American Beauty/American Psycho

by chuwuyas

Summary

American Beauty/American Psycho is the sixth album by the American band Fall Out Boy, with 11 tracks. Here, is a collection of 11 individual oneshots based in the songs.

Notes

Me @ myself: You know your useless ass suck at writing multi chapter fics, wait till you have at least three stories done to start posting them.

Also me: Fuck you ugly ass bitch you're not my mom.
American Beauty/American Psycho (2015) is the sixth album by the American band Fall Out Boy, with 11 tracks. You probably heard some of the songs before, like Centuries or Immortals, but you can listen to the whole album [here](#) if you want. It’s worth it, I promise!

I’ve been wanting to write a fanfiction about this album since the first time I listened to it, back in 2015, but I’ve never found a fandom where I shipped different couples enough to fit in the stories I had in mind. The first one (Irresistible), in particular, I carried the idea with me along the years while waiting for the perfect couple to show up and finally give me the opportunity to write what I had in mind for this song; the other plots came to me with time, but now I already know what to write for each song. The stories won’t connect with each other, so if you want to skip a song/chapter because you don’t ship the couple the story is about and read only the ones about the couple you ship it’s okay. I will update the relationships tags as the fic goes on.

So the tags don’t get too long, I will write the respective tags and trigger warnings at the start of each story and write a quick summary so you’ll know what will happen on it. Also, I think it’s important to tell you that English is not my first language so the stories might have some mistakes here or there. I already apologize for those, I’ll try my best to keep the stories the best I can.

Without further ado, let’s go to the first story!

“We’ve been here forever
And here’s the frozen proof
I could scream forever
We are the poisoned youth.”

– Centuries, Fall Out Boy
Irresistible - Soukoku

Chapter Summary

Dazai couldn’t help it, he loved the way Chuuya hurt him.

Chapter Notes

This is one of my favorite songs of the album and I can’t believe I finally had the opportunity to write the story I had in mind for four years. I really really hope you appreciate it just as much as I did.

(TAGS: Alternate Universe – Illegal Fight Clubs, Mentioned Character Death, Explicit Sexual Content)

[words count: 10.998]

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

As he walked down the empty streets, he checked the paper with the address his manager gave him to see if he was leading to the right place. He read the address written in Odasaku’s sloppy handwritten once again and looked around for the street’s board, quickly finding it and smiling. He was at the right street. Moving forward, Dazai rubbed his hands together to warm them up and kept looking for the address, walking down the street until he reached the said address and stopped in front of the gates.

If he wasn’t paying attention, he would’ve missed the address. Faithful to what Odasaku has told him, his final destination was a small red gate between two closed pubs with nothing but a small board with the words “underground detectives” shining in red neon lights swinging forth and back with the cold wind. He tilted his head to the side to the small gate, checking the address once again and confirming he was at the right place; he looked around and shrugged, pulling the gates and walking down the stairs to meet the two huge securities at another small red closed door.

“Uh, my manager told me about this club?” Dazai said when the securities closed his way to the door, scratching his neck uncomfortable.

“Do you have the card?” One of the securities said, coldly robot-like voice.

“Oh, yeah! Sorry.” Dazai said, remembering the card Odasaku gave him along with the address. He picked the card with the words ‘vita sexualis’ written on it in a fancy and sophisticated calligraphy and showed it to the security. The security took a look at the card and walked out the way to the club, opening the door for Dazai and nodding at him. Dazai smiled at the securities and walked into the club, sighing happily when the door was closed behind him and the warm air hit his face, taking a look around.

It was big. The light was narrowed to a weird red one that seemed to let things hotter (seriously, what was with these people and the color red?), the place was surrounded with different people.
everywhere and the _noise_, God, the noise was so loud that made Dazai feel home. He smiled to the atmosphere and took a deep breath, the smell of sweat and blood and alcohol and sex filling his senses and sending him straight to hell, where he belongs.

“Dazai? Dazai Osamu?” Came a voice from behind him, over the loud noise of the club making him open his eyes to meet the person that was talking to him. It was a blonde tall man in glasses, good looking, probably around his age and with a gaze on his face to cover a cut. “I’m Kunikida Doppo, Oda told me you’d come.”

“Nice to meet you, Kunikida-kun. That’s a pretty ugly cut you got there.” Dazai replied with a smirk, shaking the hand Kunikida was handing him.

Kunikida touched the bleeding gaze on his left cheek. “Oh, this? This actually was given by a friend of mine, Ranpo. He got mad at me because I stole his lunch.” He explained with a giggle, leading the way between the people to somewhere more reserved. “I don’t fight, but Oda told me you do. Are you here to fight?”

“Yes, sir.” Dazai said, following Kunikida to wherever he was taking him. They ended up in the back of the club where they could have a clean vision of the whole club, far from the fighting ring, resting against a wall next to the stairs. “So what’s the club policy to fight?”

“Don’t kill anyone.” A new voice said, from a guy sitting on the steps of the stairs, with a bomber military leather jacket that was definitely too big for him, his right hand bandaged and with an open bag of chips on his lap. “Everything else is fine.”

Dazai smirked at the bandaged hand. “You must be Ranpo, the guy who fought with Kunikida.”

“I didn’t fight with him.” Ranpo grumbled, his mouth full of chips. “This pussy doesn’t fight. I just punched him because he’s an asshole.”

“I prefer to organize the fights and preserve my pretty face to my future significant other, thank you.” Kunikida replied, rolling his eyes before looking back at the movement on the club. “Do you want to fight today or just see the fighters we have here? I can find you an opponent if you want to fight, I think Tachihara is here today.”

“No, just looking the opponents is fine.” Dazai replied, crossing his arms on his chest and looking at the people walking up and down the club. He found a lot of beautiful people there, gorgeous woman and handsome men everywhere that took his breath away multiple times; he talked to a few people, made some friendships, get to know Kunikida and Ranpo better and drank a beer before the first fight was announced.

“Ladies and gentlemen here present on this beautiful day, let’s start the fights!” Said the man in the middle of the fighting ring, the crowd cheered. The man walked out the ring and two other men walked into it, one with ginger hair tied up with a bandana and the other with dark hair.

“Junichirou and Ryuunosuke.” Ranpo introduced them to Dazai, making him nod. “They’re good. Ryuu will win.”

In fact, Ryuunosuke did win the match. A few fights passed, some ending faster than the others and the opponents varying between women and men and fight styles. He studied the different opponents, memorizing their fight styles just in case he ended up fighting with any of them and picking up the ones he thought he would win or lose against with. By the last fight he had four promising opponents he would like to fight against with, the Tachihara guy Kunikida mentioned earlier being one of them, when the final fight started.
“You guys thought you wouldn’t see him today, didn’t ya?” The speaker said with a big smile, walking around the ring and making the crowd cheer. “You really thought he wouldn’t fight today?”

“Who?” Dazai asked to Kunikida, but he just smirked.

“You’ll see.”

Dazai frowned, but he looked at the ring again and listened to the words the speaker was saying before the lights narrowed down and the crowd cheered even louder, if that was possible. The speaker walked out the ring and other guy walked in, very tall and strong, with dark hair and an intimidating scar crossing his face. He growled, showing his muscles to the crowd. Dazai raised an eyebrow.

“This guy? He’s weird.” He said, Ranpo snorted.

He was about to complement his sentence when the big guy’s opponent walked into the ring, making the crowd cheer so loud Dazai thought his eardrums would explode. He closed his eye to the loud noise, opening them after a few seconds and looking back at the ring. When he saw the opponent, he widened his eyes.

“You got to be kidding me.”

The guy that was going to fight against the big one was definitely more than 40cm smaller than him, skinny and small, jumping around the ring and encouraging the crowd to cheer louder like he wasn’t about to be fucking murdered.

“Are you guys really gonna allow this?!?” Dazai asked desperately. “He’s going to fucking die!”

Ranpo opened his eyes for the first time since Dazai arrived the club, looking at him with narrowed green eyes and a mischievous smile that made a shiver run through Dazai’s spine. “Just watch it.”

So he did.

At the start, he was reluctant to watch the fight because it felt like the redhead small guy was going to be ripped apart right there in front of everyone and dozens of people were gonna watch his imminent death without doing anything, but when the fight started all Dazai could do was watch tin amazement he guy dancing around the ring, like he belonged there and anywhere else.

The big guy didn’t have a chance against him.

Only a few seconds after the beginning of the fight the match was over, the big guy falling passing out on the floor and the redhead cheering his victory. Dazai didn’t take his eyes away from him, he couldn’t take his eyes away from him, the image of his victory stuck into his mind like a moth getting trap in the light by fixation.

“Who-” He managed to whisper, eyes still widened in shock. “Who is this guy?”

“This, my friend.” Ranpo said with a smirk, green eyes glowing at him. “Is Nakahara Chuuya, our best fighter.”

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Dazai returned to the fight club the other day. And the other day. And the other day.
He talked to Odasaku that night, saying that he went to the club and saw the fighters and got
interested, so Odasaku talked to Kunikida and asked him to put Dazai on the fight list. He quickly
did it, so Dazai already had a fight reserved to the next Saturday.

He couldn’t help but think about how much he wanted to fight with that Nakahara guy.

Knowing Nakahara’s reputation, it was almost impossible that his first fight at the Underground
Detectives Club was with the dude. It would probably be with some random guy just to test his
strength and see his fight style, but he couldn’t help but wish he could fight with Nakahara sooner;
the guy’s fight style remembered Dazai of his ex-fight partner, Fyodor, the only guy that could
actually stand a chance against him and actually made things interested to him. He kinda missed
Fyodor sometimes, even though the guy was a total jerk, he could make the fights last because they
were both too smart and competitive to let the other win.

What did he need to do to have a chance to fight against that Nakahara Chuuya guy?

He shook his head, squeezed the backpack’s shoulder strap and walked into the club. It was
relatively emptier today, with just a few people here and there talking and training while others drank
and made out against a wall; he saw Kunikida and Ranpo talking next to the same stairs he
met Ranpo the other day, so he headed there to greet his new friends.

“What’s up, Dazai?” Kunikida said with a smile, fist bumping him. “Ready to your first fight?”

Dazai smiled. “I was born ready.”

“This is how you talk.” Kunikida smirked, then opened a small green notebook and leafed through
the pages. “Your opponent today is Tachihara, I talked to you about him the other day. He’s 20, 1,71
and about 57kg, I think it’s gonna be a good fight.”

“Okay.” Dazai nodded, picking up the notebook Kunikida was handing him and looking at
the Tachihara’s guy information. “And what about Nakahara?”

“What about him?” Kunikida asked.

“When will I fight with him?”

Ranpo started laughing instantly, throwing his head backwards. “Good joke.” He said between the
laughs, but stopped as soon as he saw the confused look Dazai was shooting him. “Oh shit, you’re
serious.”

“Why wouldn’t I be?” Dazai asked, truly curious. “I mean, I saw his fight the other day and I think
he might be a good opponent to me.”

“Listen.” Kunikida said, pinching his nose. “Chuuya is our best fighter, he’s kinda the king of the
monarchy here. We need to see how good you fight before we can even think about letting you fight
with him, otherwise he could kill you.”

Dazai snorted. “Please.”

“I mean it.” Kunikida insisted, then took his notebook back from Dazai’s hands and put back inside
his coat pocket. “Okay, let’s see your fight with Tachihara today and, if you are good enough, I will
talk to Chuuya about you, how about that?”

“Okay.” Dazai nodded.
“If you want to talk to Chuuya about other things, though, he’s at the bar.” Ranpo said, pointing at the bar with the beer bottle he was holding. Dazai looked at where the bottle was pointing, finding the small person with orange hair with his back at him. He smiled and nodded at Ranpo, silently thanking him, then started to head at the bar.

Once he was close enough, he ran his fingers through his hair and cleaned his throat, taking the seat next to Chuuya who didn’t even bother to look at him, just kept looking forward and sipped from his beer.

“So.” Dazai started with his best flirty face, resting one elbow at the bar counter and raising an eyebrow. “What’s a place like you doing in a guy like this?”

Chuuya looked at him sideways, frowning. “Who the fuck are you?”

“I’m the new fighter.” Dazai replied, smirking. Chuuya wasn’t impressed.

“Whatever.” He said, then looked forward again and took a sip from his beer. Dazai waited for a moment in expectation, but Chuuya didn’t say anything else.

“That’s- that’s it?” He said, frowning. “You’re not gonna say anything else?”

Chuuya hit his bottle on the bar counter. “What the fuck do you want me to say?”

“I don’t know, maybe ‘cool, good luck on your fights, maybe we can fight together someday’?” Dazai suggested, making Chuuya finally look directly at him.

Suddenly, he forgot how to breath.

It was his eyes, Dazai thought. Big, bright blue eyes that looked like the deep ocean and seemed to freeze the blood in Dazai’s veins, with a cold expression that said ‘I can look into your soul and I’m not impressed’ and fuck, that was hot. He was so hot. The orange messy hair falling in front of his cold blue eyes, the ghostly pale skin with purple bruises from his previous fights, the thin yet muscular body only partially covered by the black tank top. His expression that told him ‘I’m better than you and I can finish you in a matter of seconds’. And, honestly, Dazai was willing to let him step over him and he would definitely thank him after that.

“Cool, good luck on your fights, maybe we can fight together someday?” Chuuya echoed his previous sentence with a cold, monotone voice that definitely turned Dazai on. And then his expression suddenly turned into a mischievous one, an arched eyebrow as he leaned his body forward to whisper to Dazai: “If you’re worth it.”

Dazai needed a cold shower.

Chuuya finished his beer and stood up, tapping Dazai’s shoulder before leaving the bar without any other word. For a moment Dazai was petrified, like he was framed up on a wall to be kept out of problem, until Ranpo called him and turned off his daydream about Chuuya stepping over him.

“Oi, Dazai!” Ranpo said, getting closer to the bar with slow funny steps that made Dazai tilt his head to the side in curiosity. Was he limping? “Stop flirting with Chuuya and get ready for your fight.”

“Right, the fight.” He said once Ranpo was close enough, letting the man use him as support when he stood. Ranpo then lead the way to a small room in the back of the club where he could change, with a separate restroom if he wanted privacy and a few lockers to keep his things. Kind of a locker room.
When he walked into the locker room, he opened a big smile when he saw who was waiting for him. “Odasaku! You came!”

Odasaku smiled. “What kind of manager would I be if I lost your first fight here?”

“He’s actually here to see the guy who works at the bar.” Ranpo said from the door, resting against the door stop, arms crossed in front of his chest and a Cheshire cat smile on his lips. Dazai never noticed that before, but Ranpo was really small; maybe just a few inches taller than Chuuya, and the oversized bomber jacket (that definitely wasn’t his, Dazai’s noticed the patch saying “E.A.POE” on the jacket before) he wore only made him look even smaller.

“Shut up you, Edogawa.” Odasaku hissed. “I’m not here to see Ango.”

Ranpo smirked, green naughty eyes glowing at him. “I never said his name.”

Dazai giggled, putting on his black and blue fighting shorts. “He got you, buddy.”

“Shut up, both of you.” Odasaku hissed again, but the red on his cheeks revealed the truth. “Dazai, stop messing around and get ready for the fight. Where’s Kunikida?”

“No idea.” Ranpo shrugged. Dazai finished putting the fight clothes on, his arms, neck, chest and thighs covered with white bandages that made Ranpo arch an eyebrow. “What’s that?”

Dazai shrugged, but didn’t reply. Instead, he started his warm-up exercises and ignored the weird looks Ranpo was shooting at him as he talked to Odasaku about the fight policy on the club and other random things. About 20 minutes later Kunikida showed up, the cut on his cheek starting to disappear, saying that the fight was about to start; Dazai smiled and hugged Odasaku when he wished him good luck and told him he would watch him from the bar—bullshit, Odasaku. You want to talk to the barman–.

The fight was good. The guy he was fighting with was good, but Dazai felt like the dude could be better if he used his whole potential instead of holding back his strength; his moves were predictable but his fight style was good, he could even hit Dazai a few times and win a round, but he wasn’t good enough.

Distracted with Tachihara, Dazai didn’t notice Chuuya approaching Ranpo and Kunikida watching his fight next to the ring. He rested against a pilaster and crossed his arms on his chest, analyzing Dazai’s fight skills.

“He’s good, but show off way too much.” He said, Ranpo and Kunikida nodded. “Who’s the brat in white bandages?”

“Dazai Osamu, Oda indicated him to me and I told him to come here and see if he felt comfortable.” Kunikida replied, still watching Dazai and Tachihara’s fight. Dazai won the second round, the third and decisive round quick starting. “Looks like he made himself at home.”

“Funny guy, this Dazai.” Chuuya said with a snort. “Came to me, flirted and said he wanted to fight. I almost gave him a chance just for the courage.”

“Chance to fight or to fuck with you?” Ranpo asked, smirking mischievously. Chuuya punched him on the arm, Ranpo giggled. “Just asking.”

The fight ended, Dazai easily winning the last round. He and Tachihara greeted each other and properly introduced themselves, laughing at whatever they were saying to each other as Dazai sipped from his bottle of water and then poured the rest of the water from inside the bottle into his head to
reduce the heat and wash the sweat and the blood coming out from a cut on his eyebrow.

“Fuck.” Chuuya breathed at the scene, eyes stuck in Dazai’s wet hair and bright smile. “Fuck, he’s hot.”

Ranpo snorted. “Does Nakahara Chuuya is gay?”

Dazai talked to Tachihara just a little more before picking up his towel from the ring’s floor and throw it around his neck, drying his wet hair and walking down the small stairs to meet his friends. Chuuya moved away from the pilaster the moment Dazai hit the last step of the ring stairs, walking to meet him in the middle of the way.

“Nothing bad.” He said, catching Dazai’s eyes on his, close enough to feel Dazai’s heavy breath on his forehead. Pretending to be unimpressed, he looked at Dazai from head to toe and then smirked. “For an amateur.”

Dazai smirked, keeping Chuuya’s glare for a moment until the redhead walked away. He watched the boy walk confidently away from them, then lick and bit his lower lip.

“Are you smelling this?” Ranpo said, sniffing the air. Kunikida rolled his eyes, already knowing what was coming, making Dazai snort. “Do you smell this? The smell of sexual tension?”

“Shut up.” Dazai giggled, drying properly his hair and running his fingers through them to try and fix the messy strands.

“I’m serious dude, how did you manage to call Chuuya’s attention?” Ranpo insisted, looking really impressed. “I mean, I get that you’re hot and all that but fucking hell I thought you two were gonna fuck right here. Not saying I wouldn’t like to see that, tho-”

“And I’m out.” Kunikida said, putting his green notebook back on his pocket and making Ranpo laugh. “You were really good, Dazai. I might talk to Oda to schedule another fight for you, if you want.”

“I would like that, thank you.” Dazai said, then Kunikida nodded and left without any other word. Ranpo and Dazai looked at each other for a moment without saying anything.

“Wanna get a drink?” Ranpo asked.

Dazai smiled. “Sure.”

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Apparently the managers of the club liked Dazai, because that same night he was woken up by a text from Kunikida saying he had other four fights in his schedule for the next week. This, and the other text that really called his attention.

Chuuya wanted to train with him.

He jolted up on his bed, cheering loudly and smiling before printing the text and sending the print to Ranpo. The answer was immediate, Ranpo sounding as excited as he was.

The next day he went to the club with a huge, proud smile, because he somehow managed to call the king of the club’s attention and was going to train with him. The same guy who was apparently untouchable, according to the way Ranpo and Kunikida talked about him, the guy who won every single fight he fought, don’t matter how big and strong his opponent was.
He walked into the club like he owned the place, even though he was there for just one and a half week. He saw Kunikida and Chuuya instantly, the long dirty blonde hair and the pretty messy orange one being a headlight between the unknown faces, a pretty woman with brown hair talking to Kunikida while Chuuya drank in silence next to them.

“What’s up, Dazai?” Ranpo said, suddenly appearing in front of him with his usual bomber military oversized jacket, pointing at the cut on his eyebrow. “Nice cut.”

“Thank you, it’s a battle scar.” He said, making Ranpo giggle.

“Let’s go.” Ranpo said, pointing at the bar with his head. “I wanna introduce you to someone.”

“Lead the way, sir.” Dazai replied, gesturing for Ranpo to walk in front of him. Ranpo started to lead at the bar with the same funny steps Dazai noticed before; so he wasn’t wrong, Ranpo did limp.

They stopped in front of Kunikida, Chuuya and the pretty woman with brown hair, greeting them as Ranpo asked the barman –Ango, Dazai found out– for two whiskies. He sat down in the stool next to Kunikida, shaking his legs in a childish way when Ango gave him his whisky.

He gave Dazai his own glass, then pointed at the pretty woman. “Dazai, this is Yosano. She’s our angel and personal doctor.”

“Nice to meet you, ma’am.” Dazai said, picking Yosano’s hand and kissing softly the back of it. He pretended he didn’t hear Chuuya snorting.

“Nice to meet you too, Dazai.” Yosano smiled, then rolled her eyes. “This is an illegal fight club, kid. You don’t need to be that polite.”

“I prefer to keep the good manners.” Dazai stated.

“He’s our new guy.” Kunikida said, sipping from his own whisky.

Yosano smirked. “Oh, I see. Welcome to hell, Dazai.”

“Thank you, I already feel like home.” Dazai said, then drank his whole whisky in just one sit.

Chuuya finished his drink and stood up, slowly walking to Dazai and stopping in front of him for just a second to check him out, say “let’s see how good can you be” and smirk before leaving. Dazai smirked back, following Chuuya with his eyes until he disappeared among the people.

“Holy shit,” Ranpo breathed. “I thought he was just messing with you yesterday, but he totally wants to fuck you, dude.”

“Good.” Dazai murmured, still looking at where Chuuya disappeared, then looked back at his friends. “So, the fights today?”

Kunikida picked up his notebook, leafing through the pages. “Uh, we have Atsushi and Ryuu, Naomi and Gin, Tecchou and Twain. There’s a few others as well.”

“No Chuuya?” Dazai asked, sitting next to Ranpo.

“Chuuya have a fight tomorrow with this guy from the other club.” Ranpo said, sipping from his whisky. With a straw. “I think the guy is French? He seems good, I would fight with him too.”

“You can’t fight anymore.” Kunikida pointed without looking up from his notebook, kicking Ranpo’s bad leg slightly.
Ranpo grunted. “Yeah no shit, Sherlock.”

Dazai looked at Ranpo’s bad leg, feeling more and more curious about the reason he limped. So he used to fight? How did he hurt his leg? For some reason, he felt like he shouldn’t ask it directly at him.

“Oi, Dazai.” Kunikida said, snapping his fingers in front of his face and taking him away from his thoughts. Dazai blinked and looked at the man. “Chuu is calling you.”

He nodded, then looked around for Chuuya. He found the redhead at the top of the stairs where he met Ranpo, calling him with his hands and with an impatient expression on his face, tapping his foot on the floor repetitively.

“There’s a ring upstairs used for training.” Yosano explained. “It’s reserved so there won’t be anyone there but you two.”

“Just clean up the mess after you’re done, if you know what I mean.” Ranpo said, looking at him with those naughty green eyes and raising his pinky suggestively as he sipped from his whisky with the straw. Yosano and Kunikida twisted their noses in disgust. “Go get him, tiger.”

“Shut up.” Dazai snorted, but started to lead where Chuuya was waiting for him. He stopped at the locker room to pick up his backpack before finally going to Chuuya, quickly climbing the stairs and meeting his new fight partner on the last step.

Chuuya gave him a crook smile before pointing at hall with his head, leading the way along the hall with multiple doors until they reached their final destiny; he opened the door at the end of the long corridor and let Dazai look inside.

Like Yosano said, it was a training room. There was a ring in the middle of the room just a little bit smaller than the one downstairs, some punching bags in different sizes, some speed bags, two big lockers with multiple training equipment and a few other things; he saw two toilets on the back of the room and a drinking fountain next to a huge mirror that covered the whole wall. A big window took the whole wall next to the one with the mirror and the toilets.

It was a nice room. Made Dazai feel like home.

“So?” Chuuya said, walking into the room and dropping his backpack next to one of the lockers with the fight equipment. “What do you think?”

“It’s nice.” Dazai said, closing the door behind him. He walked further into the room, turning around himself to look at everything. He took a deep breath, the smell of dust and leather filling his sense.

“Good.” Chuuya smiled, looking at Dazai as he tied his hair in a low ponytail and put on his half finger fighting gloves. “Did you warm-up yet?”

“Yes.” Dazai nodded, walking to the other locker and dropping his backpack on the floor. He took off his shirt and shoes, then tied his own hair up in a half ponytail. “Let’s do this.” He said, shamelessly taking off his pants right there to put on his training shorts. He smirked at the way Chuuya looked at him from head to toe and licked his lips.

Chuuya finished putting on his training clothes (just his half finger black gloves and a black and red fighting shorts that may or may not have made Dazai hard) and walked to the ring. Dazai finished putting on his training clothes right away (the same clothes as Chuuya, but blue instead of red and with his usual white bandages covering his whole body) and followed his new training partner, climbing up in the ring and walking around it to get used to its size; just a little bit smaller than the
one downstairs, he would get used to it in a second.

“I saw you fighting yesterday.” Chuuya said, hitting his hands together. Dazai gasped. “You’re good, but show off way too much. You need to focus on your opponent instead of showing off to the ladies watching you.”

“Maybe I just like enjoying the view.” Dazai replied with a smirk, looking at Chuuya from head to toe, walking around the ring and surrounding Chuuya like he was his prey. Chuuya licked his lower lip and snorted, following Dazai’s moves and walking around the ring like he was doing.

“When we start, I’m gonna make you beg for me to stop.” Chuuya said with a crook smile, cracking his neck and moving to a defensive stance for his first move. Dazai mirrored his stance and smirked, challengingly raising an eyebrow. “I’m gonna get you to burst just like you were a bubble.”

“Do it, baby.”

Chuuya attacked right away. Dazai barely had time to properly wide his eyes with the sudden movement before raising his arms to block Chuuya’s jab and slip from a hook, immediately stepping back when Chuuya’s offensive moves were too quick to hit back; he ducked from another jab and blocked a kick, using this small time to fight back. He used a spinning heel kick to increase the distance between them for just a second so he could breath, not even having the time to properly inhale before Chuuya was coming for him with all he had.

He blinked and he was at the floor, Chuuya’s left leg keeping his right arm pressed against the ground. “If you want to fight against me out there someday, you need to take this serious. Focus.”

Dazai grunted and stood up in a stance again, this time initiating the fight. He started with a left uppercut immediately followed by a straight kick that made Chuuya gasp and wide his eyes, blocking with a certain difficult that made Dazai smile slightly; he wasn’t perfect after all, he could fail. He was fool enough to try the same move again, being immediately blocked and gaining a cut on his lip from a painful punch in the face.

“Bold of you to assume I don’t pay attention on your moves.” Chuuya said with a crook smirk. Dazai touched the cut and licked the blood on his lips, purposely slowing down the act to catch Chuuya’s attention. It worked.

They stanced, Dazai starting the fight again. He tried a right cross that was easily blocked and gave the opportunity for Chuuya to counterattack with two followed jabs and a roundhouse kick; Dazai managed to slip from the punches and the kick, counterattacking and sending him straight to the floor with a sweep kick. Chuuya groaned in pain when his back hit the floor and Dazai used his knee to keep him against the floor as he leaned to whisper to him:

“I am taking this serious.”

“Oh, so we’re gonna get naughty here, aren’t we?” Chuuya said with a mischievous smile that sent a shiver through Dazai’s body.

He didn’t know exactly how this happened. In a moment he had Chuuya defenseless under his knee and in another he was the one who was being held against the floor, eyes widened in shock, Chuuya using his own knee to keep him on the floor.

“Rule number one.” Chuuya said with a crook smile. “Don’t underestimate your opponent. There’s too many sharks and not enough blood in the waves, if you underestimate the wrong person you might end up killed.”
Chuuya walked away, giving Dazai the opportunity to stance again before the next attack. He started this time, using multiple jabs that didn’t give Dazai any other option but block or slip and unconsciously walk backwards until he was glued against the ropes; Chuuya stopped the moves, walking away and letting Dazai return to the middle of the ring so they could start again.

They tried again. Dazai started, using a right hook and surprisingly managing to hit Chuuya, even though it was a scrape; he didn’t miss more time, he kept going with all he had and attacking the redhead until Chuuya didn’t have a choice but giving up.

Chuuya, of course, would never give up.

The next hook Dazai tried Chuuya ducked and grabbed Dazai’s arm in the air, pulling it down violently and making Dazai hiss in pain. He leaned with the strength of the tug, his face stopping dangerously close to Chuuya’s to the point he could feel his heavy breath against his face; he forgot how to breath, don’t having the courage to take his arm away from Chuuya’s grip, especially when he saw Chuuya’s eyes moving from his own to his half-opened mouth. Dazai mirrored the act, eyes traveling from Chuuya’s cold blue eyes to his red mouth, half-opened like his own, inviting him to taste his lips; he closed his eyes and leaned forward, ready to catch Chuuya’s lips on his own, until he felt the violently tug.

He hissed again when Chuuya twisted his arm painfully to his back and sweep kicked him sending him straight to the floor, his belly hitting the floor strong enough to make the air escape his lungs. He gasped, Chuuya keeping him pressed against the floor with his knee while he kept twisting his arm to his back, the pressure of Chuuya’s weight not allowing him to look up and meet his eyes.

“Rule number two.” Chuuya whispered against his ear in a soft, seductive voice, his orange hair tickling Dazai’s face. “Don’t let your opponent distract you.”

Dazai smile naughtily, not even bothering his face was being scrubbed against the floor, all he could think about was how irresistibly good Chuuya felt above him that way. Maybe he was crazy, maybe he was a sucker for pain, but he wanted to feel like this over and over again.

“Fuck, okay.” Dazai breathed, then moved when the pain started to get uncomfortable. Chuuya gave him another slight tug before stood up with a giggle and walk off the ring.

“We’re done today.” He said as he headed to grab his stuff, sipping from his bottle of water and pouring the rest of it on his head before leaving the training room without any other word.

Dazai, on the other hand, stayed on the floor without moving for at least two hours until Kunikida found him.

-x-x-x-

After the first training, it became more and more common for them to train together.

Before their fights, after their fights, when they didn’t have any fight at all, they just met at the training room to train together for at least three hours until Dazai was too tired to move and Chuuya was mocking him for being too weak. At first, on their first three weeks training together, they just distracted the other in the middle of the trainings to get advantage on the other, with small taunts here and there to make things more interesting, nothing too deep or daring.

Until the teasing evolved.

It started with verbal teasing. Empty promises that they would reward the other after the fights ended, explicitly conversations about what they would do to each other, where they would touch and how
good they would treat one another, how they would moan and mark the other in places people would never be capable to see. It started right there, on the training room. And then it evolved when Chuuya licked Dazai’s ear lobe to provoke and destabilize him to take the advantage on the fight. It worked, obviously; Dazai froze in shook and, in a second, he was spread out on the floor with Chuuya giggling in victory at his reaction. This turned a page on their weird relationship, the touch now being allowed to use along with the verbal teasing, even though they preferred to keep the teasing to only when they were alone at the training room.

They, obviously, couldn’t keep their hands to themselves.

They started with small teasing when they were next to their friends. Fingers running through the other’s thigh beneath the tables, prolonged malicious looks, mischievous smirks and the finger thing, when Dazai purposely licked the food from his fingers while keeping Chuuya’s stare because he knew how much the redhead loved his long fingers. You see, spending time with someone might be good to know them better.

Chuuya accidentally found out Dazai was a sucker for pain on a random night, when they were fighting and Dazai couldn’t concentrate enough to avoid Chuuya’s moves and kept getting hit.

“Focus.” Chuuya said that particular night, keeping Dazai pressed against the floor with his knee on his back and pulling his arm backwards in a way that was definitely hurting. “If you don’t concentrate, I might end up actually hurting or killing you.”

“Maybe.” Dazai smirked in a groan. “But I love the way you hurt me.”

-x-x-x-

Dazai walked into the club with a happily sigh, the warm atmosphere of the club being very welcome on that cold, snowy day. The club was particularly full that day, the strong scent of blood, alcohol and sweat filling his senses like second hand smoke, but he found Ranpo and Kunikida right away talking next to a pilaster like they were waiting for him. He walked to them, being welcome with big happy smiles.

“Dazai!” Ranpo said, kinda drunk. “We were waiting for you!”

“I can see that.” Dazai giggled. “Already drunk, buddy?”

“Obviously! I can’t be sober today!” Ranpo replied, sounding too excited to be something good. Dazai frowned when he saw the sad face Kunikida made to the sentence. “It’s been four years today!”

“Uh, since what?” Dazai asked, confused, but before Ranpo could reply Kunikida put a hand on his mouth and smiled forcedly.

“Chuuya and Yosano are waiting for us at the bar, shall we go there?” Kunikida said in a hurry, not taking his hand away from Ranpo’s mouth even after he licked his palm. “Lead the way, Ranpo.”

Kunikida took his hand away from Ranpo’s mouth, the boy smiled. “Sure! This way!”

Ranpo turned on his heels and started to lead to the bar among the people, Dazai and Kunikida instantly following him. As Ranpo walked in front of them, leading the way, Dazai watched with curiosity the way he was limping more than the normal, like his leg was particularly hurting more today. He has noticed Ranpo’s limp before, of course, but never had the courage to ask him or Kunikida about that.
“Why does he limp?” He finally asked in a low voice, so low that Ranpo couldn’t hear him above the loud noise of the club. If he wasn’t paying enough attention, he would’ve missed the way Kunikida froze for a second before keep following Ranpo.

“We had... Dark days.” Kunikida replied carefully. “He already told you about our only policy here, right? Don’t kill anyone?” Dazai nodded, Kunikida bit his lower lip. “Well, we have this policy because of Ranpo.”

Dazai’s voice broke a little. “Ranpo killed someone?”

“It was an accident.” Kunikida quickly replied, protecting his best friend. “We have two owners here, the Boss and his second-in-command, the President. Before his last fight, our Boss told him he shouldn’t hold back his strength and should go for his fights with all he had, so he did. Unfortunately, that didn’t end up very well.”

“Holy shit,” Dazai breathed. “I didn’t know.”

“As you can see, beyond the trauma, he also didn’t escape the fight unharmed.” As if to prove his point, Kunikida pointed at Ranpo limping in front of them, his right leg faltering sometimes and almost sending him straight to the floor. “He broke his leg in three different places and not even Yosano could fix it entirely. He never fought again, and has never been the same. It’s been four years today.”

Well, that explained why Ranpo was already that drunk so early the day. “The person he was fighting with,” Dazai asked. “What was his name? He was someone important to Ranpo, wasn’t he?”

“This is something you should ask Ranpo and only Ranpo, but if you’re smart enough, you won’t.” Kunikida coldly replied, letting Dazai know that the conversation was over. “But yes, he was important to him. More than you think.”

Dazai didn’t reply, just nodded in a silent promise he wouldn’t do anything and followed Kunikida to the bar, where Ranpo was already waiting for them and talking to Yosano and Odasaku was entertained in a chat with Ango, the barman. Chuuya greeted them with a small nod.

“Ango! I still remember! Give me something stronger!” Ranpo yelled at the barman, who looked at him with a sad expression before start making his drink. Kunikida squeezed Ranpo’s thigh softly, protectively leaving his hand there.

Dazai turned to look at Chuuya next to him, not being able to look at Ranpo. “So, you have a name or can I call you mine?”

Chuuya snorted, resting both his elbows on the bar counter. “You need to try a little harder if you want to take me home, pretty boy.”

Taking a sip from his whisky, Dazai left the empty glass on the counter and stood up, slowly walking around Chuuya until he was right in front of him, resting both his hands on the redhead’s thighs and leaning forward until their faces were so close that their breaths mixed. Chuuya smirked, looking at Dazai’s lips as the man smirked back, dirty.

“I’ve got some tricks on my sleeves.” Dazai whispered, brushing their lips together but never kissing him. Never kissing. “I can show you tonight, if you want.”

Chuuya used his legs to bring Dazai closer, in a way that now he was placed between his legs and
their foreheads were glued together, their noses and lips brushing against each other, eyes so deeply connected to one another that seemed to take both of them to another world. Dazai’s hands were still on Chuuya’s thighs, using them as support, his body leaning forward as Chuuya leaned backwards, elbows still resting on the bar counter and taking the lead on their dirty game.

Dazai then moved to kiss Chuuya’s neck, slowly licking and kissing the skin up and down to take some kind of reaction from the redhead, smiling against his neck when Chuuya started to sigh and tilt his head to the side to give Dazai more space and freedom.

“I’ve been practicing some new things with my fingers lately, you know.” Dazai whispered against Chuuya’s ear, giggling softly when Chuuya visibly shivered. “Do you wanna know what my fingers can do?”

“Tell me.” Chuuya whispered back, eyes closed and enjoying the good feeling of Dazai’s lips on his neck, trying the hardest he could to stay in control and don’t let Dazai win the game.

“How about I show you, instead?” Dazai suggested in a hoarse voice, sliding his hands over Chuuya’s thighs and squeezing them from over his black jeans, fingers dangerously approaching his zipper in a way that made Chuuya unconsciously arch his back a little. They’re in public, he needed to remind himself. Public.

“Dazai.” He tried to say warningly, but his voice broke with a sigh that sounded like he was moaning. “We’re in public.”

“Wanna go somewhere more reserved, then? I’ll just follow you scent, you can just follow my smile.” Dazai asked, kissing the whole extension of Chuuya’s jaw until he reached his cheek and then his nose. He glued their foreheads together, noses still brushing and breaths mixing together. This is it, Dazai thought, we’re finally gonna kiss.

But then, for Dazai’s disappointment, Chuuya deviated and slid off the stool he was sitting on, asking Ango for a beer and interrupting the man’s talk with Odasaku. Dazai stayed on the same position he was before Chuuya left the stool, but now using the own stool as a support instead of Chuuya’s thighs, looking at the redhead with an expression that screamed betrayal and pure surprise; he didn’t say anything while Ango gave Chuuya his beer and said something at him before the redhead leave the bar without any other word, just looking at Dazai with a smile that said ‘I’m winning’.

“Fuck.” Dazai said once Chuuya was gone, resting his arms on the counter and then resting his forehead on his arms, his pants suddenly too small and uncomfortable. “Fuck, fuck, fuck.”

He heard Odasaku chuckling. “Do you got a problem there, buddy?”

“I’m horny, Odasaku.” Dazai grumbled. “Let me sit on your face.”

“Why don’t you sit on Chuuya’s face, instead?”

“I would break his neck!”

Odasaku smirked. “He would die happy.”

Dazai gasped. “Odasaku!” The man laughed, returning to his chat with Ango and ignoring Dazai’s existence. Dazai raised his head and changed his weight from one leg to another because of the discomfort between his legs, grunting and asking Ango for a drink. Maybe getting drunk would help him.
He was on his third beer when he decided it wouldn’t.

He wasn’t drunk, he needed a lot more alcohol than three beers to get drunk, but he simply accepted he wouldn’t be capable to take Chuuya out of his mind that night. He took a look around at his friends; Ranpo was definitely about to lose conscience by the amount of alcohol he drank, crying on Kunikida’s shoulder and using his best friend as a support while Kunikida just ran his fingers through Ranpo’s hair protectively, whispering something on his ear that were probably comfort words, Yosano sitting in front of them with a bottle of water on her hands and nodding to whatever Ranpo was saying. Dazai pondered if he should be there too, comforting his friend, but Kunikida and Yosano knew Ranpo better than him and probably were the best options to take care of him; he even asked Kunikida with his eyes if he wanted him to be there too, but Kunikida just denied and gave him a sad smile. Dazai smiled back, he would talk to them later.

Finishing his third beer, he stood up and stretched, waving at Ango and Odasaku—even though they were too focused on each other to notice him—before walking away from the bar to the middle of the club where people were dancing and drinking and making out like tomorrow would never come. He took a deep breath, the toxic smoke of cigarette and other drugs filling his lungs and taking him to a completely different atmosphere from the bar; he smiled to the people around him, his body automatically starting to move in the rhythm of the song playing above the loud noise of drunk and high people, even more when Junichirou walked across him and gave him a small blue pill that Dazai immediately took. He wasn’t innocent, he knew what that would do to his body.

It took about ten minutes for the pill to take effect. It wasn’t strong, almost made him grumble in disappointment, but at least took some sort of effect; it made him feel in ecstasy, like he was finally high, but still conscious about everything around him, so that was enough for him. He wasn’t one to take drugs.

Dazai took a look around, his mind unconsciously going back to Chuuya and looking for him among the people, even though he knew it was impossible for him to find him like that. He looked for the redhead for a few minutes until he gave up, the noise starting to get too loud for his like, making him look for somewhere else more reserved and quieter; his mind traveled to the training room, making him snort with his stupidity. He climbed up the stairs and shoot one last look at his friends still at the bar, Ranpo surprisingly still awake but really close to faint on Kunikida’s shoulder, and then disappeared on the long corridor.

He walked to the training room humming the song that was playing on the club, opening the door dancing in a funny way on the rhythm of the song and then closing and locking the door behind him. Like he thought, Chuuya was there, smoking in silence next to the huge window and watching the sunset. Dazai smiled and walked to Chuuya with small jumps still in the rhythm of the song he was humming.

“Beautiful view we have here.” He said, resting against the window and looking at Chuuya, then raised an eyebrow in a stupid flirty way. “The other is just the boring sunset.”

Chuuya chuckled, exhaling the cigarette smoke. “What are you doing here, jackass?”

“I didn’t see you downstairs, so I decided to look for you because, you know.” Dazai said, then looked at his pants. “You kinda left me in the lurch, dude.”

“Really? I don’t know anything about that.” Chuuya said innocently, crook smiling. He took a drag from his cigarette one last time before putting it out, taking a step closer to Dazai and holding his jaw with his fingers; Dazai smirked, leaned forward and opened his lips briefly, knowing what Chuuya would do, letting the redhead softly touch their lips together and pass the cigarette smoke to his mouth. Dazai inhaled the toxic smoke, holding it on his lungs for a moment before
exhaling, keeping Chuuya’s glare on his while doing it. Chuuya smiled. “C’mon, let’s train a little.”

Dazai smiled back, following Chuuya to the punching bags. Chuuya pointed to the one they were gonna use and walked to the lockers, finding his stuff and quickly changing to his training clothes, knowing fully well Dazai was watching all his moves and purposely turning his back at him as he put on his shorts and tied his hair in a ponytail to tease him. He could feel Dazai’s glare on his back the whole time, smirking when he turned to look at him and raising his eyebrows when he noticed the man was already on his training clothes, wrapped hands and all.

“So.” Chuuya said, getting closer to Dazai and cracking his knuckles. “You wanna go first?”

Dazai bowed exaggeratedly. “Please, do the honors.”

Chuuya rolled his eyes, but placed himself in front of the punching bag anyways as Dazai walked to stay behind it and hold it for him. He counted to three and started punching the bag, concentrated, glad Dazai was strong enough to hold the punching bag for him.

“What’s with the bandages?” Chuuya suddenly asked, when the curiosity was stronger than the sensibility, never stopping punching the bag.

Unlikely how Chuuya thought Dazai would react, he just shrugged. “It’s easier to hide the battle scars than to deal with people asking about it. I have too many war wounds and not enough wars.” Chuuya almost stopped punching the bag to give Dazai a hug, but then the look in Dazai’s eyes changed to a dirty one. “It’s also easier to hide another kind of marks.”

“Oh yeah?” Chuuya asked, voice falling to a seductively one. “What if your significant other doesn’t want you to hide them? What if they want other people to know you belong to someone else?”

“Then they would have to let me mark them as well.” Dazai replied in the same dirty voice as Chuuya. “Mark their neck in a visibly spot, and other places only us would know.”

“I see.” Chuuya breathed, the effort starting to take effect on him and make him breathless, sweat starting to stick his hair on his forehead and neck. “Which places?”

“Their chest.” Dazai started, starting to get sweat as well. “I would start with their chest and would go down with the marks to their belly and then their back. The inner thigh.”

“Fuck.” Chuuya groaned, closing his eyes and getting the ghost feeling of Dazai’s lips on his inner thigh. His legs faltered and the blood started going to his dick.

“But I wouldn’t mark them only with my mouth.” Dazai kept saying, Chuuya missed a punch in the bag when he realized what Dazai was gonna do. “I would mark them with my fingers. I would go down on them and mark them on their mind, making them get crazy over my long fingers and ability. I would squeeze their body hard enough to make my fingers mark the skin, I would-”

He was cut in the middle of the sentence by Chuuya’s lips being strongly pressed against his.

Dazai gasped in surprise, but willingly reciprocated the kiss. He dropped the punching bag and held Chuuya’s thin waist hardly, fingers squeezing the naked skin in a way he knew Chuuya would like, bringing him closer as Chuuya threw his hands on Dazai’s neck and pulled him forward to kiss him more comfortably; both of them opened their mouth wide open and groaned together, sliding their tongues at the same time to meet outside their mouths, making loud and obscene noises that made they groan and their blood run faster in their veins.

Chuuya pushed Dazai blindly backwards until they were far enough from the punching bags, fingers
between the messy and sweaty hair pulling the strands with force, sighing happily when Dazai pulled his legs up to intertwine them on his waist so the height different wouldn’t interfere on the kiss. Dazai took him to the closer wall, pressing him against it and kissing him even more deeply, if that was possible, mouths moving together in a perfect and dirty melody that was worthy of a porn movie; Chuuya arched his back as Dazai squeezed his thighs, leaving marks that would definitely stay there for a while, the movement rubbing their dicks together and making they moan loudly. Dazai broke the kiss and changed Chuuya’s red lips for his neck, kissing and licking and sucking the skin to leave marks, the mix of pleasure from the kisses and dicks rubbing together with the minor pain from being pressed and scrubbed against the wall giving him a feeling of total delightment.

He uncrossed the legs from Dazai’s waist and jumped from his lap, smashing their lips together in another hurry kiss as he pushed him backwards across the training room until Dazai was being pressed against the fighting ring, using his hands to stabilize himself while Chuuya took the lead of the kiss. Without breaking the kiss or opening his eyes, Chuuya unwrapped both his hands to feel the texture of Dazai’s hair directly on his palms, fingers intertwining with the messy strands and pulling them with strong enough to make Dazai hiss in pain and tilt his head backwards, giving Chuuya a free view of his neck. He started biting and sucking the neck right away, pulling the bandages around Dazai’s neck a little bit down so he had more skin to work with; Dazai sighed, closing his eyes and pulling Chuuya closer by his waist as the other hand stayed beside him, holding the ring to stabilize both of them.

Chuuya pulled Dazai backwards just a little bit more against the ropes of the ring. “Get in.” He whispered against the skin of his neck, Dazai willingly obeyed. He passed under the ropes and laid down on the floor in the middle of the ring, Chuuya following him and crawling over him until he was sitting on his lap, hands dominantly pressing Dazai’s arms against the floor as he started a deep and hurried kiss.

Dazai moaned with the dominance, arching his back on the floor when Chuuya started to move his hips forth and back, opening his legs to increase the sexual contact. Chuuya moaned with him, releasing Dazai’s arms and allowing him to hold his hips and butt in a possessive way as they kissed deeply; Dazai left one of his hands on Chuuya’s butt and ran the other over his body, scratching and squeezing the skin along the way to his hair, intertwining his long fingers between the long, sweaty strands and pulling them hardly, making Chuuya make beautiful and obscene sounds that would be stuck inside his mind for ages. Especially when he started to ride him over their thin training shorts.

“Fuck,” Dazai breathed with the feeling, squeezing Chuuya’s thighs strong enough to leave marks. “Fuck, Chuuya. Do you have-”

"Yes.” Chuuya replied with a sigh, kissing Dazai one last time before quickly leaving his lap and make Dazai grunt in disappointment. He quickly went to his backpack next to the lockers, hurriedly looking for the bottle of lube and condoms he always carried with him and smiling when finally found it, going back to a very neglected Dazai spread out in the ring’s floor. He chuckled, crawling back to him and sitting on his lap. “Do you need a hand over there?” He said, touching Dazai’s dick from over the thin shorts and making the man groan with the contact.

“Please.” Dazai breathed back, closing his eyes and enjoying the moment as Chuuya smiled, pulling down Dazai’s shorts and immediately grabbing his very hard dick, stroking him slowly and making the man squirm in the floor, his back arching, eyes closed in pure pleasure. Up and down, up and down, the accumulation of sexual tension over the month returning at him all at once and almost making him come with just a few strokes.

“Not yet.” Chuuya whispered next to Dazai’s ear, messy hair tickling his face and hand still working on Dazai’s dick when he noticed the man was already next to his climax. “We’re not done here yet,
calm down.”

“Fine.” Dazai managed to reply, eyes still closed and heavy breathing. Chuuya dropped Dazai’s penis for just a second so he could take off his own fighting shorts, releasing his neglected dick and sighing in relief, then getting on his knees over Dazai again. He touched the man’s hand and half-laced their fingers together, making him finally open his eyes.

“Mind to help me?” Chuuya said with a smirk, eyes misty with lust.

Dazai moaned loudly. “Fuck, yes.”

Chuuya let go from Dazai’s hand to bring two of his fingers to his mouth, closing his eyes when he started to suck the fingers, Dazai moaning again at the view. Chuuya was always beautiful, but Dazai thanked all the gods he knew for the opportunity to see the redhead like that; eyes closed as he pornographically sucked his fingers like he was born for that, the messy and sweaty hair falling over his face and touching his shoulder, the last sun’s rays of the afternoon hitting the sweat on his pale skin and almost making the skin glow, the new hickeys he gave him made Chuuya look like he was a masterpiece that belonged to a museum.

And then the bastard opened his eyes, looking at him with those wonderful, cold blue eyes that almost seemed to look white in the orange sunlight, his expression screaming lust as he sucked his fingers like a professional.

Fuck, Dazai was so gone.

Once the fingers were wet enough, Chuuya lead Dazai’s hand to his butt and helped him to touch him, showing him the way he liked being touched. Dazai willingly let Chuuya take the lead, he was more than happy just to see the redhead’s expression as he started fingering himself with Dazai’s fingers; Dazai sat down on the ring, holding Chuuya closer with one arm as he fingered him slowly and deeply, watching the man’s expression, their moans echoing around the room. They were so glad no one else was there and the noise downstairs was definitely louder than the noise they were making.

Chuuya sighed, still holding Dazai’s hand to lead the fingering even though he was the one being fingered, but Dazai didn’t care. He knew Chuuya was dominant in the ring and in the sex he obviously wouldn’t be different, even when he was the one who was going to be fucked. Dazai fucked Chuuya with his finger the way he deserved to be fucked, deeply, hardly, intensely, adding another finger when he saw just one wasn’t enough to satisfy the redhead; the new finger was willingly welcome, Chuuya’s moans getting louder and louder as he fucked himself deeply in Dazai’s long fingers. By the third finger, when he thought he was finally ready, Chuuya pushed Dazai backwards until he was laying down on the ring again, reaching the condom and the lube next to his leg and quickly putting the condom on Dazai’s dick, pouring the rest of the lube on it and giving him a few strokes to spread the liquid before holding the penis at his butthole, slowly sitting down. Dazai held his waist to help him, moaning, giving time for Chuuya to get used to the new pain.

Chuuya, of course, didn’t fail to amaze him.

He sat down all at once, making Dazai let out a loud surprised gasp and squeeze his waist with his fingers, back arching in the floor to look at his partner in surprise. He found Chuuya already smiling in a dirty way at him, messy orange hair falling in front of his face, sweat dropping from his forehead; he smiled back at him, resting his head back in the floor as Chuuya started to move, using one of his hands to push Dazai against the floor and keep him there, letting him know he was still in the lead.
Chuuya moved slowly, wiggling his hips in a provocative way, driving Dazai crazy. He ran his fingers over Dazai’s chest, leaning his body forward and lifting his butt a little bit before sitting down again, lazily, smirking as he leaned down to kiss Dazai; Dazai immediately leaned to meet Chuuya’s lips in the middle of the way, hurriedly, only for Chuuya to avoid the contact between their lips with a crook smile. Instead of properly kissing, Chuuya squeezed Dazai’s jaw and made him open his mouth, sliding his tongue to outside his own mouth and licking Dazai’s lips; Dazai then did the same, bringing his own tongue to meet Chuuya’s outside their mouths, eyes deeply connected to each other for the moment, lips connected together for a small thread of saliva that Dazai swore was the most sexual thing he’s ever seen.

Of course, that was only until Chuuya brought one of his hand to Dazai’s neck.

Dazai immediately knew what he was gonna do, and he willingly accepted it. As Chuuya kept moving his hips up and down, with their moans echoing around the room, he remembered Dazai’s fetish of being hurt and brought one of his hands to press Dazai’s neck; with his fingers, he pressed slightly the man’s carotids to decrease the arrival of oxygen to the brain, loving the way Dazai smiled in a dirty way and rolled his eyes in pure pleasure with the feeling, back arching in the floor and hands squeezing Chuuya’s waist with force, his fingerprints leaving marks in the skin. He brought one of his hands to touch Chuuya’s neglected penis, stroking him in the same rhythm Chuuya was riding him, making the man sigh with his eyes closed.

“Fuck,” Dazai’s voice broke a little, “fuck, Chuuya. Fuck, I’m coming.”

Chuuya increased the grip on Dazai’s neck just a little, riding him faster and making both of them share a loud moan. “Come for me, baby.”

And so Dazai did.

With a hoarse and lengthy moan, arching his back, he came. He increased the strokes on Chuuya’s dick as he came, bringing the man to his own orgasm with a soft grunt; only then Chuuya dropped Dazai’s neck, allowing him to finally breath, getting off his lap and laying down next to him in the floor to recover from the intense orgasm.

“Fuck, that was intense.” He said with a heavy breath, facing the white ceiling with cracks here and there.

Dazai nodded, heavy breathing just like Chuuya. “Let’s do that again sometime.”

“We just fucked and you want to fuck again?” Chuuya snorted, turning his face to look at him. Dazai nodded again.

“Damn right I do.” He said, then turned his own face to meet Chuuya’s eyes. “I love the way you hurt me, baby.”

Chuuya chuckled. “I can see that, yes.” He said, then reluctantly moved to clean up the mess they made and throw the used condom in the trash as Dazai just stayed there, still recovering from the orgasm and humming the song that was playing downstairs. Once he cleaned up the mess, he returned to the ring and raised an eyebrow at Dazai. “Wanna take a shower and go back to the club?”

“Fuck, yes.” Dazai quickly replied, standing up and running to the toilet. Chuuya chuckled and followed him, grabbing two towels on his way.

It doesn’t even need to be said that they fucked again in the shower. Twice.
whaddup I'm Juliana I'm 20 and I have no fuckin idea how 2 write smut

Ranpo is probably my favorite character here, so I made a draw of him in the story that you can see here.

P.S: I didn't directly mention the character death but I think it's pretty obvious, I'm sorry :((((( please, comment what you thought about the story!
Edgar Allan Poe shouldn’t be surprised when Mori Ougai appointed him for a new case.

He knew the Port Mafia never slept and he should be ready all the time for unexpectedly missions, but he expected to have a few days off before his next mission. The one involving the kids’ traffic exhausted him. Still, the moment Chuuya knocked on his door saying the Boss was calling him, he was ready to his new mission and to kill whoever Mori ordered him to kill. This is how his life went at the Port Mafia. Mori would give him strict orders to kill someone, he would find the person, torture them for useful information and then kill them mercilessly, even after they gave him the information.

This is how he was trained to work, this is how he was told to act like. This is how a psycho was supposed to be.

He walked down the long, dark and cold corridor in silence, with only his large and heavy steps echoing in the empty hall, heading to the Boss’ room. He stopped in front of the huge door, fixing his clothes and brushing his hair with his fingers before slightly knocking the door; the answer came with a soft ‘come in’.

Poe crossed the room in a second, stopping beside the Boss’ chair and giving Mori a respectful bow. "Chuuya-kun told me you wanted to see me, sir?"
“Yes.” Mori replied, fingers laced in front of his face as he watched the sunset. “I have a mission for you.”

Edgar Allan Poe shouldn’t be surprised when Mori gave him a new case. Yet, there he was.

“There’s this guy.” Mori proceeded. “He’s been causing a lot of problems to us lately. I want you to eliminate him.” He pointed vaguely at the files on the side table next to his chair. Poe nodded, picking up the files and looking at the information inside it. Nothing he’s never seen before. “He hacked into some of our systems and have confidential information about our... Methods. He must be eliminated immediately, without calling attention.”

“He will, sir.” Poe replied, robotically, reading the information Mori gave him. He waited for a moment to see if Mori had more information about the case to add, but he was completely silent as he watched the sunset, indicating the conversation was over.

He gave the Boss another respectful bow and turned on his heels to leave the room, stopping middle ways when Mori called him. “And Poe?”

“Yes, sir?” He replied, looking around to meet Mori’s cold eyes.

“Do not fail.”

Poe gave him a crooked smile. “Have I ever?”

-x-x-x-

“So you have a new case?”

Poe nodded, packing a few clothes to bring to the hotel room he reserved for the next few days next to where his new victim worked so he could keep an eye on this ‘Edogawa’ dude and study his routine. Chuuya leafed through the files’ pages, comfortably sitting on Poe’s chair and using his writing desk as support for his feet while he studied the information Mori gave him.

“Please, take care of Karl.” Poe asked, closing the last bag and turning to look at his partner sitting on his desk and looking at confidential information that wasn’t for him. Chuuya pet the raccoon on his lap. “If anything happens to him, you’re dead.”

“Yeah, whatever.” Chuuya replied, still paying attention at the file. “Once you’re gone, I’m gonna cook him and eat him at dinner.” Almost like he knew what he was talking about, Karl gave a high-pitched screech and bit Chuuya’s finger. “Ow, stupid raccoon!” Chuuya hissed. “I’m gonna cook you, fucking pet!”

Poe snorted. “I think he’s gonna kill you in your sleep.”

Chuuya grunted, trying to sound angry with the raccoon, but he was petting Karl anyways. “Let him try, I’m gonna hunt him down like a chicken.”

“Please, don’t cook Karl. He’s a good boy.” Poe said, leaning down to pet Karl and smiling in a stupid childish way as he started to talk with the raccoon like he was talking to a baby. “Who’s the best boy? You’re the best boy! It’s you, Karl! It’s you!”

“Oh, grantors of dark disgrace.” Chuuya begged. “Please, kill me now.”

“Shut up.” Poe giggled, taking the ‘Edogawa’ dude’s file from Chuuya’s hands and checking the address that was written on the first page once again. He nodded to himself, picking up his gun,
knives and backpack and stroking and kissing Karl’s head before hiding the file on his back and going to his bag. He turned to Chuuya. “Don’t touch Karl.”

Chuuya chuckled. “I won’t, don’t worry.”

Poe sighed in relief. “See you in... Two weeks? A little bit more?”

“Or less.” Chuuya shrugged. “Have fun with the detective. Good luck.”

“Yeah, you too.”

He quickly gave Karl one last kiss on his head and then left his room, closing the door behind him and leaving Chuuya there alone. He passed through Mori’s office and told him he was about to start his mission and would update him with information about the case in a few hours, once he was established and comfortable at his fancy and expansive hotel room –thank God Chuuya Nakahara was his partner and only made reservations for him in the best hotels in the area for his missions–. He took a taxi and arrived the hotel in just a few minutes, not surprised with its magnificence –once again, Chuuya was his partner–. He dispensed the help and took his stuff all alone to his room, on the last floor, leaving the bag and the backpack in the floor and locking the door behind him before going to the window, not even bothering to take a look around the room; just like he imagined, his room had a direct view to the place where his target worked, a detectives agency or something like that.

Poe took off his shoes and walked to the king-sized bed, laying down on it and taking the file from his back. He started studying the file carefully.

TARGET NAME: Ranpo Edogawa

AGE: 26

ABILITY: Super Deduction

His ability seems to give him the power to deduce everything about something with just a look. The ability is started when he put on his glasses.

“Interesting ability.” Poe murmured to himself, leafing through the pages and gathering information. Edogawa was small and thin, with dark brown hair and green eyes that usually were closed, nothing really interesting about him except for his ability and the fact he hacked into the Port Mafia’s systems, but what really called Poe’s attention were the fact that there wasn’t a single photo of his face.

There were about ten photos of him, all in different angles and different places but his face was never completely showing. It was always partially covered by his hair, by shadows, by his hands or by someone else, but never showing. That was, at least, curious.

He shrugged, read a few more details about the target and then left the file behind, stretching and yawning. Poe took off his long black coat and left it in the chair next to the bed, getting into the blankets and closing his eyes. His mission would have to wait till tomorrow.

-x-x-x-

In the first three days, all Poe did was watch his target from his hotel room.

He watched and studied his routine, memorizing his schedules and habits, like the time he left the work for lunch or field missions, organizing and thinking of a way to capture him without leaving
traces behind. He didn’t usually leave the building he worked in his daily routine, except when he went out for lunch, and when he did, he was always accompanied by a tall man in a sand-colored coat or a man with blonde hair. That would difficult Poe’s mission, but he would find a way to finish it perfectly like he always did. He was the best worst thing that hasn’t happened to him yet.

Because he couldn’t give himself the afford to fail. Not at the Port Mafia. Especially when he knew what would happen to him if he did.

What would happen to his soulmate.

It wasn’t mentioned before, but in the world where Poe lives some people have this weird connection with other people that’s called ‘soul bond’. Like the name says, it’s some kind of a mental link that connect two people’s souls together –or in some rare cases like Chuuya’s, three – and give them the power to feel the other’s physical pain, so they know when the other is in trouble and needs help. The soul bond is more common in ability users –even though normal people can also have the link–, so Poe knows he has a soulmate out there somewhere, even though he never heard of them and they never heard of him. Honestly, it was better this way.

It was better for his soulmate if they never find out all the horrible things he’s done.

Poe ran his fingers through his messy hair, stopping looking at the building where Edogawa worked at to stretch and update Mori about the case, who was honestly so boring he wanted to throw everything up and straight up shoot the guy with his sniper the next time he appeared on the window, but Mori would legitimately kill him if he did that. He needed to talk to the guy to get information from him before he could finally kill him.

This is why he finally decided to move to the second step: follow the dude when he left the building for lunch.

He picked up his knives and gun, hiding them behind his back and putting on his long black coat before sitting back on the chair at the window where his sniper was positioned, checking the guy’s office once again to see if he was still there and then leaving the room behind to wait outside the hotel. He leaned comfortably against a wall with a newspaper in hands, opening it and pretending to read the news as he patiently waited for his target to leave the building for lunch. Like the previous three days, he left the building exact at 11am with the man in sand-colored coat and the blonde one.

Poe followed them. Luckily, the place where they had lunch was close to the building where they worked so they could walk to it instead of taking a taxi, making it a lot easier for Poe to follow them. They walked a few blocks before stopping at a small restaurant, probably familiar and pretty cozy, taking the table next to the front window like they probably did every day. Poe went to the café parallel to the restaurant, sitting in one of the tables outdoors and having a clear vision of his target, seizing the opportunity to have his own lunch. Fuck, he was starving.

As he watched his target having his lunch, he took notes of things he didn’t notice before and were not written at his file. The guy has a sweet tooth, was probably a vegetarian, liked soda a lot, apparently didn’t know how to properly sit on chairs and the way he ate his food was so fucking weird Poe wanted to kill him right now just because of that; he ate his food with his fucking fingers and didn’t even seem to care he was at a restaurant, what meant that was his natural way of eating and he probably ate like that all the time, because his friends didn’t even bother to try and tell him to use the chopsticks. Poe wanted to kill him with the fucking chopsticks instead of his gun. He would probably torture him with the chopsticks when he has the chance.

They stayed in the restaurant for at least an hour, talking and laughing together at their own jokes before finally paying their food and leave the establishment, returning to their work. It wasn’t until
Poe himself left the café behind that Edogawa looked straight at him and Poe suddenly forgot how to breath.

Edogawa was beautiful.

He didn’t pay attention at his facial features before because the photos Mori gave him weren’t clear enough and never showed Edogawa’s face, but now he was angry about that. How could someone so beautiful exist in a world like that? Poe suddenly wanted to kill him because he was too pretty. Still with the chopsticks, though.

Their eyes met for just a second, but that was more than enough for the view to stay in Poe’s dreams for at least a month. Big, bright green eyes that seemed to look straight into Poe’s soul, seeing all his flaws and crimes, even though they were more than five meters away from each other, but his glare sent a shiver though Poe’s body. Fuck, he wasn’t supposed to be this pretty.

Poe quickly returned to his hotel room, making sure he misleads Edogawa and the other men before quickly running up the stairs and lock himself inside his room. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

This mission would be harder than he thought.

-x-x-x-

Poe kept the routine for the next few days.

When Edogawa left the building for lunch, he followed him. When he went to a field mission, he followed him. Even when he just went to a park to buy an ice cream and piss off the pigeons in a stupid and childish way, Poe followed him. He followed him everywhere, but always keeping a certain distance between them after Edogawa saw him the other day, just waiting for the perfect opportunity to show and he finally be able to catch him and complete his stupid mission. Honestly, the mission was starting to get on his nerves and he just wanted it to end as fast as it could. He wanted to return to the Port Mafia, damn it. He missed Karl.

But the Edogawa dude never left the fucking building alone.

He was always with the dude in the sand-colored coat or the blonde man, sometimes with a pretty woman with short hair or a teenager with platinum hair and suspenders or with a blonde kid that seemed to be a farmer or something like that. Sometimes he was with an older man with silver hair and dressed in traditional Japanese clothes. When he was with this man, Poe avoided following him too close; he seemed to be dangerous, Poe didn’t want to get problems.

It wasn’t until the 7th day following him that Poe finally saw the chance to get him.

For the first time since he started following him, he left the building alone. Poe didn’t miss a single second before getting his gun and leave the hotel room like a rocket, running a little until he found Edogawa again and started following him in silence around the streets. He also couldn’t stop thinking that it was really weird for him to leave the building that late at night and alone.

He walked for a few streets in a straight line until he turned around in a corner that lead them to a more reserved and emptier street, what made Poe smile victoriously. He was finally going to finish his damn mission.

But then, something went wrong.

Poe was checking his gun when he heard the first giggle that definitely didn’t belong to Edogawa; he frowned, gun ready to be used on his hands, spying the street from the corner. Like he thought, the
giggle didn’t belong to Edogawa, but to one of the three big guys that cornered him; he widened his eyes, because even to him that was almost 1,90 the men looked like giants. For a moment, he thought about letting the guys kill Edogawa and make him a favor even without knowing it, but for some reason it felt so wrong that the idea was quickly forgot.

He was ready to shoot the first guy when the first punch came.

For a moment, he thought it was just his brain messing up with him and making him imagine things, because there wasn’t anyone next to him at the moment and he still felt someone punching him; he even took a look around just to confirm that he was alone there, eyes widened in surprise, but after the second punch he was sure that was really happening. He spied the street from the corner, looking at Edogawa leaning down in pain, the punch hitting him in the exact same place it hit Poe. The third punch made Poe lean his body forward in pain, arms protectively holding his belly, eyes still widened as he heard Edogawa’s screams in pain.

No, no, no. This wasn’t happening. This couldn’t be happening.

Poe stayed motionless the whole time, even though he knew he should do something to help Edogawa, he just couldn’t move. He just stayed there the whole time, feeling Ranpo’s pain and not doing anything to help him or himself, laying down in the floor when the pain started to get too strong but with the same shocked expression on his face, eyes widened in pure shock, breathless. Even after the guys left and someone came to rescue Ranpo, Poe couldn’t move. He was too shocked to do anything, too scared, too surprised. He couldn’t move, because he found his soulmate in the worst way possible.

It was Ranpo Edogawa, the person he was assigned to kill. He was assigned to kill his soulmate.

When did things get so wrong?

-x-x-x-

When Poe managed to return to his hotel room it was almost midnight. He stopped by a pharmacy to buy some bandages and then at a restaurant to buy food, ignoring the other’s people weird looks as he wrapped himself in the bandages and cleaned up the wounds as he waited for his food to be made. He took the food and then ran the fastest he could to the hotel room, locking himself inside the room and finally being able to scream in frustration; he put the food on the table and pulled his hair the hardest he could, biting his lips to hold up the scream so hard it bleeds. This wasn’t supposed to be happening, this couldn’t be happening.

Fuck.

He took his phone off his pocket, unlocking the screen and looking for Chuuya’s contact.

E.A.POE [11:46pm]: Chuuya

E.A.POE [11:46pm]: Chuuya fuck Chuuya I’m fucked I’m so fucked

Chuuya [11:46pm]: What’s going on?

E.A.POE [11:46pm]: I found my soulmate

Chuuya [11:47pm]: Really? That’s awesome, dude

E.A.POE [11:47pm]: No Chuuya you didn’t understand

Chuuya [11:47pm]: Okay...?

Chuuya [11:47pm]: And who are they?

Chuuya [11:49pm]: Wait

E.A.POE [11:49pm]: Fuck Chuuya fuck fuck fuck

Chuuya [11:49pm]: NO WAY

Chuuya [11:50pm]: FUCK POE YOU’RE KIDDING RIGHT?

E.A.POE [11:50pm]: I don’t know what to do

E.A.POE [11:50pm]: I can’t fail this mission

Chuuya [11:51pm]: But you know what’s gonna happen if you finish it, don’t you????

Fuck, Poe knew. He knew fully well what would happen if he finished his mission. The pros of having a mental link with your soulmate? If they’re in trouble, you can feel it and help them.

The cons?

If they die, you die as well.

-x-x-x-

Poe spent the whole night awake, thinking about some way to finish his mission without ending up killed. He made researches, tried to come up with solutions, theories, ways to escape this situation alive, but every way ended with him dying. If he killed Edogawa like he was supposed to do, he would die with him because of the mental link; but if he didn’t kill him and return to the Mafia without his head, Mori himself would kill him or worse, he could make Chuuya kill him and then Edogawa would die anyways. He was at a dead end with no escape.

What was he supposed to do? He didn’t have anything less to do except keep following Edogawa until he came up with a plan that didn’t end with him dying.

For now, he would keep the original plan. Follow Edogawa, memorize his daily routine and them capture him at the first chance he has, except he tried not to think about the part of the plan where he killed him.

At the moment, about four days after the day Poe found out about the... soulmate thing, Edogawa was at the park with the man in sand-colored coat and the blonde one as always, sitting in a bench beneath a huge tree and close to the lake, feeding the ducks and pigeons. Poe was watching them from a bench a little bit far away from theirs, pretending to read the newspaper and humming a random song that was playing on his phone as he watched them carefully. He paused the song the moment he saw the other two men with Edogawa stand up, say something to him and then go together somewhere else to do only God know what, finally leaving him alone for the first time since Poe started following him (he didn’t count the other night). Poe smiled, closing the newspaper and leaving it on the bench before standing up and check if his gun was still on his back. His phone buzzled with a new message, he picked up his phone from his pocket and checked the text; it was just a random picture of Chuuya with Karl on his head. He quickly replied and put his phone back on the pocket, looking back at where Edogawa originally was.
Poe froze. He wasn’t there anymore.

And then, the voice behind him: “Who are you?”

Poe jumped with the scare, looking with wide eyes at the voice. It was Edogawa, right in front of him, looking at him with a genuine curiosity, head slightly tilted to the side. There was a small cut on his lip, matching Poe’s and remembering him how fucked up he was.

“What-” Poe started. “What are you doing- *Fuck*, you shouldn’t be here.”

“At the... Park?” Edogawa asked, raising an eyebrow.

“No, talking to *me*.” Poe explained. He sounded terrified. “You shouldn’t- *I* shouldn’t be talking to you. *Fuck*.”

“You’re the one who’s been following me for the past two weeks.” Edogawa replied. “Don’t think I didn’t notice. Are you a stalker or something?”

*Fuck, fuck, fuck.* This is not how his mission should’ve been going.

Especially when Edogawa brought one of his hands to pick up his glasses from his pocket and activate his ability. Poe immediately brought one of his hands to his back to pick up his gun, Edogawa stopped middle ways.

“Oh, I see.” He said. “It’s about the files, isn’t it?”

Poe didn’t reply, but he felt like he didn’t need to.

“You need to come with me.” Poe said, voice cold as ice, taking a step closer to Edogawa just for him to take a step back.

“Let me ask Kunikida.”

“This is not-”

“He said no.”

“You didn’t even talk to him.” Poe threw his arms dramatically in the air. He liked the dude better when he wasn’t talking to him.

“If I promise you I won’t tell anyone about the files will you let me live?” Edogawa asked, raising an eyebrow.

Oh, only if he knew... “Uh, no.” Poe replied.

“But Dazai would kill me if I died before them.”

“I can kill them as well if they want?”

“Kunikida wouldn’t let them die.”

“I can kill him as well.”

Edogawa smirked. “Then Yosano would definitely come for you.”

“How about I bomb the fucking agency down? Then everyone would die.” Poe suggested, once
again throwing his hands dramatically into the air.

“Not Yosano.” Edogawa said, still smirking, green mischievous eyes glowing at Poe. “She can’t die.”

“God fucking damn it, just come with me!” Poe yelled. “It’s gonna be easier this way!”

“Nop.” Edogawa said, clicking the ‘p’. “You’re funny, do you wanna go out for a coffee? I’m Ranpo, what’s your name?”

“I’m literally here to kill you.”

“Irrelevant.” He said, handing Poe his right hand. “Nice to meet you, killer-san.”

“Please, never call me killer-san again.” Poe said, Ranpo chuckled. He hesitantly shook Ranpo’s hand, ignoring the shiver that ran through his spine.

“So, do you want a coffee?”

Fuck, why not? The mission was already completely fucked up.

“Yeah, whatever.”

-x-

They went to a café next to the park, after Ranpo tell his friends he was going out with another friend that Kunikida and Dazai—the blonde man and the one with the sand-colored coat, Poe figured– suspiciously didn’t know about and would let them enjoy their date, even though they would never admit it was a date and Ranpo was totally being the third wheel. Poe let Ranpo lead the way a few steps ahead him, so they wouldn’t seem to be walking together, even though the man seemed to have zero sense of direction and Poe needed to tell him the way to the café all the time; Poe choose a small café far from everything so they wouldn’t take the risk of being caught together, sitting in the back of the café with a clear vision of the street just in case he needed to leave the place in a hurry.

“So,” Ranpo started once the waitress gave him his vanilla latte. Like Poe figured before, he has a sweet tooth. “Will you tell me your name?”

“No.” Poe replied, sipping from his black coffee, looking away from Ranpo.

“Why are you following me?”

“I’m afraid you already know the answer.”

Ranpo snorted, sipping from his latte. The cream left a moustache above his lips that Poe may or may not have found adorable. “Yeah, but I wanna hear you say it.”

“I’m here to kill you, Ranpo Edogawa.” Poe simply replied, with a cold and monotone voice.

“How do you—” Ranpo frowned, but stopped in the middle of the sentence. “Oh, you have a file about me. It makes sense.”

“I also have strict and direct orders to kill you for what you’ve done.”

Ranpo raised an eyebrow. “But will you?”
Will he?

Poe sighed. “I... Don’t know. I know I should, my Boss gave me direct orders to kill you mercilessly, but...”

“But...?” Ranpo encouraged him to proceed.

“I can’t tell you.” Poe admitted. Fuck, this shouldn’t be going this way. “Trust me, it’s better if you don’t know.”

“Don’t act like I don’t know how the Port Mafia works. I’m a detective.” Ranpo stated, rolling his eyes. “My friend Dazai? They were from the Port Mafia before they joined the Agency. One of their soulmates—who is Kunikida, by the way—works with us, but the other is still at the Mafia. I know your methods, I’ve read them, and I-”

“Wait, wait. Hold on.” Poe said, interrupting Ranpo’s mumble. “Did you just say Dazai has two soulmates? And one’s at the Port Mafia?”

“Uh, yeah?”

Poe chuckled, because what was the fucking probability he just randomly found Chuuya’s soulmates? “You’ve gotta be kidding me.”

“You don’t believe in soulmates?”

“Oh no, I do. Unfortunately, I know mine.” Poe explained. “What’s the fucking probability your friends’ soulmate is my partner?”

Ranpo slowly opened his eyes. “What...?”

“My partner, Chuuya, has two soulmates. Having more than one soul bond is really rare so it can’t be just a coincidence.” Poe said, chuckling exaggeratedly. This really couldn’t be just a coincidence. “Now that you said this, I’ve noticed Dazai’s bandages matches with Chuuya’s scars, so this-”

“Wait, your partner is Mr. Fancy Hat?” Ranpo asked. He sounded as shocked as Poe. “Redhead, really small? The gravity manipulator?”

“How the fuck-”

“He’s the reason why I hacked into Port Mafia’s systems.” Ranpo said, letting out an unbelieved sound. “Dazai wanted to see him and show him to Kunikida. Apparently, they know he’s the third soulmate.”

“What the fuck, dude.” Poe said. “You hacked into Port Mafia’s systems just because Dazai wanted to show Chuuya to Kunikida? Why didn’t they just show a picture of him?”

“I mean, it wasn’t that hard.” Ranpo snorted. “Your systems suck, dude. You really should dismiss the person who deals with this stuff.”

“Should I remind you I’m literally here to kill you because of that?”

“Nah, I know. Are we already friends enough so you can tell me your name?”

“No.”

“Can I call you Mark? You look like a Mark.”
“My name is not Mark.”

“Jordan?”

“No.”

“Harry?”


Ranpo bit his lip. “Kyle?”

“No. Stop that.”

“Karl?”

“No, but my raccoon is named Karl.” Poe said. Damn, he misses Karl.


“No. Stop that.” Poe grunted. “Why are you only saying American names?”

“Because you’re not Japanese.” Ranpo said, finishing his latte. “I figured you’re American or British by the way you talk. You have a cute accent.”

Please God, don’t let it be a blush on Poe’s cheeks. “Indeed, I’m American.”

“I knew it!” Ranpo cheered. “So, wanna go out again someday else, Edward?”

“If the next name you try is Jacob or Bella I’m gonna fucking kill you right here, right now.” Poe threatened him, but Ranpo only laughed.

“Sure, John.” He said, leaving some money on the table and then standing up. “If you’re gonna kill me, kill me right now. Because if I walk through that door, you won’t have another chance.”

Poe didn’t reply. Instead, he watched with an ache in his chest as Ranpo walked away from the café to meet Dazai and Kunikida outside the establishment.

-x-x-x-

E.A.POE [9:27pm]: I can’t kill him.

Chuuya [9:27pm]: Yeah no shit, captain obvious

Chuuya [9:27pm]: What happened?

E.A.POE [9:27pm]: We kinda went on a date today?

Chuuya [9:28pm]: You-

Chuuya [9:28pm]: You went on a date-

Chuuya [9:28pm]: With your target?

E.A.POE [9:28pm]: I also met your soulmates

Chuuya [9:29pm]: The fuck was you doing with Dazai and Kunikida
E.A.POE [9:29pm]: Wait, you know they’re your soulmates?

Chuuya [9:29pm]: Yeah, Dazai was my partner before you came to Yokohama. They told me they found our other soulmate after they got into the Armed Detective Agency.

E.A.POE [9:29pm]: Ranpo works with them. They’re friends.

E.A.POE [9:30pm]: Why did you never mention your soulmates worked at the Agency?

Chuuya [9:30pm]: Oh? So you’re already calling him by the given name? Shall I expect the wedding by the end of the weekend? And I never mentioned it because I could’ve put them in danger.

E.A.POE [9:30pm]: Fuck you, Nakahara.

Chuuya [9:30pm]: No thanks.

E.A.POE [9:30pm]: Seriously, what do I do?

Chuuya [9:31pm]: Do I look like your fucking therapist? I’m already taking care of your fucking trash panda pet and now you want me to give you advice.

Chuuya [9:31pm]: /Romantic/ advice

E.A.POE [9:31pm]: Karl is a raccoon, Chuuya.

E.A.POE [9:31pm]: Besides, this is what partners are supposed to do?

Chuuya [9:32pm]: I’m sure it’s not, but go off I guess.

Chuuya [9:32pm]: Also, so you do admit you want romantic advice? Hate to tell you, buddy, but one of my soulmates is a stupid suicidal maniac who almost killed me and our other soulmate with them multiple times, and the other is a man that has schedules to do literally everything, probably including jerking off.

Chuuya [9:33pm]: Can’t help you, sorry.

E.A.POE [9:33pm]: Well, I’m assigned to kill my soulmate but I can’t because if I do, I will die with him.

Chuuya [9:34pm]: What a chaotic duo we are, my friend.

Chuuya [9:34pm]: What a chaotic duo.

-x-x-x-

Poe hated to admit it, but he was starting to get used to follow Ranpo everywhere, either when he left his work for lunch or get off on a field mission or just to feed the ducks at the park. Even when his friends were with him and Ranpo knew he was being followed. Actually, especially when Ranpo knew he was being followed. Poe could talk to him and get to know him better when he acknowledged Poe was there.

Ranpo was kinda nice. He would try to guess Poe’s name each two minutes and would miss it entirely –seriously, Ranpo, what kind of name is Rhoninberg?–, he took him to random places to annoy the birds and made Poe take care of him because he was a total child and would get lost with a blink of the eye, but he would also just sit in silence next to him and watch the sunset together.
enjoying the other’s company even though there were always this tense atmosphere around them because of Poe’s mission. He shouldn’t be befriending the guy he was supposed to kill, but how couldn’t he when Ranpo was so nice to him and was literally his soulmate? It’s not like Poe could kill him anyway.

And, with the days passing by, it’s not like he wanted to kill him anymore.

“Stop following me.” Ranpo grumbled, annoyed, walking among the people on the streets and trying to ignore the weird dude following him.

“I’m not following you.” Poe replied, hiding behind a tree and spying Ranpo. “We’re just... Oddly going to the same direction. It’s just a coincidence.”

“Sure, Raymond.” Ranpo said, not stopping walking. “Don’t you feel hot with that coat? It looks so heavy, I’m sweating just to look at it.”

Poe shrank into his coat, leaving the tree he was hiding and then hiding behind a car. “I can never feel the hotness because my soul is in an eternal darkness.”

“Is that a My Chemical Romance song?” The detective snorted. “Hey Gerard, do you want an ice cream?”

“No.”

“Chocolate or vanilla?”

“My taste is too refined for mundane things like that.”

“Chocolate it is.” Ranpo concluded, stopping by a bakery to buy two ice creams. Poe waited outside the bakery, resting against the wall next to the door and pretending to read the news of a random newspaper he found in the floor, but always keeping an eye at Ranpo with the help of the mirrored door just in case he decided to run away or mislead him between the crowd; he left the bakery a few minutes later with two ice creams in hands, passing by and ignoring Poe to put his ice cream at the bench in front of the bakery and keep walking. Poe threw the newspaper away and grabbed the ice cream before keep following him.

Ranpo walked for a few more blocks until he reached his destiny –with Poe’s help, obviously–. It was a huge hangar, almost definitely abandoned, with a very dead body in a puddle of blood right in the middle of it; Poe gasped, how could he not notice Ranpo was taking him to a murder spot?

“Why did you bring your shadow to work?” Dazai asked, a stupid smug on their lips, hands inside their coat pockets.

“Frank is nice.” Ranpo shrugged. “Aren’t you, Frank?”

“My name is not Frank.” Poe replied from a certain distance, trying to mix himself with the shadows. “It was a mistake, I didn’t mean to follow him here. Just pretend you can’t see me here.”

“I can see you.” Dazai said.

Poe covered his face with his coat’s sleeve. “Not when I do that.”

Dazai chuckled, “I like this one.” They said, then turned back to the dead boy in the floor. It was a woman, with long dark hair and probably around her 30’s, but Poe couldn’t tell for sure from that distance.
“You think it was the Port Mafia?” Kunikida asked, using his pen to check the dead body’s clothes.

“No.” Both Poe and Dazai replied at the same time, making all the three detectives look straight at the Port Mafia. Poe instantly regreted speaking, shrinking into his coat and looking down, pondering if Chuuya would ever forgive him if he straight up killed his two soulmates right now.

Ranpo smirked. “Hey Tyler, come here.”

Poe bit his lower lip, changing his weight from one leg to another. “I prefer to stay out of the Agency’s subjects.”

“We won’t tell anyone you’re here.” Ranpo insisted, shaking his hand in Poe’s direction. “I just want you to take a look, come on Daphydd.”

“Is that even a name?” Poe asked, uncrossing his arms from his chest and walking to Ranpo. “And no.”

“It was worth a try.” Ranpo shrugged. “So, what do you see?”

Poe looked at the dead woman unimpressed. “A dead body.”

“Wow, thank you for your unequaled acknowledge, we haven’t noticed that before.” Kunikida rolled his eyes. “What are you doing, Ranpo?” Dazai poked him slightly with their elbow, silently telling him to stay quiet.

Poe frowned, getting on his knees to take a better look at the dead woman. “Uh, female, around her 30’s, apparently divorced but not long ago.” He pointed at her left hand where a small mark caused by a long time wearing a ring could be seen. He then touched the skin to measure the temperature and looked inside her dead eyes. “Body is still not cold enough, so she can’t be dead for more than 5 hours.” Poe moved around her, picking up his handkerchief from his pocket and carefully moving her head so he could have a clear vision of her face. “Curious,” he said, “She wasn’t killed here.”

“Good, very good.” Ranpo said, smart green eyes looking at Poe with a notable pride. “What else?”

