think that we don't know too much about each other, let's change that! I think you’re a pretty neat guy, Saihara-kun.”

“Oh… uh..”

He honestly felt relieved and flattered, warmed by this shining star that's reaching out and giving him an opportunity. He gains more motivation to speak and he lets his words flow.

“I like to read, and sometimes coook. I help my unc-cle from time to time with c-cases.”

“That's pretty interesting! I don't really have other hobbies besides piano. You got into this school because of your status as a detective, right?”

“Mmm... yeah, I help the poolice from time to time... it's noothing really that impressive, but… i’d like to be as goood as a detec-ctive as my unc-cle is.”

“That's really admirable, Saihara-kun! Detectives have extremely hard jobs.”

Sounds drown out in Shuichi’s ears, the conversations of other students in the classroom don’t register.
“Hey, uh…” she clears her throat, “Do you have a hard time talking… or pronouncing words?”

“Huh? Oh. Erm…” Shuichi looks to the wall beside him to avoid Kaede’s piercing eye contact.

The eye contact that always makes his brain shake and his lungs feel cold.

“Oh! Did I… offend you? I'm so sorry! I didn't really mean to, i’m just curious since I don't hear you talk very often. It's kind of exciting, actually!” she tries to reassure him.

He looks down at his paper

“Oh… I guess I do… I c-can't talk… very well.” he feels the waterworks already forming, and he hopes Kaede doesn't notice. “I'm sorry.”

“Why are you apologizing?” she worryingly addresses.

“I knoow that.. my vooice is weird.”

‘Suck it up, suck it up. Stop getting so damn emotional whenever this happens.’ he tries to wipe his eyes without her noticing.

“It’s not at all! It wasn't my intention to make fun of you! I should be sorry for asking about a personal thing”

“It's alright... “ he let out a small, shaky breath of air.

“I think-k yyou’re really k-kind, Ak-kamatsu-san.”

She giggles “Thanks, I think you’re also a really kind person Saihara-kun, even if we don't talk
much, I can tell.”

He can't help but smile, the once shivering feeling he held moments ago, all but evaporated.

The teacher called time and Kaede stands up. She smooths her hands over her skirt and looks back to Shuichi, “Thanks, Saihara-kun. If you ever need to talk, let me know. You have my number!” she waves and goes back to her seat.

Shuichi folded his assignment.

“Saihara-chan!!!”

Familiar footsteps and a familiar voice come thundering behind Shuichi. He turns around right before exiting the front school gate to see a nostalgic scene unravel before him.

A panting and yelling Kokichi eagerly catches up to Shuichi.

“Yes?” Shuichi questions.

“Let’s walk home together, kay?” Kokichi states.

“Is your home even in the direction of mine?”

“Nah, but it's cool… don't feel like going home immediately anyways! I wanna spend time with Saihara-chan!”

“If it's alright with you, then…”
Shuichi leads the way out of the school building, with Kokichi following suit. They eventually ditch the mass majority of walking students after a couple of minutes.

“It's so hot outside” Kokichi starts,”I wish it was cold so Saihara-chan could be romantic and offer me his jacket.”

“Yeah, but then I’d be cold, wouldn't you be wearing a jacket too?”

“Sure, but I get cold reeeally easily. I have to bring my fall blazer with me into class so I won't freeze to death.”

“The s-cchool isn't that c-coold, yoou knoow”

“Pfff, yeah… but it's cold for me”

“Right.”

They turn a street corner, where Shuichi’s apartment further resides.

“So, what are you going to do for your summer break?”

“I doon't knoow… I usually just… stay at home all day, I guess.”

“Let’s change that, then! You can take me to the zoo, or a museum, or the summer festival!”

“Are youu implying I’ll take youu, and pay for everything?”

“Of course! A supreme leader needs to learn how to finance, after all. I can't be spending all my money on dates!” Kokichi gives a mischievous smirk.
“Dates?”

“Of course, that's a lie! I'd spend any amount of money because I'm filthy rich, baby!”

“Uh… right.”

‘Dates…’

“Hey, what do you mean by…”

‘It's probably just him being weird, or something'

“Nevermind.”

“Tell me, Saihara-chan! I hate when people leave me hanging!” He poked Shuichi’s arm.

“It's not important, besides, we’re already here.” Shuichi stands in his doorway, opening the small apartment with his keys.

“Awwww come on… tell me…! I'll send my goons after you to have you assassinated if you don't confess right now!” Kokichi crosses his arms.

And with that, Shuichi closed the door in his face, hearing a muffled, “I know where you live! I'll murder you in your sleep, you dumb idiot!”

‘What did you want to say!!!!’
Shuichi’s phone buzzed around 18:23

‘You’re still on about that? -S.S.’

‘Of course.’

‘It wasn’t really anything important. -S.S.’

‘If you say so!’

Shuichi closed the messenger app, and he let the early night take him to rest.

Chapter End Notes

discord: si#1718
instagram: @cowmaeda
Shuichi wakes up on the Friday morning before summer break. He feels more tired than usual, with the clutches of sleep still having a firm grip onto his heavy eyes. He yawns and shuffles out of bed, thoughts still incoherent and loose ‘Uncle.’ he thought.

‘Uncle. Coming….’

‘Oh!’ his mind snapped into awareness. His room was a mess, as usual, with socks astray and dirty clothes tossed around. He somehow forgot that his uncle would be staying for the next week starting tomorrow. He almost considered not attending school to clean his apartment, but he has an essay due today that he couldn't afford to miss.

Shuichi is brushing his teeth as incoherent thoughts become more sophisticated and awake. ‘I wonder if Ouma-kun is awake right now?’

He spits midway,

‘I wonder if Ouma-kun would like my uncle, maybe I could invite him over.’

‘I wonder if Ouma-kun’s hair naturally sticks up like that, I've never touched it.’

Tired eyes stare back at him in the mirror, ‘I want to touch his hair.’

He spits again.

‘That's normal, right?’
His face heats up, almost on a predetermined timer that just went off. He rubs one of his hands against his cheek to the point of irritation.

‘Who am I kidding.’

...

‘I wonder if Ouma-kun…’

‘No Ouma-kun today.’ He scans his eyes around his second period class, ‘It's understandable I guess, it is the Friday before summer break.’ Shuichi pulls out his phone just to make sure.

‘No school today? What's up? -S.S’

It still is relatively early in the day, so he expects Kokichi to be catching up on rest. He closes his phone as the bell rings.

“Saihara-kun!” Kaede shouts as Shuichi was about to leave his second period classroom. She quickly walks up to him, “Would you like to eat lunch with us?”

“Us?” he softly says.

“Momota-kun, Harukawa-san, Amami-kun, and Miu.”

‘That's... a lot of people’ he thinks to himself, ‘I'll probably be a downer... I'll end up being afraid of
saying anything, and I'll make it awkward for everyone’ his breaths become shaky.

‘I wish Ouma-kun was here, it’s always easier with him. I can't do this by myself, and I'll screw everything up.’

‘I’ll—’

Heat.

Kaede’s touch to Shuichi’s shoulder snaps him out of the icy cracks grooving into his mind. “Saihara-kun, don't cry.” she looks at him with a comforting look.

“Here.” she grabs his wrist and drags him back into the classroom.

“Guys, you probably already know,” she releases her grip and pats Shuichi’s shoulder. “This is Saihara-kun!” she nods.

“Yeah, you went with us to the arcade.” Rantaro’s hands were leaning against the desk.

“Arcade? Why didn't you invite us?” Kaito asks.

“You don't remember? You were too busy sucking face with Haru-jacky.” Miu crosses her arms.

Maki just gives Miu a death stare and Miu quiets down immediately.

“Saihara, bro!” Kaito outstretched his hand to Shuichi, “Nice to meet you!”

Shuichi slowly stretches his hand to meet Kaito’s, with Kaito harshly shaking that rippled to the rest of Shuichi’s body. “I'm Momota Kaito” he points to himself, and then to the girl standing next to him, “This is Harukawa Maki!”
“Hello.” she nods.

Of course Shuichi already knew everyone, he spent hours listening to their conversations during class. They just didn't know anything about him.

Shuichi can't find his voice to speak, so he only waves.

“Let's eat in here for today, is that okay?” Kaede asks.

“Is that okay with the teacher?” Rantaro lays his backpack down.

“He let Miu and I eat in here the other day.” she replies.

Rantaro only nodded.

Shuichi was lucky to pack his lunch today, because he didn't feel like going to the cafeteria and coming back. Kokichi was absent as well, so he couldn't order food for him.

He was also silently appreciative of Kaede’s suggestion to eat in the classroom, with less noise and people. The others sat in a circle in the center of the classroom.

“Did you do the project for advanced kanji?”

“No, who even does his ridiculous projects when he only offers a small percentage of points for them?”

Noise.

“I'm so stressed out, this school can really pressure you sometimes.”

White Noise.
It doesn't matter who's talking. He could hear every word said but not process anything.

The sound a TV makes when it has no reception. He can't breathe.

He feels a familiar warmth seep through his shoulder. “Saihara-kun?” Kaede’s hand rests on Shuichi. He realizes that the circle has become silent, and all eyes were on him.

“Yes?” he heavily breathes.

“What do you think?”

“About what?”

“You heard about the extra credit for bringing in supplies for world history, right?” she sighs, “I think it's quite unfair, especially for people who don't have the time or money for it.”

“Yeah… I agree.” he nods.

“What's on your mind? You seem kind of spacey.” Anami lifts a pretzel to his mouth, “Well, I guess
“You're always kinda spacey.”

“Do you not want to eat with us or some shit?” Miu exclaims.

“That's... noot it.”

“Then what is?” Maki gives Shuichi a bored expression.

“I... uh...” he swallows, hoping the others couldn't hear it, “I'm soorry.” Shuichi quickly packs his lunch up and sprints out of the classroom. He could hear a faint, “Saihara-kun!” as he shut the classroom door.

He makes a beeline for the men's restroom, shutting himself into a big stall and immediately sliding down the wall. His face feels like lava mixed with a freezing burn stinging in his eyes. ‘I'm so useless’ his mind ruptures.

He shoves his hands into his hair and starts pulling. His heart is racing, and he can't stop crying, no matter how many times he wipes his eyes in an attempt to stop. He feels like filling up the bathroom sink and drowning himself. ‘I'm so useless.’

‘I'm so useless.’ he feels like his throat is closing in on itself, he chokes an irritated sob.

Minutes feel like hours as the temperature in his body contrasts with itself, a cold in his core and hot in his head. ‘I'm so useless, I'm so useless, I'm so useless, I'm so useless, I'm so useless’

“Saihara?” he heard a knock on his stall door.

Shit. ‘Leave me alone Amami.’ he thinks. ‘Just go away, go away, go away...’

“You don't have to open the door, just, Akamatsu asked me to check on you.”
He doesn't respond.

“You don't have to say anything. We just wanted to let you know that whatever you're going through…” he sighs,

“You don't have to go through it alone.”

He forces himself not to make any noise, not even to breathe.

“The bell rings in five minutes.” he hears his footsteps leaving the bathroom, “See you later, Saihara.”

Rantaro left the bathroom, leaving Shuichi’s mind focusing on the cold floor he was laying on. He traced his fingers in between the tiles, feeling the texture of dirt and grit collect in his finger. The only things in existence: his fingers, the tiles on the floor, and the grit in between the cracks.

Kokichi.

He quickly reaches for his bag to retrieve his phone. His fingers gliding across the screen, heart dropping into his shallow stomach.

‘where are you. -S.S’

He bites his lip, hoping to draw blood, but he feels too weak.

‘please kokichi im so scared i hate this i hate school and people trying to be kind to me i just want you here. -S.S’

He hears the deafening screech of the school bell ring in his ears. He wasn't going to stick around the rest of the day. It didn't matter any way, since it was the day before summer break.
He forces himself up from the floor, knees wobbly and weak. Shuichi clasped the bar on the stall wall to support his weight. He moves through the crowd of students to exit the school building, not bothering to sign out properly.

He was home in minutes, and eventually asleep in his bed.
Thank you to SelenaShuu for taking the time to draw this amazing art adsjfdsajfk !!! I love it so much and thank you thank you! aAAAAAAA

Chapter End Notes

ill probably write one more chapter before I eventually get burn out and not update for a
month again.

id rather write when im at my most creative anyways since it sucks to write when I have writers block.

anyways i plan to make all of you suffer so prepare.

discord: si#1718
rotten citrus.

Chapter Notes

sorry for the wait, was kind of afraid to write this chapter because I wasn't sure if I wanted the story to go this way but uh.... yeah now I'm pretty sure.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He feels a certain chill run through his body, and an undesirable scent that scorched his nose.

Rotten citrus and burnt lilac that's sickly sweet, staining his senses and slowly suffocating his vision.

It smells like death, is he dead?

‘am I dead?’ he thinks, as it’s not obvious.

Although his vision is drowned by the white noise and his nose blocking sight, he witnesses blobs of white staining his peripheral vision.

A certain and familiar laughter accompanies the milky lights.

‘am I dead?’ he asks again, although is mouth remains still.

Shuichi sees Him, His small face smiling pleasantly into Shuichi’s innards. When was he cut open? His nonexistent intestines spill out, having an inexact color that's hard to put into words,

it didn't hurt.

Shuichi looks up again to find Him turn into Her, face horrifyingly morph against itself, and revealing that same smile of deceit masked by innocence.
It wasn't actual innocence nor deceit, nothing felt real when it came to Her.

“am I dead?”

“possibly.” she responds.

“what happened?”

she remains silent.

…

“Huh?”

Shuichi wakes up with a startle on Saturday morning, feeling out of place and removed from his surroundings. His heart is racing, and his breath is just starting to catch up with him. The inside of his nose feels cracked, and his eyes are filled with a strange, stinging sensation. He immediately searches for his phone, screwing up his password a couple times before opening the bright screen.

He opens the messenger app on his phone to find his messages sent to Kokichi are still on delivered. ‘He’s probably busy,’ he places his phone back onto his desk, ‘He does have a secret organization, I guess.’

‘Still…’ the certain feeling of an unidentified panic settles within Shuichi. He blames it on his anxiety warming him up again, and he ignores the cold feeling in his finger muscles.

Shuichi yawns quietly and breathes in the scent of breakfast. His uncle is probably home by now, and Shuichi hasn't finished cleaning his room. Another weight added to his ever growing amount of daily panic. He silently wishes his uncle doesn't enter his room and scorn him for the mess. Shuichi changes into a new pair of clothes, peeling off the nightmare-induced sweat staining his fabric, and he makes his way downstairs.

He sees his uncle sitting in the small kitchen, cup of coffee resting near his right hand, and a sudoku sheet near his left. “Hey, Shuichi.”
“Good morning.” Shuichi yawns.

“How is school? Keeping up with grades?”

“Yeah, the work isn't particularly hard.”

His uncle fills in a number and greets Shuichi’s eyes. “Sit down, I haven't seen you in a while.” He yawns, “Work has been driving me crazy.”

“I can say the same” Shuichi seats himself across from his uncle. “Except, it's school… I guess.” he sighs.

“I thought you said it was fine?”

“I'm complaining for no reason. It's been better, but it is what it is.”

Shuichi’s uncle gives him a sour look, “Feel free to complain, I'd like to know what goes through your teenage brain sometimes.”

“Nothing… really.” he removes his eye contact briefly.

He only receives a sigh from his uncle, “Want to go out to eat? There's this cafe in the city I always pass by, but I've never actually been before.”

“Aren't you already drinking coffee?” Shuichi questions.

“It's de-caf.” he stands to rinse his cup. Shuichi observed quietly. Despite his Saihara family status, Shuichi doesn’t resemble his uncle at all. He has dry, textured, black hair, which contrasts sharply with Shuichi’s sleek, glops of blue mess.

Another thing to remind him of the distance between them. How different they are, how Shuichi will
never live up to his uncle’s status. ‘How I’ll always disappoint him.’ he shudders inwardly and turns his attention back to the conversation.

“Alright,” he says,

‘I feel disgusting’ he thinks.

“Soounds nice.” he says,

‘I hate to be such a disappointment to you.’ he thinks.

“I'm going to shower first.” he says,

‘I feel disgusting’ he thinks. He wipes the oil staining his forehead against his shirt.

The atmosphere of the cafe is pleasant. The ceiling lights are dimmed, with only sun lamps giving the establishment light. It smells like coffee and cinnamon, and it isn't particularly busy.

Shuichi checks his phone.

The hostess seats Shuichi and his uncle, hands them menus, then quickly asks for their drink orders.

Shuichi checks his phone.

His uncle orders a small black coffee, “And you?” the waitress said with a gleam, eye contact pouring into Shuichi’s vision.

Shuichi hurriedly looks to his uncle with a flustered twist in his cheeks. His uncle seems to
understand and slightly waves to the hostess’s attention. “He'll have the same thing, but with half and half creamer.”

The hostess nods and writes down their orders onto her notepad. “I'll be back with you shortly.” She leaves to an area behind the counter.

“Thank you.” Shuichi inspects the grooves in the wooden table.

Shuichi checks his phone.

“I'm not going to be there all the time to do this for you, you know?” Shuichi’s face down-pan into a look of embarrassment.

“It's okay.” His uncle reassures, and he folds his hands together, “Anyways, I needed to talk to you about something.”

He feels a shock of nervousness infecting his body, “What is it?”

“I think I may have to sell the apartment near the police station, but the one we live in is too far away.”

“So… we may have to move?” He questions.

“Perhaps, it's still up in the air since I'm not sure about selling it yet.” he sighs, “It shouldn't impact your school or anything, but I may start driving you every morning.”

“If we move?” he asks.

“If we move.”

Shuichi nods.
Shuichi checks his phone.

“What’s up?” his uncle observes him.

“What?”

“You keep looking at your phone, what's wrong? Or are you just bored by an old man like me?”

Shuichi’s hands become clammy, “No, I’m just concerned… about something.”

“What?”

He gives in, “I made a friend, and he hasn’t responded to my text in a while… and he didn’t show up to school yesterday.”

“Maybe he’s just preoccupied?” his uncle suggests.

“I guess. It's just not like him.”

The waitress comes again to deliver their drinks. She places them accordingly and smiles. Shuichi’s uncle nods in appreciation. She leaves and Shuichi stares at the steaming mug in front of him.

“Who’s the friend, then?”

“I believe I’ve mentioned him before. It was the new student with the weird talent.”

“Oh? Mr. 10,000 member organization guy? I remember. That’s kind of a strange friendship, huh?”

“He’s not so bad… He’s interesting and fun to be around, I guess.”
His uncle gives him a wide smile, “I’m glad, Shuichi. Don’t worry so much like you always do. I’m sure he’s busy, you did say he has an entire organization.” he takes a sip of his black coffee.

“I was thinking that…” Shuichi observes his uncle’s wrinkles in his hands covering the mug. “I’m sorry for being rude, by… e-coonstantly chec-cking… my phoone.”

‘I'm so difficult.’ Shuichi feels the familiar sense of coldness arise in his chest, and his mind falling into the invasive thoughts of ‘stupid’ and, ‘dumb’ and, ‘retarded’ and…

‘why can't you speak correctly?’ and,

‘i'm sorry you have to deal with this, uncle.’

Even now he felt as he was ruining his company with his uncle by thinking this way. He didn’t deserve to think such self deprecating thoughts while they were just trying to enjoy themselves. ‘Suck it up.’ he scolds himself.

‘Suck it up, suck it up, suck it up.’ He tries leveling his breathing, and he forces eye contact back to his uncle’s face.

His uncle only gives him a sad smile.

"It's fine.” He says.