Like Poe thought, she really was about thirty or forty years old, notably small, with a large cut on her throat that was probably the cause of the death; or that was what normal people were supposed to think. “Can you lend me your pen?” He asked to Kunikida, extending his hand towards him without looking up from the body. Kunikida quickly gave Poe his pen.

Poe then carefully opened the dead body’s mouth, making sure he wasn’t leaving his fingerprints there, using Kunikida’s pen to pull the tiny piece of cloth out of her mouth. Both Dazai and Kunikida gasped. “The cut wasn’t what killed her.” He concluded, showing the cloth to the detectives.

“How did she die?” Ranpo asked, excitedly, a big proud smile on his lips.

“Our lady corpse here was killed somewhere else, probably next to the river taking into account that there’s dirty in her shoes and the tips of her dress are wet.” Poe said, standing up and returning the pen to Kunikida. “She had a fight with her ex-husband, who didn’t accept the end of the relationship, and he strangled her to death.” To prove his point, Poe pointed to the small marks around the bloody cut that could easily pass unnoticed. “He put a tissue inside her mouth so she wouldn’t scream too loud and call someone else’s attention. After she died, he quickly cut her throat to mislead the police and dumped her body somewhere that would take a while until someone found it and give him the time to escape.”
“Holy shit,” Dazai breathed, “Are you sure you’re a killer and not a detective?”

“I like reading detective books in my free time.” Poe scratched his neck, embarrassed, trying to hide his red cheeks with his long hair. “Mori doesn’t give me a lot of free time, but I enjoy the ones I have.”

“Fuck Mori.” Dazai said. “I hate that dude.”

“Yeah, me too.” Poe admitted, then looked at Ranpo. He was already staring at him, big bright eyes glowing specifically at him in a way that made Poe’s heart melt. “So, how did it go?”

“Perfect.” Ranpo smiled, and then, “Ashton, do you wanna join the Agency?”

Poe, Dazai and Kunikida gasped in unison. “What?”

“Join the Agency.” Ranpo echoed. “Of course, you would have to spent a few years missing like Dazai did before you could really join the Agency, but do you want to?”

“You don’t even know my name and you want me to join the-”

Ranpo rolled his eyes. “Your name is Edgar Allan Poe, you’re 28, your ability is called ‘The Black Cat of Rue Morgue’ and it allows you to transport people into the universe of the novels you write. You’re American, but has been living in Japan for at least 6 years because your accent is barely notably; I just noticed it because I thought you were cute.” Poe opened his mouth to reply, but Ranpo raised his hand and interrupted him. “I know you were assigned to kill me, you don’t need to remind me. And I also know the reason why you won’t complete your mission.” he sighed, “You found out that night at the alley, don’t you? The night I was beaten down?”

Poe nodded slightly, too shocked to say anything. Ranpo knew everything this whole time?

“I talked to Mr. Fancy Hat.” Ranpo proceeded, once again raising his hand to interrupt Kunikida and Dazai when they opened their mouth to talk. “Yes, I’ve been talking to him lately. The most part of what I know about you I learned all by myself, but he also told me a lot of things about you, including the fact you actually hate your job.”

“What kind of person likes torturing and killing other people?” Poe said, twisting his nose in pure disgust, trying to defend himself. “Of course I hate my job, I don’t like killing people, I’m not a-” He stopped himself in the middle of the sentence, biting his lip.

Ranpo opened his eyes. “A psycho.” he said, “you’re not a psycho.”

“But I can’t fail.” Poe insisted. “If you talked to Chuuya, you know I can’t fail. You know what would-”

“Like I said, I talked to Mr. Fancy Hat.” Ranpo repeated. “He told your Boss about the situation, and the Boss understood it. You don’t need to worry about failing your mission anymore, Poe, your Boss dismissed you.”

Poe slowly raised his head up to meet Ranpo’s eyes. “What...?”

“Of course, the reason why your Boss dismissed you from this mission was because you would also die if I died, and he didn’t want to lose you. It’s the same reason why he didn’t order someone to kill Dazai after they left the Mafia.” Ranpo snorted. “But yeah, you don’t need to keep reminding me each five minutes you were here to kill me anymore, because you’re not. You’re free, Poe.”
“Fuck,” Poe chuckled, tears streaming down his face, “I would kiss Chuuya right now if he was h- I’m kidding! I’m kidding!” He quickly yelled when both Dazai and Kunikida took a step towards him.

“Well,” Ranpo said with a crooked smile, pretending to check his nails. “I kinda told Chuuya what to do, so...”

Any other word was needed, Poe just crossed the distance between them, held his face and kissed him.

“So,” Ranpo whispered, face still close enough to Poe’s to feel his breath. “Do you wanna leave the Mafia?”

“Yes.” Poe nodded. He was never so sure of something in his entire life. “But Chuuya-”

“He’ll live.” Dazai replied. “Chibi is used to it, he’ll understand.”

“We could find a way of take him away from there t-”

Kunikida snorted. “He won’t. Trust me, we’ve tried before.”

“Well,” Poe said, holding Ranpo closer by his waist. It felt so good not having to worry about killing him anymore. “So how do we start?”

“I know someone,” Dazai said with a smile, “he’s the one that erased my past when I left the Mafia, he can help you too.”

“Good,” Poe nodded, then kissed Ranpo softly on his lips again, “very good.”

At first, when Mori Ougai assigned Edgar Allan Poe for this mission, he thought it would be just another simple mission as always. He thought he would find his target like he always did, finish him and then return to his horrible routine until Mori assigned him for another mission and the cycle would restart, trapping him in an eternal looping he could never escape.

Damn, he’s so glad it wasn’t.

Chapter End Notes

Soooo, any thoughts? ;)

Chapter End Notes
Chapter Summary

Chuuya literally fought everyone he met including the fucking Zeus, Dazai tried every possible way to commit suicide, Kunikida is the voice of the reason, Akutagawa has asthma and Atsushi is a walking ball of anxiety.

They, somehow, stop the apocalypse.

[or; the one I got really carried away and wrote a 23k long oneshot about gay pining demigods]

Chapter Notes

IT'S A PERCY JACKSON AU BITCHES

There’s gonna be a lot of references from the first book here (I actually read some parts of the first book again to help me with certain things?), including that™ scene yall are probably thinking and I’m not even ashamed, so if you read the PJO books you will have a better experience reading this one. I even wrote a prophecy for the story –it took me almost two hours to write it!!!!!!–. They’re all 17 here except for Akutagawa and Atsushi who are 16.

I’m not gonna lie, there’s a major character “death” here so please be careful reading it. It’s not actually a DEATH death, it’s more like what happened to Thalia (again, those who read the books or watched the movies will get what I mean) but it’s still painful.

Without further ado, let’s meet our heroes!

(Alternate Universe – Percy Jackson setting, book references, character death BUT NOT REALLY)

[words count: 23,770]

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

We all grew up believing in some sort of myth and legends. Being the Tooth Fairy, Santa Claus or Easter rabbit, we all believed in something when we were younger and stopped believing in it with time. The Greeks, in its turn, believed in ancient Gods and creatures that were responsible for the world’s creation as we know now days and to explain the beginnings of the universe in human language; ancient and immortal powerful gods that could obliterate or built entire cities in a blink of an eye, with magnificent and omnipotent powers that lived in the Mount Olympus, the house of all the gods –or, at least, the twelve principal ones–. Demigods, monsters, heroes, all the myths the Greeks believed in to try to explain how the universe worked.

Except they were real. All the myths, stories, legends, everything they believed in was real; the
monsters, the gods, the demigods, but especially the heroes.

Our hero today is named Nakahara Chuuya, and this is the story of how he saved the world, stopped the apocalypse, and fell in love.

-x-x-x-

As he ran down between the trees, daggers firmly held in both of his hands, Chuuya tried to come up with a plan that didn’t evolve slash his partner to death for leaving him alone against Yosano. He always knew Fukuzawa saw the best in his kids and wanted them to fight with their full potential, even when they were just training or playing capture the flag –except for Akutagawa, Fukuzawa didn’t let him play capture the flag—, but fuck, putting him against her and Kouyou was some sort of suicidal mission. There was no way in hell he could win against them.

Especially when his beloved, adorable partner left him alone to do gods only knows what. Probably try a new way to commit suicide and fail, like he always did.

Chuuya spied from the corner of the big rock he was hiding behind, breathless, trying to see someone of his team that could help him and silently begging for his father for Yosano and Kouyou to not find him there. All he could see were trees and more trees, sometimes someone from the opposite team running among the trees, the clanking of metal and kids fighting away from him, but nothing about Yosano, Kouyou or Dazai, the fucking bastard that left him alone.

A sound of wood cracking was heard, Chuuya held his breath, and then a soft voice: “Chuuya? Are you there?”

“Fuck,” Chuuya breathed, leaving his hiding spot to meet Kenji. “How’s the situation?”

Kenji was a small kid from the Cabin 5 and his brother. He was 14, blonde, with freckles and a soft voice that could make everyone melt if they didn’t know how strong the kid actually was. Kenji could literally lift a truck if he wanted. Chuuya loved him.

“Not good.” Kenji replied, scratching his neck. There was a bloody cut on his eyebrow, his spear thrown above his shoulder. “Atsushi is not playing because he had an anxiety attack so Yosano told him to stay in his Cabin until he felt better. Tecchou and Tachihara are handling the situation pretty good, but Kunikida told me to find you. We need your help to defend our flag.”

“Sure,” Chuuya replied, twisting his daggers in the air, “but are you sure we’re gonna get there in time to help them? How are we gonna get there so fast?”

Kenji smiled creepily, then cupped his hands around his mouth, “Ryu!” he called. Chuuya instantly regreted asking the question.

You see, there was a reason why Fukuzawa didn’t let Akutagawa play capture the flag.

Akutagawa Ryuunosuke was a kid from the Cabin 13 and one of Chuuya’s best friends on the Camp Half-Blood. He was really shy and reserved and the most of the time he preferred to spend his time with his sister Gin and his brother Fyodor or fighting with Atsushi than to bond with the other campers, but he and Chuuya got along pretty well. Except, maybe, when Ryuu used his powers with him.

Chuuya hated traveling in the shadows.

It always felt so nauseous and cold and fast and dark, Chuuya hated when he needed to be
transported to somewhere else with Ryuu’s ability. He never dealt very well with darkness.

Kenji, on the other hand, seemed to enjoy a lot traveling in the shadows. Luckily, he didn’t get nauseous like Chuuya did.

The moment Ryuu stepped out of the shadows, Chuuya pushed him away and walked a few steps to throw up behind a bush. “I told you to let me know the next time you’d travel in the shadows!” he grunted after putting all his lunch out, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

“I’m sorry,” Ryuu said with a cough, taking his inhaler from his pocket and using it before holding his sword with both of his hands, “we kinda needed your help.”

Chuuya narrowed his eyes at him, pointing his daggers at him in a threatening way before following the sound of metal clanking together and screams. Like he imagined, his team was almost losing the game, the team blue surrounding them and their flag like wolves surrounding their prey, Tecchou, Tachihara, Gin and Kunikida trying to keep the other team away and fighting with all they get; he smirked, twisting his daggers around his hands and walking into the fight.

“You guys can’t even stand a fight without me?” He said, calling everyone’s attention; and gods, he loved that attention. The people from his team smiled at his entrance in the fight, knowing that game was already theirs, making the people from the opposite team shake in their bones. “Now,” he proceeded, walking among the people from the team blue until he was in front of his team’s flag, then smirked again, “who wants to fight against gravity?”

Of course, no one wanted. Everyone at the Camp Half-Blood knew what Chuuya’s ability was capable of, they didn’t even try to fight against him because they knew he could kill them if he wanted –which he didn’t, by the way– without even moving; he probably has one of the strongest abilities at the Camp, being match to only Yosano and Tachihara, maybe. Atsushi liked to call them ‘the mighty three’.

The game quickly ended after Chuuya joined the battle. Their flag was well defended and the opposite team’s flag was captured by Kunikida, who flew to where the team blue kept their flag after Chuuya replaced him at the match and took their flag from Ranpo’s hands without too much effort –he probably just pointed his bow at him and threatened to put an electric arrow inside his skull if he didn’t. Kunikida could be terrifying sometimes, giving his team the victory.

“Team Red wins the game.” Fukuzawa announced, making Chuuya’s whole team cheer loudly and the other team grumble in disappointment.

“No casualties? How boring.” Yosano, from the Cabin 7, grumbled. A few people came to her so she could take a look at their wounds, but nothing too serious that could give her the opportunity to use her actual powers. They were quickly cured.

The crowd started to dissipate, the campers returning to their cabins. Some remaining people came to talk to Chuuya, some complimented Kunikida’s abilities, some congratulated them for winning the game, but all Chuuya could think about was: “Has anyone seen Dazai?”

And then, a voice from behind him: “I’m right here, Chibi~”

Ah, there he was.

Dazai was comfortably sitting at the top of a big rock, with a stupid smug smile in his lips and legs shaking in the air, looking at Chuuya like he was enjoying seeing the way he started to get red from anger.
“Oi, stupid mackerel!” Chuuya shouted, walking to Dazai with heavy steps and hands clenched. “Get down here so I can kick your ass!”

“My, my, chibi. Don’t you think you’re too small to feel such anger?” Dazai mocked, successfully making Chuuya even more angry.

“I’m gonna kill you! Stupid bastard! Waste of bandages! Hideous asshole!” Chuuya yelled, trying to escape from Kunikida’s arms so he could punch Dazai in the face. “Get down here! I’m gonna make your dreams come true and fucking kill you! Why did you leave me alone back at the woods?!”


Dazai smirked again, sliding over the stone like a slide, landing next to Chuuya. “Sorry, Chibi. Fyodor read somewhere about a new way of trying to commit suicide and I decided to try. Unfortunately, it didn’t work.”

Now was Kunikida who was trying to kick Dazai’s ass and was being hold back by Chuuya. Luckily, everyone else was gone and they were the only people there.

“You–! I’m gonna–! Stupid bastard–!” Kunikida yelled, trying to reach Dazai’s neck to strangle him. “Don’t try to commit suicide in the middle of the game!

The smug returned to Dazai’s lips, “so at any other time I can?”

“No!” Both Kunikida and Chuuya replied.

“Damn.” Dazai grumbled.

Suddenly, Akutagawa showed up from behind a tree, walking off the shadows. His expression made Chuuya hold up the mock he was gonna say. Ryuu was paler than normal, eyes slightly widened, hands visibly shaking. He looked terrified.

“Ryu?” Chuuya asked. “Are you okay?”

He coughed, gave him a slight nod, used his inhaler and returned it to his pocket. “Fukuzawa wants to talk to you, Chuuya.” He said, but then corrected himself, “No, Lucy wants to talk to you.”

Chuuya, Dazai and Kunikida held their breaths. Akutagawa proceeded:

“She has a prophecy for you.”

-x-x-x-

Talking to Lucy always felt like a whole new experience every time, even when she was just casually walking around the camp and talking to her friends instead of having that weird green smoke surrounding her body when she gave the campers their respective prophecies. She was a really nice girl, around Chuuya’s age, with a long red hair, braces and kind eyes, even though she could be terrifying when she wanted. She was usually with Atsushi and Kyouka, but sometimes she liked to hang out with Poe and Ranpo or Ango and John as well.

At the moment, Lucy was sitting down in front of Fukuzawa in his office as they drank tea and had a light conversation while waiting for Chuuya to show up. Akutagawa offered to take him there by the shadows, but Chuuya immediately dismissed the offer and preferred to force Dazai to take him there using his ability; for some reason, Dazai’s ability to teleport felt so much more comfortable to use
than Akutagawa’s shadows’ travel, even though their abilities were pretty much the same.

Chuuya hesitantly knocked the door of Fukuzawa’s office, gulping in anxiety. Receiving a prophecy always made him anxious. “Come in,” the answer came. Chuuya quickly walked into the room and locked the door behind him.

Lucy waved at him, smiling. “Hello, Chuuya.”

“Hey.” Chuuya said, taking the seat next to her and accepting the cup of tea Fukuzawa was handing him. “You wanted to see me?”

“Yeah, Anne wants to tell you something.” She said, pointing at her head. Anne was how Lucy gently named the Oracle living inside her. “Ready?”

“Fuck, no.” Chuuya giggled, rubbing his hands together. “Anne scares the shit out of me.”

“You’re gonna be okay, kid.” Fukuzawa said, casually sipping from his tea. “Just... Don’t fight the Oracle and you’re gonna be fine.”

“Wow, thank you,” Chuuya rolled his eyes, then turned to Lucy, “I’m ready. What is my destiny?”

Lucy nodded, then left her cup of tea on the table and closed her eyes. Instantly, the lights in the room started flashing and the temperature of the air suddenly dropped, making Chuuya feel chills and shrank in his seat, waiting for ‘Anne’ to finally show. A green mist started to come out of her body, dancing around Lucy like a smoke, trembling and trembling until it acquired the form of a doll with snake eyes around Lucy’s body.

And then, the voice inside Chuuya’s head:

\[
\text{to the west, four half-bloods shall lead,}
\]
\[
\text{to dust or to gold one must become,}
\]
\[
\text{beneath the moonlight, a beast shall raise,}
\]
\[
\text{and by the hands of the poisoned youth,}
\]
\[
\text{world to preserve or raze”}
\]

The mist gradually started to return to Lucy’s body until it was completely gone, the room returning to its original temperature and the lights turning on again when Lucy returned to open her eyes and smile, picking up her cup of tea from the table and taking a sip of it like she didn’t just tell Chuuya about the end of the world. Sometimes he wondered if she knew what happened with her while she gave people their prophecies.

“So,” Fukuzawa said, calling his attention. “What did it say?”

“What the fuck,” Chuuya breathed, “what the fuck, Lucy.”

“What?”

“Chuuya,” Fukuzawa called him again, coldly, trying to focus him, “what did it say?”

Chuuya gulped. “It said ‘to the west, four half-bloods shall lead, to dust or to gold one must become’ he stopped in the middle of the sentence, “what does that mean? Someone- Someone will die?”

“What else?” Fukuzawa encouraged him. “It’s extremely important that you say exactly what-”

“I know.” Chuuya said, then proceeded, “beneath the moonlight a beast shall raise, and by the
hands of the poisoned youth,” a pause, “world to preserve or raze.”

“That’s intense.” Lucy said, sipping from her tea. “What does that mean?”

“Ah, crap.” Fukuzawa cursed, both Chuuya and Lucy gasped. “The Book.”

“The... Book?” Chuuya frowned. “Which Book?”

Fukuzawa pinched his nose. “There’s this old rumor running around that someone stole one of Hades’ books that can change reality. It’s an old green book that looks like Kunikida’s notebook, but with blank pages that can make everything someone writes on them come real.”

“Sounds dangerous.” Chuuya said, Fukuzawa nodded.

“Indeed, the book is extremely dangerous,” he said, “if it falls into the wrong hands... It can cause the apocalypse. The end of the world as we know it.”

“Thank you, I feel so much better now knowing the destiny of the world is on my hands.” Chuuya said with a forced laugh, Lucy shoot him a sad look. “So I just have to find the book and return it to Hades, right? How many time do I have to complete the mission?”

“The prophecy didn’t state exactly when the world will... Fall. So I’ll give you two weeks, when the winter solstice begins.” Fukuzawa replied, then stood up. “Try to find the Book as fast as possible. Take Kunikida, Atsushi and Akutagawa with you.”


“Look, I know you two have been partners since both of you arrived the camp, but do you really prefer to take Dazai with you, knowing one of the lines of your prophecy says one of you will perish?” Fukuzawa raised his eyebrows. “Besides, Atsushi is stronger than he seems and could be really useful for your mission.”

“Fine, I’ll take the walking ball of anxiety with me.” Chuuya grunted, finishing his tea and standing up. He waved goodbye to Lucy and followed Fukuzawa to outside the Big House, turning to face him after he closed the door behind him. “Do you... Do you really think one of us will die?”

Fukuzawa sighed. “I can’t tell, Chuuya. The prophecies are hardly clear enough for us to know exactly what will happen beforehand and often has double meanings, that line could mean literally anything” a pause, “but I prefer to avoid certain casualties. Pack your things and be ready to leave by 5am.”

“Okay.” Chuuya said. “I won’t disappoint you, sir.”

“You could never disappoint me, kid.” The President said with a soft smile. “Go tell your friends about your mission, we’ll talk more after dinner.”

“Yes, sir.”

Chuuya gave Fukuzawa a respectful bow before running to where Akutagawa, Kunikida, Fyodor and Dazai were waiting for him, resting against a tree next to the Zeus’ cabin and talking to each other. They instantly stopped talking when they noticed Chuuya running to them.

“So?” Kunikida started, impatiently, “what’s your prophecy?”

“Woah,” Fyodor, from the Cabin 13 and Akutagawa’s brother, said, “Chuuya got a prophecy? You
didn’t tell me about it.”

“I said Lucy wanted to talk to him, what did you expect, genius?” Ryuu replied, slapping Fyodor’s head. Fyodor slapped him back.

“We’re going on a mission.” Chuuya told them, making all the four boys gasp.

Dazai opened a big smile. “Yes! Where are we going? What’s the-”

“No, not you.” Chuuya interrupted him, shooting him a sad glare, “Fukuzawa told me to take only Kunikida, Ryuu and Atsushi with me. I’m sorry, mackerel.”

“What?” Dazai said, Chuuya never saw him look so sad. “Why not? But we’re partners, aren’t we?”

“Yes, of course we are, but-” Chuuya stopped in the middle of his sentence, biting his lips. Instead of replying, he turned to look at Kunikida and Akutagawa. “Pack your things, we’ll leave by 5am. Ryuu, call Atsushi and tell him he’s going with us.”

“What? Why do we have to take moonfish with us?” Ryuu grumbled.

“Is the President sure is safe to send three children of the big three on a mission outside the Camp?” Kunikida asked, carefully, but Chuuya just shrugged.

“I don’t know man, it’s what he told me,” he replied, “go pack your things and tell Atsushi we’re going on a mission.”

Akutagawa grumbled, but started to lead to the Cabin 3 and tell Atsushi anyways with his brother laughing next to him. Kunikida shoot Chuuya a long glare before sighing and going to his own cabin to pack his things for the mission, leaving Chuuya alone with Dazai.

For a moment, nothing was said. They just stayed there in an uncomfortable silence, watching the other campers talking to each other and helping the children of Apollo to set up the campfire for dinner, thinking about what to say.

“I’m sorry, Dazai.” Chuuya finally broke the silence after a few minutes, looking at his partner. “I wanted to take you with me but Fukuzawa told me to take Atsushi instead. I know we never left the Camp without each other before.”

“It’s okay, who would want to send a simple son of Hermes on a mission when you could take a son of Poseidon, one of the big three?” Dazai mocked, visibly broken, then turned to look at Chuuya, “can you tell me the prophecy, at least?”

Chuuya did. There wasn’t a reason to keep the prophecy from his partner, not after so many years going on missions together.

“Sounds... Dangerous.” Dazai said. “Are you sure you’re gonna be okay?”

“Kunikida will be with me, I’m gonna be okay.” Chuuya giggled, finally being able to take that sad expression away from Dazai’s face and making him smile. “Don’t get into a lot of trouble while I’m gone, okay?”


Chuuya smiled. “Damn right, we will.”
Dazai smiled as well, then the silence returned to them in a comfortable way. They stayed there watching the other campers until Chuuya decided to go pack his own things for his mission and Dazai went for a shower—forced by Chuuya, obviously. The stupid didn’t like showering—, agreeing to meet after dinner. At his cabin, Chuuya pondered what he should take to the mission; he ended up picking just a few changes of clothes, his toothbrush and his weapons, knowing Kunikida would take care of the rest of the important stuff.

Dinner went just fine as the other days, with the cabin 7 leading the sing-along around the campfire and the usual games they did after each dinner, giving half their foods to the gods and thanking them for everything. Chuuya, that day, asked his father for protection in his mission.

They went to sleep, and by the time Fukuzawa told him to leave the camp he was already waiting at the Big House for his friends to arrive. Besides the President, Ryuu was already there with his backpack on his back and a black coat covering his body, Rashomon in the sheath next to his left leg; Fyodor and Gin were there too, to say goodbye to their brother. Atsushi came right away, looking sleepy—probably the calmest expression Chuuya’s ever seen in his anxious face—, carrying a backpack and with an oversized hoodie covering his body; he stopped next to Akutagawa and closed his eyes, trying to sleep while standing.

Kunikida was the last one to arrive, wearing a jeans jacket above his Camp Half-Blood shirt and with Thunderstroke’s string across his torso, a small backpack on his back. Dazai was with him, messy hair like he just woke up, probably not wanting to miss Chuuya’s leaving. The view of Dazai without his usual blue backpack used on their missions made Chuuya’s heart ache; they were partners for ten years now and they never went on a mission without each other.

“Argus will take you to Tokyo, from there you’re on your own.” Fukuzawa explained, giving each one of the four campers a canteen with nectar, a Ziploc bag full of ambrosia squares, 11000 yen and ten golden drachmas. “The entrance to the Underworld is at the Shiroyama beach in Fukui, you can start looking for the Book from there.”


“I’ll explain on our way.” Chuuya replied.

“Why can’t we just go there by the shadows? I think I can transport two people with me.” Akutagawa suggested, putting the stuff Fukuzawa gave him in his backpack.

Atsushi was only half-awake. “But we’re in four?”

Akutagawa hissed, “I’m not taking you, moonfish.”

“I’m not traveling to the other side of the country by the shadows.” Chuuya grunted, crossing his arms in his chest. Dazai gave him a crooked smile.

“I can’t fly with three people as well.” Kunikida said. “Too much weight.”

“And Atsushi is a son of the Sea God anyways, he can’t fly.” Chuuya pointed, Atsushi nodded.

“We’ll go overland.” Akutagawa concluded with a nod, everyone else nodded as well.

Fukuzawa smiled. “Be careful on your mission, kids.” He said, then everyone turned their backs to start going to the exit of camp.

“Before we can go,” Kunikida suddenly said, then extended his hand to Dazai, “give it back.”
Dazai gasped, “What?”

“My wallet,” Kunikida answered, “I know you took it, give it back.”

Dazai stared at him for a moment before grumbling and returning Kunikida’s wallet to him.

Kunikida grunted, putting his wallet back in his pocket, “fucking Hermes’ children.”

Chuuya giggled at them, watching Kunikida and Atsushi start climbing the hill to the exit of the camp as Akutagawa hugged his siblings goodbye before following them, then turned to Dazai. He took a step forward and hugged him, being happily held back.

“Be careful out there, Chibi.” Dazai murmured against his ear, running his fingers through Chuuya’s hair, not wanting to let him go.

“You too.” Chuuya replied. “Don’t have too much fun without me, okay?”

“And you kill some monsters for me.” The Hermes’ son said with a giggle, sending a shiver through Chuuya’s body. “Take care of Akutagawa and Atsushi, don’t let them kill themselves.”

Chuuya chuckled, then walked off Dazai’s embrace. “I will.”

“Oi, stop flirting with each other and let’s go!” Kunikida called them from the top of the hill, impatiently waiting for Chuuya, Akutagawa and Atsushi seeming to have an argument with each other as they waited for the redhead.

“Coming!” Chuuya yelled at him, then hugged Dazai one last time before running up the hill to meet his friends. Dazai watched them until they disappeared from his view, then sighed.

“They’re gonna be okay, kid.” Fukuzawa said, scaring Dazai. He almost forgot the old man was there. “Chuuya is strong and Kunikida is a very responsible man, they’ll take care of Atsushi and Akutagawa.”

Dazai sighed again. “I hope so.”

“They also went to a lot of missions,” Fyodor added, “I’m pretty sure they will find this... Book or whatever very quickly and return to the camp before you can even miss them. All of them.”

“Yes,” Dazai murmured, frowning to Fyodor before looking back to where Chuuya and the others went, “yeah, they will.”

“Alright,” Fukuzawa said, clapping his hands and gesturing vaguely to the camp, “go back to your cabins and go to sleep, there’s still a few hours left until breakfast.”

Fukuzawa and Gin were the first ones to left, Fukuzawa returning to the Big House and Gin returning to the Cabin 13 while Dazai kept standing there, looking at the hill, waiting for Chuuya to come back running and take him with him. They were partners since they arrived the camp, they weren’t supposed to go on missions without each other.

Fyodor touched Dazai’s shoulder softly, hands covered by his black gloves, preventing him from using his ability unintentionally. “They’re gonna be okay.” That’s all he said before following Gin back to their Cabin.

“They’re gonna be okay.” Dazai murmured to himself after Fyodor left, still looking at the hill, the sun beginning to appear on the horizon and illuminating the whole camp. “They’re gonna be okay.”
Like he always did when Chuuya or any other camp went on a mission, Argus drove them to the Tokyo bus station. Atsushi and Akutagawa fell asleep in the middle of the way, resting against each other and snoring softly, Atsushi drooling on Ryuu’s shoulder and Akutagawa’s asthma making him wheeze in his sleep, what made Chuuya giggle; what wouldn’t he do right now to have a camera with him and be able to record this epic moment to use as blackmail material later. Kunikida was taking notes the whole way to the bus station, focused, probably organizing their schedules and steps so they could do everything perfectly. Chuuya’s always admired his ability to organize everything so perfectly he was never late for anything, whether it was to wake up in the morning and have breakfast or to get to certain places like his missions or just visiting Fukuzawa in the Big House when he wanted to see him. He was glad Kunikida was there with him.

Except Akutagawa and Atsushi were there too, which meant they were three children of the Big Three walking alone on the outside world, defenseless, with only their power to protect each other and keep them from get killed. Three children of the Big Three and a son of Ares with anger issues. What in the Styx was Fukuzawa thinking when he decided it was a good idea to send all the four of them on a mission at the same time? They were the worst combination ever. They were going to attract the double of the problems they usually would if they were alone.

As if to illustrate Chuuya’s worries, the moment Argus left them alone at the bus station and drove away they were attacked by a Fury. Atsushi was only half-awake and Kunikida and Chuuya didn’t even realize what was happening until Akutagawa wielded Rashomon and quickly cut the Fury in half, the dust falling above them like a yellow powder rain.

“This,” Kunikida stammered after a moment in complete silence, wide eyes, “this is what I meant with not being a good idea sending all the four of us on a mission at the same time.”

“We’re gonna die.” Atsushi said, next to an anxiety crisis. “Oh Styx, we’re gonna die.”

“Shut up, moonfish,” Akutagawa hissed, putting his sword back on the sheath, “we’re not gonna die.”

Chuuya bit his lip. He preferred to keep certain things about the prophecy to himself for now.

“We should go.” He said, squeezing his backpack shoulder strap. “We should take a train to get there faster. The faster we find this book, the faster we can avoid the bloody apocalypse and return home safely.”

Atsushi gasped. “T-the what?”

“Did you- did you just say ‘apocalypse’?” Kunikida asked with widened eyes. Ryuu wheezed, chest heaving as he fumbled his pocket for his asthma inhaler.

“The prophecy.” Chuuya said, suddenly remembering he still didn’t tell them about it. “I’m gonna tell you about that in the train, let’s go.”

“Do you think it’s safe for us to go there by train?” Akutagawa asked after using his inhaler.

“No,” Chuuya replied, “but we’re not safe anywhere.”

“Fair enough.” Kunikida said, then took the lead to the ticket office to buy their tickets.
They’ve been outside the Camp Half-Blood for less than two hours and were already attacked by a Fury. Chuuya didn’t even wanted to think about what else was waiting for them.

Kunikida bought them the tickets and then they walked into the train, looking for an empty cabin so they could discuss the details about the mission without calling too much attention. The train started, leaving the bus station behind, and Chuuya’s mission finally began.

As the train moved forward, he told his friends about the prophecy, still insecure about the part one of them would die, but letting them know about the dangers that waited for them. Of course, the prophecy would scare them, but it wasn’t safe to keep them in the dark. Kunikida would come up with an idea sooner or later.

They managed to stay silent on their way for their destiny for about ten minutes until Atsushi started to tremble.

“What’s wrong, ‘Sushi?” Chuuya asked when he noticed Atsushi’s expression and body language.

“Oh, we have company.” Atsushi replied, slightly pointing with his eyes to somewhere behind Chuuya and Akutagawa.

Both Chuuya and Akutagawa quietly turned around to see what Atsushi was seeing, holding their breaths when they saw.

“Di immortales,” Akutagawa breathed, “is that—”

“Yes.” Chuuya whispered back, his hands immediately going to his daggers in his belt. “A Harpy.”

Harpies were disgusting monsters from the Underworld of insatiable hunger, with the head of a woman and body of a bird, usually with huge wings and deadly claws that could cut you in half without too much effort. Luckily, the harpy didn’t seem to have noticed the demigods already knew she was there, because she was still reading a random magazine and with her wings hidden, what gave them time to come up with a plan.

“She still didn’t notice we know she’s here.” Kunikida said, fingers touching the string of his bow. “Don’t need to panic, Atsushi.”

“I’m not panicking.” Atsushi said, clearly panicking. Ryuu brought one of his hands to his arm and touched his wrist with two of his fingers, softly squeezing his pulse point to feel his heartbeat and then recreating the pattern with his pinky, anchoring him, preventing him from having an anxiety attack. Atsushi’s breath gradually returned to normal. “How—”

“Shut up,” Ryuu hissed, still squeezing his wrist and recreating his heartbeats, “what’s the plan?”

“We can try to slid out the train without calling her attention.” Chuuya suggested, but Kunikida shook his head. Electricity was already starting to run through his bow.

“It’s impossible she wouldn’t notice it,” he said, “she’s here to kill us.”

Akutagawa looked around, “I can—”

“I won’t travel in the shadows.” Chuuya quickly replied with a hiss, both his daggers already in his hands. “I’m gonna kill her.”

“I can put an arrow inside her skull while the three of you run away.” Kunikida suggested, picking up his bow and pulling the string, a glimpse of an electric arrow appearing on the grip.
“No!” Chuuya said, a little bit too loud, scaring his friends. “No one will be left behind; do you hear me? No one.”

“Then what do you suggest us to do?” Kunikida grunted putting his bow down, the electric arrow disappearing.

Surprisingly, Atsushi was the one who came up with a plan. Actually, he didn’t even say anything, his eyes just started glowing in a cold, pale blue like they always did when he was using his powers and his jaw clenched in concentration; a few seconds later, someone on the train started coughing. Chuuya, Akutagawa and Kunikida turned to look for the person who was coughing, finding the Harpy leaning forward and holding her neck, coughing water.

She was drowning.

“Demigods,” she hissed, her claws on view, eyes widened in a mix of agony and pure anger while the water kept pouring out from her mouth full of pointed and deadly fangs. The Harpy stood and opened her wings, taking a step towards the half-bloods. “Heroes shall die.”

“Kunikida, now!” Atsushi shouted, seeming to be doing a lot of effort. Kunikida stood right away, bow in his hands and the electric arrow cutting the air like a rocket before entering her skull with a hollow sound, the Harpy exploding in yellow powder and leaving the smell of sulfur in the air.

Kunikida kept standing for a moment after the Harpy was gone, bow still positioned in his hands like he still needed to use it, looking at where the monster was with wide eyes before falling back in his seat. Luckily, they were alone at the car and no one else saw a woman turning to dust and a kid with a sparkling bow in his hands.

They all turned to Atsushi after the monster was gone, who was already half-asleep. “How did you do this?” Chuuya asked.

“I’m the son of Poseidon, I can control the water.” Atsushi replied, resting against the window and smiling groggy, “she was drinking water.”

That’s all he said before passing out, his body falling forward and being quickly grabbed by Akutagawa.

Chuuya would thank Fukuzawa for telling him to bring Atsushi to this mission later.

-x-x-x-

After the occurrence on the train, they decided to keep traveling overland. Public vehicles weren’t safe neither for them or for common mortals, they were lucky no one else was at the wagon on the train with them when the Harpy attacked and no one saw someone turning to dust in front of them.

Kunikida was leading the way through the forest, even though the prophecy were destined to Chuuya, but the redhead honestly didn’t care. The son of Zeus was a better leader than him, he was more than happy to let him lead the way while he just watched his back.

Akutagawa, on the other hand, wasn’t really happy to have to carry Atsushi passed out on his back. Apparently, the overuse of his powers tires him so much he simply faints; Chuuya made a mental note to never overload him during a fight, otherwise it could end up really bad.

They were walking for at least eight hours until Kunikida suddenly stopped, finding a small glade between the trees and next to a lake and stating they would stay there for the night; it still wasn’t night, the sun didn’t even start to fade yet, but travel during the night wasn’t safe. By the time they
found the glade Atsushi was already awake, having an argument with Akutagawa about something stupid enough to not call Chuuya or Kunikida’s attention, the two boys ignoring them as they cleaned up the ground to sleep and the other two looked for woods to make up a fire to warm them during the night.

After the sleeping bags were ready and the fire was already tickling, Kunikida left the glade saying he saw a highway next to the forest and would follow it to see if he could find a McDonalds or some tiny marked to buy them food. Akutagawa offered himself to follow him by the shadows, but Kunikida denied it saying he would be fast and flew away, leaving the other three demigods behind with the fire and all his stuff—except, obviously, his bow. Chuuya fell in his sleeping bag with a sigh after Kunikida was gone, facing the big trees above them and the sun finally starting to fade between the leaves and the branches, thinking about the prophecy.

To dust or to gold one must become.

What did that mean?

Beneath the moonlight, a beast shall raise.

This one made him anxious and fear the night. He stayed more alert than normal because of this line, carefully watching everything around him, almost paranoiac, like something would raise from the shadows to exterminate him and his friends; he had his daggers ready on both his hands all the time, ready to reaper everything that suddenly attacked him or his friends.

And, of course, there was the last part.

By the hands of the poisoned youth, world to preserve or raze.

Fukuzawa told him the prophecies often had double meanings, but this one seemed to be really clear to him. He should avoid the end of the world, but how could he do that?

What was he supposed to do?

Before he could drown in his own thoughts, Akutagawa suddenly stood up and called his attention, “I’m gonna take a look around to see if we’re safe.”

“Okay, be careful.” Chuuya replied with a nod, and then Akutagawa disappeared among the shadows without any other words. Once they were alone, he turned to look at Atsushi. “Oi, ‘Sushi. Are you okay?”

“Uh?” Atsushi said, jumping lightly for the sudden scare. “Oh, I’m fine. It’s just that using my powers that way tires me a lot. I’m gonna be better tomorrow when we wake up, don’t worry.”

“Do you want an ambrosia? I know we shouldn’t use them unless we are really hurt but you seem so tired.” Chuuya asked, already picking up his backpack and looking for the Ziploc bag with the ambrosias.

Atsushi denied. “No, no, it’s okay,” he said, then stood up and cleaned his clothes. “I think I’m gonna take a bathe at the lake? I still feel the smell of sulfur on my clothes.”

“Sure, go ahead.” Chuuya replied, gesturing to the lake. “Just be careful, please. Take your weapon with you and scream if you need help, I’ll be there in a second.”

“I will, don’t worry.” Atsushi smiled, then picked up his backpack and started to lead to the lake behind the trees.
Chuuya sighed and fell in his sleeping bag again, closing his eyes and humming a song Yosano used to sing while curing him after he used Corruption. They were gone for half a day but he already missed the stupid songs of the cabin 7.

He was almost asleep when he heard the crack of a wood, his eyes suddenly opening wide. Chuuya sat down and picked up his daggers, looking around for the origin of the sound, alert to everything around him. He stayed in complete silence, paying attention to everything he could hear and trying to distinguish the different sounds; Atsushi on the lake, the birds above the trees, the wind blowing softly, an owl somewhere above him. Wood cracking again.

Steps.

Chuuya was in a defense stance in a second, daggers ready to be used, trying to identify the origin of the noise. He knew it couldn’t be Kunikida or Akutagawa because they didn’t walk in the ground like he did and it also couldn’t be Atsushi, he was still hearing the water a few meters away from him. A moment pass, and then the monster finally walked off the trees.

Except it wasn’t on the ground; it was in the trees. It was the Fury, the one Akutagawa killed at the bus station. She was already alive again.

“Hero,” she said, ugly yellow fangs glowing with the campfire, “give the Book back and you’ll suffer less pain.”

“Fuck off, ugly bat!” Chuuya yelled back, his daggers growing longer and heavier in his hands until he was holding two swords made of celestial bronze and gold. “I don’t have the book, stupid demon with melted brain!”

“Liar!” The Fury hissed, then flew out of the branch she was standing and attacked Chuuya with her claws. Chuuya swung both his swords, lifting them in the air and cutting the Fury’s feet in the middle of the air, making her hiss once again in pain at the same time he did a somersault and landed gracefully on one knee.

“C’mon!” He shouted angrily, swinging the swords in his hands and facing the Fury. The monster looked at him in pure anger, eyes glowing yellow, bat wings wide opened in the air as she turned around and attacked him again.

“Foolish demigod, I can feel the Book around! Give it back!” The monster yelled, crossing the air like she was sniffing it. The Fury then flew in his direction with her claws in front of her, ready to cut Chuuya’s throat like butter, hissing angrily. Chuuya let her come closer enough to almost hit him before lifting his swords again and swinging them in the air, cutting the Fury in half and making the monster explode in yellow powder, the disgusting smell of sulfur filling the air again.

“Ugh,” he said to himself, his swords returning to the normal daggers’ shape and putting them back in the sheath before touching his shirt with yellow monster dust and make a grimace, “I hate Furies.”

Akutagawa walked off the shadows a few seconds later, a brown bag in his hands. He stopped when saw Chuuya’s expression, “what happened?”

Chuuya looked blankly at him, covered in yellow dust, “I hate furies.”

“A Fury attacked you?” Akutagawa said, putting the brown bag down before crossing the distance between them to check Chuuya. “Are you okay? Did it hurt you? Where’s moonfish? Why didn’t he help you? I’m gonna kill that seaweed-”

“Ryuu, relax, I’m okay.” Chuuya giggled. “Atsushi is taking a bathe at the lake, it’s not his fault.”
Kunikida returned to the glade a few seconds later, two other brown bags in his hands, gracefully landing on the floor. Like Akutagawa, he stopped when he saw Chuuya covered in yellow powder.

“Chuuya?” He said, putting his bags next to Akutagawa’s and walking closer to the redhead. “What happened?”

“A Fury, it’s okay,” he replied with a vague gesture, “can someone check on Atsushi? He’s at the lake.”

“Ryu, go.” Kunikida said, but Akutagawa protested.

“Why me?”

“You’re faster, go.”

Akutagawa grumbled, but walked into the shadows and disappeared anyways. Kunikida turned to face Chuuya. “Are you sure you’re okay? Did the Fury hurt you?”

“I’m fine, don’t worry.” Chuuya replied, then frowned. “She thought the book was with me.”

“What?”

“The book, the one we’re looking for.” Chuuya explained. “She thought it was with me. She said—” a pause, “she said she could feel it around.”

“She’s a monster, Chuuya.” Kunikida reminded him, slowly. “She could be lying.”

“I know, but—” The redhead bit his lips. “Don’t you think it’s weird?”

“Indeed,” Kunikida agreed, “but we can’t trust what a monster said. Do you have the book?”

“What? No, of course not.”

“Neither do I, and neither does Ryu and Atsushi.” Kunikida said. “See? It’s okay.”

Chuuya seemed to think for a moment, then sighed. “Yeah,” he said, “you’re right.” he sat down around the fire, looking inside the brown bags Akutagawa and Kunikida brought to see the content; canned food, water and some other kinds of food and drinks. He stood up again when Ryuu returned with Atsushi, both of them comically wet and arguing. “Uh, what happened?”

“He threw me in the water!” Akutagawa shouted.

Atsushi grunted. “It’s not my fault you smell!”

“You little— I’m gonna— I’m—” Ryuu tried to form a sentence, but he ended up preferring to get into a physical fight with Atsushi instead of arguing.

Chuuya giggled, picking up his backpack. “I’m gonna take a lake bathe, I’ll be right back.”

“You’re not going anywhere alone.” Kunikida replied, also with his backpack on hands. “Let’s go. You two, stay here.”

Akutagawa and Atsushi were too busy fighting to reply, but Kunikida knew they didn’t need to. He gave Chuuya a ride to the lake, where they bathed and washed their clothes in silence while keeping each other’s backs, and then returned to the campfire to find Akutagawa and Atsushi in an uncomfortable silence, cooking their dinner, trying to ignore each other.
Both Kunikida and Chuuya giggled at them, then sat down around the campfire to eat.

“We’re gonna take turns to sleep and watch the place, okay?” Kunikida suggested, eating his dinner. “I’m gonna go first, you can sleep until I wake up one of you to take the next turn.”

They all agreed, and then Akutagawa raised his hand, “are you sure we’re safe now?”

“Yeah, I flew around and didn’t see anything.” Kunikida frowned. “Why?”

“Because we’re being followed since we left the camp behind.” Akutagawa said, and without any other word he disappeared in the shadows.

When he returned with the person that was following them, Chuuya was on the top of them and fighting them without even taking a proper look at their face. He simply knew who it was.

“You bastard– Stupid– Little shit– What are you doing here– What–” Chuuya said between the slaps and punches he was giving the person beneath him.

Dazai tried to hold his arms to stop the punching session. “Chibi– Chibi, calm down– Calm–”

“You’re following us!” Chuuya shouted, finally stopping with the punches. He managed to scratch Dazai’s face, at least. “Since we left the camp? You saw me fighting with the Fury? You didn’t do anything to help?!”

“In my defense, I was watching Atsushi taking a bathe when the Fury attacked you.” Dazai tried to explain himself, but only made things worse. Kunikida was strangling him in a second.

“You– Pervert! Why did you– Why–” Kunikida shouted as he strangled Dazai, but Dazai seemed to be quite enjoying being shaken.

“Ah, do you guys know the real reason why Akutagawa and Atsushi were fighting a few minutes ago and were both wet when they returned from the lake?” Dazai proceeded with a dirty smile and hoarse voice, ignoring the fact he was being strangled and Chuuya was still sitting in his belly. Both Akutagawa and Atsushi widened their eyes. “Oh, this is great. They were-”

“Shut up!” Both of them shouted at the same time, making Dazai giggle.

“Okay,” he said, “I’m gonna keep your little secret~”

“Bastard!” Kunikida shouted, finally stopping strangling him and sitting on his knees. Dazai adjusted where his neck was still cracking from being shaken. “You weren’t supposed to be here!”

“Well but I couldn’t just stay there and leave Chuuya alone!” Dazai said. “I couldn’t leave any of you alone!”

Chuuya breathed, still sitting on Dazai’s lap, remembering what the Fury told him, “why did you take it?”

Dazai turned to face him. “What?”

“The Book,” Chuuya said, voice breaking, “why did you take it from the Underworld? Why would you-” a pause, “why would you want to cause the apocalypse, mackerel? Why? Why would you do something so terrible like that?”

“Chibi, what are you talking about?” Dazai asked, frowning. Everyone else was silent, just watching the conversation.
“Don’t act dumb with me, Dazai Osamu.” Chuuya laughed without funny. “I know the Book is with you, I know you’re the one who took it from the Underworld, I just wanna know why.”

“Chuuya, I didn’t take the Book.” Dazai replied, looking as broken as Chuuya. “Why would you say something like that? Why would you accuse me of something like that?”

“The Fury,” Kunikida explained, “she said she could feel the Book around, but it’s not with any of us. And then you appeared here out of nowhere, Dazai. What are you doing?”

“Guys, it’s not with me.” Dazai said again, starting to look desperate. “You can look inside my backpack, you can look on my clothes, but I swear on the fucking Styx it’s not with me. I would never do something like that, you have to trust me. Chuuya, you have to trust me.”

And damn it, Chuuya did. Chuuya would trust Dazai his own life if he needed to, and no one in the world would be able to change his mind.

“Damn it,” Chuuya said after a moment in complete silence, leaving Dazai’s lap and sitting next to him, “you shouldn’t be here, mackerel. The prophecy said four half-bloods, not five.”

“Well, I’m not coming back now.” Dazai said, sitting down on the floor. “We’re gonna save the fucking world and go down in history, people will remember us for centuries! We’re gonna be okay chibi, don’t worry.”

But Chuuya knew they wouldn’t. Chuuya knew one of them would be left behind, he knew one of them was supposed to die, he was just avoiding this line of the prophecy so he wouldn’t get crazy, but how could he ignore this line now that Dazai was with them? Dazai, the guy that tried every possible way to kill himself? This line of the prophecy was a whole meat for him, and Chuuya didn’t want his partner to die. He didn’t want any of them to die.

He would pay with his own life to avoid that if he needed to.

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Luckily, they weren’t attacked during the night. They took turns of two hours to sleep and then left the glade when the sun rose, keep following for their destiny through the trees. Kunikida took the front line, leading the way, his bow always in his hands ready to be used and Chuuya took the rear, watching everyone and keeping them safe, protecting them; Dazai was right in front of him, telling him jokes and trying to come up with plans for when they recovered the Book, poking Atsushi’s neck in front of him and annoying him, trying to come to a reaction that wasn’t a grumble.

They arrived Gotenba close to lunchtime, deciding to leave the forest behind for a moment, the Mount Fuji being saw from distance. The view of the majestic Mount Fuji always took Chuuya’s breath away, even though he’s seen the mount multiple times before, seeing the huge mount was always a nice view. Kunikida took them to a small café, sitting in the booth beneath the big window, giving them an open view of the highroad and next to the door just in case they needed to leave the place in a hurry.

A waitress came over, took their orders and then left them alone again. “So,” Dazai said, resting his elbows on the table, “what’s the plan?”

“We go to the Underworld, talk to Hades about the Book and ask him if he can help us find it.” Chuuya said.

Akutagawa snorted, “sure, this is gonna be easy like that.”
Chuuya turned to face him, “do you have any other plan?”

“We go to the Olympus and ask Kunikida’s father to help.” Akutagawa said. “My dad sucks, he won’t help us that easy.”

“The prophecy said ‘to west’, it means the Underworld.” Kunikida reminded them. “If you guys want to talk to my father, we’re going to the wrong way. The Olympus is in Tokyo. But I don’t think he would help us anyways.”

“Why not?” Atsushi asked. “I mean, I know he’s immortal and all that stuff, but how could he rule the world if there wasn’t a world to rule? Everyone would die with the apocalypse.”

“He’s the god of all gods, ‘Sushi.” Chuuya replied. “I think he has more important stuff to do instead of helping five demigods with their mission. We’re heroes, we’re supposed to prove our strength.”

Akutagawa snorted again, “your brain must be so small, moonfish.”

“At least I have a brain!” Atsushi grunted, and then they got into a physical fight. Kunikida rolled his eyes, ignoring the boys fighting next to him.

“We must organize our ideas if we’re going to the Olympus.” He said, looking for his notebook inside his jacket. He frowned. “Where’s-”

“Wow Kunikida-kun, you really think my ability is strong?” Dazai said with a smirk, casually leafing through the pages of Kunikida’s notebook. “I’m flattered~”

Kunikida took his notebook from Dazai’s hands, “stop stealing my stuff or I’m gonna start stealing you too!”

Dazai raised an eyebrow to him, “if you want to steal someone,” he said, smirking while the waitress returned with their food and served them before leaving them alone again, “you need to learn the art of robbery first.” he raised his hand, still smirking, showing Kunikida a pink wallet.

Kunikida gasped, “is that-”

“The waitress wallet, yes.”

“You can’t just steal the people’s wallets like that!” Kunikida said, shocked. “Give it back!”

“Actually, we kinda need the money.” Chuuya replied, scratching his neck and mouth full of French fires, making Kunikida gasp again. “And the waitress didn’t need the money anyways, right mackerel?”

“Precisely. You need to learn who to steal before you can actually steal them, this is something Ranpo taught me some time ago. You need to read the people.” Dazai said, putting the waitress money inside his pocket and throwing the wallet away, then pointed at a man sitting alone at the back of the café. “You see that guy over there? He’s okay to steal, he’s rich; you can say by the watch his wearing. Only steal people that you know won’t miss the money stolen, you wouldn’t be such a hero if you stole a poor person’s money.”

“That’s... Very clever and kind. Still illegal, but very clever.” Kunikida admitted, looking around the café. “What else?”

“You need to keep the attention of the person you’re stealing on your face all the time, so they won’t notice your hands.” Dazai proceeded, looking inside Kunikida’s eyes and smirking. “You don’t need
to be too close to the person you’re stealing, if only your hands reach their body, you’re gonna be okay. Keep them focused on you and they won’t notice it,” as if to prove his point, Dazai took his hands from under the table and showed Kunikida the stuff he stole from him; his wallet and notebook again, “if the person you’re stealing is distracted enough, you can even steal other kind of stuff,” he put Kunikida’s bow on the table. Thank the gods mist was something very powerful and mortals wouldn’t notice a five feet long bow resting on the table. “Once I stole Tachihara’s belt and he only noticed it when his pants fell off in the middle of the camp, it was gold.”

Kunikida was definitely impressed, he didn’t even yell at Dazai for stealing his stuff. “Where did you learn all that stuff?”

“I’m a son of Hermes with the ability to teleport myself, I learned a thing or two over the years.” Dazai snorted, then looked at the movement on the café again. It was relatively full; he could get a lot of money if he tried hard enough. “Do you wanna see me in action and learn a couple of things?”

“Please, show us your incredible ability to steal people’s money.” Kunikida replied, gesturing vaguely at the café as he started eating his food. Even Akutagawa and Atsushi stopped fighting to watch him.

Dazai smiled at them, cracked his knuckles and stood up, stretching before going to his first victim. He greeted the pretty woman in a red dress with a seductively smile, said something to her and made her giggle as he stole her wallet from her purse without her noticing, then with an exaggerate twist he went to the second victim; he purposely bumped into the old man with an ugly moustache and apologized, stealing his watch and wallet without him noticing as well. By the fifth victim, Dazai seemed to be dancing around the people while he stole all kinds of stuff from them; wallets, watches, rings, necklaces and even food he stole. He returned to their booth with a proud smug, sitting back in his original place next to Chuuya with his pockets full of random and valuable things and finally starting eating his burger.

“Damn it, I wish I could steal their phones as well,” Dazai murmured with his mouth full of food, “rich people have really nice cellphones.”

“We need to go before they start noticing their stuff is gone.” Chuuya said, finishing his food and picking up his stuff. “Let’s go, you can eat on our way.”

Dazai grumbled, but picked up his food and put it inside a brown bag before standing and letting Chuuya carry his stuff for him. Kunikida, Akutagawa and Atsushi followed their lead, packing their food and picking up their stuff before running out from the café at the same time the first person shouted their wallet was gone and a chorus of ‘mine too’ followed the first one.

-x-x-x-

For the first time since they left the camp, Chuuya had a nightmare.

It started pretty much the same way it always did when he had a nightmare. He was alone at a large field, with six dead people next to his feet and his whole body covered in blood. He knew what happened there, he was the one that killed the people. His hands and arms were still glowing with the last glimpses of Corruption, his whole body bumping like he was next to the biggest speaker in the world, blood escaping from each one of Chuuya’s pores. Mouth, nose, ears, eyes, all he could see was his blood making everything red and the dead bodies, the people he killed.

The people the monster inside him killed.

The nightmare was always the same. It made Chuuya revive the day before he arrived the Camp
Half-Blood and met Dazai and Kunikida.

But them something changed.

Chuuya frowned when he noticed the particular change in the nightmare; the number of dead people narrowed. Every time he had this nightmare, there were always six dead people. The six people he killed when he used Corruption for the first time and Dazai saved him in the last second, almost too late, right when he was about to combust for too much power.

This time, there were only four people.

He gulped, afraid to step closer to the dead bodies, knowing he wouldn’t like what he was about to see. Chuuya reached the first body, reluctantly touching them and turning the body to check their face. Suddenly, he forgot how to breath.

It was Akutagawa.

His face was almost unrecognizable with the huge cut crossing his whole face, his dead eyes facing the sky and mouth opened like he died screaming. His whole body was scratched and the clothes ripped apart, like a very angry tiger attacked and killed him but not without making him suffer endlessly before, to the point Chuuya was sure he was begging to die; Rashomon was next to him broke in the middle, the dark blade with glimpses of red made of Stygian Iron glowing in the pale moonlight. Chuuya checked his pulse just to make sure he was really dead and then went to the next body, the platinum hair already telling him who they were.

Atsushi looked as bad as Akutagawa, but his cuts looked more like blade cuts than claws scratches. Like Ryuu, his whole body was cut open and there wasn’t a single spot in his body that wasn’t covered in blood; his torn clothes, his hair, his skin, the puddle of blood on the floor beneath him.

Kunikida was the next body and by far the worst one; he was impaled with Atsushi’s sword and where his right arm was supposed to be there was only a stump dripping blood. Like Akutagawa and Atsushi, his whole body was cut open and covered in blood and his bow was broken next to him, still sparkling with the last vestiges of electricity.

He wasn’t brave enough to check Dazai’s body.

Chuuya took a look around the slaughter, trying to not looking at his dead friends, the blue moon too big to be considered normal watching all his steps. He heard a maniac laugh above the sound of the wind, echoing around the field, seeming to come from everywhere.

When he turned to look at where he found Akutagawa, he saw the dark silhouette on the shadows with just the too white teeth being visible. He frowned, knowing deep down that the smile was familiar but not being able to remember who the smile belonged to.

He woke up screaming.

Dazai was with him in a second, holding him from behind and trying to keep him still while Chuuya had a panic attack.

“Chibi, chibi, it’s okay! You’re okay!” Dazai tried to assure him, but all Chuuya could think about was the view of his friends’ dead bodies. Akutagawa with a cut across his face, Atsushi completely covered in sword cuts and blood, Kunikida impaled. Dead, dead, dead. They were all dead. He screamed louder.

“Chuuya, look at me!” A new voice said, holding his face and trying to make him look at them,
but Chuuya couldn’t tell who they were. Dead, dead, dead. “I don’t know what happened, but it’s just a dream!”

A dream? What kind of dream was that? No, no, no. They’re dead, they were all dead.

“Breath with me! Chuuya!” The voice was saying again, softly slapping his face to focus him, but it sounded so distant. Where was he?

The person that was talking to him touched their foreheads together and held his face firmly to keep him from moving and narrow his field of vision, forcing him to pay attention at the dark eyes in front of him.

“You’re safe!” The person said, struggling to keep Chuuya still. “Breath with me, okay? In and out, in and out.”

Slowly, Chuuya managed to calm his senses and focus on the person in front of him, helping him with his breath and matching their breaths together. The person didn’t let go from his face until Chuuya was breathing normally again, only then they separated their foreheads and sat down on their knees.

“Better?” Akutagawa asked, worriedly.

Chuuya nodded, relaxing on Dazai’s arms and resting his head on his shoulder. “Yeah, I’m sorry. How did you do that?”

“It’s okay, you don’t need to apologize.” Ryuu said, then pinched his nose. “Moonfish has a lot of panic attacks, I had to learn how to stop them.”

Atsushi gasped, “you learned how to stop panic attacks because of me?!”

Akutagawa grunted. “Don’t feel too special, I still hate you.”

“Sure you do, Ryu.” Dazai snorted.

“Are you okay, Chuuya?” Kunikida said, getting down on his knees and touching Chuuya’s forehead. “What did you dream about?”

Chuuya bit his lip, the nightmare still too fresh for him and making him close his eyes firmly when the flashes returned to his mind. The cuts, the wounds, the blood, that laugh and that familiar smile...

“This mission is getting on my nerves, that’s all.” He lied, closing his eyes when the tiredness of the panic attack started to fill his body.

Kunikida didn’t seem to buy the excuse, but he didn’t say anything.

“Go back to sleep, Chibi.” Dazai whispered against his ear, still hugging him from behind. “There’s still a few more hours until we leave. I’m gonna stay awake and protect you.”

Chuuya didn’t reply, he just gave Dazai an extended glance before sliding in the floor until he was laying down with his head comfortably on Dazai’s lap. He closed his eyes when Dazai started to stroke his hair, sighing happily when the tiredness finally hit him.

He fell asleep faster than he thought, ignoring the inner feeling that they were being followed.

-x-x-x-
They spent the next day walking in the highroads, following to their destiny.

By the fifth day on the road, they’ve crossed more than half the way to Fukui and there were still nine days left. This is why they decided to take a break when they reached Nagoya.

The best part of going out on mission was having the opportunity to see new places and meet new cultures like that, even though they didn’t usually leave the country. Chuuya always found amazing the way some cultures changed from a city to another, from a state to another, even though they still spoke the same language and were still on the same country. The diversity was amazing.

They talked and decided to stay in a hotel for once instead of sleeping in the woods like they’ve been doing for the past five days. Chuuya groaned in relief, his back was killing him. As they walked down the city, they found a fancy hotel called ‘Lotus Hotel’ right in the center of the city that seemed to be screaming for them to choose it to spent the night, the neon letters catching their attention like they were hypnotized.

There was a guy in front of the hotel staring at them like they were some sort of monsters. Chuuya clenched his fists and rolled up his sleeves, ready to fight the dude. “Do you got a problem, man?”

“What? Oh no, no.” The guy quickly replied with a smile. “You just seem to be really tired; don’t you want to come in and rest a little?”

Chuuya and Kunikida, the most doubtful and smart ones, exchanged a suspicious look while the other three sighed in relief, clearly tired. They turned to look at Chuuya and Kunikida, excitedly, and how could they say no to the offer when their friends were looking at them with such enthusiasm? And besides, resting a little wouldn’t kill anyone.

They decided to walk into the hotel to take a proper shower and rest, immediately gasping in amazement when they took a look around the hotel.

It was enormous, at least five time bigger than it seems from outside. There was a big fountain right in the middle of the hall that seemed to grow as the crystal-clear water was splashing up in a synchronized way that made the water look like it was dancing, big elevators made of glass took multiple people to the higher floors and the biggest chandelier Chuuya’s ever seen was placed right above the fountain, made of crystal and diamonds. There was no way in the seven oceans they could afford a night at that hotel.

The bellhop appeared in front of them, smiling brightly, handing Chuuya a door key. “Welcome to the Hotel Lotus! We hope you enjoy your stay and have fun, here’s your room keys and your LotusCash cards,” he handed Kunikida five red plastic credit cards, “they work in the restaurant and all the games. Have fun!”

“Uh, but we-” Atsushi tried to say, but the bellhop raised his hand to interrupt him.

“The bill’s taken care of, don’t worry about that.” He said, smiling brightly once again, then left the boys alone to talk to another two people that entered the hotel.

Kunikida and Chuuya faced each other. “Uh, this is weird.”

“Who cares?” Dazai said, taking the keys from Chuuya’s hand and looking for an elevator, “if the bill is already taken care of let’s enjoy a little.”

“Ok, but who took care of the bill?” Kunikida argued, but Dazai didn’t seem to care. He smiled at the elevator.
“I’m gonna take a bath and sleep for eighteen hours,” he said, pulling Atsushi and Akutagawa with him, “let’s go, lovebirds.”

Kunikida and Chuuya frowned at each other again, shrugged and decided to follow Dazai to their room. They would leave after taking a shower and sleep a little.

Their room was on the 59º floor, the master suite of the floor. It was huge, with two beds king sized beneath the big window and a bar stocked with all kinds of food; candies, cakes, pies, sodas. A hotline to room service, two fluffy towels and bath stuff above each bed and silk sheets. A big-screen TV with satellite and high-speed internet. At the bathroom, a hot tube big enough to fit all the five of them inside it at the same time.

“This is-” Kunikida started, taking a look around the room.

“The fucking paradise.” Dazai interrupted him with the largest smile Chuuya’s ever seen.
“I’m gonna take a bath, does anyone wants to join me? I’m sure there’s space enough for all of us.”

“I don’t feel really comfortable in a bath alone with you knowing you were spying me at the lake the other day.” Atsushi replied, leaving his stuff on one of the beds and looking for food in the bar.

“You could just drown me, but fair enough. I’m gonna drown myself.” Dazai nodded. “Kunikida-kun? Chibi?”

Kunikida and Chuuya faced each other. “Nah, you can go alone.” Kunikida replied, taking the bed in the left and leaving the bed in the middle for Chuuya and Dazai to share.

“I’ll go,” Chuuya said, Dazai immediately opened a big smile before Chuuya raise his hand, “as long as you wash my hair.”

“Deal, let’s go.” Dazai ran for the bathroom, leaving the door open to Chuuya. Chuuya sighed and picked up his backpack before following Dazai to the bath.

Faithful to the deal, Dazai washed his hair like he used to do after Chuuya used Corruption, as a form to relax him and clean his mind. The water was so warm Chuuya wanted to stay there forever but there was an entire hotel for them to explore, he could take another bath later, they had time. Kunikida ended up joining them at the hot tube a few minutes later, only to hasten them up because Atsushi and Akutagawa wanted to take a bath as well before they could explore the hotel together.

After they took their baths and ate some food from the bar –two pizzas, three sodas each one of them and then a whole cake–, they decided to go to their exploration. They started with the restaurants, finding the best ones and already choosing what they would eat for dinner after they crossed a double door that lead them to a whole new area from the hotel. They suddenly forgot how to breath.

It was like looking at the biggest amusement park that existed in the world. Roller coasters, Ferris wheels, climbing walls, an indoor bungee-jumping bridge, waterslides and everything that a normal amusement park had. Everything. They could see the laser tags rooms and virtual-reality suits to play with the laser guns, multiple videogames, a twister area and a dance floor where multiple people where dancing. The loud music intoxicated them, their bodies unconsciously moving in the rhythm of the song like they were hypnotized.

They didn’t even talk to each other to reach a mutual agreement, they just instantly scattered without any word.

Atsushi went straight to the waterslides, Kunikida went to the laser tag rooms, Akutagawa to the
Ferris wheel, Dazai quickly disappeared from view and Chuuya went to the roller coasters. Chuuya didn’t care they shouldn’t be scattering this way, he didn’t care it was dangerous, all he could think about was riding the biggest roller coaster he’s ever seen in his life at least five times.

Chuuya wasn’t sure how much time he spent going from one ride to another, but he was sure he should’ve gone to all the rides in that park by the end of the day. He met his friends a few times while they were having fun and going from one ride to another and game to game, even took a few rides and played with them a few times, but most of the day he spent alone. He saw Dazai trying to commit suicide in at least five rides, luckily failing in every single one of them.

They met again only when they all went to the dance floor.

Kunikida was the first one Chuuya found, dancing to the sound of an electronic music that was playing on the dance floor, with a glass of something alcoholic in his hands that would make him regret his life choices the next day. Electricity was running through his body, but neither he or the people around him seem to notice.

The next ones he found were Atsushi and Akutagawa, only a few meters away from him and seeming to have a lot of fun together. Chuuya started walking to them but stopped as soon as he noticed what they were doing.

They were kissing.

He couldn’t help it, Chuuya stopped in the middle of the people on the dance floor and started watching them. Maybe he was already too drunk, but he was sure it didn’t seem like that was their first kiss; they were kissing slowly and deeply, hands passionately running through the other’s bodies, smiles on their lips like they were really enjoying what they were doing.

“They’re together.” Someone suddenly said from behind him, making him jump in scare. It was Dazai, with a glass of the same drink Chuuya and Kunikida were drinking, smiling softly at him. “They’ve been together for a while now.”

“How do you know that?” Chuuya asked, turning around to face Dazai and throwing his arms over his shoulders as Dazai grabbed his waist and started moving them in the rhythm of the song that was playing.

“That night at the lake, when you guys found out I was following you.” Dazai replied, leading the dance. The air seemed to get hotter, hard to breath, the loud music bumping his ears like they were right under the speakers, making him dizzy. “They were kissing at the lake, this is why both of them were wet when they returned.”

“It makes sense.” Chuuya agreed, closing his eyes for a second because of the nauseous feeling in his body. When he returned to open his eyes, he seemed to be twice as drunk as he was when he closed his eyes, starting at Dazai’s eyes like he was watching him through a mist; his eyes went from his partner’s eyes to his mouth, so inviting, so kissable. “They make a good couple.”

“Yeah,” Dazai breathed, touching their foreheads together and mirroring Chuuya’s act, staring at his lips, “so good.”

“So good,” Chuuya echoed, closing his eyes and letting the moment take over his body. The loud song seemed to get lower when all Chuuya could focus was Dazai right in front of him, leading the dance, his warm breath brushing against his lips. “So good.”
The next thing he knew, they were kissing.

Kissing Dazai was nothing like he thought it would. He thought it would be hurried, sloppy, with lots of saliva and groans because of the repressed tension over the years, probably against a wall after a game at the camp, but his lips were so soft he almost didn’t notice they were touching his own lips until Dazai tilted his head slightly to the side and opened his mouth briefly. Chuuya sighed and deepened the kiss, pulling him closer, sliding his tongue inside Dazai’s mouth and properly kissing him like he should be kissed.

The song seemed to get louder and louder, intoxicating him, making him broke the kiss because the pressure inside his brain was too strong. When he parted their lips and opened his eyes, he finally realized something was wrong.

“Dazai.” He called, frowning when he noticed his mind was a blank page. “What- what are we doing here?”

“Kissing, obviously.” Dazai replied with a drunk smile, leaning forward to kiss Chuuya again, but Chuuya put his hand in front of his lips.

“No, not right now. I mean at the hotel.”

Dazai looked at him like he was crazy. “To have fun? C’mon, Chibi, don’t think too much.”

But Chuuya did. Something was wrong.

“I’m sorry, I have to go to the restroom.” Chuuya said, sliding out from Dazai’s arms and leaving the dance floor in a hurry.

He ran the farthest he could from the dance floor, somewhere where the loud song wasn’t intoxicating his feelings and making him dizzy, like he was being drugged. Chuuya sat down on the steps of the stairs that lead to the bungee-jump, running his fingers through his hair and trying really hard not to panic. Focus, Chuuya, c’mon. What was he doing there? For a terrifying second, he couldn’t remember anything. He had a mission. Mission? What mission?

The Book.

Chuuya gasped, his memories gradually starting to come back to him. He was on a mission to find the book that could cause the end of the times and stop the apocalypse. That’s it. He needed to get the hell out of there.

He returned to the dance floor, looking for his friends. He found Dazai in the same place Chuuya left him, dancing alone with two glasses of alcoholic drink, seeming to have a really good time all by himself.

Chuuya shook him. “Mackerel!”

Dazai gave him a drunk smile. Wrong, it felt wrong. “Chibi! Do you think I can die if I mix these two drinks?”

“We need to leave.”

“Why?” Dazai seemed really disappointed, “I thought we would take a bath together later.”

“This place is a trap, we need to leave.” Chuuya said, hurriedly, but Dazai wasn’t paying attention on what he was saying anymore. “Dazai!”
Dazai grumbled, “what?”

“We’re on a mission, remember? We need to save the world?”

“Yeah,” Dazai replied, but he didn’t seem to care, “just a few more minutes.”

“No more minutes!” Chuuya replied, then pulled his wrist to walk with him.

“Hey!” Dazai shouted, pulling his wrist back. “What are you doing?!”

Chuuya punched him in the face.

The punched finally seemed to bring Dazai back to reality, his eyes widening when the drunk mist left his eyes and the vision cleared, “what the hell?”

“We need to get out of here right now.”

Chuuya grabbed Dazai’s hand, and together they ran to where Kunikida was sat down in a couch between a girl with light brown hair with a blue lock and a tall guy with dark brown hair, his arms thrown over their shoulders as he told them a silly story about the camp half-blood.

“And then I told them,” he said, groggy voice from the alcoholic drink, “you can’t use olive oil as lube!” but they didn’t listen to me.” the two people with him laughed.

Chuuya twisted his nose at the story, “Oi, drunk asshole, we need to leave.”

“Right now?” Kunikida asked, blinking slowly.

“Yes, right now.” Chuuya replied.

“But we’re gonna get married!” Kunikida grumbled, pulling the two people closer and kissing their foreheads.

Dazai frowned, “all the three of you?”

“Yes!” The girl replied. “We’re in love! Right, Doppo-chan? Tetsu-chan?”

“We sure are!”

Dazai snorted at the nickname, “Doppo-chan.”

“I’m sorry Kunikida-kun, we need to postpone the marriage.” Chuuya replied, then punched Kunikida in the face like he did with Dazai. Kunikida seemed to be disoriented for a second before recovering his senses and stand up with a jump.

“Di immortales.” He said, widened eyes, “this is the craziest night of my life.”

“Tell me about it, buddy.” Dazai replied, tapping his shoulder. “Congratulations on your marriage by the way, Doppo-chan.”

“Shut up.” Kunikida hissed, quickly apologizing for the two people on the couch –who already seemed to forget about him– before following Dazai and Chuuya among the people to find Akutagawa and Atsushi.

“You seemed to be enjoying your new significant others, did you really kiss both of them?”
“Shut. Up.”

Dazai didn’t stop to giggle even when Kunikida punched him.

They found Akutagawa and Atsushi next to the bar, talking privately to each other and with a whole bottle of vodka on their hands. Chuuya didn’t say anything when he got close enough to them, just forcefully hit their heads together to wake them up. Both of them gasped when they recovered their senses and Akutagawa picked his inhaler from his pocket to use it.

“Let’s go.” Chuuya said between his teeth, angrily, clearly done with that place’s shit. Dazai quickly teleported them to their room to pick up their stuff before teleporting them again to outside the hotel.

It felt like all the tiredness from the previous days decided to hit them at the same time. Their bodies felt limp, their eyes imploring to close, bones feeling hollow and the hungry, damn it, it felt like a monster inside their belly begging to escape.

They didn’t know how much time they spent inside the hotel room, but was definitely more than a few hours.

The climate changed completely from when they walked inside the hotel. The sky was darker and the air colder, unlike the day they arrived the city, so they should’ve been there for at least a day or two.

Chuuya asked the next person that walked pass them, suddenly forgetting how to breath when the answer came.

December 21th.

They’ve been in the Hotel Lotus for eight days, and the winter solstice was tomorrow.

-x-x-x-

They reached Fukui next to midnight, choosing to follow straight at their destiny instead of stopping to rest. They couldn’t waste time, they had to find the book now. The apocalypse was on their hands, all the well-deserved rest could wait a little.

Like Fukuzawa told him it would be, the entrance to the Underworld was at the Shiroyama beach. The climate next to the beach seemed to be a lot colder than the other places, the strong wind messing up their hairs and clothes and the sand making everything harder to see. Hades must be furious with the person that stole his book.

Atsushi found the entrance beneath an archway made of stone in a lake next to the beach, in the middle of the water, the grass and the trees on the stone being really dense on that part of the beach. They took a look around the archway, looking for some way to open the door to the Underworld, failing miserably.

Akutagawa had his arms crossed in his chest and an arched eyebrow, “are you guys gonna keep looking for a way in like absolute morons or are you gonna ask me how to do it?”

“Do you know how to get in?” Kunikida asked, raising his eyebrows.

“Obviously.” Akutagawa rolled his eyes. “He’s my father, I know how to walk into his place.”

Atsushi gasped. “You visit him?”
“I usually use the shadows, but yeah sometimes.” Ryuu replied, then crossed the way to the stone archway and stopped right in the middle. “His children have a free pass to his world. We can walk in and walk out anytime we want.”

“Speaking of way out,” Dazai said, “how are we going to leave?”

Akutagawa shrugged. “I’ll take you out. But you have to stay with me all the time.”

Chuuya grunted, “I will not-”

“You don’t have a choice.” Akutagawa interrupted him. “I know you don’t like traveling in the shadows, but this is our only way out. Unless you want to live with our precious Lord of the Death forever.”

“No, thanks.” Chuuya replied with a grimace, already starting to prepare his stomach to the shadows’ travel.

Akutagawa cracked his knuckles and his neck, “are you ready?” they all nodded, then he touched both sides of the stone archway at the same time and murmured something in ancient Greek.

For a moment, nothing happened, then the stones a few meters away from the archway started falling down. Chuuya jumped out of the way of a stone right in time to escape his imminent death, and in a few seconds, they were staring at a small cave were the stones originally were.

“Well,” Akutagawa said with a fake smile, bowing at the cave, “shall we?”

Chuuya gulped, and then they walked into the cave. Kunikida used his bow to illuminate the dark place, the dust being too heavy to allow them to see anything, the passage behind them closing when the stones started falling down until the passage was completely locked and their only way out was Akutagawa. The place actually looked like a cave, with a small spring of water right in the middle of the cave that seemed to follow through the walls and deadly stalactites dripping water. There were some skulls and other kinds of bones around the place, what made Chuuya have chills. They really were about to enter the world of the death. Hades’ world.

“Oi, Charon!” Akutagawa suddenly broke the silence. He coughed, picked up his inhaler from his pocket, used it and put it back, walking to an old man sitting next to a wooden barge. Chuuya hasn’t noticed the man until now.

The man raised his face, cigarette smoke popping out from his mouth. “Ryuunosuke. It’s been a while.”

“Yeah, I know.” Ryuu replied, resting his elbows in a counter in front of Charon. “Look, is dad home? I need to talk to him.”

“Sure enough, Lord Hades is in his quarters.” Charon replied with a small nod. “Do you want to schedule an hour?”

“Trust me, he’ll want to see me now.” Akutagawa said with an ironic chuckle. Suddenly, he looked terrifying. “Ride for five, please.”

Charon dragged from his cigarette. “Only the dead shall sail in the waters of the Styx. Once your hero friends are dead, they shall sail.”

“Yeah but we don’t have time.” Ryuu rolled his eyes, then walked back to where his friends were waiting for him. He stopped in front of Dazai. “Show me the stuff you stole from those people at the
café.”

Dazai gasped, “what?”

“We have to give Charon something valuable in exchange for the ride.” Akutagawa rolled his eyes again, grumbling. “Every time is the same story, ‘only the dead shall sail blah blah blah’. It’s so annoying.”

“Ohay uh,” Dazai said, looking inside his infinite backpack. As a gift rom his father, Dazai won a magic backpack that could fit literally everything inside it and it still would weight like the bag was empty. “I have mortal money, watches, rings, seven credit cards including two American Express and-” he raised a pack of cigarettes, “cigarettes?”

“It will work.” Akutagawa replied, taking the pack of cigarettes from Dazai’s hands and looking inside his backpack for drachmas. “Give me two drachmas each one of you, go.”

They gave him the golden drachmas and then Akutagawa returned to Charon, putting the cigarette pack and the gold on the counter. “Ride for five, Hirotsu.”

Hirotsu looked at the stuff above his counter and nodded, pointing the wooden barge.

“Sure, Ryuunosuke.”

Ryuu smiled, then got into the barge who already had at least eight spirits. Everyone else followed him, sitting down at the same time Charon –Hirotsu?– started poling the barge in the spring water in the direction of the wall. For a moment, Chuuya thought they would directly hit the stone and Charon would finally get the dead he wanted, holding Dazai’s hand in fear, but then the wall started trembling like it was made of smoke and they simply passed through it. Chuuya closed his eyes the moment the tip of the barge hit the smoke wall, returning to open them only when Dazai give his hand a soft squeeze.

He opened his eyes, and they were sailing through a dark, oily river, swirling with bones, dead fish and other kind of things like plastic dolls, old pictures, soggy diplomas with gilt edges.

Chuuya breathed, “the River Styx.”

“Indeed, young hero.” Charon said. “For thousands of years, humans have been throwing in everything as you come across. Hopes, dreams, wishes that never came true.”

“Di immortales.” Kunikida whispered, one hand firmly holding his bow’s string and the other being held by Atsushi. Akutagawa didn’t want to hold his hand.

Chuuya couldn’t help it, he went to put his hand on the pollute water, but before he could touch the filthy water something inside him warned him that he shouldn’t touch that water, mist dancing around his fingers, making him pull his hand away from the river. Above them more mist could be seen, deadly stalactites pointing at them from between the greenish mist.

As Charon poled the barge ahead, the shoreline of the Underworld came into view. Craggy rocks and black volcanic sand stretched inland about a hundred yards to the base of a high stone wall, which marched off in either direction as far as they could see. A sound came from somewhere nearby in the green gloom, echoing off the stones, something like the howl of a large animal.

Hirotsu smiled, the green mist making his smile look skeletal. Chuuya hasn’t noticed before, but Hirotsu’s skin was so pale he could see his skeleton in the greenish light. “Well, good luck with the Three-Face. He’s hungry.”
“Don’t worry, I know how to deal with him.” Akutagawa said when the bottom of the barge slid onto the black sand, then jumped out of the barge. He helped Atsushi to jump out, noticing the boy was on the edge of a panic attack. “Thank you for your glorious help, Charon.”

Charon nodded at him, then ferried the barge across the river without saying anything else. Akutagawa took the lead and started following the spirits through the well-worn path, still holding Atsushi’s hand, in the direction of the entrance of the Underworld. Chuuya didn’t know exactly what he expected, but the entrance to the World of the Death looked like the boarding area of an airport, except it looked way darker and terrifying. As they moved forward, the howl got louder and louder and more spirits appeared in their view, leading to the same way they were leading.

Akutagawa wasn’t impressed, he pointed at the different queues the spirits were forming. “This one leads to Asphodel Fields, this one to Elysium. Most of them don’t want to risk judgement from the court, so they just go straight to the Asphodel Fields because it’s easier.”

Indeed, the queue for the Asphodel Fields seemed to be going faster than the other.

As they got closer to the gates, the animal howl was so loud they could feel the ground beneath their feet shaking. Chuuya took a look around, trying to see the animal that was howling, partially afraid of what he was gonna see, and then finally saw it.

About forty feet in front of them, the green mist shimmered and they were soon looking at an enormous shadowy monster sitting exactly where the path split into three lanes.

Dazai immediately shrank next to Chuuya, grabbing his hand and squeezing it so hard Chuuya was afraid his bones were going to break. He took a look at his partner, squeezing his hand harder when he saw the pure fear in Dazai’s eyes and the way he was shaking in terror.

“That’s... A pretty big dog you got there, Ryuu.” Dazai said, voice trembling in fear, wide eyes.

“He won’t hurt you, Dazai. I promise.” Akutagawa said, then moved to stop in front of Atsushi and hold his face in a fond way, “I won’t let him hurt you, okay? I won’t let him hurt any of you. It’s a promise, everything is okay. Stay with Kunikida, I’ll be right back,” he said, kissing his forehead and then pulling Kunikida closer, telling him to hold Atsushi’s hand while he was talking to Cerberus.

Akutagawa cleared his throat and left to talk to Cerberus. The giant three-headed dog looked at him with pure anger like he was about to slaughter him right there, what made all the four other demigods close their eyes in fear. But when they returned to open their eyes, their jaws fell open in surprise. Akutagawa was actually petting the dog, who was now laying down on the floor, wagging his enormous tail and throwing a few spirits around with the movement, letting Akutagawa pet his head in the middle for a moment before going to the one on the left.

He was petting Cerberus, the monster that guard Hades’ door. And the dog was enjoying it.

Suddenly, the dog didn’t seem so terrifying anymore.

Akutagawa returned a few moments later, with a smile in his face and monster spit in his black coat. “He’s a good boy.”

“I think I’m gonna faint.” Atsushi said, actually seeming like he was about to faint. Ryuu was quick to hold him, passing one of his arms over his shoulders to hold him still.
“Let’s go.” Akutagawa said, starting to lead them to Cerberus.

“Uh, are you sure-” Kunikida started, but Akutagawa interrupted him.

“Bucky is a good dog, he likes me.” He said, walking to the huge dog and passing under his belly without any problems. Atsushi had his eyes closed. Chuuya, Dazai and Kunikida reluctantly followed them, hands on their weapons ready to used just in case the big dog decided to use them as a toy.

“Did you just call Cerberus ‘Bucky’?” Kunikida asked, really curious, asking the question everyone wanted to know.

Akutagawa looked at him like he just said the stupidest thing in the world, “it’s his name?”

“I thought his name was like... Cerberus.” Dazai said, both Kunikida and Chuuya nodded. They passed through the metal detector, Akutagawa touching the machine and whispering a few words in ancient Greek to let them pass without any problems.

“Oh, no,” Akutagawa chuckled, “Cerberus is a pseudonym, like Charon. Cerberus’ name is Bucky.”

“Now that you said that, you did call Charon ‘Hirotsu’ back there.” Chuuya nodded. “What else is a pseudonym?”

“My father, the Lord of the Death,” Akutagawa said with a creepy smile that sent a shiver through Chuuya’s body, “Most of people know him as Hades, but me? I call him Mori Ougai.”

-x-x-x-

They reached Hades’ palace after what seemed to be hours walking, and now Chuuya understood why Akutagawa preferred to go literally anywhere by the shadows. It was so much easier and faster. Just a blink of an eye and you were at your destiny, but Akutagawa respected Chuuya’s displeasure of traveling in the shadows and just guided them through Hades’ land in the conventional way. Walking. They passed through the Asphodel Fields and Elysium and at some moment by Persephone’s garden, what gave them an enormous will to eat the food growing there even though all of them knew fully well that, once you eat Underworld food, you’d be stuck there forever. Chuuya needed to hold Dazai’s hand all the time to prevent him from running to the garden and eating the poisonous mushrooms.

The Furies were waiting for them when they reached the palace, but they didn’t seem to care about them for once. They just stayed there, on the top of Hades’ palace, watching all their moves like the three most hideous fusion of a bat and an owl. The palace’s gates were wide opened, made of bronze and a dark iron, with engravings of scenes of death for all the gate; bombed cities, soldiers with gas masks, starving people.

“Lovely place, this one,” Chuuya murmured as they crossed the huge gate and walked through the path to the front doors.