‘What's the point of even assigning homework over a long break?’ Shuichi grumbles to himself, with his hand aching from the constant writing.

It was around 8:00PM and Shuichi’s room felt nice. The AC being at a comfortable temperature, and soft music playing from his earphones. He decided to distract himself from the burning feeling of worry by doing as much homework as he could. He also didn't feel like doing it all at the last minute, like he did last year.
Although he is terrible at speaking and constructing adequate conversation, Shuichi really always enjoys expressing himself through writing school papers. He likes his teachers, however, he's much too scared to actually talk to them. But, writing for school is Shuichi’s way of showing his teachers that in fact, he exists.

That he's here.

That he's a living, breathing person with ideas.

Shuichi stops his pen and yawns. His eyes peer to his bed, and he turns his desk light off. He plops himself onto his cold bed and lies comfortably, sucking up the feeling of chill blankets. His eyes droop sleepily until he feels a sudden vibration coming from his phone.

‘Ouma-kun is calling you! Accept / Decline’

Shuichi hurriedly presses accept and lifts the phone to his ear, “Oouma?”

A meek voice echoes through the speaker, “Mmn, Saihara-chan.” a loud cough rings through Shuichi’s phone.

“Um, are you okay?”

“Heheh, can you come here… please.”

“Huh? Oouma what's going on?”

“Mmm… I'll text you address——” another hacking cough aches Shuichi’s ears.

“Alright, just… hold on please. I'll have my uncle drive me.”

Kokichi just makes an unidentifiable noise and hangs up.
Shuichi arrives at a tiny, run-down apartment complex that's 5 miles from his own house. His uncle looks over the number plates placed next to different apartments and doors. “It was 1622, right? Building B?” his uncle asks.

“No, 1633.” Shuichi runs his eyes down the different doors and numbers. He has the worst feeling imaginable, with his anxiety actually having a reason to act up. He feels that his organs have been all switched around as he keeps scanning numbers, with the feeling of a mallet hammering against his brain.

‘1628… 1629… 1630… 1631… 1632…’

“1633!” He almost runs to the door number, with his uncle following slowly suit. “Calm down, will you?” his uncle shouts, but Shuichi doesn't care.

Shuichi approaches the cracked, wooden door. He tries ringing the doorbell, but he doesn't think he heard anything from the inside. Must be broken.

He tries rapping at the door, to find that the door is already open. The door slowly creaks open, and Shuichi looks back at his uncle.

“I mean, you're sure this is his apartment, right?” his uncle scratches his head in reluctance.

“It's the oone he gave me…” Shuichi faces the door again and pushes it into the dark apartment. “This feels k-kinda weird… Like I'm noot suppsoosed to do this.”

His uncle follows him into the apartment, “You're okay, I'm here as well.” He gives Shuichi an affirmative pat on the shoulder.

“Oouma?” Shuichi finds a light switch and flips it on. It was a one room apartment, with another door presumably leading to the bathroom. The room is small and drafty. Clothes, old bowls of cereal, and ramen are stacked up against each other.
Rotten citrus and burnt lilac that's sickly sweet, staining his senses and slowly suffocating his vision.

It smells like death.

“Interesting set up for a supreme leader.” His uncle blankly states. Shuichi says nothing in return, as his couldn't with his throat burning in his stomach.

He makes his way to the single door and opens it gently. He sees Kokichi,

Sitting on the bathroom floor.

Head lollled to the side.

His breathing was uneven and raspy.

“...Hey… Oouma… hey.” Shuichi immediately falls to his knees to reach for Kokichi. “What's wroong… what's wroong?”

Kokichi makes a small noise and lifts his face to meet Shuichi’s. “Hi, Saihara-chan.” he slightly giggled and then cringed. Kokichi lifts his hand to his throat, and slides one of his legs to his chest.

Shuichi notices the patches of blood around his lips, “Are yoo hurt?”

“There's blood and bile in the sink.” says Shuichi’s uncle.

“Hey, Oouma…” Shuichi’s eyes become extremely hot, lava filled his tears as he holds Kokichi’s shoulder. “What h...happened.”

Kokichi’s dull face edged into a weak frown. “Didn't feel very good…” his eyes trains off of the pair. “Called Saihara-chan because －”
“Yoou're internally bleeding! Why didn't yoou c-call an ambulance!?” Shuichi shouts.

“Didn't feel like it.”

“What do yoou mean yoou didn't feel like it!”

“Dunno.”

“Kid, I'm driving you to the ER.” Shuichi’s uncle kneels down beside Kokichi. Kokichi doesn't say anything, or… responds at all. “C’mon, let's try to stand up. Can you walk?” he stretches a hand to the Kokichi.

Kokichi trains his eyes to his hand, taking it with an exasperated sigh. He stands with Shuichi’s added support. Kokichi’s entire body shakes violently, and his skinny knees wobble. He groans and turns to the sink to hack up more blood and vomit. Shuichi almost hears choking sobs mixed with the unpleasant coughing. He rubs circles into Kokichi’s back and Shuichi feels like he can't breathe.

He feels so hurt watching Kokichi like this. The lava tears won't stop flowing down his hot face. He can't breathe.

He can't breathe. He chokes out a broken sob, with his body becoming uneven and shaky. He feels as if earth doesn't exist, that everything has been removed from him, and he can't feel anything but Kokichi’s hacking noises and the vibrations he makes.

“You're okay,” his uncle looks into Shuichi’s bloodshot eyes. “I've got this taken care of, alright? We're going to drive him to the emergency room and he'll be fine.”

Shuichi hiccups and forces a nod to his uncle. “Mhm…” He feels Kokichi’s body stilling, and a small wind of relief breezes through Shuichi.

“Okay, one more thing.” His uncle says, “Can you find a bag around here?”

Chapter End Notes
yikes... sorry (^:  

I feel like the pacing is kind of weird or rushed for some reason idk but uhhhh e comments/kudos always appreciated!  

feel free to personally yell at me:  

discord: si#1718
Shuichi shifts his gaze over to Kokichi for the 100th time during the car ride. Although he seems better than he did in the apartment, he is still occasionally coughing up blood. Every time he hacked, choked, and sobbed, he made an effort for Shuichi to not look.

“Hoow are you dooing?” Shuichi runs his fingers against each other, resisting the urge to claw into his skin.

“Hmm… I'm feeling terrific, actually! Hey Mr. Saihara sir, feel free to open the car door and let me out, because I'm about to go win the lottery!” A single cough erupts quickly, “I'll buy 300 gallons of panta.” Kokichi finishes, his tone becoming weaker.

“Stoop being sarc-castic with me.” Shuichi huffs in frustration.

“Hmm? I feel just fine! Really, no need to drive me the hospital.” He lets out a small giggle before being shut down quickly.

“You're going.” Shuichi and his uncle say at the same time. His uncle continues, “I'd feel guilty if I didn't help my kid’s friend.” Shuichi’s uncle glances to Kokichi in the mirror, “Where are your parents, anyways?”

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
“Well, long story short… My parents ran away to the circus when I was around 4 years old. They became internationally famous, and were then enlisted as Italian government spies for an upcoming war between various European powers! They're currently somewhere in Brazil undercover, probably raking coffee beans or something.”

“Alrighty then, don't tell us.” His uncle sighed.

“I juuuust tooold yooou! Mr. Saihara-chan’s uncle-san!”

“Uncle-san?” His uncle glances to Shuichi, and Shuichi just gives him a shrug in defeat. “Weird little dude.” His uncle mutters to himself, and decides to focus on driving.

Shuichi tries to make eye contact with Kokichi, in an attempt to silently question him. However, Kokichi does his best to keep his gaze away from Shuichi. He's only left to stare at the glob of purple mess. ‘He's never talked much about his parents… Well… I never really asked.’ he hums to himself. ‘He does have a sister, right? Where was she? Maybe she's older and moved out… But… He's living by himself then, wouldn't an older sister be taking care of him?’ he continues into a reassuring thought, ‘Well… he's around 16 years old anyways, that's the legal age to live alone I suppose. It might not be any of my business.’

Shuichi doesn't even notice that the car stops, his mind acting too busy to comprehend his surroundings. That's until he notices those violet eyes coming into vision. Oh, he's looking at him. He can forget at times that he much appreciates Kokichi's eye contact, a special eye contact that doesn't feel scary. Shuichi digs his eyes into Kokichi’s, and neither of them say anything for what feels like minutes.

Although, it must of been seconds, as his uncle breaks it up quickly. “We're here, let's go.” He turns the car off, and opens the driver side door.

“C-can yooou stand?” Shuichi opens Kokichi’s door.

“I'm fine, I feel totally fine. I really didn't need to come here in the first place.” Kokichi gets out by himself and walks past Shuichi. He scrambles himself together to catch up to Kokichi’s fast pace.

They arrive in the ER room, and Kokichi plops himself immediately into a seat. He lets out an exasperated sigh, crosses his legs, and pulls out his phone to dwiddle on. Shuichi sits next to him.
Shuichi examines the room, it's freezing cold, and he's silently thankful that he's wearing a sweater.

There's barely anyone else in the waiting room, and the only other persons is a mother and her son. Her son was crying and rubbing his arm, and his mother yells at him to quit the action. His uncle goes to the front counter to sign in.

He looks to Kokichi’s phone to see what he's playing, it looks like some kind of shooting game? Kokichi seems to be running away from a purple fog with an axe in his avatar’s hands. Shuichi doesn't know much about video games, but this one doesn't look very good.

Kokichi notices Shuichi watching him, and he turns his body away from him. Sinking into his seat further, and hiding his screen from Shuichi.

“What?” Shuichi crosses his arms, “What's yoour deal?”

Kokichi only glances at him before returning his sight back to the screen. His eyes widen and he starts coughing into his hand again. However, It settles within a couple seconds. ‘At least it's calming down now.’

A door opens from the office, a nurse in blue scrubs inspects the room and calls out, “Ouma Kokichi?”

Kokichi stands to his feet, “Follow me, please.” The nurse motions him to the door. “Okie dokie!”

And with that, Kokichi is gone.

His uncle seats himself next to Shuichi. “How are you?”

“I'm noot sure.”

His uncle sighs and wipes his face with his hand.“Interesting fellow, huh? He seems… secretive.”

“Uh huh.”
“I’m not exactly sure if that’s a good thing, Shuichi.”

“...”

“This seems kind of lame to say, but you should watch who you hang out with.”

“Are you lecturing me?” Shuichi snaps his head towards his uncle.

“Don’t start with an attitude. I drove your friend here out of concern, where are his parents?”

“...”

“Shuichi!” His uncle raises his voice, and the mother across the room starts to stare.

Shuichi hushes his voice, “I don’t know! He doesn’t talk much about his personal life! He’s probably of legal age to live alone anyways. You leave me at home all the time!” he continues, “Listen, uncle... You don’t know him like I do. He’s the only person willing to talk to me at school, and is just... I don’t know.”

“The problem is, you don’t let anyone talk to you. I’m sure there are plenty of other kids who would love to get to know you. But, Shuichi! You don’t give people chances!”

“I gave him a chance!”

His uncle only sits in a sickly silence. He eyes Shuichi up and down, and folds his arms together. Shuichi decides to hold his ground, despite his uncle’s intimidating aura and bad mood.

“I— I went to an arcade... with him and others in my class. We had fun and... I wouldn’t be able to do that if he wasn’t with me.” he sniffed, “I began talking with some other people in my class... they invite me to lunch sometimes... ”
“I was able to c-coomplete a sc-chool assignment with a partner for the first time in such a loong
time.”

“I was able to… be myself moore. That's what Oouma-k-kun has given me.”

“Okay, calm down please.” His uncle unravels his arms and places a hand on Shuichi’s shoulder.
“I'm just concerned for you, I don't want you to get hurt. I can't force you and what decisions you
make, especially since I'm absent a majority of the time.” He removes his hand slowly from Shuichi’s
shoulder.

“I just want to be better to you, and… I wish I could be there for you more often.”

“That's not yoour fault, thoough! Yoour job and everything…” Word vomit starts pouring from
Shuichi’s mouth, “I admire yoou a lot, and I knoow I've said it so many times! But, I do! Yooou are
there for me, and moore than anyoone else!”

“I really appreciate what yoou do for me, and I hoope to repay you for yoour k-k-kindness.”

“Don't feel like you have to repay me for anything, watching you grow up is enough to make me feel
proud. I love you, kid.”

Shuichi nods and smiles, “Yeah… back at yoou.”

His uncle lifts his sleeve to check his old watch. “It's already past 10:30PM, are you hungry at all?”

“A little.” Shuichi responds.

“Then… I'm going to go and get us some food real quick. I think there's a 24/7 fast food place
around here, so I'll be back in around 10 minutes.”

“I want a cheeseburger, please.” Shuichi watches his uncle stand and search for his keys.

“Sounds good, I'll be back.”
He leaves out the windowed door, leaving Shuichi to his own thoughts.

He decides to ignore them for now,

He places identical earbuds into his ears, and listens to music instead.

Shuichi was long finished with his cheeseburger, it wasn't particularly that good, but it satisfied his hunger nonetheless. It's been around an hour and 30 minutes since Kokichi went into the doctor’s office. Shuichi feels his eyes droop until he hears a familiar door open.

An old man in a white doctors coat steps into the waiting room, “Saihara?” he calls. Shuichi and his uncle stand to greet the brittle man. “That's us.” Confirms his uncle.

“We wanted to ask you a couple of questions about our patient, Ouma Kokichi, if possible.”

“Of course.” he nods.

“Are you his parent or guardian?”

“I am not.”

“Do you know his parents or guardians?”

“I do not, I believe he lives alone or he refuses to tell us.”

“Yeah… he's refusing to tell us too.” The doctor sighs. “Does he have any family you know of?”
“He has a sister!” Shuichi speaks up, “I don't have her contact information, though. Also, she doesn't seem to live with him either.”

“Well, that's very helpful… huh.” The doctor scribbles notes on his clipboard. “Well, you're the ones who brought him here so… What is your relation to the patient?”

“I'm his friend.” Shuichi says, “This is my uncle.”

“Since you're the only ones here for him, I suppose it's fine to disclose what's going on.” The doctor eyes his notes, “He is severely underweight, to the point we could consider it an eating disorder case… However, we believe the cause for this malnutrition is gastroparesis.”

“It's a chronic disease that's believed to be caused by the damaging of the vagus nerve in the stomach. It prevents food from being properly emptied in the stomach, and various other symptoms, such as: vomiting after meals, feeling full for days, and extreme sensitivity to certain foods. His throat was bleeding when he got here, and we've treated that part but… it can't be cured, but it can be treated.”

“I just wonder why he didn't come in sooner, because it can become extremely painful, and perhaps fatal if the symptoms aren't alleviated.”

Shuichi’s head is spinning in circles. ‘gastro… gastro — what? I really just thought that maybe… Ouma-kun didn't like to eat or…’ a sudden realization strikes Shuichi. ‘I forced him to eat all those times, did I make him feel sick afterwards?’

“We will keep him overnight, just to make sure all is well and things get straightened out.”

“C-can I see him?” Shuichi chokes up, facing the doctor.

“We usually only let the family of patients visit after visiting hours but… I don't see any family with him, so I suppose so.”

“You can go,” his uncle says, “I'll wait out here, okay?”
“Yeah.”

“Follow me, please.” The doctor directs Shuichi through the labyrinth of doors, until they arrive at Kokichi’s room. The doctor raps the door and walks in. Shuichi follows closely behind the doctor.

He sees Kokichi in a small bed, his clothes were changed into a hospital gown, and he is still twiddling on his phone. Shuichi laughs inwardly at the thought of Kokichi never putting down his video game.

“Don’t stay for too long or I’ll kick you out.” The doctor sneers and quickly leaves the small room.

Kokichi greets Shuichi with a big, shining grin. Similar to the warm ones he’d always shine towards Shuichi at school, but something feels different. It feels more like a warm mirage, a feeling of coldness hidden under steeps of warmth.

“Saihara-chan! Our master plan isn’t over yet, we still need to actually steal the drugs!” Kokichi folds his hands behind his head.

Shuichi only stares at Kokichi with a stern frown.

Kokichi’s expression stiffens at Shuichi’s icy glare, but his smile doesn’t falter. “Oh come on! We won’t be caught by the police, just follow my lead!”

“Just stop it...” Shuichi mutters.

“Eh? You’re pulling out at the last second? You’re not a very good crime partn—”

“Stop it!” He abruptly yells, making Kokichi jump in surprise. His hands fall to his lap, and his easy-going expression mushes into a disgusting neutrality. Not the kind of warm neutrality that Kokichi usually gives off, but the kind of neutrality that Shuichi sees after Kokichi’s silent temper tantrums. “I doon’t get it, Oouma.”

Shuichi’s face twists and turns into a whirlwind of different emotions. Sadness, anger, loss, despair, he can’t keep track of it all, and it hurts. “Why didn’t you tell me anything? Anything at all? This
whole thing made me realize... I really don't know anything about you!"

Shuichi feels the rush of lava, and that familiar feeling of dread rush over his face. His sobs lace into his words, with tears mixing into his tone. "I thought you said that you find it hard for yourself to lie to me! Was that a lie?" he practically shouts, "I thought you had family, where's your sister? Was that a lie, too? K-kook-kichi!!?"

The tears break up his speech, and he lets his sobs take him over. "W-why are you living... in such a terrible place? Why... didn't you tell me you were in pain like this?"

"I could've helped you!"

There it is, that disgusting neutrality shifting into something more sickening. "Fuck off." Kokichi’s poison stabs Shuichi in the gut.

"Oouma!"

"You're annoying, go away." Kokichi says with a weakly, and meek hush. He forces his eye contact away from Shuichi to stare at the blank TV screen.

"I don't believe that... you're just trying to run away again."

"..."

"Please! Just tell me what's going on with you! I want to know who you are, once!"

Kokichi forces his murderous eye contact back into Shuichi’s cold gaze. "I'll call security if you don't remove yourself from this space."

Then, the magnum opus overtook Shuichi’s trembling body. A lone percussionist bangs the drum thrice.

"I love you." Shuichi chokes out.
Kokichi’s expression snaps into something horrifying. “Get out, just get the hell out Saihara!”

“No! I won’t leave!” His feet move by themself, silent steps come closer to the small hospital bed.

Kokichi quickly rushes out of the bed sheets that once trapped him. He immediately digs his palms into Shuichi’s stiff shoulders, and shoves him into the door. His grip at arm’s length, and a look of pure hatred weaves through Kokichi’s face.

Shuichi gasps as a small pain strikes his back, and Kokichi’s expression flashes a look of guilt, before searing his eyes into Shuichi once again. He retracts his grip from Shuichi.
Shuichi looks to the floor, eyes darting, and tears overflowing in his eyes. Where is he? Where is Kokichi? Where is his safety blanket that always comforted him in situations like these?

Kokichi doesn't comfort him this time.

Kokichi doesn't hold his hand this time.

Kokichi is stabbing daggers into him.

“Fine.” Shuichi barely breathes out, and he hurriedly exits the room.

Chapter End Notes

art by me // hopefully it isn't too weird looking I have a really weird way of drawing faces jdjkdksk

discord: si#1718
wartimes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

He stayed inside all week, filling cups of water to half finish them. The cups didn't want to move, neither did he. Shuichi hasn't moved at all. His throat is dry and full of aching drywall, his hair slick with disgusting oil, and his eyes swollen from lava draining into and out of his vision. The cups are half finished, and his dehydration doesn't matter. His sleep schedule having no grips on his being anymore, he lays away at a cruel hour of 4:00AM, doing absolutely nothing. Although, he's doing something.