They walked up the steps of the palace and crossed the black columns, Akutagawa always leading the way and Kunikida in the rear, ready to protect his friends just in case something went wrong. The entry hall had a polished bronze floor that seemed to boil in the reflected torchlight, and the roof was so far above Chuuya couldn’t even see it.

Akutagawa knew all the guards along the way to Hades’ room, greeting each one of them with a small nod or waving at them. He walked down the halls like he owned the place, like he was used to
it, like he was Hades’ himself, and Chuuya needed to remind himself that Akutagawa was the son of the Lord of the Death and could kill with a snap of his fingers if he wanted. Chuuya silent thanked all the gods for being Akutagawa’s friend and not his enemy.

At the last door were two skeletons guards, wearing Greek armors and holding spears, their hollow eyes looking at the demigods like they could see the fear inside their bodies. They grinned at them, the smile making Chuuya feel chills.

Akutagawa talked to the guards and they stepped aside, the doors swinging open and Akutagawa not even waiting for the doors to be completely open before walking into the room and taking Atsushi with him by his hand. Chuuya, Dazai and Kunikida faced each and gulped before entering the room.

Chuuya didn’t know exactly what he was expecting the Lord Hades to look like. Maybe a man with red eyes and a diabolic smile and fire surrounding his whole body while he laughed at lost souls and ate human flesh. He thought he would wear a black silk robe and a crown made of gold and hold a giant sickle and have a throne made of human bones.

In fact, he did have the throne made of human bones, but all the rest seemed so... Casual?

Hades was a tall man with very pale skin and black hair shoulder-length, wearing a long black coat and a red scarf. He was sitting down on the throne made of human bones, watching the fireplace in front of him with his fingers crossed in front of his face.

There was a blonde girl drawing with crayons sitting on the floor.

“Well, well. The good son always return home.” Hades said, hoarse voice full of malice, turning around his throne to look at Akutagawa. He smirked at Ryuu and Atsushi’s hands still together, “came to introduce me your little hero boyfriend? To what do I owe the honor of your visit?”

Something in Hades’ posture made Chuuya want to bow down and serve him, and the inner feeling made him angry. He would never bow down to anyone.

“Cut the crap, Mori. You know exactly why we’re here.” Akutagawa rolled his eyes, but didn’t let go from Atsushi’s hand. He knew that, if he did, Atsushi would have a panic attack. “We need to find the Book that someone stole from you.”

Hades snorted. “Well? And what am I supposed to do? Tell you who stole it?”

“Of course I know, what kind of god would I be if I didn’t know what happen in my own world?” Hades scoffed, tilting his head to the side, “but isn’t it your mission to find it? To ‘prove yourselves’ or whatever?” he smirked, “why would I simplify your mission for you? Don’t you want to prove yourselves? Then prove it. Bring the Book back to me, stop the apocalypse,” he looked at his nails, unbothered, “or you can go to the Olympus and ask my brother to stop this bullshit. He could end this with a snap of his fingers if he wanted, but does he? Does he care about this world enough to interfere with a hero’s mission?”

“But- but how-” Chuuya started, Hades rolled his eyes.

“I’ll tell you one thing, son of Ares.” He said, voice sending a shiver through Chuuya’s body. “The book was stolen from my office, right from that bookshelf over there,” he pointed at a bookshelf behind Chuuya, who turned around to look at it, “no one, except for my beautiful Elise-chan here, are allowed to step into my office. Based on that information, what can you tell me?”
“Someone walked into your office without you allowing them.” Chuuya nodded, not even having to think about it.

Hades smiled mischievously, “but these doors hasn’t been opened for months.”

Chuuya stopped, “but how could anyone walk into the office if the doors weren’t opened? Unless...”

“Unless...?” Hades said, raising his eyebrows.

Unless the person used shadows’ travel.

Dazai seemed to reach the same conclusion, because he suddenly held his breath and his face blanched to the point Chuuya thought he would pass out right there.

“And I’ll tell you more, little hero.” Hades proceeded, his smile growing dirtier and dirtier when he saw Dazai’s face turn pale. “It’s someone you know.”

“Ryu, take us back!” Dazai shouted, grabbing Chuuya and Kunikida’s arms and running to Atsushi and Akutagawa. Akutagawa only had time to wide his eyes before taking them back to the human world using the shadows’ travel, the naughty laugh of Hades echoing in the dark of the shadows.

They landed in the water with a painful bump.

“Fuck, mackerel!” Chuuya screamed when they walked off the water, starting to punch Dazai. “He was going to tell who stole the book!”

“He wasn’t gonna tell us, he was gonna trap us there.” Dazai ran his fingers through his hair. Chuuya stopped punching him for just a second when he noticed the despair in Dazai’s eyes. “The person didn’t steal the book, Chuuya, he allowed them to have it. Trust me, I know who stole it.”

“Really? Then tell us!” Kunikida threw his arms up, seeming to be as desperate as him.

“I can’t.” Dazai replied. “Not yet. We need to talk to your father before.”

“Why not?” Akutagawa asked after using his inhaler.

“Because if this person writes on the book what I think they’re gonna write, this won’t be just the apocalypse,” a pause, Dazai bit his lip, “it will be the end of the whole universe and our existence.”

-x-x-x-

Because they didn’t have time, Dazai teleported them back to Tokyo using his ability. He took Chuuya and Kunikida with him while Akutagawa took Atsushi by the shadows, combining to meet in the alley next to the Skytree and team up again.

As they tried to come up with a plan, Dazai explained the person’s intention with the book without revealing their name. Honestly, it was getting on Chuuya’s nerves; why didn’t Dazai want to say their name? Why was he protecting them?

The more Dazai explained their intentions, the more Chuuya got angry with the gods and the person themselves. If the gods could end this bullshit right away why didn’t they? Why would they let the apocalypse happen just because they didn’t want to interfere with a hero’s mission?

Once the plan was ready they walked into the Skytree, Chuuya’s face so red with anger Dazai was
afraid he was gonna combust right there.

He hit both his hands on the counter, scaring the distracted guard, “Take us to the six hundredth observation deck right now.”

“Uh, there’s no such observation deck, buddy.” The guard replied, frowning.

Chuuya grabbed his collar and pulled him closer, looking him dead in the eyes. “Listen to me, buddy. We have three children of the big three here, a son of Hermes that could kill you in a blink of the eye and a very angry son of Ares, now take us to the six hundredth observation deck otherwise I’m gonna tear you skin apart and put it back on inside out.”

The guard let out a small sound of fear, raising his hands like he was surrendering himself. “B-but Lord Zeus don’t see anyone unannounced—”

“Trust me, he’s gonna see us.” Chuuya replied with a cold expression and a wicked smile, dropping the guard’s collar and pushing him back forcefully against the chair he was sitting. The guard fumbled around his messy desk for a silver key card, then handed it to Chuuya.

“Insert this in the security slot, make sure no one else is in the elevator with you.” The guard said, hands shaking in fear. Chuuya violently took the card from his hands and walked to the elevator, being followed by his friends; Kunikida murmured a quick apologize to the guard before walking into the elevator.

Chuuya slipped the card into the slot and the card suddenly disappeared, a new button appearing on the console. A red one saying 600. He pressed the button and waited.

“Whatever happens up there,” Kunikida broke the silence as the elevator lifted up, “please, don’t fight with my father.”

Chuuya, of course, did exactly that.

When the elevator stopped and they stepped out of it, the feeling of seeing the Mount Olympus for the first time almost made the anger inside Chuuya’s body disappear.

Almost.

They were standing on a narrow stone walkway in the middle of the air. Bellow them was Tokyo, looking so tiny, like they were watching the city from an airplane. In front of them, white marble steps wound up the spine of a cloud into the sky. And right there, on the end of the stairway, was the Olympus.

From the top of the clouds rose the decapitated peak of a mountain, its summit covered with snow. Clinging to the mountainside were dozens of multileveled palaces—a city of mansions—all with white columned porticos, gilded terraces, and bronze braziers glowing with a thousand fires. Roads wound crazily up to the peak, where the largest palace gleamed against the snow. Precariously perched gardens bloomed with olive trees and rosebushes. Chuuya could see an open-air market filled with colorful tents, a stone amphitheater built on one side of the mountain, a hippodrome and a coliseum on the other. It was an Ancient Greek city, except it wasn't in ruins. It was new, and clean, and colorful, the way Athens must've looked like twenty-five hundred years ago.

Kunikida was the only one that wasn’t impressed, having been there a couple of times before.

They passed through some wood nymphs, satyrs and naiads along the way, the creatures greeting the demigods with giggles and big smiles, throwing olives and flowers at them as they walked through
the road, seeming to be enjoying having new visitors at their place. Kunikida greeted a few of them by their given names, recognizing them from his earliest visits to his father.

As they reached the main road, towards the big palace at the peak, Chuuya increased his steps. Dazai was next to him in a second just in case he needed to keep him from punching a random minor god or whatever. Steps lead to a central courtyard. Past that, the throne room.

“Oh boy,” Dazai whispered the moment they stepped into the throne room and Chuuya pulled his hand away from Dazai’s touch, immediately increasing his steps, hands firmly clenched into fists in the sides of his body as he crossed the huge hall. “This is not gonna end up well.”

“You think so?” Akutagawa ironically asked next to him, raising his eyebrows before following Chuuya along the hall. Kunikida, Dazai and Atsushi shared a look, running to reach Chuuya.

They walked into the throne room, the air immediately escaping their lungs at the majestic view. Twelve thrones were arranged in an inverted U like the cabins at the Camp Half-Blood, huge marble sculptures and columns painted with silver and gold that rose to the domed ceiling gilded with moving constellations. The thrones were empty except for four of them; the head throne on the right, the one on its immediately left, the one next to this one and the one at the end of the U. Zeus, Poseidon, Ares and Hermes. Their fathers.

But, apparently, Chuuya wasn’t impressed at all with the ten feet ancient gods sitting right in front of them, because he kept walking through the room until he was in front of Zeus’ throne, a completely pissed expression in his face, fists still clenched on the sides of his body when he angrily pointed a finger at the god.

“You.” He said, grunting. “You giant ancient stupid asshole, fuck you.”

The room fell a little bit darker. Zeus was almost impressed, raising his eyebrows. “Excuse me?”

“You heard me.” Chuuya proceeded, face so red in anger that even his eyes seemed to be on fire. Dazai unconsciously took a step closer to Chuuya to protect him just in case things went wrong; Kunikida, Atsushi and Akutagawa followed his lead. “The world is literally about to end outside; you can stop the apocalypse in five seconds if you want but all you do is sit your ugly fat ass here, eat grapes and watch shit going down out there! Do something!”

Zeus leaned forward on his throne, “watch your mouth, foolish mortal. You’re talking to a god, not to your friends. Show some respect.”

“You heard me.” Chuuya proceeded, face so red in anger that even his eyes seemed to be on fire. Dazai unconsciously took a step closer to Chuuya to protect him just in case things went wrong; Kunikida, Atsushi and Akutagawa followed his lead. “The world is literally about to end outside; you can stop the apocalypse in five seconds if you want but all you do is sit your ugly fat ass here, eat grapes and watch shit going down out there! Do something!”

Zeus leaned forward on his throne, “watch your mouth, foolish mortal. You’re talking to a god, not to your friends. Show some respect.”

“Maybe when you stop being an idiot and start respecting your wife instead of sticking your ugly ancient dick into everything that moves, I will start respecting you!”

Both Poseidon and Hermes gasped with Chuuya’s petulance, shocked, mumbling to each other. Ares was the only one that seemed to be enjoying the little fight, looking at his son with an amusement smile in his lips and laughing at everything he said.

“Chibi, I think it’s enough.” Dazai murmured when he saw the weather starting to change outside the palace, trying to grab Chuuya’s arm to take them away from there only to Chuuya violently pull his arm away from Dazai’s touch.

“You’ll regret taking to the great Zeus this way, foolish half-blood.” Zeus said with a grunt, standing in front of his throne with a cold expression that made all the hairs in Chuuya’s body shiver. He knew he shouldn’t be talking to him this way, but he was so angry; Zeus could stop the apocalypse
right now if he wanted, but he wasn’t gonna to interfere just because the prophecy was for a demigod?

“I’m gonna stick my half-blood foot up your stupid ancient ass, that’s what I’m gonna do!” Chuuya grunted back instead of properly apologize for his bad behavior. “Are you gonna do anything or not?!” Zeus didn’t reply. “Right! So I’m gonna fix the huge mess outside and save the fucking world, if you excuse me. You can keep eating your grapes and watch me stopping the apocalypse from your privileged seat.”

“Chuuuya.” Kunikida whispered in a hurry, warningly way, looking around for a quick escape route when the lightings started to dance outside the palace. He turned to look at his father, bowing respectfully. “My apologies, my father. We’re gonna leave now, if you may allow us.”

“You need to review your friendships, my son.” Zeus said, still looking at them with an angry expression as the master bolt appeared in his hand with a flash of light. “Feel the anger of the gods.”

He touched the tip of the master bolt on the ground, sending another flash of lights around the room as the lightings outside the palace whipped violently. The torches fire burned out with the wind and the only illumination on the palace came from the huge full moon outside. For a moment nothing really happened, just the lightings dancing violently and loudly outside as the wind inside the palace started to get stronger, but Kunikida and Dazai both took a step closer to Chuuya to protect him if needed; as fast as the storm began it faded, Zeus still looking coldly at them, the remaining wind messing up their hair as they finally heard the first groan.

The three of them instantly turned around to look at the origin of the noise, finding Atsushi grumbling and leaning forward in pain with his arms protectively holding his stomach.

“Moonfish?” Akutagawa called when the boy fell on his knees when the pain was too strong, gently touching his shoulder. “Atsushi? Are you okay?”

Atsushi didn’t reply. Instead, he kept grunting in pain louder and louder until his grunt turned into an angry growl, almost animal, raising his eyes to meet Akutagawa’s next to him. Akutagawa gasped and took a few steps back, shocked when he noticed Atsushi’s eyes looked cat-like.

“What did you do to him?!” He angrily asked Zeus, but Zeus just kept looking at them with that cold expression when the storm started again. Before Chuuya, Dazai or Kunikida could reach them to regroup and then left the palace, Akutagawa ran back to Atsushi and protectively held him, using the shadow his body was making to take them out of there.

“Ryuuu, wait!” Dazai shouted, but Akutagawa and Atsushi were already gone. He grunted and ran to Chuuya and Kunikida, holding them and teleporting themselves to outside the palace just in time to escape Zeus’ bolt.

They landed painfully in the ground the farthest Dazai could teleport them from the palace and Zeus’ rage, in an alley behind a marble bridge. Dazai groaned in pain, turning around in the floor until he was facing the dark grey sky.

“Fuck!” He screamed the loudest he could, painfully, closing his eyes to avoid crying. “Fuck, Chuuya! Fuck!”

“I know!” Chuuya yelled back, sitting down in the floor and pulling his hair. “I’m sorry!”

“Bullshit!” Dazai replied angrily, standing up and pointing at him, “are you out of your mind?!”

“I was mad, okay?! I didn’t think he was gonna react that way!”
“It’s fucking Zeus!” Dazai said with a dramatic forced laugh. A thunder sounded behind the gods’ palace, “and you told him to fuck off! How did you think he was gonna react?!”

“He overreacted!” Chuuya tried to defend himself, but both Dazai and Kunikida snorted. “Guys, please!”

“I knew that your uncontrollable anger would get us in trouble sometime,” Kunikida ran his fingers through his hair, seeming to be in the verge of tears; the view was so painful Chuuya wanted to run away and save Kunikida from that much suffering. “We need to find Akutagawa and Atsushi before we can get the hell out of here. Something is wrong with Atsushi.”

“Yeah no shit, Sherlock.” Dazai replied. “Just another thing to worry about, as if the destiny of the world wasn’t already in our hands.”

“It’s gonna be okay, we’re gonna- we’re gonna be fine.” Kunikida tried to assure them, but it was more like he was trying to assure himself instead. He started floating above the floor, holding the string of his bow “I’m gonna look for them, wait here. I’ll be right back.” and with any other word he flew out, leaving Chuuya and Dazai alone.

For a moment, none of them said anything. Chuuya just stayed there in silence, sitting in the floor and looking at his hands while Dazai kept standing, resting against a huge stone and looking at the sky. When the silence started to get too uncomfortable Dazai sighed and slid his back in the stone until he was sitting next to Chuuya.

“I’m sorry, Chibi. I didn’t mean to scream at you.” He said, looking at the sky. Chuuya glanced at him for a second before mirroring his move.

He shook his head and sighed, “no, I apologize. I fucked things up.”

“Yeah, you kinda did.” Dazai agreed, smiling slightly. Chuuya giggled. “But everything is already fucked up, so it’s okay. We’re a team, we’re gonna figure this out.”

Chuuya sighed again, “I hope so.”

They fell in a comfortable silence this time, waiting for Kunikida to come back, their hands on their weapons just in case they needed to defend themselves, until Chuuya sighed again. His mind hasn’t stopped bothering him since the moment they kissed back at the Hotel Lotus; he knew for sure they kissed, he knew he liked it, but his memories were so blurred he almost couldn’t remember what they were doing. He wondered if Dazai felt the same.

“Mackerel, that night at the Hotel Lotus...” he started, biting his lip. Dazai glanced at him, “do you remember anything?”

Dazai scoffed, “Doppo-chan.”

Chuuya laughed, “not this part, even though it was pretty iconic. I mean... Before it. When we were dancing?”

“Oh,” Dazai said, then bit his lip like Chuuya did. He looked away from him, “no, I’m sorry, Chibi.”

Chuuya’s heart broke in a million pieces, “oh,” he said, “okay.”

Kunikida returned a few moments later, with his face paler than normal and eyes widened in terror. He landed gracefully in the floor, walking to Chuuya and Dazai.
“I found Ryuu and Atsushi.” He said with a worried voice, what made both Chuuya and Dazai worry with him.

“What happened?” Dazai asked, standing up.

“You guys need to see it.” Kunikida replied, restless. Chuuya’s never seen such an anxious and terrified expression in his face before, and he didn’t like it.

“Then take us there!” Chuuya replied, standing up impatiently. Kunikida nodded and held both Chuuya and Dazai by their waist, slowly flying with them to the place where he found the other two demigods because of the additional weight.

His knees failed when he landed with them, almost sending all the three of them to the floor, but recovering himself in the last second. Dazai immediately ran to Atsushi passed out against a tree, but all Chuuya could look at was Akutagawa.

There was a cut crossing his face, exactly like his nightmare.

Obviously, the cut was a lot smaller and less mortal than in the nightmare, but it was still there. Bleeding, starting on the left side of Akutagawa’s forehead and crossing his face to the right side, passing above his nose and ending next to his jaw. Chuuya unconsciously walked to Ryuu, his eyes widened like he was hypnotized, holding his face to inspect the cut.

“What happened?” He whispered, voice breaking in the end.

“Atsushi.” Ruuy replied. The use of Atsushi’s given name sounded so weird when it was Ryuu that was saying it. “He– I don’t know what happened, Chuuya,” he sounded so worried and desperate Chuuya pulled him for a hug. “He just started growling like an animal and then he had fangs and claws and I was so scared, I didn’t know what to do. When I tried to touch him, he scratched me. I had to knock him out.”

“And tie him to a tree?” Chuuya raised an eyebrow.

“That was me.” Kunikida raised his hand. “I was scared he was gonna wake up, kill Ryuu and run away.”

“That was the right thing to do.” Dazai said from next to Atsushi, pulling one of the boy’s hands to show it to the others, making Chuuya gasp in shock. Black claws rose from where his nails were supposed to be. “This... *This* could kill someone without too much effort.”

“What happened to him?” Chuuya asked.

“A curse.” Kunikida replied. “It’s a curse, Chuuya. He was cursed. My father cursed him.”

The blue full moon shone above them, and suddenly everything made sense. *Beneath the moonlight, a beast shall raise*; the prophecy said. The prophecy was beginning to materialize.

What meant one of them was about to die.

Chuuya turned to look at Dazai, who was already staring at him, “you’re thinking what I’m thinking, don’t you?”

“Yes,” Dazai replied, not seeming to be really happy about it, “it’s time for us to meet our real enemy and save the world, baby.”
They returned to Tokyo after Dazai nullified Atsushi’s curse and the boy finally woke up.

He didn’t seem to know or understand what happened to him in the past few hours, but honestly, it was better this way. They would need all their power to fight the person that stole the book and, well, stop the apocalypse.

They were clearly nervous and anxious, Chuuya could say by the way Akutagawa kept using his inhaler, held Atsushi’s hand and recreated his heartbeats to prevent a panic attack and Kunikida kept changing his weight from one leg to another and holding his bow’s string, looking like he was about to pass out any moment. Chuuya himself couldn’t stop shaking, what was honestly getting him on his nerves.

Dazai was the only one that seemed to be calm between all that thunderstorm, humming a random song Yosano used to sing to him when he was hurt while he walked ahead of them and lead the way to where they were supposed to meet the traitor.

Chuuya wasn’t sure if he wanted to know who they were.

When Dazai gradually decreased his steps until he stopped, Chuuya knew they were there. The place where the traitor would reveal themselves, the place where they would fight, the place where they would recover the Book and stop the apocalypse.

The place where one of them was gonna die.

“When we recover the Book, what are we gonna do?” Atsushi asked what everyone else was thinking.

“We’re gonna destroy it, obviously.” Dazai replied, walking to the fence of the bridge and resting his elbows on it, looking at the ocean in front of him. “Each one of our weapons can destroy it, it’s gonna be easy.”

“And when are the person gonna come?” Akutagawa asked. “Are they really gonna come?”

“They’re not gonna come, he’s already here. He’s been following us since we left the camp.” Dazai replied, turning around to face his friends, smirking in a naughty way. “Don’t you, Dostoyevsky?”

They all froze.

Behind them, there was a movement in the shadows and then a dark, malicious laugh that sent chills down Chuuya’s body.

It was the same laugh from his nightmare.

Slowly, they all turned around to look at the owner of the laugh, meeting Akutagawas’s brother, Fyodor Dostoyevsky and his creepy smile that was hunting him down in his dreams for ages.

How couldn’t Chuuya make the relation before?

“Ah, this is boring.” Fyodor grumbled. “You were supposed to die at the Underworld. Dad should’ve killed you.”


“Why?” Fyodor scoffed, like Akutagawa just said the stupidest thing in the world. “Why not, little
bro?” he took the Book from his coat pocket, making everyone hold their breaths, and started throwing it on the air like a ball. “This world has been polluted for centuries now, the gods have been controlling the universe for too long,” he proceeded, approaching the heroes, “when I heard about this book that could turn real everything that’s written on it, I instantly knew what I needed to do, so I talked to dad and he gave me it as a gift. Isn’t dad amazing?”

“You want to cause the apocalypse.” Akutagawa said, voice breaking as the tears started to fill his eyes. “You want everyone dead, why?”

“I never said I wanted everyone dead.” Fyodor raised his eyebrows, then smirked. “Only the gods.”

“A world without gods, without the gods ruling the world.” Dazai said, walking to stand between Chuuya and Kunikida. “This is what you want, isn’t it?”

“Not exactly, no.” He shrugged, then returned to smile. Chuuya wanted to take that smile away from his lips so bad. “I want a normal world without monsters, gods, heroes.”

Something clicked inside Chuuya’s brain, “you wanna extinguish the universe as we know it and rewrite it like you want it. Like mortal people know it. Without the gods, demigods, powers, abilities and everything else.”

Fyodor smiled, “I always liked you, Chuuya. You’re not an Athena’s son, but you’re so smart. Ranpo must be jealous of you.”

“Shut up,” Chuuya grunted, his draggers growing bigger and heavier in his hands until he was holding two swords, “are we gonna fight or not?”

“There’s nothing you can do anymore, it’s already done.” Fyodor chuckled, opening the green Book very similar to Kunikida’s notebook and showing the page filled with his cursive handwritten. “I won’t stop till the whole world knows my name.” Like the universe was waiting for his signal, a thunderstorm started forming above them, the wind so strong it was hard to see something. The ground shook beneath their feet and a small crater opened, dozens of skeleton warriors raising from the floor.

Fucking Hades’ children.

Chuuya didn’t waste any other second, he jumped forward in Fyodor’s direction with a scream and swung his swords in the air at the same time Kunikida did the same with his bow. Their move seemed to take everyone else away from their shock, quickly joining the fight with their respective weapons and the mutual acknowledge that they needed to recover the Book and destroy it the fastest they could and, well, stay alive.

It was hard to see anything over the heavy wind, but Chuuya was guiding himself by the sounds. Kouyou always told him his hearing was his best weapon on a fight when he was blind and often made him train blindfolded, so he didn’t care that much about his sight. As long as Fyodor kept dodging from his attacks and giggling while doing it, Chuuya would be fine.

“Take the book from him!” Someone yelled above the wind and the sounds of metal clanking together, probably Akutagawa, but Chuuya was too focused on Fyodor to think about it.

Fyodor giggled in the heavy wind again, thunders sounding next to them, “it’s useless. You can’t stop the Book now.”

“We can sure try!”
Dazai appeared out of nowhere, jumping in the wind with his black dagger in his hand and saving Chuuya from having his head cut off by Fyodor. Chuuya gasped, he didn’t even notice Fyodor wielded his katana.

“Watch out, chibi!” Dazai yelled angrily, then left to take care of the skeleton warriors while Chuuya fought Fyodor.

Chuuya blinked at where Dazai vanished with his ability before returning to his own fight. Around him, he would hear the sound of water and metal clanking together, screams in pure anger and see the flash of lights and the habitual sound of thunder of when Kunikida used his bow. Fyodor seemed to be enjoying fighting with him, because he didn’t use the shadows to run away from the battle. The wind got stronger and heavier, to the point it was hard to keep his eyes opened.

Fyodor’s katana and Chuuya’s swords clenched together in the middle of the air, Fyodor’s laugh seeming to echo around his mind like a curse

“Give up, Chuuya, there’s nothing you can do.”

Chuuya dodged from Fyodor’s katana and did a somersault in the floor, gracefully landing on one knee and cutting the back of Fyodor’s leg, sending the boy with a scream of pain to the ground. A thunder sounded, and Chuuya was sitting in his chest with one of his swords pointed to his throat and the other to his chest.

“Give me the Book. Now.” Chuuya said with a cold voice, pressing his sword harder on Fyodor’s neck to the point it started bleeding.

Fyodor smiled perversely, “or what? You’re gonna kill me?”

Chuuya returned the smile, “bold of you to even ask it.”

“You don’t get it, do you?” Fyodor gave a dry giggle. “It’s already done. The only way to stop this is destroying the Book.”

“Oh, don’t worry, we will.” Chuuya replied. The battle was still going down around them.

Fyodor licked his lips. “But are you ready for the consequences, Chuuya?”

Chuuya’s held in his sword faltered a little, “what consequences? Tell me!”

“You see, you can destroy the Book now.” Fyodor said. “But it will take one of you with it. Turned to dust, whoosh.”

The prophecy returned to his mind like a cold wave. *To dust or to gold, one must become.* He spent the whole mission trying to figure out who the prophecy was talking about, and the line was destined to him all along.

Suddenly, the line didn’t scare him that much.

He smiled at Fyodor, so more relaxed now that he knew what the prophecy was talking about, “I’m ready to face my destiny,” Chuuya said, loving the way Fyodor widened his eyes in fear, “but are you?” he pressed his sword a little bit harder in Fyodor’s chest, opening a small cut that immediately started bleeding. “Give me the Book, Fyodor.”

Fyodor widened his eyes even more, if that was possible, and touched his coat to show Chuuya where the book was. The skeleton warriors returned to the crater in the floor, back to
the Underworld. Chuuya smiled and picked up the Book from a hidden pocket, one of his swords returning to the dagger’s shape and he pressed the tip of it on the back of it. He closed his eyes and smiled, thinking about his friends; if he was going to die to save the world, he was more than happy in finish his mission.

That was, of course, until something crossed his vision and took the book away from his hands.

The movement scared him, making him fall from Fyodor’s chest and the villain try to run away. Akutagawa was there on a second, using the shadows to teleport himself to behind Fyodor and press Rashomon against his neck so he wouldn’t escape, then looking at where Dazai was now standing with his small black dagger pressed on the back cover of the book, hands trembling in fear.

“Dazai.” Chuuya asked carefully, with all his worries about the prophecy returning to his mind. No, no, no. This couldn’t be happening. “Drop the book.”

“It’s okay.” Dazai said, voice trembling. “It’s gonna be fast, isn’t it? It’s not gonna hurt, is it?”

“Dazai, please, drop the book.” Chuuya asked again, voice starting to break as his tears started to fill his eyes. “Dazai, please. Please, drop the book.”

“Dazai-san, please-” Akutagawa tried, but Dazai interrupted him.

“I’ve been thinking about the prophecy for a while. About the part it says one of us would die. Fukuzawa knew it would be me, didn’t he? This is why he didn’t want me to come with you. Well, I knew too. I knew it would be me, and how could I miss an opportunity to die?” He said with a forced giggle, tears starting to stream down his face, dagger twisting on the back cover of the book. “But here’s the thing,” he looked up to Chuuya, eyes screaming for help, “I don’t wanna die.”

“You don’t have to, Dazai-san.” Atsushi said. He was holding Chuuya back so he wouldn’t run to Dazai. “Drop the book, we can talk about this.”

“No.” Dazai insisted. “I can’t.”

“We can talk about this later Dazai.” Chuuya was practically begging now, he didn’t even care he was crying like a baby. This couldn’t be happening; their story wasn’t supposed to end like this. “Please, drop the book.”

“I can’t,” Dazai repeated with a broken smile, “I can’t let you die. Please, live for both of us,” he wiped the tears from his face, “I’m sorry it had to end like this, but it’s the only way.”

“Dazai, please!” Chuuya yelled, sobbing, being held back by Atsushi. “Please, drop the book!”

“I love you, Chuuya. Nakahara Chuuya.” Dazai confessed, still smiling. He ignored Chuuya’s screams as he opened the book to destroy it right on the page Fyodor wrote, then widening his eyes, because he wasn’t holding the right Book.

That was Kunikida’s notebook.

And there, on the other side of the deck and with a smile in his lips, Kunikida was holding the real Book.

“How did you-” Dazai started, shocked.

“You shouldn’t have taught me how to steal people.” Kunikida said. “I changed the books the
moment Chuuya and I attacked Fyodor, but none of them noticed it.”

“Kunikida-san!” Atsushi shouted.

“It’s okay, Atsushi. You’re all more important than me, it has to be me.” Kunikida replied with a quiet smile, opening the Book on the page Fyodor wrote. He grabbed the small dagger he used to carry with him to use in short-range fights, pressing the tip of it on the page and letting the electricity run over his body. “Please, take care of each other for me.”

“Stop it!” Fyodor suddenly yelled, “this world is polluted, the gods are poisoned! This world would be better without them! Our generation could clean up all this poison!”

“No,” Kunikida said, “we are the poisoned youth.”

Kunikida stabbed the Book, and the world exploded in light and dust. Chuuya yelled Kunikida’s name over the storm, his scream hurting his throat as he watched one of his best friends dying, being held back by Atsushi to keep him from running to Kunikida and try to save him. They all watched in complete terror as the Book in Kunikida’s hands started turning to dust and the dust gradually rising towards Kunikida’s fingers.

And then, suddenly, right when the book turned to dust and Kunikida was about to be incinerated, a huge thunder crossed the sky and fell right above Kunikida’s head.

Chuuya screamed once again in total fear for his friend, momently forgetting that lightings couldn’t hurt a son of Zeus’, but as the wind gradually decreased and the weather returned to normal, his fear slowly turned into confusion.

Because right there, where Kunikida was supposed to be, stood a statue made of gold. A statue made of gold with Kunikida’s appearance.

Chuuya tried to stand up and run to the statue, but his legs faltered before he could even try it. He fell back into the floor with a groan, being held back by Atsushi, world getting dizzy as his vision started to darken.

The last thing he saw before passing out was the huge cut on his stomach caused by Fyodor’s katana, the weapon still crossing his body like it was made of sand, and Dazai’s scream in pure fear.

-x-x-x-

He woke up almost a week later.

Chuuya didn’t immediately opened his eyes after he woke up. He groped the soft sheets and the mattress beneath him, frowning at the familiar feeling, trying to understand where was he. Was he dead? Did he die? This didn’t feel like the Elysium’s fields, it felt like-

He slowly opened his eyes, trying to get used to the sun light entering the room by the open window parallel to the bed he was lying on, meeting the familiar look of the Big House at the Camp Half-Blood. There was a blanket above his legs and a big bandage around his stomach, where he was wounded; he was shirtless, one of his hands was also bandaged and a few band-aids were used to fix some minor wounds here and there. Next to him, at the bedside table, was a glass with a reddish liquid smelling like strawberries. He tried to reach the nectar, but his whole body protested.

Atsushi was next to him in a second, handing him the glass with nectar and helping him to drink it with the straw. The sweet taste of chocolate cookies and milk filled his senses like warm wave, instantly making him feel better.
After he drank the whole liquid, he took a proper look at Atsushi. The bags under his eyes were huge and dark, like he hasn’t slept well in ages, and his hair was a confused mess of platinum strands clearly not brushed for at least three days. He wore a casual Camp Half-Blood shirt and his head was bandaged.

Honestly, he didn’t seem so much better than Chuuya himself.

“How much time-” Chuuya started, closing his eyes because of the headache.

Luckily, Atsushi understood what he meant, “Almost a week. Ryuu, Kenji and I have been taking turns to watch you. Dazai was watching you too, but Yosano prohibited him from seeing you because he kept throwing himself at you to cry and opening your stitches.”

Chuuya giggled, “yeah, that looks like Dazai,” a pause, he bit his lip, “... Kunikida?”

Atsushi’s expression instantly fell to a sad one. “I’m sorry, Chuuya-san. We tried to bring him back, but nothing worked. Zeus himself brought the statue to the Camp, but...” a pause, “we can’t bury him, so we were waiting for you to wake up to burn his shroud.”

Chuuya didn’t know what he was expecting. Maybe he was expecting Kunikida to enter the room with his stupid notebook in his hands, yelling at him that he was two seconds late to the schedule he made, or for him to greet him when he left the room and hug him because he missed him, but none of these things happened.

Kunikida was dead. One of his best friend’s was dead.

“What happened to Fyodor?” Chuuya asked, trying not to think about Kunikida, sitting down in the bed and putting his bare feet in the floor; one of his legs was also bandaged.

Atsushi handed him a Camp Half-Blood shirt, then helped him stand, “no one knows, he ran away. He disappeared after you passed out and no one found him.”

“Good,” Chuuya said after putting on the shirt, using Atsushi as a support when he stood so he wouldn’t fall, “because if he ever crosses my way again, I’m gonna kill him.”

Atsushi didn’t reply, but he didn’t have to. They walked off the bedroom and then Lucy helped Chuuya to go down the stairs, looking at him with a sad expression all the time like she felt guilt for giving him the prophecy.

“It wasn’t your fault,” Chuuya assured her once they were outside the Big House, “don’t blame yourself, please. It wasn’t your fault, Lucy.”

Lucy gave him another sad glare, but ended up smiling and helping Atsushi to take him to the Cabins, where Akutagawa was waiting for them. She left them there and Atsushi waved at his boyfriend, who crossed the distance between them and gave Atsushi a quick peck on the lips before strongly hugging Chuuya. Chuuya, of course, returned the hug with the same intensity, ignoring the wound burning in pain in his stomach.

Akutagawa ran his fingers through Chuuya’s hair from underneath the bandage around his head – bandage that Chuuya hadn’t even noticed that was there until that moment– and sighed happily, then broke the hug to look at his eyes. Chuuya traced the scar in Akutagawa’s face with his finger, then kissed his forehead.

“Are you okay?” Chuuya asked, carefully inspecting Ryuu’s face for more wounds, relieved when he didn’t find anything.
Well, anything except for his broken arm.

“Yes,” Ryuu replied with a smile, “you?”

“I’m okay, my head just hurt a little.” Chuuya replied with a giggle. More campers came to talk and check him; Yosano, Tachihara, Kenji, Ranpo. They all surrounded him in a circle as he started to talk to all of them and willingly answer their questions, except for the ones involving Kunikida.

As more people came to talk to him, more claustrophobic he felt, until someone finally save him.

He turned to look at the opening in the circle in time to see Dazai sneaking through the campers, walking to him with large steps.

“Dazai!” Chuuya opened a huge smile as he saw his partner crossing the crowd, “I’ve-

The sentence died on his lips as Dazai smashed their lips together.

Chuuya gasped in surprise with the sudden kiss, but quickly started to retribute it. He held Dazai’s face and pulled his hair as Dazai opened his mouth and tilted his head to the side to properly kiss him, French-kissing him in front of everyone and not even caring that everyone was staring, pulling Chuuya closer by his waist and squeezing his skin from under his shirt.

Now this is how Chuuya imagined their first kiss to be like.

It was messy, hurried and full of split, with hands running over the other’s body and small groans caused by the happiness of seeing the other alive. They were kissing like their lives depended on it, ignoring completely the way the other campers were making sounds of vomit to the PDA. This is how they were supposed to kiss since the start.

They only parted their lips when the air made itself completely necessary, but didn’t step away from each other. Dazai touched their foreheads together and kept pecking Chuuya’s lips even after the kiss was over, hands still squeezing Chuuya’s waist, not wanting to let him go.

“So you do admit you remember what happened in the Hotel?” Chuuya said in a teasingly way, looking at his lover with narrowed eyes.

“So of course I do,” Dazai replied in a whisper, heavy breath brushing against Chuuya’s lips, “how could I forget the day I finally kissed the love of my life?”

“Shut up.” Chuuya giggled, and then kissed him again.

The rest of the day seemed to pass as fast as it always did as Chuuya slowly returned to his normal routine, except for the fact he could train with a wound that size in his stomach so he just watched his siblings training with the kids from the cabin 7. By the end of the day, when the sun slowly started to fade behind the hill, all the campers reunited in front of Kunikida’s statue to burn his shroud, with Chuuya, Dazai, Atsushi and Akutagawa wearing laurel wreaths to celebrate their mission.

Kunikida was the only child of Zeus at the camp, so Yosano and Ranpo offered themselves to make his shroud because they were the closest to him in the camp. His shroud was beautiful, made of golden silk with embroidered laurel wreaths and lightnings, the word ‘ideal’ written right in the middle of it with silver threads.

Burning the shroud and praying for Kunikida’s soul made Chuuya finally realize he was gone. He would never hear his voice or his laugh again, roll his eyes at his exaggerate schedules and be amazed by his powers. They would never go on missions together again and would never complain
about Dazai or mock about Atsushi and Akutagawa’s clear crush on each other, they would never sit together at the hill and watch the sunset again.

Kunikida Doppo, the idealist, was gone.

Chuuya only noticed he was crying when Dazai touched his cheek to wipe away his tears and kissed his forehead. He turned to look at his partner, finding him with a sad smile on his lips and tears streaming down his own face.

“I’m sure he’s watching us from the Elysium’s Fields now,” Dazai said, holding Chuuya’s hand and intertwining their fingers, “he will always be with us.”

Chuuya glared at Dazai for a moment and then looked back at Kunikida’s statue, right in the middle of the camp and in front of the bonfire, almost like he was protecting the whole camp, and it sent a wave of reassurance through Chuuya’s body. He smiled, then faced up the sky as the bonfire’s flares went up towards the heaven and the tears streamed down his face.

As long as they were alive, Kunikida would never be forgotten.

Chapter End Notes

Fun Fact: Kunikida is actually my favorite BSD character.

Fun Fact 2: The girl that was sitting with him at the Hotel Lotus? She's my OC. Her name is Katsumi, her ability is called 'flares in the night sky' and she can control fire and water!

Please PLEASE comment your thoughts about the story! This is the longest thing I've ever wrote and it's everything for you <33
Chapter Summary

Dazai Osamu is a closed book only few can leaf through the pages, but how could Kunikida Doppo be such a poet if he didn’t know how to read between his lines?

Chapter Notes

It took me SO LONG to come up with a plot for this one I almost started hating this song. Please, press F.

This is the last relationship tag I'm gonna add, so the rest of the songs/stories will vary between those four couples. There’s a total of three stories for each couple (except for skk and sskk that shares the third one), you can try to guess which song will be for each couple lmao.

(TAGS: Canon Compliant, mutual pining, character study, implied sexual content)

[words count: 11,630]

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“And in the end
I'd do it all again
I think you're my best friend
Don't you know that the kids aren't all, kids aren't alright.”

Busy days were the only kind of days that could actually tire Kunikida Doppo to the point he regretted stepping out of his warm bed in the morning.

Of course, being an organized man of ideals like he was, it required a lot to actually tire him. Loud clients, naughty kids, stubborn clients, the bloody Port Mafia attacking the Agency or his lovely partner disappearing from the face of earth to do God only knows what were the only things that could make him get crazy to the point of almost throwing everything up, lay down in the floor and cry for the rest of the day until Yosano –literally– kicked his ass to make him return to work.

Today, the universe seemed to be testing him, because it dumped all the five things above his head in an interval of two hours.

The first thing he saw when he stepped into the office that day was the three very excited kids running around, screaming and messing up the whole place. Kunikida stopped at the door, closing his eyes for only a second and taking a deep breath before finally entering the place and starting his daily routine. Oh, this would be a day.
The guardian of the kids, a woman around her 40s, didn’t even try to rebuke her kids for all the mess they were doing. Actually, she was almost as bad as them; nine to ten sentences she said were screaming, like she didn’t know how to keep her voice down. She was Atsushi’s client, and even the boy seemed to be kind of annoyed with her and the kids. He shoot a desperate look at Kunikida, almost like he was begging for help, but there was nothing he could do about them. He wasn’t one to deal with kids, maybe Yosano could deal with them.

After the loud woman and the kids were gone, the office managed to get a five-minutes interval without trouble. Only a look at the next client that stepped into the office and Kunikida instantly knew he would be a hard one to deal; his posture simply screamed authority, he would definitely be a stubborn client. He designated him for Ranpo, he didn’t want to increase his already increasing headache. Lucky Tanizaki and Naomi that were at a mission outside the town and wouldn’t have to pass through all that shit.

Where was Dazai?

“Has anyone seen Dazai?” He asked his friends, impatiently. Dazai should already be at work.

It was Kenji who replied, “oh! He was there until a few minutes before you arrived. He left a few minutes after the previous client arrived, picking up some things from his desk and saying he had some stuff to do.”

Kunikida arched his eyebrows, “do you remember what he said before leaving?”

“I think he said something about the emptying his sadness? I can’t tell for sure.”

“Had some stuff to do my ass,” Kunikida grunted, standing up, “empty his sadness, you say? Did he say anything about the weather before leaving?”

“Yes...?”

“That little–” he mumbled, “I know exactly what kind of stuff he’s going to do, that bastard.” Kunikida said, then left the office without any other word.

You see, after spending a few years having Dazai Osamu as your partner and most of the days having him 24 hours with you, you kind of learn a thing or two about him.

Kunikida, luckily, knew most of his dirty tricks.

He headed straight to the bar, which was a few blocks away from the agency, knowing fully well he would find the smug bastard there. With the years, one of the things Kunikida noticed about Dazai is that the man used to say he was gonna empty his sadness when he was going to flirt with random people and steal their wallets.

Just like he imagined, Dazai was at the bar with his hair tied up in a half ponytail and flirting with a pretty girl at the counter. He rolled his eyes and crossed the way to Dazai, stopping in front of him and tilting his head to the side, arms crossed on his chest and an arched eyebrow.

Dazai smiled at him, “oh hello, babe~”

“Fellow associate.” Kunikida said, “You think you can just escape from work to come here and flirt with random people and leave everything behind? Breaking news: You can’t. Let’s come back to work, waste of bandages.”

The girl giggled at Dazai and Kunikida, then left both of them alone without saying anything. Dazai
watched the girl until she disappeared from view, then grumbled and looked at Kunikida.

“Why do you always have to screw up my plans?”

Kunikida pulled Dazai up and tapped his back in the exit’s direction, “because you’re my partner and you’re stuck with me. Come, let’s go,” he said, gesturing to the exit door, “go, go, go.”

Dazai grumbled again, loosening his hair and reluctantly letting Kunikida guide him back to work.

They returned to the Agency only to find out the Port Mafia decided to attack them.

Of course, all the people that were at the Agency at that moment could deal with some Mafia subordinates without any trouble, but being attacked by the Port Mafia still got Kunikida on his nerves. These guys had nothing better to do? All they did was increase his headache and make him regret leaving his apartment that morning.

Luckily, the President seemed to notice how tired his own subordinates were with all the hard job, because once the day was over and all the Agency members were at their respective homes, he sent them a quick message saying they would take the next weekend off and make a trip to Shirahama to rest.

-x-x-x-

Fukuzawa borrowed Kunikida his minivan that could fit everyone inside it at the same time.

Kunikida wasn’t gonna lie, he was impressed with the car. He would drive and Yosano would take the passenger seat to take turns with him when he started to get tired, Ranpo, Atsushi and Dazai would be immediately behind them because they simply cannot drive and Kenji and Kyouka, the youngest ones, would take the back seats to have more space in case they decided to sleep during their way to Shirahama. Even their baggage fit the minivan without any problems. Kunikida asked himself since when the President had this car and why was he knowing about this just now.

Yosano and Ranpo helped him fit the baggage inside the car in a way that wouldn’t bother Kenji and Kyouka while the rest of the Agency packed the food for the trip. Ranpo complained all the time about why he wasn’t helping the others with the food, but he was strictly prohibited to even stay around the food while the trip hasn’t begun, otherwise he would eat everything before time and everyone would starve in these eight hours to their destination.

“Allright,” Kunikida said after the last baggage was inside the minivan, “all done. Where’s the food?”

“Atsushi and Kyouka are making the last sandwiches.” Kenji replied, carrying two thermal bags with the drinks and placing it on the back seat. He returned to inside the Agency building to pick up more bags.

Kunikida turned to look at Dazai, comfortably sitting on the roof of the car and watching them packing the trip stuff, “why don’t you help Kenji, Atsushi and Kyouka?”

Dazai gave him a slight smile, came down from the roof of the car and followed Kenji to inside the building without saying anything. Kunikida watched him disappear inside the building and then sighed, arranging the bag Kenji brought inside the car.

Yosano started to help him, “he likes you, you know.” she said, throwing two blankets at the back seats for Kenji and Kyouka. “He just doesn’t show it.”
“The day Dazai show a single emotion is the day pigs will fly.” Kunikida replied, not looking at her. He finished arranging the thermal bags and started arranging the other two Atsushi and Kyouka brought. Yosano didn’t say anything else, just glanced at him for a second before taking her seat inside the car and letting the others finish the packaging.

The bag Dazai brought was the last one, and soon they were ready to leave. Kunikida helped Kyouka and Kenji with the seatbelts and kicked Ranpo inside the car when he started to complain about the snacks again, closing the door behind him and telling the three men at the middle seat to put on their seatbelts before finally taking the driver seat. Fukuzawa came to talk to him about the hotel he reserved for them and give him the coordinates, then wished them good luck at the trip and Kunikida finally started the car.

The trip has begun.

-x-

The first few miles went just fine.

Yosano was reading the map for him and choosing the songs that played in the car, Ranpo was surprisingly silent playing with his PSP and eating Fini strawberry pencils, Atsushi was talking about the beach with Kyouka and Kenji and Dazai was completely silent with headphones on, watching the buildings passing by like a blur like they were the most fascinating thing in the world, occasionally humming in the rhythm of the song he was listening to. Kunikida couldn’t help but look at him, the way his hair looked light brown in the sunlight and the skin seemed to glow, beautiful eyes focused on the highway.

How could Dazai be so fascinating even when he wasn’t doing anything?

Ranpo was the one that broke the silence, once they were already out of the town and all they could see next to the highway were trees, suddenly screaming and almost making Kunikida lose the control of the car, “what happened?!” Kunikida asked, worriedly, decreasing the speed until he stopped and looking at him by the rear-view mirror.

“There’s a waterfall there!” Ranpo replied excitedly, pointing at a spot between the trees, a strawberry pencil hanging outside his mouth, “let’s go!”

“No,” Kunikida said, “we’re already going to the beach and we’re 15 seconds late because of you.” Ranpo grumbled, “stop making schedules for everything! We’re on a trip, can you have some fun for once in your lifetime?!”

“We’re not going to a random waterfall you saw in the middle of the trees in a highway.” Kunikida insisted, starting the car again and immediately making everyone start complaining about it. He turned to look at them, “what now?”

“I wanna go to the waterfall!” Kenji cried, Ranpo and Atsushi started begging.

Yosano giggled, “let them go to the waterfall, Kunikida. They won’t stop complaining if you don’t let them.”

Kunikida turned to look at her like she has betrayed him in the worst way possible, “you were supposed to help me deal with them!”

“It’s what Ranpo said,” she said, “we’re on a trip, let’s have some fun.”
Everyone at the car cheered, knowing they won the small argument. Kunikida looked at Yosano for a few more seconds before sighing, knowing he has lost.

“Alright,” Kunikida finally agreed, “but only for a few minutes, okay? We still have a seven-hours long trip to take and you guys are not the ones the will drive. I’m gonna look for a safe place to park, hold on.”

“There’s a place to park over there!” Ranpo yelled. He sure was excited with the waterfall. “It’s a public waterfall!”

“Okay! I’m going, calm down!” Kunikida yelled back, starting the car again and leading to the park lot Ranpo mentioned. “God damn kids.”

Ranpo looked offended, “I’m not a kid!”

“You’re the biggest kid!”

Dazai scoffed, finding funny the small argument, “It’s been less than thirty minutes since we left the agency behind and someone already managed to get Kunikida-kun on his nerves, I’m actually impressed.”

“You’re just jealous because you’re not the one that got him on his nerves.” Ranpo threw a strawberry pencil at Dazai, the candy hit him in the face. Dazai didn’t reply, he just smiled, started eating the candy Ranpo threw at him and returned to look to the trees outside the car while Kunikida looked for a place to park.

In fact, the waterfall was public. The place was small but really comfortably, counting with a parking lot, a ticket office and a small restaurant where a few people were having lunch. Ranpo didn’t even wait for Kunikida to buy the tickets for everyone before running to the waterfall already with his swimming clothes and a towel around his neck, taking Dazai, Atsushi, Kenji and Kyouka with him; Kunikida sighed and looked at Yosano, silently asking her with his eyes to follow them and keep them from accidentally drowning themselves while he brought them the tickets. After he had the tickets, he headed to where Ranpo ran.

The waterfall was actually really smaller than Kunikida thought it would be. He followed the thin river to the waterfall, finding out it was only about sixteen feet tall and ended in a small lake with crystal blue water where Ranpo and the others were already swimming.

Yosano was sitting on the edge of the rock next to the waterfall with a book on her lap, her feet swinging in the air, “Kyouka is having a lot of fun. I think she never saw a waterfall before.”

“I think there’s a lot of things this kid didn’t see,” Kunikida replied, standing next to her, “you’re not gonna swim?”

“No, I prefer just to watch them,” she gestured vaguely to Ranpo with Kenji on his shoulders and Atsushi with Kyouka, playing chicken fight, “what about you?”

“The water seems too cold, I’ll just watch them as well,” Kunikida said, then frowned when he took a look around the lake and saw someone missing, “where’s D-”

A sound of wood cracking behind them made him turn around to check the noise. He only had time to wide his eyes and hold his glasses before Dazai cross the distance between them, grab him by his waist and jump from the rock.

Kunikida hit the cold water with a long scream, submerging for a few seconds before returning to the
surface, “you son of a–” he yelled at Dazai, but the rest of the sentence died on his tongue when he saw Dazai deeply laughing in front of him, like he just witnessed the funniest thing in the world.

Dazai was laughing. Like, truly laughing. Throwing his head backwards and with his mouth wide opened, his laugh echoing around the place. Kunikida couldn’t help it, he unconsciously started smiling bigger and bigger until he was laughing with him, eyes shining in pure admiration.

He threw water in Dazai’s face and tried to drown him anyway.

Dazai started throwing water back at him still laughing, initiating a small water fight there while the others just watched them like they were totally drunk. Kunikida and Dazai happily playing together and truly laughing instead of annoying or fighting with each other? If they weren’t watching them with their own eyes, they would never believe it.

The others slowly returned to their own activities while Dazai and Kunikida kept playing with each other. He was already wet, there wasn’t much he could do now beyond enjoying the lake and the waterfall. It was pretty nice; the water pressure wasn’t too strong and he could easily stay under it, shivering by the cold water hitting his back and laughing at it.

The small water fights gradually decreased until they were just gazing at each other, Dazai having only his nose and half of the head above the water and with a mysterious look in his eyes that Kunikida would give literally anything to find out what it meant.

“What are you looking at?” Kunikida asked, starting to get annoyed, moving his arms to stay above the water.

Dazai didn’t reply, he just gave him a long glare, spat water on his face like a fountain and swam away. Kunikida watched Dazai swimming away from him with an ache in his chest, confused, then turned to look at Yosano still watching them from up the rock. She just shrugged and returned to her book.

They decided to go back to the car only when Kenji and Atsushi’s lips started to get blue from the cold water, signaling it was time for them to leave. They took a shower at the club’s locker room to warm up and bought food from the restaurant, the weather starting to change as the night started to fall. Once they were all with dry clothes and warm inside the car, started raining. Luckily, they managed to get inside the car before the rain arrives.

After eating their dinner, Kyouka, Kenji and Atsushi almost immediately fell asleep in the back seats, the water having tiring them more than the others. Ranpo threw a blanket above them before returning to his own dinner, playing with his PSP and with his headphone on, Poe’s jumpsuit covering his body. Yosano was still reading her book in silence in the passenger seat and Dazai was passionately watching the rain, following the drops on the window with his fingers, humming the song he was listening to with his own headphones.

As he took them to their destiny, Kunikida wondered what was going on inside that beautiful mind.

-x-x-x-

Having waste too much time at the waterfall, they had to stop in a cheap hotel to pass the night so they wouldn’t have to drive at night, and then returned to the highway as soon as the sun rose. When they were less than two hours away from their destiny, some jerk dirtied the whole car with mud and Kunikida was forced to take them to a jet wash. He could leave the cleaning for later, but he knew that, if the mud dried, it would be too difficult to take it away from the bodywork and he definitely didn’t want to mess up the President’s car; the cleaning would take only a few minutes
and they would return to the highway without bigger problems.

Except the jet wash was full and, when Kunikida tried to drive away from it, another car got into the queue and blocked the way out, so they were stuck.

They managed to get a ten-minutes interval in complete silence before Ranpo break it, “let’s play truth or dare!”

“Hell no.” Yosano quickly replied, turning on her seat to look at him. “I know exactly why you wanna play this game and I will not allow this.”

Ranpo seemed really disappointed, “why not?”

“Because they need time to figure things out and if you hurry things up like that, I’m gonna kill you and leave you dead.” She hissed, narrowing her eyes at Ranpo in a threatening way.

“Who needs time?” Kunikida asked, frowning.

“No one.” Yosano replied, glancing at him, then looked forward again. “You can play any other game except for this one.”

“Never have I ever?” Ranpo tried.

“Not this one either.” She replied.

“Spin the bottle?”

“How are you gonna spin a bottle inside the car?” Kenji asked, leaning his body above the middle seat to join the conversation.

“20 questions?”

“No.”

“Scattergories?”

“Kunikida-san would win every match in five seconds.”

Ranpo tilted his head to the side, “... Spy with my little eye?’”

“This one you can play.” Yosano finally agreed, making Ranpo cheer.

“How do you play?” Kyouka asked, leaning her body above the middle seat like Kenji was doing.

“You say the first letter of something you’re seeing and the others have to find out what is it.” Yosano explained. “For example, I spy with my little eye something beginning with ‘W’.”

“Is it wheel?” Ranpo tried, Yosano shook her head.

“Is it window?” Atsushi tried, wrong again.

“Is it wall?” Kunikida said, looking very bored.

Yosano smiled. “Yeah,” then she turned to look at Kyouka, “got it?”

Kyouka nodded, “I spy with my little eye something beginning with ‘A’.”
“Is it Atsushi?” Again, Kunikida said with a bored voice.

“Yes.” Kyouka replied. “How did you know?”

Kunikida looked by the rear mirror at Atsushi in front of Kyouka. “Lucky guess,” he said, Dazai giggled.

“I’ll go now!” Atsushi said excitedly. “I spy with my little eye something beginning with ‘C’.”

“If it’s ‘cars’ I quit the game.” Kunikida said, “is it cars?”

Atsushi looked very embarrassed, “... Yes.”

Kunikida hit the steering wheel, “I knew it!” he said, trying to bit up the smile starting to grow on his lips. He looked around the parking lot, “alright, I spy with my little eye something beginning with ‘D’.”

“Is it Dazai?” Ranpo tried, with a naughty smile on his lips that confused Kunikida.

“Uh, no?” He said, looking at Ranpo by the rear mirror. The queue moved a little.

“Is it door?” Atsushi tried.

“No.”

“Is it... Dirty?”

“No.”

“Oh, I know!” Kenji said, noticing the same thing Kunikida noticed inside the car in front of them, “is it dog?!”

Kunikida smiled, “yes. There’s a cute dog there,” he pointed at the dog inside the car in front of them, everyone started to try to call the dog’s attention but the dog didn’t care about them.

“I’ll go now.” Ranpo said, “I spy with my little eye something beginning with ‘B’.”

“Is it bullshit?” Yosano tried, rolling her eyes.

“Stop being so mean to me!” Ranpo protested, making Yosano giggle. “And no.”

“Is it box?” Atsushi tried, Ranpo denied.

“Is it blood?” Kyouka tried.

“You’re seeing blood somewhere?” Kunikida asked, starting to look for the blood. “Where?”

“Oh, I need to see the thing he’s seeing as well? I’m sorry, I thought only he should be seeing the thing.” Kyouka said. “I’m not seeing blood anywhere.”

“Is it book?” Atsushi said, Ranpo opened a smile.

“Finally.” He said. “Now doctor Yosano, please put your book down.”

Yosano looked at him with narrowed eyes, but put down her book.

“My turn!” Kenji said. “I spy with my little eye something beautiful starting with ‘S’!”
For the first time, Dazai entered the game, “is it Kunikida-kun’s eyes?”

“But none of those words start with S?” Kenji seemed really confused.

“Oh, sorry.” Dazai said, smiling at Kunikida by the rear mirror, “I was focusing only on the ‘beautiful’ part.”

Kunikida broke the eye contact by the rear mirror when his cheeks started to burn, looking away from Dazai’s eyes and trying to hide his smile behind his hand.

Ranpo scoffed, “is it sexual ten-”

Yosano hit him with her book.

“It’s the sun!” Kenji replied when he noticed no one else would try to guess because they were too focused on fighting each other. “The sun looks beautiful today.”

After that, their car finally arrived the jet wash and a few minutes later they were ready to leave.

Kunikida and Dazai didn’t talk about how they kept looking and softly smiling at each other by the rear mirror the whole way to their Hotel.

-x-x-x-

When the finally reached their destination, Kunikida wondered what was the President thinking when he decided to reserve rooms in a hotel like that for them.

It was a 4 stars hotel, with the facade being at least twice the size of the Agency in pastel colors and multiple rooms, next to the sea and with access to the beach. There were indoor and outdoor heated swimming pools and two different large bathhouses and the hotel was close to everything; train station, supermarkets and other important things.

They would sure enjoy their stay.

“Alright,” Kunikida said when they did the check-in, stopping in front of his friends, “the President got us three guestrooms, so we’ll have to share. Who’s gonna stay in the VIP room?”

“You and Dazai.” Everyone replied at the same time.

Kunikida was actually impressed, “really?”

“I’ll get one room with Kyouka and the boys will share the other room.” Yosano replied. “You guys will share the remaining room. It’s simple math.”

“Okay,” He nodded, “but why it has to be me and Dazai?”

“Woah, Kunikida-kun.” Dazai said, sounding hurted. “You don’t wanna share a room with me?”

“I do,” Kunikida replied a little bit too fast, his cheeks acquiring a red tone. He pushed his glasses back, “I was just wondering why you guys all agreed with that.”

“No reason,” Ranpo replied with a naughty smile that was starting to get Kunikida on his nerves, “let’s go, I wanna see my room.”

He pulled Atsushi and Kenji to walk with him, going in the elevator’s direction. Kunikida watched them with a confused expression as Yosano pulled Kyouka to walk with her and left him and Dazai
behind. Dazai tapped his shoulder, smiled at him and followed the others. Kunikida didn’t have any other option but follow them.

Two of the guestrooms were a Japanese Western kind of room, on the last floor—the 6th one—and with ocean view. Ranpo quickly took one of the beds all to himself and threw himself at it, leaving the other king-sized bed in the boy’s room for Kenji and Atsushi to share; luckily, the bed was big enough to fit them comfortably. The other Japanese Western room went for Yosano and Kyouka, also with ocean view, and individuals king-sized beds for both of them, and Kunikida and Dazai got the VIP room at the end of the hall.

One look inside the room, and Kunikida immediately regretted all his life choices.

Of course the VIP room would have only one bed. It was destined for couples. Why did Fukuzawa reserved the VIP room, knowing it was destined for couples?

Dazai didn’t seem to care about sharing a bed, he just went straight to the closet and put his baggage inside of it before throwing himself at the bed, “ah, I liked the room.”

Kunikida was too embarrassed to say anything and Ranpo was almost dying from laughter on the floor. Kenji and Kyouka entered the room to explore it and Atsushi instantly followed them, going to the balcony to enjoy the beautiful view the room offered.

“I’m going to the beach; doesn’t anyone want to come with me?” Yosano said from the room’s door, pointing to the corridor.

“I’ll go!” Ranpo said, recovering himself from the laugh attack and standing again with a small jump, “I’m gonna build the biggest sandcastle!”

“No way!” Atsushi said, returning to the room. “I will build the best one!”

“How about a bet?” Ranpo suggested with a naughty smile, raising an eyebrow, “whoever build the ugliest sandcastle and lose has to buy ice-cream for the winner!”

“Deal! Prepare your wallet already, you’re gonna lose anyway!” Atsushi returned the smile. Kenji already seemed to be excited with the idea.

“I wanna play too!” He said, jumping in excitement next to Atsushi.

“Let’s make pairs then! Kyouka, you’re with me.” Ranpo pointed to himself, Kyouka nodded. “Oh, we’re gonna slaughter your sandcastle!”

“We’re on it, Sherlock Holmes!” Atsushi said, then all the four of them ran to outside the room at the same time to pick up their beach stuff. Yosano rolled her eyes and giggled, smiling at Kunikida before following the kids outside and closing the door behind her.

Once she was gone, Kunikida fully entered the room and put his baggage inside the closet with Dazai’s. He then turned to look at his partner laying down on the bed and then to the couch parallel to it, “I’m gonna take the couch, you can keep the bed.”

“What?” Dazai said, supporting his weight in his elbows to look at Kunikida and raising an eyebrow, “there’s enough space for both of us, we can share it.”

Kunikida raised his eyebrows, “are you sure?”

“Yeah, come here.” Dazai called, moving to the right side of the bed and leaving an empty space
for Kunikida, tapping the mattress. Kunikida frowned at him, but went to the bed and sat on the edge of it. “Lay down.”

“What?”

Dazai rolled his eyes, “it’s okay, Kunikida-kun.”

Kunikida frowned at him once again, but reluctantly took off his shoes and laid down next to Dazai. In fact, the bed was big enough for both of them.

“See?” Dazai whispered, laying down on his side and facing Kunikida’s face, “big enough.”

“Yeah,” Kunikida whispered back, mirroring Dazai’s position and laying down on his side. They faced each other, their faces too close to one another even though the bed had a lot of free space, “big enough.”

Dazai smiled slightly at him, with a soft expression in his eyes that Kunikida would do literally anything to find out what it meant but knew he would probably never do, because if he asked about it he knew Dazai would just smile at him in a way that said ‘you don’t know me; you could never know me’ and go away without saying anything, leaving Kunikida and all his mixed feelings behind. He was a hurricane, a strong wind that could destroy everything on his way but still was fascinating and Kunikida was just a simply drizzle, so common people sometimes didn’t even notice he was there.

Dazai was a closed book, and Kunikida was so desperate to leaf through his pages.

He didn’t even notice when he brought one of his hands to take a strand of Dazai’s hair away from his face, fingers gently tracing the skin as he put the hair behind his ear. Dazai didn’t say anything or moved away from the gesture, so Kunikida took that as a signal to keep stroking his soft hair. He didn’t even care it was weird.

“Do you wanna go somewhere else? The bathhouses or the beach?” Kunikida asked in a whisper, looking inside Dazai’s beautiful eyes while he kept stroking his hair, fingers playing with a specific curl of his bangs.

“Nah, this is fine,” Dazai replied in the same low voice, closing his eyes and moving a little bit closer to Kunikida so he could stroke his hair properly. Kunikida held his breath to Dazai’s move, thinking it was too intimate, but gradually relaxing when Dazai’s breath started to slow down until he finally fell asleep. He knew he couldn’t walk away from him now, he knew Dazai usually didn’t sleep properly so he couldn’t take the risk of trying to slide down from the bed and accidentally wake him up, so he just closed his own eyes and moved closer to his partner, smiling slightly when Dazai unconsciously moved closer to him in his sleep to the point his nose was on Kunikida’s neck, Kunikida’s own sleep and tiredness from the long trip starting to fill his body, fingers still playing with Dazai’s hair as he slowly started losing conscience until he finally fell asleep with that weird feeling in the pit of his stomach that confused the hell out of him.

-x-x-x-

It was Ranpo who found them, when the sun was almost completely hidden in the horizon and the stars could already be seen in the dark blue sky, so he obviously managed to get some blackmail material. By the time he found them, Dazai was sleeping in Kunikida’s chest, drooling and pulling him closer by his waist, their legs were laced together and Kunikida’s hand was still on Dazai’s head, fingers stick between the strands.
He must have taken at least 30 pictures before he started laughing, “wake up sleepyheads!”

Kunikida instantly woke up, throwing his body to the side by the fright and hitting the floor with a painful bump. Ranpo started laughing louder.

“What the hell, dude?” Dazai said, sleepy voice and messy hair, trying to look at Ranpo with half-closed eyes, “what are you doing?”

Ranpo was using a table as support to laugh, “Yosano told me to check if you were still at the room. We just returned from the beach and she wants to go out to have dinner.”

Only then Kunikida seemed to notice Ranpo’s hair was still wet, all messy and curl from the ocean and he still had his towel around his neck, “but you really had to wake us up like that?”

“I couldn’t help it, sorry.” Ranpo said, but he didn’t seem to be really sorry. “Are you two coming or not? Do you guys prefer to stay alone for a few more time?”

Both Kunikida and Dazai were too sleepy to notice what he was implying, “can I take a shower first?” Kunikida asked, scratching his eyes and yawning. He hoped his glasses didn’t get crooked for having slept with them on.

“Sure.” Ranpo nodded. “But don’t take too long, Yosano will get mad if you take too long.”

“Yeah, yeah. We’ll be fast.” Kunikida replied, gesturing to the door.

Ranpo smirked, “We?”

“Get out!” Dazai shouted, throwing a pillow at Ranpo. He dodged from the pillow with a loud laugh, leaving the room and closing the door behind him. Dazai fell off in the bed again with a grunt.

Kunikida stretched and stood up, stumbling on his feet by the remaining traces of sleep on his way to the closet. He opened it and looked for comfortable clothes to wear, picking up blue jeans and a random white shirt before leading to the bathroom to take a cold shower. The climate was good enough for a cold shower.

He left the shower a few minutes later, already ready to leave for dinner, finding Dazai still half-asleep sitting on the bed with his eyes closed, like he was sleeping like that, messy hair and kneaded clothes. He honestly looked so adorable and innocent like that, Kunikida frowned at his own thoughts.

“Oi, Dazai,” He called with a giggle, “go take a shower.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Dazai replied with a hoarse voice, showing Kunikida he was awake, “going.”

“Go, go, go,” Kunikida said, clapping his hands together to wake Dazai up, “I’ll wait for you.”

Dazai smiled with his eyes still closed, “thank you.” he said, then left for the bathroom. Kunikida sat down in the bed to wait for him.

He tried not to think about his growing feelings while he waited for Dazai.

In part, was because he had no idea what those feelings meant. Everything was so new to him he had no idea how to deal with that. Dazai was his partner and they’ve been partners for two years now, so he should be used to having him closer to him all the time. But at the same time, it felt so weird and
terrifying he wanted to throw his feelings through the window and run away. He thought that, maybe if ignored these weird mixed feelings, they would end up going away.

Wouldn’t they?

Dazai left the shower after a few minutes, already on his clean clothes, hair dripping water and messy. Kunikida stood.

“You’re leaving like that?” He asked, pointing at his messy hair. Dazai just shrugged and ran his fingers through his hair to brush them before picking up his wallet and raising his eyebrows.

“Happy?” He said.

Kunikida giggled and opened the door, “let’s go.”

The others were already waiting for them when they reached the entry hall, Yosano looking really impatient and ready to beat the shit out of Ranpo laughing loudly with Atsushi next to her.

She sighed in relief when she saw them, “oh, thank God you’re here. The next time we’re traveling together I’m not bringing the kids.”

“What did we do?” Kenji asked next to Kyouka, seeming to be hurt.

“Oh, not you. You two are angels, I’m talking about Ranpo.” Yosano replied, poking Ranpo in the stomach with her elbow. “Shut up!”

“Oof!” Ranpo grumbled, “can you stop being so mean to me? My birthday is tomorrow!”

The sentence made Dazai visibly freeze, like he just remembered something important, and it called Kunikida’s attention. Did he forget Ranpo’s birthday?

“Can we please go? I’m starving!” Kenji said, dramatically holding his stomach. Yosano nodded, and then they went to the closest pizzeria they could find.

During the rest of the night, Dazai seemed to be off. Kunikida noticed the way he kept getting distracted, how his eyes seemed to be misty, with a sad expression on his face that Kunikida desperately wanted to take away from him. Dazai was beautiful, he shouldn’t be sad, he should be showing the world his beautiful smile and laughing and flirting with every girl he saw. Something was wrong with Dazai, and Kunikida didn’t know what.

Everything would be a lot easier if he just opened up about himself with people instead of keeping everything to himself and drowning with his own thoughts.

After dinner, they all went to Yosano and Kyouka’s room after changing to their pajamas. Sitting on the bed, she explained to the oldest ones while Kenji and Kyouka were out with Atsushi that the kids were commenting with each other that they saw a blanket fort in a movie and liked a lot, so she wanted to surprise them with one. They all obviously agreed, specially Ranpo, who immediately started looking for sheets for the fort.

It took about an hour, but they managed to build a blanket fort big enough to fit all of them inside it comfortably. Yosano even put fairy lights in the fort and build it around the TV so they could watch Netflix without leaving the fort, indicating that she went to the trip already thinking about the kids’ dream. She really was focused on making the trip unforgettable for them, on making they live like normal kids for once in their lifetime.
Once the fort was done, they all entered it and laid down comfortably in the blankets in the floor to see if they needed more space to fit the three remaining kids. Luckily, it was big enough.

Yosano left the fort, “I’m gonna call them, you can choose something on the Netflix for us.”

Ranpo was already happy about that, reaching the remote control. Kunikida took the control from his hands, “we’re *not* gonna watch CSI.”

“But-”

“No, we’re gonna watch something the kids would like,” Kunikida interrupted him, “how about a romantic comedy? There’s some good ones.”

“Not a romantic comedy, but 21 Jump Street is nice.” Dazai suggested, laying down next to Kunikida and a little bit too close to him.

“I vote for a Scary Movie marathon.”

Kunikida gasped, sitting down in the blankets, “this is *not* the kind of movie for-”

“Oh, please,” Ranpo scoffed, “the kids are *murderers*, Kunikida. They can handle some sex scenes and dirty jokes.”

“Scary Movie is nice.” Dazai agreed. “I haven’t watched the 5 yet.”

“Oh, Kyouka will *love* Scary Movie,” Ranpo giggled, taking the remote control from Kunikida’s hands and looking for the movies in the Netflix’s catalog. Kunikida grunted, falling back in the blankets.

Dazai giggled, moving closer to Kunikida and using his arm as a pillow. Once again, Kunikida held his breath for the proximity and intimacy, but gradually relaxed and pulled Dazai closer, letting Dazai tangle their legs together.

“Are you sure it’s a good idea let the kids watch Scary Movie?” Kunikida whispered to Dazai, fingers unconsciously starting to play with the man’s hair.

“It’s okay, Kunikida-kun,” Dazai replied in the same low voice, leaning towards the soft stroke in his hair, “like Ranpo-kun said, Kyouka used to be a murderer. They can handle it.”

Ranpo scoffed, glancing at them, “if you two start kissing, I’m gonna vomit.”

“Why would we start kissing?” Kunikida asked with a frown, actually confused, but Ranpo just looked at Dazai like Kunikida just said the stupidest thing in the world, shook his head and returned to the Netflix’ catalog.

Yosano returned a few seconds later with the kids, their audible gasps and excitement audible from inside the fort. Kenji and Kyouka quickly ran to the fort, entering it with the biggest smiles in their faces and eyes shining in pure admiration, looking everywhere around the fort and laughing in excitement.

“Kyouka! Kyouka! Look!” Kenji exclaimed, pointing at the fairy lights with the biggest smile the other’s ever seen. “Fairy lights!”

“They’re so beautiful.” Kyouka said, looking around the fort and touching the lights, with stars in her eyes. Kunikida’s heart melted a little, he’s never seen Kyouka looking so happy before.
“Come inside!” Atsushi said, entering the fort and laying down next to Ranpo, “oh! We’re gonna watch movies?”

“I brought popcorn and soda.” Yosano said, letting Kenji and Kyouka enter the fort before her and closing the blanket door behind her. She sat down in front of Ranpo and Atsushi and scattered the popcorn and the sodas. “What movie did you guys choose?”

“Scary Movie marathon!” Ranpo replied, filling his mouth with popcorn and making Kenji giggle.

Yosano raised an eyebrow, “Kunikida allowed this?”

“Yes,” Dazai replied, leaning over Kunikida’s body to steal popcorn from Ranpo and then staying there, hovering above him, “didn’t you, Kunikida-kun?”

Kunikida looked at the man pairing above him, close enough for the tip of his hair tickle his face, “yes,” he said, but he didn’t actually remember what he was talking about, “yes, I guess so.” Dazai’s eyes followed his words, looking at his lips like he was saying the most interesting thing in the world, and Kunikida’s eyes unconsciously mirrored the action. They both leaned a bit closer, but then Kunikida blinked and recovered his senses when he realized what he was about to do, pushing Dazai back to his original place.

“I think I’ve watched only the first one,” He said, returning to the movie subject and reaching the popcorn, “if you keep leaning above me, I can’t see the movie.”

Dazai grumbled, but reached on pot of popcorn and two sodas for them to share and returned to his original place in Kunikida’s shoulder, comfortably using him as a pillow.

“Better?” He asked, raising an eyebrow.

Kunikida pulled him minimally closer, “better.”

“Okay,” Yosano said, slowly, “what’s happening?”

“What?” Both Kunikida and Dazai asked at the same time, mouths full of popcorn.

Yosano shook her head and found a comfortable place next to Kenji and Kyouka, who were already eating and anxiously waiting for the movie to start, “forget it,” she said, then reached the remote control, “ready?”

“Yes!” Everyone replied at the same time. She smiled and pressed start in the first movie, and the marathon begun.

-x-x-x-

The last movie ended around 2am, and this is also the hour Dazai suddenly disappeared.

By the last movie, all the kids were already asleep and only the oldest were awake. Yosano brought a small chocolate cake for Ranpo and they sang happy birthday to him, then Kunikida went to the bathroom and Dazai disappeared and neither Yosano or Ranpo could tell where did he go.

That was enough for Kunikida to start panicking, remembering the way Dazai seemed off since dinner.

He instantly left the room behind saying he would look for Dazai, and Yosano and Ranpo let him. He started looking inside the hotel, in the bathhouses and the pool, but he was nowhere to be seen,
so Kunikida had to go outside the hotel even though it was 2am. What wouldn’t he do for Dazai Osamu, honestly?

Kunikida then walked to the beach, looking for his stupid partner that seemed to be playing hide and seek with him, but he also didn’t find anything. He even asked the few people around if they had seen Dazai, but no one saw him; he returned to the hotel and asked the guard if he saw him, but the guard said he didn’t leave.

If no one saw him leaving the hotel, that meant...

*Oh.* Oh, shit.

Kunikida gasped and turned on his heels, starting to run up the stairs to the roof. He climbed the stairs the fastest he could, opening the door for the roof and leaning in the door stop to recover his breath.

And there, dangerously sitting on the edge of the roof, was Dazai.

“Dazai,” Kunikida carefully called him, stepping closer to him, “I don’t know what happened, but we can talk about this. Please, don’t jump.”

“What?” Dazai replied, turning around to look at Kunikida with a frown. He looked back at the edge of roof and only then seemed to notice where he was. “Oh,” he giggled, “I’m not gonna jump, Kunikida-kun. Don’t worry.”

Kunikida didn’t seem to buy the excuse, “then why are you there?”

Dazai looked at Kunikida for a moment, looked back forward and returned to look at his partner, extending his hand towards him, “do you trust me?”

“No.” Kunikida replied.

“Of course you don’t.” Dazai scoffed, “but please, trust me on this.”

Kunikida examined Dazai’s face for a moment, then reluctantly crossed the remaining distance between them and grabbed his hand, letting Dazai do whatever he wanted to do. He slowly sat down next to his partner, legs swinging in the air, the lack of safety grid making him vertiginous, taking care to not to fall for his imminent death.

“See?” Dazai asked, softly smiling at him, still holding Kunikida’s hand.

And *damn*, Kunikida saw.

Even though the view of their room was good, it could never compare to this. They could see the whole ocean from up there, the big full moon reflecting in the crystal-blue water and making it glow, the soft waves making the reflection tremble. The stars looked closer this way, dozens of small glowing dots around the whole dark blue sky showing them multiple constellations, shining just for them and everything they did. A rain cloud could be seen from distance, slowly approaching them.

“Woah,” Kunikida breathed, appreciating the view, “it’s beautiful.”

“Yeah,” Dazai agreed, but he wasn’t looking at the sky, “it is.”

Kunikida turned to look at Dazai, blushing really hard when he noticed that Dazai wasn’t talking about the sky. He pushed his glasses back and cleaned his throat in embarrassment, making Dazai
giggle and look back at the horizon with a soft expression in his face.

“You’re sad.” Kunikida said, noticing Dazai’s body language.

“I’m always sad.” Dazai scoffed. “Life is an endless nightmare I’m-

“No,” Kunikida insisted, “you’re sad because today’s date reminds you of something bad.”

“How did you know?” Dazai gasped, actually seeming to be surprised.

Kunikida faced him in silence for a few seconds, then looked away to the horizon, because it didn’t matter Dazai was smiling and playing around, Kunikida could tell he wasn’t really okay with just a look inside his eyes; he didn’t open up about his feelings with words, but his eyes told Kunikida everything he needed to know.

Dazai was a closed book, yes. But, honestly, how Kunikida be such a poet if he didn’t know how to read between his lines?

When Dazai was nervous, he tended to keep moving his body unconsciously back and forth and change his weight from one leg to another, sometimes playing with the tip of his coat or the bandages. He was ambidextrous, but usually used his left hand to write at work so the right hand was free to annoy whoever was sitting next to him. Dazai liked his coffee sweet, but used to drink it bitter just to see Atsushi’s disgust face. He was a cat person, he was scared of dogs and used the pain as a copying mechanism, just to check if he was still alive and breathing; just to check if he was still human. The bandages around his body were used to cover his battle scars, because he thought it was easier to hide the hideous scars than to explain to people why his whole body was covered with multiple cuts and gunshots.

He was intriguing and fascinating, like a mystery book written by a renowned writer that made their readers breathless, desperate to know what was inside that beautiful mind, dying to know how the novel would end. Kunikida wasn’t even surprised when the realization finally hit him and he understood why Ranpo talked about they kissing. He wanted to kiss Dazai.

Kunikida glanced at Dazai, smiled and looked at the sky, “because you’re my best friend.”

Dazai didn’t reply, he just kept staring at Kunikida like he just put the stars in the sky in complete fascination and then smiled brightly, “yeah,” he said, looking back at the horizon and resting his head in Kunikida’s shoulder, moving their hands together until their fingers were intertwined and giving a soft squeeze, “I think you’re my best friend too.”

“Do you wanna talk about it?” Kunikida asked in a whisper, tracing invisible patterns in the back of Dazai’s hand with his thumb and resting his head above Dazai’s own head.

For a moment, like Kunikida thought, Dazai didn’t say anything, but then he moved briefly and reached his coat pocket with his free hand, taking a picture from there and handing it to Kunikida, tapping the middle of the picture, “this is Oda Sakunosuke,” he said as Kunikida carefully picked up the picture and looked at it, “but I used to call him Odasaku.”

“What happened?” Kunikida asked, looking at the picture. It was an old black and white picture, its edges starting to rip off by the time, with Dazai and two more dudes sitting in a bar, Dazai on the right with his eye closed –eye in the singular, because his right eye was hidden with a bandage– and the Odasaku dude in the middle, a guy in glasses taking his left side.

“He was murdered,” Dazai replied with a forced giggle, Kunikida squeezed his hand a little bit harder, “he was stupid and faced a guy knowing he would end up killed. It’s been... It’s been five
years today.”

“I’m sorry for your loss.” Kunikida said, handing the picture back to Dazai. “He’s in a better place now.”

“And so am I.” Dazai said, smiling nostalgically, “Odasaku told me to be on the good side before he died, he told me to save people.”

“And I’m sure he’s proud of you, Dazai.” Kunikida assured him, moving his head minimally to look at Dazai’s face. When Dazai raised his own face to face him, Kunikida held his neck in a reassurance way and looked deeply inside his eyes, “I am proud of you.”

Dazai kissed him.

At first, Kunikida didn’t know how to react. Of course, he’s been thinking about kissing Dazai for a while now, but all the mixed feelings were confusing him so much he didn’t know what to do. Gradually, he relaxed and closed his eyes, moving his hand to his cheek and stroking the skin, retributing the kiss. It was slow and timid, shy, inexperienced, like they were just getting used to the other’s lips, mouths softly moving against each other.

They parted their lips a few seconds later, touching their foreheads together, eyes still closed and breaths mixing together, “I don’t wanna be your best friend,” he whispered, brushing his lips against Kunikida’s and giving him a quick and soft peck, “please, I don’t wanna be just your best friend.”

“You’re my best friend.” Kunikida said again, “but you could never be just that.”

Dazai sighed in relief, then kissed Kunikida again. The kiss was a little bit deeper this time, with both of them already knowing the other felt the same, lips hurriedly moving together and hands running through the other’s body, experiencing new spots and feelings, mouths making beautiful sounds together. They both leaned their faces slightly to the side and opened their mouths, finally letting their tongues met and deepening the kiss even more. When Dazai slid his hand under Kunikida’s shirt, Kunikida had to remember they were still sitting on the edge of the roof and any false move could send them both to their imminent deaths.

“Wait,” Kunikida whispered, parting their lips to breath, “be careful.”

“Let’s go to the room,” Dazai whispered back, seeming to be in a hurry, kissing Kunikida again.

Kunikida stopped him, understanding what he meant, “uh, don’t you think it’s a little bit-”

“It’s not. I’m yours,” Dazai interrupted him, “I’m all yours, when it rains it pours.”

Any other words were needed, Kunikida just grabbed Dazai’s hand and pulled him to return to the bedroom. He almost didn’t manage to lock the door behind them because he was too busy kissing his partner like tomorrow didn’t exist.

The rain finally hit the city when they hit the bed, already shirtless, the soft sound of the drops hitting the huge windows of the bedroom matching with their soft moans echoing around the room, hands intertwined above Dazai’s head in the bed, lips working together. They parted their lips when the air made itself necessary, Kunikida changing Dazai’s lips for his cheeks and then softly kissing the whole extension of his face until he reached his neck, kissing the skin that wasn’t covered by the bandages, Dazai’s beautiful moans sounding right against his ear and making his entire body shiver in pleasure.
Kunikida stopped when his hands reached the end of Dazai’s chest bandages, in a spot next to his left armpit. He stopped kissing his neck to look inside his eyes with a mute question, briefly raising his eyebrows.

Dazai bit his lower lip, like he was ashamed, “you already know what’s beneath them,” he whispered, stroking Kunikida’s arm, “you can take them off if you want, it’s okay.”

“Are you sure?” Kunikida asked, returning to kiss Dazai’s neck and tracing the end of the bandages with his fingers.

“Go ahead.”

Kunikida unwrapped the first knot, slowly taking the bandages off Dazai’s chest and noticing the way Dazai’s breath started to get heavier. He probably never showed his skin to anyone; he should be nervous.

When his chest was completely naked, Kunikida had to stop for a moment to admire Dazai’s beautiful pale skin, seeming to glow with the moon’s glimmering, full of multiple cuts and other kinds of wounds. Beautiful manuscript lines of won battles, making him the most fascinating book in the world.

Unlike Dazai thought he would, Kunikida didn’t think the scars were nasty or ugly. Instead, he leaned over the first scar at the end of his neck and kissed it softly, letting his lips linger in the skin.