Living?

Automatic responses like breathing, blinking, digesting, and twitching… all signs that he is still existing. The pointless existence that makes his head thump, the kind of existence he doesn't deserve to occupy. He feels too big, and he's always felt that way. His slim body always feeling disgusting, still living alongside others who don't deserve to be in his depressing presence. He takes up too much space.

Even surrounded by his things, his familiar bed, his cold laptop, the old hat on his desk, and the winter coat his uncle bought him one year… they don't feel like possessions. He feels as if he is borrowing something he shouldn't. He's bothering everyone's time.

The world always moves slower when Shuichi is present, and that's just his fault for existing. He's sitting around, doing absolutely nothing, wasting everyone's time. Wasting his uncle's money, love, mentorship, and time. He grimaces at the thought of his uncle’s departure earlier in the week, countless ‘I’m oo-k-kay’ and ‘don’t woorry aboout it’ echoes in his mind. The disbelief of his uncle’s warm face, settling onto Shuichi’s hot and flustered cheeks. ‘He doesn't deserve someone like me.’ he notes. ‘Someone as terrible as me.’ he finishes.

He feels like destroying everything, and the only way he perceives everything his through himself.

‘I don't want to be here anymore.’ He furrows his brows together, trying to prevent invasive and dangerous thoughts infect his mind. He could distract himself, play on his phone, watch a movie, but he can't move. Or, he doesn't want to move? He can feel the heat return to his face, recent memories forcing their way back into his sick mind. Shuichi has never had much trouble sleeping. In fact, he could dangerously oversleep at times. But, the thoughts that plagued his brain with poison kept the nightly hours stacking up.
It was 12:00AM on Tuesday, ‘I doon't get it, Oouma.’ His mind clanked and seared metal into itself. He refused to go further.

It was 1:00AM on Wednesday, ‘Fuck off.’ We're to that part already? His muscles were sore from staying idle.

It was 2:00AM on Thursday, ‘You're annoying, go away.’ Shuichi felt like scratching his head until it bled.

It was 3:00AM on Friday, ‘Please! Just tell me what's going on with you! I want to knoow who you are, for oonce!’ Those were his words, right? Choking sobs resounded throughout his room that day, the kind he had been repressing for a while.

Here, it's 4:00AM. Shuichi sits up quickly, his body becoming achingly numb too quickly. His head slushes to nothing but the one thing he's been refusing to admit. That one percussionist who played out of rhythm with the orchestration, he was an annoying player, one that should be removed from the lineup. ‘I love you.’ He said.

‘I love you.’ Shuichi said.

“Eh.” He gasped a silent choke, and twisted his fingernails deep into his skin. His entire body spasms, he feels so fucking cold. The entirely of all the blankets working together to warm him did nothing to alleviate his heart’s hypothermia. Shuichi feels exactly the same as he always did without him, but now there was an extra layer of ice chilling his spine. He wants to tear apart his skin to find that certain warmth that's gone missing.

He streaks his cold nails into his skin, looking for some kind of heat to warm him. Short and ragged nails scrape the side of his skinny arm. A painting of two thin white lines turn into something a little more irritated and red. The work feels like fire and hot charcoal, burning across his skin to heat it.

‘I love you.’ Another streak of fire.

‘I love you.’ Another streak of charcoal.

‘I love you.’ Another choked sob coming from his sore throat.
“I hate you.” He weakly says to himself. The fire of his arms seep into his soul, he feels more and more irritated with every breath sinking into his chest.

“I hate you…” Another flash of burning radiation.

“I hate you,” Another cigarette bud scraping into his skin.

Multiple superpower countries are invited to Shuichi’s war, he feels nothing but a rush of anger fuel his cold submarine warfare. “I hate you.”

scrape

“I hate you.”

scrape

“I hate you.”

scrape

Bodies are piled up high in No Man’s Land.

“I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I HATE YOU, I HATE YOOU!”

scrape, scrape, scrape, scrape, scrape, scrape, scrape, scrape, scrape, scrape, scrape, scrape, scrape, scrape, scrape, scrape, scrape, scrape, scrape.

His breathing steadily evens out as he becomes aware of the pain staining his arm. Vertical white and red lines crawl across his pale skin. Although some wounds penetrated his skin, no actual blood was spilling out. He sighs in relief, but then he really starts to get hit with the burning sensation.
He stands from his bed, with a shaking tremble in his knees, and shuffles his way to the bathroom. Silent ‘ow’s spilling from his lips as he turns the bathroom sink on. He hisses as he lets cold water run over his damaged arm. ‘Why did I do that?’

He stands there for a while, his defeated expression glaring back into him in the mirror. ‘Why am I like this?’

‘…’

‘I hate you, Saihara Shuichi.’

He turns the sink off, and the soldiers return to the trenches.

Chapter End Notes

im sorry if i worried everything with the original end note, ill still keep it here since its important for me i guess? i wrote this chapter when i was having a meltdown, but i do feel better now. thank you for everyone’s concerns, i sometimes dont realize how kind people are i guess. so thank you.

discord: @si#1718
original note:
im so tired of being here and just existing I can't do it anymore and im just so afraid of everything
His nails felt numb from the winter cold blistering into his skin. His ankles were slightly exposed, and it sent chills to his spine. His hair felt dry, his skin felt dry, but his eyes were not. Shuichi sat under his middle school's oak tree, the one he visited often during fall and spring. Instead of warm leaves gleaming from the grass, there was only snow. Brittle, and cold snow.

His eyes were red, and bothered. His hat covered his embarrassment, and the snow melted his body slightly. He was alone, and he had always been alone. He had never heard the sound of warm footsteps approaching him, and he never will, so why did he hear the sound of crunching snow? It didn't feel warm.

“What's wrong with you?” She said.

“...”

She sighed harshly, and lowered herself to Shuichi’s eye level. Penetrating her eye contact past Shuichi’s barrier of ice, he still held his head low, and his breath shook and fogged through the cold air. “You can’t just cry every time something doesn't go your way, Saihara.”

She went for his hat, pulling it off his head and settling it into her lap. Shuichi’s hands outstretched for her grip, but she instantly pulled away, a mixed look of resentment and emotion settling onto her face. “You look better without it, and not as emo.”

“I—” Shuichi started.

“Shut up, I’m pissed off at you. Listen to me.” Her hands shifted into her pockets. “It's your fault you're like this, right? Saihara, you don't want to change. There's a reason why everyone starts weird rumours about you, because the way you act is fucking weird. I don't care if you have a crush on me, I don't care what you do in your free time, but it's your own fault that things turned out this way.”

“Noone of it is... truue.” He choked, rubbing his hand into his head.
“What?”

“I doon’t knoow. I just c-can’t. I never did anything, and everyone hates me, and I doon’t know why. I never did anything… I never did anything. I never did anything!” Shuichi sobbed into his hands, chest heaving, and his throat cutting up inside itself.

Her eyes squinted, and she hesitated for a moment before continuing. “I believe you… I was never one to start or believe rumours. But, I know rumours start for a reason, and those reasons are your fault. The way you act towards people, the way you dress, the way you always have that miserable expression on your face… Who’s fault is that?” She shoveled snow into her hands, and formed a snowball.

“I don't particularly care about you, Saihara. But, I still feel obligated to babysit you because of some kind of weird thing you have with people. I can't explain it…”

“I’m soor—”

“Let me finish. When spring comes, and we all have to graduate to high school, what are you gonna do then? You can't live the rest of your life like a hedgehog, distancing yourself so much from the people you need. You need people, Saihara. I hate to say it, but everyone needs a friend.”

“…”

“I'm not your friend, find someone else for that. But, let's make a promise, okay?”

Shuichi nodded.

“Never try to kill yourself again.”

“…”

He nodded.
She took the snowball in her hand, and crushed it on top of Shuichi’s head. “Now go home, Saihara. I hope to see you tomorrow.”

She smiled.

‘Hey, Saihara-kun! How are you? -AK’

Shuichi squints at the hours old text message displayed on his screen. He checks the time, and sighs as he reads ‘2:00PM’. His eyes feel burnt, and his arms feel even worse than scorching. He scrubs his scalp, basking in his own disgusting oil. He types in his password, opening to a message page with the name, ‘Akamatsu-san’ labeled on top.

He feels his arm screaming, and guilt builds in Shuichi’s dry throat.

‘I’m sorry for not responding, I was busy. I’m good, how are you? -S.S’ He rewrote it a couple times, before deciding that this may be the best he can do. His brain still feels scrambled and mushy.

‘I'm good! Thanks for asking. -AK.’

…

A couple of agonizing minutes pass by, Shuichi keeps his screen open as he is left on read. “Errr.” He says to himself, ‘Was that all?’ he thinks. He’s about to close his phone and go back to sleep, but he saw the three little typing dots light up.

‘Hey, so I'm having a party tonight at my house. It won't really be anything special, just some people from our homeroom. Sooo… I'm inviting you! -AK’

Shuichi doesn't know how to feel. He hasn't been invited to a party since grade school, and that was only because it was a requirement to invite everyone in a class. What would he even do there? It's not like he can socialize without Kokichi… oh.
Oh…

Shuichi Suppresses his face from his mind, it isn’t a good time to start everything back up again. He clenches his phone in hand, biting his lip slightly, and just tries to think about his response to Kaede. ‘It can’t be bad, it’s just people from homeroom.’ He sniffs.

‘I want friends…’

‘I want friends.’

‘you need people, Saihara.’

‘Oh, okay. What time, and um… where do you live? -S.S’

‘I’ll email you the information, I didn’t think you would agree, honestly. Hehe, I’m glad! -AK’

‘Thank you. -S.S’

‘I tried texting Ouma-kun, but he just called me a loser and left me on read after that. ): -KA’

Huh? Shuichi hurriedly opens Kokichi’s messenger ID, only to stare back at the sent messages left on read.

Tuesday @ 11:00PM
‘Ouma-kun. -S.S’ -read

Wednesday @ 12:21AM
‘Can you please talk to me? -S.S’ -read

Thursday @ 9:38
‘Are you at least safe? -S.S’ -read

‘What an asshole,’ he thinks ‘He could of at least told me he’s okay, but he has no issue responding
to Akamatsu-san, huh?’ His brows knit together, and he feels cold irritation fill his body again.

‘I’ll come, Akamatsu-san :) -S.S’

‘Call me Kaede, please! -AK’

He didn't want to be late, but he didn't anticipate Kaede’s house being so far away. Summer is hot and balmy, especially in the evening. The sweat sticks to his neck and forehead, his ears feel like magma. Wearing a long sleeved sweater is not Shuichi’s best decision, but he couldn't wear a short sleeved shirt.

He touches his arm in shame, thoughts racing through his head as he approaches Kaede’s door. ‘This is dangerous.’

‘You’re going to burn.’

Everything feels hotter as he stands on her doorstep. He could feel his leg twitching, and his heart shaking in his ribcage. He lets out a shaky breath before proceeding to quietly knock.

…

No one came to the door.

‘Did no one hear it? Was I too quiet? Is this even the right house… what if they did hear it and they just don't want me here?’ Glass bottles shatter like Dominos in his skin. ‘If I knock again, will it seem rude? Especially if they heard me the first time… Will they—’

“Saihara-kun!” A familiar feminine voice startles Shuichi, and he doesn't even realize he was zoning into that iceberg.

“Helloo…” He greets Kaede.
“It's so hot outside, why are you wearing that thing? Here, come in quickly so you don't roast.” She widens the door, allowing Shuichi entrance. He stresses over Kaede’s comment, but he pushes it to the back of his mind. ‘She doesn't know.’

Shuichi follows her to the living room, finding most of his homeroom classmates, sans Kokichi and Hoishi. All eyes were on Shuichi, and he immediately feels the presence of death creeping his on his shoulders. The feeling of pressure, and heat, and cold, and bones snapping, and arm scratching, and —

“Saihara, I'm glad you made it!” Kaito outstretches his hand to meet Shuichi’s. He doesn't understand what Kaito is trying to do, so he settles for an awkward high five that makes Shuichi want to die on the spot.

“We already have too many boys here, Akamatsu! Why did you invite another?” Tenko huffs, crossing her arms, and glancing at Himiko.

“Does it really matter…? More people are a bother either way.” Himiko drones.

The white noise buzzes.

“You should of told me you were gonna invite the pervert, Kaede. I don't need Shithara ogling me the entire time!” Miu gasps, “B-but you can if you want to…”

Shuichi feels like he doesn't belong here, everyone already wants him gone. He feels the hot pressure building in his eyes, their eye contact just wouldn't budge and he wants to run. “I'm—” He starts.

“Hey guys, I invited him because he's our classmate.” Kaede speaks up.

“Yeah, stop being obnoxious.” Rantaro chips in.

“Here, Saihara-kun.” Kaede gently holds his wrist, and guides him to her couch. She seats herself, and pats the spot next to her at the end of the couch. Shuichi is silently thankful he's at the end, and he doesn't have to sit by anyone else. Kaede beams a smile into Shuichi, and he feels warmth invigorate throughout the lower layers of his skin. He still feels bad, and his arm hurts.
Kaede averts her eyes, and focuses on his classmates packed up in the living room. “So! I wanted to talk about some plans I've... well, planned for summer break!” Her smile shines brightly to the room, “I have a couple ideas, but I understand it may be hard for people to show up and stuff... so let's plan early!”

“What did you have in mind?” Kirumi addresses.

“Do you guys go to the annual summer festival?”

“Ah! Tenko, Himiko, and Toujo-san all went together last year!” Tenko exclaims. “Himiko spilled iced coffee all over herself, and Toujo-san had to scrub it out of her clothes afterwards.”

“Mmm... don't talk about that, it's embarrassing. There was an ancient spirit that weakened my MP status at the festival... and I got tired.” Himiko yawns.

“You're always tired.” Rantaro scratches his head.

“The mana in the air here is really... mana deficient. Even poor mana levels can weaken a powerful mage like me, but you'd all be running if I was at maximum power.”

“Tenko will gladly let Himiko turn her into a frog and step on her!” Tenko says.

“What.”

“What?” Tenko awkwardly laughs.

Affirmations spread throughout the room, people fondly recalling memories, laughing at a time Korekiyo snapped at school trip, or remembering how Kiibo accidentally blew a hole in the wall the last time they went on a field trip... and Shuichi feels lost. He's never been invited to anything, and he's never been excited for school field trips or... anything. He's never had someone to share those times with, and the sharing of fond memories strikes a longing and loneliness in his heart. He feels left out, and he feels...?
Jealous.

Kaede is laughing hard, her words stuttering by the enormous happiness in her body. “And, the time that— Haha. Nevermind, okay! Let’s get back to the topic at hand.” She wipes away at her eyes. “Summer festival, yeah? It's in a couple weeks and we should all meet up and have fun as a class. I do want everyone to pitch in some money though, doesn’t matter how much.”

“I can provide all the expenses needed.” Kirumi voices.

“Ah, Toujo-san! You really don't have to do that! I'd feel bad if it was just you paying.” Kaede responds, a worry striking across her face.

“If it makes you feel uncomfortable, then I shall not. But, I will still offer as much money as you need.” Kirumi nods.

“Thanks a lot! We really appreciate you, Toujo-san.”

“Mhm.”

“So, this is supposed to be a party right?” Rantaro starts, “What else did you plan, Akamatsu?”

“Nothing in particular, I just wanted to hang out for a bit. I guess… whatever you guys wanna do! I'm up for it!” She clasps her hands together.

“Iruma said she brought booze.” Rantaro glances.

“Uh, oh… okay.” Kaede’s face shoots into an unreadable expression.

“Is that okay, Kaede? Your parents aren't home and stuff… You asked what we wanna do, and Iruma Miu wants to get fucked up!” Miu reaches into her book bag, and pulls out a bottle of sake and vodka.

“That’s kind of a weird combination.” Rantaro comments.
“Ugh… it's all I had, and we have soda, right?” She hisses.

“I mean, I don't mind if you guys want to drink… just make sure you can get home alright.” Kaede eyes the bottles standing on the coffee table.

“Aren't we a little young to drink? It's disrespectful to your body, and Tenko dares not to disrespect her temple.” Tenko’s face noticeably heats up.

“Nyah… it's fine isn't it? It's just like a potion, makes you feel warm, and stuff.” Himiko’s lidded eyes eyes the bottles.

“Himiko! You've had alcohol before?” Tenko shakes her small frame.

“Hey, stop doing that!” She settles, “Hasn't everyone?”

Everyone nods in agreement with her, and Tenko seems flabbergasted.

’No.’ Shuichi silently thinks, he feels extremely isolated, and he drops his eyes away from the circle. ‘I'm not normal at all, am I?’ His breath exhales with a shake, ‘Why am I so behind everyone else? I can't have these experiences.’

The world flashes in and out of sequence, the living room lights muddle together and the colors makes blobs of nothing in particular. He feels his eyelashes stained with dry wetness, and his nose red and hot from exhaustion. White noise comes in one ear, and out the other. He almost didn't catch his name.

“Saihara, did you want any?” Rantaro holds a red cup in front of Shuichi. “I don't want to pressure you or anything, just asking.” Shuichi quickly nods and receives the cup from Rantaro.

He smells the potent smell of alcohol fill his nose, and it smells so disgusting. White noise still pools at the bottom of his brain, and he swishes the drink around in his hand. ‘I want to have experiences, and I want to be normal, and be like everyone else… and have friends, and make memories, and spill ice coffee on myself, and be made fun of for being clumsy like that.’ He lifts the cup to his face, purposely turning away from everyone else.
He feels the cold liquid trickle down his throat, and the cold soon turns into a stinging heat that burns his throat and nose. He doesn't want to cough and disturb others with his ugly voice, but he has to relieve his throat. He decides to drink more to combat the feeling, and the urge to cough his guts up disappears for a smidgen of a second.

Still, it feels better.

“What are you doing this week?”

“I found something interesting the other day…”

“Did you see that video of…”

“Oh, you listen to…”

Shuichi drinks more.

“Do you remember when…”

“Yeah, I asked her out last…”

“The mana in the…”

“I will gladly…”

“He…”

“They… g… j”
Shuichi drinks more, his ears feel bloated by the uselessness of conversation he's not involved in. 'Why do I even want friends.' He gulps down another swig. 'Everyone just talks about... things that aren't important.'

'I want friends, though.'

'But do I?'

'It must be fun conversation, right? Why do people enjoy talking to each other? I love talking to people... I like being comfortable around him... but I can't. I hate talking to people, it makes me hot and flustered. But, people are so great... the problem is me.'

'The problem has always been me... Everything is my fault, right? The way I act is my fault, and I get what I deserve. I don't talk to people, so I'm isolated... then I get mad for being isolated. It's my fault, isn't it? Why am I mad?'

'Who am I mad at? Others? I can't blame others for not wanting to talk to me... their reactions are completely understandable when I'm a creepy mute. I'm mad at... myself? I'm too tired to be mad at myself, I'm too tired for everything. I just don't want to be here anymore, I'm tired of living.

I'm tired of living.'

Minutes feel like seconds, his brain quickening to a sprinting pace. His movement feels sluggish and the lights blur even more. He feels the dull pain of his arm, and he doesn't care. He feels hot, and tired, and he just wants to collapse. Tears flow freely down his face, he doesn't understand anything surrounding him. 'I'm so ignorant of the world. It's all my fault.'

He feels a gentle hand and an even gentler voice crawl between the cracks of obnoxious noise. “Saihara-kun... Are you okay?” Kaede rests her hand on Shuichi’s shoulder.