“You’re beautiful,” Kunikida whispered as he went for the next scar, kissing it as softly as the first one, “you’re beautiful, Dazai. So, so beautiful,” he kept kissing each one of Dazai’s scars until he’s kissed every single one of them, and then started to unwrap the bandage in his arms, also kissing each one of his scars and whispering how beautiful and fascinating he thought Dazai was. He unwrapped his whole body and kissed every single skin spot he found, every scar, every manuscript line written in his body.

That night, they made love. They didn’t have sex, they didn’t fuck. They made love during the whole night, slowly and passionately, with only the moon shining through the window and the turbulent ocean as witnesses of their love and the hickeys hidden around their bodies where no one else but them could see as proofs that the night wasn’t a dream.

-x-x-x-

Kunikida woke up to the sun hitting his face and a beautiful mess of brown hair right in front of him, tickling his nose.

He smiled groggy, checked his phone for the time and didn’t even care he woke up two hours later than he used to, pulling Dazai closer and putting his face in the curve of the man’s neck to inhale his scent, the sweet smell of chocolate shampoo filling his senses and making him feel even more comfortable than he already was. Dazai was still sleeping, messy hair falling over his pretty face and expression smell of chocolate shampoo filling his senses and making him feel even more comfortable than he already was. Dazai was still sleeping, messy hair falling above his pretty face, lips half-opened and drooling, breathing softly, eyelashes trembling slightly with his dreams. He hasn’t wrapped back his body with the bandages yet, so Kunikida could see his whole body and all his scars clearly; the cuts, the gunshots, the burns, the bad words and insults permanent craved in his skin. Battle scars, reminders that he survived each one of his bad days. All the lines that made Dazai Osamu the fascinating and unique book he was.

Kunikida couldn’t help it, he started kissing Dazai’s shoulder and scars, stroking Dazai’s waist from under the blankets and tracing the naked skin with his fingers. Dazai slowly started awakening,
smiling with his eyes still closed as he stretched minimally and turned around to hug his lover and use Kunikida’s chest as a pillow.

“Good morning, honey.” Kunikida whispered, kissing Dazai’s forehead and pulling him closer. “Time to wake up.”

Dazai smiled groggy, “we’re using pet names already? Good morning then, love puddle. Kissy bunny. Pumpkin.”

“Oh no, pet names are cancelled.” Kunikida giggled, tracing invisible patterns in Dazai’s back with his fingers. The sun hit the hickeys across his body making him look like a beautiful painting. “Let’s go, I think the others are already awake. Today’s our last day here, I wanna go to the beach.”

“Nooo, why can’t we stay a little longer?” Dazai grumbled childishly, opening his eyes and looking at Kunikida with those beautiful misty eyes by his sleep that almost made Kunikida throw everything up and stay there forever.

“No,” Kunikida insisted, kissing Dazai’s forehead again and sliding off the bed, “let’s go, sleepyhead.”

Dazai laid sprawled on the bed, with the blankets covering only his waist. Kunikida immediately picked up his phone and took a picture, setting it as his wallpaper. Honestly, how couldn’t he when Dazai was out there looking like a whole masterpiece, with the sun hitting his pale skin and the hickeys Kunikida made seeming to glow in the sunlight?

“Come on, Dazai,” Kunikida tried again, then went to the bedroom’s bathroom to take a shower. He stopped in front of the mirror and immediately blushed really hard, noticing the multiple hickeys around his skin matching with Dazai’s. There was no way in hell they could pass unnoticed by Ranpo.

While he was taking his shower, Dazai silently joined him and hugged him from behind, resting his chin in Kunikida’s shoulder and letting the water take away all the sweat from the night. Kunikida turned around and kissed him softly, not even bothering about their morning breath.

After taking their shower, they left the room together and went to where Yosano told them to meet her, at the dining hall. She was having breakfast with Ranpo and Atsushi, Kyouka and Kenji were nowhere to be seen.

“Good morning.” Kunikida said once they were close enough to their table, already with their breakfast in hands, “where’s Kyouka and Kenji?”

“They’re outside selling lemonades.” Yosano replied, sipping from her tea and not looking up to them, “they saw the kids doing that on a movie so they wanted to try it. It’s good to see them doing normal stuff.”

“Yeah, I think so too,” Kunikida nodded, then sat down in front of her and Ranpo.

It took one look at Kunikida and Dazai sitting together for Ranpo to choke on his own food and start laughing hysterically.

“So the night was good, wasn’t it?” Ranpo asked, trying to recover from his laugh but only laughing even harder when he noticed the way Kunikida immediately started blushing like crazy and Dazai looked from to his food, biting up a smile. “Oh my God, it was good.”

“What are you talking about?” Atsushi asked, innocently, looking between Ranpo and the men
sitting next to him.

“What happened?” Yosano inquired, tilting her head to the side.

“Oh, c’mon,” Ranpo threw his arms in the air dramatically, “isn’t it obvious? Look at their faces! Look at the hickey in Kunikida’s neck!”

Kunikida instantly brought one of his hands to cover the hickey, and only then Yosano seemed to understand what happened, “no way.”

Ranpo started laughing loudly again, calling the other people’s attention, “oh my God, this is great. Who topped? Was it Dazai? I bet it was Dazai.”

“We don’t ask about your sexual life with Poe, Ranpo.” Kunikida said, really embarrassed, uncomfortable with the way all his friends were looking at him.

“Edgar tops,” Ranpo casually spilled, gesturing vaguely with his chopsticks, “I’m too lazy to top, but I top sometimes when he’s too tired to do it. So, who topped?”

“Thank you for the amazing details about your sexual life with your boyfriend, Ranpo.” Yosano rolled her eyes. Kunikida murmured something under his breath, playing with his food and blushing again.

“What did you say? I can’t hear you.” Ranpo said, leaning over the table to try to hear what Kunikida was saying.

“I said we switched!” Kunikida shouted, a little bit too loud, calling the other people’s attention again and wanting to hit his head in the table. “Happy?”

“Oh my God, so you did it more than once?” Yosano asked, now seeming to be really interested in the conversation. Atsushi was trying to camouflage himself with the chair, his face as red as Kunikida’s. “Damn, you two are fast. I was hoping you guys to kiss or at least confess your feelings for each other, but fuck? More than once? I’m impressed, congratulations.”

“Thank you~” Dazai said, seeming to be enjoying the conversation about his intimacy, casually eating his breakfast like they weren’t talking about his sexual life with his partner.

Kunikida grumbled, hiding his face in his hands, “can we please change the subject?”

“Please!” Atsushi said, his mouth full of food.

“Sure, sure.” Yosano rolled her eyes. “Do you guys wanna go to the beach?”

“Yeah,” Kunikida nodded, visibly relaxing and returning to his food.

Ranpo scoffed, “are you guys gonna fuck in the sea?”

Kunikida gasped and Atsushi chocked with his food, “Ranpo!”

-x-x-x-

They stopped to pick up Kenji and Kyouka before leaving to the beach.

The kids seemed to be having so much fun they almost didn’t want to take them away from their small lemonade stand, who actually seemed to be working. Some people actually stopped and bought lemonade from them, and they managed to get at least 50 yens before Yosano told them to
close down the stand. Kenji almost cried and Kyouka looked so sad Kunikida was actually afraid she was going to cry.

After removing the lemonade stand from the front of the hotel, they stopped in their rooms to change to their swimming clothes before race to the beach with Atsushi and Ranpo. Yosano rolled her eyes to Ranpo’s childish behavior for the 20th time that day and calmly accompanied Kunikida and Dazai, who were more than happy to be able to walk to the sand holding hands because everyone already knew they were together.

Yosano set a beach umbrella next to where Ranpo, Atsushi, Kenji and Kyouka were playing in the sea and spread a towel in the sand to lay down and sunbathe.

“You can go there if you want,” she said, putting her sunglasses on, “I’ll stay here for a while.”

Kunikida looked at Dazai, sitting next to him with a blue shirt and shorts, “wanna go?”

Dazai smirked, “on a date? Yes.”

“Oh my God, you guys are gonna be one of those disgustingly affective couples, aren’t you?” Yosano removed her sunglasses to look at Dazai, who was laughing of Kunikida’s embarrassed face. “You already have pet names? I’m gonna vomit.”

“He’s apparently trying to come up with the worst pet name in history.” Kunikida grumbled, scratching his eyes and standing up, taking his shirt off and holding the hand Dazai was handing him. He didn’t care everyone could see the hickeys around his chest.

“This is exactly what I’m trying to do.” Dazai smiled. “Let’s swim a little, oojy coojy woojy moojy poo-poo.”

“I’m breaking up with you.” Kunikida said, unimpressed, dropping Dazai’s hand and leaving for the sea. Dazai laughed deeply before running up to him and jumping on his back for a piggyback ride.

“Don’t break up with me, Kunikida-kun~” Dazai hummed, leaning his head on Kunikida’s face, “you took my virginity away. You touched my goods~”

“You weren’t a virgin, Dazai.” Kunikida rolled his eyes, holding Dazai’s thighs to keep him still as he stepped into the cold ocean.

Dazai giggled, “you still touched my goods, though.”

“You touched mines too. We’re even.”

“What did Dazai touch?” Kenji asked, suddenly appearing next to them, emerging from the sea.

“Nothing!” Kunikida quickly replied before Ranpo could say something, “what are you guys doing?”

“We’re playing shark!” Kenji said excitedly, “play with us!”

Kunikida smiled, then dropped Dazai in the sea, “sure, who’s the shark?”
Something touched his leg under the water, making him jump in fright. Kyouka emerged a seconds later, smiling, “it’s with you.”

Everyone instantly swam away from Kunikida, leaving no other option for the man than to start chasing his friends in the sea. Yosano ended up joining them a few minutes later, seeing the way they were having fun and not wanting to stay out of it, playing in the cold water with them until lunchtime, when she forced them to return to the hotel to eat something. After lunch, they spent the rest of the day in the sand building sandcastles and making bets to see who could build the biggest castle. Ranpo won.

When the day was over and the sun was starting to fade in the horizon, Kunikida and Dazai went for a walk in the sand. They held hands and giggled softly to each other’s jokes, bare feet in the cold ocean water and sea breeze messing their hair, the comfortably feeling of the ocean making they want to stay there forever. Unfortunately, after that night, they would return to their busy routine and dangerous life.

“I wanna stay here forever,” Kunikida mentioned as they walked around the sea, fingers firmly held between Dazai’s, “I don’t wanna go back.”

Dazai smiled, closing his eyes to feel the warm breeze the ocean was sending to their faces, hair moving with the wind, “we can come back later. This place will be here forever.”

“I can’t wait to come back, then.” Kunikida smiled, stopping by the sea and forcing Dazai to stop too. The man opened his eyes and stopped in front of him, the sun hitting his eyes and making them look twice as beautiful as they usually were, “I’m happy we’re here.”

“I’m happy you’re here,” Dazai replied, closing his eyes and smiling softly, touching their foreheads together, “I’ve been waiting for you to figure things out for so long, I’m glad you finally did.”

Suddenly, everything clicked inside Kunikida’s brain. The malicious looks Ranpo used to shoot at them, the weird teasing, Dazai’s soft smiles and long glares when they were being teased about having a relationship. The way he used to blush when Dazai smiled at him and the way his heart felt like it was going to melt, the casual babbling, the way they sat together closer than they should. They were just giving him time to figure things out, but everyone knew about Kunikida’s crush on Dazai. Everyone but Kunikida himself.

“So this is what Yosano and Ranpo were talking about back in the car,” Kunikida concluded, “Ranpo was tired of waiting and wanted to help me figure my feelings out, but everyone else wanted to give me time,” a pause, “even you, don’t you?”

Dazai smiled, “I noticed your feelings before you did, yeah. Ranpo was obviously the first one to notice it, he noticed we had feelings for each other even before I could.”

“Sometimes I honestly don’t know if I love or hate Ranpo.” Kunikida scoffed, rolling his eyes before holding Dazai’s face softly and pressing their lips together.

“Even I was getting tired of waiting for you, you know.” Dazai giggled after the kiss was over, still with his eyes closed. “You’re so oblivious.”

“You started dropping hints,” Kunikida said, remembering the random pick-up lines Dazai told him and the long glares with double meanings.

Dazai nodded, “I like dropping hints that I’m in love with you,” he said, then opened his eyes and looked intensely inside Kunikida’s own eyes, “I’m in love with you, Kunikida-kun.”
Kunikida didn’t reply, but he knew he didn’t have to. He just smiled and kissed Dazai again, deeply and passionately, trying to share all his feelings by his lips and pulling him even closer, almost like he was afraid that he would suddenly disappear from his hands. The warm sea breeze surrounded them like a familiar and comfortable hug, clothes and hair stirring with the wind, sand dancing around their bodies. Kunikida smiled against Dazai’s lips, heart seeming like it was about to explode inside his chest and butterflies happily flying around his stomach as the cozy feeling started to consume his whole body, the words floating inside his mind being so welcomed he wasn’t afraid of it anymore.

He was in love with Dazai, too.

“I’ll be yours
When it rains it pours
Stay thirsty like before
Don’t you know that the kids aren’t all, kids aren’t alright.”

Chapter End Notes

PLEASE PLEASE comment your thoughts about the story or the book, I’m putting a lot of effort in each one of them :((

(you can talk to me on twitter if you want, I’m @favkaminari)
Chapter Summary

Suspecting of Poe’s weird behavior, Ranpo one day decides to follow him to see why his friend usually left the Agency so early on Friday nights and where he went.

He can’t say he’s not particularly surprised and kinda turned on when he finds out why.

Chapter Notes

me, when I don't know whether I should make skk or knkdz the side ship: ah fuck it Dazai has two (2) hands

Okay look, jokes apart I just found out some skks doesn't like knkdz and vice versa so I think I should tell you guys that I ship both of these ships and I really can't choose between them, so some of the fics here (the Ranpoe ones, especially) will have both of the ships as a side ship, okay? Please, be careful reading it in case you don't like one of these ships. I don't wanna make y'all uncomfortable.

Without further ado, I had a lot of fun writing this one lmao, enjoy it!

(Canon Compliant, explicit sexual content, funny)

[words count: 7.881]

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Thank you for asking for our services, we’ll return to you as soon as we solve or have any clue about your case.”

The ginger woman in front of Ranpo smiled briefly and nodded, shaking his hand before leaving the agency behind. Her case was actually pretty simple, just an ability user with an intangibility power breaking into her store and messing things up to scare her, making her think it was a ghost when it was actually her 16 years old neighbor; Ranpo managed to solve her case in three seconds, but he promised Kunikida he would start to work harder and actually care about his clients instead of showing off and dismiss cases he found boring.

"What’s her case?” Dazai asked, sitting on Ranpo’s desk and picking up her file to check her report.

Ranpo stretched, resting his feet above his desk, “her neighbor is an ability user and he’s breaking into her store to scare her. She thinks it’s a poltergeist.”

Dazai giggled, “ohohoho, nice.”

“Hey, you two.” Kunikida pointed at them from his desk, “Osamu, use the chairs, please. And Ranpo, take your feet off your desk.”
“Oh no,” Dazai said, kicking down his chair and blinking innocently at Kunikida, “looks like my chair is broken, can I use your lap as a seat?”

Kunikida threw a book in Dazai and Yosano started laughing deeply from her desk, “I’m telling Chuuya you’re sleeping in the couch today!”

“You guys can’t stay away from me~” Dazai hummed, leaving Ranpo’s desk and returning to his own desk, touching Kunikida’s face as he walked by his desk.

“Yes we can,” Kunikida grunted, pushing his glasses back, “I hate you.”

“You love me.”

“Hate you.”

“Love me~”

Kunikida grunted again, not looking into Dazai’s eyes and trying to mask the blush on his cheeks, “go back to work, smug bastard.”

Dazai smiled softly, “I love you too, honey.”

“Oi, Poe-kun!” Ranpo called the man the moment he saw him trying to sneak through the door to outside the office. Poe jumped in fright and turned to look at Ranpo with wide eyes, “where are you going? Are you done with your cases already? It’s still pretty early.”

“Oh, yeah,” Poe scratched his neck, uncomfortable with all the attention focused on him, “I got some things to do.”

“Do you want me to go with you?” Ranpo said, already standing, but Poe jumped again.

“No, no!” The man quickly denied, “it’s some personal things from a case, it’s okay.”

“Are you sure? I can accompany you if you want.” Ranpo insisted, but Poe shook his head.

“It’s okay, Ranpo-kun. See you on Monday!” He said, waved goodbye to the other members of the agency and left the office without any other word.

Once he was gone, Ranpo started grumbling, “one day I will find out where he goes on Friday nights.”

Here’s the thing about Edgar Allan Poe. After the Guild was defeated, he and Ranpo started to get closer and hang out more and more to the point Poe spent more of his days at the Agency with Ranpo, whether it was helping him with certain cases or just sitting in silence at the couch, writing his novels while the others worked, so Fukuzawa simply asked him if he wanted to officially join the Agency. Poe, of course, didn’t have a reason to deny the offer so he did the entrance exam and passed, and now he was Ranpo’s field partner. They worked good together and Poe could deal with Ranpo’s childish behavior without bigger problems, so they were a good team; they were good friends and trusted each other deeply, could understand each other with just a look and Poe was the only person that actually entertained Ranpo enough to calm down his TDAH a little bit. Ranpo could read Poe like the palm of his hands, like Kunikida, Chuuya and Dazai understood each other, like Atsushi and Kyouka trusted each other.

Except for this particular thing that was getting Ranpo on his nerves.
Every Friday, Poe left the work almost three hours earlier than the normal and Ranpo simply had no idea why or where he went. Poe simply hid the reason so well not even Super Deduction could find out why.

And it was getting Ranpo on his nerves.

“Why don’t you just follow him?” Dazai suggested, sitting on Kunikida’s desk and eating cookies. Kunikida was unbothered, already used to his boyfriend’s behavior, still filling his paperwork in silence.

“I’ll definitely do it someday, but not today,” Ranpo pouted, “he’ll notice it.”

“What do you think he does? I call dibs on walking around the city punching criminals dressed up as Batman.”

“Chuuya would tell us if he saw a 6 feet tall man walking around in a bat costume punching criminals,” Kunikida said, not looking up from his paperwork, “he would be the criminal being punched.”

Dazai giggled, “You think chibi would let someone punch him?”

“Nop.”

“If Poe-kun is not walking around the city punching criminals dressed up as Batman,” Ranpo said, “then what is he doing?”

“Maybe he has a secret family and twenty-one kids to feed.” Dazai shrugged.

“Maybe he’s working with the mafia.” Atsushi said, joining the conversation.

Yosano tapped her chin, “Maybe he has a secret life where he works as a drag queen?”

“I’m sorry, what?” Ranpo asked, frowning.

“Maybe he’s a whore!” Dazai shouted.

Kunikida slapped the back of Dazai’s head, “don’t call your friends ‘whore’, Osamu.”

“What do you think he’s doing then, Doppo?” Dazai replied, rubbing the back of his head.

“Maybe he’s actually doing what he said he was gonna do. Working on his cases.”

Ranpo snorted, “doubt it. He does this every Friday, if he was working on his cases, he would do that on other days as well.”

“Let’s make a bet!” Dazai said, excitedly, taking a 1000-yen bill off Kunikida’s wallet and placing it above the desk, “I think he’s a whore. Or a gogo boy.”

“What the fuck.” Kunikida said, taking his wallet away from Dazai’s hands. “Don’t use my money on bets and don’t call your friends whore.”

“Too late,” Dazai chuckled, then turned to look at his friends, “so? Anyone else wanna bet?”

Yosano sighed, walked off her desk and placed another 1000-yen bill on Kunikida’s desk, “I just think he has a girlfriend and doesn’t want to mix his personal life with work.”
“Poe-kun is gay, but it’s still a good theory,” Ranpo said, then walked to Kunikida’s desk to place his own 1000-yen bill above the other bills, “I honestly don’t know what to think about it, but I’m gonna say he still has outstanding issues with the guild and is trying to deal with it.”

“Good theory, good theory.” Dazai rubbed his hands together, seeming to be enjoying the bets. He turned to look at Atsushi, “Atsushi-kun? What’s your theory?”

Atsushi slowly left his desk and walked to Kunikida’s, placing his bill with the others, “he’s with the mafia.”

Dazai snorted, “oh, my loved Atsushi-kun, you just lost 1000 yen.”

“Chuuya would tell us if Poe were working with the mafia.” Kunikida said, ignoring all the people standing in front of his desk.

“Not if he was undercover.” Atsushi tried to argue, raising his eyebrows, but Dazai snorted again.

“Sometimes you seem to forget Chuuya is our boyfriend, but go off I guess.”

“I still can’t believe Kunikida is dating a mafioso.” Yosano said, sounding really impressed. Sometimes, Ranpo also didn’t believe it.

“I’m dating him too!” Dazai said, annoyed, dramatically throwing his hands in the air.

“You’re stupid, Kunikida isn’t.”

“Like you said,” Kunikida said, “I don’t mix my personal life with work.”

“You’re really brave for dealing with their bullshit, congratulations.” Ranpo said, returning to his desk. Everyone else mirrored his action.

“It’s a burden I have to carry every day,” Kunikida replied with a sigh, running his fingers through his hair, “thank God Chuuya help me dealing with Osamu’s bullshit.”

“You guys love me.”

“We’re gonna kick you out of this relationship.”

Dazai was almost impressed, “and live without my amazing blowjob?”

“We’ll live.” Kunikida said. He didn’t even care anymore about having their private life being exposed this way, Dazai couldn’t keep his mouth shut. “Besides, we both know Chuuya gives the best blowjobs.”

“True, but I’m the best kisser, though.”

“Nop, I’m afraid that’s me.”

“Are you kidding me? I almost drown every time I kiss you!”

“Chuuya doesn’t complain.”

“I’m not complaining, either.” Dazai said, “drowning with your saliva would be such a nice way to die.”

“You guys are so fucking disgusting.” Yosano said from her desk, looking like she was about to
vomit and making Dazai laugh loudly.

Ranpo stopped paying attention to the conversation after that, his mind taking him back to Poe and his weird disappearings. What could he possibly be doing that was so particular not even Ranpo, his best friend, knew? Why was Poe hiding it so well not even Ranpo’s ability was capable to find out the reason? What was he hiding?

What was Poe doing that was so bad not even Ranpo could know?

-x-x-x-

For the next few weeks, the routine remained the same. The whole week Poe would work normally, would solve his cases and write his novels when he had a free time, would help the rest of the agency and help Ranpo with his own cases, and on Fridays he would start acting weird around lunch time and would leave the office two or three hours earlier than normal, always saying he would deal with a particular case and dismissing Ranpo’s company when he offered himself to accompany him. In the first three weeks, Ranpo just looked at him with narrowed eyes to let Poe know he was suspecting of his behavior but Poe didn’t care, he just blushed and returned to his work without saying anything, like he didn’t know what Ranpo was trying to say, but after the fourth week Ranpo simply couldn’t stand it anymore.

He pushed Poe against a wall and trapped him there by placing both his arms next to his chest, so he couldn’t escape, “tell me what you’re hiding.”

Karl jumped from Poe’s shoulder and ran away. Poe gasped, some of the files he was holding fell on the floor with the sudden scare, “w-what?”

“You heard me,” Ranpo hissed, “I know you’re hiding something, tell me what it is.”

“What are you talking about, Ranpo-kun?” Poe asked, holding the rest of his files tightly against his chest and looking at the man in front of him with wide eyes.

“Don’t play dumb with me, you know it doesn’t work. Do you have a side work we can’t know about? Are you working with the mafia? Do you have a boyfriend?”

Poe made a high-pitched sound, “a boyfriend? N-no!”

“Is it the mafia, then? You’re working with the mafia? Or is it the guild? Do you still have unfinished business with the guild? Are you seeing someone?”

“I’m not working with the mafia, Ranpo-kun!” Poe said with a high-pitched voice, looking more horrified each second, “you don’t trust me?”

“At this moment? No.” Ranpo said, trying to mask how bad he felt when he saw how hurt Poe looked with the sentence, “if you tell me why you keep skipping work on Fridays maybe I’ll trust you again.”

“I already told you! It’s a case!” Poe said, starting to look desperate, “my client asked me to make everything in sigil!”

“But why only on Fridays, Poe?! It doesn’t make sense!”

“It’s the only day she can meet up with me! She works in a full turn and her only free days are Fridays!” Poe screeched, “please, you have to trust me!”
Ranpo faced him in anger for a few more seconds then sighed and walked away from him without saying anything, returning to his desk. Fighting with him wouldn’t take him anywhere, “you could’ve told me.”

“I’m sorry, Ranpo-kun,” Poe said, sounding actually sorry. He gathered the files that fell and picked up Karl from the floor, putting him back on his shoulders, “she asked me to keep everything between us. I’m sorry, I should’ve told you.”

“Damn right you should.” Ranpo said, leaning his chair backwards and facing the white ceiling above him, “what did you think I would do? Force you to take me with you?”

“No, no. Of course not.” Poe replied, shaking his hands in an anxious way. “I was just doing what she asked me to do, I’m sorry.”

“You’re right,” Ranpo nodded, then snorted, “I’m sorry, I overreacted. You can go know, Poe-kun, your client is waiting for you.”

“It’s okay,” Poe said, then waved everyone goodbye, “let’s go, Karl, I have to take you home before meeting up with her.” he petted the raccoon’s head and smiled at Ranpo one last time, leaving the office and closing the door behind him.

Ranpo waited for a few seconds until Poe was outside the building to scream, “fuck!”

Kunikida jumped on his chair, widening his eyes at Ranpo, “what?”

“Well, this is not what I was expecting,” Dazai grumbled, sounding really disappointed with the reason why Poe left the agency earlier on Fridays.

“He’s lying, Dazai! Fuck!” Ranpo shouted, frustratedly, pulling his hair, “he’s lying!”

“What?”

“He couldn’t look me in the eyes while he talked to me! He’s lying and he’s not even hiding it!”

“But why is he lying?” Kunikida asked.

“Maybe he’s protecting someone?” Yosano suggested, arching an eyebrow, “maybe he’s protecting us.”

“He’s protecting himself, this is what the bastard is doing.” Ranpo hissed.

“Maybe there’s a reason why?” Atsushi said, looking between Ranpo, Yosano, Dazai and Kunikida.

Ranpo turned to look at him, “what reason?”

“Maybe he knew you would react this way,” Dazai said. Everyone turned to look at him, “this is why he doesn’t want to tell you. I mean, you already reacted this way with a simply lie, what would you do if he told you the truth? Seriously, Ranpo, what was that?”

“He’s my best friend! I’m worried about him!”

Dazai tilted his head to the side, “are you worried about him, or about the fact he could end up changing you for someone else?”

Ranpo stopped, widening his eyes at Dazai, “this is not– I wouldn’t– He wouldn’t.”
“If you’re so suspected and worried about him, why don’t you just follow him? If he’s with the client he talked about, then you have your proof and everything will return to normal.” Yosano said, gesturing at the door with a pen.

“I can’t follow him right now, he’ll notice it.”

“I’m not saying today,” Yosano said, rolling her eyes, “I’m saying next week. If you keep pretending you believed in him, he won’t notice if you follow him.”

Ranpo snapped his fingers, smiling openly, “Doctor Yosano, if you didn’t like girls I would kiss you right now.”

Yosano twisted her nose, “ew, no.”

“Go back to work, there’s two more hours left.” Kunikida said, returning to his paperwork and ignoring his annoying boyfriend throwing paper balls on him. Everyone else gradually returned to their own paperwork, and sooner the office fell in a comfortable silence.

As he filled his own paperwork, Ranpo started to build a plan inside his mind to catch Poe on the act and finally find out why was he keeping secrets from him when they used to share everything with each other when they were alone in the dark in one of their rooms, hidden under the blankets, talking softly and whispering under their breaths about how safe they felt with each other and how they could move mountains and work a miracle if the other asked.

-x-x-x-

The following week seemed to pass so slowly Ranpo was really starting to think someone with a time loop ability hit him so Friday would never come and he would never find out Poe’s secret. It looked like the week had a whole month inside it, but the Friday finally came with a warm weather and comfortable humor at the agency that almost made Ranpo forget he was mad at Poe.

During the whole week, Ranpo managed to act normally in Poe’s presence and pretend everything was okay, but when Poe wasn’t around, he almost ripped all his hair off with the anger and frustration he was feeling. The feeling of being so blind and kept in the dark when he was so used to see everything so clearly was getting him on his nerves. Damn it, why was he so worried about it?

“Already going, Poe-san?” Dazai asked from Kunikida’s desk, turning off Ranpo’s thoughts and bringing him back to the real world. He blinked and turned to look at the man at the door.

“Yeah, Ligeia is already waiting for me and I still have to leave Karl at home because she’s allergic to him.” Poe said, petting the raccoon on his shoulder and smiling slightly at Dazai.

“Oh, do you want me to accompany you?” Ranpo asked, trying to sound the most innocently he could, already knowing the answer.

“No, it’s okay.” Poe shook his head, then waved the rest of the agency goodbye. “Bye.”

“Good luck with her!” Ranpo yelled before Poe could close the door behind him. Poe put his head inside the office again and smiled at Ranpo, then left the agency.

Once Poe was gone, Ranpo waited for three minutes until he knew the man was already outside the building to stand up and hit his desk, gathering his stuff and quickly putting them inside his backpack.

“Today is the day, buddy.” Dazai said, comfortably eating cookies laying down on Kunikida’s desk
while the man still worked on his paperwork, unbothered. Apparently, nothing Dazai did could bother him anymore.

“I’m gonna catch him in the act!” Ranpo said, throwing his backpack on his back and picking up his phone to check the time.

“Tell us what he does after you find out.” Yosano said, not looking up from her paperwork.

“I will, bye.” It’s all Ranpo said before running to outside the agency, hitting the door behind him and hearing Kunikida’s complain. He ran down the stairs and quickly called a taxi, giving the taxi driver Poe’s address and paying him more than it was needed to take him to Poe’s house the fastest he could.

In fact, the ride was quick and he reached Poe’s apartment a few minutes later, jumping outside the taxi and checking if he could see any glimpse of Poe inside the apartment before hiding in the coffee shop in the other side of the street, seeing Poe’s heavy hair from the window.

Poe left his apartment a few minutes later, without Karl and with a backpack on his back. He looked around the street for someone and then started to walk in the opposite direction of where Ranpo was. Luckily, he didn’t need a taxi to go to his destiny.

He walked for a few streets, occasionally turning left and right in certain places and keep walking hurriedly through the streets, like he was late to do something. Only with his body language Ranpo could tell he wasn’t gonna meet with the client he talked about; the client would understand if he was a few minutes later. He was going somewhere else where he couldn’t be late.

A few more streets later, when Ranpo was already completely lost and had no idea where they were anymore, Poe finally stopped. Ranpo stopped behind the corner of the street, spying Poe talking to a security guard in front of the entrance of an elegant pub, with a red neon sign above the door; the guard nodded to whatever Poe was telling him and pointed at a small gate next to the pub, giving Poe access to it.

What could Poe be possibly doing in a pub, when he couldn’t even talk to strangers without stuttering?

Ranpo waited for a few minutes before Poe disappeared in the gates, then headed to the pub. He greeted the security guard and walked into the pub, knowing the guard would never allow him to follow Poe through the small gates; only authorized people could use the gates, it took only a look at it for Ranpo to know it. Poe was working in a pub?

The pub was big, but pretty comfortable. The walls were painted with a pretty ton of brown and green and the lights were low, the bar was full of expensive drinks and there were a few people here and there, talking to each other and laughing and drinking. At the pub, the familiar melody of November Rain by Guns N’ Roses was echoing around the place, but if Ranpo payed enough attention he could hear the distant melody of a Lady Gaga song playing somewhere else. Poe was nowhere to be seen.

He took a look around the place, looking for his friend and the origin of the Lady Gaga song, finding a closed door at the end of the pub with another security guard in front of it.

There!

Ranpo quickly walked to the door, but the security stopped him, “may I see your ID, sir?”

“What?” Ranpo gasped.
“Your ID,” the security said again, with a blank face, “you need to hit the majority to enter this place.”

“What? I’m 26!” Ranpo said, throwing his arms dramatically in the air, “I don’t even look like a kid!”

“Still need to see your ID.”

Ranpo grumbled, fumbling his pockets for his ID. He showed it to the security guard, raising his eyebrows, “happy?”

The security guard looked at his ID, to his face, then to his ID again, apologized and stepped away from the door. Ranpo smiled at him and opened the door, entering the place ready to catch Poe in the act.

Instead, it was more like the place itself caught Ranpo in the act.

This definitely wasn’t a common club. Ranpo stopped by the door, widening his eyes at too loud song and the multiple half-naked people around the place, the extremely strong smell of alcohol and the stench of summer sex intoxicating his senses. Everywhere he looked, he saw people sensually dancing in poles and other really thirsty people watching the ones dancing, waitresses and waiters walking around the place wearing nothing but tiny underwear and with glitter and sweat covering their bodies, some people drinking vodka straight from the dancers’ bodies.

A strip club. That- that was a strip club.

“What the fuck.” Ranpo breathed, too shocked to say anything else, unconsciously stepping further into the place.

The song was loud and, like Ranpo thought, the Lady Gaga song was coming from there. The main light of the club was a sensual tone of red, but there were multiple colorful lights flashing in the rhythm of the song and multiple drunk people dancing together and heavily making out, being in the middle of the dance floor or in one of the reserved couches in the back of the club. A pretty waitress with black hair and vibrant blue eyes offered him a glass of whisky, but Ranpo denied it. She had her boobs uncovered.

What was Poe doing in a place like that?

The more Ranpo walked around the club, the more he wanted to throw his investigation up and have fun. The people could be really convincing, especially when they had their goods uncovered and were smiling at you like that. He kept looking for Poe, trying to spot the man probably sitting awkwardly in the back of the club with a glass of soda in his hands and looking like he was very close to pass out from embarrassment.

When he finally found Poe, however, he felt his eyes gradually widening in pure shock as his pants started to get tighter.

About three meters away from him, serving four other people with a silver tray in his hands, was Poe. Shirtless, wearing a skinny leather pant, suspenders, black boots, fingerless leather gloves and a choker.

“Uh, Poe-kun?” He called, uncertainly, seeing the way Poe visibly froze with his name being called. Poe slowly turned around to look at Ranpo, eyes just as widened as Ranpo’s.

Ranpo had to scratch his eyes and slap his own face to see if he wasn’t dreaming, because he simply
could not believe what his eyes were seeing. Poe... Poe had his fluffy hair parted in the middle, actually showing his beautiful grey eyes painted with a soft grey make up and thin black eyeliner; his nails were also painted black and there was a tiara with black cat ears on his head. His choker was made of leather and had a silver cat ID tag on it.

It was like Poe just walked off of one of his dirty dreams. It was like looking straight at his dirty dreams.

Poe quickly apologized for the people he was serving and grabbed Ranpo’s arm, pulling him away from the people when he noticed Ranpo was too shocked to do anything. Ranpo kept looking at his friend with wide eyes, still unsure if he was dreaming or not, thinking about something clever to say.

“How many for the hour?” It’s what he said instead.

“Shut up,” Poe hissed, and the authority in his voice totally did not turn Ranpo on, “what are you doing here?”

“What are you doing here?” Ranpo asked back, moving his weight from one leg to another to try to mask the half-boner on his pants. Damn it, Poe always had those abs?

“I work here,” Poe finally admitted, not having a way to hide his secret anymore, “did you follow me here?”

“Obviously, you were lying to me!” Ranpo said, throwing his arms up dramatically, “how the hell did you end up working in a place like this?”

“The money is good; the money I get at the agency can’t fully cover my apartment.” Poe shrugged, looking around them. Ranpo simply could not stop staring at his face, fascinated by the way Poe’s eyes looked almost transparent with the half-light and the grey makeup; of course, he always thought Poe was beautiful, but this? This should be illegal.

“Oi, Black Cat!” Some random dude called, making Poe turn to look at him, “stop chatting and go back to work!”

“Just a moment!” Poe said, gesturing vaguely between him and Ranpo.

Ranpo tilted his head to the side and raised an eyebrow, “black cat?”

“Is how they call me here,” Poe said, “I can’t use my real name.”

“And what exactly do you do here?”

Poe rubbed the back of his head, some strands of his bangs falling on his forehead, “People seem to like the way I dance, so sometimes I do the pole and private dances, but I usually work as a waiter. People say I dance like Uma Thurman, it’s kinda nice.”

“And you actually do this kind of stuff?” Ranpo asked, actually impressed, raising his eyebrows. Even with his ability, he would never guess Poe, the social awkward with social phobia Poe, the Poe who was too shy and anxious to even initiate conversations with anyone at the agency that wasn’t Ranpo, could ever ask for a cup of tea without passing out or start crying.

He can’t say he wasn’t liking this side of Poe, though, because he was. A lot.

“Yeah, of course,” Poe nodded, “I do a lot of things here, you have no idea.”
Oh, only if Poe knew how he wanted to know...

“You said they call you ‘black cat’ here,” Ranpo said, “are you wearing a cat tail buttplug under your pants or...?”

“I am not, but I can if my client desires.” Poe automatically replied, like he was used to tell people this kind of stuff, then widened his eyes. “I, uh... I shouldn’t be telling you this.”

“No, no, I wanna know.” Ranpo held his shoulders. “I wanna know.”

“You wanna... Know?” Poe slowly repeated, “you’re not ashamed? You don’t think it’s disgusting that your best friend works on a strip club?”

“Ashamed or disgusted are not the words I would use,” Ranpo scoffed, pointing at his pants. Only then Poe seem to notice the huge volume his boner was making, “do I look like I’m disgusted to you?”

“Disgusted is not the word I would use,” Poe echoed Ranpo’s previous sentence, smirking, “do you need some help there, buddy?”

Ranpo moaned, “fuck yes.”

The next thing he knew, they were heavily making out against a wall in a random room of the club.

Poe pressed him further against the wall, helping Ranpo to intertwine his legs around his waist and holding his thighs up to prevent him from falling on the floor, rubbing their hips together, moaning in the middle of the really messy and obscene kiss. Ranpo enlaced his fingers between Poe’s heavy hair and tilted his head to the side, deepening the kiss even more, tongues dancing together sometimes inside his own mouth and sometimes inside Poe’s, trying to see whose mouth was hotter, wetter, tasty.

They parted their lips when the air made itself necessary, Poe changing Ranpo’s warm lips to his neck, sucking and licking and biting the skin to mark it. Ranpo wanted to know what Poe did on Friday nights? Then he was gonna find out.

Poe led them blindly to the closest table he found, throwing all the things from above the table in the floor before laying Ranpo down in the wood and climb above him, returning to the wet and pornographic kiss. Skilled hands ran through Ranpo’s whole body, squeezing the skin and looking for weak spots, agile fingers quickly unbuttoning his shirt and throwing it away before sliding his jeans’ zipper down.

“Fuck,” Ranpo breathed when Poe returned to suck his neck, arching his back in the table when he felt Poe’s fingers tracing the skin under his pants, holding his dick under the underwear and stroking him, “I didn’t know you could do this kind of stuff.”

“There’s a lot of things you don’t know about me, Ranpo.” Poe whispered back, abandoning the honorifics, his voice acquiring a hoarse and dominant tone that made Ranpo moan deeply. Poe watched his reaction with curiosity, “oh, is that a dom kink I see here? Do you want me to dominate you?”

“I want you to do literally everything you want with me.” Ranpo replied with his eyes closed, not even ashamed of what he was asking for and how he should be looking like a desperate whore like that.

“Oh, I will.” Poe said with a naughty smile, throwing his tiara away and taking off his boots before
sliding down Ranpo’s pants. He threw the pants away like he did with their other clothes and leaned over his chest, starting to kiss and suck the skin to mark him as he went down with the kisses, stopping by the tip of his underwear. Poe raised his eyes to meet Ranpo’s as he slowly kissed his dick over the cloth, smirking to the way Ranpo desperately arched his back again and brought his hands to pull Poe’s hair.

Poe started to lick Ranpo’s dick over the underwear, using a lot of saliva to make the white cloth transparent and show the hard penis, but suddenly stopped when Ranpo started to moan loudly, “you won’t moan,” he said in an authoritarian way, making Ranpo instantly bit his lip to hold another moan, “you will moan only when I tell you to, okay? Answer.”

“Fuck, okay.” Ranpo quickly agreed, making Poe smile.

“Good.” He replied, then slid Ranpo’s underwear down and immediately put his whole dick inside his mouth, not even giving time for Ranpo to understand what was happening.

Ranpo bit up another moan, back arching in the table and fingers pulling Poe’s hair with strength, but Poe didn’t really care, he was used to it. He licked the whole extension of Ranpo’s dick, up and down, up and down, circling the glans with his tongue and stroking the rest of it with his hand, making sure he was using a lot of saliva to make things dirtier and messier, massaging his balls and tracing the sensitive skin with the tip of his fingers, loving the way Ranpo reacted to his touch, biting his lip so hard to stop his moans it was almost bleeding.

He stopped sucking Ranpo’s dick only when he noticed he was close to his orgasm, once again making Ranpo grumble in disappointment, “you won’t come, also. I want you to come when I’m inside you, fucking you slowly and deeply. Do you want me to fuck you, Ranpo? Answer.”

“Fuck. Fuck, yes.” Ranpo groaned. Apparently, that was the only word his brain filled with lust could remember. “Please, fuck me.”

Poe left the table for a second, leaving Ranpo behind to take off his pants the fastest he could and look for lube. It was easy to found, there were lube and condoms everywhere around this place.

He returned to the table in a second, already with a condom covering his dick, climbing back above Ranpo and kissing him deeply and hurriedly as he covered his fingers with lube and led them to Ranpo’s butt. Ranpo once again arched his back and moaned in Poe’s mouth when he felt the cold and wet finger circling his butthole, moving his hips against the fingers to feel them better.

“Oh, someone’s in a hurry.” Poe murmured, still torturing Ranpo with his fingers, holding one of Ranpo’s leg up and throwing it over his shoulder, squeezing the skin of his thigh as he finally stopped playing with him and slowly started introducing the first finger inside him.

Ranpo held both sides of the table to keep himself still, eyes closed and mouth opened from where his heavy breathed escaped, still trying to hold up his moans. Poe twisted his finger inside him and removed it before introducing again, slowly fucking him with his finger, preparing him for his dick. The introduction of the second finger made Ranpo moan loudly, what made Poe grunt at him.

“I said no moans.” He hissed, biting Ranpo’s clavicle as a form of punishment. Ranpo seemed to like it. “You really like being dominated, don’t you?”

“Yes, sir.” Ranpo managed to reply, moving his hips against Poe’s fingers and fucking himself. “I guess so.”

“Good to know.” Poe giggled, scissoring him and twisting his fingers inside him, introducing the
fingers as deep as he could inside Ranpo as the man fucked himself.

By the third finger, Ranpo was ready. Poe removed the fingers and giggled at the way Ranpo grumbled in disapproval, reaching the lube in the floor and pouring a big amount of the liquid in his penis, stroking himself a few times to spread the liquid before throwing the empty bottle away and head the tip of his dick to Ranpo’s butt, slowly penetrating him. Ranpo tried to bit up the moan, closing his eyes tightly and holding the table above his head, arching his back again.

Once he was completely inside Ranpo, Poe leaned above him, sweat dropping from his forehead, wet messy hair, “are you okay?”

“Fine,” Ranpo breathed, enlacing his legs around Poe’s hips to facilitate the penetration, “move.”

“Easy there, I’m not going anywhere.” Poe giggled, but slowly started moving. He placed his head in the curve of Ranpo’s neck, using one of his hands to hold Ranpo’s waist and the other to squeeze the skin of Ranpo’s thigh.

Gradually, the moves started to increase as Ranpo got used to the pain. Poe finally allowed him to moan loudly, so both of their moans were echoing around the room as the loud song outside the room was used as a soundtrack for their sex. As Poe fucked him, hurriedly and deeply, he leaned over for a dirty and messy kiss, full of tongues and saliva, moaning in each other’s mouths as their sweaty bodies moved together, sweat dropping on the table beneath them and making it harder to stay in the same place.

This is not how Ranpo expected the night to end, but he was happy it ended up this way.

Poe brought one of his hands to touch Ranpo’s neglected dick, starting to stroke him in the same rhythm he was fucking him, fast and hurriedly, moaning next to his ear and driving him crazy. Ranpo’s breath started to get heavier as his orgasm approached, fingers dropping the table beneath him to hold Poe’s head and pull his hair.

“I’m coming, Poe, Edgar, I’m coming.” Ranpo stammered, eyes closed and mouth opened, moaning deeply as Poe increased the penetration and the strokes.

“Put your venom in me, baby.” Poe whispered with a hoarse moan, his own moves starting to get deregulated.

Ranpo arched his back on the table, moaning loudly as the intense orgasm finally hit him, eyes rolling in pure pleasure. Poe came right away with the same loud moan, biting Ranpo’s neck as his own orgasm hit him, making him see stars.

“Fuck.” Poe said once the orgasm was over, breathing with difficult, his sweaty hair dripping on the table beneath them and next to Ranpo’s messy hair.

“Where did you learn all that?” Ranpo said, breathless, facing the white ceiling above them. His arms were pending in the air next to the table and his legs were still around Poe’s waist, keeping him close.

Poe raised his head to look at him, and Ranpo had to bit up another groan; his hair was falling over his face, dripping sweat, and his makeup was smudged under his eyes. Damn, if this is what Poe looked like after sex every time, they really needed to fuck more times.

“Like I said,” Poe smirked, looking at Ranpo in a naughty way, “there’s a lot of things you don’t know about me.”
Ranpo smirked back, “mind to tell me, then?”

“I can show you everything.” Poe replied, then slid out of Ranpo and left the table. His knees faltered and he almost fell, but managed to stay still and walk to the trashcan to throw away the used condom. He then turned on his heels to face Ranpo, still laying down on the table, “I need to go back to work, my shift isn’t over yet.”

“Can I join you?” Ranpo asked, raising his head to face Poe. His hair was also dripping sweat, glued to his forehead, messy and tangled.

Poe smiled, putting his underwear and pants back on, “sure, I can show you some things. Actually, I want to show you something.”

Ranpo smiled back in a dirty way and quickly left the table, limping for the pain in his ass and going to his clothes. After they both cleaned up the mess they made, dressed up and Poe fixed his hair and makeup, they returned to the club, where Poe immediately sat Ranpo down on a red couch in front of a small circled stage with a pole in the middle and went to talk to one of the club’s manager. They talked for a bit and then the manager nodded, making Poe smile and return to where Ranpo was waiting for him.

“Okay, here’s my rules,” he said, pointing at the pole, “I can touch you, but you can’t touch me. If I kiss you, you can kiss me back but without touching, okay? Unless I touch you first and let you touch me.”

“Fuck, okay.” Ranpo quickly nodded, starting to move anxiously on the couch, his dick already starting to respond to the authoritarian tone of Poe’s voice. Poe smiled at him and gestured to the manager, who nodded at him and went talking to the DJ.

“Is this thing on?” The manager asked, tapping the microphone and smiling openly, “alright everyone, everyone come closer for today is our lucky day! Our beautiful Black Cat is doing a dance today!”

Everyone cheered, starting to approach the pole Poe was gonna dance and stopping around it to watch him as he got ready for his dance. He put on black high heels and stood, walking around himself a few times to get used to his new height and then blinked at Ranpo, climbing the small stairs to the stage and his pole.

The club’s lights narrowed a little bit and a new one flashed above Poe, all the spotlights now focused on him, and then a new light flashed.

Above Ranpo.

Oh, God.

The song started, and Ranpo instantly held his breath when Poe started to walk around the pole like a fucking model, parading with his black high heels like he was born for this, not even a single sign of shyness on his face as his beautiful grey eyes seemed to stare right into Ranpo’s soul, looking at all his sins and judging him for every single one of them.

Poe started with a simple back slide, but it was enough to make Ranpo’s dick hard for the next ten thousand years. Especially when Poe was doing this while looking deeply inside Ranpo’s eyes, with a focused and sexy expression that made Ranpo crazy, his whole attention focused on Ranpo even though there were dozens of other people on the club. He was so glad he followed Poe here today, oh God, he was so glad.
Poe turned around the pole again, then did pirouette followed by a fan kick, climbing over the pole like it was nothing, returning to the floor with an inside leg hang. He slid over the stage and arched his back in the floor, always looking at Ranpo, dancing for him and only for him. Returning to the pole just in time for the chorus of the song start, he jumped for another fan kick immediately followed by an outside leg hang that made Ranpo breathless, widening his eyes, fascinated by the way Poe did the moves like they were the easiest things in the world.

He held his breath when Poe did another pirouette and a shoulder mount twist before returning to the floor and slid again through the stage, looking at him with those naughty grey eyes, “fuck, oh fuck.” Ranpo stammered, starting to break out in a cold sweat, not being able to take his eyes away from Poe when the man started to approach him with determined steps, knowing he was gonna be part of the show.

Poe smirked in a dirty way at him, climbing above his lap without touching him, “relax,” he whispered against Ranpo’s ear, biting his lobe before licking his face and hold the backrest of the couch over Ranpo’s head, moving his hips back and forth in a provocative way. Ranpo looked at him with misty eyes by lust before looking at his hips, hands trembling on the sides of his body, desperate to touch him. Poe smiled, let his hips touch Ranpo’s lap for only a second and walked away, starting to move in the rhythm of the song in front of him; he threw his hair to the side and looked at Ranpo from over his shoulders, eyes narrowed and mouth half-opened as he spread his legs and leaned his body over to touch his toes, using the high heels as his favor, his ass facing Ranpo.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck.” Ranpo stammered again, heart beating so fast he was afraid he was gonna pass out right there, especially when Poe returned to his lap and sat down with his back to him, leaning his body back and sensually moving his hips back and forth, resting his head on Ranpo’s shoulder with a sensual expression on his face, bringing his hands to grab Ranpo’s own hands and slide over his naked chest, over his abs and then over his thighs covered by the skinny leather pants.

Ranpo’s never been so hard in his entire life.

When the song was next to end, Poe turned around on Ranpo’s lap and grabbed his face, squeezing his jaw to force him to open his mouth and slid his tongue out, making Ranpo instantly mirror the action and bring his own tongue to outside his mouth to meet Poe’s, kissing him in the dirtiest way he’s ever seen. The kiss lasted until the song was over, the lights returning to its normal and the people around then clapping and cheering excitedly, throwing some bills at them. Poe smiled and pecked him on the lips one more time before leaving his lap and standing in front of the rest of the people, thanking them with a bow.

The people started to disperse, and then Poe turned to look at Ranpo, still sitting on the couch, with a huge boner and breathing heavily.

“This is the craziest night of my life,” he managed to mutter over his breath, making Poe giggle.

“My shift is over, but the night isn’t,” Poe said, then raised an eyebrow, “do you wanna go home?”

Ranpo was standing in a second, like he was never breathless in the first place, grabbing Poe’s wrist and quickly pulling him among the people. Poe chuckled again, but let the man lead them back to the locker room so Poe could change to his normal clothes before going back home.

That was, indeed, the craziest night of Ranpo’s life and it was not even close to end.

-x-x-x-
The next Monday, when they arrived the Agency together but quickly split to start their respective works, Dazai quickly ran to him with a really excited expression followed by Yosano and Atsushi.

“So?” He asked in a low voice, looking around to see if Poe wasn’t listening to them, “did you find out what he does?”

“Oh yeah, totally,” Ranpo giggled, scratching the back of his neck covered by hickeys, “where’s the bet money?”

Yosano walked back to her desk and opened a drawer, picking up the money from there and handing it to Ranpo. He picked up the money and counted it, smiling at the quantity; Poe would totally kill him when he found out that Ranpo told the others about his secret work, but how could he hide something like that from his closest friends?

Ranpo counted the money again, smiled and pushed it against Dazai’s chest, walking away from him without saying anything else. For a moment, no one said anything in pure shock, trying to process the new information, but then Dazai opened the biggest of the smiles when he finally understood what it meant and said:

“He’s walking around the city dressed up as Batman punching criminals!”

Ranpo just laughed deeply and sat down behind his desk as Yosano snorted and Atsushi turned bright red, glancing at where Poe was staring at him from the other side of the office with a mischievous expression on his face. He blinked at him and looked away, starting to leaf through the paperwork above his desk, biting up a smile to their little secret that was really close to be exposed.

Dazai, on the other hand, only understood why Ranpo gave him the money of the bet two hours later, with a loud gasp and screaming “no way!” in the middle of the Agency.

Chapter End Notes

I legally cannot write smut I don't even know why I still try it please press F

PLEASE!!!!!!!! Comment your thoughts about the story <3

(P.S: Just in case anyone wants to know what the fuck was Poe doing during the pole dance scene, I took the references for the moves from this website so you can take a look to try to imagine what he was doing if you want)
Jet Pack Blues - Soukoku

Chapter Summary

Chuuya would never admit it, but he was starting to get tired of waiting outside their door for someone who would probably never come back.

Chapter Notes

my brain: fifteen is being animated! write something happy for skk!

me, going full angst: what? i can't hear you

This is the last skk oneshot here :((( but they will still appear in future ones (in the next one, who's a sskk one, for example, they're the side pair) so stay tuned! I aged them up a little bit here because I thought it was weird for two 18yo share a house so????? They're 24 here and Dazai left the mafia when he was 20, the rest is the same.

(TAGS: Canon Compliant, angst, character study, no happy ending I'm sO SORRY)

[word count: 8.431]

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Four years ago, Dazai left their house in the middle of the night saying he would go for a mission.

At first, Chuuya hasn’t seen a problem in that, although it was pretty weird that Mori decided to send Dazai alone in a mission when they usually did all the missions together. He just quickly kissed Dazai goodbye and then returned to his sleep. They worked at the Port Mafia, after all; at this point, they were already used to be sent on sudden missions at improbable times.

But this, Chuuya figured some time later, wasn’t a common mission.

He started to think something was wrong right in the day after the night Dazai left, when he woke up alone on their too big bed and found Dazai’s long black coat carefully folded on the chair next to the writing desk, with a small ripped paper resting above the coat with ‘I love you’ written on it in Dazai’s messy handwritten.

The note itself was pretty suspicious, since Dazai wasn’t one to share his emotions like that, but leaving the coat behind, when he was so used to wear the goddamn coat everywhere Chuuya was starting to think the cloth was glued to his shoulders?

He ended up just shrugging, putting the note inside his pocket and leaving the room behind to start his own day. When Dazai returned from his mission, he would ask him about it.

The thing is, Dazai never returned.

That day, at work, he was informed that Oda Sakunosuke, a mafia executive and Dazai’s best friend,
was dead. He was killed in a confrontation with an ability user called ‘Gide’ that also had the power to see the future, what ended up causing the death of both of them. Chuuya was horrified, suddenly understanding why Dazai seemed so devasted and particularly sad last night, desperately wanting to hug him tightly and tell him everything was gonna be okay with time.

Later that night, wearing Dazai’s long black coat, Chuuya went to their front door to wait for him to come back from his said mission, holding firmly the umbrella between his fingers and ignoring the torrential rain and cold wind hitting his body like a thousand knives. He just sat down at the stairs’ steps in silence and waited for his lover.

And waited. And waited.

He waited for at least five hours when he decided that Dazai wasn’t returning that night.

It wasn’t that weird, actually. Even though Chuuya was desperate to see his boyfriend and tell him everything was gonna be okay, some of the missions they did at the mafia sometimes went on for days, weeks, even months, so he should’ve known Dazai wasn’t returning on the same night he left, but he still expected to see his beautiful face before going to sleep.

Chuuya didn’t sleep very well that night, jolting up awake every time he heard a small noise outside their house, hoping to see Dazai entering the house with bloody clothes and new wounds around his body, which Chuuya would willing take care of. He would clean up the wounds, stitch the cuts and wrap back Dazai’s body with new bandages, then would make him a soup and spend the rest of the night cuddling with him on their bed, running his fingers over his hair and letting him cry in silence, singing softly next to his ear to let him know he was there for him at any time he wanted. He would always be there for Dazai, Chuuya would always be there for his partner and lover.

But, apparently, Dazai had other plans.

The next day, after a busy day at work and a few people messing with the mafia to be dealt with, Chuuya put Dazai’s long black coat back on and returned to the same place he was yesterday, at the steps in front of their door, waiting for Dazai to come back from his mission. It wasn’t raining that day, but it was still cold enough to make him shrank into the coat, momentarily closing his eyes to inhale his lover’s familiar smell of whisky and sweat stuck in the cloth.

Dazai’s smell always made Chuuya feel like home, even though other people would think the mix between whisky and sweat wasn’t a good combination, Chuuya would always think that was the best combination in the whole world. The whisky reminded him of the nights back when they were both young and stupid and drank together hidden from Kouyou, Hirotsu and Mori in a random room at the mafia’s facility, talking to each other about their respective days and sharing secrets that would easily be forgotten in the next day due to the hungover, but still were very important to them because it showed how much they trusted each other. The sweat, on the other hand, reminded Chuuya of the tough nights, where he used Corruption and felt like his body was about to combust with pain as the god living inside him took control of all his actions, eating and killing him from inside, making him so angry all he could see was red and all he could think about was destruction and annihilation, until Dazai softly brought him back and saved him with a gently touch that took all of Chuuya’s pain away, giving back his control, taking him away from the darkness, making him feel human again.

Funny how Dazai’s ability was called ‘no longer human’, yet he was the person that brought back Chuuya’s humanity.

The first time Chuuya used Corruption was terrifying. They were fighting with some guys and, even though Chuuya’s and Dazai’s fight skills were impeccable, the guys were managing to kick their asses to the point he was almost starting to accept they wouldn’t make it out alive. That’s it, Chuuya
thought for a terrifying second, we’re gonna die. Oh, grantors of dark disgrace, do not wake me again.

For a moment, nothing happened. And then, the whole world exploded in red.

He doesn’t record exactly what happened, his mind was too blurry at this point, but he could surely remember the pain he felt. How he felt like someone was pulling out every single one of his bones, slowly stretching them, how he felt like his organs were on fire, how he felt like he was being stabbed by serrated blades a thousand times per second, how he felt he was being murdered from inside to outside. It felt cold, dark, lonely, like he was floating alone on the space with his eyes blind so he couldn’t see where the atmosphere was taking him. He saw the blood and heard the screams of pure terror of the guys he was slaughtering, but he couldn’t see their faces or know exactly what they were saying; his mind was totally filled with rage, to the point he couldn’t control his body. He was so angry, so angry.

Chuuya heard a maniac laugh from distance, not entirely sure from where the laugh was coming, but deep down knowing it was coming from him. He could feel his own blood spouting out of his body in multiple places, his skin being ripped apart, blood running faster in his veins as his brain started to work slower, blurring his vision even more, scaring him even more. He unconsciously raised his arms and laughed maniacally again, a huge red and black circle that reminded him a lot of blackholes suddenly appearing on his hands, ready to take down the building in front of him.

And then, the calm after the storm.

It was the soft touch in the back of his neck that brought him back. For a moment, nothing seemed to change, he kept hearing his blood running wild on his eardrums and feeling the skin being ripped apart, but then his sense slowly returned to his mind and he finally managed to recover the control of his body, the world that seemed so red turning into a beautiful tone of blue.

His legs faltered in exhaustion and he fell down, being catch in the air by Dazai and raising his face to meet his beautiful eyes, “you’re okay now, partner. I got you.”

The night Chuuya firstly used Corruption was also the night he and Dazai shared their first kiss.

He wasn’t shocked this ended up happening, he actually knew this would happen sooner or later. After using Corruption, Chuuya was so scared he would end up accidentally leaking it again he simply couldn’t stay away from Dazai, touching him, making sure he got skin contact to keep him from unintentionally freeing the monster living inside him.

Dazai didn’t say anything about the way Chuuya suddenly became touch starved, but he willingly let the boy intertwine their fingers together as he took them back to the Port Mafia facility to take care of their wounds. Usually, Chuuya would take care of the wounds of both of them so they didn’t have to go to Mori, but Chuuya seemed so tired and bad Dazai simply couldn’t keep him from real doctor’s cares.

After Chuuya was taken care of, Dazai took him back to the small room they shared at the facility.

“Don’t leave,” is what Chuuya said when Dazai tried to walk away from him, with a tearful voice and curled up in himself, desperately holding his arm, “please. Please, don’t leave.”

How could Dazai say no when Chuuya looked so broken and desperate like that?

He didn’t say anything while he took off his coat and dropped it on the closest chair, taking off his shoes and laying down in front of Chuuya under the blankets, facing his face. Chuuya immediately
made sure he was touching some part of Dazai’s body, firmly holding his hand. He was shaking.

“You’re okay, Chuuya.” Dazai whispered in the dark room, barely being able to see the way Chuuya was looking at him, using the blankets as a fort to keep them safe, “you’re safe.”

Chuuya sniffed, “this is stupid,” he giggled, moving closer to him and resting his forehead in Dazai’s chest, “I’m just... I was scared. I’m sorry, I look like a baby now.”

Dazai pulled him closer and softly kissed the top of his head, burying his face in the beautiful mess of orange hair and closing his eyes, “it’s okay, I was scared too.”

“You were?”

“I thought we were gonna die,” Dazai admitted, tracing invisible patterns in Chuuya’s back with his fingers, “I thought- I thought you were gonna die. The way you suddenly started turning those people to dust, the way there was blood everywhere. God, Chuuya, I was so scared.”

“I didn’t want– I don’t know what happened,” Chuuya stammered, “I just thought we were gonna die and then... That happened. And I don’t know what happened,” his voice kept getting more and more tearful each word until he was fully sobbing, squeezing Dazai’s shirt between his fingers and pulling him closer, his skin scratching where it wasn’t touching Dazai, “it hurted so much, Dazai, so much. I didn’t like the pain, I don’t like feeling pain, I don’t like this thing living inside me. I’m scared, I’m so scared.”

“It’s okay, you’re okay now. You’re safe, we’re safe.” Dazai murmured on his hair, running his hands through Chuuya’s back, trying to make him feel safer knowing he was being touched.

Chuuya didn’t reply, he just kept sobbing and trembling when the scratching under his skin started to get too uncomfortable and agonizing, desperate for more contact, holding Dazai closer and crying on his chest. He started running his own hands through Dazai’s body, very close to an anxiety attack, touching every skin spot he could find until he finally reached his face, touching his cheeks and running his fingers through his hair and touching their foreheads together.

“You’re safe, Chuuya. Please, listen to me.” Dazai asked, holding Chuuya’s face and making him look at him, “shhh, you’re safe, I got you, shhh, I got you.”

Chuuya blindly groped Dazai’s face, feeling how he was also crying, and smashed their lips together without any other word.

At first, Dazai was too shocked to do anything and just gasped in surprise, but slowly started to reciprocate the kiss. It was terrible and messy by the lack of experience by both parts, wet, salty because of the tears, desperate, like each other’s lips were the air and they were desperate to breathe, full of teeth and hands running through the others bodies and then stopping at their hair where they enlaced the fingers between the strands.

The kiss didn’t last long, but was more than enough to finally calm Chuuya down and clean up his mind from the terrible day they had, every single one of his thoughts disappearing from his mind until the only thing he could ever think about was Dazai.

Dazai, Dazai, Dazai. It was always Dazai. Dazai anchored him, Dazai made him feel human, Dazai saved his life.

He was glad he had Dazai in his life.

Still, waiting for Dazai to come back to their home was starting to make him anxious, even though
he’s left for only two days.

Chuuya waited for a few more hours in front of their house until he sighed and gave up, returning to the comfort of their home and closing the door behind him, leaving it unlock as he headed to the kitchen to have dinner just in case Dazai returned home in the middle of the night. He sat down on the balcony as he ate his soba and drank wine in silence, their house seeming too big for his taste without Dazai there to mess everything up and get Chuuya on his nerves, leaving his bloody clothes and used bandages everywhere.

It’s been only two days, but he was already missing the bandages everywhere.

“Come home,” he whispered to the empty house, eyes starting to get wet with not spilled tears as the pain inside his chest increased, “baby, come home.”

-x-x-x-

Four years ago, Dazai left their house in the middle of the night saying he would go for a mission. Sometimes, Chuuya wondered if he ever did something wrong to deserve this. Of course, he was part of the Port Mafia and has been killing people for as long as he could remember, but still, he wondered if he ever did something to Dazai to make him run away from him like that. What is something he said? Was it something he did?

Why did Dazai throw all their history in the trash like it was nothing?

Sometimes, he wondered if Dazai ever loved him. If he ever wanted to be alone.

Every day, he would walk to the exact same spot outside their house to wait for Dazai to come back from his mission. Every day. It didn’t matter if was raining, cold, hot or the world was literally falling outside, every single day he would walk to the stairs wearing his lover’s long black coat and wait for him for at least five hours until he decided he wasn’t returning that day, then he would go back inside and cry for the rest of the night while looking at their old photographs and memories they made together along the years.

Dazai was never a person to show his emotions, Chuuya knew. He used to say emotions made people weak, because they gave other people a way to hurt them when they needed something in return. Chuuya, of course, always thought that was bullshit, even though Chuuya himself used to hide some of his emotions sometimes, he thought emotions were what made us human. His feelings for Dazai were what made him human.

Dazai Osamu was a fascinating person that could surprise even Chuuya sometimes, who was already used to him and his peculiar personality. He was a closed person and caused fear from those who didn’t know him—and even for those who did know him—, he was known to be the youngest mafia executive and for the extensive murder list he had, no one wanted to mess with him, but Chuuya? Chuuya knew each one of his secrets, he knew his tastes and hobbies, the things he liked and the things he disliked and his odd manias, like the way he ate his vegetables first because he knew that, if he left the vegetables to eat after he ate the whole meat, he wouldn’t eat them at all. Or how it didn’t matter if they were at a risky mission, if Dazai saw a cat, he would immediately throw everything up just to pet the cat and do that baby voice as he talked to it and practically beg Chuuya to bring the cat home.

“We barely can take care of ourselves, mackerel, how do you think we can take care of a cat?” Is what Chuuya always said when Dazai looked at him with those big pleading eyes, sitting down on the floor with a stray cat on his arms, pouting.
This is, also, how they managed to get five cats during their time together at the Port Mafia. Mr. Whiskers, Al Catone, Kitty Cat, Mr. Meow and Rashomon, because for some reason the tiny black cat with big yellow eyes got along really well with Akutagawa. It was kinda annoying sometimes, because Chuuya had to take Rashomon from Akutagawa’s coat multiple times because the boy kept trying to steal their cat.

When Dazai left, though, he decided to give the cat to Akutagawa because he couldn’t take care of that many cats all by himself.

Mr. Whiskers was his faithful squire. When Chuuya was sad or just feeling down after a tough mission, the white and orange cat would follow him anywhere and stay by his side until he fell asleep, then he would lay down on his pillow and watch his sleep like a real guardian angel. It was Mr. Whiskers that stayed by Chuuya’s side during the whole week after Dazai left, meowing, rubbing against Chuuya’s leg, looking at him with those big green eyes like he knew what his owner was feeling and wanted to help, like he was telling Chuuya with his eyes that he was there for him and would never leave like Dazai did.

“You're the only one I can really trust, aren’t you, Mr. Whiskers?” Chuuya would ask the cat, petting his head, smiling softly by the way the cat would meow back at him like he was actually understanding what Chuuya was talking about, laying down on Chuuya’s lap and purring loudly and happily.

It’s not like Chuuya didn’t trust Dazai, no. He trusted the stupid waste of bandages with his own life, even though he knew he could end up dead because of his blind trust on the taller man, he knew Dazai would never let him die, he knew he would always save him. This is what partners do, isn’t it? Save each other, trust each other?

Then why didn’t Dazai trust Chuuya enough to be honest with him about his fake mission and tell him he would never come back?

Why did their history have to end like that?

But, honestly, it didn’t matter Dazai suddenly left like that. Every day, after work, Chuuya would wait for him outside their house wearing his long black coat, saying ‘baby, come home’ in a melody of tears.

Chuuya never cried so much in his entire life like he did when he finally started to accept Dazai wasn’t coming back, around the second week after he left.

He was laying down on their too big and alone bed, facing the white ceiling above him, listening to the city finally going silent for the night outside their house as the ringing in his ears got violent with his loud thoughts. All of their cats were sleeping on the bed with him, making him feel a little less lonely than he was, the rain pouring violently outside as a soundtrack for his breakdown.

“Baby, come home,” he cried in the dark room being occasionally lighten up by lightings, protectively curled up in himself, “baby, come home.”

Sometimes, when he was missing him too much, Chuuya would go to his favorite bar to take a drink.

Usually, Hirotsu told Kajii or Kouyou to accompany him and keep him from doing something he would later regret, but they ended up being really nice drink buddies. Especially Kajii, who knew who to make new exotic drinks and always used Chuuya to try them and see if the mix he made was good. Chuuya would willingly try each one of Kajii’s new and special drinks, picking up his
favorites and helping him with tips for future drinks he would end up creating. Being friends with a scientist could be really fun sometimes.

When the alcohol finally reached his brain, though, wasn’t really nice. Instead of forgetting, Chuuya remembered. He remembered each one the good times, the tough days, the long nights, the passionate kisses and the intimate touches they shared when they were alone inside their room, with only their cats being witnesses of their young and toxic love.

“Are you ready yet, mackerel?” Chuuya would say impatiently outside the bathroom as he waited for Dazai to be ready for the party or something like that Mori was hosting downstairs.

“My, my, slug, life’s too long to feel such a hurry;” Dazai said from inside the bathroom, opening the door with a smug smile, “life’s too long and you’re too short.”

“Son of a– I’m not that small! I’m still growing!” Chuuya angrily replied, ready to throw hands with Dazai, but Dazai wasn’t impressed. He was used to Chuuya’s sudden attacks of anger.

He just grabbed his tiny hands when the redhead tried to hit his chest and pulled him closer, hugging him and resting his chin above Chuuya’s head as Chuuya started to escape from his arms.

“We don’t have to go,” Dazai murmured, still holding Chuuya on his arms even though the boy was fighting with him, “we could flight off the light tonight and just stay here, split a drink, cuddle and watch horror movies.”

Chuuya fought for his liberty for a few more seconds until he gave up and sighed, knowing Dazai wouldn’t let him go. He slowly hugged back the taller man and closed his eyes, “Boss is hosting a party, everyone’s there.”

“But we’re not like the others, are we?” Dazai asked back, kissing the top of Chuuya’s head and burying his face in the beautiful mess of orange strands, “do you wanna go?”

“Not really, no.” Chuuya replied, enjoying his partner’s smell of whisky and sweat. He was never a big fan of parties, especially the ones involving the whole mafia and other kind of bad people; he just preferred when the parties were small, particular, where he could drink with Kajii and Kouyou while keeping a look at Dazai with Oda and Ango, flirting with him by distance.

“Let’s stay here tonight, then.” Dazai said, then started to led them to their bed. Chuuya willingly let Dazai lay him down on the comfortable mattress before joining him, laying in front of him and smiling softly at him, bringing one of his hands to take the strand of orange hair away from Chuuya’s eyes and put it behind his ear, “have I ever told you how beautiful you are?”

Chuuya bit his lip to hold up the smile, blushing, “maybe, but I can’t remember for sure right now. I think you’ll have to remind me.”

Dazai smiled again, then leaned forward and softly touched their lips together in a long but delicate kiss, “you’re beautiful, my love. Beautiful, like an ethereal flower found only in the most sacred ground of the highest mountain. Ephemeral, majestic, stunning, breathtaking,” for each word, Dazai gave Chuuya a delicate peck on the lips, “you’re the most gorgeous thing I’ve ever put my eyes on. You’re so, so beautiful.”

“More beautiful than Kitty Cat?” Chuuya said with a crooked smile, raising an eyebrow. It was actually a rhetorical question just to mess with him, because he knew Dazai was completely in love with their fluffy white cat.

“Ah, shit. This is low blow; do you want me to lie?”
Chuuya giggled, then pulled Dazai’s face closer and touched their lips together, kissing him slowly and passionately, smiling between the kiss when he felt Dazai himself smiling. The long and soft nights were good, obviously, but the tough nights were also important to their relationship, because it showed how much they loved each other even though the four-letter word was never said out loud.

The worst nights, Chuuya thought, were the nights where Dazai’s depression and self-hate were so strong he couldn’t stop crying. Those nights were the nights where he couldn’t take his eyes away from Dazai, because he knew he would try to kill himself if he was left alone, and Chuuya simply could not lose him.

Chuuya hated those days. Like, really hated. Dazai usually made him so worried he simply couldn’t sleep or eat and actually got sick for worrying so much, but he never let Dazai know he also felt bad when Dazai himself was feeling down. He needed to be there for his partner, he needed to be there for his lover.

During the tough nights, Chuuya would dismiss every single one of his schedules just to spend the whole day with Dazai. He didn’t care Mori would go for his neck the next day, his partner’s health was way more important than his job at the mafia. He could find another job if Mori ever kicked him out of the mafia, but Dazai? He could never find another Dazai if he ever succeeded in one of his suicide attempts.

“How are you feeling, mackerel?” He would carefully ask when he noticed Dazai was acting off, facing high places more than usual, looking excessively at the knives Chuuya carried with him in their missions, tapping his fingers in his gun.

“Sad.” It’s all that Dazai would reply, walking forward and not checking if Chuuya was following him. This is how Chuuya knew he was having one of the tough days; Dazai tended to be passive aggressive when his depression hit him.

Luckily, Chuuya knew how to deal with him when no one else could.

When he noticed Dazai was having one of the tough days, Chuuya would throw everything up and take him back to the mafia facility. It didn’t matter if they were in the middle of a mission, it didn’t matter Mori would rebuke him for leaving a mission like that. He would take Dazai back to the mafia facility and then take a long bath with him, wash his hair and change his bandages for new ones, cook him his favorite food and then bring him to the game room the mafia facility had, so he could interact with other people and distract his mind from his sick and destructive thoughts. Chuuya would call Oda and bring him there to talk to Dazai, knowing he would feel safer if his best friend was there with him, and then he would silently stay next to him the whole time to show him he would always be there for him.

If none of these things helped, though, Chuuya still had an ace upon one’s sleeve.

He would wait to see if anyone could make Dazai smile or distract him from the destructive thoughts and, if no one could, Chuuya would simply stand and walk away from him, knowing Dazai would follow him with his eyes.

Chuuya then would stop by the door, bent his legs in a ridiculous way, turn around and point at Dazai and say with a stupid high-pitched voice, “there will be no second chance.”

It didn’t matter if he lost a little bit more of his dignity each time he did it, the satisfaction and happiness of seeing Dazai deeply laughing didn’t have a price.
Four years ago, Dazai left their house in the middle of the night saying he would go for a mission.

Every day, since the day Dazai left, Chuuya would walk to the exact same spot in front of their house and patiently wait for him. The long black coat Dazai left behind was now Chuuya’s favorite cloth, beginning to tear apart in certain parts by the excessive use, the color starting to fade and the black turning into a dark tone of grey, painfully reminding Chuuya that Dazai left a long time ago and would probably never come back.

“Please, come back.” Chuuya would whisper in the cold night, tears streaming down his face. “Baby, please, come back. Come home.”

The days passed, the weeks passed, the months ran, and with a blink of an eye a year passed. A whole year passed, and Dazai still hasn’t come back from his mission.

Chuuya went to visit Oda’s grave when his death completed one year, even though he was never really close to the man. Maybe, deep down, he was expecting to found Dazai there, sitting in front of the grave and waiting for Chuuya to finally find him, then he would smile and hug him tightly, apologizing for leaving for so long.

Instead, the only thing he found at Oda’s grave were weeds and dirty.

He sighed, not really knowing what he expected to find there, but removed the weeds and the dirty from the grave and sat down with his back to the stone, holding the umbrella above his head to protect himself from the cold rain.

“Uh, hello,” he awkwardly said, feeling oddly because he was talking alone, resting against the stone, “I know we weren’t that close when you were, you know, still breathing, but I thought I should make you a visit today.”

Chuuya was always kind of jealous of Oda, even though he knew he didn’t need to. Of course, Dazai deeply loved Oda and Chuuya was aware of it, he couldn’t deny it, even though he knew Dazai’s love for Oda was different from the love Dazai felt for him. But, honestly, how couldn’t Chuuya be jealous of Oda when Dazai looked at him like he put the goddamn stars in the sky?

“Odasaku is my best friend, yes.” Is what Dazai would always say when he noticed Chuuya was jealous of him, giggling and gently touching Chuuya’s cheek to make him look at him. Dazai then would kiss Chuuya softly on the lips for a long time, slowly tracing Chuuya’s cheeks with his fingers before breaking the kiss and smile, “he’s my best friend, but you’re my soulmate.”

Certain memories hurted more than others.

“You know, sometimes I wonder if you knew Dazai would run away.” Chuuya giggled, leaning his head towards the grey sky, “I wonder if he ever told you what he was gonna do that night. It’s been a year, you know? It’s been a year since you died, it’s been a year since he ran away and left me alone.” a thunder sounded in distance, the cemetery shone briefly with the lightning. Chuuya went silent for a few minutes, then sighed, “I miss him so much, Oda.”

Why did Dazai have to run away and leave him behind?

There was a time during the first year that Chuuya really tried to hate Dazai. Passionately. He thought it would be easier this way; Dazai left him alone, he ran away, he threw everything they had and built along the years in the trash, how couldn’t he hate him? He tried so much to do it, with all
his forces and capacity, daily remembering all the bad stuff he did to him and the thing he didn’t do, purposely rubbing salt into his wound, but nothing was enough to make him hate him. Not when the love he felt for Dazai was stronger than the feeling of being left behind.

Chuuya was so, so stupid. Yet, so loyal to Dazai.

If Dazai suddenly returned, Chuuya would probably forgive him for everything he’s done. Punch him multiple times and work off his anger on him, of course, but forgive him.

“You know,” Chuuya said again, giggling at his own thoughts, “I was always kind of jealous of you. Dazai always spent a lot of time with you and always seemed to happy when you were around, I wish you were always around just to see him smile. You were so good for him, I’m so glad you were his friend,” a pause, Chuuya faced the grey sky above him again. He smiled sadly, “thank you for being his friend, Oda.”

A soft wind crossed his face, warm in the cold weather, and Chuuya immediately knew it was Oda answering him. He smiled and leaned his face towards the sky once again, enjoying the warm feeling inside his chest, a single tear streaming down his face being instantly whipped away by his hair whooshing with the wind.

The rain and the wind started to increase, letting Chuuya know it was time for him to leave. He stood up and hit the dirty away from Dazai’s long black coat, turning around to face the grave in front of him.

“I’m sorry things had to end like that for you, Oda,” he said, touching the stone, “but you’re in a better place now, you’re Dazai’s guardian angel now. Please, take care of that bastard.”

Another warm wind crossed his face, making him smile again. He whipped the tears away from his face and sniffed, “I need to go now, but I promise I will come back later,” a pause, he looked at the sky, “uh, I don’t know what else to say?” he giggled, “see you later, I guess. Goodbye.” and with that he left, leaving Oda’s grave and all his hidden feelings behind.

After visiting Oda’s grave, Chuuya went straight to the closest bar he could find. There were too many feelings gathered, suffocating him, too many tears not spilled, he needed to drink to distract himself from the pain.

It didn’t matter if he was in the other side of the city, it didn’t matter if he already had a destiny on his mind, his legs would always take him to Dazai’s favorite bar.

The Lupin Bar was very cozy yet very painful for him, because it reminded him of Dazai. Not because it was his favorite bar, but because of the memories they made together there. The nights they danced together ignoring all the weird glares everyone was shooting at them, when they first split a drink, when they kissed in public for the first time, their first real fight.

When Dazai asked him to be his boyfriend.

Chuuya used to think the Lupin Bar was Dazai and Oda’s place and only theirs –and Ango’s–, but with the time he started to realize it was actually Dazai’s bar. The bar he went with his best friend and the bar he went with his lover, his safe place, the place that made him feel safer and less sad, like the pub’s door were a portal that took him to a whole different world. A world that couldn’t hurt him like the real world could.

Sometimes, when he was missing Dazai too much, he would go to the bar and just sit down at the stool Dazai used to sit, ask for a drink and then just hum the songs that played at the bar as the other
people around him had fun and he remembered the good old days. Not entirely good, but good enough.

Now and then, Hirotsu, Kouyou or Kajii would find him passed out at the counter and take him back to the mafia facility, help him with the clothes dirty with vomit and spilled alcohol, put him under the shower and then take care of him during the rest of the night. It wasn’t a nice view, seeing Chuuya like that, but there was nothing they could do.

On his worst days, Chuuya would drunk call Dazai’s old number just to hear his voice on the answer machine.

*Hello, this is Dazai Osamu~. If you’re hearing this it’s because I was too lazy to pick up the phone when I heard it ringing, so just leave a message and I’ll answer it. Maybe. Ah! Death by mushrooms? I must try it-*

“Hey,” Chuuya would say with a sad and groggy voice by the alcohol, tired, unconsciously playing with the bangs falling in front of his eyes like Dazai used to, “I just called to tell you I went visiting Odaakusu’s grave today. He’s a really good listener, we had a really nice chat; it was good to take all my feelings off my chest. They were starting to suffocate me, you know? Hiding my feelings were never my best feature, but now I don’t have a choice because you’re not here to listen to me anymore,” a pause, a long sigh, “why aren’t you here anymore, mackerel?”

*Why did you have to leave me, Dazai?*

Loving Dazai was blue. It was painful, sad, yet inexplicably beautiful; Dazai made June feels like September, he made the blue days look bright red, he made Chuuya feel like home. He was his anchor, he made him feel human.

“Sometimes I wonder if you left because you didn’t love me anymore but wasn’t brave enough to tell me,” Chuuya giggled, violently whipping away the tears already starting to run through his face, “actually, did you ever love me, Dazai? Why did you run away like a fucking coward? You couldn’t even be honest to me and tell me the truth! You couldn’t even break up with me in a proper way! You’re such a coward, Dazai, such a coward! Honestly, fuck you!”

At this point, all Chuuya could feel was anger. Anger for being left behind, anger for still loving Dazai after everything he did.

“I hate you! I hate you so much! I hate you! I hate you!” he screamed, sobbing, squeezing his phone so hard it was about to break between his fingers. He then would recover his conscience for only a moment, his eyes would clear with tears, and his voice would break in a soft whisper, “I love you. I love you, please, come home.”

*Why did love need to be so painful?*

-x-x-x-

Four years ago, Dazai left their house in the middle of the night saying he would go for a mission.

For two whole years, Chuuya didn’t have any news from Dazai. He didn’t know if he was dead, he didn’t know if he was alive, he didn’t know where he was or what he was doing. Yet, every single day, he would walk to the exact same spot outside their house to wait for him.

He would never admit it but, at this point, he was starting to think about the house as his house instead of theirs.
At this point, also, Dazai’s long black coat was so old Chuuya didn’t use the washing machine to wash it anymore. He was too afraid the thin cloth would rip apart and he wouldn’t be able to fix it again. Still, he would wear the coat every day as he waited for him to come back, desperately wanting for him to finally come back so he could finally rest. His hair was bigger now, falling over his left shoulder in a thin orange strand, next to the spot in his neck Dazai touched to nullify his ability for the first time almost five years ago.

After visiting Oda’s grave for the first time, it became more and more of a habit for Chuuya to go there visiting him and talk about his day. He started to see the stone as a diary, as a safe place for him to share all his thoughts and insecurities about his life when his feelings were starting to suffocate him, asking Oda for advices, befriending him even though the man was like... Dead. Oda was a good listener; he was a good friend and company, even though his body wasn’t there, Chuuya could feel his spirit with him. He never thought it was possible for someone to befriend someone after they’re dead, but apparently it was.

The first time he saw Dazai again after the day he left was a total coincidence. Chuuya was at a break from his work, sitting comfortably at a coffee shop, drinking a black coffee and reading the newspaper, and he had to scratch his eyes for an entire minute because he simply could not believe what his eyes were seeing; Dazai, alive and in flesh and bone, walking in the other side of the street like he used to do it every day.

It felt like a mirage, to be honest. Like his eyes were tricking him and making him see things. He even asked the closest person if they could see the man in a long sand-colored coat across the street just to see if he wasn’t imagining things. Just to see if his brain wasn’t tricking him.

And, damn it, it wasn’t.

It really was Dazai. Alive, healthy, resting against a wall across the street and seeming to be humming a song.

He couldn’t help it, Chuuya opened a big smile and quickly stood up, throwing a few bills at the table he was sitting to pay for his drink and heading for outside the coffee shop to talk to the man, already setting up a conversation inside his mind and thinking about what he was gonna say.

*I missed you, thank you for coming back, why did you run away like a fucking coward?*

Unfortunately, he never managed to cross the street.

He only noticed Dazai wasn’t alone when he stepped outside the coffee shop. Chuuya quickly returned to the coffee shop and hid behind a wall the moment he saw the tall blonde man leaving the building Dazai was resting against the wall and go straight at him, showing him something that looked like a file. He frowned, not recognizing the blonde man, but didn’t leave his hidden spot to ask Dazai about it.

Chuuya waited for Dazai and the blonde man to leave before leaving the coffee shop with a big smile on his lips, quickly returning to his job. If Dazai was back in town, that meant Dazai returned home. He came back, Dazai came back.

During the day, Chuuya couldn’t stop thinking about how Dazai would react when he returned home that night and saw Chuuya for the first time in two years –because Chuuya was sure Dazai didn’t see him back at the coffee shop–. Would he like his long hair? Would he apologize? Did he wanted to make it a surprise? Chuuya didn’t know, but he cleaned up their whole house and dressed up with his best clothes as he waited for Dazai to come back. He put his best wine at the fridge and cooked Dazai’s favorite food, giving their cats a shower and even putting small ties on them, just to
welcome him in the best way. Chuuya put Dazai’s long black coat on and went to the usual spot outside their house to wait for him, anxiously, smiling the whole time. Dazai was back, he was finally back.

Dazai, though, didn’t seem to notice it.

Chuuya waited for hours without losing the expectation, smiling openly every time a taxi parked next to their house expecting Dazai would leave the car with a huge smile, with flowers in his hands and saying ‘baby, I’m home’, but it never happened. For hours, Chuuya waited for Dazai to come home, but he never did.

He only noticed Dazai wasn’t coming back when the sun started to rise in the horizon, hitting Chuuya like a truck that he waited for the whole night and he didn’t return.

Uh, so Dazai noticed Chuuya at the coffee shop and didn’t return that night because he wanted it to be a surprise? Why didn’t he return?

His chest ached with the sadness and the too familiar thought of being left behind, but he returned to inside the house to change clothes and go to work anyways. Maybe Dazai would make him a surprise and already be there when he returned home that night after work, so they could compensate those two years they spent apart with kisses, cuddle and sex.

But, with the days passing by, Chuuya was starting to think Dazai forgot about him.

He saw Dazai a few more times after that day, always with the tall blonde man and sometimes with a woman with short hair and a man wearing an ugly beret. He looked good, he looked happy; even though Dazai didn’t see or talk to him, seeing his smile and laugh from distance was enough for now. It showed Chuuya that Dazai was doing fine, he was kicking the depression’s ass and surviving 100% of his bad days.

Still hurted seeing him so close yet so far away from him, though.

Chuuya started visiting Oda’s grave more after Dazai was back, part because he still expected to find his lover there waiting for him and part because seeing him brought back too many bad memories and anguish feelings and he needed to take them off his chest otherwise he would drown with his own thoughts.

Contrary to what Chuuya first thought, Dazai was aware he was around. They exchanged looks a few times when they occasionally met on the streets, but Dazai always seemed so terrified when they met that he quickly broke eye contact and ran away. Chuuya wanted to talk to him so bad, but neither of them seemed to be brave enough to come to the other and actually talk.

Actually, Chuuya did try to talk to Dazai. Multiple times. But, every time Dazai saw him coming to him, he ran away.

Dazai seemed to be too good at running away.

With the days passing by, Dazai seemed to start avoiding him. He stopped going to the places they accidentally met, he tried to run when he saw they were going to the same direction, trying to mislead Chuuya, hoping the redhead didn’t notice him there –he always noticed, though–, he started going out more with the tall blonde man to keep Chuuya from coming to him when they met because he knew Chuuya wouldn’t talk to him if he was accompanied.

It took him a while, but Chuuya finally started hating Dazai.
It was the way Dazai looked at him when they accidentally met on the streets, Chuuya decided. The way he looked terrified and tried to avoid him, run away from him like he was some sort of an animal, like they didn’t spend the last five years living together, like they weren’t each other’s partner and lover and like they weren’t the other’s first everything. First kiss, first time, first people they said the four-letter word to. Like they didn’t have a history together.

Seeing the love and loyalty he had for Dazai slowly turning into hate and anger hurted.

At first, he thought it was just his brain telling him he’s stupid and he should give up when Dazai turned away when they occasionally met, but seeing Dazai started being painful and triggering.

It started with the anger attacks, when the frustration started to get so strong he simply couldn’t keep it to himself. At work, he seemed more dangerous than never and people who already feared him started to fear him even more, to the point even Akutagawa started to avoid him. After the anger attacks, the irritation and the frustration hit him like a truck, then the sadness and the hostility and then, finally, the pure rage.

Seeing Dazai was painful at the same time it was annoying. He started wanting to punch his face every time they met and even only the mention of his name could make him angry. Everyone was confused at the start, knowing how deeply Chuuya loved Dazai, but they got used to it with time and ended up understanding what was happening.

Chuuya was going through the five stages of grief, even though Dazai was still alive.

Was really hard at first, letting him go. They went through a lot of things together; they’ve been each other’s anchor and stability for as long as Chuuya could remember, they made each other feel human, they supported and protected each other and he would always be grateful for it but, Chuuya ended up painfully learning, moving on would be the better for both of them, and Chuuya was willing to move on.

Some of the old habits, though, remained the same.

Every day, he would walk to the same spot outside his house to wait for Dazai, even though now he knew he wasn’t coming home anymore. He moved on, he was happy with his new life and Chuuya was happy for him, he was ready to move on as well. The long black coat still fit him really well, but he ended up stopping wearing it with time to preserve the memories; the good and the bad ones, because they were all equally important to their relationship and self-grown. Still, when he was missing him too much, Chuuya would pick up the long black coat from the bottom of his closet and wear it as he waited outside his house, looking at the stars above him, not exactly knowing what he was waiting for.

Finally letting go from Dazai and the past felt good and relieving, like a burden was taken off of his back, even though it was still painful and Chuuya would never admit it out loud. Deep down, don’t matter how much Chuuya tried, he could never forget their story or completely hate Dazai; he would always be grateful for him and everything they’ve been through, and part of him would always love him even if it was only a small and almost imperceptible part.

Part of him, Chuuya knew, would always want Dazai to come back.

Four years ago, Dazai left their house in the middle of the night saying he would go for a mission.

It’s been four years, and he still hasn’t come back.
Chapter End Notes

The next two ones are also angst and I'm not even sorry. Honestly, I don't expect anything from myself anymore since I killed Kunikida in the third one.

PLEASE PLEASE comment what you thought about the story! I'm really proud of it!
Novocaine - Shin Soukoku

Chapter Summary

What could happen in five seconds?

In five seconds, someone could be born, someone could die, someone could win the lottery if they were lucky enough, someone could lose everything they had if they were unlucky enough. Break ups, marriage, laughter, break downs. For some people, five seconds is a short time; for others, it’s an eternity.

For Akutagawa, five seconds is the time it takes for him to see his whole life passing through his eyes just to have everything he knew slipping through his fingers without being able to do anything to prevent the tragedy.

The universe is cruel.

Chapter Notes

Ah shit, here we go again.

So I was supposed to publish this one sooner but then avengers endgame happened and SLAUGHTERED ME and I just had to read a bunch of stevebucky fics and cry. I'm okay now (or am I?)

This one have its angsty parts but has a happy ending. Enjoy it!

(TAGS: Aged-Up Characters, temporary amnesia, angst with a happy ending)

[words count: 9.619]

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The sun was already starting to fade on the horizon when Chuuya called him.

Akutagawa checked his appearance in the mirror again, running his fingers through his hair before reaching the phone on the king-sized bed, “hello?” he said, supporting his phone between his shoulder and right ear as he used his free hands to fix his tie.

“Ryu!” Came Chuuya’s excited voice through the phone. Akutagawa could hear a distant murmur in the line. “Where are you? Everyone’s already here!”

“Sorry, I’m late.” He said, using hair spray to fix a stray hair that kept falling off over his forehead, “I’m almost ready, I’ll be there in an hour or less.”

“Hurry up!” Chuuya yelled, “Osamu’s about to lose their mind!”

Akutagawa giggled, “okay, I’m ready. I’m leaving now, see ya.” He said, finishing his hair and
picking up his cars’ keys from the bed.

“Drive safe.” Chuuya said, then hanged up. Akutagawa put his phone back in his coat pocket, checked his appearance again and smiled.

It’s not like he had any self-esteem, but he looked pretty good dressed up like that.

Picking up the rest of his stuff, he left his room. He quickly walked down the stairs and stopped by the kitchen to pick up a beer before leaving the house behind, locking the door behind him and unlocking his car.

The party Chuuya and Dazai were hosting was at their house and in the other side of the town, but he could reach his destination with a blink of an eye. His car was fast, he was a good driver, he was used to reach his destinations faster than anyone.

Today, although, the universe seemed to go against his favor.

It wasn’t like he didn’t know he shouldn’t drive that fast. Actually, he knew that fully well, but he didn’t like the delay. People drove so slowly; it was so annoying.

And, besides, he was a mafioso. He could do whatever the hell he wanted.

Fall Out Boy was blustering through the car speakers as he drove the fastest he could towards his destination, singing the lyrics loudly and passionately. It’s been a while since he last drove all by himself and could sing the songs loudly like that without hurting his partner’s delicate ears. The road was empty, the last rays of sun shining on the horizon as he drove towards the sun, the familiar and warm ocean breeze passing through the car as he drove past the ocean. His phone ringed with a new text, probably from Chuuya, and he looked away from the road for just a second to glance at the phone screen.

This is when all the shit happened.

Akutagawa didn’t see the truck coming. He looked at his phone for just a second and, when he looked back at the road, he just had time to wide his eyes and turn the steering wheel violently to the right when he saw the giant truck coming to his direction, instantly losing the control of the car and hitting it against security barrier.

The impact sent the car flying through the air, across the security barrier, to the hill. At this point, the pain Akutagawa was feeling was so strong his whole body seemed to be on fire, not even his ability could protect him anymore. The car twisted in the air multiple times, hitting multiple stones and trees on its way to the bottom of the hill, the broken glass cutting his whole body.

The only thing he remembered before blacking out when he violently hit his head and the car finally reached the bottom of the hill were two beautiful kaleidoscopic eyes that he would do literally everything in his power to never forget.

-x-x-x-

It took him a while to wake up after the accident.

Akutagawa didn’t know how many time has passed since the accident, but he figured it was at least more than a week. He couldn’t remain awake after waking up, too, because the pain inside his head and the nauseous was so strong it made him pass out again without having time to form a sentence, so he just screamed painfully and fainted again. This cycle remained for at least a day, with brief intervals where he could wake up from his sleep and stay awake for only five seconds before
screaming and passing out again for the pain again. Wake up, the pain, screams, pass out, repeat.

When he finally managed to stay awake without feeling too much pain, he noticed something was wrong. He couldn’t tell if it was with him or the place he was, but something was definitely wrong.

First of all, he couldn’t remember what happened with him or how the hell he ended up at a hospital. He couldn’t record the last time he’d been on a hospital, but he could tell this was definitely one; everything was too white, the sheets, the walls, the curtains, the cabinet with medicines against a wall parallel to his bed. He frowned, since when Mori Ougai took his subordinates to hospitals, taking the risk of losing them?

The second thing he noticed were the flowers resting silently on the bedside table. Akutagawa couldn’t tell what surprised him more; the fact someone remembered his asthma and brought plastic flowers to the hospital or the fact someone brought flowers to him.

The last, but not least important, thing he noticed, was the doctor silently looking at him at the end of the bed. Akutagawa instantly widened his eyes, recognizing the doctor.

She smiled, “how are you feeling, Akutagawa?”

“What are you doing here?” Is what he replied instead, breathless, starting to look for a way out. He looked down at himself, his despair increasing when he noticed he wasn’t with his coat and was defenseless. “How did you capture me? What happened?”

“Woah, what?” Yosano said, frowning, “You got into a car accident, remember? I’m taking care of you. I didn’t capture you, why would I?”

“I don’t record a car accident,” Akutagawa said back, coldly. He just didn’t run away because he felt like his muscles were numb, “why are you taking care of me? Why not Mori?”

Yosano’s frown seemed to increase even more, “Mori? Mori Ougai? But Mori is-” she stopped in the middle of the sentence, her confused expression falling to an understandable one and then to a worried one, “Akutagawa, what’s the last thing you remember?”

“Why should I tell you? You’re the enemy!”

“Right now I’m a doctor and nothing more than that,” Yosano replied, rummaging her pocket for her cellphone, “would you feel more comfortable if Chuuya or Dazai were here?”

The mention of Dazai seemed to relief Akutagawa a little bit, “Dazai-san is here? Chuuya-san too? For me?”

“They’re all here,” Yosano said with a small nod, still with a worried expression, “we’re all here for you. I’m gonna call them, I’ll be right back.”

After Yosano left the room and closed the door behind her, Akutagawa dropped the breath he was holding and took a deep breath, looking around the room. Just like he told her, he didn’t remember what happened. He didn’t remember how he ended up being cared by Yosano Akiko, an Armed Detective Agency member instead of his own Boss, he didn’t remember a car accident; if there was a car accident, then who else got hurt? Gin? Higuchi? Kouyou? Were they there to see him too? What was happening?

Why couldn’t he remember anything?

He was taken off of his thoughts when the room’s door was opened again and Chuuya and Dazai
entered the room, instantly smiling openly and in relief when they saw that Akutagawa was awake and not screaming in pain.

Chuuya was the first one to reach him, touching his cheeks and inspecting his face, “you’re awake, oh my God, you’re awake. How are you feeling? Are you in pain? Are you okay?”

“I’m okay, Chuuya-san,” Akutagawa replied, blushing with all the contact, “what happened?”

“You got into a car accident,” Dazai answered, a few steps behind Chuuya, looking at Akutagawa with the same relieved expression Chuuya had but then frowning, “you don’t remember?”

“This is what I wanted to talk about,” Yosano said, a little bit far away from them, “I think– Guys, something is wrong with him.”

Neither Chuuya or Dazai had time to reply to her before a fourth person blustered into the room like a hurricane, instantly running to Akutagawa’s bed and throwing himself in Akutagawa’s chest.

“Ryu, you’re awake!” Atsushi cried, “oh my God, you’re actually awake. I was so worried, oh my God, I can’t believe-”

The room suddenly went silent when Akutagawa violently pushed Atsushi away from him, facing the man with pure anger.

“What are you doing here?!” Akutagawa angrily shouted, “is this a trap? You captured me? That’s it, isn’t it? Once I’m free, you’re all dead.”

“Ryu, what are you talking about?” Atsushi slowly asked, frowning, “no one captured you, why would we?”

“I don’t know about Chuuya-san, but the last time I checked you were the enemy. You, Dazai-san and the doctor over there.”

“The enemy ?” Dazai frowned, “we’re your friends, Akutagawa, what are you talking about?”

“Ryu-” Atsushi tried again, but Akutagawa hissed.

“Don’t call me Ryu! We’re not friends, we’re not close so you can call me by my given name!” he said, ignoring how hurt and confused Atsushi looked, looking at Yosano, “you said there was a car accident and everyone was here, so where’s Gin? Kouyou?”

“Akutagawa,” Chuuya called, tilting his head to the side, “Gin– Gin died, remember?”

Akutagawa turned to look at him like a second head had grown on his neck, “what?”

“Tachihara killed her. Almost eight years ago,” Dazai slowly replied, tilting their head to the side like Chuuya did, “you don’t remember?”

“What? And where’s Tachihara, then?” Akutagawa asked, suspicious, obviously not believing them. Why should he? They were the enemy.

“You killed him, Ryuu,” Atsushi replied, seeming to be on the verge of tears, “you killed him when you found out about what happened to her and Hirotsu. I know it, I was there.”

“That doesn’t make any sense, eight years ago I was twelve and she was ten. We didn’t even know Tachihara back then.”
“How old are you right now, Akutagawa?” Yosano asked, picking up a file and starting to write everything Akutagawa was saying.

“Uh, twenty?” He replied like it was obvious.

A group gasp was heard.

“Akutagawa,” Chuuya said, seeming to be in a hurry, “you’re twenty-eight.”

Akutagawa looked at him like he was crazy, “that’s impossible, you’re two years older than me.”

“Yes,” Dazai nodded, “and we’re thirty.”

“You’re twenty-eight, Ryuu.” Atsushi repeated, stepping closer to Akutagawa’s bed, only to be violently pushed back again.

“I already told you to not call me Ryuu, jinko.” Akutagawa hissed, “call me that one more time and this is the last thing you’re gonna say in life.”

Atsushi took a few steps backwards with the old nickname, resting against a wall, the tears finally streaming down his face, “jinko? No, no, no, no. This is not happening, this can’t be happening.”

“Oh, what now?” Akutagawa grumbled, starting to lose his patience with Atsushi’s drama, rolling his eyes.

It was Chuuya who replied, looking as shocked as the rest of the group, “you haven’t called him jinko in eight years, Akutagawa,” he said, touching Dazai’s arm. Akutagawa frowned when he saw Dazai reaching Chuuya’s hand and intertwining their fingers, “you’re joking, right? Please, tell me you still remember everything you went through.”

“Haha, very funny, Ry- Akutagawa,” Atsushi said with a forced laugh, sobbing, "you can stop joking now.”

“Everything we went through?” Akutagawa echoed, frowning, “what did we go through? The times we tried to kill each other? The mutual hate? Please, enlighten me because I’m in the dark here.”

Dazai tilted their head to the side once again, “you’re married, Akutagawa.”

“What?”

“We’re married.” Atsushi repeated, raising his left hand to show Akutagawa the gold ring shining on his ring finger.

Akutagawa stopped, widening his eyes at the gold ring. He then slowly turned to look at his own fingers, afraid of what he was about to see, heart starting to race when he noticed he was wearing a ring exactly like Atsushi’s, only a little bit scratched. He stared at the ring on his finger for a moment before looking back at Atsushi, widening his eyes.

Only then he seemed to notice how different Atsushi looked.

He was definitely older. The expression marks caused by age were already starting to appear in the corner of his eyes, he now had an undercut but his platinum hair was long enough to fall over his eyes in tiny and messy curls, the black strand on the right side of his head was now thicker and mixed with the silver strands; his right cheek had an old white scar very similar to a sword cut. Akutagawa faced him stunned for a few more seconds before looking at Dazai and Chuuya, still
standing together next to his bed.

They also looked older, but still really elegant. Chuuya had cut his hair but not that much, the orange lock with few traces of white starting to appear among the strands now at the cheeks instead of the shoulders, multiple scars could be seen around his body and he wore glasses now. He had a scar crossing his left eye and the eye was a misty mix of white and grey, showing that he was blind of the left eye.

Dazai’s hair was pretty much longer that Akutagawa remembered. The tips were now touching their shoulders and they were keeping the strands away from their eyes in a half ponytail, they grew a short beard and there was a scar over their nose.

Oh, and they were also missing an arm.

Akutagawa unconsciously blew his long hair away from his eyes and then frowned, because he didn’t record his hair being long enough to fall over his eyes.

Dazai seemed to notice Akutagawa’s glare on their arm, giggling slightly, “oh, this? I lost this on a fight against Fyodor eight years ago. I killed the bastard, but as you can see, I didn’t escape unharmed.”

“I didn’t, too,” Chuuya said, pointing at his bad eye, “Fyodor made me use Corruption when Osamu wasn’t around and it almost killed me, but they managed to save me in the last second. I can’t barely see shit now because of the consequences of the long use of my ability, but that was the last time I used Corruption.”

“You never used Corruption again?” Akutagawa sounded shocked, “and what about your ability?”

“Oh, I don’t have an ability anymore.” Chuuya giggled, gesturing vaguely with his hands, “Osamu have this expansion of their ability that they can fully remove someone else’s ability if they touch the person long enough. After the last time I used Corruption I ended up so bad they had to remove my ability entirely so I could live. Honestly, I don’t really miss it anymore.”

“That’s... Sad.” Akutagawa slowly said, “what else happened?”

“We have time to update you later,” Yosano said, walking closer to his bed and tapping Chuuya’s and Dazai’s head so they would step back and give Akutagawa space, “right now, I need to ask you some questions to see until where you can remember and diagnose you, okay? It won’t hurt, I promise you. You can trust me.”

Akutagawa looked at her for a second, then turned to look at Chuuya and Dazai. Chuuya smiled, nodding slightly, “you can trust her, it’s okay.”

It felt weird, having to trust someone that he always saw as an enemy. But, if Chuuya was telling him to trust her, how couldn’t he? He didn’t trust Yosano, but he trusted Chuuya, and if Chuuya trusted her, Akutagawa would give her a chance.

After everyone left the room, Yosano smiled slightly at him and sat down at the end of his bed, handing him a glass of water. Akutagawa willingly took the glass from her hands, drinking all the water at once, his throat feeling so dry that hurted to talk out loud.

“Let’s start from the beginning,” Yosano said, filling his glass with more water, “what’s the last thing you can remember?”

Akutagawa drank all the water again and then bit his lip, “I remember being locked inside my room,
facing the ceiling, waiting for something. Jinko– Jinko and I had a deal; I could kill him, but only if I managed to stay six months without killing anyone else. I don’t know if I did it, I don’t know what happened, but the last thing I remember was Chuuya-sahn saying he had to save the Agency or something like that. After that, I only have flashes of certain things but nothing important enough, just random things like washing my coat or listening to some music and writing something.”

“Okay,” Yosano nodded, writing something down on her notebook, “you said you remember Chuuya saying he had to save the agency? Do you remember against who we were fighting with?”

“The Hunting Dogs,” Akutagawa said, not having to think about it. He clearly remembered the agency being runaways, “you guys killed those people on live and were being chased because of it, I record it clearly.”

“The Hunting Dogs?” Yosano opened her mouth in shock, “holy shit, Akutagawa, that’s– That’s almost nine years ago. It’s when we lost Kunikida.”

“Kunikida? Isn’t that the blonde dude with the ideals?”

Yosano bit her lips, like the memory still hurted, “yes, we lost him against the hunting dogs. He took one of them with him too, but he died in an explosion. I– I couldn’t save him.”

“I’m sorry for your lost,” Akutagawa said, “that’s the fourth death you inform me about, who else died?”

“Fukuzawa and Mori died too, against the Decay of Angels,” she replied, “Kajii died a few months later, against a British organization called The Dark Order we faced. Ranpo and Poe didn’t die, but they moved to the USA after Fukuzawa died, and Higuchi...” a pause, like she was afraid of telling him about what happened to her, “we lost Higuchi a while back at a car accident. This is why we were so worried when we found out you had a car accident, Akutagawa. Atsushi– He was so worried; you have no idea.”

“Higuchi... She died?” Akutagawa slowly repeated, feeling an ache inside his chest. He was aware he was a shit senpai and friend, but still... He liked her a lot; she didn’t deserve to die like this. “Who else died?”

“A few other people died, but if you only remember the events up to when we faced the hunting dogs, you won’t remember them. Do you remember Charles? Doyle? Oscar?”

Akutagawa tried to give a face to the names, which sounded slightly familiar, but he couldn’t remember anything. He sighed, “no, I’m sorry.”

“You– You don’t remember Oscar?” Yosano asked, sounding and looking really hurted. Akutagawa felt bad for forgetting about this Oscar dude; whoever they were, they must’ve been important to him. “This is– I’m sorry, Akutagawa, it’s just... Oscar was so important to you and Atsushi, when they died you were so devastated, and now seeing you forget about them is... Hard. It hurts. Please, don’t tell Atsushi you forgot about Oscar.”

“I won’t.” Akutagawa nodded. It wasn’t like he planned to talk with the weretiger in the first place, anyways. “Maybe I’ll remember them with time? Maybe my memories will return? It’s been how long since the accident?”

“Six months.” Yosano replied, with a blank expression. Akutagawa widened his eyes, “you’ve been in a coma for six months, Akutagawa.”
Well, that wasn’t exactly what he was expecting her to say.

-x-x-x-

After Yosano asked him a few questions, she gave him some medicine and he quickly returned to his sleep so he could properly rest after waking up from a six-months long coma. Akutagawa stayed at the hospital –that ended up being Yosano’s own hospital– for two more weeks until Yosano finally discharged him and allowed him to return to his home, but telling him to come back to her every 15 days for the next two months for a check-up.

At first, Akutagawa didn’t believe what she or the others were saying. Having a car accident, being in a coma for six months and then noticing he forget eight years of his life after waking up? This sounded crazy even though they lived in a world where some people had abilities. But even though he didn’t want to, with the days passing by he started to believe they were actually telling him the truth.

It was his appearance that finally made him start to believe them. He looked older than he remembered; he was taller, stronger, his haircut was different and he definitely didn’t record the scratch crossing his torso before waking up, but that was him. That was him facing him back in the mirror, showing him an image he never thought he would see someday, staring back at him with widened grey eyes as he slowly ran his fingers over his face, feeling his skin, tracing the short beard growing on his chin, looking at the long and messy entangle of dark hair falling over his face. The tips of his hair were still white, showing him that some habits never changed, but his whole hair now touched his shoulders and he had bangs that reminded him a little of Higuchi.

He never thought he would like his hair longer, but he definitely did.

At some point during the two weeks he stayed at the hospital, Atsushi brought him some change of clothes and his coat, even though he knew he wouldn’t need it there, but knowing he didn’t feel safe without it. Atsushi looked at him for only a second when he entered the room to give Akutagawa the long black coat the hosted Rashomon, almost like he was embarrassed or ashamed of him, but Akutagawa didn’t really care; looking at Atsushi and knowing they were married and he didn’t remember it still felt too weird for him, he preferred to keep the personal things aside for now.

During the weeks, Kouyou showed up to talk to him. She also looked older like everyone else did, with shorter hair and now wearing more casual clothes instead of the fancy traditional Japanese clothes he remembered she wore. As she talked to him, he found out that, after Mori’s death, Kouyou assumed his place as the mafia Boss and now the Port Mafia and the Agency lived in harmony—as far as they could possible live--; of course, they still had their disagreements and it wasn’t that rare that they would end up on a fight and getting badly injured, but they were moving on. They were living.

He ended up finding out, sometime later, that the reason the mafia and the agency were living in harmony was because Kouyou and Yosano, the agency’s president, were having an affair.

“I’m sorry for asking this way, but why you? Why not Dazai-san?” Akutagawa asked when he found out about Yosano being the agency’s president.

“Well, would you trust Dazai as the agency president?” Yosano replied, raising an eyebrow.

“Yes.” Akutagawa instantly replied, making Yosano snort.

“Of course you would,” she said, “but they said I would be a better President, so I accepted it.
They’re better with Chuuya, honestly.”

Akutagawa snorted, thinking about how the mafia and the agency were always meant to be the two sides of a coin and their destinies were always meant to end up entangled. Dazai and Chuuya, Yosano and Kouyou. Atsushi and Akutagawa.

It still felt pretty weird to him, knowing that he ended up marrying the weretiger. Especially when one of his last memories before the car accident were Atsushi telling him he could kill him if he lasted six months without killing anyone. What changed in those six months? Why did he change his mind?

How the hell did he end up marrying the enemy?

Atsushi was never ugly, he knew; he had eyes, after all, he wasn’t gonna lie just because he hated the guy, but marrying him? Only the thought of liking the dude sounded ridiculous to Akutagawa, can you imagine marrying your enemy?

You’re not enemies anymore, Akutagawa had to remind himself every time his blood lust started to scratch under his skin, desperate to escape through his pores. A long time passed since he’s been the enemy. You need to talk to him, you need to understand what and when your relationship changed or started to change.

Sometimes, when the curiosity over the facts was too strong, Akutagawa wished he could remember how he ended up falling in love with Nakajima Atsushi.

But how could he ask Atsushi about certain things, when he had such mixed feelings?

Even though he knew Atsushi wasn’t the enemy anymore, for him, it’s been only six months since he and the weretiger made a deal about killing each other. It’s been almost nine years, Akutagawa knew, but for his conscience it’s been only six months.

With the memory regression, Akutagawa could remember clearly things that happened nine years ago. He could remember the first time he saw Atsushi, when he ripped his leg off and laughed while doing that; he remembered when they fought together against Fitzgerald and when he trusted Atsushi enough to give him Rashomon so he could face that dude that trapped both of them on the floor, even though he felt extremely vulnerable without his coat, even though he swore he would kill Atsushi a few minutes after that.

He recorded, particularly, of a certain occasion where they faced each other. It happened a few days before their official met, when Akutagawa ripped Atsushi’s leg off, so neither of them actually knew with who they were talking to at that moment. Akutagawa remembered clearly the way the night seemed to be darker than the normal, how the shadows seemed to embrace his body with cold arms as he laughed maniacally away from Atsushi’s view, with only his too white teeth glowing in the dark shadows.

“Who are you?” He remembered the way Atsushi asked him with a trembling voice, scared, with tears streaming down his face as he looked at Akutagawa by the shadows.

Akutagawa remembered the way he smiled even bigger, with only half of his face appearing in the light when he coldly replied before letting Rashomon go after Atsushi, “I’m your worst nightmare.”

Those memories, though, wouldn’t help him with his current situation.
Surprisingly, it was Atsushi himself that came to the hospital to pick Akutagawa up after Yosano discharge him. He looked as nervous and anxious as always, but Akutagawa could see the relief in his eyes when Yosano told him he would be okay and was ready to go home; as he put Akutagawa’s stuff in the car’s trunk, he couldn’t stop smiling and humming a love song that Akutagawa didn’t record, but still thought it was kinda nice.

The drive home was so uncomfortable Akutagawa almost threw himself out of the car at least five times, even though Atsushi’s house was only ten minutes away from the hospital. Akutagawa could feel the tense atmosphere inside the car for Atsushi’s part, the way the man kept glaring at him through the rear mirror or sideways, how he was visibly shaking with anxiety and turned up the music to try to decrease the extremely uncomfortable silence at the car.

The trip that was supposed to take ten minutes seemed to take more than an hour with the uncomfortable atmosphere. When they finally arrived Atsushi’s house, the man parked and left the car the fastest he could, like he wasn’t able to breath inside the car, visibly taking a deep breath after leaving the car and walking around it to pick Akutagawa’s things up from the trunk. Akutagawa sighed and stayed inside the car for a few more minutes until Atsushi softly knocked the window next to him and told him to go inside; he sighed again and then took a deep breath, leaving the car and following Atsushi up the steps toward the front door. Atsushi unlocked the door and stepped into the house, leaving Akutagawa’s stuff above the sofa and then crossing the living room towards the kitchen, giving Akutagawa space for him to take a look around the room and assimilate things.

The house wasn’t that big, but was pretty comfortable. On his left, a dark grey couch stood in the middle of the living room in front of a fireplace, a TV was placed above the fireplace and there was a piano silently resting against the wall next to the fireplace; parallel to the piano, stairs made of wood lead them upstairs, to the bedrooms. On his right, a table with six seats was being illuminated by the sun entering the house through the big windows behind the table, a chandelier hanging above the table and a big mirror showing Akutagawa his own reflection; a long corridor separated the living room from the dinner room and lead to the kitchen, where Atsushi seemed to be looking for something among the pans because he was making a lot of noise. Akutagawa stepped further into the house, entering the living room and going to the pictures standing above the fireplace and the piano, hanging on the walls, scattered around the house, ghostly looking back at him with faces he wish he hasn’t forgot.

Akutagawa recognized the faces in most of the pictures, but some of them gave him a weird and sad feeling in the bottom of his stomach because he couldn’t give name to the faces and he knew he should. He knew he should’ve been able to tell who that guy with light brown hair and green eyes was, or the one with dark hair and bright blue eyes. A certain picture called his attention, making him bring his hand up to pick up the portrait and look at it closer.

Both him and Atsushi were at the photography, standing in front of a sunset and smiling openly, each one of them with their arms thrown around the person’s shoulders standing in the middle of them, smiling with his eyes closed, dark green hair falling over his eyes almost hidden behind his glasses. The person’s face felt oddly and slightly familiar, but Akutagawa couldn’t give a name to the face. And it was killing him.

He frowned, brain scratching with an old and repressed memory, tracing the person’s face with his finger, “...Oscar ?”

“Nope,” Atsushi said, appearing out of nowhere behind Akutagawa and almost making him drop the portrait, “this is Charles, Oscar was blonde.”

Akutagawa widened his eyes, remembering what Yosano told him about Oscar, putting the portrait
back over the fireplace, “I’m sorry, Jinko, I-”

“It’s okay, I figured you wouldn’t remember Oscar because you only remember the events until we faced the Hunting Dogs.” Atsushi giggled, but Akutagawa could tell he wasn’t okay with that. “It was Yosano who told you to keep that away from me, wasn’t it?”

“She said they were important to us.” Akutagawa said in a low and carefully voice, like he was afraid Atsushi would break down any minute.

“They were,” Atsushi nodded, smiling sadly. He reached a portrait behind Akutagawa and handed it to him, “this is Oscar.”

Akutagawa looked at Atsushi, then at the picture. Again, both him and Atsushi stood in front of a building with a person with dirty blonde hair between them, smiling openly; all the three of them seemed to be having a lot of fun, posing like they were bad boys, arms crossed on their chests and wearing solar glasses. The illumination told him that the picture must’ve been taken at the golden hour, because Atsushi’s platinum hair seemed to be glowing in the orange light.

He traced the person’s face with his finger again, a soft tickle in the back of his mind telling him the face was familiar and comforting, “what happened to them?”

Atsushi pinched his nose, looking down, “we were facing this dude named Carroll, who had the ability to make people have hallucinations with their biggest fear, and we were having our asses ugly kicked. Honestly, I didn’t think we were gonna make it,” a pause, Atsushi whipped away the tears starting to form in his eyes before crossing his arms in his chest again, “Oscar’s ability allowed them to stop time, but only for a few minutes; they started taking the people out of the building, because they knew we wouldn’t make it if we stayed there any longer, but he didn’t manage to get everyone out. I was the last one there, I saw in slow motion Carroll recovering his senses and stabbing Oscar in the back right when they were about to pick me up. I didn’t have time to warn them, I couldn’t save them. The blade... The blade crossed their chest, Ryuu.”

A flash of memory crossed Akutagawa’s mind, but it faded as fast as it came. Still, it lasted longer enough to make him frown, “I tried– I tried to help you. I stood up, tried to go back to the building, but then someone held me back. Who was it?”

“Chuuuya,” Atsushi said, raising his eyebrows, “do you remember it?”

“Not really, no.” Akutagawa said, shaking his head and giving the portrait back to Atsushi. “It’s just... A feeling, a flash of memory. Something I should know.”

“Yosano said you could have some memories back if you experienced certain triggers,” Atsushi nodded, eyes shining in excitement, “Oscar was important to us, maybe they’re a trigger?”

“Why exactly were they important to us?”

Atsushi bit up a smile, blush crossing his cheeks, “they... They kind of showed us we liked each other? If we’re together now, it’s because of them. We were best friends.”

Akutagawa wasn’t impressed, “we needed someone else to show us we liked each other? Really?”

“I mean, it’s not like you were an open book,” Atsushi argued, raising an eyebrow, “we pined over each other for almost two years until Oscar literally slapped our heads and screamed at our faces they were done with our bullshit. Luckily, it was worth it,” a pause, he giggled, “you know, I still remember what you always told me when I tried to ask if you liked me. You used to say -”
"I don’t feel a thing for you." Akutagawa automatically replied, not even having to think about it.

Atsushi smiled, surprised, “yes. Yes, that’s it.” he said, then his smiled turned into a mockingly one, “liking me is a trigger for you, Ryuu?"

“Shut up,” Akutagawa giggled, pushing Atsushi slightly with his shoulders. Atsushi giggled back, then they fell into a short comfortable silence as Akutagawa returned to look at the portraits on the walls and over the fireplace and the piano; he frowned when he noticed some portraits were missing, pointing at the spots without dust where the photos used to be, “did you remove some pictures?”

“Oh, yes,” Atsushi replied, embarrassing scratching his neck, “I remove some of our photos that could make you... Uncomfortable, if you know what I mean, since you don’t remember our life together. I can put them back someday else, when you start– If you start–” he stopped in the middle of the sentence, squeezing his eyes to keep himself from crying and taking a deep breath, “I’m gonna make us dinner, what do you wanna eat?”

“Anything is fine, since it doesn’t have-”

“Onions, I know.” Atsushi gave him a forced smiled, then left to the kitchen. Akutagawa watched his back until he disappeared behind the walls, then looked down and sighed.

He knew it wouldn’t be easy, but he didn’t expect it to be that hard. Watching Atsushi like that hurted, even though one of the things he recorded clearly from his past was his hate for the weretiger, but like the own sentence states, it stayed in the past. They moved on from the mutual hate, they had a life together, they got married, they apparently loved each other, even though Akutagawa only remembered the mutual hate for now. He didn’t know exactly why, but he would try to be better for Atsushi.

Akutagawa would try to be better for his husband.

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After dinner, Atsushi showed him a few other pictures that could trigger memories from his past. Exactly like Yosano thought, some fragments of memories returned when he experienced certain triggers, like pictures or graphic describes of events they’ve been through, but no memory fully returned. They were all fragments, incomplete pieces of a whole puzzle that kept him from looking at the whole board, but that was okay for now; Yosano said that the amnesia wasn’t permanent after the first fragment of memory Akutagawa randomly recovered, so his memories were still there somewhere deep down inside his mind, locked up, waiting for him to free them.

Still, it was so fucking annoying having his memories locked up like that.

Besides the long-term memories, he also couldn’t remember casual things from his daily routine. At what time he and Atsushi usually woke up? Did they go to work together? Was he still working at the Mafia? Did Atsushi have any habit that got into Akutagawa’s nerves? When did they got married? How did their marriage party go? How Atsushi liked his eggs in the morning? What was Atsushi’s favorite color?

Atsushi, Atsushi, Atsushi.

All he could think about was Atsushi.

Deep down, Akutagawa knew he never truly hated the weretiger. Of course, he didn’t like him and tried to killed him multiple times, hurted him, laughed while doing it and liked it, but actually hating him? He didn’t like to admit it not even to himself, he would never say that out
loud, but he never hated him. Akutagawa never hated Atsushi.

With the days passing by, Akutagawa started to get more comfortable around Atsushi’s house –no, not Atsushi’s. It’s their house– and company, relieved when he saw on Atsushi’s body language that he was also trying to give him space to adjust to things but the effort was exhausting him a lot and making him stressed, given all the time they spent together before the accident. It took the man a while, but he finally started to feel more comfortable around Akutagawa and seemed to be getting used to his memory loss, even though he still tried to help Akutagawa to recover some memories with massive effort.

Akutagawa pretended he didn’t, but he always saw Atsushi crying on their bedroom at the end of the night when the efforts to recover Akutagawa’s memories were in vain.

Every day, Atsushi and Akutagawa would take a few minutes from their routine to try to trigger Akutagawa’s memories. Atsushi would tell Akutagawa funny and sad stories about their life together, about their friends, about the things that happened to them, just to see if he could trigger anything. Anything, even a small piece of memory, a random fragment that could tell them that they were making progress and one day they might come back to what they used to be.

Atsushi missed Akutagawa so, so much.

Some small pieces of memories returned to him, but nothing big enough that could actually make them cheer. Still progress, though. A few days later after the first memory was triggered by Oscar’s story, Akutagawa recovered some random memories; Atsushi’s favorite color, how the weather was when they got married, their cat that unfortunately got sick and died, the day Dazai lost their arm and Chuuya almost died. The day he found out Tachihara killed his sister and Hirotsu and killed him.

Some memories were so painful Akutagawa wished he hasn’t record them.

He didn’t know where Atsushi was right now. It was the end of the day; the sun was already starting to fade in the horizon and the birds were singing happily in the trees in front of him, the warm breeze brushing against his face and making him smile slightly as he just enjoyed the nice sing-along of the birds and felt the sun warming up his pale skin. A glimpse of memory crossed his mind, him and Atsushi by the ocean holding hands with the sunset in the horizon, but he didn’t hold up to the memory to look deeper at it; he knew it wouldn’t work, he had to let the memories flow naturally over him otherwise they would slip through his fingers and he wouldn’t be able to do anything to avoid it.

At first, having glimpses of memories where he and Atsushi were... Too close , was weird. He was used to the hate , not to the fond looks and soft smiles he saw on the memories; when a piece of memory of a kiss came to his mind for the first time, he was so embarrassed he couldn’t look straight into Atsushi’s eyes for more than two seconds without turning bright red.

“Why are you blushing?” Atsushi asked when he noticed Akutagawa’s bright red cheeks when the memory of the kiss came to Akutagawa’s mind, looking up from his book and raising an eyebrow.

Akutagawa cleared his throat, not meeting Atsushi’s eyes, “it’s just... A fragment of a memory.”

“Really?” Atsushi said, putting down his book and now fully paying attention at his husband. Akutagawa tried not to think about how cute Atsushi looked with that long grey cardigan and glasses, “and what is it?”

“It’s nothing.” Akutagawa replied, shaking his head, but sighing when he saw Atsushi arching his
eyebrows. “It’s embarrassing.”

“Chuuya drunk at our wedding kind of embarrassing or private things kind of embarrassing?”

A fragment of Chuuya dancing shirtless over a table holding a whole bottle of champagne crossed
his mind, but he ignored it, “it’s... The second kind.”

“Oh, I see,” Atsushi giggled, returning to his book, “so what did you remember?”

Akutagawa was reluctant to tell him, but it wasn’t like Atsushi hasn’t shared that memory with him,
was it? “it’s... A kiss.”

Once again, Atsushi dropped his book to look at Akutagawa, “really?” he asked, excitedly, “and
how did it go? How are you feeling?”

“I’m okay,” Akutagawa nodded, “it went good, we were next to a tree. I think we were at a picnic?”

“I think I remember that. It’s the day Yosano and Kouyou told us they were having this thing going
on,” Atsushi smiled openly, Akutagawa’s heart melted a little, “that’s amazing, darling.” a pause,
Atsushi seemed to realize what he just called Akutagawa and cleared his throat, “Akutagawa. I
meant Akutagawa.”

“It’s okay,” Akutagawa replied, trying to mask his burning cheeks, “you can... You can call me
whatever you want.”

For a moment, Atsushi didn’t reply, but then he smiled in a way so fond and softly that made
Akutagawa’s heart skip a painful beat.

This happened almost two weeks ago, but the view of Atsushi’s fond smile was still so fresh in his
mind he could redraw it perfectly and with an extremely wealth of details.

Back to the present, Akutagawa didn’t even notice he wasn’t alone anymore and was stupidly
smiling at the birds until Atsushi sat down in the bench next to him, giggling.

“If you knew what the blue birds sing at you, you would never sing along. These new flocks are
nothing but vultures.” He said, looking at the birds flying around the tree right in front of their
bedroom’s balcony, “how are you feeling today, Ryuu?”

“Numb,” Akutagawa replied, looking sideways at Atsushi before looking back at the birds, “ever
since the accident, I feel numb. Like someone filled me up with novocaine.”

“That’s deep.”

“You’re the one deadass calling the canary birds ‘vultures’.”

Atsushi laughed, “they do look like vultures sometimes, though.”

Akutagawa echoed the laugh, “Sapphire liked chasing them. I miss her.”

“I do, too.” Atsushi smiled, “she’s in cat’s heaven now, looking for us.”

“You’re going to cat’s heaven when you die, too, so you can tell her we missed her and she was a
good cat.”

Atsushi turned to look at Akutagawa, raising and eyebrow and crook smiling, “did you just say I’m a
cat? Are you flirting with me, Ryuu?”

“I don’t– I mean, you’re a tiger and– Cats and tigers are felines and– I don’t know, I’m–”
Akutagawa tried to explain himself, but he only stumbled in the words and started to blush with Atsushi’s gaze focused on him.

“It’s okay, darling,” Atsushi replied, reaching Akutagawa’s hand and giving a soft squeeze. “I’m messing with you.”

Akutagawa looked down at Atsushi’s hand resting softly above his own hand, wondering what he should do, part of him telling him to take his hand away from there and the other part telling him to run away in pure embarrassment. Instead, he turned his palm up and properly held Atsushi’s hand, slowly intertwining the fingers just to see how they would look together, Atsushi’s gold ring seeming to glow in the golden hours, fingers perfectly fitting together like they were made only for that.

They didn’t talk about how they kept holding hands for the rest of the night, until Atsushi told him to get inside and have dinner.

-x-x-x-

Yosano called them later that night, asking them to meet her at the hospital the other day because she wanted to talk to them and check on Akutagawa’s mental and physical health.

The trip to the hospital, though, needed to be anticipated, because Akutagawa woke up screaming in the middle of the night.

It started with a headache right after they had dinner, and it increased during the night; when the pain inside his head was too strong to handle, Atsushi gave him an aspirin and told him to rest, so Akutagawa spent the rest of the night at the bedroom away from Atsushi’s worried eyes. He ended up falling asleep pretty quickly, when the medicine started to work on his body and fight the headache. At first, when he noticed he was dreaming, he thought it was a simple dream and nothing more than that. Akutagawa wasn’t used to dream, so the idea of simply having a dream was already pretty weird, but he quickly learned it wasn’t a simple dream when the first memory hit him like a truck.

He was standing in the middle of a street, in the middle of the night, alone. Akutagawa frowned and then looked around, called out for help, but nobody answered, so he concluded he was alone there; but where, exactly? He couldn’t recognize the street or the surroundings of the street and no reference point could be seen, so he didn’t have any other option but move forward and seek for help. It took him only four steps until something happened.

Akutagawa blinked, and then a door suddenly appeared in the middle of the street. Not a wall with a door on it, just a door; an old red, wood door standing in the middle of the street.

“What the fuck,” he whispered to himself, frowning, crossing the way to the door and stopping in front of it. He analyzed its edges and touched the peeled wood, looking around the door and raising an eyebrow when he didn’t find anything, “okay, then.” He then spinned the doorknob and opened the door, crossing the door stop.

A flash light blinded him for a second, making him grunt in disapproval, but when he returned to open his eyes he found himself standing in the middle of a long corridor. On both walls, multiple pictures could be seen until it vanished from view, following the corridor, ending in a dark spot very far from him. Akutagawa frowned, turning around to look at the door he crossed, raising his eyebrows again when he only found another long corridor with more pictures on the walls. He
looked around once again, looking for the door and a way out, but he didn’t find anything; he then tried to wake up, knowing it was a dream, but he also didn’t succeed in that.

With a sigh, Akutagawa walked to the first picture, not having any other option but follow this weird dream. He touched the frame, and the whole world exploded in white.

The memories, like he thought they would, didn’t return to him one by one. Instead, they surrounded him like a cold wave, freezing his bones, drowning him with the events he once experienced on his life but couldn’t remember, invading his numb mind all at once in a painful way. Akutagawa felt like he was drifting in the cold ocean all alone but at the same time too encircled by multiple people, every single one of them talking at the same time like ghosts inside his head, telling him facts he once forgot, trying to push him back from wherever he was drifting. He tried to scream, but no sound came out; the ground and the air around him also felt numb, like he was floating alone in outer space. He couldn’t hear anything, but at the same time his memories were screaming loudly inside his mind. He couldn’t see anything, but at the same time he could see everything. He remembered them, he remembered all the events he once forgot.

He remembered Oscar, he remembered his and Atsushi’s first kiss, first time, the day they got engaged, the day they got married. He remembered silly things like Kenji falling into the chocolate fountain they had in their marriage, Atsushi giving Kyouka a bunny, Dazai using a fake arm to scare kids on Halloween and they and Chuuya matching costumes –Dazai looked amazing as Winter Soldier, especially with the fake metal arm they made for the occasion–. He remembered the nights where he and Atsushi spent awake, silently looking at the stars until the sun came out, and the tough nights where his depression hit him like a truck. The failed missions, the fallen friends, the waisted youth.

He remembered everything, and then everything started to vanish from his mind once again when he couldn’t handle the pain.

Akutagawa woke up screaming, with his head bumping so hard with the memories he actually was afraid it was just gonna explode. The memories flashed behind his closed eyes above the sound of his painful screams echoing around the house, making him squeeze his hands hardly against his ears as he curled himself up in a ball, begging for the pain to stop.

The last thing he saw before passing out was Atsushi entering the room with the scariest expression on his eyes Akutagawa’s ever seen.

-x-

Akutagawa woke up a few hours later, already at Yosano’s hospital, with Atsushi sleeping with his head in the bed. He groaned at the remaining migraine, squeezing his eyes closed before opening them again, looking at Atsushi peacefully sleeping next to him and smiling slightly. He brought his hand to run his fingers over his husband’s hair, brushing them away from his eyes, waking up Atsushi in the middle of the way.

Atsushi was standing the moment he saw Akutagawa was awake, back with his worried and scared expression, “Ryu! Oh my God, Ryuu, you’re awake! Oi, Yosano, Ryuu’s awake!” he screamed towards the door, then turned to look back at his husband,”what happened?!”

“My memories,” Akutagawa said with a raspy voice, sitting down in the bed as Yosano entered the room with wide eyes, “they returned to me all at once and I guess I couldn’t handle the pain. And damn, it hurted.”

“Your... Memories?” Atsushi slowly repeated, carefully studying Akutagawa’s face, “you
“I guess so,” Akutagawa replied, giving Atsushi a crooked smile, “I don’t why or what triggered them, but I do. I also don’t know if I remember everything, but a lot of memories returned to me when I fell asleep this night. It’s still pretty blurry, give me a few days and I’ll be okay.”

“I made an x-ray on you to check your brain,” Yosano said, approaching his bed and checking the drip connected to his arm, “it looks like you’re okay. Atsushi said you had a migraine last night?”

“Yes,” Akutagawa nodded, “so I took an aspirin and went to sleep to see if it would pass, but then I had this weird dream after I fell asleep and then my memories returned to me. All at once. And it hurted.”

“So you fainted by the pain, I see,” Yosano nodded to herself, writing down what Akutagawa said in a small notebook, “how was the dream?”

“Weird.”

She giggled, “I know that, weird how?”

“I don’t know, it had this long and dark road and then a door appeared in the middle of it out of nowhere and then I was standing in the middle of a corridor with pictures on the wall and when I touched the first picture everything started to come back. I’ve seen some people talking about the pictures on the walls when they had livid dreams but I thought I would have one memory back at time, not every single one of them at once. Damn, it hurted.”

“Oh okay,” Yosano nodded once again, finishing writing Akutagawa’s report on her notebook, “I’m gonna bring something for you to eat, okay? You can talk about while I’m not back.” And without any other word she left the room, closing the door behind her and leaving Akutagawa and Atsushi alone in the room.

Atsushi turned to look at Akutagawa after she was gone, “when did we get married?”

“April 24. Chuuya got drunk at the party and Kenji fell into the chocolate fountain.”

“Our first kiss?”

“September of 2016, beneath the rain after a really tough mission Dazai setted us together.”

“Who confessed first?”

“You, because I thought feelings made people weak at that time. Oscar kicked my ass when I told them about it.”

“Dazai and Chuuya’s wedding?”

“Uh, it was October, but I can’t remember the exact day. It was a very small wedding, only the closest ones attended, but Chuuya ended up punching Dazai in the nose and it started bleeding. I can’t remember the reason.”

“Dazai said something about Chuuya looking like a dwarf in a suit and Chuuya got mad.” Atsushi giggled, sitting on the edge of Akutagawa’s bed and grabbing his hand. It was Akutagawa that intertwined their fingers together.

“I’m sorry for forgetting, my love,” Akutagawa said, bringing Atsushi’s hand to his lips and softly
kissing the back of his hand, “I promise I will drive safer now.”

“It wasn’t your fault, darling,” Atsushi smiled fondly, then raised an eyebrow, “what makes you think I will ever let you drive again?”

Akutagawa giggled, “fair enough.”

Atsushi chuckled, then moved closer, “can I kiss you?”

“God, yes,” Akutagawa said, willingly letting Atsushi close the distance between them and touch their lips together in a soft and fondly kiss.

Here’s the thing: after Akutagawa recover the first memory about them kissing, he started looking at Atsushi with other eyes. He obviously knew they were used to it at this point, considering they were married and all that shit, but he started paying more attention on the weretiger; the way he never brushed his hair in the morning, how he liked his coffee very dark and sweet, the songs the sang when he was showering and the way he danced alone on their living room when he thought Akutagawa wasn’t looking, without music, the long grey cardigan he liked to wear moving gracefully around him as he moved around the room, with his eyes closed and smiling, enjoying himself and his own company. All of the little things that made Nakajima Atsushi the amazing and fascinating man Akutagawa married.

All of the little things that made Akutagawa fall in love with him all over again.

He smiled against Atsushi’s lips, slowly kissing him back, enjoying the good feeling of the man’s sweet lips softly moving against his own lips. Atsushi’s lips tasted like toothpaste and tears, but Akutagawa didn’t care; he kissed Atsushi like his life depended on it. Like his lips were air and he was desperate to breath.

After parting the kiss, Atsushi touched their foreheads together, a single tear streaming down his face as he smiled openly, leaning towards Akutagawa’s hand when the man brought his hand to whip the tear away from Atsushi’s pretty face, “don’t cry, my love.”

“I love you,” Atsushi whispered, desperately, “I love you, I love you.”

“I love you too,” Akutagawa whispered back, brushing their lips together, “it’s okay now, my love. It’s okay.”

They kissed again and, somehow, it felt like the first time all over again.

During the rest of the night, Atsushi stayed there in the bed with him even when Yosano kicked his ass back to the chair saying Akutagawa needed to rest –he just waited for her to turn around before jumping back on Akutagawa’s arms, laughing, burying his face on his neck. For the next days, they would need to show up to the hospital every two days to check on Akutagawa’s mental health to see if there wouldn’t be any damages on his brain caused by the memory loss, but it was okay.

Everything was gonna be okay, as long as he had Atsushi by his side.

Chapter End Notes

Since I imagined Atsushi wearing a long grey cardigan and glasses I can't stop thinking about it.
PLEASE PLEASE comment your thoughts about the story! if you ever wanna scream with me about this or any other story here you can talk to me on me twitter!

(P.S: Yep, the Oscar dude here is Oscar Wilde. Lovely guy, love him a lot.)
Fourth of July - Kunikidazai

Chapter Summary

It was during a trip to the USA that Kunikida Doppo met the love of his life.

He can’t say he’s actually sorry for all the songs he wrote about him, even after all these years.

Chapter Notes

!!!!!!!!!!!! MY FAVORITE SONG !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Even though this is my favorite song, I struggled SO MUCH to write this one. I'm Brazilian so I have absolutely NO IDEA how the fourth of July works, so this is probably REALLY inaccurate. Like, really really. By the movies, I'm assuming there's people everywhere in the streets and they start celebrating it in the night of the day before like christmas. If this is not how the fourth of July works (what I 100% think it isn't lmao), just pretend this is an AU where it works this way.

(TAGS: Alternate Universe - No Abilities, meet cute, love at first sight, bittersweet ending (????), implied sexual content)

[word count: 18.205]

See the end of the chapter for more notes


Walking down the empty streets by the end of the day, the man tried to find anything that could serve as an inspiration for him. He can’t actually say his last book was a complete success and, even though he could hear one or two songs he wrote on the radio sometimes, he needed something new. He needed a new success that could take his mind away from his imminent failure slowly coming closer day by day, something that could actually give him enough money so he wouldn’t have to worry about having to come back to his mother’s house so he wouldn’t starve to death.

“ A writer? A musician? This is bullshit, you’re gonna starve to death,” is what his mother always told him when he said he wanted to be an artist, “go find a real job, be a doctor or an engineer, find a beautiful woman and have children; your failed songs and books won’t take you anywhere, money will.”

The park was particularly empty when he finally arrived, the sun still shining in the horizon but the cold wind of the night already starting to send shivers through his body –it was summer, damn it, why the hell was Japan so cold?—. He walked to his usual bench in front of the lake and sat down, watching the sunset, rubbing his hands covered by the grey fingerless gloves together to try to warm them up before opening his notebook on a clean page and pick up his pen, touching the tip of it on the yellowish page and biting his lower lip, thinking.
Damn it.

The writer’s block was killing him.

It was lasting for at least five months now. It doesn’t matter how hard he tried, how long he spent looking at beautiful sights or listening to classic music on repeat, nothing came up to his mind. Nothing, not even a single sentence that he could use.

Every day, he came to the exact same spot at the park to watch the sunset and try to come up with lyrics for his new song or a plot for his next book or even a short poem. A single sentence. Something to start, a starting point. That’s all he needed.

Still, all he could see on the blank pages of his notebook were the ink spots of the times he tried to come up with something but couldn’t.

The cold wind blew again, making him shrink in his clothes. He heard footsteps somewhere next to him, but he didn’t rise his face to meet the person.

“I thought I would find you here,” the person said once they were close enough, sitting down next to him and starting to watch the sunset with him, “any lucky today?”

He sighed, “like the other days, all I could see inside my mind is a blank space. I don’t know what to do.”

The pretty woman next to him giggled softly, not looking at him, “I think you need a break, Kunikida. We should travel somewhere else so you can rest. If you keep forcing your mind to work like that, you might end up crazy and prematurely old,” she giggled again, hands inside her coat pockets to keep the cold away, looking at him with her head slightly tilted to the side, “I think I can even see the white hairs already.”

“Shut up,” Kunikida snorted, pushing her with his shoulder, then sighing again, “I don’t have a place to go, Yosano, you know that. I’m stuck here.”

“Well, do you wanna go somewhere else? Another country, maybe?” Yosano asked, raising her eyebrows.

“I don’t have money to-”

“This is not what I asked,” she said, “do you wanna go somewhere else?”

Kunikida looked at his best friend for a while, with a blank expression, not quite understanding what she had in mind, but ended up nodding, “yes, of course.”

“Good,” she nodded as well, picking up her phone from her pocket and opening the Google app, “where?”

He frowned, “the... USA, I guess? I always wanted to meet Los Angeles.”

“USA could work, we’re close to the fourth of July.” Yosano casually said, more to herself than to Kunikida, typing something on her phone. Kunikida saw sideways she putting a number series on three or more pages, then smiling after a few minutes focused on the screen, “there!” she said, handing Kunikida her phone so he could see what she was doing, “one week in Los Angeles. Is one week okay? We can get more if you want.”

“What?!” Kunikida gasped, looking at the flying tickets and hotel rooms already reserved, “This is
“Don’t worry, Kunikida, everything’s on me,” she gestured vaguely with her hands, “is your passport okay? We’re flying tomorrow night.”

“Yosano, this is– I can’t– You can’t–”

“It’s okay, consider that as a present,” Yosano gave him a crooked smile, “put me on the dedication of your next book and we’re even.”

“I always put you in the dedications.”

She smiled, “exactly.”

He returned the smile, eyes wettering a little, “thank you- Oh my God, thank you.”

“No problem, really,” Yosano tapped his thigh, standing up, “go pack your stuff and check your passport, text me if we need to delay the trip.”

“I will,” he said, then stood up as well and hugged her tightly, “thank you, Yosano.”

“Oi, stop being so needy,” she mocked, but hugged him back with the same intensity, “I’m your best friend and I want your best. You wanna seek for inspiration on the other side of the world? No problem, we’re going to the other side of the world and I will pay everything so you don’t need to worry about anything but your book or your songs. You wanna write a whole new trilogy about cat-like alien gods with fluorescent green skin that eat nothing but fish food and an album with 40 tracks to show to your evil mother that yes, you can make money being an artist and your art is as valid as any other career option? Hell yes, we’re gonna prove her. We’re gonna take this writer’s block the hell out of you and you’re gonna write the best book in the world and an amazing album full of those melancholic songs you compose and I love.”

“Why did I ever do to deserve you?” Kunikida sobbed, not even bothering to hide the tears anymore, giggling, “I love you.”

“Yeah yeah, I know, now go home and pack your things or I’m gonna leave you here and travel alone,” Yosano rolled her eyes, breaking the hug and kissing him on the forehead, smiling, “go, my little grasshopper. Text me when you’re home.”

“Thank you,” he said again, mirroring her act and quickly kissing her on the forehead before turn on his heels and run back home to pack his things.

The trip that should take ten minutes walking was done in five, with Kunikida running all his way back home and then running up the stairs to his old apartment and then almost dying from exhaustion when he finally reached his home, breathless, resting against the kitchen’s counter to recover his breath. After drinking a whole bottle of water and rest a while, he went to his bedroom to check on his passport and pack his stuff; it took him almost fifteen minutes to find the passport, forgotten on the bottom of his closet, but still valid. He sighed, and then spent the rest of the nights writing his next day’s schedule on his notebook and checking the stuff he was gonna take to the trip.

He spent the whole night awake talking to Yosano about tourist points they should check once they arrived the USA and making plans for the fourth of July, a day that would bring a lot of people to the streets and, according to Yosano, Kunikida simply couldn’t miss the party.

Kunikida managed to sleep a little only when the sun was already starting to appear behind the curtains of his small bedroom, thinking about the trip and everything that could happen. Maybe he
Kunikida always hated flying, literally and metaphorically.

Literally was because he hated highs and was particularly terrified of planes; he’s watched enough documentaries and news about shit going wrong on flights and dozens of people dying because of it to avoid flying as much as possible, but you unfortunately couldn’t go to the USA without a plane so he had to face his fears and pose like he wasn’t almost dying of fear on their flight while Yosano mocked him, already used to fly.

Metaphorically, was because people always told him that have high hopes could be really bad for him. The highest the hopes, the hardest the fall. Having your feet on the ground was one of the best things you could have in your life; it could save you from frustration, from disappointment. Expect nothing from the others, and you’re gonna be fine.

Still, there was he. Flying literally and metaphorically. Thirty-five thousand feet above the ground thinking about all the things he was gonna write on this vacation, about all the good stuff that was about to happen.

When the plane landed, Kunikida had to keep himself from running away from the plane to throw up and finally properly breath. Even though Yosano held his hand during their whole way to the USA, he still couldn’t keep the anxiety and the fear away.

The trip to the hotel was calmer, for Kunikida’s mental sake. The weather in Los Angeles, unlike Yokohama, was warm and as peaceful as Hollywood could be, with people happily walking around the hall of fame and taking pictures with their favorite artist’s stars and even the traffic was very welcome to Kunikida; seeing that many cars meant he was on the ground, safe, very far from the immense and terrifying blue sky and away from planes and flights. Yosano only half-mocked him because of that, but he didn’t care, she could mock him as much as she wanted –it was actually quite fair that she mocked him, because he mocked her for at least a month for her fear of moths after he found out about that--.

It took him a while to reach their hotel because of the traffic, but they managed to reach it by lunchtime. Kunikida let Yosano take care of the check-ins and talk to the hotel desk clerk because she spoke English fluently; she talked to them for a moment before giggling slightly to whatever they said and nod for the bellboy to help them with their baggage. They walked into the elevator and, ten floors later, they were standing in front of Kunikida’s room.

“Open it,” Yosano said with a crooked smile, “it’s all yours.”

Kunikida nodded at her, took a deep breath and opened the door. The room was probably bigger than his living room, a king-sized bed in the middle of the room with a huge mirror taking almost the whole wall the bed was resting against, a couch and a big screen TV with satellite, internet and a minibar with all kinds of food and drinks; a closed door between the TV and the closet probably led him to a private bathroom, with probably a big hot tube that could fit four people at once.

“This is,” Kunikida breathed, “amazing.”

“Check the sight,” Yosano replied, resting against the door stop and watching Kunikida reactions. He turned around to look at her, raising an eyebrow before heading to the double glassed doors that
led to outside and opening them, letting the warm breeze of Californian summer fill the room.

He gasped the moment he stepped outside the room.

“I asked for a very specific room,” Yosano returned to say, stopping next to him and resting her elbows on the security bar of the balcony, looking at the Hollywood sign standing basically in front of them, “I figured you would be inspired if you could look directly at the Hollywood sign, you know.”

“Fuck, you were right,” Kunikida said in unbelief, stunned by the amazing view, “this is amazing, thank you so much.”

“It’s okay,” Yosano giggled, “I’ll be in the next room if you need me. I’m gonna take my stuff there and then we can have lunch, I’m starving.”

“Okay.” Kunikida replied, but he wasn’t really paying attention to what she was saying.

She raised an eyebrow, “are you listening to me?”

“Yeah, yeah,” Kunikida replied, shining eyes still fixed on the Hollywood sign.

“I don’t like girls.” Yosano said, Kunikida blindly nodded.

“Yeah.”

“I like eating puppies for breakfast.”

“Nice.”

“Once I stabbed a person for science purposes.”

“Mm-hmm.”

“I threw your notebook out the car when we left the airport.”

“Sure,” Kunikida mumbled, but then widened his eyes and turned to look at her, “wait, what?!”

“Oh, now you’re paying attention,” Yosano giggled, pushing Kunikida with her shoulder, “you can enjoy the view as much as you want. After we eat. I think Ranpo still lives here, I’m gonna text him to see if he could meet us for lunch.”

“Ranpo?!” Kunikida opened a huge smile, “oh my God, I forgot he was living here! Please, text him, let’s assemble the original big three!”

“I will,” Yosano nodded, then walked back inside the room, “you have fifteen minutes to get ready, bye.”

“Okay, bye.” Kunikida echoed, and then he was alone inside his room.

He sat down on the wooden armchair of the balcony after Yosano was gone, still looking at the Hollywood sign and smiling, momentarily closing his eyes to enjoy the warm wind hitting his face. If someone has told him two weeks ago that he would spend the fourth of July on the USA with his best friend, he would’ve laughed and told the person that they were crazy. Still, there was he, looking at the Hollywood sign from his fancy hotel room in Los Angeles. God bless Yosano Akiko and her rich ass.
Just like she said she would, fifteen minutes later she was knocking on his door wearing a whole new outfit with her purse hanging on her shoulder, texting someone. Kunikida picked up his stuff before leaving his room and locking the door behind him, letting her lead the way to outside the hotel.

“Ranpo is still living here,” she informed while she signed for a taxi, “he’s gonna meet us at the restaurant.”

Kunikida just nodded, already starting to get excited, walking into the taxi once they managed to call a car. Yosano told the driver the address and they were sooner driving through the big Los Angeles’ streets and traffic. Even the traffic was welcomed, honestly. Kunikida was living a dream.

The restaurant wasn’t that far from the hotel, but the traffic made the path take almost half an hour. Ranpo was already waiting for them when they arrived, looking around resting against the restaurant wall, arms crossed on his chest and impatiently stamping his feet. When Yosano paid the taxi driver and they left the car, Ranpo immediately opened a huge smile and jumped on them.

Literally.

It took Kunikida a lot of effort to keep all the three of them still standing after Ranpo suddenly jump on them, hugging them tightly and laughing excitedly, but he managed to stand still after stumble a little bit.

“Oh, my Godness,” Ranpo said, “Kunikida still has this stupid ponytail!”

“Yeah, I missed you too, Ranpo,” Kunikida rolled his eyes, but returned the hug with the same intensity as Ranpo, “how’s life going?”

“I got married!” Ranpo replied, breaking the hug and showing Kunikida and Yosano the ring on his finger. Yosano screamed and grabbed his hand to look the ring closer, “how long are you guys gonna stay here? You have to meet Edgar!”

“One week,” Yosano replied, on the verge of tears of happiness for her friend, “please, introduce us to your husband. Oh my God, I’m so happy for you.”

“Oh, so you’re gonna stay for the fourth of July?” Ranpo smiled, pointing to inside the restaurant for them to get inside, “let’s do something together, then!”

“Please!” Yosano cried as they sat down on the table she reserved for them, Kunikida sitting in front of her and Ranpo.

They engaged a casual conversation about their lives after that, updating each other about topics the others didn’t know and events they missed after Ranpo moved to the USA, years ago. Before moving to the USA, Ranpo, Yosano and Kunikida were best friends; all the three of them, none of them was ever left behind, until Ranpo had to move to the USA with his adoptive father and they were forced to split up. Luckily, Kunikida and Yosano kept the friendship and talked to Ranpo even though he was now living on the other side of the world, but with time Ranpo was getting more and more distant until they only contact each other on holidays and special dates like birthdays or days that were important to them –like the day they met, almost twenty years ago–. Kunikida never wanted them for lost the amazing friendship they had, but it is what it is. There was nothing they could do to avoid it back at that time.

Fortunately, their friendship was so strong it seemed to change nothing even after all these years. Even though they were whole different people now.
Lunch was good. They managed to recover all the time they spent apart within just a few hours and, without even noticing, they were already talking like nothing ever happened to them or their friendship. Ranpo showed them pictures of his wedding and his husband, a tall man with dark and long hair called Edgar Allan-Edogawa Poe, and told them about how good his life was there; Yosano was also more than happy to share about her life with her CEO girlfriend to him and quickly agree to come back to the USA for the New Years’ Eve so they could spent it together and with their significant others as a double date.

“It can be a triple date, you know,” Yosano teased Kunikida, poking him with her elbow, “if you find someone until there.”

Kunikida wished it was that easy.

One word leads to another and they were almost kicked off the restaurant after spending almost the whole day there chatting about their lives. After paying for their food, all the three of them decided to go to a park so they could talk more; Ranpo was quick to take them to his favorite park, sitting beneath a huge tree with an open view of mountains and a big lake in front of them. They could see some people here or there, but it was mostly empty.

During the rest of the day, they just stayed at the park enjoying each other’s company, like they used to do in the good old days, when they didn’t have to worry about anything but being young and imprudent. Kunikida has lost the count of how many shit they did together back to when they were teenagers, even though he’s always been the most responsible one of all of them, Yosano and Ranpo had an incredible ability to drag him into confusion and then get away with it—he still regrets that time they broke into a private swimming pool and got caught, though–.

“Oi, Kunikida, are you hearing me?”

Kunikida shook his head to turn off the daydreaming, focusing back his eyes and looking at Ranpo, “sorry, what?”

“I asked you why you decided to come here.”

“Oh,” Kunikida said, “it was Yosano who paid, actually. I needed inspiration for my new book so she decided we were going on a trip.”

“It be like that sometimes, you know,” Ranpo gestured with his hands, laying down on the fluffy grass and looking at the sky, “Edgar is also a writer and he has those long-ass writers block sometimes and I hate when it happens because he gets so sad and frustrated, I hate seeing him down like that.”

“Yeah, I know the feeling. It’s been five months since I can’t write a single sentence for my songs or books and it’s getting on my nerves.”

“But we’re here to find your inspiration and help you to get out of this endless well,” Yosano said, also laying down on the grass but using Kunikida’s legs as a pillow, “maybe tomorrow will help you.”

“Tomorrow?”

“The preparations for the fourth of July,” Ranpo replied, “oh, this is gonna be great. I usually spend the fourth of July with Edgar’s family, but this year we have to spend it together like the old times.”

“I was actually gonna suggest that,” Yosano nodded, pointing at a random cloud and saying it had a cat’s shape before returning to the subject, “we can take the opportunity that we’re together again
“Works for me,” Kunikida said, “you guys are the ones with experience here, I’m just following you.”

“Don’t worry, Kunikida-kun,” Ranpo smiled, looking at him with those narrowed green eyes that seemed to look right into his soul, “we’re gonna take this writer’s block the hell out of you.”

He didn’t know why, but Kunikida also had this feeling, too.

-x-x-x-

Having a good night of sleep in Los Angeles, Kunikida quickly learned, was almost impossible, especially when your hotel room faced an avenue and the fourth of July was only one day ahead.

Though he appreciated people being happy outside the hotel, he needed his hours of good rest before spending the next day and probably the whole other day awake—he knew both Ranpo and Yosano pretty well to know they wouldn’t want to miss a single minute of this day and would want to spend the whole night awake doing God only knows what–. Of course, Kunikida would willingly follow his friends in their adventures and throw his ideals in the trash for just one day just for them; still, he couldn’t help but worry for his health if he spent more than 36 hours awake in a roll. But how could he sleep with all those noises outside the hotel?

So, when he finally accepted he wasn’t gonna sleep anymore that night, he picked up his notebook and wrapped himself in a blanket before going to the balcony and sit down on the wooden armchair, facing the Hollywood sign, looking at the lights around the streets and the people already starting their days, the first signs of the sun starting to appear in the horizon. Kunikida held his breath, stunned, opening his notebook on a blank page and picking up his pen, touching the tip of it on the paper stained with old ink spots of his previous failed tries of escaping from this hell of writer’s block.

He faced the paper, the Hollywood sign, the sun rising in the horizon and then the paper again, biting his lip, trying to think about something worth of writing, a single word, a three-word sentence, but all he could think about was how fucked up he was.

Kunikida snorted, throwing his head backwards and resting his head against the wall, facing the sky. Why was it so hard to find inspiration? Yosano did all this stuff for him, she paid everything, she gave him the best hotel room ever and at what cost? What was the use of all this effort if he couldn’t escape the writer’s block?

He had just one job, just one, and still managed to fail. Of course, the trip was just beginning and he had time to think. Kunikida had time to escape his personal hell before returning to the Japan, but this was still frustrating. Looking at the stained paper in front of him knowing he had all what it takes to write something amazing, but being kept back by his own mind like a prisoner. Like being trapped inside a box on his own mind.

It was just so frustrating.

Honestly, he didn’t know what caused the sudden writer’s block. Of course, being a writer, he knew fully well he was subjected to go through a writer’s block anytime, but it literally came out of nowhere right when he finished a simple poem and still hasn’t come back, five months later. Often, he could write a thing or two that he could later fit into a book or a song or a poem, but he always ended up so frustrated with his messy thoughts and low self-esteem he quickly discarded the ideas saying they weren’t good enough; Yosano was always there to tell him everything he wrote was
amazing, but it was so hard to believe her when his mind already accepted his failure.

Maybe his mother was right, after all. Maybe he wasn’t born for this, maybe he should join a University and find a real job and become a doctor like Yosano or an engineer or even a forensic scientist, like Ranpo.

Maybe a teacher. A math teacher.

He quickly shook his head to dismiss the daydreaming, giggling at the mental image of himself in front of a whole class teaching a bunch of kids that couldn’t understand what the hell was he saying math. Nope, not gonna work.

The sun was already completely showing in the horizon when Kunikida finally left the wooden armchair and returned to his room, frustrated, with nothing but ‘it was the fourth of July’ written on the blank page of his notebook. He couldn’t even consider it as progress.

He laid down on the bed and quietly faced the ceiling, crossing his arms on his chest and gradually closing his eyes as the hours without sleeping finally started to reach him, deciding to take a nap only when he was already on the verge of his sleep. With the fuss of the people outside the hotel room and the sounds of the cars on the streets, he dreamed with the most beautiful pair of glowing brown eyes he’s ever seen.

-x-

Yosano called him about four hours later, waking up from his well-deserved nap, softly knocking the door to tell him she was there. Kunikida jolted up awake, almost falling off the bed, quickly leaving the bed and stumbling across the room to open the door of his room and let her in.

“Good morning,” she said with a big smile, already dressed for the day, “sorry for waking you up.”

“Mornin’,” Kunikida said back with a hoarse voice from his sleep, messy and entangled hair, missing his glasses. He touched his head because of the headache and groaned, “you didn’t wake me up.”

“Sure,” Yosano rolled her eyes, entering the room, “get dressed, we’re going shopping.”

“Noooo,” Kunikida mumbled, throwing himself back on the bed and closing his eyes. The four hours of sleep he had were good, but he still needed more, “I want sleep.”

“I already let you sleep for four hours,” Yosano replied, raising her eyebrows, making Kunikida open one eye to look at her, “I know you were awake this morning.”

Kunikida rose up, resting his weight in one of his elbows, “how?”

“These walls are just so thin and you’re so loud, I heard you moving and opening the door to the balcony,” she replied, “any luck?”

“I got like, a six-word sentence,” he said, falling back on the bed and ignoring Yosano rummaging around his clothes, “but it’s stupid and doesn’t have a context, so I think it doesn’t count.”

“Everything counts,” Yosano said, throwing a white blouse and a grey sweater at Kunikida, “what’s the sentence?”

“It was the fourth of July.” Kunikida replied, picking up the clothes middle air.

She stopped rummaging around his clothes to look at him, “what was in the fourth of July?”
He sighed, “exactly.”

Yosano giggled, throwing at him the last piece of his outfit for the day, “let’s go, great writer. Let’s shop a little.”

“I can’t go shopping.” he said.

“Why?”

“I, uh-” he looked around for an excuse, only to notice he couldn’t see shit, “I have a headache and lost my glasses.”

“They’re in your head.”

“The headache or the glasses?”

“Both.”

Kunikida brought both his hands to touch the glasses resting on his head, almost hidden between the messy strands of his hair, “oh, thank God.”

“C’mon, I’ll give you five minutes to get dressed so we eat breakfast together and then go shopping. Ranpo said he was gonna pick us up by 6pm.”

“What-” he stopped middle sentence, putting the white blouse and the sweater on, “why?”

“He said there’s a parade today already and we couldn’t miss it, so he’s taking us to the Santa Monica beach,” she replied, not even bothering to turn around so he could dress comfortably, “are you ready to spend the whole night awake?”

“I thought we could return to the hotel sooner from shopping and take a nap before going to the parade? I don’t know, it’s not healthy to spend more than 24 hours in a roll awake.”

“As your personal doctor, I say it’s okay to spend more than 24 hours in a roll awake if you don’t do that often,” she made a pause, rethinking what she just said, “I mean, it’s not okay okay, but it’s just once, Kunikida, you’re not gonna die because of it.”

Kunikida grunted, struggling to put the skinny black pants on from under the blankets, then jumping from the bed once he was ready, “fine,” he said, going to the bathroom to fix his hair, take an aspirin and brush his teeth.

Two minutes later, he was as ready for shopping as he could possibly be. Shopping with Yosano always felt like a whole new experience every time, so he needed to wait until they were at the mall before judging how the shopping would go –probably with him carrying so many bags he couldn’t even see where he was going, but it’s okay. He wasn’t in the place to complain about anything on this trip because Yosano was paying literally everything.

“How did you sleep? How was your first night at the USA?” She suddenly asked once they were inside the taxi, already driving through the LA traffic, towards the closest mall.

“Yeah, I didn’t sleep very well,” he replied, making a grimace with the memory of the loud noise outside his hotel room, “I think I had one of those weird dreams, though.”

Yosano stopped looking at her cellphone to look at him with the mention of his weird dreams, raising her eyebrows, “and what did you see?”
“Not much, just a person with brown eyes. It was like looking at a dark room and facing a silhouette with glowing eyes,” Kunikida replied, looking away from her and facing the buildings passing through them like a blur outside the car, “I don’t know if it was really one of the weird dreams or just, you know, a simple weird dream, because nothing happened. It was just the glowing brown eyes.”

“Maybe we’ll find out today,” Yosano said, writing down what he said on the notes of her cellphone like she always did when he had the ‘dreams’.

“Yeah,” Kunikida said, “maybe.”

Here’s the thing about Kunikida: ever since he was a child, sometimes, he had glimpses of the future through his dreams. It wasn’t like dreaming with the lottery numbers or with the apocalypse, no, they were simple dreams about mundane things of his or the people around him lives; phrases someone would say in a certain occasion, a surprise test back at school, someone on his family getting engaged or pregnant. Like a deja vu. He always thought it was pretty weird, having the ability of predicting the future –well, not actually predicting, but still–, but Yosano said it was normal and many people had it, he just had the visions more often than other people had.

This particular vision, though, was making him feel something else.

Every time he had the vision, so he would know he was having one, he woke up with a headache. Yes, the headache was a pain in the ass, but he usually took a medicine and ignored it for the rest of the day until his vision materialized –funny enough, they always materialized in the same day he had the dreams–, but this one made him feel something else in the pit of his stomach. A very annoying and tiny feeling of anxiety for something that was still about to happen.

God, he looked like a teenager girl.

Deciding to ignore his headache, the vision and weird feeling in the pit of his stomach for now, he started paying attention to Yosano and what she was saying. Since they arrived the mall and during the rest of the day, Kunikida managed to forget about it as Yosano started buying useless things she definitely didn’t need and things for him he also didn’t need –he enjoyed and liked a lot the new shirt she bought for him to use that night, though. They stopped for a snack by the end of the day and, when their hands were already without space for more bags, Yosano finally told him it was time for them to go and get ready for their first parade.

They got back to the hotel extremely fast, considering the streets and the traffic was already starting to get hard to walk through, quickly leaving their stuff in their respective rooms before taking a shower to get ready. Ten minutes later, Kunikida was already waiting for Yosano and Ranpo sitting on his bed with the clothes Yosano told him to use, his faithful green notebook filled with song lyrics hidden in an inner pocket of the jeans jacket he was wearing. Yosano took a little longer to get ready, washing her hair and then drying it with a hair dryer before knocking on Kunikida’s door, letting him know it was time for them to go.

Ranpo was impatiently waiting for them outside the hotel, resting against his cars, twisting the keys on his fingers. He opened a big smile as soon as he saw them, crossing the distance between them and hugging them tightly.

“So,” he said once he broke the hug, pointing with his head to his car, “who’s ready to get crazy for the fourth of July?”

“It’s still the third,” Kunikida pointed, raising his eyebrows.
“Irrelevant,” Ranpo gestured vaguely with his hands, “shall we?”

“Let’s go, before I change my mind.” He sighed, but followed Yosano and Ranpo in the direction of Ranpo’s car. Kunikida was never one to enjoy full places; he always got so uncomfortable around too many people and avoided crowds as much as he could, but he was there in Los Angeles with his two best friends who were doing the best they could to bring his inspiration back to him and help him, how could he say no to them? Besides, it was just the first parade. They had a lot more things to do the next day.

He would be fine.

-x-x-x-

So he was wrong.

That Kunikida hated crowds wasn’t a secret to anyone, but crowds in a foreign country where the native language was so distinct from his and during the Independence Day? Damn, that would be hard.

It wasn’t even the fourth of July yet, but people were already at the streets celebrating it. Everywhere he looked, all he could see was blue red and white; the buildings, the people, the cars on the streets and the banners scattered around everything his eyes could see were decorated with the America flag in multiples sizes and shapes.

He was never one to enjoy crowds, but he couldn’t help but think this one looked amazing.

He let Ranpo and Yosano lead the way between the crowd, holding the back of Ranpo’s shirt so he wouldn’t get lost, letting them take him to the edge of the beach. Even there a lot of people could be seen, sitting on the sand or walking in the seashore with their feet in the water, but it was somehow emptier than the streets, so it was okay for Kunikida. The sun was already starting to fade in the horizon, hitting the water in beautiful tones of orange and pink, making the sea look like a livid painting; he took his phone from his pocket and took a picture, enjoying the view, appreciating it and ignoring Yosano and Ranpo talking next to him even after putting his phone back in the pocket.

However, Kunikida started paying attention to their conversation when he saw sideways the way Yosano gasped and started pulling Ranpo’s sleeve, pointing at someone a few meters from them wearing a sand-colored coat, “Ranpo, Ranpo, is that-”

“Oh my God,” Ranpo said, widening his eyes in the direction of the person, “Dazai ? Dazai Osamu?”

The man in the sand-colored coat, hearing his name, turned around to look at Ranpo with a surprised expression on his face, probably because he didn’t expect anyone to recognize him there. He then smiled openly when he saw the green-eyed man, gasping loudly, “Edogawa Ranpo!”

“Oh my God, it’s really you!” Ranpo laughed in disbelief once he confirmed the man was actually Dazai, crossing the distance between them and hugging him as tightly as he used to hug both Yosano and Kunikida. Dazai willingly returned the hug, laughing in the same way Ranpo was laughing, smiling openly, “it’s been so long!”

“Oh my God, it’s really you!” Ranpo laughed in disbelief once he confirmed the man was actually Dazai, crossing the distance between them and hugging him as tightly as he used to hug both Yosano and Kunikida. Dazai willingly returned the hug, laughing in the same way Ranpo was laughing, smiling openly, “it’s been so long!”

“Right?” Dazai agreed, breaking the kiss and walking to Yosano, taking her hand and kissing the back of it with a flirty smirk, “ma’am. Looking as stunning as always.”

Yosano rolled her eyes before giggling and pulling Dazai closer, hugging him like Ranpo did, “what are you doing here? I never thought I would see you again.”
“The wind brought me here,” Dazai replied, breaking the hug and smiling at her, “guess we were lucky to cross our paths once again.”

“I guess so,” she agreed and then turned to look at Kunikida, who was watching the interaction with curiosity, “Dazai, this is Kunikida. Kunikida, meet Dazai.”

Dazai turned to look at Kunikida, and Kunikida suddenly forgot how to breath.

It’s the eyes he saw in his dream.

The pain inside his head suddenly stopped, telling him his vision materialized, but Kunikida wasn’t paying attention to that. All he could think about was how beautiful Dazai was, with his brown hair being illuminated by the sun rays and eyes seeming to glow in the twilight, making his dark brown eyes look like the most beautiful mix between light brown and red, looking like a deep cliff Kunikida wanted desperately to throw himself in.

“Hey,” the man whispered with a crooked smile as he handed Kunikida his right hand, staring deeply inside Kunikida’s eyes, kind and mysterious eyes shining towards him.

“Hey,” Kunikida whispered back, holding Dazai’s hand and shaking it gently, incapable of taking his eyes off him. None of them seemed to want to break eye contact or notice they were still holding hands, too focused on each other to notice how weird it was looking.

“Did they just bond?” Ranpo whispered behind his hand to Yosano, making her giggle, “did we just work as human Tinder, is this what happened?”

“Shut up,” Kunikida snorted, reluctantly breaking eye contact with Dazai and dropping his hand, trying to ignore his racing heart. The man giggled at him and put both his hands inside his coat pockets, smiling slightly.

Ranpo giggled too, looking at Dazai, “so, are you gonna follow us today or you’re gonna keep following the wind?”

Dazai looked at Ranpo and Yosano, seeming to think for a few seconds about Ranpo’s offer before looking back at Kunikida, smirking, “guess I’ll land here today. I’ve been flying too high, maybe keeping my feet on the ground for a while will help me find my purpose.”

Ranpo clapped his hands, with something behind his mischievous smile that Kunikida didn’t know what meant while looking between him and Dazai, green eyes narrowed in their direction, “awesome!” he said, “let’s go, then!” and without any other word he grabbed Yosano’s arm and pulled her to walk among the people with him, leaving Dazai and Kunikida behind.

They looked at each other, raised their eyebrows and then shrugged, with any other option but follow Ranpo before they got lost. Dazai giggled softly as Kunikida started grumbling about Ranpo leaving him behind like that when he knew fully when he wasn’t good with crowds, sneaking through the people to reach his friends with the other man by his feet.