Shuichi can't respond, he can't tell if it's the alcohol burning his throat, or the tightness of tears choking it. He cries harder under Kaede’s warm touch. He feels the room become quiet, and the lingering of eyes settling onto his gross body. “Here, follow me... okay?” Shuichi nods and removes himself from the couch.
“I’ll be back guys, give me a few moments.” She addresses the room, and rubs Shuichi’s back in comfort. “Let's go to my bedroom for a sec, come on.”

His chest feels like breaking in half, and he starts hyperventilating the minute the door shuts in Kaede’s room. His mind can't think at all, he only feels cold air rapidly shooting in and out of his chest like a gun. He feels his arm being pulled by Kaede. She sits on her bed, and gestures Shuichi to sit next to her. He obliges, slowly sits down, and his entire body shakes as his lungs scream for relief.

“Here…” Kaede guides his head onto her lap, and she starts calmly running her fingers through Shuichi’s hair. “You don't have to say anything, I understand… I just want you to feel safe, Saihara.”

“I hate being here…” He sobs into her lap.

“Where’s here?”

“Here… Earth… Living and… everything. I hate it.”

Kaede paused, unsure of what to say next.

"I..."

“I know we haven't talked much before but… you've been doing so good. So so good, Saihara. Was there something that happened?”

“…”

“I expected Ouma-kun to show up with you or something… Are you two okay?”

“Noo…”

Kaede places her other hand onto his back, “Do you want to talk about it?”
“H-he… got sic-k-k. Really sick-k, we droove him to the ER… He was ac-cting weird and we foound out some stuff… bad stuff.” He sniffs, “He never toold me anything aboout what was gooing on with him… and I toold him that… I felt hurt by it? He just… snapped and I don't knoow why, and now he's ignoring me…”

“I toold him I looved him, and that made him… r-really mad.” His breath picks up again, and Kaede continues to hold him, comfortably stroking his hair and rubbing his back.

“I think Ouma-kun is a really secretive person, and I'm not sure why… but, Saihara… he's probably been hurt badly before or something. I may be wrong about that but, it sounds like he was pushing you away for a reason… do you know the reason?”

“I…” Shuichi pauses, ‘Do I? I wasn't able to really think before but… he always mentioned how he didn't want me to worry about him. I…’

‘Shit.’

“I have to throw up.” He tells Kaede.

“Oh, right. You're obviously drunk, just relax… The bathroom is over there.” She points to the closed door near the exit of her room.

“Mnn…” He groans, and hurriedly makes his way to the toilet. He feels vomit plastering the insides of his throat, the taste of alcohol coming back up and sickening his face. The repressed emotions of hatred, and love, and understanding being thrown into the toilet. Unpleasant hacking noises coming from his own vocal cords, and the feeling of drunken lilac staining his tongue.

He smells like rotten citrus.

Chapter End Notes

I'm taking the SAT tomorrow and I'm staying up to finish this garbage… yikes. this chapter was longer than usual.i think so//? yay?? im fucki tired jj

discord: si#1718
“Hey, Saihara-kun…”

Ah, that sweet and familiar voice that soothes his soul. But, why does he hear it? His ears feel like mush and his brain is enveloped in darkness for what feels like months. A soft touch to his shoulder prompts his eyes to open, the darkness turns into a pounding headache that doesn't stop. He groans, and turns his face towards Kaede. “M’sorry… What time is it?”

“It's 9AM, I only just woke up 5 minutes ago.” Kaede sleepily rubs her eyes.

Shuichi sits up, his stomach immediately turns over with the gesture. He keeps the impending vomit down, and scans his eyes around Kaede’s room. Trophies upon trophies littering all across the walls, rewards and metals that decorate the large room, and multiple piano models that fill the corners.

“Everyone else went home last night, you were already asleep so I just crashed right beside you.” Kaede explains.

“Huh?” Shuichi’s face grows red in embarrassment, he slept with a girl? “I'm so soorry! I didn't mean to take the bed.” He covers his face in his hands, partly because he still needs to throw up.

“It's okay, seriously! Sleepovers are fun!” She nods. “You must feel pretty bad though, do you remember anything from last night?”

Guilt speeds into Shuichi, a recollection of memories that he probably shouldn't of remembered. “Yeah… everything. I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to spill my emootions all over you.”

“Please don't be sorry, Saihara-kun. We're friends, and I'm here to listen to you.” She sighs, “I really wish you would of opened up sooner, because then by now we would be best friends!”

“You really c-coonsider me your friend?” Shuichi questions.
She smiles warmly, “Of course. You’ve made a lot of friends, and people enjoy being around you! I'm glad for that since... I’ve always been somewhat worried about you.”

The tire of cold snaps like harsh wind behind Shuichi’s eyes, and he feels the nausea of leftover alcohol burn. He lowers his head into himself. ‘It's always this way, isn't it?’ He questions.

The sleepy thoughts clank against each other. ‘No one actually wants to be friends with me, it's because they feel obligated to. It's because they are ‘worried.’

I want to be friends with people, and I don't want to worry them.

I'm changing that today.’

“Thank you, Ak-ka—”

“Kaede! No need for formalities, right Shuichi-kun~?” She teases.

‘Well not that it's any easier.’ He comments to himself. “K-Kaede.” Shuichi smiles.

‘Today.’ He repeats.

“Hey K-kaede? C-can I borrow your phoone?” Shuichi feels a nerve inside of him tick. A feeling of motivation mixed with reminding anger that thumps against his temples.


“Hmmm.” He covers his chin in thought. “You said that Ouma texted youu, right? Well he hasn’t responded to mine at all. I just wanted to talk to him.” He still feels the acidic build up in his throat, and his heart feels like its sweating through the muscles containing it.

“Here,” She lends Shuichi her phone. A glittery phone case with a striped pattern beneath the gel sits in his hands. “I don’t mind, but I also don’t want to get too involved. Your business is yours, right?” She smiles. “I'm going to go make something to eat, do you like toast?”
“Uh yeah… Who doesn't? It's… toast.” Oh, that was probably the worst thing Shuichi has ever said to anyone in his life. He inwardly panics, hoping Kaede would ignore his lame attempt at a joke.

She nods as she leaves the room.

Shuichi opens the messenger app.

Shuichi hears a brief knock on his apartment door later that night. He still feels nauseous, but the gradual absence of water bottles in his fridge helped the situation. He doesn't feel like dealing with this right now, but he is the one to annoy Kokichi, so he will deal with Kokichi. Now.

Shuichi slowly opens the door open to a familiar, but recently absent face. Kokichi glares at Shuichi with a bored look. Shuichi immediately regrets every decision he has ever made that lead to this point in his life.

“Um, he—”

“Paint my nails.” Kokichi states, his face morphs into his usual easy-go demeanor. He moves past Shuichi into his dark apartment.

“Wh- Hey! I didn't say you c-could come in!”

“...”

It registers to Shuichi late that he’s already inside.

“I guess come in?!?” Shuichi almost trips over himself while closing the door. His legs feel like jelly from being sick all day today, and he silently thanks Kaede again for driving him home. He sees Kokichi already seated in the kitchen with a single bottle of nail polish on display. “Are you serious?” Shuichi sternly says.
“Hmmmm? I'm always serious!” Kokichi puts a leg up on his kitchen table. “Isn't this the face of someone who is a serious fella’?” He wiggles his foot to challenge the table Gods above.

“Not exactly, and please get yoour feet off the table!” He scrambles to sit across from Kokichi.

“Don't sit so far away, aren't you on nail painting duty?” He grins.

“Why do you want me to paint your nails so badly?” Despite his reluctance and cautioned behavior around Kokichi, he scoots his chair closer.

“Well, I painted my left hand yesterday which was pretty easy.” He quickly lifts his hand to show him. “But as it turns out, I'm not ambidextrous!”

“I wanted to talk to you, not paint your nails.”

“You can't do both? C'mon, get to work, helot.” Kokichi sticks his right hand into Shuichi's table space. ‘What did he just call me?’ Shuichi questions. He gives in and picks up the bottle of polish. It looks purple and glittery, it says “gel” on the cap but he's not sure what that means.

Shuichi starts on the index finger slowly, making sure not to touch the skin surrounding the nail. “I still want to talk to you.” Shuichi actually doesn't mind this arrangement so much, he can concentrate on something else to avoid eye contact.

“We're talking now, aren't we?” Kokichi cooley says.

“Yeah, but you ignored my texts.”

“I'm a busy bee, I have an entire underground army to oversee.” Kokichi pauses for a second, “Oh, that rhymes!”

Shuichi moves to the ring finger, being a little easier since the surface is bigger. “I won't invade on your privacy anymore, there are obviously things you don't want to tell me.” Strokes of paint can
also be felt beneath his skull. “I’m ok-kay with that.”

“Hmmm.” Kokichi hums.

“You're not obligated to tell me about things you don't want to. I just felt somewhat betrayed.”

“I don't like hospitals.” Kokichi rests his head back into the wooden chair slightly. “Weirdly bright rooms with bare walls, they creep me out. Why would people ever want to work there? It's beyond me.”

“Wait, you were upset because you don't like hospitals?”

Kokichi gives a mischievous smile, “Is your puzzle complete now? The detective solves the mystery!”

“The puzzle?” He continues onto the thumb, definitely the easiest of the nails. He feels satisfied covering the small area. “I don't think I could ever solve it... but I don't need to.”

The hand is finally completed, matching with Kokichi’s other. He lifts up the pair and gleefully smiles, “Pretty, huh?”

Shuichi nods and inspects his handiwork, he can say that he did a lot better job than Kokichi did on his own hand.

“Want me to paint yours?” He rings.

“Huh?”


“I understand what you said. I, uhm?” He looks at his own ragged nails, damaged from biting and peeling out of anxiety. “Isn't it kind of weird, though?”
“It’s not weird if it looks nice, c’mon Saihara-chan! It can come off easy with remover if you don’t like it.”