“You’re a writer, aren’t you?” Dazai asked with a half-smile while gracefully sneaked through the people, immediately next to Kunikida.

Kunikida stopped to look at him, surprised, “yeah,” he nodded, blinking before returning to his sneak, “how did you know?”

Dazai crooked smiled, “I’m good at reading people. Besides, you look like a writer.”
“Uh, thank you?” Kunikida frowned, “this- this is a compliment, right? Is that a compliment?”

“It’s a compliment,” Dazai nodded, “I appreciate everyone that could create new whole worlds through simple words.”

“I wish my mom thought this way, too,” Kunikida uttered with a low grunt, decreasing his steps once he had Ranpo and Yosano back on his sight, “what about you? You sound like a writer.”

“I’m an artist, yes, but I express my art through paint and canvas instead of paper and pen,” Dazai replied, narrowing his steps to match Kunikida’s, walking by his side, “I’m better with colors than with words.”

“I think you’re pretty good with words,” the blonde man thought out loud, making Dazai giggle softly next to him, “where did you meet Yosano and Ranpo?”

“Like you and them, I was also born in Yokohama and spent half of my life there before letting the wind take me away. I met Yosano and Ranpo before leaving.”

“You live here now?”

Dazai gave him another one of his half-smiles, “I don’t belong anywhere.”

Kunikida grumbled, “are you sure you’re not a writer? Jeez, I’m the writer here but I feel like I’m talking to Shakespeare right now.”

“Sorry, I’m just trying to cause a good first impression,” Dazai laughed for a moment, and Kunikida swore it was the most beautiful sound he’s ever heard; once he was done laughing, he kept walking next to Kunikida, “tell me about you, Kunikida-kun. What takes you away from Yokohama and brings you to the big Los Angeles?”

“I have this writer’s block that’s during too long, so Yosano wanted to cheer me up and brought me here to see if I could have my inspiration back,”

“Is it working yet?”

Kunikida turned to look at Dazai, with the end of the day’s sunlight hitting his silhouette from behind and producing a half shadow that made him look like an angel, the orange and pink sunlight making his deep eyes look light brown, soft wind blowing his hair away from his forehead. He was beautiful, so, so beautiful.

“Yes,” Kunikida finally answered after a few seconds, still focused on Dazai’s eyes, “yes, I think it is.”

-x-x-x-

Dazai Osamu, Kunikida quickly learned, was a very intriguing and mysterious person.

Even though Dazai said he liked to talk that way –cryptically, like he was a thousand years old vampire– to impress people, Kunikida knew it was a lie. The man simply liked talking that way, it wasn’t to impress anyone, it was his natural way of talking –even though he started to talk more casually with the time passing by, when they started to know each other better–. Despite the formal way of talking, Dazai was very childish, especially when he started walking next to Ranpo and Yosano stayed behind with Kunikida, watching them; in an interval of ten minutes, they managed to play four different party games and almost fall to their imminent death when they started walking on the edge of a bridge with their arms opened for balance. If it wasn’t for Yosano to
grab Ranpo’s arm when he accidentally slipped, he would probably be dead by now.

Once Dazai was fully comfortable around his tiny group, he started to get louder. Like, really loud. The partnership Dazai x Ranpo was something that was gonna cause a headache in both Kunikida and Yosano for the next two weeks, but Kunikida chose to ignore it when he saw the way both of them were smiling and having fun.

“Oh no, I know that look.”

Kunikida blinked and turned to look at Yosano, not noticing how he’s probably been staring at Dazai for quite a while now, “what?”

“The shining eyes and the soft smile, I know that look way too well,” Yosano explained with a crooked smile, “you’re gone already, aren’t you?”

“What? I’m not-” Kunikida mumbled, pushing his glasses back to mask the embarrassment, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh, Kunikida,” Yosano said with a voice tone that Kunikida definitely didn’t like, “you’re hopeless.”

“I’m not, I’m just– I’m just admiring him. He’s admirable, that’s– that’s it. It’s okay, everything is under control.”

“I should’ve known,” Yosano said, closing her eyes momentarily like she was in pain, “oh, I should’ve known. You fall in love way too easy for your own good and I should’ve known meeting Dazai wouldn’t be good for you.”

“Shut up, I’m not in love with him,” Kunikida hissed, “I’ve known him for three hours.”

Yosano turned to look at him with a sad expression, in a way that seemed to stare directly into Kunikida’s soul, and her voice softened, “and since when did it stop you?”

Damn Yosano Akiko and their years of too close friendship.

Kunikida never wanted to be like that. Ever since he was a child, he had his ideals perfectly written down in his notebook, since simple things about his daily routine like waking up at 5:50am and watering his plants once a day to other kind of things that wouldn’t happen for a while, like joining the University when he turned 18 and marrying his perfect woman once he was 26, but he ended up learning way too late that you can’t write your destiny like that.

He wrote down in his notebook very specific things his future significant other must have, but never wanted to be a person who fell in love way too easy and hard. Only a long look and a soft smile towards him, and he was gone. Maybe, deep down, he wrote the ideals to try to mask how much he hated this trace of his personality; maybe having high standards would help him deal with his hopeless heart.

Was he in love with Dazai already? He would say no. They’ve known each other for only three hours, it’s impossible for someone to fall in love with another one that quickly.

Was he walking on thin ice, though? Definitely.

-x-

The parade Ranpo told them about was pretty nice. It wasn’t that long, but also wasn’t too short, so it
gave them enough time to enjoy it without getting too bored—what happened pretty fast to Ranpo, considering his mind was working 24/7 and he never had a break. The beautiful colors of the America flag and the loud songs the cars on the parade were playing ended up being a really nice experience for Kunikida, considering how much he hated crowds and tumults, but part of that was because he wasn’t alone; he could see Yosano and Ranpo happily chatting on his left while they watched the parade and Dazai in silence on his right, with his hands in his coat pockets, smart eyes following the movement on the streets.

When the parade was over and the people started walking around the streets and narrow down the tumult on the sidewalks, Kunikida asked what were they gonna do next. Honestly, he had no idea where they were at the moment; they followed the parade along the streets to the point they weren’t at the beach anymore and he couldn’t see a reference point to help him situate himself.

“We’re not going home tonight, if that’s what you’re asking,” Ranpo replied, then turned to look at Dazai, “do you know any places where we can watch the fireworks?”

Dazai shrugged, “I usually watch it from my hotel rooms, but we can look for a hidden place where we can watch it peacefully once they start.”

“Let’s go back to the beach!” Yosano said excitedly, “but let’s stop somewhere to eat and grab a drink before it.”

They all agreed and, together, they parted to look for a restaurant or an open bar.

It was easy to find, with all the movement because of the holiday the other day. Everywhere he looked, he could see people having fun together wearing the colors of the America flag, drinking, laughing, living, not worrying about tomorrow or about anything about their lives. It was nice seeing people so happy, Kunikida secretly wished he could be as happy as them too.

Once they had dinner and brought something to drink while they waited for the fourth finally arrive, they returned to the streets heading towards the Santa Monica beach. The weather was very cozy, not that cold but also not warm, what made Kunikida shrink into his jeans jacket when the wind blew a little too hard.

“So,” Dazai suddenly said while they were heading to the beach, both of them a few meters behind Yosano and Ranpo so they couldn’t hear what they were saying, “I know Ranpo is married, but are you and Yosano together?”

Kunikida choked on his own saliva, coughing, “what?”

“Are you guys together?”

“No!” Kunikida replied, chuckling, “she’s my best friend and she has a girlfriend.”

“Oh,” Dazai’s eyebrows raised in understanding, “you just seem very close, I thought you were dating.”

Kunikida snorted, “maybe you’re not that good at reading people, after all.”

“Oh, I’m actually not,” Dazai giggled, gesturing vaguely with his hands, “I made it up because I wanted to look cooler, Ranpo actually told me about you.”

This actually surprised Kunikida, “he did?”

“Yeah, many years ago,” Dazai replied. He kicked a rock in the ground and gave a little jump, “he...
told me he had a writer friend when I told him I was an artist. He said I would like you.”

“Do you?” Kunikida asked with an arched eyebrow, biting his tongue right away.

Instead of laughing and walk away like Kunikida though Dazai would do, Dazai smiled, “yeah,” he said, “I’m liking you very much until now.”

“Good,” Kunikida gave him a crooked smile, “me too.”

Dazai smiled at him once again, “so,” he said, jumping on the street’s curb and starting to walk through it, extending his arms for balance; Kunikida instantly grabbed one of his hands to help him stand, “do you have a girlfriend?”

“Nope,” Kunikida shook his head, “actually, I think women don’t really like me.”

“What about a boyfriend?”

Kunikida raised an eyebrow, “is this your way of asking if I’m single?”

“Maybe,” Dazai replied, looking at Kunikida sideways. He gave his hand a soft squeeze, “are you?”

“Yes, I’m single,” Kunikida said, returning the squeeze in Dazai’s hand, “what about you?”

“I’m in a forever and endless search of a beautiful and ethereal woman that would willingly commit double suicide with me,” Dazai said with a monotone voice tone that actually scared Kunikida, looking at him sideways once again and smiling briefly, “or a man,” he added, looking forward again, “but yes, I’m also single. As free as a bird.”

“Why don’t you fly away, then?” Kunikida asked. He understood metaphors way too well to miss what Dazai was implying.

“Like I said before, I always let the wind guide me, but I chose to land here today,” the man in the sand-colored coat replied, jumping over the cracks in the floor and using Kunikida as a support to keep walking on the street’s curb, “flying is good, but sometimes you need to keep your feet on the ground for a while, you know?”

“I don’t like flying, literally and metaphorically. I rather keep my feet on the ground all the time.”

Dazai stopped walking, forcing Kunikida to stop too. He turned around to face the man, confused with the reason why he suddenly stopped walking, finding him looking at him with kind eyes and an expression on his face that Kunikida couldn’t read; but then he crooked smiled, tilting his head slightly to the side, staring deeply into Kunikida’s eyes, and said, “like me, you’re an artist. If you keep your feet on the ground all the time, how are you gonna look at the whole canvas once your painting it’s finished?”

If Kunikida wasn’t already in love with Dazai before, he definitely was now.

-x-x-x-

Kunikida hasn’t realized how much they walked following the parade until they were back to their original start point.

Once they were back to the beach—they made sure to mark the reference point next to the Santa Monica Pier so it would be easier for them to find each other in case one of them accidentally got lost in the crowd–, they didn’t even wait for the tiredness to pass before start looking for a more peaceful
place to stay for the fireworks, noticing the crowd was still very intense there. Maybe because watching the fireworks from an open space like a beach was nicer than watching them from between the high buildings, Kunikida thought.

While letting Ranpo and Yosano lead the way among the people on the beach and look for a more peaceful place for them, Dazai asked Kunikida to see his composition notebook. At first, Kunikida was reluctantly to let him see his poems and lyrics of songs he never finished, but he ended up handing the man the small green notebook anyways. They sat down by the beach once Yosano and Ranpo found a comfortable place—not peaceful. Finding a peaceful place there would be impossible, they quickly learned—, a few meters behind them and facing the sea, their shoulders brushing together by the proximity; Dazai opened the notebook and started leafing through the torn and old yellowish pages, filled with scratches and ink spots and random draws Kunikida made when he was too frustrated with his writer’s block, with unfinished song lyrics and words violently scratched, but also with messy lyrics of songs and poems he actually managed to finish, sentences he later used in his books, random sketches of people doing random stuff of their daily routine. The draws weren’t that good, they were all messy and confused and Kunikida actually just made them when he was tired of writing and needed images instead of words in front of his eyes, but Dazai seemed to like them a lot.

“You said you were a writer,” Dazai said with a smile, curious eyes shining towards the draw that was supposed to be Yosano with glasses on reading a book on her balcony, “but you didn’t tell me you were also an artist.”

Kunikida blushed, pushing his glasses back in embarrassment before burying his fingers in the soft sand beneath his hands, “oh, this is not big deal, it’s just- it's just a hobby. They not even that good.”

“I think they’re pretty good,” Dazai insisted, turning the notebook around to look closer at the draw before leaf the page again, reaching the page that contained the biggest amount of ink spots of his previous failed attempts of escaping the writer’s block. Once he noticed Dazai reached this page, he carefully picked his notebook back and closed it, putting it back inside his jacket pocket; Dazai raised an eyebrow, “what is that?”

“The writer’s block. I haven’t written anything in five months,” Kunikida sighed, throwing his body backwards to lay down in the sand and face the sky, not caring about getting his hair and clothes dirty, “maybe I should give up.”

Dazai frowned at him for a moment before mirroring his pose, laying down on the sand next to him still close enough to make their shoulders brush, facing the stars. They remained quiet for a while, listening to Yosano and Ranpo talking and giggling soft a few meters in front of them and the other people walking around, but still distant enough for them to not understand what they were saying; slowly, Dazai reached Kunikida’s hand buried in the sand and slid their palms together, intertwining their fingers and giving his hand a soft squeeze. Kunikida closed his eyes and bit up a smile, returning the squeeze and ignoring his stomach twisting around.

“We all have tough days,” Dazai said in a low voice once he was sure Kunikida wouldn’t push him away, “and we all managed to survive 100% of them. You’re gonna be okay, just relax and don’t think about this; don’t think about giving up, but also don’t think too much about having to write. Give time to time and you’re gonna be okay, I promise.”

A sentence quickly popped into Kunikida’s mind. I’m the drought and you’re the holy water I have been without.

He gasped, dropping Dazai’s hand to pick up his notebook and write down the sentence before it vanished from his mind; once he was ready writing, not bothering his handwritten was all messy and
sloppy, he took a deep breath and put his notebook back in his pocket, smiling at the sky. That was the first real sentence he wrote in five months, the first sentence really worth of writing.

“What happened?” Dazai asked, turning to look at Kunikida with an arched eyebrow.

Kunikida smiled at the sky again with an ecstatic feeling of relief, “inspiration,” he replied before reaching Dazai’s hand again and intertwine back their fingers, “God, I haven’t felt that in months; I almost forgot what it felt like.”

Dazai smiled at him, shining eyes focused on the side of Kunikida’s face, but Kunikida didn’t dare stare back at him; he knew he wouldn’t be able to avoid it, he knew he was gonna kiss him if he did.

“Oi, lovebirds!” They both raised their heads to look at Ranpo, waving at them a few meters in front of them, “Yosano got sparkles! Do you guys want one?”

“I do!” Dazai replied, standing up and pulling Kunikida with his by his hand, “c’mon, Kunikida-kun!”

Kunikida didn’t reply, but he let Dazai take them to Ranpo and Yosano, who were already holding the sparkles and lighters on their hands. Dazai was quick to grab two of the long sparkles and start jumping around himself in pure excitement, letting Ranpo light up the sparkles before giving one to Kunikida and keep the other to himself, twisting the sparkle around and letting the flashing flames dance around them. Kunikida let Dazai’s excitement fill his own body as he accepted the sparkle Dazai was handing him, letting the man push him as he started laughing and running around the beach, still holding his hand and holding the sparkle up above his head as he ran; Kunikida ended up doing the same, eyes focused on the beautiful flashing fame as he ran around with Dazai, twisting and spinning and doing random patterns in the air and watching in pure fascination the sparkling flame light up Dazai’s face and hair, showing the poet the man’s happy expression and wide smile, pale skin painted in beautiful tones of orange and yellow.

When Dazai placed the sparkle in front of his face and looked at Kunikida through the flames, Kunikida swore that not even the sparkles shone more than Dazai’s eyes.

“When have you been my whole life?”

Dazai smiled. He didn’t reply.

“It’s almost midnight,” Yosano informed, getting closer to them with a sparkle close to its end on her hand and Ranpo playing childishly with two sparkles a few meters away from them, moving the sparkles around and making light saber’s noises with his mouth, “do you guys wanna stay here or join the crowd?”

“We could watch the fireworks from the pier,” Dazai suggested, holding his sparkle away from his face to talk to Yosano, “the view is nice from there.”

“Isn’t it a bit full there?” Ranpo asked between his light saber noises, joining the conversation, “but the view is indeed really good from there.”

“Would you be okay with that? I know you don’t really like crowds.” Yosano asked, turning to face Kunikida.

Kunikida looked at her, at Ranpo and then at Dazai, shrugging, “yeah, let’s go.”

Yosano smiled and Ranpo cheered, returning to his self light saber battle, letting her lead the way to the pier. Ranpo followed after her and Dazai and Kunikida stayed a few meters behind, still holding
their sparkles and twisting them in the air.

Kunikida pretended the fact they were still holding hands since they were laying down on the sand meant nothing.

In fact, the pier was a lot fuller and louder than the part of the beach they originally were. Everywhere they looked, they could see kids running around, people holding sparkles like them and proudly walking around with the colors of the American flag, happily talking, laughing, making new friendships and sharing stories; because of the large amount of people, it took them a while to finally reach the pier and find a place to watch the fireworks once they started.

Once they were settled, Dazai rested again the security barrier and looked at Kunikida, raising an eyebrow in a flirty way, “so,” he said, “are you ready for your first fourth of July?”

“It’s just a date,” Kunikida rolled his eyes, resting an elbow in the security barrier next to Dazai, “I really can’t see why people get so excited over it.”

“American people are really patriot,” Ranpo replied, shrugging, “the fireworks are nice, though.”

“They’re the best part of the fourth of July,” Yosano nodded, “you’ll see.”

“It’s almost time.” Ranpo informed, checking his phone for the time.

Kunikida stood correctly once Ranpo said that, changing his weight from one leg to another. The people around them started to talk louder and the crowd to get bigger, the clock almost reaching its time; when the countdown started Dazai reached his hand and intertwined their fingers together, giving a soft squeeze before looking away to the beachfront where people were already pointing their fireworks to the sky. Something about this view made Kunikida’s heart beat faster, smiling in amazement when the first firework finally reached the sky.

The countdown hit its end, the clock hit midnight, the fireworks hit the sky and Dazai’s lips hit Kunikida’s.

Suddenly, the fireworks weren’t in the sky anymore; they were in Kunikida’s chest, exploding inside his body, the smoke intoxicating his senses. He almost couldn’t hear the loud noise the fireworks were making, because all his senses could focus about were in the extraordinaire taste of Dazai’s soft lips; warm and wet lips with a vague taste of the wine they drank before, his tongue still tasting like alcohol and dreams.

It was the fourth of July, and they were the fireworks.

It took Kunikida a while to reciprocate the kiss; at first, he was too shocked and surprise to do anything, but once he recovered the control of his body he pulled Dazai closer by his waist and pressed him against the security barried, holding his face with the other hand and gently stroking his cheek, tilting his head slightly to the side to kiss him better. Dazai smiled in the middle of the kiss, willingly letting Kunikida deepen the kiss and let their tongues met, bringing both of his hands to the man’s face and tracing the skin with his fingers before taking his hands to his hair, where he entangled the fingers between the blonde strands of hair.

Honestly, Kunikida didn’t care he was missing the fireworks. Not when Dazai was kissing him like that and making such beautiful sounds with his mouth.

They only parted their lips because Kunikida felt someone repetitively poking him in the ribs, taking his attention away from Dazai and the kiss and tickling him; he dodged away from the fingers poking him and giggled, pushing his face away from Dazai’s only enough to look at Ranpo looking at him.
with a dirty smile.

“What?” He asked the man, kind of annoyed, smiling when Dazai started laughing and kiss his neck.

“You missed the fireworks.” Ranpo said, raising an eyebrow. Yosano was next to him laughing behind her hand, holding her phone in front of her face and taking pictures. Of course she wouldn’t miss an opportunity to make fun of Kunikida later.

Kunikida raised an eyebrow and smiled, looking back at Dazai, “did I?” he answered Ranpo, lost in the way Dazai’s eyes seemed to look directly into his soul before kissing him again.

Ranpo grumbled, “ah, shit. You won’t stop kissing now, will you?” he rolled his eyes, poking Kunikida in the ribs again and breaking the kiss, “you have time to kiss later, let’s go somewhere else.”

“Where?” Dazai asked, face buried in Kunikida’s neck and voice muffled by his skin.

“I don’t know, somewhere else,” Ranpo shrugged, “I can text Edgar and tell him to meet us and then we can go to a pub or something.”

It was Yosano’s time to grumble, “if I knew we were gonna find someone for Kunikida to get laid on this trip and I would be the third wheel, I would’ve asked Ozaki to come with me.”

“Oh, now it’s my fault?” Kunikida asked, pretending to be mad about it, but there was a smug in the corner of his lips, “where’s the pub you talked about?”

“There’s a really nice pub here with a karaoke, but there’s probably gonna be full of drunk and happy people;” Ranpo answered, pointing to somewhere across the crowd already starting to decrease, “I go there with Edgar sometimes. I also know the manager, so he could find us a table even if the place is full.”

“Works for me,” Kunikida replied, trying to focus on Ranpo and Yosano and not on Dazai sucking his neck ignoring the fact they were in public, “lead the way.”

Ranpo nodded, then turned on his heels and started to walk among the crowd. Dazai stopped kissing Kunikida’s neck as soon as Ranpo started to walk away from them, quickly pecking him on the lips before smiling and grabbing his hand, intertwining their fingers; Kunikida smiled back at him and pulled him to walk with him, following Ranpo among the people with Yosano immediately behind them. Kunikida hasn’t noticed how much he was uncomfortable in the middle of the crowd of the pier until they finally managed to escape it, taking a deep breath and sighing in relief; despite being a singer, crowds really weren’t his thing.

The pub Ranpo talked about wasn’t that far from the pier, but still wasn’t that close. They had to walk for about fifteen minutes until they finally reached it, finding the place with a small queue to enter the place and a pop song bumping inside the pub; instead of walking to the end of the queue, Ranpo walked to the front door and talked to the security guard for a moment, starting a quick conversation and laughing to whatever the guard was saying and also making the guard laugh. Two more minutes of conversation, and Ranpo managed to get them to enter the place without having to wait for a booth in the queue.

The other three who were waiting for him raised an eyebrow, but Ranpo just shrugged, “like I said, I know the owner.”

Yosano snorted at him, but no one said anything. They followed Ranpo inside the pub to their booth,
placed under the big window with a free view to the Los Angeles’ streets and with a clear view of the bar and the small stage in the back of the place, where a dude was singing a random song Kunikida once heard on the radio and playing the guitar.

The pub itself was really nice and comfortable, despite being a bit too full for Kunikida’s taste. It had the small stage in the back of the place and a bar with multiple drinks being shown on its right, the lights in the pub were narrow, the walls were filled with random posters of bands and paintings and some game machines could be seen here or there, some with people playing and some waiting for someone to use them. As soon as they say down a waitress came to talk to them and note their drinks, leaving them alone again once they all asked her what they want.

“I’ll be right back, I’m gonna use the bathroom,” Dazai said, sneaking out from where he was sitting next to Kunikida and going towards the toilets with stupid little jumps, like he was holding the pee for real long. Kunikida snorted at him, watching him with shining eyes and a stupid smile that made Yosano actually worried.

“Okay, I can’t keep this from you anymore,” she said, making Kunikida look at her with a confused expression. His confused expression only increased when he noticed Ranpo was also looking at him with a worried expression, deep green eyes carefully studying him, “you have to promise you’ll be careful.”

Kunikida gasped, “what?”

“Dazai,” Yosano said, as if it would shine a light above Kunikida’s head and he would suddenly understand what she was talking about, “look, he’s not the man for you.”

“What do you mean he’s not the man for me?” Kunikida frowned, “he brought my inspiration back.”

This made Yosano stop, opening and closing her mouth like she didn’t know what to say. She then tilted her head to the side, carefully inspecting Kunikida’s face, “he did?”

“Yes,” Kunikida nodded, “what’s so wrong about him?”

“There’s nothing wrong about him,” Ranpo said with a monotone and serious tone of voice that made Kunikida arch an eyebrow. Why does it sound like a rebuke? “it’s just... We know you too well to know you usually give yourself too easily in your relationships and expect your partner to do the same, and Dazai would never do this. He would never hit your expectations.”

“What the hell does that mean?!?”

“Dazai is a free spirit,” Yosano said, squeezing her eyes with her fingers before gesturing vaguely with her hands, “I’m sure you heard him saying this before, but he lets the wind take him. He doesn’t belong anywhere, he has no strings on him, and he’s been like that since we met him many years ago. Don’t expect him to change just because you accidentally bonded in a summer trip, don’t expect him to change for a summer love,” she made a pause, looking deeply inside Kunikida’s eyes, “even though I’ve never seen him looking at someone like that, don’t expect him to change because of you.”

“Your idealism makes you see the best on people and blind you from the other things,” Ranpo proceeded her thought line, “you always say you don’t like getting your hopes too high but you always do this when it comes to the people you fall in love with, but we’re your friends and we want your best, so we’re letting you know beforehand that you should be careful with Dazai. We’re not saying you should kick his ass as soon as he returns from the bathroom, but please be
aware Dazai won’t hit your ideals.”

“I honestly don’t know why are you guys making such a big deal of this,” Kunikida snorted, trying to mask how much his heart was hurting and how Ranpo and Yosano’s words felt like a straight punch in his stomach, “it’s just a summer love, I’m gonna forget about him as soon as I return to Yokohama. It’s not- it’s not like I expected him to come back to Yokohama with us or something like that, no.”

Yosano studied Kunikida’s face in silence for a while, with those big purple eyes that seemed to stare directly into his soul, but ended up just sighing, “just be careful.”

“I will, don’t worry.” Kunikida replied with a nod, sniffing and drying his nose with the sleeve of his jeans jacket. Yosano and Ranpo stared at him for a few more seconds before sighing and engage a conversation entirely different from what they were talking about, thanking the waitress coming with their drinks with a smile.

Dazai returned a few moments later, rubbing his hands together and retaking his original place next to Kunikida, sighing happily and smiling as he sat down and grabbed his drink. The conversation was quickly forgotten by Kunikida once Dazai returned, a big smile taking the place of his pout as he willingly put his arm around Dazai’s shoulder and brought him closer to kiss his right temple, clinking their glasses of whisky together when Dazai rose his glass for a toast; they drank the whole whisky in one sit, making a grimace by the burning feeling in their throat as the alcohol passed by. They asked for another drink as soon as the first ones ended, smiling when the waitress returned with a bigger glass of whisky for Kunikida and three shots for Dazai.

“Take it easy,” Yosano said, poking him with her elbow, “don’t get drunk yet, we still want you to sing a song for us.”

Kunikida gasped, almost choking with his drink, looking at her with wide eyes, “what?”

“Why do you think we brought you here?” Ranpo raised an eyebrow, smirking, “what’s the point of having a singer friend if they’re not gonna sing for us?”

“You gotta be kidding me,” Kunikida snorted, “I came here to have fun, not to remind me why my mom hates me.”

“C’mon, it’s just a song,” Dazai encouraged him, poking him with his elbow.
Both Yosano and Ranpo nodded, “you don’t need to keep singing if you’re too uncomfortable.”

“I honest feel so betrayed right now,” Kunikida grumbled, looking at all the three of them with narrowed eyes as if he was actually offended, but there was a trace of a smile in the corner of his lips, “alright, I’ll go,” they all cheered, Kunikida raised a finger, “but just one song, okay? I’m not gonna serenade random people.”

Dazai raised an eyebrow, smirking, “not even me?”

Kunikida made a pause, “okay, maybe you,” he said, making Yosano and Ranpo force sounds of vomit. He giggled, drinking the rest of his whisky and quickly pecking Dazai in the lips before sneaking out of their booth and walk towards the small stage in the back of the place. Once he was there he talked to the guard next to the stage, asking if he could sing a song after the current person finished singing their own. The guard nodded, then pointed at the instruments resting behind the stage for the singer’s use; Kunikida looked among the guitars before picking up a red and black one, placing the black strap over his shoulders and starting to tune it, tracing his fingers over the strings, getting used to its shape before smiling and nodding to himself. This one would work. He
then talked to a guy next to the stage about a song to see if he knew which song he was talking
about, smiling when the guy nodded and willingly offered himself to play the drums for him.

A few minutes later and the person currently singing was done, giving Kunikida free space on
the stage and the total attention of all the people around the pub. He rolled his eyes when Ranpo started
waving desperately at him and scream like a girl at a boyband’s concert, walking to the middle of the
stage and taking the stool place behind the microphone, clearing his throat and giving the public a
crooked smile.

“All right, so this one goes to an amazing person I met today, to my best friend who gave me the
opportunity to be here today and, well, to the dude screaming in the back of the club,” he said with a
giggle, making Ranpo let out a hysterical girlish scream and the crowd laugh, “here I go.”

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, count to three and returned to open them, the lights of the
club now focused on him, making his eyes look pale grey. Kunikida started tracing the strings of the
guitar, nodding to himself when the guy who told him he would help him with the drums started
playing it, taking another deep breath and looking in the direction of Dazai when he started singing.

Am I more than you bargained for yet?
I've been dying to tell you
Anything you want to hear
'Cause that's just who I am this week
Lie in the grass, next to the mausoleum.

Some people on the crowd gasped and started singing with him, others ignored him and returned to
whatever they were doing before Kunikida walked into the stage, some just watched him in silence
and some were recording him with his phone, but he didn’t actually pay attention to those people.
Besides the song, all he could focus about were the beautiful deep brown eyes of Dazai looking
straight at him through the crowd, even though the pub was too dark for Kunikida to
actually see
Dazai clearly, but he could recognize his silhouette and see a glimpse of his face through the
narrowed lights.

He could see the admiration in Dazai’s eyes. Admiration and... Something else.

I'm just a notch in your bedpost
But you're just a line in a song
(A notch in your bedpost
But you're just a line in a song)

Drop a heart, break a name
We're always sleeping in
And sleeping for the wrong team

We're going down, down in an earlier round
And sugar, we're going down swinging
I'll be your number one with a bullet
A loaded God complex, cock it and pull it.

During the whole song, like he always did when he was singing, all Kunikida could focus about
were in the song and, in this case, Dazai. He ignored the crowd and all the attention he
was getting, he ignored the flashing lights of cellphones in front of his phone, he ignored the mumble
of the people talking about him and his voice, he ignored all the things that weren’t important right
now. By the end of the song, now standing behind the microphone and totally into the song as he
moved in the rhythm of the sounds escaping his guitar and the drums, he was smiling openly and
singing with everything he had. Suddenly, he remembered why he liked to be a singer, even though he didn’t like the crowds that much; the feeling of producing the thing you like to hear, the scratch his voice tone and screams made in the back of his throat and the feeling of actually making something you love, something other people could enjoy as much as you did. The feeling of making people enjoy something you produced, something you were making.

Once the song was over, the few people who were actually listening to him singing stood to applause him. He smiled openly at them and bowed in thanks, waving at them and taking the hair dripping sweat from his forehead before leaving the stage and returning the guitar to the security guard, who praised him with a smile; he then thanked the guy who helped him with the drums and grabbed a drink before returning to his booth, smiling at the people who praised him along the way.

“So?” Kunikida said once he reached his friends booth, sitting down back next to Dazai, “how did it-”

He didn’t even had time to finish the sentence before Dazai grab his face and smash their lips to together in a hurried kiss.

Kunikida gasped in his lips, but willingly reciprocated it in the same hurried way. He brought one of his hands to hold Dazai’s face and the other to his waist, pulling him closer and gasping once again when Dazai simple moved to sat down in his lap, tilting his head to the side and biting his lower lip to make him gasp again so he could deepen the kiss even more; Kunikida was more than happy to let him let their tongues met, not even caring they were in public and that kiss definitely wasn’t appropriate. He held Dazai closer and groaned when Dazai moved his hips forward, causing an amazing friction between their growing boners.

“Ew, stop it,” Kunikida heard someone say somewhere next to them, but he didn’t care enough to identify to who the voice belonged to, “this is disgusting, go find a room,” the person said again when both Kunikida and Dazai groaned again, a hand suddenly appearing between their faces and forcing them to break the kiss, “stop it, damn it.”

“Go eat a dick, Edogawa,” Dazai grunted, burying his face in Kunikida’s neck and starting to lick and suck the skin. Kunikida tilted his head backwards to give Dazai a free view of his neck, closing his eyes and sighing as he brought his hands to run them over Dazai’s back before placing one of his hands inside of Kunikida’s shirt, tracing the skin of his chest with cold fingertips that took a groan from the man that was a little bit too loud.

“Oi, you’re in public,” Ranpo needed to remind them once again, poking both of them repetitively to see if they could get some sense and stop eating each other in the middle of a pub, “jeez, I didn’t know you were so horny. If you wanna fuck go back to the hotel, no one needs to see you two fucking in the middle of a pub.”

“Where’s the hotel?” Dazai asked, moving his hips back and forth and making Kunikida sigh once again by the friction between their boners, holding him by the waist and unconsciously forcing him to move again.

He sighed before replying, with his eyes closed: “It’s a little bit far away from here, but I think we can reach it faster by the subway.”

“Then go now, I don’t think the subway will work for too long,” Yosano said, looking at them with a dirty smile and mischievous eyes, twisting her whisky while looking at them heavily making out
next to her, “enjoy your fourth of July, Kunikida.”

“Oh, I will.” Kunikida replied with a certain determination he’s never had before, kissing Dazai again before kicking him out of his lap so they could run to outside the bar. He stopped to pick up his wallet and pay for their drinks, but both Ranpo and Yosano gestured vaguely with their hands telling him to leave the bills for them; he gave them a brief smile before waving goodbye and grab Dazai’s hand, pulling him to walk with him to outside the bar.

“Don’t forget the condoms!” Yosano yelled before they left the pub, making Kunikida strangely blush and almost trip on his feet. As if he didn’t just leave his best friends behind and ran off a bar to get laid with someone he literally just met. He really threw all his ideals up on this trip, huh?

Waiting for the train to arrive felt like a whole torture to them, especially because they apparently couldn’t keep their hands to themselves since they found out they were in the same page. Even though they weren’t a lot of people waiting with them, they struggled but kept their hands to themselves until the train arrived and they took the emptier car, where they returned to the make out session without bothering with the people shooting them weird glares; they were young and they were in love and they were the fireworks of the fourth of July and they didn’t give a shit about what other people were thinking, they weren’t going to hide it just because a bunch of old people thought they were indelicate.

Their way to Kunikida’s room, once they finally arrived the hotel, seemed a lot worse than when they were at the train, because now they knew no one was watching them and they could use their hands as much as they wanted with worrying about getting dumped from the hotel for indecency in the halls. From wall to wall, every hall they passed in their way to Kunikida’s room was now marked in their history, with a lot of hands and dirty sounds and giggles and sighs and moans; Kunikida unlocked the door of his room once they reached it and immediately pressed Dazai against the closest wall inside the room, blindly kicking the door closed and locking it back before he could entirely focus on the man with sand-colored coat pressed against the wall, with his eyes closed and mouth half-opened, heavy breathing, running his hands over the whole extension of Kunikida’s body.

Dazai’s coat was the first cloth to be thrown away around the room, alongside with Kunikida’s jeans jacket and their respective shoes, their hands running over the other’s body as they blindly went to the bed, mouths deeply connected to each other in a way Kunikida didn’t know where his lips ended and Dazai’s started; he broke their lips only to laid Dazai down on the bed as gently as he could before climbing above him and return to the kiss as passionately as before, running his hands over his thin body, tracing the skin –the small spots that weren’t covered by the weird white bandages, at least– beneath the shirt, fascinated with the sounds that were escaping Dazai’s mouth.

Once again, they broke the kiss to get rid of their shirts when the sweat started to get too uncomfortable and only the kisses weren’t enough; they needed more contact, they needed more skin. After taking Dazai’s shirt off, Kunikida hovered over his body and studied his chest, fully covered by the bandages, hands softly squeezing both sides of his hips, not exactly knowing what to do from now on; if Dazai wore the bandages, there’s probably gonna be a reason, right? He couldn’t simple take them off like that without his permission.

But, even seeing the way Kunikida suddenly stopped, Dazai didn’t say anything. He didn’t tell him to keep going, he didn’t tell him to stop, he just stared back at him with the same intensity Kunikida was looking at him, with deep brown eyes shining in the pale moonlight that was entering the room by the big windows, seeming to looking directly into his soul, judging all his sins, watching all his demons. Dirty brown eyes that seemed to hold all the fireworks they saw later inside the deep abyss.
“You’re beautiful,” Kunikida ended up saying when the silence started to get too violent, leaning over to kiss Dazai softly in the lips, “so, so beautiful.”

Dazai closed his eyes and smiling, leaning his face above to meet Kunikida’s lips in the middle of the way, throwing his arms over his shoulders and starting a slow and deep kiss. He enlaced his legs in Kunikida’s waist and brought him closer, rubbing their dicks together, taking beautiful moans of both of them.

Slowly, they get rid of their remaining clothes and then returned to their own atmosphere of pleasure and lust, bodies sliding together and producing beautiful sounds in the pale moonlight, with fireworks inside their chest and stars in their eyes. During the whole night they were just one, and Kunikida thought that maybe, just maybe, this could work.

And, even if it didn’t, what they had that night was enough.

-x-x-x-

The sun wasn’t even completely set in the horizon when Kunikida woke up alone in the too big and cold bed.

He didn’t immediately open his eyes once he woke up, but he shivered when the cold wind hit his naked skin and frowned. He then stretched and extended his arm to look for the body that was supposed to be laying down next to him, finding nothing but an empty and cold space that painfully told him no one has been there for quite a while. He sighed and only then opened his eyes, facing the white ceiling above him.

Why did he thought Dazai would stay after sex? They’ve known each other for half a day, damn it, they weren’t even supposed to go to bed together.

The cold wind once again hit his naked skin, making him shrunk into the sheets and blindly look for his glasses. He found them in the bedside table and scratched his eyes before putting the glasses on and looking towards the door to the balcony, holding a gasp when he noticed a silhouette through the curtains looking at the Hollywood sign while smoking a cigarette, the toxic smoke dancing around his body, Kunikida’s black blouse falling in one of the shoulders and showing the bandages and the small spot of skin on his neck marked with hickeys from tonight, the Hollywood sign appearing behind him as if to complete the whole work of art Dazai Osamu was. Kunikida couldn’t help it, he grabbed his phone and took multiple photos of Dazai before picking up his notebook and starting to write the random words that were crossing his mind, trying to fit them in sentences and then turning them into poems and lyric songs, knowing they would later make a beautiful song.

It was the fourth of July
You and I were
You and I were fire, fire, fireworks
That went off too soon
And I miss you in the June gloom too
He wrote down what he had in mind, then started to sketch Dazai’s silhouette. The view was simply so beautiful he just had to concretize this moment in every way possible.

While he was sketching, Dazai giggled, “are you drawing me like one of your French girls?”

“Maybe,” Kunikida giggled back, finishing a line in Dazai’s hair and then leaving the notebook behind. He grabbed a shirt on his closet before going to the balcony and hug him from behind, resting his chin on his shoulder and closing his eyes, “morning.”

“Morning, Kunikida-kun,” Dazai replied, handing Kunikida his cigarette. Kunikida took a drag from the cigarette and returned it to Dazai, hugging him closer when the cold wind blew again, making Dazai giggle, “I thought you were a morning person?”

“I am,” Kunikida nodded, burying his face in Dazai’s neck and inspiring his scent. The delicious mix of sweat, sex and smoke, “it’s just that someone kinda tired me last night, you know?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about~” Dazai said, finishing his cigarette and throwing it out of the balcony before turning around to face Kunikida, “c’mon, let’s go back inside. It’s kinda cold today and I want to shower.”

“Yeah, me too,” Kunikida said, quickly pecking Dazai in the lips before forcing a disgust expression, “I still feel the sweat on my body, it’s disgusting.”

Dazai raised an eyebrow, “or we can take a shower together? Save water and all that stuff.”

Kunikida also arched an eyebrow, “Is this an excuse to have shower sex?”

Dazai smirked, “maybe.”

How could Kunikida say no when Dazai was staring at him with such beautiful brown eyes?

-x-

Yosano called them a few hours later, saying there was another parade for them to watch and that Ranpo wanted to go to the Santa Monica Pier again. Oh, and also a picnic with Ranpo’s husband, Edgar.

“Oh, I really should’ve asked Ozaki to come with me,” Yosano grumbled, walking in the sand between Dazai and Kunikida and Ranpo and Edgar, holding her sandals on her hands and with her feet on the water while their looked for a nice spot on the beach for their picnic.

Kunikida chuckled, “why don’t you call her? She’ll be here tomorrow.”

“But then you would be the one being the third wheel, Kunikida-kun,” Dazai said, holding hands with Kunikida, “today’s my last day here.”

“Oh, the wind’s already taking you away?” Ranpo asked while licking his ice cream, with his husband’s arm thrown around his shoulders.

Dazai nodded, “I’ve been on the ground for too long already. It’s time to fly away.”

Kunikida didn’t know why, but the sentence hurted more than he thought it would.

Damn it.

He didn’t expect to fall that hard.
“Well, if today’s your last day here we have to celebrate!” Ranpo said with a big smile, “let’s go to the amusement park.”

“Fuck yes,” Yosano nodded, “the Santa Monica park is so nice.”

“let’s have our picnic first, shall we?” Kunikida said, pushing his glasses back and dropping Dazai’s hand when he finally spotted a nice place for their picnic, under a big tree by the end of the beach, extending the towel in the sand so they could sit over it. Ranpo immediately started pulling a lot of different snacks from his picnic basket once they sat down, making Kunikida raise an eyebrow, “hungry, buddy?”

Ranpo shrugged, “I haven’t had breakfast so I could eat better here.”

Poe grumbled next to him, Yosano giggled and Dazai smiled, opening the picnic basket Yosano handed him and picking up a piece of chocolate cake, then handing Kunikida the basket. He fumbled around it for a pie, letting out a low cheer noise when he found it and then returning the basket to Dazai and Yosano, sitting facing the ocean a few meters away from them with Dazai by his side; with the holiday, a lot other families decided to come to the beach as well, so he could see many people walking around the sand and the sea or just sunbathing everywhere he looked, having fun and enjoying the warm weather, building sandcastles, wearing the American flag colors or even with a small flag somewhere on their body –Ranpo wasn’t exaggerating, American people really were really patriot.

After finishing their picnic, they decided to stay there a little longer instead of going somewhere else because the weather was really good for a sea bathe. Poe, Ranpo’s husband, preferred to stay under their beach umbrella reading a book while Ranpo and Yosano ran to the sea, screaming because of the cold water, and Dazai and Kunikida went for a walk in the sea shore, with their feet touching the cold water, holding hands and just casually talking about mundane things about their lives, sharing stories about Ranpo and Yosano and telling each other dreams that would never come true. Before turning on their heels to head back to their original spot once they were too far away from there, they stopped to grab ice creams.

They all got lunch together, then headed to the parade Ranpo talked about around 2pm. It was a little bit far away from the beach, so Ranpo needed to take them there by car –what was kinda hard, considering the way the streets were full and the traffic was intense because of the multiple parades that were happening around the state, but they managed to reach it without bigger problems. It looked as beautiful and stunning as the first one, full of colors and loud songs and people screaming as the parade passed by, following it through the streets, enjoying it as much as he was doing. Once it was finally over Ranpo took them back to the Santa Monica Pier, where they went to the amusement park.

“God,” Kunikida said once they entered the park, looking around the rides and the people with toys they got from the machines, “it’s been years since I last went to an amusement park.”

“What was the last time?” Yosano asked next to him, licking her ice cream, “was it that time we went to the Tokyo’s amusement park with Atsushi and Ryuu?”

Kunikida shook his head, “no, it was that time we went to it with Kouyou and that other girl. What was her name again? Higuchi?”

“Ah yes, that time she threw up on you when we rode the rollercoaster, I remember,” Yosano snorted, “Katai was too scared to ride the rollercoaster and didn’t go with us. When we returned he was sleeping next to the security guard.”
“After we found him he forced us to go to more peaceful rides,” Kunikida giggled, “God, I miss Katai.”

“He’s living his best life,” Yosano said with a half-smile, then turned to look at Ranpo and Poe next to her, “where do you wanna go first?”


“Oh no, not the rollercoaster,” he said, making Ranpo giggle.

“You’re gonna be okay, sugar. Let’s go.” He grabbed Poe and Yosano’s hand and started pulling them towards the rollercoaster queue, leaving Kunikida and Dazai with no other option but follow them.

“Do you want something? Cotton Candy, a hotdog, another ice cream...?” Kunikida asked as they passed in front of the food court, but Dazai denied.

“I’m okay,” he said, then looked at Kunikida with a naughty smile and snarky eyes, “but I do want something.”

“We’re not gonna fuck in the toilets and you already have my heart, what else do you need?” Kunikida joked, not missing the blush that quickly crossed Dazai’s cheeks.

But as soon as the blush came it was gone, and the naughty smile returned to Dazai’s lips. He shot a quick glare to where Ranpo, Poe and Yosano went and looked back at Kunikida, “scatter.”

Kunikida didn’t need any other word before grabbing Dazai’s hand and pull him to run with him among the people, misleading the others like two big children.

They only stopped running when they were in the opposite direction of the rollercoaster, next to the game's booths and the Ferris wheel, laughing deeply and resting against a wall to recover their breath after the run. Kunikida had to support himself in the wall when he saw the way Dazai was deeply laughing, throwing his head backwards and holding his stomach, mouth wide open as he chuckled, and this only made him fall in love with him a little bit more.

Once they stopped laughing and recovered their breath, Dazai smiled, “c’mon, let’s play something.”

“Lead the way, sir,” Kunikida said, willingly letting Dazai intertwine their fingers back together before pulling him to check the games’ booths.

They first did the balloon and dart game, where Kunikida won a small stuffed cat, and then parted to the cross-bow shoot, then the water gun, then the basketball and the ring toss and then they went for the rides after being dumped from the booths because they kept scaring the kids with their loud laughs and keeping them from playing. By the end of the day they had ten different stuffed animals in different sizes, Kunikida had blue plastic glasses that matched with Dazai’s red ones, they drank so many smoothies they really didn’t know how they didn’t have a stomachache yet and Kunikida had to put some sense in Dazai’s mind because he was really close to get a tattoo on his butt.

Standing in the Ferris wheel queue with their matching blue and red plastic glasses and drinking their 9th smoothie, they waited for their turn in the ride as Dazai stroked the stuffed yellow cat he affectionately called ‘Kunikida’ and Kunikida himself struggled to hold all their stuffed animals and other prizes they won at the booths. Yosano, Ranpo and Poe still haven’t found them.
The sun was already starting to set in the horizon when their turn on the Ferris wheel arrived. Luckily, they managed to get a whole booth only for them because the couple behind them was too annoyed to share a booth, so they would have the honor to witness the sunset from up there all by themselves. Damn, what Kunikida ever did in his life to be so lucky?

Like crowds, highs weren’t Kunikida’s thing, but he would make an exception today. As their booth slowly went higher, Kunikida could see the sun starting to fade in the horizon and the deep blue ocean being illuminated by the orange and pink sunrays, the few colored clouds on the sky making the view look like a work of art; he went to the edge of the booth and stared in amazement at the sky, eyes shining in pure admiration, the people on the ground now looking like tiny ink spots of his canvas.

Highs weren’t Kunikida’s thing, but he could maybe change his mind.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” Dazai said, stopping next to him and looking at the horizon, “this is why I like highs; you can see everything from up here.”

“I don’t like highs,” Kunikida said, unconsciously getting closer to Dazai when the booth shook a little, “I prefer to keep my feet on the ground. It’s safer.”

“Maybe,” Dazai nodded, then pointed at the sunset, “but can you see this from down there?”

Kunikida stared at Dazai, then at the sunset, then at Dazai and then at the sunset again, smiling, “yeah, you got a point. I think I can enjoy the high a little bit.”

Dazai giggled, not looking at Kunikida. Sideways, Kunikida could see Dazai’s eyes acquiring a light brown color by the sunset’s light, the sun kissing him skin so well Kunikida swore the golden hour never did someone so well like it did Dazai.

“I can see why you enjoy flying,” Kunikida said when he returned to look at the horizon, still fascinated with the stunning view, “the view is beautiful.”

“Fly with me.”

Kunikida stopped, holding a gasp. He turned to look at Dazai, eyes slightly widened, “what?”

“Fly with me,” Dazai echoed with a soft smile, not looking at him, “you will never have to face another writer’s block if you fly with me.”

Then, Kunikida did what he never thought he would one day do; he pondered. He pondered flying away with Dazai, letting the wind take them, cutting all the strings that were holding him back; he thought about all the places they could meet, all the things they could see, all the people they could know. The new memories they could make, a new history they could write and paint. But...

“I can’t,” Kunikida said, turning to face Dazai. Damn it, this is why he didn’t want to talk about it; he knew their time was running out and Dazai would soon fly away, and Kunikida didn’t want to say goodbye at him, “I’m sorry, I- I can’t.”

“It’s okay,” Dazai replied, still wearing that soft smile on his lips, turning to meet Kunikida’s eyes, “I think it’s better this way.”

“I want to be with you,” Kunikida quickly said, scared that Dazai could get the wrong idea, holding both sides of the man’s face, “but I have a life in Yokohama. I wish I could leave everything behind, I wish I could fly away with you, but I- I simply can’t,” he made a pause, touching their foreheads together and closing his eyes, “it’s the same reason I can’t ask you to come back to Yokohama. I
can’t cut your wings, I can’t force you to stop flying.”

“It’s okay, Kunikida-kun, really,” Dazai said back in a whisper, also with his eyes closed, placing his hands in the back of Kunikida’s head between the blonde strands of hair, “I guess we’ll just have to be lucky enough to cross our paths once again one day.”

“I’ll be here again next year,” Kunikida promised, lips brushing against Dazai’s by the proximity, “I’ll look for you. I will never forget you.”

“Good,” Dazai said. Kunikida could feel his smile, “because I won’t forget you too.”

Kunikida giggled and, with tears streaming down his face and the beautiful Californian sunset as a witness, he kissed Dazai one last time before letting him go.

-x-x-x-

When he finally found Yosano, Ranpo and Poe, Dazai wasn’t with him anymore. He reluctantly left right after they walked out of the Ferris wheel, with tears in his eyes and a soft smile in his lips, in a silence promise this wouldn’t be their last time together. Yosano and Ranpo hugged him tightly after he told them Dazai left, running their fingers through his hair and saying everything would be okay, but he actually didn’t need to hear it. For as crazy as it sounded, Kunikida was okay; of course, saying goodbye to Dazai and letting him go hurted like hell, but despite the momentary sadness, he was surprisingly okay, because he and Dazai promised to each other they would meet again one day.

It didn’t matter if it took one or ten years, Kunikida would wait for him.

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Yokohama, July 4, 2029. Now days.

He watched in silence the cherry blossoms falling from the trees towards the ground, already painted in pink by the flowers. The coffee inside his cup war piping hot, the hot smoke dancing in front of his face like a warm mist, warming him in the cold weather. Japan wasn’t usually that cold at that period of the year, but he enjoyed the cold; he enjoyed the long sweaters and the fluffy socks, the coffee piping hot and the fireplace crackling in the living room, giving his house a cozy orange tone very welcomed by him. Cold days meant he could stay in front of the fireplace the whole day with his coffee and a good book, comfortably in the huge house, enjoying the silence and his own company as he wrote his novels and songs.

The man recorded clearly the day his creativity and inspiration came back to him and never left again, many years ago. During the fourth of July, in the USA, he met the love of his life and the reason he never knew again what a writer’s block felt like. Thanks to that fascinating man, a decade
ago, Kunikida was able to write a new book and a whole album about their small time together that marked his whole life forever; the album and the book ended up being a success, what gave him enough money to pay Yosano back for their trip and buy a comfortable house, still at that summer, where he was living until now days.

Every year, he would travel back to the USA in the fourth of July in the hope of meeting Dazai again. He would look everywhere for him, go to the places that marked their history and just wait for the man to casually come to him with the wind, gracefully landing next to him and smile at him in that way only Dazai Osamu could.

The destiny, though, had different plans for them.

Kunikida never saw Dazai again. He looked for him everywhere, going on long trips in the hope of accidentally meeting him in a storm, asking Ranpo and Yosano for places where Dazai could’ve gone, but nothing worked. The wind took Dazai away from Kunikida for good, and he would never see him again.

Sometimes he wondered what would’ve happened if he had flown away with Dazai. Would they still be together? Would they gradually split up and follow in different paths? Would they land somewhere and cut their wings, build a nest and have a peaceful life? Kunikida would never know. Dazai was his favorite “what if”, Dazai was his best “I’ll never know”.

But, even though they never met again, Kunikida was forever grateful for Dazai and everything they had. He would forever be the love of his life, he would ever be the person that brought Kunikida’s meaning back. He would never forget the fourth of July.

Chapter End Notes

please don't laugh at me I have no idea how the fourth of July works please send help. Comment what you thought about the story because I'm really insecure about this one :(  
(P.S: The song Kunikida sings in the karaoke is called "Sugar, We're Goin Down" and is also from Fall Out Boy. You probably heard it before, it's really good)
Chapter Summary

Poe gets caught in a thunderstorm, Ranpo is pining. They slow dance together in their hotel room. There’s a lot of fluff and love in the air.

Karl is jealous.

Chapter Notes

This one is way shorter than I planned.

I wanted to make all of the oneshots here more than 8k, but unfortunately I couldn't make this story longer because this song is pretty simple so?????????? it actually doesn’t have a deep plot like centuries or irresistible but it's still pretty cute.

Actually, it's all fluff. There's no actual plot, it's only fluff here.

(TAGS: Canon Compliant, getting together, dancing together, fluff)

[words count: 3.850]

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The pouring rain outside the hotel room told Ranpo that he was stuck there for a very long time.

He watched the storm with a quiet expression in his face, following a drop of water in the window until it merged with another drop and fell faster towards the end of the glass, disappearing from his view. Although the room was warm, the man shrank with the sound of the strong wind outside and the cold atmosphere, holding his long hoodie closer for warmth; he could hear Kunikida and Dazai talking softly through the thin walls of the cheap hotel, in the room next to his, and he knew it wouldn’t take long until the couple started making out and make Ranpo want to rip his ears off. Yosano was probably downstairs with Atsushi and Kyouka and Tanizaki was silent in his room with Naomi. Ranpo didn’t want to know what they were doing.

And Poe, well, Ranpo didn’t know where Poe was.

He left around an hour ago, right before the storm started, saying he would buy them pizza because Ranpo started complaining he was hungry. Honestly, Ranpo didn’t know why the President sent all of them to this mission in Tokyo; with Super Deduction, he could tell everything about the case they were all into in a blink of an eye and could save everyone a good time, but Fukuzawa insisted they all needed to investigate it together and said he would praise Ranpo if he collaborated, so how could he say no? He would probably stay silent the whole mission eating his snacks while the others tried to find out the culprit of the murderers, and when he finally got bored he would them and make them mad at him for staying silent the whole time. He can’t say he cared, though.
When the view of the storm shaking the trees outside the room started getting too boring, he pulled the curtains back and sat down in the armchair by the window, where Karl was comfortably sleeping, picking up his PSP and a lollipop from his hoodie pocket while he waited for Poe to come back with their pizza. Considering how long ago he left, he would probably be back anytime by now.

A minute passed, then two, then three, and the room’s door was opened. Ah! There he was.

Ranpo only raised his face from his PSP when he heard the water drops hitting the wood floor and saw Poe standing in front of the open door, with his black coat wrapped around something in his hands—probably the pizza—entirely wet.

He stopped humming the song he was humming and arched an eyebrow, taking his lollipop off his mouth, “uh, welcome back?”

Poe breathed exasperatedly, barely moving because of the wet and cold clothes, “I was gonna wait for the rain to stop before coming back, but it was taking too long and the pizza was getting cold so I just... Ran in the middle of it. It didn’t actually work because the rain was too strong, I almost fell like five times and almost got hit by a bus, but here’s your pizza I guess,” he unwrapped the pizza and placed it above the table next to the door before throwing his wet coat away, moving hardly like a robot. He opened his mouth to say something, but then widened his eyes and sneezed, “ah! I think I’m gonna catch a cold.”

“Thank God you didn’t take Karl with you, then,” Ranpo giggled, petting the raccoon sleeping next to him and then leaving the armchair to walk to Poe, “go take a shower to warm yourself, I’m gonna wait for you so we can eat together,” seeing the way Poe raised an eyebrow, Ranpo rolled his eyes, “yes, don’t take too long or I’m gonna pretend I never said it and eat alone.”

“Thank you,” Poe quickly said, running to the room’s bathroom and hissing with the wet and cold clothes touching his skin. Ranpo giggled again, closing the room’s door and walking to Poe’s baggage to separate dry and warm clothes for him.

While waiting for his partner to take his shower, Ranpo returned to his game and his neglected lollipop, sitting above the table and shaking his legs in the air. Luckily, Poe didn’t take too long in the shower, so in a few minutes he was back to the room wearing his black sweatpants, a grey hoodie and fluffy socks, with the towel wrapped around his hair and giving Ranpo a free view of his pretty face. Ranpo had to bit up his gasp with the view; although he was pretty aware of Poe’s beauty, seeing him in such a domestic way, without his heavy hair covering his face and in casual clothes, always made his stomach ache.

At this point, Ranpo was already sure he had feelings for Poe. He didn’t know when he started seeing the man with other eyes, but he was already used to it; to his stupid heart racing when the man was around and the blush that inevitably covered his cheeks when their hands rubbed together when they were walking side by side, way too close to be considered ‘friendly’, and the warm feeling in the pit of his stomach when he saw him smiling.

Ah, fuck, so he was gone for his best friend. So what?

“Um, Ranpo-kun?”

Ranpo blinked, focusing back his vision in Poe snapping his fingers in front of his face, “sorry, what?”

“I asked if you want me to use the microwave to warm the pizza.”
“Oh, no,” Ranpo replied, jumping off the table and throwing his PSP on their bed before opening the pizza box and immediately picking up a slice, “this is fine.”

“Are you sure? It’ll take only a minute—”

Ranpo rolled his eyes and bit a large piece of his slice, “it’s okay, Poe-kun.”

Poe raised an eyebrow at him in a mute question, but then just shrugged and picked up his own slice before sitting down in the chair next to Ranpo. Karl immediately took his spot in his lap, squeaking for a slice of pizza, making Poe chuckle softly as he shared his food with his raccoon. They ate in silence, enjoying each other’s company and the sound of the violent rain outside being the only sound in the room above the annoying chewing noises; at distance, they could hear Dazai’s giggle and the familiar sound of a bed softly hitting a wall, and Ranpo definitely, definitely, didn’t want to know what was happening in Dazai and Kunikida’s room.

When the pizza was over, the silence in Ranpo’s room started to get uncomfortable and the noise in Dazai and Kunikida’s room started to get louder, Ranpo suddenly jumped from his chair.

“I’m gonna put a song.”

Poe giggled softly at him, knowing exactly why he wanted to put a song, leaving the dinner table and going to the bathroom to fix his hair. He returned a minute later in a messy half-bun, with some strands of his wet hair falling in front of his eyes and wearing his reading glasses, picking up the book he was reading and sitting in the edge of their bed as Ranpo put a playlist on his cellphone. Slowly, the song Ranpo chose started echoing around the room, above the sound coming from the room next to his, making Ranpo silently sigh in relief; he let his phone above the armchair and went to their shared bed, sitting next to Poe and then laying down to face the ceiling, humming the song.

A moment passed, and he looked at Poe’s back and pulled his hoodie, “lay down with me.”

“I’m reading, Ranpo-kun.” Poe replied, not looking up from his book. Karl returned to his original spot in the armchair, sniffing Ranpo’s phone for a second before ignoring it and laying down with his back at the men in the bed.

“And I want you to lay down with me,” Ranpo said, pulling Poe’s hoodie again, “you can keep reading, just lay down with me.”

“Read facing the ceiling is uncomfortable,” Poe argued, “and the book is very interesting.”

Ranpo shrugged, “I can tell you the end if you want.”

“Please, don’t do this.”

“The main character d-”

“Okay! I’ll lay down with you!” Poe said, putting the book down and laying next to Ranpo. Ranpo cheered with his victory over this little argument, happily throwing his leg over Poe’s hips and hugging his left arm, closing his eyes and smiling; he felt Poe freeze for a moment, but he gradually relaxed when Ranpo returned to hum the song that was playing in his phone and trace invisible patterns in his arm in the rhythm of the song.

A thunder bursted outside the room, really close to the hotel, making the lights tremble a little and the loud noise scare Poe. He widened his eyes and jumped by the sudden fright, almost falling of the bed, being held back by Ranpo; he held his arm gently and slid his hand to Poe’s, intertwining the fingers and giving him a soft squeeze, whispering over the song and the rain that everything was
“I hate thunderstorms,” Poe grumbled, making Ranpo snort. He kept humming the song.

“Yeah, I don’t like them either,” he said, then started to tap the back of Poe’s hand when a faster and happier song started, shaking his head in the rhythm of it, “ah, I love this song.”

“I can see that,” Poe giggled. He tried to recognize the song, but failed.

Ranpo started moving his head and tap Poe’s hand faster as the song went through, singing a little bit louder until it reached its pre-chorus and Ranpo suddenly dropped Poe’s hand to stand and start jumping around the room. Poe lifted his chest and rested his weight in his elbows, raising an eyebrow at Ranpo happily jumping and using a hair brush as a microphone.

“What are you doing?”

“What am I doing,” Ranpo snorted, easily spinning around himself because of his fluffy socks, “I’m dancing, obviously.”

“I didn’t know you could dance,” Poe said, giggling when Ranpo walked to Karl looking curiously at him from the armchair and picked him up, spinning him around and singing the song lyrics’ to him.

“Everyone can dance if they don’t give a shit about what the others think about,” Ranpo replied, jumping around the room with Karl while humming the song, “isn’t it, Karl?”

Karl let out a squeaking song, making both Ranpo and Poe laugh.

When the song ended, Ranpo returned Karl to him spot in the armchair and laughed by the way the raccoon seemed actually annoyed with him. Another song started, this time a slow song, and Ranpo turned to look at Poe.

“Looks like your raccoon isn’t a dancing type,” he said, then bowed at Poe, “will you give me the honor of this dance instead?”

Poe giggled, sitting in the edge of their bed, “I don’t dance.”

“C’mon, Poe-kun,” Ranpo insisted, hand extended towards his partner, “it’s just a song, no one’s gonna judge you if you don’t know how to dance.”

“Didn’t you just say everyone can dance?” Poe raised an eyebrow.

Ranpo smiled, “exactly.”

Poe bit up a smile, then sighed and stood up, grabbing the hand Ranpo was extending at him, “fine,” he said, “I guess I could dance a little.”

“This is how you talk,” Ranpo said with a crooked smile, pulling Poe closer to him. He reached the cellphone and re-started the song, facing his partner again and moving him in the rhythm of the song; Poe willingly let him take the lead, he really didn’t know how to dance.

Ranpo, for Poe’s lucky, started slowly, letting Poe get used to the steps and the shame of dancing with someone for the first time. He spun the taller man and caused him to giggle by the height difference, spinning around with him again and then intertwining their fingers back together before the pre-chorus started, slowly leading the steps and dancing around the tiny hotel room.
“Not bad,” Ranpo giggled, holding Poe’s waist and helping him match their steps, “just try to be a little more relaxed.”

“I’m kinda embarrassed,” Poe admitted, but did what Ranpo told him. Ranpo watched the way Poe’s shoulders relaxed as he slowly got used to the dance steps, smiling proudly.

“I’m gonna bend you, okay?” He said, carefully leaning Poe backwards when the man nodded, holding firmly his waist so he wouldn’t fall, “there you go.”

“Shouldn’t I be the one bending you? I’m the taller one,” Poe asked, holding one of Ranpo’s hand and his shoulder tightly, opening his eyes when he noticed he wouldn’t fall. Ranpo was staring at him with big and bright green eyes, leaning over him in a way their noses were almost touching.

Ranpo lifted he back up, smirking, “I’m sorry, what?”

Poe grunted, biting up a smile, “nothing,” he replied, and willingly let Ranpo move them around the room. He quickly matched Ranpo’s steps, even though he was considerably slower and sloppier, Ranpo was patient enough to give him time to learn the steps before teaching him new ones; he broke the contact between their bodies and spinned Poe around three or four times, making the taller man giggle as he easily spinned in the wood floor because of the fluffy socks he was wearing. Karl watched them dancing from the armchair with curiosity in his eyes, seeming very close to join their dance.

Ranpo held his hand again, and then was Poe’s turn to spin him in the rhythm of the song and then bring him closer, momently taking the lead and bending him over like he did with him. Ranpo widened his eyes, getting caught off guard, holding Poe tighter as he was bent over but slowly relaxing when he was sure Poe wasn’t gonna let him fall.

“I told you I could bend you,” Poe whispered with a crooked smile, still holding Ranpo down, leaning over him and blocking the light from the ceiling in a way that he seemed to be emanating it, like an angel. Some strands of his hair fell off his messy bun, brushing against Ranpo’s face and tickling him.

Ranpo wasn’t sure if angels existed, but if they did, this is what he thought they would look like.

He let Poe lift him back up before taking the lead back, grabbing Poe’s hand and spinning him twice before bringing him closer and gluing their chests together, dropping his hand to throw both of his arms around his shoulders and decrease the speed of the dance. He felt Poe freezing for only a moment before slowly run his hands over Ranpo’s back and establish them in his waist, letting Ranpo slowly move them back and forth in a slow dance; he held his waist a little bit harder when Ranpo moved to step over Poe’s feet, giving him the lead of the dance.

The song they were dancing too ended, but they didn’t move apart. Poe kept moving them gently around the room as another slow song started, still holding Ranpo’s waist tightly to keep him still over his feet as they danced slowly, so deep focused on each other they couldn’t quite understand what the singer of the song was saying.

Ranpo looked up, forcing Poe to take his chin off the top of his head to look down at him, looking at him with big green and bright eyes that seemed to look straight into his soul, looking at every single one of his secrets and, with a low and soft voice, he whispered only for Poe to understand, “I’m in love with you.”

Poe froze again, stopping the dance to look at Ranpo with widened eyes. He didn’t break the embrace or let him go, though.
“What...?” Poe finally said after a few minutes of shook, pretty much in a whisper like Ranpo did, carefully studying his face for any traces of jokes or mockering. He didn’t find anything.

“I have been for a while now,” Ranpo continued, in the same low voice as before. He tapped the back of Poe’s neck for him to proceed with the dance, breaking the eye contact and closing his eyes when Poe started to move slowly in the rhythm of the song again, “but I never saw an opportunity to let you know. This one seems like a good one.”

“You’re... In love with me?” Poe slowly repeated, as if he was still processing what Ranpo just told him, eyes still widened as he moved in the autopilot around the room, “how- how?”

“Can you explain why you like detective novels so much?”

“Uh, I think it’s because they’re interesting and intriguing?”

“Well,” Ranpo smiled, “there’s your answer.”

Poe gasped, almost tripping and sending both of them straight to the floor, but managed to recover his stability in the last second. Ranpo giggled at his reaction, “you’re an amazing person with an incredible ability and personality. You’re my best friend and I knew I would fall for you one day since the first time I saw you.”

“I thought Yosano-san was your best friend?” Poe said, raising an eyebrow.

“She is,” Ranpo nodded, “and so is Dazai and Kunikida, but this is not what I meant,” he made a pause, raising his face to meet Poe’s eyes, “they’re not the ones I fell for.”

Poe blushed, looking away from Ranpo’s face. Ranpo giggled and buried his face back into the man’s chest, starting to hum the lyrics of the song they were dancing to.

“I’m- I’m also in love with you, if you want to know,” Poe admitted in a low and soft whisper, voice breaking and stuttering a little as his cheeks burnt up with shyness.

Ranpo smiled, eyes still closed, “I know.”

“Of course you knew,” Poe giggled softly, running his hand over Ranpo’s back; Ranpo giggled with him, the sound of his laughter causing vibrations in Poe’s chest, making him feel even more high with his feelings than he already was.

The purple sky and the lightnings outside their hotel room served as a landscape when the lights narrowed down because of the thunderstorm. Although Poe was usually scared of thunderstorms, he really wasn’t paying enough attention to this one to care about it; he thought the light in Ranpo’s green and bright eyes were more fascinating than the storm outside.

Ranpo stepped off of his feet when he noticed Poe was starting to get uncomfortable, and they retaked the casual slow dance. That must’ve been the fourth song they were dancing to and they didn’t seem to want to stop, and Ranpo was more than happy to dance with Poe the whole if he wanted. He would do literally anything if it meant they could look at him that way and feel his heartbeat against his ear.

Poe spinned Ranpo around, giggled and brought him closer to hug him and move back and forth, “you were the song stuck in my head, every song that I’ve ever loved,” he sang next to Ranpo’s ear in a whisper, sending chills through Ranpo’s spine, “played again and again and again, and you can get what you want, but it’s never enough.”
“And I spin for you like your favorite records used to,” Ranpo sang with him, spinning both of them together easily because of their fluffy socks, taking a giggle from Poe, “I spin for you like your favorite records used to.”

“You’re my favorite record, Ranpo-kun,” Poe whispered against Ranpo’s ear, quoting the song to him, making Ranpo’s heart race like a speed car.

He didn’t reply. Instead, he raised his head from Poe’s chest and gently held his face, bringing his face down and softly touching their lips together. Poe happily reciprocated the kiss, stopping the dance for a second so he could focus only on Ranpo’s soft lips tasting like a terrible mix of pizza and strawberry lollipop, willingly ignoring it as he leaned down because of the height difference and tilted his head to the side so their lips could fit better together, smiling when Ranpo softly bit his lower lip and asked to deepen the kiss.

They only parted the kiss when the air made itself necessary and something started pulling Ranpo’s pants. He gasped and broke the kiss to look at Karl biting and pulling the edge of his sweatpants and making a squeaking noise, like he was mad at something.

Poe facepalmed with one hand as the other still held Ranpo by his waist and Ranpo laughed, picking the raccoon from the floor to look him in the eyes, “there you are, you jealous little fucker. Yeah that’s right, I stole your owner, he’s now mine.”

“There’s enough Poe for both of you,” Poe said, “you don’t need to be jealous, Karl,” he tried to pick Karl up, but the raccoon made another squeaking noise and bit his finger, “ouch! Don’t bite me!”

Ranpo laughed loudly, “he’s so mad at you, man.”

“I think he felt threatened,” Poe said with the finger Karl bit inside his mouth to clean the small cut he caused, “he’s not used to people that close to me.”

“I think he’ll need to get used to it, because it’s gonna happen very often from now on,” Ranpo said, raising an eyebrow at Poe and then turning to face the raccoon, “yeah that’s right, you’ll have to share Poe-kun with me.”

Karl squeaked again, like he was complaining about what Ranpo just told him, making both Ranpo and Poe laugh.

Ranpo put Karl back in the floor and then turned to face Poe again, still with his finger inside his mouth. He raised an eyebrow, “want me to kiss it better?”

Poe looked at Ranpo with a blank expression for a moment, then slowly took his finger from his mouth and pointed it to Ranpo. Without breaking eye contact, looking at Poe with narrowed green eyes, Ranpo started licking his finger up and down slowly, not caring about the fact the cut was only in the tip of it; then, when the finger was already wet, Ranpo put the entire finger inside his mouth and started sucking it, never breaking eye contact. He smiled when he saw Poe’s expression change from a neutral one to a horny one, licking his finger over and over until it was completely wet, finally taking it from him mouth and smiling innocently.

“Better?”

Poe was still looking at him with his eyes filled with lust when he answered, “I think I hurt my dick too.”

Ranpo laughed deeply, the whole body shaking with giggles as he leaned forward and
grabbed Poe’s face to kiss between his laughs. Poe giggled in their lips and pulled him closer, happily kissing him back.

He made a mental note to thank Fukuzawa later for forcing him to come to this mission.

Chapter End Notes

Yes I have a thing for Poe with his hair up in a messy bun keep scrolling.

I hope yall enjoyed the fluff. Trust me, you're gonna need all the fluff before the next two ones.

(Trust me.)

Please comment!
Immortals, part 1 - Shin Soukoku

Chapter Summary

To be honest, Akutagawa didn’t quite understand this weird concept of immortality; if he truly was immortal like Chuuya told him he was, then why the hell he... Kept dying, like he was stuck in some sort of time loop? If he really was immortal, wasn’t he supposed to like, not die?

If he was immortal, then why the hell did Atsushi keep slipping through his fingers like that?

[or; five times Akutagawa and Atsushi met through their lives but it ended terribly wrong and one time it finally didn’t]

Chapter Notes

PLEASE READ THE NOTES!

- Okay so first of all I'd like to apologize for the delay. I ended up getting REALLY carried away with this one so I had to separate it in two parts because it ended up getting TOO long (the whole word counting is 38.788)
- If you paid enough attention to the summary, then you should know what's gonna happen here. Please, be aware that you're gonna witness both of them dying here. Five times. And none of them are nice. So if you don't feel comfortable reading this kind of stuff, I suggest you to skip this story and wait for the last one.
- The first time is a canon compliant where everything is the exact same as in canon except Chuuya isn't and was never at the mafia. Actually, he won't show up in none of the times, but you'll understand why.
- This part contains the first three times. I'll post the second part tomorrow.
- IT WASN'T BETA READ SO I'M SORRY FOR THE GRAMMAR MISTAKES!

Without further ado, let's go!

(TAGS: major character death, graphic descriptions of violence, reincarnation, angst with a happy ending)

[word count: something around 18.400)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[I]

He’s not actually sure when it all started.

It happened so naturally he couldn’t even tell when his mind started to change, but he felt it was somewhere around the time the weretiger said he could kill him if he spent six months without killing
anyone else. At first, right after he made the promise, he thought about a full lock-up; he thought that, if he was completely locked up from the outside world, he could keep his bloodlust on the line and keep his promise. Of course, he knew this was a terrible idea and it definitely wasn’t gonna work, but he decided to give it a try; he thought it was his best option at that time, there was nothing more he could do.

And of course, the idea didn’t last long, because Dazai kept pairing him and the weretiger together on field missions, even though they weren’t even from the same organization.

Honestly, Akutagawa didn’t understand what was Dazai doing. Did he want to make him break the promise and kill the weretiger in the first opportunity he had before the six months? Or he simply hated him so much that he had fun watching them having to collaborate and make an effort to not jump in each other’s neck—because yes, if Akutagawa couldn’t kill Atsushi or anyone else during these six months, then Atsushi couldn’t kill him too—?

It started only a few days after the Agency’s innocence was proved, Kunikida saved Dazai from the prison and the hunting dogs were defeated. He was laying down on his bed facing the musty white ceiling above him while waiting for Mori-san to give him a mission when his phone started buzzing and Dazai’s name flashed on the screen, making him almost fall from his bed in surprise.

He quickly picked up, hearing the noises in the other side of the line, “Dazai-san?”

“Oh, Akutagawa!” Came Dazai’s excited voice from the other side, almost taking a smile from Akutagawa, “are you busy today?”

“No, no! I’m free, I’m totally free!” He quickly replied, sitting down on his bed. Did Dazai-san want to meet up with him? Did he-

“Good!” Dazai cut Akutagawa’s thought, and then the phrase Akutagawa didn’t want to hear; “because I need you to help Atsushi with something!”

Yeah, he should’ve known better.

“What...?”

“Atsushi needs to take a look at something suspicious happening at a warehouse and no one here can accompany him and I just don’t want him to go there by himself, you know?” Dazai explained in a dramatic tone of voice; Akutagawa could literally picture him thrown at a sofa with his arm across his forehead, “so, as the warehouse is next to the mafia facility and you work together so well, I thought you could, you know, help him a little by accompanying him?”

“We worked together like twice and it was terrible,” Akutagawa grunted, “we literally talked about killing each other after the last time.”

“But you didn’t actually kill each other, did you? Both of you are still alive and the criminal was captured, so it was a 10/10 mission.”

Akutagawa grumbled, “why can’t one of you go with him? Why can’t you go with him?”

“Like I said, no one can accompany him and I already have to take a look at something with Kunikida-kun and luckily screw up all his schedules, so it can’t be me,” Dazai replied in a mischievous and childish way that Akutagawa could almost hear his pout, “but I understand if you can’t go. Being the strongest mafia executive and having such an incredible ability like yours must be-.”
“I’ll do it!”

Dazai smiled through the phone, “already changed your mind?”

“You said the warehouse was next to the mafia facility, didn’t you? So it won’t take too long, I can go with him.”

“Awesome!” Dazai cheered, “so go down to meet him, he’s already waiting for you~”

“What?” Akutagawa shouted, but Dazai had already disconnected. He looked stupefied at his phone screen for a few seconds, facing his lock screen while trying to assimilate what just happened, but ended up just grunting and grabbing his coat before leaving his room behind.

He passed through Gin –alive and very well thanks to doctor Yosano– and let her know where he was going before leaving the facility behind, rolling his eyes as he walked to meet Atsushi resting against a tree across the street typing on his phone.

Akutagawa cleared his throat to announce his presence and said, “jinko.”

“Gwaahh-!” Atsushi said when he jumped in surprise, almost dropping his phone and the plastic folder he was holding as he widened his eyes and raised his face to meet Akutagawa’s eyes.

Akutagawa rolled his eyes again, “let’s go.”

It took Atsushi a few more seconds to recover from the sudden scare. When he did, they started to lead together to the warehouse Dazai talked about, with Akutagawa walking a few steps behind him so it wasn’t too apparent that they were walking together.

Like Dazai said, the warehouse was pretty close to the mafia facility, so they reached the place without too many efforts after only a few minutes of incessant walking. It was big and old like most of the warehouses around that area, with musty and spray-defaced walls full of bricks and cracks and a strong and present smell of drugs that were intoxicating Atsushi’s improved senses.

“This place is disgusting,” Atsushi said, twisting his nose, “does this place really smell that bad or it’s just you?”

Akutagawa stopped and turned to look Atsushi deadly in the eyes with a blank expression that made Atsushi have chills.

“Oh! Kunikida-san said there’s some rumors about someone selling mustard gas bombs around the city, so he wanted me to check this out when Ranpo-san gave us this place.”

“Okay,” Atsushi replied, “no jokes for you.”

“The only joke I see here is you,” Akutagawa grunted, rolling his eyes, clearly done with Atsushi’s shit, “what do you have to do here?”

“Oh! Kunikida-san said there’s some rumors about someone selling mustard gas bombs around the city, so he wanted me to check this out when Ranpo-san gave us this place.”

“It’s so simple, why couldn’t you check this out by yourself?”

Atsushi looked emotionless at him, “it could’ve killed me.”

Akutagawa returned the look, “so you decided to kill me with you?”

“You’re not gonna die,” Atsushi said, stopping in front of the warehouse’s door and touching his left ear against the metal to see if he could hear anything inside the place; he pushed his face away from the metal a few seconds later and turned his nails into claws, starting to slowly work in the locker,
“it’s empty, let’s go.”

Akutagawa called Rashomon in a second and then a big hole stood were the huge metal door originally was.

Atsushi slowly turned to look at Akutagawa, with an expression in his face that seemed really close to disappointment, “really?”

“You’re too slow,” Akutagawa grunted, walking over the fragments of metal in the floor and stepping into the warehouse. He heard Atsushi mumbling something behind him, but he didn’t pay enough attention to understand what he was saying.

They took a look around, and they didn’t need to be some sort of a genius like Ranpo to know they were obviously misled. Despite the dirty mess the dust was making in the floor and the remaining smell of paper burning, the place was entirely empty. No clues, no people, not even a single tip that could tell them the place was actually being used for making bombs. If this were the place, then the people making the bombs knew they were discovered before they reached the warehouse. They were too late.

“Great,” Akutagawa grunted, “you made me leave my room for nothing.”

Atsushi opened his mouth to reply, but a buzzing noise caught his attention.

He stood up from where he crouched to touch the ashes in the floor and focused his tiger’s audition in the noise, trying to identify where was this coming from; he carefully took a turn around himself and his eyes stopped somewhere behind Akutagawa, outside the warehouse. With his eyes glowing quickly with a glimpse of his ability, he brought his claws out and slowly started to lead to outside the place.

It took Akutagawa only one look at Atsushi for him to understand he caught something with his improved senses, already following him by his feet. Once they were close enough to the warehouse’s exit door, he also started hearing the noises –something stridently metallic, like metal clinking iron, annoying enough to make him uncomfortable–.

He dodged easily from the attack that came from behind.

Atsushi gasped in surprise, impulsively throwing his body to the side to escape the katana coming to his direction, but the shield Akutagawa made with his ability was big enough to protect both of them. The person who hit them was a man around his 50s, with dark hair and a nasty scar crossing his face from side to side, wearing a maniac smile that unfortunately showed them his yellow and rotten teeth.

The man twisted his katana in the air, stancing, “oh, what do we have here? Some kids trying to play heroes?” he made a pause, raised his pinky and his smile turned into a naughty one, “or were you simply trying to have some time alone?”

Akutagawa twisted his nose, “it’s extremely disgusting that you would even think that we were in some sort of relationship that’s not our mutual hate for each other or we had feelings for each other.”

“Are you the one behind the mustard bombs?” Atsushi asked from where he was still laying on the floor, ignoring Akutagawa’s bitchness, making the man in front of them raise an eyebrow.

“Oh? So you really are trying to play heroes,” the man said, twisting his katana in the air again in quick movements as if to show them he was dangerous, “sorry to break you, kid, but you’ll have to look for somewhere else to play.”
Akutagawa shoot a quick look at Atsushi, with a very bored expression in his face, silently asking him if he could leave his promise behind for just a day and kill the man. Atsushi denied.

“Ah, for fucks sake,” he grunted only for Atsushi to hear, rolling his eyes before facing back the man in front of him with the same bored expression as before, letting Rashomon threateningly materialize itself in the air behind him, “tell me what you know about the mustard gas and I’ll let you live.”

“And what makes you think I would tell you anything?”

Akutagawa didn’t reply, he just let Rashomon cut the air next to the man and part a huge container that was resting in the back of the warehouse in a blink of an eye, leaving a burning path in its way. Atsushi was now standing next to Akutagawa, with both his arms tiger-like and the claws threateningly out, eyes glowing in a pale yellow and fangs also showing.

The man gasped and started shaking, his katana now trembling in his hand as Akutagawa gave him a crooked smile, so small Atsushi would’ve missed it if he wasn’t looking at him sideways, “because I think you’re not entirely dumb and have enough braincells to know you shouldn’t mess with the Port Mafia.”

“Or the Armed Detective Agency,” Atsushi properly added, sounding very proud, making Akutagawa roll his eyes again.

“Yeah, whatever,” he said, letting Rashomon stop threateningly in front of the man, “now tell us what you know and you can live.”

-x-

Apparently, when you’re under pressure and with a demonic entity menacingly next to your neck, you can spill things up really fast.

It took only one or two cuts in the man’s face for him to piss on his pants and tell Akutagawa and Atsushi everything he knew about the mustard bombs. He wasn’t the one making them, but he worked for the person that were making the bombs and transporting them; he didn’t have an ability, he never met the boss face to face and was pretty much of a cry baby. Honestly, Atsushi could hiss at him and he would probably start crying. The “mission” turned out to be pretty simple, and they sooner could return to their respective facilities and luckily never see each other again before the six months end and Akutagawa could finally accomplish his promise and kill Atsushi.

Dazai, obviously, seemed to have other plans for them.

It didn’t take long until Dazai called Akutagawa again after that day, asking him to accompany Atsushi in another mission. Of course, Akutagawa properly tried to deny, but Dazai turned out to be really convincing (it wasn’t like Akutagawa needed a lot to agree to whatever Dazai said, though; only one or two compliments and he was already bought). Akutagawa was really reluctant at first, always following Atsushi to his missions smelling something fishy, ready to kill him in the first opportunity he had in case the weretiger decided to send him to an ambush, but he gradually started to get used to it when the missions started to get more and more common. He would never admit it out loud, but they actually made a good team—this, of course, if you ignore all the bickering and the times they literally almost sent each other to their imminent death on purpose—.

That was, of course, until Akutagawa started to pay more attention on Atsushi.

He’s not actually sure when he first started seeing the pattern, but he thinks it was around the seventh or eighth mission they did together. The way Atsushi was always ready to literally give his life in
exchange of a minor inconvenience; someone dying, an unsuccessful mission, being captured and causing someone to get hurt. Every time something went wrong in a mission, even if it was something very simple and insignificant, Atsushi tended to close up and start uttering with himself, pinching his arms while he walked as if he was punishing himself, with unfocused eyes and a sad expression that was seriously started to get Akutagawa on his nerves.

It was during another one of his casual—and failed—missions that Akutagawa finally understood why Atsushi was acting that way: he didn’t find himself worth of living if he wasn’t performing his job perfectly.

He didn’t have a purpose.

Honestly, it was so stupid and obvious that Akutagawa mentally cursed himself. Atsushi spent his whole life in the hands of his abuser mentor thinking he wasn’t worth of living, needing to prove himself all the time; damn it, he even mentioned it when they fought that Russian dude together, so he should’ve known the weretiger would have inner issues. He should’ve known the weretiger needed to succeed in every single one of his missions otherwise he would feel like a failure, he would feel worthless, like his mentor was right when he told him he wasn’t worth of living. On one hand, he needed to perform his job perfectly in every single one of his missions to feel worth of living but, on the other hand, he mentally felt like he was living like a machine without a proper purpose, on autopilot. How could Akutagawa take so long to realize that?

Or better, how could Akutagawa realize all that with just a look at the weretiger’s face?

He rubbed his hands together in the back of the car, fumbling his coat pocket for his inhaler when realization finally hit him. If he wanted Atsushi on his full potential when the six months ended—in just one month—, he needed to give him a purpose.

Gin, silent next to him, gave him a questioning look with the sudden use of his inhaler, but Akutagawa just shrugged and returned to look to the buildings passing by as Hirotsu took them to their destiny.

“It’s nothing,” he said.

She didn’t seem to buy the excuse, but didn’t say anything. Honestly, it was better this way.

With the arrive of a foreign organization to Yokohama, the Port Mafia and the Armed Detective Agency needed to join forces once again to defeat a mutual threat. Some dude with an ability to teleport himself captured the President of the Armed Detective Agency and the Boss of the Port Mafia and was now keeping them locked up in a max security building; the dude also seemed to have an antidot that temporally blocked any abilities in the world, so Mori and Fukuzawa were in danger and they needed to take them out of there as fast as they could.

The Armed Detective Agency was already there when Hirotsu finally reached the destination, followed by ten other vans filled with mafia agents. Akutagawa jumped out of the car, coughing by the extended exposition to the cold air conditioned, rubbing his arms as he walked to meet Atsushi, who was also walking to meet him in the middle of the way.

“What do we know?” He asked once he was close enough, looking around at the mafia agents bringing his guns out of their cars so they could surround the building. He waved at Dazai.

“Ranpo-san said they’re keeping both of them in the same floor, but in different prison cells,” Atsushi replied, pinching his nose, “they’re about ten floors under the ground in a max level security prison and without their abilities, so it’s gonna be kinda hard to break in. Their whole organization is
here, so even if your agents stay in the top floor to keep their own agents busy and we go for them with just the strongest ability users, it’s gonna be hard and dangerous.”

“We’re gonna make it,” Akutagawa said, turning to look at Atsushi in the eyes, “if we send our best field agents to the underground, we can make them beg for mercy. They’re gonna regret messing with the strongest organizations in Yokohama.”

Atsushi grumbled dramatically, “why do you have to be so edgy? Besides, you can’t kill anyone, remember? Only one month to go, so no vengeance for you.”

“Yeah, whatever,” Akutagawa rolled his eyes, then passed through Atsushi and let their shoulders brush so the other man knew he needed to follow him, “we’re here to save them, we’re gonna save them.”

“I sure hope we do,” Atsushi replied, walking by Akutagawa’s side, “because if we don’t, I don’t know what I’m gonna do.”

“You’re not the next in the President’s line, are you?” Akutagawa asked, stopping by the front door of the building, “so you don’t have to worry about that.”

“The next in the President’s line is Kunikida-san, but he gets a little, uh-- anxious, under pressure situations.”

“I see,” Akutagawa nodded, “but this is gonna work, don’t worry,” he gave Atsushi a quiet smile, so quick Atsushi would’ve missed if he wasn’t looking, then turned around to the mafia agents already positioned, “the strongest ability users will go to the underground, the others stay here covering us. To the ability users, remember: they have an antidot capable of blocking your abilities, so be careful and try not to get hurt. We don’t know how the antidot work.”

Dazai, Kunikida, Kenji, Higuchi and Gin stepped forward in their directions, already positioned for the fight, silently nodding with their heads so Akutagawa could open the doors and they could break into the building. He nodded back at them and called Rashomon out, letting his ability float above his head threateningly; Atsushi turned his arms and legs into the tiger’s ones and let his fangs and claws out, ready to go.

Akutagawa counted to three, and opened the doors.

Everyone bursted into the building like fire guns.

-x-

Akutagawa and Atsushi went straight to the stairs for the underground floors.

Dazai and Kunikida offered themselves to go with them, but both of them agreed it was better if they split up across the floors to cover a larger area instead of going straight to the last floor, because they knew it wasn’t gonna work. The better they could do right now was to force the enemies to split up to defend their base and gradually leave the floor where Fukuzawa and Mori were when their fire power was too strong. That was their alibi.

Except, Akutagawa and Atsushi sooner noticed, something seemed off.

After leaving Kunikida and Dazai in the second-floor underground, they both kept going down the floors and looking for their bosses’ cells, but every floor since the second one seemed empty. There wasn’t a way that Ranpo could’ve misunderstood the clues, so they were in the right place, but something was wrong; wasn’t it supposed to have lots of agents from the enemy organization there to
face them, to protect their base?

Where were they?

“Something’s wrong,” Atsushi whispered next to Akutagawa, carefully inspecting the long corridor full of closed doors, “it’s been three floors since I last heard heartbeats.”

“What do you hear?” Akutagawa said in the same low voice, hands trembling both by anxiety and the cold atmosphere.

“Mechanical beeps,” Atsushi replied, “machines?”

“Computers,” Akutagawa replied with a nod, “we’re in the security area. This is where they control the cameras.”

“So we keep going down?”

Akutagawa made a low grunting noise, turning on his heels, “I guess so.”

Atsushi grabbed his wrist before he could walk away from him.

“What?” He asked in a whisper.

“Voices,” Atsushi replied with a weird ghostly expression, “one floor down.”

“What do they say?”

Before Atsushi could reply, the floor beneath their feet cracked and they fell down in a free fall.

Luckily, Akutagawa could make a shield with Rashomon when the floor broke and save both him and Atsushi from their deaths. They fell down above the fragments of concrete and dust, not waiting for all the dust to narrow down before getting ready to fight with their backs to each other so they could have a 360º vision of the battlefield and could cover the other’s blind spots, waiting for their enemy to take the first step.

A shadow crossed Akutagawa’s sight, he used Rashomon to hit it. He missed.

A deep laugh echoed around the debris, “too slow.”

“Show yourself, coward!” Atsushi shouted, grunting in a way he sounded like a wild animal, trying to see something through the dense dust. For some reason, the dust didn’t seem to start fading.

Akutagawa coughed, covering his face with the sleeve of his coat, also trying to see something through the dust. The soft red light Rashomon emanated was sending flashes of moving shadows around them, keeping them from getting entirely blind. Every single one of his systems screamed that something was wrong.

“It’s a trap,” he whispered to Atsushi when the shadows around them started to get higher, kinda breathless because of the dense dust, “I’m gonna distract them and you keep going.”

He wasn’t surprised when Atsushi replied, “I’m not leaving you.”

“I’ll just distract them, I’ll meet you in a few minutes,” Akutagawa said, stepping away from Atsushi, but the weretiger grabbed his wrist again.

“Let me do it.”
“No.”

“Please.”

“No,” Akutagawa grunted, “you’re the stronger one, so you’ll go. You’ll go, I’ll stay. You’re not gonna play hero today.”

“Akutagawa, I need-”

Akutagawa grunted again, “I know, okay? But let me do this today,” he said, then tried to hit the shadow again with Rashomon when it got closer. He missed it again, “now go,” when Atsushi didn’t reply or move to do what he told him, Akutagawa finally turned to look at him.

It’s when the bullet came.

It was a single bullet and hit his right shoulder, but the pain was strong enough to make it seem like he was caught in a fire. He gasped in surprise, widening his eyes by the shock, starting to tremble when the blood in his veins started to burn like they were on fire; he tried to make Rashomon go after the person that shot him, watching in absolute horror his ability start to tremble like he was looking at it through a screen until it finally disappeared in the air. For a moment, he thought it could’ve been Tanizaki saving them, but Tanizaki’s illusions didn’t feel like this. His illusions didn’t feel like he was having a part of his body ripped apart.

With another gasp, realization finally hit him. The antidot Atsushi talked about earlier, the one that could block any abilities in the world. This is why Rashomon couldn’t protect him.

Rashomon wasn’t there anymore.

He was brought back to reality by Atsushi, holding his wound and trying to stop the bleeding, “oh my God, where did this bullet come from? Are you- are you okay?”

Without Rashomon, they were defenseless. There wasn’t a way they could fight like this, “we need to get out of here,” he said, voice trembling a little by the pain.

“Watch out!”

Atsushi managed to stop the metal bar in the air just in time to save Akutagawa from getting hit by the person who shot him, now visibly through the dark dust. It was a man around his 20s, wearing a black hoodie and with red eyes glowing through the mist, holding the metal bar with a creepy smile in his lips. He didn’t seem to bother that Atsushi managed to stop his attack.

Akutagawa dodged when the attack came and Atsushi yelled, throwing his body to the side and hitting the debris painfully. His whole body seemed to be on fire, like he was submerged in hot water, heart beating dangerously fast with adrenaline; every single one of his muscles hurt like he was hit by a truck, his body joints burning and hurting like he had a fever. He hated feeling pain and didn’t think he could even move his body by now, but he needed to get up and help Atsushi; he wasn’t gonna let the weretiger die like this, he was gonna be the one who was gonna kill him in just one month.

Ah, man. He had a bad feeling about this.

When he finally managed to stand, he grabbed a piece of concrete in the floor that could serve as a weapon and slowly walked to where Atsushi was fighting the man with the metal bar. Luckily, neither of them seemed to notice him approaching, what gave him time to calculate his next steps:
1) He could actually leave Atsushi there and use him as a distraction while he kept looking for Mori and Fukuzawa and then return to help him once he’s found them, hoping to find the weretiger still alive.

2) He could leave him there and call for help. Kunikida could definitely deal with this dude.

3) He could try to help him and take the risk of getting killed because he didn’t have his ability anymore.

Only one of these three options was viable.

Atsushi dodged from an attack of the man, taking the opportunity to scratch his belly with his claws. The man growled in pain, but kept attacking with all his strength even with his organs almost falling off of his body. He didn’t seem to get bothered by the pain after one or two seconds, and it was actually starting to make Atsushi worried and scared; also, his moves seemed to get faster and stronger each second, what told Atsushi that the man must’ve had an ability based in pain. The pain made him stronger, maybe?

The man laughed when Atsushi once again tried to attack him and missed because of the dense dust that seemed to get heavier and more difficult to see and breath through each second, coughing breathless as he kept trying to attack. Time was passing by and Akutagawa was hurt, they needed to get help.

The building trembled around them with an explosion a few floors above them, what made Atsushi wide his eyes and his heart start to beat even faster. If there was an explosion indoors, then the building would start collapsing any moment and they all would be buried by tons of concrete and metal wires. They would be dead in a second.

He looked with widened eyes as the man moved forward again, laughing hysterically as he twisted the metal bar in the air like it was nothing and hit Atsushi. He yelled in pain when the first hit came, getting caught off guard, bringing his arms to protect his face as the man kept moving forward and hitting him with the metal bar, cutting his skin, sending waves of pain through his body as Atsushi stepped backwards to avoid the hits; a big fragment of concrete in the floor made him stumble and sent him straight to the floor, now giving the man the whole control of the situation. Atsushi closed his eyes when the man raised the metal bar and laughed maniacally again, pushing the bar down towards Atsushi’s chest.

Atsushi squeezed his eyes tightly as he waited to be impaled, then slowly opened them when he noticed the man was taking too long to finish the job. His eyes widened in pure terror as he watched the scene in front of him.

Akutagawa was there, standing with difficult in front of him, forcing a fragment of metal further into the man’s neck as his blood spilled from the wound like a fountain.

The metal bar the man was holding was now crossing Akutagawa’s chest, his blood flowing through the bar until it was dripping in Atsushi’s lap.

“I’ll see you in hell, bitch.” Akutagawa said to the man, then dropped his dead body and watched in fell into the ground until he finally collapsed and fell backwards.

Atsushi grabbed Akutagawa before he could hit the floor with a look of complete terror in his eyes, breaking the edges of the bar so he could hold him without also getting hurt and making Akutagawa scream in pain.
“Shhh, it’s okay, it’s okay,” Atsushi said as he sat back down in the floor and carefully put Akutagawa in his lap, trying to stanch the blood and watching in terror as the blood kept flowing through his trembling fingers, “oh my God, oh my God, what did you do? What did you do?”

“He was going to kill you,” Akutagawa said, coughing blood and making a grimace by the pain, “I couldn’t– I couldn’t let him. Oh God, this really hurts.”

The building trembled again, some concretes fell from the ceiling, “we have to get out of here,” Atsushi said, still trying to stanch the blood, “we can– we can save you.”

“You have to go,” Akutagawa said, groaning by the pain. Every time he moved the wound in his chest spilled even more blood, “jinko, jinko,” he tried to call, but he knew Atsushi wasn’t gonna pay attention on him if he kept calling him like that, “Atsushi,” he then said, making Atsushi gasp and widen his eyes, shocked with the sudden use of his first name; the first time Akutagawa ever called him by his name, “you have to go.”

“I’m not leaving–”

“No, shut up, listen to me,” Akutagawa grunted, “sooner, you were gonna say you needed a purpose, didn’t you? And when we fought that Russian dude a few months ago– you thought you weren’t worthy– you need to–” he made a pause, starting to get breathless and with his vision getting blurry by the blood loss, finding it difficult to breathe through the heavy dust and the pain and to form coherent sentences; he didn’t have much time. He looked back up, catching Atsushi’s eyes when he said: “so I’m giving– so I’m giving you one. A purpose. Get out of here, survive and live for me.”

“What– What are you saying? We can– we can still–”

“You have to go, damn it!” Akutagawa said when the building trembled again and more concretes fell off from the ceiling, “go on and live for me!”

Atsushi sobbed, squeezing his eyes tightly when Akutagawa sighed and started to blink slower, touching their foreheads together, “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.”

“It’s okay, it’s okay,” Akutagawa said, looking up to meet Atsushi’s eyes, “don’t worry, this is– this is fine,” even with all the pain, he managed to giggle, “I guess you escaped from being killed by me, huh?” suddenly, the pain in his chest wasn’t so strong anymore when he raised his hand to touch Atsushi’s face, looking inside his kaleidoscopic eyes as he felt his heartbeat slowly decreasing, and his voice softened: “have I ever told you how beautiful your eyes are?”

With a gasp, he opened his eyes wide open.

He didn’t sit down immediately, so he took time to try to understand what was happening. Above him, the sky was pale white and without clouds; beneath him, the floor was fluffy and cozy, like he was back to his bed when he was 5 and life was still good. The wind that blew his hair was warm and comfortable, reminding him of summer days back to when he still had his mother and still didn’t know about the horrors of this world. He didn’t take a look, but he could tell he wasn’t wearing his usual clothes or his coat; somehow, the thought of being vulnerable here didn’t scare him. The atmosphere in this place was warm and cozy like his mom’s hug.

What was this place?
Frowning, Akutagawa finally sat down and took a look around. As far as he could see, he was in an open field and everything was too white; the sky, the floor, the sweatpants and the shirt he was wearing, the horizon. Everything was systematically white, except...

Except from the boy silently sitting down in a wood trunk with his back at him a few meters away from him, with bright orange hair.

Slowly, he stood up and took the firsts steps towards the boy, taking the opportunity to take another look around the place to see if he could see anything in distance while standing. The floor beneath his bare feet felt like cotton, reminding him slightly of the feeling of having his feet buried in the soft and warm sand of the beach.

(He never went to the beach.)

Once he was close enough to the boy, he started talking, “surprisingly, you lasted for a long time this time, considering the choice of life you made. Kind of a peculiar life, I must say.”

Akutagawa frowned at the boy, “do I know you?” he asked, feeling an odd feeling inside his chest as he stared at the boy’s bright orange hair and pale blue eyes. Something about his face made Akutagawa feel warm inside, like he was looking at a distant friend.

Hearing his question, the boy stopped looking at the small puddle in the floor beneath his feet and turned to look at him, raising an eyebrow, studying his face, “oh, you don’t remember me,” he said after a few seconds, returning to look at the water puddle, “it actually makes sense, considering what you did in your last time here.”

“The last time?” Akutagawa echoed the boy’s statement, with a high-pitched voice, “what is this place?”

The boy smiled softly, “I think you already know this answer.”

Yes, Akutagawa had a very vague idea, but even the thought felt too crazy for him.

“Yes, thousands and thousands of times,” the boy answered, making gestures with his hand towards the water puddle. The pearly water seemed to tremble every time he moved his hands, like it was responding to a command, “we became friends around a millennium or two ago.”

“A millennium or two ago?!” Akutagawa echoed the boy’s statement, with a high-pitched voice, “what is this place?”

The boy smiled softly, “I think you already know this answer.”

Yes, Akutagawa had a very vague idea, but even the thought felt too crazy for him.

“Who are you?” he asked, staring at the side of the boy’s face.

Another softly smile, the boy looked at him sideways, “I think you already know this answer as well.”

Akutagawa stared at the boy’s face for a few more seconds, and then a name slowly slid through his mind and comfortably took its place in front of his eyes, shining in a soft light, unlocking a padlock inside his brain with a soft click.

“Chuuya.”

Chuuya smiled, “it’s been a while, my friend.”

Akutagawa returned the smile, some glimpses of old interactions between them flashing through his mind before disappearing. They remained silent for a while, until Akutagawa asked: “can you
“explain to me what is this place? What’s— what’s happening? ”

“It’s simple.” Chuuya replied, gesturing with his hand again and making the water puddle tremble again, “for people like you, it’s the afterlife. After death, most of people don’t pass through this place and simply reincarnate in a new body, but being immortal has its privileges. You have the honor of resting here for a while before choosing your new life.”

Akutagawa nodded with his head, then suddenly stopped.

Wait a minute.

“Immo— immortal?”

“You’ll soon learn that some people have the privilege of being immortal,” Chuuya said, stopping the explanation for a moment to give the water puddle a further look. He narrowed his eyes, bit his lip and did a slide gesture with his hand after a few seconds, making the pearly water tremble; Akutagawa wondered what he was doing, “it’s rare, but it can happen sometimes. Funny enough, you have three people in your life who are also immortal.”

“Really?” Akutagawa asked, actually surprised, but the word still seemed too weird for him to bother asking who those people were, “but if I’m immortal like you said I am, then how did I die? I died, didn’t I? I’m dead?”

Chuuya giggled, “yes, you are dead. Your body is mortal, but your soul... Your soul will live forever.”

“Who are you, Shakespeare?” Akutagawa grumbled, making Chuuya laugh, “who are the other three people?”

“You’ll have time to learn,” Chuuya cryptically replied, then made a gesture with his hand towards the horizon in front of them. Akutagawa looked at where Chuuya was gesturing, raising his eyebrows when the air started to tremble and a white door suddenly materialized a few meters away from them in the middle of nowhere, out of nowhere, “but now is time for you to go. Your new life is waiting for you.”

“What?” he asked, widening his eyes at Chuuya, who just gave him a crooked smile, “what am I supposed to do?”

“You’ll figure it out. After all, you’ve been doing this for thousands of years now,” Chuuya said, gesturing with his hand again and suddenly making Akutagawa appear in front of the door, frowning, “I’ll see you later, Ryuu. Have a good life.”

Akutagawa turned to give Chuuya one last look, then touched the doorknob and opened the door.

[II]

Tachihara dropped the bag filled with money above the table with a loud bump, making Akutagawa rise his eyes from his cellphone to look at him. The boy was proudly smiling as he opened the bag and immediately started throwing the money up, making ridiculous noises of amusement.

“Where did you get that?” Akutagawa asked, returning to the game he was playing on his cellphone but still paying attention to the redhead.
“Dude, this new establishment next to the beach is wild!” Tachihara replied, laying above the table and throwing more money up, happily letting all the bills fall over him and cover his body, “they’re making tons of money! Why didn’t we get them sooner?”

“Because we’re getting ready for our biggest robbery, damn it. The biggest robbery of our lives, remember?”

Once again, Akutagawa raised his face to look at his sister in the opposite side of the room, looking at Tachihara with an incredible disappointed expression that made him proud.

“Of course I remember!” Tachihara replied, trying to sound like he was regretted, “but it’s just a little robbery! I was starting to get bored, I missed killing some cops.”

“How many did you kill?”

“Only three.”

“Good,” Gin nodded with her head, “were you alone? Where’s Higuchi?”

“Yes, I was alone. She’s helping Kajii with the van,” Tachihara replied, throwing Gin a pack of money, “here, go buy a new jacket for you.”

She grabbed the pack in the air, looking at Tachihara deadly in the eye, “don’t think you can buy me with money. One more slip and I’m killing you myself.”

“Sure, now go on and buy a My Chemical Romance hoodie. You can use it in our next robbery,” Tachihara mocked, getting a slap in his face as Gin stood up and passed through him, grabbing to more packs of money.

Akutagawa watched as she left the room, then took his legs out of the table and stood up as well, grabbing a pack of money, “I’m going for a walk,” he let Tachihara know, but the man was already too busy with his money to pay attention to what he just said. He sighed and rolled his eyes, hiding his gun behind his back and leaving the room behind.

As he walked through their hidden spot, he greeted Kajii and Higuchi in the garage fixing their car and waved at Gin when they went in different directions. He put his airpods on and started walking down the street towards the sunset, not worrying if anyone would recognize him in the streets; he knew they wouldn’t.

Maybe that’s the best part of being a smart robber. You can be the biggest robber in the town, you can be in the most dangerous gang in the country, and you can still walk peacefully in the streets because no one knows your face.

Without his demon mask, he was a ghost.

But, even though Akutagawa wasn’t recognized in the streets, he was known in the neighborhood. Not because of his crimes, but because he often helped people who needed help; the old lady who lived across the street and didn’t have anyone in her life to help her, the single father two blocks away who didn’t have a job and lived with his five children, the girl who ran away from her abusive family and was now living by herself. He was a very dangerous robber and assassin, yes, but he still had his morals, thank you.

He waved the old lady when he passed by her, then kept walking down the street without a certain destiny. Sometimes, when the plans for their next robbery felt too exhaustive, he liked going for a walk to relax his mind, grab a drink and drink alone at the top of a high building, watching the city
like he was one of those bad guys from the shows he liked to watch when he was a kid and still wasn’t corrupted by the world.

(Well, watching the city from high places was also good to spot new places to robber.)

He was actually pondering grab a drink and go to the highest building in the town when he noticed something wrong across the street, when he was already downtown.

It was a boy, probably around his age, resting against a building and pretending to be distracted with his phone as he watched the people walking through him, scanning them with smart and focused eyes.

Oh, no. Akutagawa knew this look.

He hid behind a tree and carefully watched the boy’s moves, waiting for him to choose his victim so he could finally interfere. Damn stupid thieves, they always think they’re so smart, don’t they? When the most of the times they can’t even approach someone correctly to realize their theft. Don’t they know you can’t show your face when you’re gonna steal someone? Fucking amateurs. This boy really thought he could steal someone and get away with it wearing a baseball hat? If he tried to steal Akutagawa phone, Akutagawa would return home with two cellphones.

He waited for a few more minutes, and then the boy finally chose his victim. Like Akutagawa thought he would, the boy chose a senior lady a few inches smaller than him who apparently couldn’t defend herself.

So predictable.

He rolled his eyes and crossed the street, silently following the boy following the lady, waiting for him to turn in the first alley he found so he would have less witnesses. The lady, realizing she was being followed, increased her steps and turned in the first alley she found, exactly like the thief wanted her to.

Before the boy could approach the lady and announce the robbery, Akutagawa hit him in the back of the head only strong enough to confuse him, then turned to the lady with a bored expression, “get out of here, I’ll take care of him,” the lady thanked him and quickly left the alley behind with tears in her eyes, leaving Akutagawa alone with the boy groaning in pain in the floor, “what the fuck are you doing?”

“Who the heck are you?” the boy asked back, rubbing the back of his head and looking at Akutagawa with narrowed eyes. His hat has fallen off, showing his bright platinum hair.

“First of all, rob people in the streets is incredibly immoral,” Akutagawa said, kicking the boy’s leg, “second of all, this is not how you rob people. Seriously, cover your face in the next time, it’s harder for people to recognize you this way.”

The boy was staring at Akutagawa like he just said the stupidest thing in the world.

“You– you’re teaching me how to rob people?”

Akutagawa scoffed, “no, of course not,” he said, “I’m giving you advices. Teaching you would take time.”

“So teach me.”

“No.”
“Please?”

“No.”

“Pleeease?”

“I don’t even know you.”

“We would know each other if you taught me.”

Akutagawa stared at the boy for a moment, looking inside his kaleidoscopic eyes who felt oddly familiar for some reason, then shrugged, “ok, fine.”

It wasn’t like he had anything to lose, anyways.

-x-

Honestly, Akutagawa didn’t know what he was thinking when he suddenly decided to recruit Nakajima Atsushi to his gang out of nowhere. Looking back from now, seven months later, he still thought he was kinda stupid to bring the boy home; he had to hold Gin back so she wouldn’t immediately kill him and had to hear Kajii grumbling for five hours straight about how stupid and risky it was ("you can’t just go for a walk and suddenly adopt a kid!") , but something about Atsushi’s eyes felt so familiar to Akutagawa that he simply... Couldn’t let him escape. He needed to keep him close.

Training him, like he thought it would, was hard. The boy was too used to simply steal random in the streets without caring about the consequences, so he took some time to put some sense in his mind, but it didn’t take as long as he thought it would. Only three months in the gang and Atsushi was already as good at robbing as Tachihara and Higuchi were, except he didn’t like to kill like the others two did; Gin still judged him because of that and every time he refused to kill someone she just looked at Akutagawa with the biggest disappointment look in her eyes, like he’s brought a burden to the gang and now everyone needed to deal with this. Luckily, Atsushi didn’t delay their robbery.

At first, everyone was obviously a little bit apprehensive with the sudden recruit of a new member, but Atsushi, Tachihara and Higuchi quickly became really good friends. His first field mission after the recruitment was scolded by both of them, so it brought them closer –and no, Akutagawa was totally not jealous of it--, so he now followed both of them everywhere and joined their little and chaotic ‘squad’; Kajii was neutral about him and Gin still thought that recruiting someone new when they were so close to the Big Robbery™ was stupid and needless, but there was nothing she could do about it anymore. Seven months later, he was already on the family.

Seven months later, Atsushi was already on the family and the Big Robbery was right in the corner, very close to happen.

The day they would rob the Bank of Japan was dangerously peeking them from the corner and Akutagawa Ryuunosuke never felt so ready in his entire life. Nothing could possibly go wrong.

-x-

He quickly realized he’s never been so wrong in his entire life.

-x-

Hiding behind a pilaster, he waited for the shots to stop before he could peek by the corner of the concrete. He grunted, dried the blood dripping from the cut in his eyebrow and changed the
magazine, shooting the cop who was shooting at him in the middle of his head and sending him flying backwards in an explosion of blood; he tried to look for his friends around the genocide that was happening there once the cop was dead, hoping to see literally anyone of them, just so he could be sure he wasn’t the last one standing.

Ah, man, he really hoped he wasn’t. It would be a shame have to spend all the money they stole by himself.

Funny enough, the robbery was a success. They managed to get almost all the money, made some hostages in their way, shot and killed some cops and Gin accidentally cut his leg with her knife when they were fighting hand-to-hand against a cop, but all in all, a 10/10 successful mission. He simply got caught in a campfire when he returned to get the last bag of money by some cops when he was leaving the bank who accidentally found him without his mask and now he had to kill them before they could report his face. He managed to kill five of them, but there was still one missing and he couldn’t find him.

Where were his friends?

Taking a look around when the only sound he could hear in the hall was his heavy breath, he spotted Atsushi’s white hair behind a fallen bench. His heart seemed to race twice as more as it was already racing, stomach starting to twist in anxiety and, gulping, he slowly left his hidden spot and started walking towards the man.

“Please don’t be dead,” he murmured to himself as he walked towards him, “please, don’t be dead.”

Once he was close enough, he called Atsushi in a whisper. The man suddenly jumped from where he was hiding, widened eyes and his pistol in his trembling hands; luckily, he still had the bag with the bombs Kajii gave him in case he needed to blow some things up.

“Ah, fuck,” he whispered, running his fingers through his hair, “ah, man, this is bad. I can’t– I can’t find Tachihara or Higuchi.”

Akutagawa tapped his GSM earpiece, trying to contact Kajii in the car, but it was still silent. It has been silent for over an hour now. God, he hoped Kajii was still alive.

“We need to go,” he whispered back, grabbing Atsushi’s wrist when he heard more and more police cars arriving the bank, “maybe Kajii is still here.”

Atsushi quickly nodded, then let himself be pulled by Akutagawa towards the back of the bank where they knew that were an alternate exit used by employees. When they heard the police breaking into the bank, they started running and only stopped when they managed to leave the bank, in a narrow alley next to the building. The police helicopters were flying above the local and multiple cars could be seen around the place, surrounding all their ways out in a hope they could catch us; Akutagawa smiled when he saw that they could run away from there easily because the cops didn’t know about the way out they used. He made a mental note to thank Higuchi later for her forcing them to study the bank anatomy.

“He’s not here.”

Akutagawa turned to look at Atsushi, who had a ghostly expression in his face, “what?”

“Kajii,” Atsushi explained, “he’s not here. Oh my God, we’re gonna die.”

“Shut up, we’re not gonna die,” Akutagawa hissed, giving Atsushi’s hand a strong squeeze and then raising both of his eyebrows because he hasn’t noticed they were holding hands until now, “it
doesn’t matter Kajii’s not here; it means he’s still alive and maybe the others are alive as well, we just need– we just need to think a little.”

Surprisingly, Atsushi came up with an idea pretty fast, “let’s steal one of their cars.”

“What...?”

“Let’s steal one of their cars,” Atsushi repeated, pulling Akutagawa to run with him towards the closest police car they found. They stopped by the corner of the building to peek through it before running as fast as they could to the first car they saw that were with the doors opened and they could easily steal.

Akutagawa quickly took the driver’s seat and didn’t even wait for Atsushi to completely sit down before hitting the boot and skidding away from the bank, laughing hysterically in pure adrenaline as the cops quickly noticed one of their cars were stolen and started shooting at them.

“Go faster! Go faster!” Atsushi shouted as Akutagawa increased the speed of the car, also laughing like a maniac as they ran away from the cops and started a chasing.

“Baby! Shot them if they’re too close!” Akutagawa shouted back, handing Atsushi his pistol and entirely focused in the road as he dodged from the cars and crossed a red sign.

“Baby?” Atsushi asked, accepting the gun and kneeling in his seat to have a clear view of the cops chasing them.

Akutagawa had to turn the steering wheel violently to the side to dodge from a car, almost sending Atsushi flying through the car, “fuck! We’re gonna talk about this later!”

Atsushi murmured something incomprehensible and fired his gun, making a hole in the rear glass and hitting the driver of the car behind them straight in the head, making him lose control of the vehicle and crash. This is why Akutagawa recruited Atsushi; he had a perfect sight.

Turning left in a street to exit the main road, Akutagawa started to come up with a plan. There wasn’t a way they could mislead all the cops with the car, so they needed to leave the car behind, but how were they gonna do this if the cops were that close to them?

“They’re coming closer!” Atsushi let him know as if he didn’t already know it.

“You were the one who wanted to play Bonnie and Clyde!” Akutagawa grunted, “you wanna play Bonnie and Clyde? Fine! You’ll be Bonnie, I’ll be Clyde!”

For a moment, Atsushi went silent. Akutagawa shot him a quick glance, worried that something could be wrong, until Atsushi returned to talk, “why do I have to be Bonnie?”

“What?”

“Why do I have to be Bonnie?” Atsushi echoed, sounding actually annoyed, “why can’t I be Clyde? I wanna be Clyde, why can’t you be Bonnie?”

“This is not– for fucks sake, Atsushi! It’s just a pseudonym!” Akutagawa grunted again, exasperatedly. For some reason, he wanted to laugh.

“I just wanted to know!”

“We need to leave the car!” He shouted at Atsushi, changing the subject, who returned to shoot the
cops to give them time, “Do you still have the bombs Kajii gave you??”

“Yes!”

“Then throw some of them on them! When they’re distracted by the smoke we’ll jump out of the car!”

“This is a terrible idea!”

“Do you have any other ideas?!”

“No!”

“Then shut up and do what I said!” Akutagawa turned right in a street, smiling when he found a street full of alleys and big trashcans where they could hide behind, increasing the velocity even more, “on three we’ll jump! Ready?!?”

“Yes!” Atsushi replied, holding three of Kajii’s weird lemon-shaped bombs and opening the window.

“One, two,” he counted, then jumped to Atsushi’s seat and kept holding the steering wheel with one hand as the other held Atsushi by the waist, holding his breath and closing his eyes before opening his door, “three!”

Atsushi threw all the three bombs who immediately exploded in front of the cops’ cars at the same time both of them jumped from their own car, hitting the ground painfully and quickly running to hide behind a trashcan before the smoke of the bombs vanished and the cops had their vision clear again. Exactly like Akutagawa thought, the cops kept following the car when the smoke vanished, unaware they weren’t inside it anymore and giving them time to hide before they found out they ran away. Once the cops were gone, Akutagawa finally could take a deeper look at his new wounds caused by the fall; besides the ripped clothes and the bruises who would soon begin to appear, by the weird angle his arm was twisted and the huge pain, he was sure his arm was broken, but both of them were still alive so it was a 10/10 plan.

With a groan, he tried to put his bone back in place, but the pain was too intense. He would have to wait until they were back at their house to fix it.

He turned to look at Atsushi, and only then he seemed to noticed how fucked up the boy was. His leg, his arm and wrist were also clearly broken, his shirt was ripped apart where they rolled over the concrete and his back was completely scratched and with deep cuts because of it, and he had at least four broken ribs; his face and hair were entirely covered by dirt and blood and his head was bleeding, but Akutagawa was sure it wasn’t a concussion because he made sure Atsushi didn’t hit his head when they jumped. This is why he had a broken arm now.

“Fuck, this hurts,” Atsushi cried, holding his arm closer to his chest, “ah fuck, this hurts.”

“Come on, we need to hide,” Akutagawa said, standing with difficult. As long as he could tell, there wasn’t any other broken bone besides his arm and probably one or two ribs, so he needed to handle the pain and help Atsushi who was clearly worse than him.

Difficulty, he helped Atsushi to stand and started to go further into the alley they were in front of to look for a place to hide. Now standing, Atsushi seemed even worse than when he was sitting down; Akutagawa hasn’t noticed all the blood in his shirt caused by the big hole in his stomach and one of his ribs poking out by the huge wound it made when they jumped. The view of the wound scared the hell out of Akutagawa; they needed to take care of this wound the fastest as they could, otherwise...
He cut his own line of thought. He simply refused to think Atsushi wasn’t gonna make it, especially because he was the one who caused his wounds by falling above him in the ground when they jumped.

Walking for a few more blocks in this maze, Akutagawa finally found a warehouse that could serve as a hiding spot for them until he called Kajii and he came to save them. Slowly, he helped Atsushi to get into the warehouse and sat him down behind some boxes, picking his phone out of his pocket to send a text to Kajii with his location so he could pick them up before crouching in front of Atsushi and touch his face to check him out. Atsushi softly smiled at him, blinking slowly, raising his trembling hand to rest it above Akutagawa’s.

“Oh my God,” Akutagawa whispered in pure horror as he saw Atsushi’s situation, biting up a sob and trying really hard to hold the tears, “what did I do to you?”

“It’s okay,” Atsushi whispered back, voice breaking in the middle of the sentence and coughing blood, “I knew this would happen sooner or later, I just hoped it would be later so we could’ve had some time,” he smiled again, giggling softly, “you make a pretty damn good Clyde, you know.”

Akutagawa giggled, drying the tears that escaped his eyes, “after you’re recovered, we’re leaving the country. We’re going to... The Bahamas. Yes, the Bahamas. And we’re living a good life full of money and danger,” he stopped when he heard the sirens getting closer, grunting and trying to pick Atsushi up, “damn it, we have to go.”

“No,” Atsushi shook his head, “you’re going, I’ll keep them busy.”

“What? No, of course not.”

“Akutagawa-”

“No, I’m not leaving-”

“Akutaga-”

“We’ll just steal another car and take you to the-”

“Ryu, listen to me! Look at me, look at me!” Atsushi angrily shouted, making Akutagawa wide his eyes and forcing him to look at him pointing at the wound in his stomach and rib poking out the skin, “there’s nothing we can do anymore! There’s no way they’re gonna keep us alive after what we’ve made! If you stay, we’re both gonna die!” he made a pause, looking deeply inside Akutagawa eyes as he picked four bombs from his backpack, “or it can be just me.”

Akutagawa looked at him in complete terror, “you can’t be serious-”

“I am very serious,” Atsushi said, voice breaking in the middle of the sentence again because of the pain. More blood spilled out from the wound in his stomach and his eyes started to get unfocused, “I’m sorry, but you have to go.”

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, I was– I caused this, I’ve made this to you, it should’ve been me. I should’ve– I should’ve been the one in your place, you should’ve been the one who made it. I’m sorry, I’m so sorry,” Akutagawa said, now letting the tears stream down his face, touching their foreheads together in a last goodbye, hoping Atsushi could one day forgive him for all the pain he’s caused to him.

Before he could push away, Atsushi grabbed his neck and smashed their lips together with his last strengths.
Akutagawa instantly reciprocated the kiss, crying in Atsushi’s lips, tasting his lips for the first and the last time. It tasted like blood, salt and dirt, but for Akutagawa it was perfect, even though it was messy and disgusting and full of blood; it tasted like love and regret and unspoken feelings, feelings that grew with the days passing by and were unfortunately hidden away from the other.

When they parted the kiss, they touched their foreheads back together, and with a smile, Atsushi whispered: “I love you, Ryuu.”

“I love you too, oh my God, I love you too,” Akutagawa replied, sobbing, “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.”

The movement outside the warehouse started to get louder, indicating the cops were already there. Akutagawa shoot a glare at his way out before turning to Atsushi again, smashing their lips together once again.

Atsushi broke the kiss, “I’ll count to 30 after you run, and then I’m gonna blow this up, okay?”

“Fuck, okay,” Akutagawa said, kissing Atsushi’s forehead, “I love you. I’m sorry.”

“I love you too,” Atsushi smiled, blinking slowly, “now go.”

Akutagawa held Atsushi’s glare for a few more seconds, then run away from the warehouse with tears in his eyes without looking back. He ran the fastest as he could with his damaged body, managing to run away from the warehouse for at least 50 meters until the explosion came, making him deaf for a moment.

Instantly, he stopped running to look back at the warehouse now on fire, the flames crackling higher towards the sky. He fell on his knees, barely missing the way Kajii finally found him just in time to save him, unfocused eyes by the tears entirely focused on the warehouse on fire. The pain in his throat felt higher than the pain in the rest of his body.

He heard a scream. For a moment, he couldn’t tell from where the scream was coming, until his hearing slowly returned to normal and he finally realized that the reason why his throat was hurting so much was because he was the one screaming.

He woke up screaming.

Akutagawa didn’t remember how he ended up there again. He didn’t remember what caused it, he didn’t remember what sent him there again, but he woke up with the sound of his own screaming in the same place as before with tears in his eyes and a forever pain in his chest.

He was dead because of him. Atsushi died to save his life.

They were reborn in completely different lives than their previous ones, but still managed to cross their destines once again and, once again, it ended with one of them dying.

What did he ever do to deserve this?

Gradually, his screams narrowed down until the point he was peacefully breathing in a fetal position in the fluffy and cozy ground, silent, joining forces to stand and take a look around. He didn’t know how many time he spent just laying down in the cozy ground, being tortured by his own thoughts and memories, wishing they could simply vanish from his mind.
(They actually did the opposite, making his previous life also pass through his mind in a painfully mix of dying in Atsushi’s arms and knowing Atsushi died to save his life.)

He can’t say he was actually surprised when he sat down after his break down and saw Chuuya again, in the same place as before, with his back at him and bright orange hair highlighting in the white immensity.

Slowly, he stood and walked to him, silently sitting by his side. Chuuya wasn’t looking at him when he started talking, “I’m sorry for your lost. Lives where Atsushi dies before you are always the toughest ones.”

“This happened before?” Akutagawa asked, actually curious. Obviously, he noticed the pattern between his two previous lives, but he didn’t think it was an often occurrence; he thought it was simply a coincidence.

“More times than you would like to know,” Chuuya replied, “but if you allow me to make an observation, your choices of lives have been a little... Dangerous, lately.”

“Apparently I’m a little twisted,” Akutagawa grunted, watching Chuuya gesture with his hand towards the water puddle beneath his feet and make the pearly water tremble. Once again, he wondered what he was doing.

“You like the adrenaline, I can’t judge you,” Chuuya said, giggling softly, “but maybe try a life where you don’t do illegal stuff for once in your existence? Lives where you’re on the good side usually last a little bit longer than the others.”

“What’s the longest life I’ve had?”

Chuuya bit his lip, seeming to think for a moment, “I think the one you were a florist. You lived twenty-five years.”

Akutagawa looked at Chuuya in a mix of horror and disappointment, “my longest life lasted only twenty-five years and I was a florist on it? How did I die, suffocating with the petals of an orchid? Perhaps being stung by a bee?

“Don’t make such fun about suffocating on petals,” Chuuya said, “you died because of the Hanahaki disease thirty-seven times.”

“Really? Thirty-seven times?”

“This is not even your worse death,” Chuuya was really close of blustering out in laughs, “once you survived a car accident and then died a few months later because you slipped in a soap while taking a shower. I made fun of you for two whole centuries after that, it’s really a shame you don’t remember it anymore.”

“Thank God I don’t remember that,” Akutagawa grumbled, “knowing about my stupidest deaths wouldn’t be good for my reputation.”

Chuuya laughed, “you did have a lot of stupid deaths. Once a piano fell above you like in the movies and the other day you chocked with your own saliva. There were also that time you made a bet with Atsushi to see who could eat more peppers and you died because of it, and that other time you-”

“Stop, stop, stop,” Akutagawa interrupted him, face red in embarrassment, “I don’t wanna know anymore.”
“What can I say? You’re always seeking for the danger,” Chuuya snorted, “you have a wild soul.”

“Wow, thanks. I’ll try to live a calm life for once in my existence,” Akutagawa rolled his eyes, making Chuuya snort. He made a pause, biting his lip and looking down at his hands, “maybe a life where I don’t meet Atsushi, so he doesn’t need to die or watch me die.”

Chuuya gave him a crooked smile, “maybe.”

Akutagawa raised his face to look at Chuuya, catching something in his voice tone that made him arch an eyebrow, “you know something, don’t you? About Atsushi?”

“You’ll soon learn that some things can’t be changed even with the start of a new life,” Chuuya said, gesturing once or twice towards the water puddle and making the water tremble, “some things are simply mean to be.”

“You’re telling me destiny is real?”

“Something like that, yes,” Chuuya nodded, “thousands and thousands of years ago, when the Universe was created, was stated that some things were meant to be exactly the way they are until now days. Certain souls were enlaced together, destined to remain together for the eternity, fated to always find their way to one another even with the beginning of a new life,” he explained with a fond look in his blue eyes, like he enjoyed talking about this subject, “you don’t remember anymore, but you and me both were there when the laws were created. We were there when they laced our souls to our significant others, and so were they.”

“So Atsushi is one of the three people you said that were also immortal,” Akutagawa nodded to himself, connecting the dots, thinking about what Chuuya’s said. He would ignore the fact that Atsushi’s soul was apparently enlaced with his own, “who are the other two?”

“Yosano Akiko is one of them,” Chuuya replied, gesturing towards the water puddle once or twice again, “but, unlike yours or Atsushi’s, her body is also immortal. She’s been on earth for thousands of years now.”

“Woah, the doctor from the Armed Detective Agency?” Akutagawa asked, mouth falling open in shock, but closing it in a pout when he started thinking about it, “actually, it makes sense. Considering her ability and all that,” he made a pause, then asked: “who’s the third one?”

“You have time to learn,” Chuuya cryptically replied, gesturing in the air in front of them. Like before, a white door suddenly appeared a few meters away from them out of nowhere, in the middle of nowhere, “but now you have to go.”

“So soon already?”

“Your new life cannot wait,” Chuuya said, gesturing with his hand for Akutagawa to leave. Akutagawa stared at his friend for a few more seconds before standing and slowly walking to the white door, stopping in front of it; before he could open it, Chuuya called him: “and Ryuu?”

He turned to face Chuuya, “hm?”

Chuuya smiled, “try to be on the good side this time.”

Akutagawa returned the smile, then opened the door, “I will.”

Like before, a white flash of light covered his body, and his new life began.
He tried to avoid eye contact as he made his way to the Armed Detective Agency.

Although the sun was shining in the sky, the temperature was low enough to make him shrink in his coat; judging by the grey clouds and the cold wind, it looked like it was gonna rain and the temperature would drop a little. A low and soft song was playing in his earphones as he silently walked through the streets, avoiding people, wishing he’d stayed at home that day—and the day before that, and the day after, and all the next days after that—.

Sighing in relief when he finally reached the building he worked at, he entered the small café in the first floor and greeted the maid with a quiet nod, sitting in one of the stools by the counter as she went to make his tea; four cubes of sugar, like he always asked for. She already knew it.

The door opened, and Atsushi entered the café.

He went straight to his usual seat next to Akutagawa, smiling at him as a greeting and asking the maid for a coffee. Akutagawa nodded at him as a form of greeting and thanked the maid when she handed him his tea, holding the cup with both of his hands for warmth and inhaling the sweet smell of his green tea before taking a sip.

He put his tea down, “how’s work?”

Atsushi sighed, mixing the sugar in his coffee when the maid gave him his cup, “same thing as always. Kouyou-san is working really hard to keep everyone in line after Dazai-san's vanishment, some people tried to start a riot with the sudden change of ruler and were killed because of it, Gin is still missing. Honestly, it’s a nightmare,” he sighed again, taking a sip from his coffee and letting the hot liquid warm up his body, “what about yours?”

“Kyouka is getting used to the new job very quickly with Oda-sensei and Kunikida-san there to help her. She’s already friends with Kenji and Tanizaki, even though she still seems quite reluctant to stop considering them as her enemies,” Akutagawa quietly explains, sipping from his own tea, “luckily, Oda-sensei is very patient.”

“Kouyou-san misses her,” Atsushi said, “but she understands she’s safer with you. Please, take care of her.”

“We will, I will,” Akutagawa replied, finishing his tea and standing up, “wanna come in? You can stay for a little, it’s quite cold outside.”

Atsushi shook his head, smiling a little, “my coat is warm enough, thank you. Besides, I got work to do, I just came here to have a coffee.”

“In the other side of the city?”

Atsushi smiled again, slightly tilting his head to the side, “maybe I just wanted to check on you.”

Akutagawa tried to mask his gasp with a forced cough that soon turned into a real one, “I need to go,” he said after he managed to stop coughing, “see you around, I guess.”

“See you, Akutagawa.”

He gave the weretiger a quiet nod, then turned on his heels and left the café. Once he was outside the
establishment and the cold wind hit his face, he could breathe properly; he took a deep breath and cleared his throat, feeling his cheeks acquiring the red tone they always acquired when Atsushi flirted with him in public, going to the side door of the café and starting to climb the stairs towards the Agency. Akutagawa greeted his colleagues with a nod and ignored Kunikida’s grumbles about him being fifteen minutes later, going directly to his desk next to Tanizaki and taking his paperwork from the drawers so he could officially start his day, already wishing for the day to end so he could return to his house and spend the whole night awake looking for clues about Gin.

The day passed as slowly as Akutagawa thought it would, very lazy and calm, without bigger cases that could force him or the others to leave the building. By the middle of the day started snowing a little, making the day even more lazy than it already was, making Akutagawa want to hide under his desk and sleep until Kunikida started yelling with him and forced him to return to his stupid work; he was so tired he almost didn’t notice when the day ended, being almost asleep in his desk, waking up with Tanizaki shaking his shoulder and telling him he could finally go home. He stretched, put his paperwork inside his desk and organized his desk superficially before waving everyone goodbye and run down the stairs.

Surprisingly, he found Atsushi waiting for him outside the building, resting against a wall and with a small smile in his lips; in the snowy day, his hair looked almost as white as the snow falling from the sky, kaleidoscopic eyes highlighting in the pale skin. The snow had already made a thin layer in the floor by now, turning the city into a cozy mix of grey and white, small flakes accumulating above Atsushi’s hair as he waited for him to leave his work.

“Why didn’t you come in?” Akutagawa asked, walking across Atsushi without looking back, “you could catch a flu.”

“Didn’t want to distract you,” Atsushi replied, increasing his steps to match Akutagawa’s and walking by his side, “besides, I knew you wouldn’t take long. How was your day?”

“Boring,” Akutagawa rolled his eyes, “I think people don’t like leaving their houses when it’s snowing, so we didn’t have many cases. What’s good, since we also don’t like leaving the agency when it’s snowing,” he snorted, making Atsushi giggle, “my health sucks, I would probably catch a pneumonia if I left the agency today.”

“And still, you’re walking in the snow,” the weretiger pointed, arching an eyebrow, “you better not catch a pneumonia, huh?”

“It’s different, we’re going home,” once again, Akutagawa rolled his eyes, “we have a fireplace, hot showers and a heater at home.”

“We also have human bodies who are naturally hot, if you know what I mean.”

Akutagawa looked at him sideways, “please, don’t flirt with me in public. I have a reputation.”

Atsushi smiled, “you can always say it’s the cold weather, if you blush.”

By Atsushi’s soft giggle that followed the sentence, Akutagawa knew he was blushing.

“It’s the cold weather,” he said.

The weretiger giggled softly again, making Akutagawa’s heart warm in the cold weather, “sure it is, my love.”

-x-
The reached Akutagawa’s apartment a few more minutes later, sighing in relief when they could escape the annoying snow that kept falling from the sky. Akutagawa left his coat in the hatrack next to the front door and immediately crossed the room towards the heater, turning it on and also lighting up the fireplace for another source of heat, then turned on his heels to talk to Atsushi.

“I don’t think I have dinner; do you want to—”

The sentence was cut in the middle by Atsushi’s lips smashing against his own, desperately, like his lips were air and he didn’t know how to breath. Akutagawa was shocked at first, but quickly held Atsushi closer by his waist and kissed him back with the same voracity, tilting his head slightly to the side so their lips could fit better.

When the kiss was over, what seemed to be hours later, Akutagawa touched their foreheads together, still holding his lover closer by his waist: “what was that?”

“You look incredibly cute in the snow.”

Akutagawa grunted, dropping Atsushi’s waist and walking away from him, towards the kitchen. Atsushi laughed at his reaction, watching him go, “go set us a bathe, I’ll meet you in a minute.”

“Don’t take too long,” Atsushi replied, already going towards the bathroom to prepare their bathe. Akutagawa replied with an agreement sound, opening his refrigerator and looking for something to eat; he ended up just drinking some milk and waiting for a few minutes until he knew the bath was already full before walking towards his bathroom, taking his clothes on his way and leaving them in the floor and arriving the bathroom only on his underwear, which he properly took off once he was inside the local.

The lights were off, but Atsushi set some candles to give the bathroom a romantic atmosphere; he was already inside the bath, with only his head above the water and smoking a cigarette, eyes closed and hair dripping outside the bath. The choker he wore to keep the tiger under control seemed darker when wet, water dripping from the spikes and strands of his platinum hair glued to his neck, bangs brushed away from his forehead; for a moment, Akutagawa was stuck staring at his lover, fascinated with how his face seemed to glow with the water drops and how beautiful and deadly he looked, with the toxic grey smoke of his cigarette popping out from his mouth and dancing above him like a mystical mist, until he crossed the distance between them and called Atsushi in a whisper to let him know he was there.

Atsushi opened his eyes and gave him a quiet smile, moving in the water so Akutagawa could enter the bath and sit between his legs in front of him, handing him his cigarette. Akutagawa rested against Atsushi’s chest and threw his head backwards to rest it in the boy’s shoulder, accepting the cigarette and taking a drag from it, slowly letting the toxic smoke fill his lungs before blowing the smoke out towards the ceiling in a misty carousel; he took another drag and returned the cigarette to Atsushi, closing his eyes and just enjoying the hot water covering his body and his lover’s hand running through his chest underwater.

“Do you wanna have sex?” Atsushi asked in the silent room, watching Akutagawa blow the smoke out.

Akutagawa shook his head, “no, I’m good,” he replied, then they both fell in a comfortably silence before he spoke again, “do you have any news about Dazai?”

The weretiger made a frustrated noise, his chest vibrating with the sound, “I’m afraid I don’t. He’s been missing since that day in the building, and no one seems to knowledge his whereabouts.”
“What about Gin?”

“No idea as well.”

Akutagawa bit his lip, picking the cigarette from Atsushi’s fingers, “and the Book?”

Atsushi went silent for a moment, watching his lover smoking for a few seconds before sighing, “the other day I went to the place Dazai-san talked about before disappearing, but I didn’t find anything. The internet also doesn’t seem to know anything about this. Honestly, I’m starting to think this Book doesn’t exist.”

“It exists,” Akutagawa said, blowing the smoke towards the ceiling and watching it make random patterns in the air before disappearing, “Dazai-san wouldn’t have disappeared if it didn’t.”

A sigh, “then why can’t we find it?”

Once again, Akutagawa bit his lip. Ever since the day Dazai told them about the Book and then suddenly disappeared, almost a year ago, Akutagawa and Atsushi had been looking for the Book so they could protect it like they promised Dazai they would, but they didn’t seem to be getting any progress on their search for its whereabouts. Of course, they knew they must be the only ones knowing about this book so they could protect it, but the book itself didn’t seem to want to be found; if the book was really as powerful as Dazai told them it was, Akutagawa was starting to think the book had its own conscience and was purposely hiding from them.

Was it possible?

Judging by Atsushi’s soft giggle next to his ear, he seemed to know what Akutagawa was thinking, “I don’t think the Book is a live being, my love.”

When did they become so close that Atsushi could read his mind?

This whole... Thing, between them started going about five months ago, around four months after Dazai disappeared and gave them the mission of protecting the Book, and it felt so natural they weren’t even surprised when they were simply walking side by side in a minute and then, suddenly, they were making out against a wall in Akutagawa’s apartment, and it never felt so right. Even though they were keeping their love a secret, hidden from everyone else’s eyes --except, maybe, from Ranpo’s-- it was like they had a magnet inside their bodies attracting them to each other, incapable of escaping their inner wills, surrounding each other like they were natural satellites orbiting around one another.

Nakajima Atsushi, Port Mafia’s White Reaper and Akutagawa Ryūunosuke, Armed Detective Agency member. Two tips of a same string that would always end up intertwined.

The Universe is cruel.

When the water started getting colder and Akutagawa was about to fall asleep in Atsushi’s chest, the weretiger softly called him in a whisper, “let’s go to bed, my love.”

Akutagawa was only half-awake, “we need to eat something.”

“Then go put some warm clothes while I cook us dinner.” Atsushi replied, placing a kiss under Akutagawa’s ear, slightly tapping his leg underwater so he could move.

The detective grumbled, but reluctantly left the bath so Atsushi could cook them dinner. Atsushi giggled, kissing Akutagawa softly in the lips before wrapping himself in a towel and leave the
bathroom, going towards Akutagawa’s room to steal one of his hoodies for the night; after the first time they slept together, it became more and more of a habit for Atsushi to leave some clothes there so he could get dressed the other day when he spent the night –Akutagawa also had some clothes in Atsushi’s apartment, but they usually stayed at his place so Atsushi’s clothes were more intense there–. After getting dressed, he went to the kitchen to cook them dinner while Akutagawa put one of his hoodies on and entered his bed, happily wrapping himself in his fluffy blankets as he waited for Atsushi to come back.

As he waited, right when he was about to fall sleep, he started hearing voices inside his head. He didn’t open his eyes, but frowned at the unknown voice saying incomprehensible words. He tried to give the voice a face, tried to understand what was being said, but was in vain; as fast as the voice came, it vanished, and a headache started. The voice seemed to unlock something inside his brain, making the headache a little bit stronger and his heart race in a weird anxiety, but he ended up forgetting about it when Atsushi returned to the room with their dinner and a happy smile in his face.

They ate in silence, then brushed their teeth and went to bed together. While being held by Atsushi and feeling the calm breath of his lover against his neck, Akutagawa couldn’t help but think something really bad was about to happen.

-x-

A few days later, when he was walking towards the Agency, Kunikida called him saying they had news about Gin.

Of course, Akutagawa was there in a minute, crossing the distance that usually took him fifteen minutes in five. When he reached the agency, he was surprised when he saw Atsushi there too, silently watching the other from a corner while the agency members were gathered around Ranpo’s desk.

“Where is she?” he blustered once he was inside the office, running towards Ranpo, “where is she?”

“She’s alive, if that’s what you’re asking,” Oda-sensei replied, holding some pictures in his hands, “she was seen a few days ago in Miyagi. Atsushi-san brought us the pictures.”

Akutagawa turned to look at his lover, almost hidden in the shadows, “you brought the pictures?”

“The Mafia still has orders to kill everyone who knows Gin,” Atsushi explained, arms crossed in his chest, “if they knew where she was, she would be dead in five minutes. I couldn’t let that happen, so I brought the pictures here instead of taking them to the Boss.”

“Doesn’t this qualify as betrayer?” Tanizaki asked, frowning.

Atsushi gave him a crooked smile, “as if they would dare to touch me.”

Akutagawa bit up a smile, looking away from Atsushi. However, he saw the weretiger blinking at him from sideways.

“So what do we do now?” Kenji asked, sitting above Ranpo’s desk and shaking his legs in the air as he tried to take a further look at the pictures in Oda’s hands.

“We get her before the mafia can,” Akutagawa replied as if it was obvious, calling all the attention to him, “if she was under the President’s wings, he could protect her, right?”

“Only if she was his subordinate,” Oda replied.
“Then we’ll set her an entrance exam.”

“We don’t know if she would pass,” Yosano said, raising an eyebrow.

“Trust me, she will,” Akutagawa said, walking to Odasaku and accepting the pictures he was handing him, “if I passed, she will pass as well.”

“I can accompany you, if you want,” Kyouka properly offered herself, looking at Akutagawa from where she was standing next to Kenji and Tanizaki, “I can help you to convince her to return home.”

“I can go as well!” Kenji said.

“Me too,” Tanizaki agreed.

And then, Atsushi: “I’ll go with him.”

Everyone turned to look at him, still resting against the wall and silently watching them argue over Gin.

“Uh, aren’t you mafia?” Kunikida asked, frowning, “how do we know you’re not gonna kill her once you find her?”

“He won’t,” Akutagawa, Kyouka and Ranpo replied at the same time, making Atsushi smile minimally.

“I won’t,” he said.

Lastly, Oda sighed and ran his fingers through his hair, “then it’s solved. By the end of the weekend, Akutagawa and Atsushi-san are travelling to Miyagi to save Gin and we’re setting her entrance exam. Me and Kunikida-san are talking to the President as soon as he-”

“We’re leaving now,” Atsushi said, walking away from the shadows towards Akutagawa and interrupting Oda.

“What?”

“We need to get her as soon as possible,” Atsushi explained, picking the pictures from Akutagawa’s hands, “I know Gin well enough to know she won’t stay in Miyagi for too long, so we need to get her before she disappears again.”

“If she was careless enough to let herself be caught by the cameras, then she wants us to get her,” Akutagawa said, following Atsushi’s line of thought, “we have a day, maybe two, to get her before she disappears again.”

“Well, what are you waiting, then?” Yosano said, resting both of her hands in her waist, “go get her and return safely.”

“We will,” Akutagawa replied, giving her and the rest of the agency a small nod before looking at Atsushi and leave the office with the weretiger by his side.

He wished he could say he was as certain they wouldn’t get hurt in this mission as he said he was.

-x-

A few hours later, already in the train heading towards Miyagi, Atsushi tried to catch Akutagawa’s
attention by sticking his head in front of his face.

Akutagawa blinked and looked away from his hands, catching Atsushi’s eyes, “I’m sorry, what?”

“What’s wrong?” Atsushi asked with a worried expression, the black strand of his hair and his dark coat highlighting in the grey and cold atmosphere inside and the white and snowy view outside the train.

“What do you mean?” Akutagawa asked, returning to the drawing he was making before getting distract with his thoughts, now paying attention to the weretiger in front of him.

Atsushi went silent for a moment, carefully studying Akutagawa’s face before speaking: “you’ve been quiet since we left Yokohama, with your brows frowned and unfocused eyes like you’ve seen a ghost. What’s wrong, my love?”

Akutagawa bit his lip, looking at his messy sketch before raising his eyes to glance at his lover, then sighed, “it’s just... A bad feeling. I’ve been having those weird dreams lately where I can’t see anything but black and red and hearing this hoarse voice repeating the exact same thing over and over again.”

“And what does the voice say?”

“I can’t tell for sure because the voice keeps repeating the sentence in a foreign language, maybe Russian or Romanian, I don’t know,” Akutagawa ran his fingers through his hair, “but I do know it’s the same sentence because I memorized what they say. Pochti vremya dlya nachala novoy ery.”

“It’s definitely Russian, but I don’t know what it means,” Atsushi said, biting his lip, “I won’t say it’s nothing and tell you to forget about it, but I will tell you to forget about it for now. Once we get Gin back, we’ll figure it out.”

“Maybe it’s just a random dream.”

“Don’t say that,” Atsushi shook his head, moving his leg to touch Akutagawa’s leg, “listen to me, okay? One’s an incident, two’s a coincidence and three’s a pattern. You said you had this dream more than once, right? Then it can’t be a coincidence,” he explained, “it means something, we just have to know what. We’ll get Gin first, then we’ll work on it, okay?”

Akutagawa gave him a crooked smile, brushing their legs together, “okay,” he said, then returned to his draw. He would try to leave this for now.

But even though Atsushi told him they were gonna figure it out later, he couldn’t help but feeling that bad feeling inside his chest that something really bad was about to happen.

-x-

It started with a headache right when they stepped in Miyagi.

At first, it felt more like being hit by a truck right in his head than like a normal and annoying headache. The sudden pain was strong enough to send him to the floor, holding his head with both his hands like he could make the pain narrow down a little bit this way; Atsushi was next to him in a second, looking at him with big worried eyes, trying to understand what happened.

And then the voice came.

*Welcome to Miyagi, Akutagawa Ryuunosuke. I’ve been waiting for you.*
“Who are you?” Akutagawa shouted, still squeezing his ears in a failed attempt of stopping the voice, “why are you in my head? How do you know my name?”

“I know a lot of things about you,” the voice said with a giggle, “for example, I know how it must be boring being on the good side when you have so much blood in your hands. The Armed Detective Agency, really? This is not where you belong, this is not the place for a soul like yours. You belong to the bad side, where you can kill your enemies, where you can free the beast you really are.”

“Shut up, shut up, you don’t know me,” Akutagawa growled, curling up his body in the floor, “you don’t know anything about me.”

“Ryu, what’s happening? What’s happening?” Atsushi asked, trying to make Akutagawa look at him, but the other man kept curling himself up in the floor, “is this the voice you talked about? Are they talking right now?”

“Yes,” the other man managed to agree, squeezing his hands tightly against his ear.

“Oh, you have your little boyfriend with you,” the voice returned to say with an ironic snort, “why don’t we bring him to our little game? Let’s see how far he’d go for you.”

“Touch Atsushi and you’re dead,” Akutagawa grunted, opening his eyes with Atsushi’s mention, squeezing his hands in fists.


Before Akutagawa could answer, the voice returned to his mind in the same ironic snort as before, “I’m not touching anyone,” they said, purposely making a pause to torture Akutagawa even more, “you, on the other hand...”

Suddenly, it was like Akutagawa was looking at something through someone else’s eyes. He was standing in the middle of a room, facing a man around his age with dark hair and red eyes wearing a white ushanka and white clothes sitting behind a desk; the man seemed to be aware of Akutagawa’s presence, having a naughty smile on his lips as he put a book out from his coat, placing it above the desk before opening it. Even in the vision, Akutagawa frowned; was that...

With a gasp, he returned to the real world and turned to Atsushi, now understanding what was about to happen, “run.”

“What?”

“Run,” he repeated, eyes widened as he waited for the worse to happen. He watched in pure terror as the Russian man slowly wrote something down in the book with the same naughty smile from before, “run, get Gin and go back to Yokohama. Tell the others- ahh!”

Grabbing his head, he already felt the effect of the book running through his body. Akutagawa grunted, trying the hardest he could to avoid the words the man wrote in the book.

“Tell the others what? What’s happening, damn it?!?”

“The book,” is all that Akutagawa replied, catching Atsushi’s eyes for only a second before start feeling like he wasn’t in control of his body anymore, watching his lover through a window, “we failed– we couldn’t– someone found it.”

Atsushi’s expression fell from a worried one to a cold one, the light vanishing from his eyes as he faced Akutagawa.
“We failed to protect it,” Akutagawa proceeded, voice breaking like he was ashamed of himself, until he suddenly stopped like he wasn’t feeling anything anymore. For a moment, Atsushi thought he was back, until Akutagawa turned to look at him and he saw his evil smile, “and now someone has to die because of it.”

Atsushi barely had time to throw his body away from Akutagawa when Rashomon suddenly appeared in the air and attacked him.

Akutagawa tried to scream for Atsushi to run, but he wasn’t in control of his body anymore. It felt like he was watching himself from the cameras of a locked room, where he was highly tied against a chair and couldn’t move, watching all his moves and attacks without being able to do anything to stop; once again, he tried to scream for Atsushi to run, but even his voice didn’t seem his anymore.

He was motionless.

In the outside world, Atsushi dodged from an attack from Rashomon using his right arm, now turned into the tiger’s one. The look in his eyes told Akutagawa he was as scared as him, but he didn’t seem like he was going to run away; it simply wasn’t from Atsushi’s nature, he would never run away from a fight like this, especially when he belonged to the most dangerous organization in Yokohama.

Especially when he was fighting against his beloved one.

Luckily, the train station was empty, so he didn’t have to worry about people accidentally getting hurt because of him and could focus entirely on trying to make Atsushi run away safely. He would never forgive himself if he hurt Atsushi.

“Ryu, fight it back!” Atsushi yelled, dodging from Rashomon, “I know you’re there! Fight it back!”

“I’m sorry, Ryu is offline,” Akutagawa replied, but that wasn’t his voice; his voice wasn’t filled with sarcasm and irony like this one was, “why don’t you fight with me and I’ll put him in the line once he’s back?”

_Run, run, run!_

The real Akutagawa tried to scream, but no sound escaped his mouth.

_Save yourself! Get Gin and the book and save yourself!

And then, when he realized he wasn’t gonna stop:

_Kill me!

But he knew Atsushi would never do it.

He tried to dodge from another attack from Rashomon, but ended up with a deep cut in his right leg and in his head. Atsushi screamed in pain, squeezing the new wound with one hand as the other tried to stop the white beast attacking him, miserably failing; he didn’t have a chance against Rashomon, especially when he was trying not to hurt Akutagawa.

“Aw, you don’t wanna hurt your little boyfriend?” Akutagawa-not-Akutagawa asked with a forced pout that soon became an evil smile, “too bad your little boyfriend wants to hurt you. Unfortunately, only one of us is leaving this place alive.”
“Then do it.”

Both Akutagawa and not Akutagawa stopped, looking at Atsushi like he was crazy. Inner Akutagawa immediately started screaming for Atsushi to run and stop playing hero because he wasn’t one, but once again, no sound came.

Atsushi stood with difficult because of the wounded leg, looking at Akutagawa through his bloody and dirty hair, “because I won’t hurt you. I could never hurt you, Ryuu.”

“Ah, young love,” Akutagawa giggled, with Rashomon floating in the air behind him. He was twisting a knife in his hands, the knife he always carried with him in case he couldn’t use his powers, “so stupid. You aware you’re not gonna make it alive, don’t you, white reaper?”

“I’m aware,” Atsushi nodded, “but if it means you could live, then I’m ready to face the consequences. I’m ready to give my life for you.”

We don’t trade lives! Stop it, Atsushi! Don’t do it! Don’t do it!

The weretiger took a step forward, changing his arm back to the human form. Inside his body, Akutagawa started screaming more desperately than never, fighting with the chains wrapped around his body so he could take back the control of his body and save Atsushi, but nothing seemed to work; he was defenseless, motionless, useless. He couldn’t do anything but watch desperately his lover kill himself.

“I’m sorry I didn’t listen to you when you said something was wrong,” Atsushi said, taking another step forward, holding his wounded leg. Akutagawa crossed the remaining distance between them with a maniac laugh, pushing the weretiger violently against a wall and sticking the knife violently in his other leg, watching the boy scream in pain, “you said only one of us was leaving this place alive, didn’t you? So this means you’ll take back the control of your body again if I die,” he said, trembling because of the pain, “then do it.”

No!

Akutagawa smirked, running the tip of the knife through Atsushi’s face and going down his neck, stopping by his chest, “any last words?”

And then Atsushi smiled fondly, looking deeply inside his eyes as he replied: “I love you.”

Akutagawa smirked once again and, all at once, he impaled the knife deeply inside Atsushi’s chest. The scream he let out inside his mind was so strong that even his motionless body shrank by the pain, “NO!”

He watched in complete terror Atsushi’s body slowly slid through the wall towards the floor, leaving a path of blood on its way, falling by Akutagawa’s feet in a quiet bump. For a moment, Akutagawa’s body was also motionless, just standing there without doing anything until Atsushi’s final breath came and Akutagawa finally took back the control of his body.

Immediately, he fell on his knees to check Atsushi’s heartbeat, letting out a sob when he didn’t feel anything and with the tears already streaming down his face, his whole-body trembling in terror. He brought his lover’s body to his lap, holding him closer and repeatedly whispering ‘I’m sorry’, moving his dead body back and forth as he cried loudly.

“I’m sorry, I’m so so sorry,” he sobbed, burying his face in Atsushi’s neck, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.”
Akutagawa removed his face from Atsushi’s body to take another look at his face, starting at his dead eyes that once seemed to livid, and this is when he accepted he couldn’t live with the pain.

He searched for the gun Atsushi always carried with him, placed it against his right temple and pulled the trigger.

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**Immortality**

*(noun)*

im-mor-tal-i-ty

The quality or state of being immortal. Unending existence. Living forever.

... 

The first thing he did when he recovered his conscience was throwing his body to the side so he could throw up.

After what seemed to be ages throwing up, he finally managed to stop and then started screaming in pain. Even after death, even knowing Atsushi would soon reincarnate, the pain of knowing he killed his loved one was so strong that Akutagawa wished his previous life could simply vanish from his mind so he could move on. What kind of sick destiny is that, forcing him to watch his loved one die over and over and over again?

To be honest, Akutagawa didn’t quite understand this weird concept of immortality; if he truly was immortal like Chuuya told him he was, then why the hell he... Kept dying, like he was stuck in some sort of time loop? If he really was immortal, wasn’t he supposed to like, not die? Why couldn’t he and Atsushi be like Yosano Akiko and also have immortal bodies so he didn’t need to watch Atsushi dying over and over and over again?

If he was immortal, then why the hell did Atsushi keep slipping through his fingers like that?

He wanted this to stop. Please, make it stop.

“I did what you told me to do!” Akutagawa angrily yelled at Chuuya, who was silently watching him with a sad expression, “I did what you told me to do and stood by the good side for once in my lifetime! And still, Atsushi died! He died, and I was the one who killed him! I killed him, Chuuya!”

The whole time, Chuuya was silent next to him. Unlike the other times, this time Akutagawa woke up next to the redhead, so he could scream at him without sitting by his side; after finally calming down and stop crying, he rolled in the floor to face the white sky above him for a few minutes before finally standing and walking to sit next to Chuuya in the trunk.

“I’m sorry, Ryuu,” Chuuya whispered after a few minutes in silence, sadly looking at him, “you shouldn’t pass through all of this.”

“I just– I just don’t get it,” Akutagawa truly said, sighing frustratedly, “I tried to be on the good side to protect both me and Atsushi, I tried to keep our things to ourselves, and still-” he made a pause, biting his lip and looking down at the water puddle beneath his feet, “and still, it ended terribly wrong. Why? Why, Chuuya?”

“Don’t ask me like I know all the answers to all your doubts, I just look smart and wise,” Chuuya replied, taking a soft giggle from Akutagawa, gesturing towards the pearly water beneath his feet like always did, “for ages, I’ve been watching you suffer from your terribly destiny without being
able to do anything to change it. I don’t like seeing you suffer, I don’t like watching you and Atsushi die over and over again.”

“Is this what you’ve been doing?” Akutagawa asked when his curiosity was stronger than his common sense, pointing at the water puddle with his chin, “watching me?”

“Not exactly,” Chuuya responded with a half-smile, “I can use this to watch your lives, yes, but it has another purpose.”

“And what would it be?”

Chuuya looked at him for a moment, seeming to be thinking either he should tell Akutagawa or not, then moved a little bit to the side and gestured towards the water with his chin for Akutagawa to take a look; once Akutagawa’s side was entirely glued against Chuuya’s so he could take a further look at the puddle, Chuuya gestured with his hand towards it and the pearly water started to tremble.

For a moment, nothing happened, and then Akutagawa held his breath. The water that always seemed to be normal was now showing him images of a very familiar man at the kitchen of his house, like he was watching him through an old and misty screen, showing him everything the man was doing; cooking his diner as he danced and sang a very familiar song about suicide. He stared at the pearly water in amazement for a few more seconds before turning to look at Chuuya, fascinated.

“It’s Dazai-san,” he said.

Chuuya smiled, “indeed. I’ve been in charge of Dazai since the beginning of the days, since they tied our souls together for all the eternity.”

Something clicked inside Akutagawa’s brain, like the last part of a puzzle was finally placed on the board and he could now look at the whole image, “the third immortal person you talked about, the one that was missing,” he said, “is Dazai, isn’t it?”

“Precisely,” Chuuya nodded, gesturing towards the water and making it tremble, “but Dazai is... A little bit different from you and Atsushi and Yosano. You and Atsushi have mortal bodies with immortal souls, Yosano has both an immortal body and immortal soul, and Dazai...” he made a pause, like he was thinking about how to explain Dazai’s immortality, “honestly, Dazai is simply weird. We’ve been tied together for thousands of years now and I still don’t quite understand how his immortality works; he can’t die by mundane things like a disease or oldness, but he definitely can be killed. His soul is immortal like yours and Atsushi’s, but he hasn’t been here in the afterlife for a very long time because he simply cannot die. This is why he’s been trying to commit suicide for years now; he became bored with the years passing by so he started trying to end his endless life by himself,” another pause, he took a further look at the puddle, “ah, there he goes again. This stupid motherfucker.”

Now that Akutagawa was seeing what he was doing, he could see what the gesture meant. Every time Chuuya gestured with his hand towards the water, something changed in Dazai’s reality; a rope suddenly disappearing, his pills accidentally falling in the drain, knives going from a dangerous place to a safe one, Dazai himself changing his route in the streets without noticing it because a car was coming in his direction and he haven’t noticed. All the things that could’ve killed him suddenly changed to something not dangerous, keeping him alive.

With a low gasp, Akutagawa finally understood what Chuuya was doing. He was protecting Dazai. “You’re his guardian angel,” he concluded, looking fascinated at Chuuya.
Chuuya giggled, “not exactly, but kind of. Something like that, I suppose.”

“Why are you here?” Akutagawa then asked, confused, “why aren’t you with him on earth?”

“I tried to be, right in the beginning of the days,” Chuuya said, gesturing towards the water and making Dazai’s image disappear. He’s shown him enough, “but it was tiring my too much. I couldn’t keep both me and Dazai safe at the same time, so we got into a mutual agreement for me to watch him from up here until I was ready to return to earth and to him.”

The confession actually surprised Akutagawa, “you could remember this place while you were on earth?!”

“At first, yes,” the redhead replied with a sad smile, “but I don’t think I would if I returned home today. I’ve been here for too long, I know too much.”

“Does Dazai-san remember anything?”

“He has glimpses of memories sometimes, but he thinks it’s just a memory from one of the multiple universes he discovered. If you asked him if he knew someone with my features, he would probably remember my silhouette but not my face or my name.”

“This is—”

“Sad,” Chuuya concluded, “I know.”

“I wish I could remember this place when I reincarnate,” Akutagawa grumbled, “my life would be a lot better if I knew what I should and shouldn’t do.”

“You would get crazy with the images of your previous deaths,” Chuuya pointed, “and trust me, you don’t want this.”

Akutagawa scoffed, “maybe I would be more careful taking a shower if I remembered the soap.”

“Or running with an umbrella.”

“Running with an— you know what? I don’t wanna know.”

Chuuya laughed, “damn right you don’t, trust me.”

“Was it that bad?”

“I think it’s on the top five worst deaths.”

“Worst as in stupid or worst as in painful?”

“Both.”

“I’m scared, but what’s the number one?”

“Even I don’t like remembering it, but let’s just say it involves buildings and pain. A lot of pain.”

“Was Atsushi around when I died?”

“His body was there, yes.”

“His... Body?” Akutagawa frowned, then shook his head, “you know what? Forget it.”
Chuuya shot him a sad glare, what told him the death must’ve been really painful, then gestured towards the water puddle once or twice before turning back to Akutagawa, “it’s time to go.”

“I’m not ready.”

“I know,” Chuuya smiled sadly at him, “but you need to go. Atsushi is waiting for you.”

Akutagawa sighed and stood up, walking to the usual white door that appeared a few meters away from them out of nowhere. He touched the doorknob, but before he could open the door, he looked back at Chuuya, “I will– I will try again. To be on the good side.”

Chuuya smiled, “good luck, Ryuu. I’ll see you later.”

Akutagawa returned the smile and took a deep breath, opening the door and letting the warm and familiar white light surround his body as he crossed the door towards his new life.

Chapter End Notes

P.S: In the BEAST AU here is mentioned that Rashomon is white. I don't know if it's a canon fact or just a headcanon, but I like this theory~

PLEASE PLEASE COMMENT!!!!
Chapter Summary

Two more deaths, and the calm after the storm.

Chapter Notes

And the second part begins!

(TAGS: The same from the last chapter)

[word count: something around 20.270]

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[IV]

“I’m legally allowed to kill Kenji and Kyouka if they keep braiding my hair while I’m asleep and Naomi if she keeps using me as a human guinea pig for her makeup tutorials.”

Atsushi giggled without looking up from his book, his glasses resting in the tip of his nose and legs thrown over Akutagawa’s own legs in a confused mess in the couch, turning the page of his book, “I think Tanizaki-kun would legitimately kill you if you touched a single hair of his sister.”

“And what am I supposed to do?”

“Accept your destiny as her human guinea pig.”

Akutagawa grunted, tapping random patterns in Atsushi’s legs, “I hope she’s born hating makeup in another life so I can use her as my human guinea pig for my makeup tutorials.”

“Sorry to break you, Akutagawa-kun,” Naomi said with a giggle, passing through them in the living room, “but I will never not love makeup. Speaking of which, I bought a new set of eyeshadows and I think you would look amazing with this metallic black shadow; can I test it on you later?”

“Hell no.”

She pouted, “please?”

“No.”

“Pleeease?”

“Why don’t you try it on your brother? Or Gin? Maybe even Ranpo-”

“They don’t have the pretty pale skin tone you have!”

“Gin is pale enough,” Akutagawa grumbled, “try on her.”
Naomi raised her eyebrows, “if you let me try on you, I’ll buy you that one trench coat you saw at the mall the other day.”

“Deal.”

Atsushi giggled at how fast Akutagawa changed his mind, watching the conversation with amusement, smiling at the way Naomi left the living room with little jumps and Akutagawa started smiling with the mention of the trench coat he liked.

The day was considerably warm outside, and the atmosphere inside the Agency was equally as nice. Dazai was out to check on something with Kunikida and, despite that, they didn’t have much cases who demanded them to leave the building behind; honestly, Akutagawa preferred it this way. Don’t get him wrong, the job was nice, he loved his job, but sometimes all he wanted to do was to stay out of problems and chill out with his friends, play some board games, watch some stupid TV shows and then drink so much coffee he would stay awake for the next two weeks and Kunikida would beat the shit out of him for being so irresponsible.

To be honest, the movement on the Agency in a whole was so low lately that he was starting to think something was wrong. They always had so many cases and the city was always being attacked and sometimes they couldn’t even properly breathe after solving a case because a new one would immediately appear and drive them crazy and then, suddenly, the city was so peaceful that it looked like the people disappeared or were simply asleep.

Quiet and peaceful, but weird.

Akutagawa yawned, closing his eyes and sliding down in the couch so he could rest his head in the inside arm of the sofa, hissing at Atsushi when the boy started to grumble because he was moving too much and unfocusing him; Atsushi slapped his foot when he purposely tried to kick his face, chuckling with his eyes closed.

“You shouldn’t sleep at work,” Atsushi said, brushing his feet in Akutagawa’s face so he would know he was talking to him.

“And you should be filling your paperwork, not reading Harry Potter as if you haven’t read this book at least five times before,” Akutagawa replied, “still, here we are.”

“Wanna have a sleepover later? We can have pizza and watch horror movies.”

Akutagawa opened an eye, “is Kyouka gonna be there?”

Atsushi shrugged, “if you wanna be alone, tell Gin to call her over so she stays at your house and you stay at mine.”

“Okay,” Akutagawa nodded, closing back his eye, “I’ll bring ice cream.”

-x-

Akutagawa never thought he would one day escape the hell he was living at the Port Mafia.

After Mori Ougai’s death, four years ago, the organization started falling down right in front of their eyes and there was nothing they could do to stop it. The new boss was merciless and untouchable, with an undying bloodlust and most cruel than everything Akutagawa had the unpleasure of witness. People betraying closest friends, people trying to kill each other, untrust, riots, invaluable losses; suddenly, they weren’t the most dangerous organization in Yokohama anymore, they were simply a war field where the battles took place inside the own organization. Some wise people like
Kouyou and Higuchi ran away when things started getting wild, but others like Akutagawa and Gin decided to stay and fight for their lives—don’t get him wrong, he was barely fourteen and had nowhere to go; if he had run away with his sister two years younger, they would probably be dead in two weeks—, and this is where they went wrong.

It took them a while to realize there was nothing they could do anymore, and when they finally did it, was the day they almost lost their lives. An ambush and too many soldiers to deal with told Akutagawa this was his end; this is where he was going to die, with his sister passed out in his arms and alone at a warehouse, cold and hurt, asking God for forgiveness for all the bad stuff he’s done in his life and promising he would be better if he ever got the chance.

When the doors of the warehouse were opened and the shots started, Akutagawa thought it was his end.

And then, like an angel, Atsushi appeared and saved his life.

He woke up a few days later at the Armed Detective Agency, with Gin asleep in a chair next to his bed, a glass of water in the bedside table, on a drip and with a pretty boy with platinum hair watching him from the room’s door.

Naturally, Akutagawa’s first instinct under his current situation was to attack the boy; he didn’t know him or where he was, it’s natural he would conclude he was in danger. But before he could do anything, he shot a glare at where Gin was peacefully sleeping next to his bed and reluctantly held back, frowning.

Then, he asked: “what happened?”

And Atsushi smiled, and he knew this boy would be the death of him.

After he was sure he wasn’t in danger, the timid silver-haired boy explained everything to him. Where he was, what happened at the warehouse, who was taking care of him and that both him and his sister were safe now. Of course, believing him at first was hard, being so used to suspect everyone around him and being reluctant to every demonstration of kindness, but he started opening up with time; he learned the boy’s name and the name of the other people at the said “Armed Detective Agency”, finding out they were some kind of supernatural organization like the Port Mafia used to be, except they fought for the good people. They were good, they were kind, they saved him and Gin.

They erased Akutagawa’s and Gin’s past, they forged proofs that they died at the warehouse so the mafia wouldn’t look for them, and then they accepted them at the Agency after they passed some sort of entrance exam.

It was God forgiving Akutagawa and giving him his second chance.

And if he had a second chance, he would be good to deserve it.

-x-

He hummed the song that was playing in his earphones as he walked towards Atsushi’s house.

The sun was already starting to fade in the horizon, shooting pretty orange and pink sunrays through the fluffy and white clouds that made the sky look like a beautiful watercolor canvas. Cars filled the streets and families could be seen everywhere by the beach, enjoying the warm breeze of the end of the day with their feet in the cold water of the ocean; for a moment, Akutagawa himself thought about stopping there and tell Atsushi to meet him there so they could enjoy the ocean together, but
the boy already made an effort to send his half-sister somewhere else so they could have some time alone, so it wouldn’t be fair with him. With a sigh, he returned to his way to his friend’s house.

When he finally reached the place, he found Atsushi stuck between the sheets of the blanket fort he was trying to build inside his room.

Akutagawa giggled, placing the ice cream’s pots above the balcony, “are you okay there, buddy?”

“Shut up,” Atsushi hissed, “help me or leave me to die.”

“What exactly are you trying to do?”

“Kyouka said I was too old to have a blanket fort, so I’m proving her wrong,” the weretiger explained, with three different sheets wrapped around his body keeping him in the floor, “thank God she left before she could see this.”

“You’re unbelievable,” Akutagawa laughed, crossing the distance between them so he could unwrap Atsushi, entering the boy’s room, “why didn’t you use your ability to get rid of the blankets? Or used it to help you to build the fort?” he asked, then raised his eyebrows, “and no one’s too old to have a blanket fort. I’m pretty sure Fukuzawa-dono would like a blanket fort and he’s forty-five; you didn’t even hit the majority yet, you can have a blanket fort.”

“I tried to use Rashomon but it got stuck in the blankets as well. I think it’s a blanket’s riot,” Atsushi said, raising an eyebrow and letting Akutagawa unwrap his body, “and correction, we are having a blanket fort. I picked seven different thriller movies, bought soda and told Kunikida-san we’re not showing up for work tomorrow until 10am, so we’re going wild tonight.”

“With soda, ice cream and pizza?”

“Hell yes.”