“...Sure then.” Shuichi nods, placing his right hand in front of Kokichi. Kokichi starts painting immediately and smiles radiance while doing it. It's the same almost ugly purple he used from before, but Shuichi didn't mind all too much.

Kokichi speaks up after a few moments of silence. “Saihara-chan, I'll give you hints to where to find the puzzle pieces. Let's play cat and mouse for a while, yeah?”

Shuichi nods.

“Yeah.”

Chapter End Notes

discord: si#1718

please do not ask about why I decided to update and why I wanted to abandon before.

I will finish this story if it kills me.

I hope you enjoyed.
The air smells like papayas, with orange and red lights gleaming throughout the busy streets. Grass and dirt kicks up between the cracked concrete where people shuffle in line for festival stands. Early fireworks bounced off the sky as the reflection of mirrored surfaces stares back into Shuichi’s face.

He never liked seeing his reflection, and he tried to avoid it if he could. But, there’s something different about seeing your appearance when you’re in company. He feels more whole, and Shuichi adverts his thoughts to try start conversation with said company.

“Who is the mouse?”

Shuichi felt like getting smashed like a papaya at that moment, his orange guts made into a sickening salad that was disgusting and spicy to anyone who ate it.

“Hmm?” Kokichi replies, barely hearing Shuichi over the crowds of people laughing and chattering amongst their friends and family.

“Well when you think about it, it’s a weird saying. Isn’t it?” Shuichi raises his voice to be audible over the crowd. “At least when it applies to us, so why does it have to be a game between us?”

“Games are fun.” Kokichi stops at a Senbonbiki stand, the cords hanging from the wood in an almost tangled mess. “Games need some sort of gambling to be fun,” he hands some paper money over to the clerk, “friendships are the same, aren’t they? Without some gamble, and without playing around, what fun is it?”

Kokichi quickly tugs his chosen string down the silky wood, he receives a small coupon for 30% off
at select festival concession stands attached to the end. “So instead of paying a million yen for festival food, we get to pay 30% off of that, what a shitty deal.”

Shuichi doesn’t understand why he tried to start some sort of intellectual conversation when he could barely process any information at all. He doesn’t particularly enjoy how loud it is, and the vomit of different colors were extremely distracting. He feels awkward in his uncomfortable yukata, blue stains of dye clashing with the bright warm lights of his surroundings. Kokichi is dressed more suitable to the event, draped in a white version of his own that seems too big for him. Before Shuichi’s weird question that refers to a conversation that he barely remembers a week ago, it was mostly silence between him and Kokichi ever since they split from their other friends.

He felt like he ate his own disgusting salad of guts. His arms still hurt slightly, feeling intensely itchy. Angry white lines spreading up his arms were covered by his sleeves, he’s been conscious about his wardrobe recently.

Shuichi glances at Kokichi’s brooding face, covered in saturated light. ‘I know I’m being irrational, but I feel like he hates me. I know he doesn’t, but I can’t shake off the feeling that there is something wrong with me.’

Does spiciness enhance the flavor of orange intestines, or does it make the salad even more revolting to taste? Shuichi was an expired papaya, poisoning those who ate from it. His mind is like mashed zest and he feels an intense migraine come on from thinking too much about papayas, and the possibility of Kokichi hating him.

He feels so ashamed.

Shuichi tugs quickly at Kokichi’s sleeve, desperately needing some sort of emotional support to let his mind relax. He knew he is being irrational, and he’s stopping it before he blows up like fireworks popping. He gives him a pleading look, Kokichi knowing Shuichi’s oncoming distress, and he knew exactly what his eyes meant. Kokichi maneuvers Shuichi’s wrists and guides him through the busy crowds of people, almost slamming into those who are dancing and eating. Shuichi feels like crying, and he scolds himself for getting overwhelmed only one hour after arriving at the festival.

Pushing, and shoving, and pulling, and people. Pushing, and people. Shoving, and then air.

Kokichi finds a nearby grassy spot above a steep hill where families have already set up blankets to prepare for the fireworks show. Scatters of trees lay beneath the hill that covered a nearby lake elegantly. Streaks of red lighting illuminated the leaves, making it seem like fall came early. Neither of them brought a blanket, so they sat themselves where there wasn’t much dirt.
Shuichi didn’t mind much anyways, he feels like dirt.

‘Well, there is something wrong with me, I guess. Maybe I’m the problem, and I’m making this harder on myself because I’m overthinking.’ Shuichi feels the rush of thrashing thoughts calm down as he hears the distant shouts of people and the silent roaring of cicadas fill his ears. Shuichi sighs, so caught up in the silent moment he almost forgets the person accompanying him.

“Well? What’s wrong?” Kokichi nudges Shuichi’s knee, seemingly throwing him off a bit. “Was that awfully selfish of me to say, huh? I only get pleasure from friendships that are games to me?”

Kokichi puffs out his cheeks in a way that amuses Shuichi.

Somehow the word ‘friendship’ strikes an unsettling note within Shuichi, and his eyes advert Kokichi’s piercing stare.

Kokichi makes a contorted face that doesn’t read well “Poor Saihara-kun needs to get better friends than wil-ol-me.”

“Stop that,” Shuichi’s eyebrows tighten, “Of cOURSE I like being your friend.”

He didn’t. He knew he didn’t. Everything surrounding Ouma Kokichi like pure light to Shuichi, like sweet fruits and red leaves bouncing off pure reflections. Shuichi didn’t realize when he came to these conclusions, but he feels his chest tighten severely with grief.

“You don’t loooove being my friend? Just like? After everything we’ve been through? You’ve seen me puke my guts up multiple times!” he crosses his arms, big hoops of fabric completely swamp his tiny appendages. “That’s at least grounds for some serious bonding.”

Shuichi blushes, raising his right hand to his face to instinctively scrub his cheek into oblivion. “You know what I meant.”

“Of course I don’t! Say you love being my friend, otherwise we can’t be best friends!”
Shuichi feels somewhat guilty, but he couldn’t place exactly why he feels so. “Friends...” he coughs over his words, “I love being your friend.” His face feels like burning hot papayas, and he lowers his head into his knees.

Kokichi relaxes all of a sudden, he sprawls into the grass and pretends to make snow angels, with only grass and dirt staining his yukata quickly. It’s almost like a ghost possessed him out of nowhere with his shift in body language.

He settles.

“The moon is pretty,” he lulls. He looks Shuichi from his crooked position, and it almost felt like complete silence. Shuichi’s heart drops into his salad filled stomach, nothing but the burning of a spicy similar to a cough drop infests his body. His cheeks light up, as well as the fireworks that cover the sky.

“The moon.” Kokichi whispers to thin air, his gaze lifting back to the sky.

The moment feels intimate, like something that was supposed to be more. Shuichi felt more. “The moon, right. It’s… nice.” Shuichi responds.

Shuichi took this as a cue to say something, the moon tonight was absolutely unremarkable, just emerging from a new moon, he wonders why Kokichi would comment on something so weird.

It hit him like a truck.

*pop*

*pop*

*pop* “you…”

A loud firework completely dwarfs Shuichi’s words, making his heart shiver in relief as well as grief. He wasn’t going to let this go.
Kokichi hummed.

*pop*

*pop*

*pop*

*pop*

Kokichi’s face illuminated with the fireworks, splotches of color dancing on his face. Kokichi wasn’t watching the fireworks, and neither was Shuichi.

“Um…” Shuichi stalled.

“Yes?” Kokichi interjects.

“…”

*pop*

“I like you.” Shuichi’s words shimmered.

“…”

Mashed papayas.

Kokichi raises from his spot, yukata covered in grass and dirt. Shuichi’s heart drops as he stands, wiping off the filth.
'What the hell did I just do?' He feels like the dirt and grass being wiped off by his hands, the filth running into the ground to be trampled on for years to come. He feels like mashed papayas whose guts are spicy and disgusting. Shuichi is disgusting, he is disgusting. Disgusting. Disgusting salad, papaya salad, disgusting spicy salad whose guts were mashed to orange cream.

His heart couldn’t take it, the fireworks and cicadas were ringing in his ears. The dark dusk made him itchy to the bone as the humidity made his heart sweat.

Disgusting.

“You’re shivering, are you cold?” Kokichi croaks. His eyes rapidly looking around for some sort of safe haven.

Disgusting.

“Saihara, come here. Come with me, please. I want to show you something.” Kokichi leans down slightly, becoming increasingly flustered and irritable with Shuichi’s lack of response.

Disgusting.

“Shuichi!” Kokichi pulls Shuichi up quickly, hiding his face with a confident steer in direction. Meanwhile, Shuichi keeps his face to the ground, wanting to die any chance he can get.

“You’re so irritating sometimes.” He mumbles, leading Shuichi down the steep hill where jumbles of trees lay, roots resting on top of each other in an interesting fashion. They stop under a smaller tree, away from the crowds of people observing the show. Lights flicker, but not physical ones.

The cicadas sting through his ears, and his neck feels hot and sticky. He hates summer.

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“The moon.” Kokichi says. He lifts his hand to Shuichi’s cheek, feeling the spicy heat emitting from his face. Shuichi starts crying, lifting his hand to meet Kokichi’s. The glue that kept his eyes stuck to the ground was removed by the touch.

Shuichi looks above him, the trees completely covering the sky while the only light emitting from the
woods were the occasional fireworks. “It’s pretty isn’t it?” Kokichi finishes, his body leans closer into the other. Breathing the same air between them, it doesn’t feel cold. It feels warm, like the sun.

Their lips briefly connect, feeling like papayas and dango.

“Yeah.” Shuichi breathes, his face inches from Kokichi’s.

It feels like a warm salad of shy taste.

Chapter End Notes

so to explain the whole Moon thing. In Japanese, moon is pronounced liked “月” (tsuki)
while Like is usually “好き” (suki)
basically just a stupid pun that doesn’t translate well to English.

the game they were playing is a common game played at matsuri where you pulled a string and at the end there’s usually some kinda goodie connected. usually it’s pretty shit.

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