Akutagawa laughed, finally managing to unwrap Atsushi and free him from the sheets, making the boy sigh in relief, then returning to the kitchen to put the ice cream in the freezer. He ended up eating a piece of chocolate cake he found inside the refrigerator before returning to Atsushi’s room, finding him still struggling the blanket fort; he rolled his eyes and scoffed, slapping the boy’s face slightly and pushing him away from the sheets so he could build the fort for him. Atsushi grumbled at first, but ended up sitting in his bed and watching Akutagawa building the fort in silence, scrolling through his cellphone as he waited.

Almost an hour later, Akutagawa finished the fort with a chef’s kiss, making Atsushi laugh. They both threw pillows and more blankets into the fort before picking up Atsushi’s laptop and get into the fort, getting under the fluffy blankets; while Akutagawa put the first movie on, Atsushi asked for the pizzas, and then they both finally started their marathon.

Then, he stopped when he noticed something, “Atsushi?”

“Yeah?”

“Didn’t you say we were gonna watch thriller movies?”

“I did, why?”

Akutagawa wasn’t impressed, “this is Harry Potter.”

By the smile Atsushi gave him when he finally noticed, Akutagawa could tell he was very aware of
it, “is it? Sorry, I haven’t noticed.”

“If I knew you were gonna force me to watch it with you for the eleventh time, I would’ve denied the sleepover.”

“But you’re already here, aren’t you?” Atsushi argued, raising an eyebrow and pulling Akutagawa closer so he could lay down over his chest, “so we’re watching it again.”

“You truly are unbelievable,” Akutagawa rolled his eyes, but willingly let Atsushi use his chest as a pillow, “the next sleepover, I’m forcing you to watch Mean Girls.”

Atsushi raised his face to look at Akutagawa, “you like Mean Girls?”

Akutagawa raised his eyebrows, “you don’t?”

The silver-haired boy scoffed, then extended his arm to start the first movie. Akutagawa once again rolled his eyes, but accepted his destiny and started unconsciously run his fingers through Atsushi’s hair as the movie finally started.

To be honest, Akutagawa still wasn’t really used to all this love and attention he received at the Agency, even after four whole years since his entrance exam. He felt like, anytime, someone from his past would break into his house and force him to go back to the mafia, saying he should’ve never left it in the first place, that his ability was too powerful and rare to be wasted like that, forcing him to return to his killing routine and then torturing him and his sister until the day they would inevitably die –and he simply couldn’t stand the thought of losing what he had with Atsushi.

What, exactly, he had with Atsushi?

They weren’t dating, no; an official request has never happened, and honestly Akutagawa was fine this way, but they also weren’t friends, because friends weren’t supposed to look at each other like that. Friends weren’t supposed to kiss and look fondly at each other like that or sleep in the same bed, or hold hands and promise under their breaths they would never leave each other when they were alone and only the moon and the stars could hear what they were saying, the promises they were making to each other.

Atsushi always said they were friends, but friends shouldn’t love each other like that.

Akutagawa shouldn’t love Atsushi like that.

-x-x-x-

He always hated receiving calls in the middle of the night, since when he was still at the Port Mafia.

It never meant something good –no one calls you in the middle of the night to say they were getting married or were pregnant or got a job. Calls in the middle of the night always meant tragedy, disaster, calamity; it always meant something was wrong and something bad happened, and this is why he was so reluctant to pick up the call when he saw ‘3:32am’ followed by Kunikida’s name flashing in the screen, a few days after the sleepover.

Akutagawa sat down in his bed, heart already starting to race and hands starting to tremble as he slowly accepted the call and brought his phone to his ear, gulping, “hello?”

“Is Atsushi with you?”

No, no, no, no.
“What happened?” He asked instead, already in the verge of a panic attack, eyes widened as he stood up with a jump and ran to his window to see if he could see something suspicious around his house.

“Look, don’t freak out, but-”

“Don’t freak out?! What kind of bullshit is ‘don’t freak out’?!” Akutagawa blustered, “you call me in the middle of the night, ask me if Atsushi’s with me and then tell me to not freak out?! I’m asking again,” he clenched his teeth, “what happened?”

Kunikida sighed through the phone, murmuring something that sounded like ‘I told you he would freak out’ to someone standing with him, then returned to the call, “Atsushi— Atsushi vanished last night after work. Kyouka said he didn’t return home, so we thought he could be with you since you two are so close, but it seems like you don’t know about him as well,” a pause, another sigh, “look, can you come to the agency? We need to find him.”

“I’ll be there in fifteen minutes,” he quickly replied, then hung out. He threw his phone on his bed and went straight to his closet to change his clothes, passing through Gin who was now silently looking at him from the door, “we’re going to the agency, you have two minutes to change.”

Gin agreed, then turned on her heels to return to her room and change to her casual clothes. Less than a minute later, both of them were already running down the stairs towards the streets to the agency; in the taxi, Akutagawa explained to his sister what happened with Atsushi and enlightened her.

Like he told Kunikida he would, they arrived the agency fifteen minutes later, already finding everyone there with worried expressions on their faces. They were all gathered around Ranpo’s desk, who really didn’t seem to be enjoying being awaken so soon in the morning; Yosano handed him a cup of coffee and a cupcake, taking a small smile from him.

“Tell me what happened,” Akutagawa said once he stepped into the office, running to Ranpo’s desk, “tell me everything.”

“We don’t know much,” Kunikida said, sighing, “like I told you through the phone, he disappeared after work last night and no one knows anything about him, except...”

“What? Except what?”

Kunikida shot a look at Dazai, who gave him a small nod in agreement, then sighed again and handed Akutagawa a small piece of paper, “except this. Kyouka found this on their door before coming here.”

Akutagawa accepted the paper Kunikida was handing him, taking a look at it. It was a simple piece of ripped and kneaded paper, stained with a red substance in certain parts of it and with nothing more than an address written on it in a sloppy calligraphy.

The red stain, though...

“Is it,” Akutagawa gulped, pointing at the red stains, “is– is it-”

“Yes,” Dazai nodded, “it’s blood.”

“And this address...” Akutagawa proceeded, feeling his heart falling into a black abyss, “Gin, do you recognize it?”
Gin took a look at the address from above Akutagawa’s shoulder, widening her eyes and shivering when she recognized it, “oh God, is this-”

“Yes,” he nodded, hands trembling, “they found us. I knew everything was too peaceful to be good, I knew something was coming but I couldn’t-”

“Wait, hold on, Ranpo-san said this is an abandoned warehouse in the other side of the city surrounded by other warehouses. A warehouse complex.” Kunikida frowned, “who found you? What are you talking about?”

“This is a hidden place the mafia used to train new recruits,” Gin explained, “it’s where Atsushi found and saved us four years ago.”

“And if they took Atsushi there and left a message at Kyouka’s door...” Yosano tried to follow the line of thought.

“It means someone found out me and Gin survived that day,” Akutagawa said, “it means someone wants us to get there.”

“It’s obviously a trap!” Kunikida said, throwing his arms in the air like Akutagawa was getting crazy.

“Of course it is, but this is where it all started,” Akutagawa proceeded, the light vanishing from his eyes, “and this is where it’s all gonna end.”

“Okay, so we have to make a– hey! Where are you going?”

Akutagawa stopped middle ways to the door, looking at Kunikida from over his shoulder with the coldest expression the blonde man has ever seen in the boy’s eyes, and said: “I’m gonna kill the Port Mafia’s boss.”

-x-

The trip to the warehouse felt three times longer than it usually did.

All the time, Gin was silent next to him carefully watching him, like she was expecting him to complain about the wait and suddenly jump from the car so he could run to the warehouse. His hands were sweaty and cold, trembling when he took his inhaler from his pocket and used it to see if he could calm down; in front of him, Kunikida shot him worried glares through the rear-view mirror as he drove towards their destiny and Dazai hummed a song by his side, not looking at him. Behind him, Yosano took another car with Tanizaki, Kenji and Kyouka while Ranpo and Fukuzawa remained at the agency, guiding them from their base.

During the whole way to the warehouse, Akutagawa stayed silent like his sister, building an inner plan to save Atsushi’s life and then end the Port Mafia’s boss life. Knowing the boss, he knew he should’ve put a lot of security guards at the warehouse while he stayed away from there, saving himself, watching the battle field from a safe place with those evil eyes and dirty smile, enjoying the blood being spilled, but this is what he usually made in the old days, when Akutagawa was still at the mafia.

Today, Akutagawa knew he would be there –he just needed to find where.

When they finally reached their destination and Kunikida parked the car, behind the warehouse and far from the guard’s eyes, he caught Kunikida’s eyes through the rear-view mirror, “I know what you’re thinking,” Akutagawa started, removing the seatbelt, “but you must understand that if we
don’t kill them, we won’t get Atsushi back.”

“I know,” Kunikida nodded, biting his lip and running his fingers through his hair, “I know, damn it, it’s just... I didn’t want this to be a massacre, but you... You have permission to kill, okay? You can kill as many people as you want, you don’t need to worry about what I will think. Just— just get Atsushi back and be careful.”

“Don’t worry, I will,” Akutagawa assured him, relieved with Kunikida’s words, opening the door and jumping out of the car, being followed by everyone else.

Once he was outside the car, Akutagawa cracked his neck and crooked smiled. If they wanted to play with fire, then they would burn.

Special ability: Beast Beneath the Moonlight.

With a flash of blue light, his arms and legs were turned into the tiger’s ones, knowing he would be a lot faster with the use of his ability, and with fire in his eyes, he started running towards the warehouse like a bullet.

He would save Atsushi.

-x-

Thank God Kunikida gave him permission to kill, because he didn’t know what he would’ve done if Kunikida saw all the lives he’s taken in only ten minutes.

He dropped what seemed to be the hundredth dead body in the floor, blood from his victims dripping from his ripped dark coat as he walked further into the warehouse towards the Mafia’s boss, smart and quick cat-like eyes catching every movement around him in his search for Atsushi. Kunikida, Dazai and the others stayed outside to deal with the remaining guards as Akutagawa went looking for his partner by himself, the claws of his white beast dangerously poking out of his fingertips and safe from the guard’s shoots by the thick skin of his tiger.

Akutagawa eventually found Atsushi in the back of one of the multiple warehouses in that place, chained to a chair in the middle of nowhere with ripped clothes and blood everywhere. For a moment Akutagawa froze, thinking he was already too late, but he gasped when he saw Atsushi’s chest slowly moving up and down with his superficial breath, showing he was still alive but not for long; immediately, he crossed the remaining distance between them and kneeled down in front of Atsushi, shaking his unconscious body to wake him up.

“C’mon, ‘Sushi, wake up. Wake up, ‘Sushi.”

Atsushi didn’t react immediately, what scared the hell out of Akutagawa, but one or two minutes later he frowned and started grumbling, slowly opening his eyes to meet Akutagawa’s, “... What?”

“Oh my God, you’re alive. You’re alive, you’re alive,” Akutagawa sighed in relief, using his tiger’s claws to break the chains around Atsushi’s body and free him, “it’s okay, I got you.”

“Ryu? No, no, no, no, what are you doing here?” Atsushi asked, eyes widening in sudden worry, using his partner’s shoulder as a support to stand still, “you shouldn’t be here, this is exactly what he wants, you need to run, you need to—”

“Oh, it’s a homecoming of sorts for Akutagawa Ryunosuke, isn’t it?”

Like a reflex, Atsushi sent Rashomon towards the voice behind Akutagawa, and like a reflex, the
owner of the voice easily dodged. Akutagawa turned to look at the owner of the voice, protectively standing in front of Atsushi, claws and fangs dangerously out; the silver-haired boy made Rashomon float in the air around them as they faced the man a few meters away from them.

The Port Mafia’s current boss, Kawabata Yasunari.

Kawabata smiled, head slightly tilted to the side, “I always knew you weren’t dead.”

“What do you want!!” Akutagawa blustered, still standing in front of Atsushi to protect him in case he needed to.

“Look at you,” Kawabata proceeded, taking a step towards Akutagawa and Atsushi and making them take two steps backwards, “you grew up pretty well, didn’t you? How’s Gin doing? She survived as well, didn’t she? You’re both playing heroes now, don’t you?”


“What do I want? Simple,” the boss said, “I want you to go back to the mafia. It’s not like I gave you permission to leave in the first place, is it? Let’s go back,” he made a pause, looking at Atsushi through Akutagawa’s shoulder and smiling, “go back with me, and I’ll let your little boyfriend and your sister live.”

“He’s not going anywhere!” Atsushi grunted, moving to stand next to Akutagawa, making an effort to stand still despite all the wounds around his body as he sent Rashomon flying through the air towards the man again, who easily dodged but made an impressed expression, “if you wanna get him, then you’ll have to pass through me!”

Akutagawa turned to look at Atsushi with widened eyes, hissing under his breath, “what the hell are you doing?”

“Giving you time to come up with a plan,” Atsushi replied in the same low voice, “because there’s no way in hell that I’m letting you go back to that place.”

Kawabata scoffed, “funny how you said that, it makes it look like he has a choice,” he said, taking his katana out of the sheath, “I tried to be nice and give you the chance to live but it seems like you don’t want it, so I’m killing you and going back to the mafia with him, but not before making him send your beheaded head to your dear agency.”

“Touch him and you’re dead,” Akutagawa replied, with cold eyes and cold expression, his lips glued together in a thin line and jaw clenched, hands turning into fists and claws trembling in anger, “don’t forget one day I worked for you, so I know every single one of your weak spots and can kill you in at least forty-eight different ways. And trust me, I’m creative.”

“Oh, you became a smart mouth, I liked it,” Kawabata giggled, twisting his katana in the air. He stared deeply inside Akutagawa’s eyes across the warehouse, then his smile faded into a cold and threateningly expression, “I’d like to see you try.”

As if he was expecting the sentence, Atsushi sent Rashomon flying across the room towards Kawabata. The boss easily dodged, laughing ironically at him when he missed.

“It seems like your little boyfriend has some vision issues, Ryuunosuke. He missed it.”

Atsushi smiled, “did I?”
In a perfectly timing, the lights of the warehouse started to flash until they fully out, leaving them in a dense darkness, the energy generator being destroyed by Rashomon. Instantly, Akutagawa grabbed Atsushi’s arm and pulled him to run with him through the warehouse’s maze with the help of his ability to give them time to think, not even stopping to think about how fast Atsushi came up with an escape route for them.

While Kawabata was lost, they ran. They ran and ran and ran even faster, turning left and right through the maze as fast as they could until they were so breathless that they couldn’t even stand anymore; they needed to dodge from bullets from Kawabata’s guards and run away from them, completely in the dark and using only Akutagawa’s night vision to run through the maze. When they realized there wasn’t a way they could pass through the guards, they decided to hide inside one of the warehouses to come up with a plan.

Akutagawa helped Atsushi to sit down, –even though the boy was good enough to run, he was still hurt–, the protectively sat down next to him and kept focused on the sounds around them outside the warehouse they were hidden; distant shoots told them the agency was still dealing with the guards, so they were all by themselves.

“How did– how did you know how to confuse him?” Akutagawa asked once they were considerably safe.

Atsushi was still heavy breathing by the effort he made, “I noticed– I noticed when he captured me. He always made sure the places he walked into was always illuminated, so I figured his ability has something to do with light. What do we know about him?”

“His ability is called Snow Country and allows him to freeze people from inside to outside, but only if he can see them,” Akutagawa explained in the same low voice, surprised with the boy’s quick perception, trying to catch Atsushi’s eyes through the dark. It was so dark that not even his night vision could work properly, “because of his ability, he doesn’t deal very well with darkness.”

“So we really need to stay in the dark, got it,” Atsushi nodded, looking for Akutagawa’s hand and intertwining their fingers, “what now? We can’t pass through the guards.”

“We can’t let him escape now that he knows both me and Gin are alive, or he’s gonna hunt us down like animals,” Akutagawa said, giving Atsushi’s hand a soft squeeze, “we need to stop him now.”

“But how?”

Akutagawa bit his lip, trying to see something around the warehouse that could help them even though it was too dark to see anything, trying to come up with a plan. He glared at the door they used to get into the warehouse, narrowing his eyes at the blurry silhouettes of the gas cylinders; a light flashed up above his head as an idea popped up in his mind, and he instantly knew what he needed to do.

“Okay, I have an idea,” he said, pulling Atsushi’s hand slightly to call his attention, “but you’re definitely not gonna like it.”

Even in the dark, Akutagawa could tell Atsushi was smiling, “you’re thinking what I’m thinking, aren’t you?”

“Yes, I’m afraid I am,” Akutagawa nodded, leaning his face forward to touch his forehead in Atsushi’s, “but I’m also afraid it’s the only way. We can’t let him escape.”

“I know,” Atsushi agreed, “so you have to go now.”
“Yes, I have to-”

Wait.

“Wait, what?”

“You need to go,” Atsushi echoed, hands starting to tremble when steps could be heard outside the warehouse along with a continuous hum, “I’ll distract him and you save yourself. Even if he survives, he will think you died with the explosion.”

“No, this is not what I was thinking,” Akutagawa violently shook his head, holding Atsushi’s arms, “you need to go and I’ll stay to give you time. I’m gonna blow this place to hell.”

Atsushi giggled softly, “so we weren’t thinking the same thing, after all.”

“Akutagawa Akutagawa, are you there?” Kawabata said outside the warehouse with an ironic laugh, tapping the metal walls in the rhythm of the song he was humming, “show yourself, Akutagawa-kun.”

“Go, I’ll distract him,” Atsushi returned to say in a hurry when the steps became louder, trying to push Akutagawa away from him, “I’ll keep him busy while you run, you can-”

“I’m not leaving you.”

“Yes you are,” Atsushi insisted, holding Akutagawa’s face when he started to grumble, “listen to me, yes you are. You need to go now.”

“No.”

“Ryuu-”

“I’m not leaving you.”

“Ry-”

“No! I’m not leaving you!” Akutagawa angrily shouted, not even bothering to try to keep the tears away anymore, firmly holding Atsushi’s arm, “I’m not leaving you!”

He gasped when a fragment of memory, maybe a distant dream, crossed his mind; both him and Atsushi at a warehouse, sounds of sirens, Atsushi deeply wounded, bombs and an explosion. Screams, pain and an eternal anguish in his heart. Without blinking, another tear streamed down his face as he looked down towards Atsushi, and his voice softened:

“Not again.”

Akutagawa couldn’t see his face, but he knew Atsushi was smiling.

When the steps got louder and the tapping stopped at the front door of the warehouse, Akutagawa moved to sit down next to Atsushi. He held his hand firmly, trying to transmit comfort, kissing him deeply in the dark one last time; it tasted like tears, sadness, fear and broken dreams, but it was perfect like every single one of their previous kisses. When the door was finally opened and Kawabata stepped into the warehouse, the flash of light that entered the place was enough to give Akutagawa a view of Atsushi’s face one last time and, with a smile, Atsushi sent Rashomon flying through the air to the gas cylinders like an arrow, barely giving Kawabata time to properly widen his eyes before realizing he was caught in a trap and being exploded to the ground along with the whole
Before the flames could reach him and Atsushi, Akutagawa silently begged for God for a next life without suffering.

He died with the view of Atsushi’s beautiful and ethereal eyes.

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*Like the other time, he woke up screaming.*

His screams felt twice as loud and painful than before, coming out in endless shouts that echoed around the white horizon like he was shouting through a speaker; his throat hurt and he still could feel the agony of having his skin burnt while he waited for his death, knowing Atsushi was suffering as much as he was suffering somewhere next to him. This wasn’t supposed to end like this, they weren’t supposed to die this way again. They were young, so so young. Atsushi wasn’t even eighteen yet, damn it.

Akutagawa would never step into a warehouse again.

*Images of Atsushi being burnt to death and memories of his painful screams in pure agony still echoed through his head, what made his own screams even louder and painful. Akutagawa knew it was over now, he knew he was dead and Atsushi was also dead and they would sooner begin their new lives only for them to die at such a young age again, and then the endless loop would start again. He was so tired, so so tired.*

He just wanted it to stop.

“Stop,” he begged through his sobs, curled up in himself in the floor, eyes closed tightly as he cried, “please, make it stop. I can’t take this anymore, make it stop. Please, please .”

A few meters away from him, Chuuya was silently watching him cry. He stared at the dark-haired boy for a long time without saying or doing anything, then sighed, and looked away from him, “I knew it wouldn’t work.”

Akutagawa raised his face only enough to look at Chuuya, frowning, “what?”

Chuuya was still quite silent when he replied, gesturing towards the water beneath his feet, “the last time you were here before that life you died for Atsushi, the reason why you don’t remember any of your previous lives before this one,” he explained, a sad look in his deep blue eyes, “was because you threatened to kill God if you and Atsushi kept dying this way.”

Well, this definitely caught Akutagawa’s attention.

“I threatened to do what!?” He asked in pure horror in a high-pitched voice, voice breaking at the end as he widened his eyes and became breathless. Suddenly, he didn’t even remember he was having a breakdown literally five seconds ago.

Chuuya closed his eyes, tilting his head slightly to the side, “they thought that by erasing your memories of your previous lives you would go back to normal, but it didn’t work,” when he returned to open his eyes, Akutagawa was actually surprised with how sad Chuuya looked, “they knew that the threat was real because they were all aware of your soul behavior, but now knowing that even by erasing your memories you still has the same anger in your eyes... I don’t know what to do. I told them their idea wouldn’t work, I told them this was simply who you were and you would never
change, but they didn’t listen to me,” a pause, a sigh, a quiet smile, “what should I do to you, Ryuu?”

“Make it stop,” Akutagawa instantly replied, sitting down in the floor and whipping his tears away, “then you won’t need to worry about me anymore.”

“I wish it was that simple, my friend,” Chuuya sighed again, resting his arms on his knees then his head on his arms, “I would do anything to end your suffering, Ryuu.”

Akutagawa stared at Chuuya for a moment in complete silence, absorbing what he’d just said, then he felt his throat burning and the tears coming back to his eyes. He sobbed and pulled his hair violently, breath starting to get faster and heart beating harder until he let out a loud scream of frustration and started punching the cozy floor beneath him.

“Bullshit!” He angrily shouted, “this is bullshit! This whole immortality stuff is bullshit and I fucking hate it! I hate it so much! What did I ever do to deserve this?! This– this curse?! Why do people say it’s a privilege to be immortal? Is it a privilege to die over and over and over again? Or even worse, to watch the person you love mostly in the world dying in such horrible ways? Why do I have to keep watching him die?” he pulled his hair again, and then an even louder scream: “why can’t I have peace for once in my lifetime?! ”

When he looked back at Chuuya, the redhead was crying.

The view of Chuuya crying actually surprised Akutagawa, because he often forgot the redhead was once human; he has feelings, he lived a happy life with Dazai and then died and came to this place, where he decided to stay for a while until he was ready to return to earth, and now he was crying, squeezing his eyes with his left hand and with thick tears streaming down his face and dripping in the water puddle beneath his feet. It was such a sad view that Akutagawa swore to himself he would do everything in his power to never see it again.

“I’m sorry,” Chuuya said between tears, “I am so, so sorry. I know you hate it, I know; you’ve been saying this to me for centuries and I’ve never been able to do anything about it. I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.”

Akutagawa bit his lip, then stood up and walked to where Chuuya was sitting and sat down by his side, “were you the one who put this curse on me?”

“No, of course not.”

“Then you don’t need to apologize, for it’s not your fault.”

Chuuya raised his face and met Akutagawa’s eyes, eyes looking crystal blue by the tears, “still, I am sorry. I wish I could do anything to stop this.”

“I believe you,” Akutagawa said, “I would give anything to stop this, too. I hate this more than anything else in this universe, but please, don’t blame yourself. ”

“Oh, only if I knew how much you would suffer from this curse when they put it on you,” Chuuya giggled, whipping the tears away from his face, “I would never have allowed this to happen.”

“I guess we can’t change the past, huh?” Akutagawa asked, throwing his arm around Chuuya’s shoulder and pulling him closer, making the redhead giggle.

“Unfortunately, we can’t,” Chuuya replied, turning to face Akutagawa and properly hug him tightly. Akutagawa willingly returned the hug with the same intensity, closing his eyes and
inhaling Chuuya’s hair—it smelled like woods and baby shampoo, what honestly was a perfect combination, “but I think we should look forward our future.”

Like magic, the white door that led Akutagawa to his new lives appeared a few meters in front of them out of nowhere. He broke the hug and stared at the door for what seemed to be ages, reluctant with what was waiting for him, then turned to look at Chuuya.

Chuuya smiled quietly, “you don’t need to go right now, you can wait for a while.”

“No, I think—I think I should go,” Akutagawa replied, standing up, “the longer I delay my new life, the more I don’t want to go.”

“Very well,” Chuuya said, closing his eyes and smiling quietly again, “then have a good life, Ryuu. I’ll see you later.”

“I’ll see you in a second,” Akutagawa said back, smiling at him and crossing the way to the door. He stopped by the doorstop, his hand in the doorknob as he looked back at Chuuya and smiled again, “thank you.”

“You don’t need to thank me for anything,” Chuuya replied, gesturing towards the water puddle beneath his feet but keeping Akutagawa’s glare, “but I do need to apologize. I’m sorry, again.”

“There’s nothing to apologize for,” Akutagawa replied, trying his best to sound confident, then opened the door, “look out for Dazai for me.”

“I will.”

Akutagawa smiled at Chuuya one last time, then opened the door and stepped into the white light without looking back, silently hoping his life would be better this time.

[V]

If Atsushi didn’t shut up in the next five seconds, Akutagawa was 100% going to kill him in the next morning when they were at school.

He squeezed his pillow tighter against his ears, knowing fully well it wouldn’t work because the singing session was inside his head and he couldn’t simply block it by covering his ears, reaching his phone and looking at the time in the screen. 3:51am.

For fucks sake.

“Will you please shut up?!” he shouted the highest he could, feeling the way Atsushi jumped with the sudden scream, “it’s almost 4am in the fucking morning! Some people are trying to sleep here!”

“Oh? Funny, you didn’t seem to bother when you were the one singing My Chemical Romance loudly at this same time last week,” came Atsushi’s answer with a bit of saltiness, in a way Akutagawa could almost hear his smirk, “it’s not funny when you’re the one being bothered, huh?”

“I am going to fucking slaughter you in your fucking sleep, rip your fucking skin off and put it back inside out,” Akutagawa grunted, “one more word and you’re dead by this same time tomorrow and your sister is going to grow without an older brother.”
“And you’ll grow without me.”

“Trust me, it would be a pleasure to live without you singing Britney Spears at the top of your lungs in my head at four in the morning,” another grunt, Akutagawa dropped his pillow and faced the fluorescent stars in his ceiling, “I hate you so fucking much.”

“The feeling is obviously mutual,” Atsushi grunted back, “why do you have to be my soulmate? Why do you have to be in my head all the time, watching my thoughts?”

“Do you think I like it? I hate your voice more than anything in this world and I’m fated to hear it inside my head for the rest of my life.”

“I hate you.”

“I hate you too, fucking bitch.”

“Stupid asshole.”

“Furry bastard.”

“Stupid emo.”

“You already called me stupid, it doesn’t count anymore.”

“Shut up and leave me alone! Get out of my head!”

“Go to sleep or I’m dissecting you for our biology class,” Akutagawa said, biting his lip so he wouldn’t giggle loudly and accidentally wake up his sister, “and for fuck’s sake, stop singing Britney Spears. You can’t even sing it properly.”

“We can discuss it later,” Atsushi replied, with a tone of voice that told him that he was also holding up his laugh, “now leave me alone.”

“I hate you.”

“I hate you too.”

Akutagawa waited for a few more minutes to see if Atsushi would say anything else, but no answer came. Inside his head, he could feel the weretiger’s soft and peaceful breath and his quiet heartbeats, telling him the boy has fallen asleep; he then sighed and rolled in his bed to bury his face in his pillow, closing his eyes and letting the sleep slowly return to his body, with ‘Toxic’ still echoing around his head.

He would definitely kill Atsushi tomorrow.

-x-x-x-

The next morning, already at school, he let his sister lead the way through the hundreds of students in the halls towards the outside of the school, where they could breathe properly. Tachihara and Higuchi were already there, sitting by a tree and talking happily to each other about something that Akutagawa honestly didn’t care about, far from the other students and, unfortunately, with a clear view of Atsushi and his own group of friends sitting by another tree a few meters away from them; once Akutagawa spotted the platinum hair, he quickly looked away and tried to hide from the weretiger, but he was already seen.

“Good morning, Akutagawa. How did you sleep?” Came Atsushi’s voice inside his head, making
him grunt and turn to look at the weretiger. Atsushi lazily waved at him.

“I hate you, don’t talk to me.” Akutagawa angrily replied, making Atsushi snort. Their friends watched their expressions confused, not understanding what was happening.

“Woah, why are you so angry at eight in the morning?” Atsushi asked, smirking at him through the campus, “it even looks like you couldn’t sleep very well because someone was bothering you last night.”

Akutagawa showed him his middle finger, told him to fuck off through his mind and turned his back at him, sitting in front of his friends and ignoring his annoying soulmate.

Here’s the thing: besides the quirks, Akutagawa lived in a world where people also had soulmates. A thin red thread that connected two people’s souls together; no one could see the red thread, but they all knew who their soulmate was because they were all able to do something unique with them. His sister, for example, was born with Higuchi’s name tattooed in her wrist. Ranpo and Poe? Everything they wrote in their bodies also appeared in the other’s bodies. Yosano and Kouyou? They could feel each other’s pain.

Akutagawa and Atsushi? They could communicate telepathically.

And, honestly, what did Akutagawa ever do in his previous lives to deserve such an annoying soulmate?

He wasn’t gonna lie, the ability was pretty useful; when they were in field missions they could talk to each other in secret, they could give each other the answers of a math test, they could feel the other’s emotions and could tell if something was wrong with them. If one of them were captured, they could communicate with each other and the kidnappers wouldn’t even notice it. Everything about this ability would be perfect if his soulmate wasn’t Atsushi.

Atsushi was an asshole.

He didn’t know why, but Atsushi developed an extremely annoying habit of pissing Akutagawa off. At first, when they found out they were soulmates, they tried to make it work –they started hanging out together and doing schools projects with each other and asking Oda-sensei or Kunikida-sensei to make them partners in fields missions to know each other better, but they quickly noticed it wasn’t gonna work. They were too different from each other and they fought more than worked together so, instead of trying to make it work, they mutually started to get on each other’s nerves. It was funny. The teasing and the inner arguments and the stupid fights they got into mentally and how they had to act normally in front of their friends when they were fighting through telepathy. Made them feel human.

In this world, every single person was born with a quirk. The larger part of the quirks were simple things like making small things float or producing water out of their own body, but those who had special quirks like Akutagawa, Atsushi and their friends, if they didn’t become villains, trained to be heroes. They studied in an academy called “Yuuei” who trained kids to become heroes and was considered the top Hero Academy in the whole Japan. Often, because of their Provisional Hero License, they were sent in field missions to deal with more light stuffs like minor villains or thieves and casual things like dealing with establishment breaks or people missing; usually, things involving more dangerous villains and situations where they could actually get killed were left to the pro heroes like Oda-sensei and Fukuzawa-dono.

(It’s not like Akutagawa, Atsushi and their respective friends never followed the pro heroes to see what they did outside the school, though. What can they say? The adrenaline was funny.)
“Oi, Akutagawa? I’m talking to you.”

Akutagawa blinked and shook his head, focusing his eyes back at his friends. He stared at Tachihara still with his fingers in front of his face, snapping them.

“I’m sorry, what?” He asked, now focused on the subject. Gin snorted.

Tachihara smiled, “I said Ranpo is hosting a sleepover at his parent’s house this weekend and he called us. Are you going?”

“Is Atsushi going?”

“Probably? Since he’s friends with Ran-”

“Then no.”

Gin scoffed, “yes, we’re going. Both of us.”

“Don’t speak for me, emo,” Akutagawa grumbled, throwing a small piece of paper on his sister.

She laughed, “you’re also emo.”

Atsushi snorted inside his head, ironically, “she’s got a point.”

Akutagawa then stood up and threw a rock at where Atsushi was watching him, hitting his leg with the rock and making the weretiger laugh while his friends looked shocked at him, “get out of my head!”

The weretiger laughed again, making their friends look confused at them while Akutagawa kept throwing rocks at Atsushi. He only stopped when Gin kicked his leg and grunted at him.

He sat down again, showing Atsushi his middle finger and cursing him through telepathy, “furry bastard,” he grumbled, “keep spying my conversations.”

“Sounds funny,” Higuchi said, “having the ability to speak through telepathy with someone.”

“Do you have any idea how hard and embarrassing it is to take a shower or even watch movies with sex scenes? I never know if he’s watching me or not.”

“Can he look through your eyes?”

“I... Don’t know? If we can, we still haven’t discovered this part of the link yet, but we can hear through each other’s ears. We can hear each other’s surroundings if we try hard enough,” Akutagawa explained, “he does that all the time, it’s so annoying. He’s like a tiny annoying presence inside my brain that I can’t turn off don’t matter how hard I try.”

Gin actually looked surprised, “you can feel his presence?”

“Yeah,” Akutagawa grumbled, “it’s like... Having a second personality. Sometimes I can feel his mood, but usually it’s just a slight scratch inside my brain when he’s awake, like a tiny fire, telling me he’s still there and I can talk to him if I want to; when he’s asleep, I feel his soft breath and heartbeats.”

“Aw, this is so sweet,” Atsushi said again inside his head, making Akutagawa red in embarrassment, “do you like hearing my heartbeats? You’re such a softie~”
“I swear to fucking God, if you keep hearing my conversations I’m going to murder you in the worst way possible,” Akutagawa grunted back, making Atsushi laugh, “I hate you and your stupid heartbeats and soft breath and nice eyes.”

“Woah, you think my eyes are nice?”

Akutagawa bit his lip with force enough to take blood when he noticed what he just did, “I do not.”

“es you do, you just said my eyes are-”

“No, I said your eyes are ugly. Please, clear your ears, you’re getting deaf.”

He could feel his brain vibrating, like Atsushi was giggling, “sure.”

“Are you talking to him again? Please, don’t do this in front of us, it’s extremely weird.” Gin said, making Akutagawa blink and focus back on her. Tachihara and Higuchi were both giggling at him, what made him red in embarrassment again, “you have this stupid concentrate expression and unfocused eyes that makes you look even more stupid than you already are.”

“Shut up, Frank Iero,” Akutagawa hissed, then turned to look at Tachihara, “you said Atsushi’s going to the sleepover? I changed my mind, I’m going too. I’m gonna annoy the fuck out of him so he would never sing Britney Spears to me while I’m trying to sleep.”

Higuchi snorted, “you know, this little brawl you two have is so much funnier knowing you guys are soulmates.”

Akutagawa grumbled, “trust me, if I could simply break the link between us I would without a second thought. Having him as a soulmate is a fucking nightmare.”

“I could say the exact same thing.”

“Asshole.”

“Bastard.”

“Furry.”

“Emo.”

“Dude, having a mental link with your soulmate is like taking sexting to the next level!” Tachihara said, excitedly throwing his arms up and making Akutagawa stare at him in absolute horror, “you can do it literally anywhere and no one will know! Damn, I wish I had a mental link with my soulmate too. I would tease them so much.”

“Please, don’t give him ideas,” Akutagawa begged with a horrified expression, “Atsushi is already bad enough just the way he is, if you start giving him ideas you could create a monster.”

“I would never have mental sex with you,” Atsushi said inside his head, sounding really disgusted, “you’re extremely disgusting and I would rather die than mental- sext you.”

“Oh, do you want me to kill you? I would willingly do it, bastard.” Akutagawa replied, grunting angrily. For some reason, he felt a little bit sad with Atsushi’s words.

“And free you from living with my annoying voice? Never. You’ll have to put up with me for a very long time.”
“It’s the price I pay for apparently have done all the seven deadly sins in my previous life as a hobby,” Akutagawa hissed, “now shut up and leave me alone.”

Atsushi giggled inside his head again, then the alarm that indicated the beginning of their classes rang. Instantly, all the students started to leave the field and return to the school’s building for their daily classes and caused a noisy mess, what took his attention from Atsushi and luckily masked the weretiger singing Britney Spears badly inside his brain; he stood up and followed his friends among the crowd, letting Gin lead the way to their class as he mentally told Atsushi to fuck off.

“I hate you,” he said, mentally.

“I hate you too,” Atsushi replied.

-x-

He was in the middle of a Math test when Atsushi called him.

“Oi, My Chemical Romance.”

Akutagawa jumped slightly in his seat by the sudden scare, looking around sideways to see if anyone noticed, then grunting, “I’m in the middle of a test, what do you want?”

“What kind of test?”

“Math.”

“Good,” Atsushi said, “so you’ll help me with mine and I’ll help you with yours.”

Akutagawa grunted very low again, “I don’t need your help.”

“Yes you do, I can feel your anxiety,” Atsushi instantly replied, what made Akutagawa curse their mental link, “besides, I know you suck at Math, so you’ll help me with my History test and I’ll help you with your Math test.”

“And what will I gain from this bargain?”

“Besides scoring your notes, I won’t bother you during the night for a whole month.”

“Deal.”

Atsushi smiled through the link, “okay, so the Battle of Hastings in 1066 was fought in which country?”

“England,” Akutagawa instantly replied, then read the questions in his own test, “okay uh, when \( x = 3 \) and \( y = 5 \), by how much does the value of \( 3x^2 - 2y \) exceed the value of \( 2x^2 - 3y \)?”

“Hold on,” Atsushi said, then remained silent for a few seconds before replying: “14. Who was the first Western to reach China?”

-x-x-x-

By the end of the weekend, exactly like Tachihara told him, Ranpo hosted a sleepover at his house. Actually, it was more like a pool party that turned into a sleepover for his closest friends instead of an actual sleepover, because when Akutagawa and Gin arrived his place there were definitely too many people in his house to be considered a simple sleepover. Everywhere you looked, you could see drunk teenagers making out and dancing together and playing stupid party games and laughing.
hysterically about something that definitely wasn’t that funny, but it was okay; they needed to act like teenagers sometimes, they needed to have fun and ignore the fact that death was always peeking from the corner, just waiting for the perfect moment to pounce, always ready to take them down. Guess this is the price they paid for training to become heroes one day.

(Akutagawa didn’t like to remember that, because of that, only 40% of them were gonna graduate and become actual pro heroes one day.)

Honestly, pool parties were never Akutagawa’s kind of parties—actually, no parties were his kind of parties—. Pool parties usually meant he had to be on swimming clothes, and he didn’t like to take his coat off; being without his coat meant he was without his ability, and he didn’t like to think he was vulnerable and defenseless; a villain could attack them any moment and he wouldn’t have a way to protect and defend himself, and this is why he tended to avoid pool parties. When he went to this kind of parties, he usually grabbed a drink and spent the whole party with the house’s cat and far from everyone else, just watching his sister and his friends from distance.

Today, he spent the whole party with Poe’s and Tetchou’s company at the living room, talking about their mutual music taste and drinking together far from everyone else. At some point Gin ended up joining them, and this is how they spent the whole party—he decided to ignore Atsushi’s annoying presence inside his brain, knowing the weretiger was listening to their conversation and would probably tease him about the endless chat about emo bands later. A few hours later, when the sun started to fade into the horizon and the weather became a little bit colder, people started to leave the house and only Ranpo’s closest friends remained at his house for the sleepover.

“Alright,” Ranpo said once everyone was gone and only his and Akutagawa’s group of friends stayed at his house, with his hands in his waist and a naughty smile, “so let’s begin the real party, shall we?”

Turns out the ‘real party’ was only them all scattered in multiple mattresses and cushions that were thrown in Ranpo’s living room, eating pizza and watching Supernatural until they were too tired to keep their eyes opened and, honestly, this was Akutagawa’s ideal kind of party. With only his closest friends, food and TV shows, without all the alcohol and the drunk teenagers screaming and being disgusted around him. Unfortunately, having only his and Ranpo’s closest friends there, meant Atsushi was there too, staring at him from the other side of the huge mess and agglomerate of mattresses, cushions, pillows and blankets, in a frenetic mental battle of who could sing the worst and loudest song inside their heads without showing any reactions on the outside. Currently, they were doing a duet of ‘Every Time We Touch’ and Akutagawa was almost dying to keep himself from bursting out in laughs; luckily, he could tell Atsushi was suffering from the same problem.

He would never admit it not even to himself, but he was actually having a lot of fun.

When the second whole season ended and they were all fighting to keep their eyes opened, Ranpo scattered them all between the living room, his own room and the guest’s room so they could sleep comfortably. After taking a shower, Akutagawa found himself laying down in a futon in Ranpo’s room, staring at the blueish ceiling caused by the lights off and the moonlight entering the dark room by the window shade, hearing Ranpo’s and Poe’s snoring and Tachihara’s soft breath next to him and the pouring rain outside that started around an hour ago and didn’t seem to be any closer to stop. Atsushi was somewhere in the room as well, but he couldn’t see or hear him; by the continuous presence inside his brain, he could tell the boy was already asleep.

A minute passed, then two, then three and then ten, and Akutagawa couldn’t sleep. No matter how much he turned around in the futon and counted sheep and tried to forcefully shut his brain down,
nothing worked. His brain simply didn’t seem to want to let him sleep.

Akutagawa stared at the ceiling for a few more minutes, then turned around and closed his eyes to try to sleep again. Another minute passed, then two, then three, and he heard a low groan.

Instantly, he opened his eyes wide open and sat down at the futon, looking around the room to see who could’ve made the sound so he could beat the shit out of them, but he didn’t find anyone doing anything suspicious. Like before, everyone was asleep. He frowned and laid back down, closing his eyes but keeping his ears focused on his surroundings.

Not even a whole minute passed, and someone groaned again.

He had to keep himself from yelling at whoever was jerking off, but he just sat down again and took another look around the room to try to find the culprit. He carefully ran his eyes over the sleeping bodies around the room, and then... There!

It was Atsushi!

Akutagawa was ready to throw his pillow at the weretiger and then jump on his neck when he noticed the boy wasn’t, in fact, jerking off. Actually, he wasn’t even awake; Akutagawa could tell by their mental link, but the moans were definitely coming from him. Akutagawa smirked by the view of Atsushi moving in his futon in his sleep and groaning in a low way, knowing he could use the fact the boy was having a dirty dream as blackmail material later and make fun of him for the rest of their lives, ready to pick his phone to record him when their mental link gave him another information.

Atsushi wasn’t, in fact, having a dirty dream. He was having a nightmare.

Akutagawa froze, not knowing what to do. He could deal with a dirty dream; he could annoy Atsushi for the rest of the year because of it and never let him forget about it, but a nightmare? How could he deal with a nightmare? With the sounds he was hearing and the images he was seeing? And the pure fear Atsushi was transmitting through their mental link...

He didn’t have any other choice but wake him up, “oi, jinko,” he called mentally, watching Atsushi’s brows frown in his sleep and he close his hands in fists, “jinko, wake up,” he tried again, but Atsushi didn’t show any reaction, “jinko,” once again, all Atsushi did was to whimper in his sleep and turn in his futon. Akutagawa grunted and then, taking a deep breath, he called one more time: “Atsushi!”

Atsushi woke up with a loud gasp, instantly sitting up in his futon.

“It’s me, it’s okay, you’re okay,” Akutagawa called his attention, making Atsushi face him with teary eyes and a ghost expression, “it was just a nightmare.”

“Fuck,” Atsushi replied through the mental link, his voice breaking a little, “I’m sorry, I didn’t want to wake you up.”

“It’s okay, you didn’t wake me up,” Akutagawa assured him, “do you wanna talk about it?”

“No, I’m fine,” Atsushi said, falling back in his futon and facing the ceiling, “go to sleep, Akutagawa.”

Akutagawa didn’t reply, but laid back down in his futon and kept eyeing Atsushi sideways, still kinda suspicious with the mixed signals the mental link was sending him. A few minutes later, right when he thought Atsushi had finally calmed down, a thunder sounded on the outside and the rain got heavier, making Atsushi let out a low gasp and shiver through the mental link again.
“Oi,” Akutagawa called again, lifting on his elbows to look at Atsushi. Atsushi raised his face to look at him, “come here.”

“What?!” Atsushi whispered out loud, narrowing his eyes, “no, thanks.”

Akutagawa rolled his eyes, “I won’t make fun of you, come here. You’ll stay away from the window.”

“I’m good.”

Another thunder, another shiver through the mental link and another loudly gasp. Akutagawa raised both his eyebrows as he stared at Atsushi, opening his blanket to give Atsushi space to lay down; Atsushi stared at him for a few seconds before sighing and slowly getting up, crossing the room in his tiptoes to avoid waking up Tachihara or the others and silently laying down in Akutagawa’s futon, sighing happily when Akutagawa closed the blanket and the warm air touched his skin, laying down face to face with the boy, but still far enough so they weren’t touching each other.

Akutagawa smiled quietly, “hi.”

Atsushi returned the smile, “hi.”

“Are you okay?” Akutagawa asked, carefully studying the boy’s face and watching the way the weretiger bit his lip and shrank up in himself.

“I’m fine, it’s just...” the silver-haired boy said, biting his lip again like he was pondering if he should tell Akutagawa what was bothering him, “you’ll make fun of me.”

“I won’t, I promise,” Akutagawa assured him, moving his hand under the blanket to touch Atsushi’s arm in a reassuring way, “I’m an asshole, but I know my limits. What’s bothering you?”

Once again, Atsushi bit his lip and sighed quietly, shrinking in the blankets until only his eyes were visibly in the dark room. Under the blankets, he slowly reached Akutagawa’s hand over his arm and rested his own hand above his, giving a very soft squeeze that almost wasn’t noticed by Akutagawa, “I’m having these... Weird dreams lately. These nightmares, flashes of things I’m sure that never happened and dreams that aren’t simple and random dreams. I don’t– I don’t know what triggers them but they’re happening with a massive frequency lately and I’m starting– I’m starting to get scared,” even through the mental link, Atsushi’s voice broke a little as he explained what was happening. He raised his face to meet Akutagawa’s eyes, his kaleidoscopic eyes looking crystalline by the undropped tears, “you have no idea how bad these dreams are, Akutagawa. The things I saw, the deaths I’ve witnessed over and over and over again, the pain I felt... It’s awful,” he made a pause, squeezing Akutagawa’s hand a little bit tighter, “and you know what the worst part is? You’re always in the worst ones.”

“What...?” Akutagawa asked, genuinely surprised but not by the nightmares, but by how Atsushi said the worst ones were the ones he died on them, “but why would you think they’re bad? I thought you hated me.”

Atsushi scoffed, “we both know this is not true.”

Akutagawa tried to mask his gasp and the red that took over his cheeks, clearing his throat, making Atsushi giggle softly, “okay, you got a point there. Do you wanna talk about it?”

“No– not really,” Atsushi replied, voice breaking a little. Akutagawa held Atsushi’s hand under the blankets and gave him a soft squeeze before he could even think about it, “I’ll just– I’ll just say they’re really, really bad.”
“It’s okay, you don’t need to tell me if you don’t want to,” Akutagawa assured him, tracing invisible patterns in Atsushi’s hand with his thumb, “but if you do, you can talk to me any time you want.”

“Thank you, Akutagawa,” the weretiger said, sighing in relief and closing his eyes, moving his hand under Akutagawa’s until his palm was up and he could intertwine their fingers together. Once again, Akutagawa’s cheeks acquired a red tone.

“Call me Ryuu,” Akutagawa instantly replied, immediately regretting his choices and biting his tongue to shut himself up. What was going on with him, damn it?

Atsushi opened his eyes when he heard Akutagawa’s words, catching the boy’s own eyes in the dark, and smiling softly. Akutagawa’s heart missed a beat with his smile.

“Very well,” Atsushi replied, closing back his eyes with a quiet smile in his lips. A thunder sounded on the outside, loud and clear enough to scare both him and Akutagawa, making him gasp loudly and shiver by the fear, the mental link sending his feelings directly to Akutagawa’s brain; Atsushi raised his face to catch Akutagawa’s eyes once again, kaleidoscopic eyes that earlier looked so soft and kind now looked scared and pleading. It wasn’t a look that matched his beautiful eyes, “do you--do you mind if I, uh--”

“No, no, of course not,” Akutagawa quickly replied, unconsciously getting closer to Atsushi to the point their noses were almost touching and their breaths were mixing together, “you can-- you can stay, don’t worry.”

Atsushi smiled in relief again, and once again Akutagawa felt his heart melting, “thank you, Ryuu.”

They fell in a comfortable silence after that, with the heavy rain pouring outside and Akutagawa singing a slow and cozy melody quietly inside Atsushi’s brain, watching the way the boy’s eyelashes trembled from time to time as he tried to sleep; somewhere in the middle of the song he was singing, Akutagawa brought one of his hands to stroke Atsushi’s hair, slowly running the fingers through the soft hair and assuring him he was safe from the nightmares, legs unconsciously wrapping together as they unconsciously got closer to each other. Akutagawa never thought he would once cuddle with Atsushi or even be this close to the weretiger, but it was... Kinda good. Comfortable. He didn’t know if they would ever talk about this night after today, but he internally hoped they could do this again someday in the future.

Right when he was about to fall asleep, Atsushi moved in front of him. Akutagawa instantly opened his eyes thinking something was wrong, but the weretiger was simply moving to find a more comfortable position for them to sleep in the tiny futon; he moved around himself until he was laying with his back at Akutagawa, pulling the boy’s hand over his chest before Akutagawa could even think about pushing them away from him and intertwining their fingers back together. Akutagawa froze for a moment, eyes widened in the dark when he noticed they were, in fact, cuddling right now, gradually relaxing behind Atsushi when the weretiger started purring through the mental link. Like, literally purring. Of course, Akutagawa knew Atsushi was some sort of a cat, but he didn’t expect the boy to literally purr.

(He can’t say it wasn’t a warming and comfort feeling, though.)

When he got used to Atsushi’s presence inside his brain and the new position, the sleep gradually started to return to him with the constant rhythm of the weretiger’s breath and the pouring rain outside. After relaxing completely, Akutagawa buried his face in Atsushi’s neck and inhaled his hair, bringing the boy closer by his chest until they were fully connected to each other, giving his hand a soft squeeze and letting out a sigh.
Before he could surrender entirely to his sleep, he smiled with a memory, “you know,” he said through the mental link, knowing Atsushi was still awake and listening to him, “I don’t actually hate you too.”

He felt Atsushi smiling through the mental link, but the boy didn’t reply. It wasn’t like he needed to, anyway.

-x-x-

Studying in the most famous and top Hero Academy in Japan had its perks. For example, it was way easier for the students to get their hero license and become provisional heroes and go on field missions, and the fame they get for that was also good. The sports festival was transmitted to the whole Japan, what meant the pro heroes were almost definitely watching them and the chances they get an internship with one of them was very high. All in all, an Academy that Akutagawa didn’t have anything to complain about.

Well, except for the villains, of course.

Being the most famous Academy in Japan meant they were a beacon for villain attacks. Of course, the Academy’s campus was safe enough for them not having to worry about sudden villain attacks, but once they were outside the gates they were on their own, what meant even school trips weren’t 100% safe, even with the presence of pro heroes like Fukuzawa-dono and Oda-sensei. Akutagawa has already lost the count of how many times they were attacked by villains during school trips, but there were so many times that the school’s director had to build dorms in the Academy’s campus to keep the students safe; he had to move away from his parents, but it worked and both him and Gin were safe, so it was fine.

The villain attacks weren’t so often, but they still happened every once in a while, especially during school trips. Today, the villains were keeping them trapped in a forest without ways to communicate with the outside world and tell the other pro heroes they needed help –they could only beg that Oda-sensei, Kunikida-sensei and Fukuzawa-dono’s help was enough to keep everyone safe. He’s not actually sure when this happened, but Akutagawa found himself alone in the dark and cold forest, surrounded by a villain with a quirk that allowed them to mix themselves in the shadows and use it as a weapon, far from the other students and without knowing if they were fine; far from him, he could hear the angrily screams of students fighting and the characteristic sound of people using their quirks to protect themselves and their friends, smell fire and see the smoke crackling towards the sky, like a beacon in the dark, telling him he was too far away from everyone to scream for help.

The cut in his left leg was so bad he could barely stand, but he kept fighting with all his strengths; he was gonna be a great hero one day, he wasn’t gonna let a single villain take him down like this –and even if they did, if he went down, he was going down fighting.

“C’mon!” Akutagawa screamed in the dark, Rashomon menacingly floating around him ready to be used, leg dripping blood and hands shaking in anger, “you’re such a coward! Stop hiding in the shadows and fight me like a man!”

The maniac laugh that followed his sentence echoed everywhere around him, making him turn around himself to check his blind spots. He could see the shadows moving, he could see the villain moving around him, but he couldn’t do anything to hit them; he couldn’t take the risk of sending Rashomon directly towards the villain and the villain use the shadows his quirk made as an advantage, he needed to study the villain’s limits before attacking them with his full potential.

If only he wasn’t so worried about Atsushi to think straight...
By what the weretiger told him a few minutes ago, he was also alone somewhere in the middle of the forest fighting with three villains all at once, hurt and desperate for help. One of the villains had a quirk capable of blinding their victims and Atsushi unfortunately got caught by it, so Akutagawa was avoiding talking to him through the mental link because the weretiger needed to focus on his surroundings and couldn’t get distracted by Akutagawa, otherwise he could get even more injured or even killed. The mental link kept them connected and informed about each other’s condition, sending their feelings and battle status to one another as a form reassurance that they were, in fact, still alive.

The mental link kept them alive.

Atsushi’s anxiety and fear were a constant presence inside his head. At any other time, Akutagawa would’ve hated feeling the weretiger’s emotions, but at the moment he couldn’t be gladder about their connection—the constant trembling inside his brain and the racing heartbeat against his ears, the angrily roar and the soft and familiar purr almost imperceptible under the roar. Listening to the constant purr was like having a wave of reassurance sent through his body, telling him his soulmate was still alive and letting him know that, trying to relax him in the battlefield, knowing how Atsushi’s purr became some sort of comfort for him after that night at Ranpo’s house.

They, of course, never talked about that night, but it had an effect on them. If anyone had told Akutagawa a few months ago he would become closer to Atsushi and stop wanting to kill the weretiger and start to actually care about him, he would’ve laughed on their face and told them they were crazy. Still, there he was, more worried about his soulmate than with his own safety, silently wishing they both could get out of this alive, praying for all the gods he knew for Atsushi to be okay.

(He didn’t want to think about the scream of pure agony Atsushi let out just a few minutes ago and how the mental link was sending him mixed signals about him.)

(Fear, pain, relaxation, comfort, pain, coldness, coldness, coldness.)

When the shadows moved once again around him followed by a maniac laugh, he sent Rashomon flying towards the villain in a hope he could hit them. He missed, but managed to hit a tree with strength enough to set it on fire, catching a glimpse of the villain because of the flames; he smirked to the light spot, more relaxed now that he wasn’t entirely in the dark and could see how the villain was avoiding the light.

Of course.

The villain’s quirk consisted in traveling in the shadows, in the dark, so they needed to avoid light spots because their ability wouldn’t work in the light. It made sense they wanted Akutagawa to be entirely in the dark.

Using Rashomon, Akutagawa spreaded the flames around the trees to have a larger light spot, making the villain tremble in the remaining shadows. Once the flames were large enough to illuminate a whole glade, the villain stumbled out of the woods and fell on their knees with widened eyes as they coughed because of the smoke, making Akutagawa smile.

“You don’t seem so brave without your shadows, do you?” he said, covering his mouth with his hands to keep the smoke away from his lungs and kicking the villain the hardest he could with his wounded leg, making the villain hiss in pain and stand on their feet to attack Akutagawa, who easily dodged from the attack, “let’s see how good you are without the shadows.”

The villain kicked him in his wounded leg and threw their body backwards to escape from Akutagawa, stumbling on their feet and accidentally falling on the ground, making Akutagawa even
more angry than he already was. He hissed, stanced, and called:

“Rashomon!”

And nothing happened.

Akutagawa instantly froze, too shocked to say or do anything. Even the villain was motionless, looking at him from the ground with widened eyes and frowned eyebrows, surprised by how the events went. Rashomon never failed before, she always instantly answered when he called her.

He tried again, and once more, nothing happened.

And then the realization finally hit him.

Besides the quirks, Akutagawa lived in a world where people also had soulmates. A thin red thread connecting two people’s souls together that gave them an ability to do something unique with each other; for Atsushi and Akutagawa, the thin red thread gave them the ability to communicate with each other telepathically.

And like any other topic in the world, there were some rumors about it.

Akutagawa never believed the conspiracy theories about the soul’s links, but he obviously saw some of them online. Some people that simply believed they were true, some other people confirming it was true because they lived it themselves, some people saying bullshit about them, but Akutagawa never believed the conspiracy theories.

Until now.

There was this really old and famous rumor, something that even his parents told him about, that the link that connected two souls together and the link that gave people their quirks was very tenuous, to the point even people specialized in this topic couldn’t distinguish them.

There was this really old and famous rumor that, when your soulmate dies, you lose your quirk, but Akutagawa never believed this rumor.

Until now.

“No,” he whispered to himself, whole body starting to tremble in horror as he desperately tried to call Rashomon or contact Atsushi mentally. Only them he seemed to notice that Atsushi’s constant presence in the back of his brain, that tiny fire that kept him resident in his mind, wasn’t there anymore. The part of his brain that housed Atsushi was now a blank space, a void, like something was violently ripped from there and only the darkness remained.

He couldn’t feel Atsushi anymore.

“No, no, no, no,” he said once again out loud, not even having to blink for the tears to stream down his face, “Atsushi?” Akutagawa called mentally, voice breaking at the end of the name, but even the mental link didn’t feel right anymore. He felt like he was talking to himself, not like he was sending the message to the weretiger, “please, Atsushi, answer me.” he tried again, but no answer came.

He didn’t even notice when the villain he was fighting with ran away, but he honestly didn’t give a shit. Like he was on autopilot, his wounded and trembling legs started stumbling among the trees on fire towards the place Atsushi told him he was, his blurry eyes by the tears preventing him from seeing where he was going –it wasn’t like he needed to see anyways, his feet simply took him there by instinct. A few more minutes of incessant running among the streets, he finally arrived the place
Atsushi told him he was— in a glade next to a river and a huge rock they could use later for stargazing.

The first thing he saw when he arrived the place was a villain in a puddle of their own blood, dead. The second, was a villain sucking blood directly from Atsushi’s dead body.

Akutagawa didn’t even think about it, he grabbed the axe he saw resting next to the villain’s dead body and ran to the one still too focused on Atsushi to notice him, striking him in the crook of the neck the strongest he could while shouting at the top of his lungs. The villain didn’t even have time to widen his eyes before having his head beheaded, head rolling in the floor away from his body still with an expression of shock on his face; Akutagawa dropped the axe and pulled the villain’s body away from Atsushi’s violently, throwing it on the other side of the glade before kneeling down next to his soulmate’s body and bringing him to his lap.

“Atsushi, Atsushi, please wake up,” he begged the weretiger, trembling hands moving to try to stanch the huge bite in Atsushi’s neck as if it would work, “please, we have to stargaze tonight,” bloody hands then moved to touch the boy’s face, unfocused dead eyes still opened towards the sky, free of life, “Ranpo is hosting a karaoke at his house next week and we’re gonna sing My Chemical Romance together, remember? You promised you would sing with me,!” he sobbed, leaning down to touch his forehead in Atsushi’s, bringing the boy’s body closer and holding him tighter. He was so cold, so, so cold, “you can’t— you can’t die like this, ‘Sushi, please wake up,” he sobbed once again, then grunted frustratedly, “who’s gonna— who’s gonna sing Britney Spears to me if not you, uh? Who’s— who’s gonna give me the answers for my Math tests and help me when my depression is hitting me hard? Who’s gonna save me, Atsushi? Please— please, you have to wake up!” he shouted, desperately shaking Atsushi’s body in a last hope he would wake up, his whole body trembling with his heavy sobs, “this is— this is not fair! I couldn’t— I couldn’t even tell you, damn it! Please!” and then his voice softened and the sobs narrowed down, and he opened his eyes to look at Atsushi’s face one last time when he heard the fire he caused getting closer and Kunikida’s screams approaching him.

“I couldn’t even tell you I was falling in love.”

Even after he opened his eyes, Akutagawa didn’t have strengths to move.

He just stayed there, facing the too-white sky above him, laying down in the soft and cozy floor as the soft breeze blew his hair and clothes. Even though he survived that day, memories of his previous life were still too fresh in his mind, Atsushi’s beautiful kaleidoscopic eyes without life facing the sky, his neck opened and his blood staining Akutagawa’s clothes and hands in a ghostly reminder that he wasn’t fast enough to save him. In a ghostly reminder that Atsushi died all alone and in pain, scared, cold.

(In a ghostly reminder that Akutagawa failed him.)

However, Akutagawa knew something was wrong the moment he raised his face and saw Chuuya there, standing, waiting for him with his usual quiet smile.

“It’s time, my friend.”

Akutagawa frowned. Not by the words, but by the fact he’s never seen Chuuya standing before; he imagined the boy would be small, but he was smaller than he thought, and the oversized sweater he was wearing only made him look even smaller. He was cute.
“What’s happening?” Akutagawa asked, standing and walking to meet Chuuya. It was weird seeing Chuuya away from his casual wood trunk and the water puddle, but something about the redhead’s smile told Akutagawa that something was off.

Chuuya smiled a little bit larger and gave space for Akutagawa to walk across him, gesturing towards the void in behind him, “I suppose I’m your genie today. I’ll make your dreams come true.”

“What...?” Akutagawa slowly asked, letting Chuuya lead the way though the cozy floor. The more they walked, the more the scenario Akutagawa was so used to started to change; silhouette of people running past them, shadows of dead trees, sounds of people laughing and chatting that sounded like music to his ears, “what did you do, Chuuya?”

“Nothing bad,” Chuuya replied with a soft giggle, then smiled quietly, “not for you, at least.”

“Chuuya,” Akutagawa said again, stopping walking and making Chuuya stop too and stare at him, “what did you do?”

Chuuya stared back at him for a moment, then sighed and turned on his heels to keep walking, forcing Akutagawa to keep following him, “some sacrifices had to be made,” he replied, with Akutagawa walking by his side through the endless white land, “I simply couldn’t let you keep suffering this way, so I had to do some stuff while you were away. I talked to some people, made some mistakes, but it was all worth it in the end. If I could do all over again I would, and I wouldn’t change a thing.”

“What kind of sacrifices?” Akutagawa asked, eyes briefly widened by Chuuya’s words, trying to assimilate everything he’s told him and trying to understand the meaning of his words; what Chuuya could possibly have done? “Are you in trouble because of me? Please, don’t tell me I got you into-”

“You don’t need to worry about me, Ryuu. I’ll be alright,” the redhead replied with a scoff, suddenly stopping walking after what seemed to be ages. For a moment, nothing happened, and then the door that usually led Akutagawa to his next lives appeared a few meters in front of them – except it looked a little bit different this time. The door that usually was entirely white and very simple now looked twice as big, with beautiful golden and silver patterns in the wood enlacing together like a big crochet. It would be a stunning view if Akutagawa wasn’t so worried about Chuuya, “they promised it would be a nice fall and wasn’t gonna hurt.”

“Wait, what?” Akutagawa widened his eyes as Chuuya gestured towards the door and the door opened, illuminating the whole white land, “who’s gonna fall? What’s happening? Please, talk to me!”

“It was an honor to have you as my best friend during all those years, Ryuu,” Chuuya replied instead, with his characteristic quiet smile that have always brought comfort to Akutagawa and now was making him terrified, “I’m sorry it took so long, but it’s finally time to be happy.”

“What are you talking about? Chuuya!” Akutagawa’s voice sounded so worried that even Chuuya stopped for a moment, but just as fast as the pity came to the redhead’s eyes it vanished, and he returned to his casual smile. He brought one of his hands to Akutagawa’s lower back, pulling him closer for a quick and tight hug, but before Akutagawa could even think about reciprocating the hug he was pushed towards the opened door and the world exploded in light as he fell in a free fall with Chuuya’s name on his lips and his next life began.

Once the door was closed and the place fell in a deafening silence again, Chuuya’s smile broke and
a single tear streamed down his face.

“I’m sorry, my friend.”

[+]

Akutagawa jolted up awake, eyes opening wide open with a gasp and body almost falling to the ground with how hard he jumped on his bed.

He fumbled his bedside table for his inhaler, hands wildly shaking as he brought the medicine to his face and used it once or twice, giving it time to take some effect on his body for him to finally start breathing properly and sigh in relief. He didn’t usually have sudden asthma attacks, they usually happened when he experienced too much adrenaline or were in a dusty place, but the sudden attacks could happen every once in a while, like this one. This didn’t stop him from hating his lungs, though.

When he finally calmed down and his breath returned to normal, Akutagawa returned his inhaler to the bedside table and reached his phone, checking the time and looking for new messages; 4:27am and fifteen texts from his group chat with his friends. He unlocked the phone and checked the messages, giggling at a meme Tachihara sent then replying to Higuchi’s newest text:

Higuchi [4:23am]: there’s this new cat cafe next to our school, who wants to check it out?

Ryuunosuke [4:28am]: is this the one in front of the comic book store?

Tachihara [4:29am]: pffff nerd

Ryuunosuke [4:29am]: quiet thot

Gin [4:30am]: lmao

Higuchi [4:30am]: Ryuu why aren’t you asleep?

Higuchi [4:30am]: also yes it’s the one in front of your comic book store

Higuchi [4:31am]: did you check it out already or do you wanna go?

Ryuunosuke [4:32am]: had an asthma attack, I’m fine now

Gin [4:32am]: damn that’s bad

Tachihara [4:32am]: awww gin cares

Ryuunosuke [4:33am]: wait for it

Gin [4:33am]: thought you would finally die this time ://

Ryuunosuke [4:33am]: there.

Higuchi [4:34am]: Gin!

Tachihara [4:34am]: are you okay tho bro?
Ryuunosuke [4:34am]: yea dw

Ryuunosuke [4:35am]: but yeah I think we should check this cat café out, even though it's not actually "new"

Ryuunosuke [4:35am]: it's been there for almost four months now lol, I always see people talking about it at work and the place seems quite nice from what I see across the street

Ryuunosuke [4:35am]: also the smell is good and there’s this cute silver-haired boy I always see at morning so yeah

Tachihara [4:35am]: yes, we’re aware. We work there too

Gin [4:36am]: it’s been 0 days since our last Ryuu’s gay bullshit, our record is 0 days

Ryuunosuke [4:36am]: stupid emo begone

Ryuunosuke [4:36am]: also don’t act like you never did gay shit, remember that time you were still in your pastel bullshit phase but then higuchi tweeted she wanted a goth girlfriend and the next day at school you showed up dressed all in black with that hideous black makeup looking like you were about to commit mass murder listening to evanescence and with a fucking raven on your shoulder? Because I record it very clearly

Gin [4:37am]: anyways stan list

Tachihara [4:38am]: IM CRYING I REMEMBER THATKSJDHTKJSAKTJKADTSJFKHJKSDFH

Gin [4:38am]: suddenly I can’t read

Higuchi [4:38am]: awwww baby don’t be embarrassed, I got my goth girlfriend ♥♥♥

Gin [4:39am]: ♥♥♥

Ryuunosuke [4:39am]: disgusting.

Tachihara [4:39am]: ^^^^

Kouyou [4:40am]: go the fuck to sleep or I’m obliterating you.

Tachihara [4:40am]: o shit yes mom

Ryuunosuke [4:40am]: it’s not like I’ll manage to but yes mom

Gin [4:40am]: yes mom

Higuchi [4:40am]: yes mom

-x-x-x-

The strap of his guitar's bag was a constant weight on his shoulder as he made his way to the small comic book store he worked at, not quite paying attention to the streets in front of him as he rolled through his playlist with his right hand and the other held the piping hot coffee, the wheels of his skateboard crackling on the concrete and people complaining as he quickly passed through them like a flash. Twenty-One Pilots was exploding in his eardrums as he giggled at a meme Tachihara sent him and the comic book store finally came to his sight, increasing the speed of his skateboard to cross
the remaining distance between him and the store and then jumping out of his skate once he was in front of the store, entering the place quite breathless.

Gin was already there talking to a client about Harry Potter and showing them the stuff they had about it, Tachihara was behind the counter chewing gum and reading Naruto and Kouyou was luckily nowhere to be seen, what made him sigh in relief.

“Akutagawa-One is finally here!” Tachihara said, raising his hand for a high five and laughing at Akutagawa’s expression of fear, “dude, relax, Kouyou is not mad at you for being late. She saw the text about your asthma attack last night so it’s fine, don’t worry,” Akutagawa sighed in relief once again as he walked to behind the counter and put his stuff there, finishing his coffee all at once and almost burning his tongue because it was too hot. Tachihara giggled at him, taking his feet out of the counter and blowing a gum ball while watching Akutagawa carefully put his guitar down, “oh, by the way, you missed his arrival. He’s already there.”

“What?!” Akutagawa shouted, turning to look at the cat café across the street so fast that he was afraid his neck would break, “oh hell no!”

Tachihara chuckled, “he arrived a few minutes ago, I guess he’s already at the counter. He’s wearing that black cardigan again, it’s kinda cute. No homo, though.”

Gin scoffed, arranging the Funko Pops at the shelves, “no homo.”

“I’m not stealing my bro’s man!” Tachihara said, sounding very annoyed, throwing a paper ball at Gin, “and I’m in fact very straight, thank you.”

“Man, this is the biggest lie you’ve ever told us,” Akutagawa snorted, then moved to the front of the store where he had a clear view of the cat café and started looking for the silver-haired boy that worked there. Both the comic book store and the cat café were still quite empty for being so soon at morning, but Akutagawa could see the silver hair across the street behind the counter attending a client with pretty orange hair, with a big smile on his lips and glasses resting in the tip of his nose. He sighed dreamily, “why is he so cute for?”

“Why are you so gay for?” Gin asked, throwing Tachihara’s Naruto manga at him, “go ask his number, coward.”

“I prefer to keep the remaining dignity I still have, thank you,” Akutagawa replied, violently throwing the manga back at his sister and grunting at her before starting back at the cat café. When he looked at where the silver-haired boy was, the boy was already starting at him, and once he caught Akutagawa’s eyes, he smiled and waved at him. Akutagawa instantly panicked and looked away, “oh shit,” he gasped, stumbling on his feet as he jumped away from the door and accidentally hitting a shelf, dropping a few books with him as he hit the floor with a painful bump.

Gin definitely wasn’t impressed, “and there it goes your remaining dignity.”

“Shut up!” Akutagawa hissed, taking the books from his chest and standing up with a small jump. The silver-haired boy was still staring at him with worried eyes as he stood up, blowing his hair away from his face and giving the boy thumbs up and a smile, what made the boy laugh softly and look away from him to the next client in the queue. He felt his heart melting, “ah! I’m gonna marry this guy.”

“You don’t even know his name,” Tachihara pointed from behind the counter, tapping the screen of his phone with a smirk, probably sending pictures of Akutagawa and his stupid fall to Higuchi and Kajii.
“Irrelevant.” Akutagawa replied, moving to pick the books he dropped from the floor and arranging them back at the shelf while Gin judged him with her eyes, resting against the shelves across the store, “what?!”

“If you don’t ask his number in the next two days, I’ll do it,” she said, raising her eyebrows in a threateningly way.

The threat didn’t provide effect, “but you’re a lesbian...?”

“If you don’t ask his number in the next two days, Tachihara will do it,” she corrected herself, making both Akutagawa and Tachihara gasp, “and if Tachihara doesn’t, then I’ll ask Jouno to do it, and we both know Jouno would do it.”

Akutagawa narrowed his eyes, “you wouldn’t-”

“Oh, you wanna bet?” Gin said, eyebrows still raised in a threateningly way as she picked her phone from her pocket and, without breaking eye contact, clicked in Jouno’s contact, the familiar sound of dialing echoing in the empty store.

Jouno picked up right away, “ah, Gin? What a lovely surprise.”

“Hey, Jouno?”

“Yeah?”

“I need you to do some-”

“Alright stop! I’ll do it!” Akutagawa shouted, jumping towards his sister to take her phone away from her. She ended the call right away, smiling at her brother in a naughty way.

“You have two days,” she said, putting her phone back in her pocket, “now go back to work. I’m not arranging this back at the shelf, you’ll do it,” she then turned to look at Tachihara, still behind the counter blowing gum balls, “hey Tachi, let’s grab some snacks.”

“Hell yes!” Tachihara instantly replied, leaving the counter and giving Akutagawa a tap in the shoulder as he passed through him to outside the store, following Gin and leaving Akutagawa all alone at the store with the mess he made and his unspoken feelings.

To be honest, Akutagawa really didn’t care about the teasings. He knew they were harmless and, even though Gin would definitely do some real stuff to hurt him, most of the time she was simply encouraging him to get out of his box. On her own and weird way. Tachihara usually followed her on her stupid teasing and sometimes even Higuchi joined them to mock him, but he didn’t mind. They were his best friends and he often did the same for them –also, they all knew their limits and the teasing was never heavy enough (except, maybe, for Gin’s), so it was okay.

And, honestly, Akutagawa kind of deserved the teasing and the threats at this point.

He’s already lost the count of how many time he’s been on this mutual eyefuck, but he thinks it’s around three or four months and he hasn’t made a single progress towards the silver-haired boy. He didn’t even know his name yet, for fuck’s sake. He kinda understood why Gin was so frustrated, but what could he do, damn it? Walk to the boy, touch his arm and say ‘hey, I know we’ve been eyefucking for over three months now, but what’s your name?’ in a flirty way? It was so stupid that not even Tachihara would do it, and Tachihara did a lot of stupid things in his life.

Akutagawa sighed, arranged the last book at the shelf and returned to behind the counter, sitting
down in Tachihara’s original seat and then opening Spotify to put his own playlist instead of his best friend’s kpop songs. Not even a minute passed and the store’s door was opened, the small bell above the door ringing and indicating a new client; Akutagawa didn’t even raise his face to look at the new customer.

“Uh, hello?”

“May I help you?” Akutagawa bored replied, finally raising his face to meet the customer’s face.

The time seemed to stop for a second, and then he suddenly forgot how to breathe, because right in front of him was the silver-haired boy from the cat café in front of the comic book store, with a quiet smile and bright eyes that seemed to twist between violet and gold. It would be a stunning view if Akutagawa hasn’t actually forgot how to breath.

“Oh shit,” he gasped, coughing violently behind his hand as he searched for his asthma inhaler in the counter. He found it after a few seconds of uncontrollable cough and frenetic fumble, using it once or twice before finally being able to breath properly after a few more seconds, taking a deep breath to calm down.

The boy across the counter was staring at him in a mix of amusement and worriedness, “... Are you okay?”

“Yes, yes, I’m fine,” Akutagawa replied with a forced laugh, “this– this kinda happens sometimes, don’t worry haha I– uh–” resting one of his elbows in the counter, he frowned and pointed at his eyes and then the boy in front of him, “your eyes– are you– heterochromia?”

“I don’t think it can be considered heterochromia because my eyes only turn violet in the sun,” the boy giggled, then tilted his head to the side, “is there anything wrong with them?”

“No!” Akutagawa shouted, widening his eyes, making the boy jump by the sudden scream, “they’re pretty! They’re beautiful! Yellow is good, yellow is pretty, it’s like– it’s like– cat pee,” he wheezed, on the verge of tears by his stupidity, “wait hold on! I’m sorry! God, I’m so lame–”

“You don’t know how to deal with people very good, do you?” The boy giggled once again, head still tilted to the side and a crooked smile on his lips as if he was finding the conversation funny.

“No I don’t, no I don’t,” Akutagawa replied, then facepalmed, “I’m sorry, may I help you? Do you need some help to find a specific book or comic or manga...?”

“Oh, no, no,” he replied, resting both his elbows on the counter, “actually, my friend was kind of getting on my nerves so I came here to talk to you. Mind to finally tell me your name?”

“Ryuutagawa Akunosuke,” Akutagawa instantly replied, then grumbled and facepalmed again, “I mean, Akutagawa Ryuunosuke. I’m sorry, I don’t know what’s happening to me.”

The boy chuckled, then extended his hand towards Akutagawa, “well, if that’s the case, then I’m Akajima Natsushi,” he said, then raised both his eyebrows when Akutagawa took his hand and squeezed it, “or Nakajima Atsushi.”

“It’s nice to finally meet you, Nakajima-kun,” Akutagawa said with a big smile, shaking Atsushi’s hand longer than the necessary, “you’re way prettier closer,” he dropped Atsushi’s hand to facepalm again, strong enough to leave his forehead red and make the slap sound echo around the store, “fuck! I’m sorry, I didn’t mean that,” he tried to apologize, but then grumbled when he saw Atsushi raising an eyebrow, “I mean you are pretty! You’re beautiful! You’re the most beautiful person I’ve ever seen!” he wheezed once again, hitting his forehead in the counter, “oh my God, I will shut up now.”
“You’re adorable,” Atsushi said with a quiet laugh, making Akutagawa tilt his head to spy him through his hair, “would you like to grab lunch later? It’s on me.”

“Yes!” Akutagawa replied way too fast with a big smile, raising his face and scaring Atsushi, then clearing his throat and calming down, “I mean yes, I would love that.”

“Good,” Atsushi smiled, “then I’ll see you in two hours?”

“Yes you will! I will be anxiously waiting!” Akutagawa said, then waved Atsushi goodbye and watched the boy leave the comic book store behind and cross the street, returning to the cat café. Not even a minute passed before Gin and Tachihara return to the store with naughty smiles and dirty looks on their eyes, making Akutagawa know they’ve seen everything and would never let him go about that.

(He kind of deserved it, to be honest.)

The next two hours were like a blur for him, for he couldn’t focus on anything but Atsushi (what a beautiful name!) and their upcoming date. Gin and Tachihara kept shooting him dirty looks and purposely calling him ‘Ryuutagawa’ for the whole day, teasing him about his ridiculous gay panic and making fun of him. Even Higuchi joined them when she arrived the store to see Gin, already knowing about his deplorable first meet with the boy he’s been eyefucking for the past three months. Honestly, what did Akutagawa ever do in his life to deserve such horribly people as his best friends?

(Don’t answer it.)

When lunchtime arrived, Akutagawa ran to the back of the store to brush his teeth and fix his appearance like his life depended on it, ignoring his sister and best friends’ teasing about it. Kouyou, his manager and apparently was the only sympathetic person in his life, helped him with tips for a good first date as she fixed his hair with hair spray and hid his leather jacket from him saying he would ruin it if he used it at a cat café; he complained at first, saying the jacket was part of his outfit and he couldn’t simply leave it behind, but deep down he knew she was right. He didn’t know what he would do if he ruined his favorite leather jacket.

Fifteen minutes and a whole can of hair spray later, Akutagawa left the small room in the back of the comic book store with Kouyou by his side to meet his friends, who were anxiously waiting for him.

“Okay, take your asthma inhaler and your wallet, your keys and your cellphone,” Kouyou said, taking his hair away from his eyes, “keep your cellphone charged and if I call you pick up, understood? I want you to be back at 3pm max.”

“I’ll be literally in the other side of the street,” Akutagawa said with the most unimpressed expression he could, putting his wallet and inhaler at his pocket, “you can see me the whole time. If you want me back just wave at me.”

“What happened to your hair?” Gin asked from where she was resting against a shelf with Tachihara by her side, with a teasingly crooked smile, “you look stupid. Cat boy is gonna laugh at you.”

“No he won’t, don’t worry,” Kouyou assured him, turning to grunt at Gin and throwing a paper ball at her, “you look beautiful, Ryuu, don’t worry.”

“Sure, mom,” Akutagawa grumbled, “can I go now? He must be waiting for me.”

“Yeah, sure,” she replied, fixing his hair one last time and smiling at him, “have fun, kid.”
“Thank you, I will,” he replied, then turned on his heels to walk to outside the store. Before he could leave the store, Gin called him.

“Hey, loser?” she said. Akutagawa turned to look at her above his shoulder, she smiled fondly, “good luck.”

He smiled back, “thank you,” he said, then left the store behind and crossed the street to meet Atsushi already waiting for him in front of the cat café.

The boy smiled at him, “hey there,” he said, then pointed at his hair, “new hairstyle?”

“Yeah, my manager was a little bit too excited with this date,” Akutagawa grumbled, then ran his fingers through the hair loaded with hairspray and giggled. He stopped and widened his eyes when he noticed what he’s said, “I-I mean, unless this is not-”

“It’s a date, don’t worry,” Atsushi said with a giggle and a bright smile, melting Akutagawa’s heart, “well, shall we?”

“Sure!” Akutagawa happily replied, giving space for Atsushi to lead the way to inside the café and inhaling the warming and wonderful smell of coffee.

Atsushi took him to a booth beneath the huge window with a free view of the street –and unfortunately to the comic book store, where he caught a glimpse of Gin, Higuchi, Tachihara and even Kouyou spying him through the corner–, next to a grey cat scratcher that was almost twice as big as them and was being occupied by five different cats and another cat scratcher a little bit smaller than the first one, white a tiny white cat sleeping on it. The place was as cozy and beautiful as Akutagawa thought it was, with cats drawn everywhere and a constant smell of new coffee surrounding the establishment that seemed particularly empty considering the time. Besides them, only five or six couples could be seen around enjoying their lunch with cats all around them, but they were all far away from them; the closest couple to them were two men around their age, one with brunette hair and body entirely covered by bandages and the other with bright orange hair that sent chills through his spine, as if the man was slightly familiar to him but he couldn’t put a name to the face; he caught the man’s eyes, noticing the redhead’s been staring back at him the same way Akutagawa was doing, frowning at him at the same time the man also frowned, like he had the same inner feeling that they knew each other.

He was brought back to reality by Atsushi snapping his fingers in front of him, “Akutagawa? Are you with me?”

“Forever,” Akutagawa instantly replied, breaking eye contact with the redhead and staring back at Atsushi, then grumbling and shaking his head as Atsushi started chuckling, “why do I keep talking?”

“Please, keep talking,” Atsushi said, resting both his elbows in the table and looking at Akutagawa with a soft smile, “you’re extremely adorable.”

“But don’t call me adorable, it’s not good for my reputation,” Akutagawa said, raising his eyebrows as he was trying to be serious, but how could he be serious when Atsushi was looking at him like he put the goddamn stars in the sky?

“Oh? And what’s your reputation?” Atsushi asked, resting his chin in his hands and watching Akutagawa. A waitress came to their booth to take their orders, momentarily interrupting the conversation; Atsushi asked for boiled chazuke and Akutagawa just ordered some lamen and a cup of tea. When the waitress left with their orders, a calico cat climbed Akutagawa’s lap and he needed
to stay extremely focused so he wouldn’t simply lay down in the floor with the cat.

“I play the guitar in a band, I need to be... Very tough, you know?” he said, gently stroking the cat in his lap and closing his eyes to stop the tears in pure happiness when the cat started purring, “very tough.”

“I can see your toughness,” Atsushi replied, pointing with his eyes at the cat in Akutagawa’s lap and giggling, “but this is really cool, though. I’ve seen you with your guitar before, but I didn’t know you were in a band; we should do a duet any day, I can sing relatively good and can also play the piano so I think we could... You know.”

“I do,” Akutagawa nodded, then mirrored Atsushi’s position and rest his chin in his hands above the table, “but tell me about you. What made you take the initiative to talk to me? Did you get tired of waiting for me?”

“Oh no, no,” Atsushi chuckled, then started stroking the white cat that jumped into his lap, “I was enjoying our long-distance term relationship, but my best friend threatened to kick my ass if I didn’t talk to you, so I had to put up the courage and cross the enormous distance between us to ask you on a date.”

“Indeed, it’s an enormous distance,” Akutagawa agreed, looking outside the window to the single street that separated the cat café and the comic book store, “and my sister did the same. Actually, she threatened to ask one of our friends to ask your number and I was terrified because I know he would, so I planned on talking to you today after the end of my shift. Luckily, you were faster.”

“Thank God I was faster, or we would have to wait till tomorrow for our date and I simply couldn’t wait any longer,” Atsushi said, then the waitress returned with their food before Akutagawa could reply. They thanked her and started eating in silence, slowly, casually sharing looks and fond smiles as the cats on their laps meowed for a bit of their lunch and the establishment slowly started to get filled, making the comfortable silence they fell gradually vanish; once they were done eating – Atsushi asked for two more boiled chazukes after the first one–, the waitress came to collect their plates and once again they started a casual and exciting conversation.

In just two hours, Akutagawa knew more about Atsushi than he knew about himself. The boy was 19, had a younger sister, was an orphan and like Akutagawa he had two best friends, called Edogawa Ranpo and Miyazawa Kenji; he was a cat person so this was his dream job, his favorite color was blue, wanted to be a writer in the future and was also an artist. He was extrovert but could be really shy around strangers and often had anxiety attacks, liked singing and his favorite band was Fall Out Boy. He was born in Tokyo, but has been living in Yokohama for the past fifteen years of his life so he didn’t remember much of his previous life, but he knew it was tough; his sister was born in Yokohama and their parents were murdered only a years later, leaving them to live with their aunt until they could live by themselves. Atsushi currently lived with his sister in a small flat downtown, next to Ranpo’s work, and their life was considerably stable –it wasn’t much, but was enough to be considered good.

In just two hours, Akutagawa was just as in love with Atsushi as he was during the past three months. He was just so, so glad for Atsushi deciding to talk to him that morning.

They only decided to leave the cat café to go talk somewhere else when the owner started shooting weird glares at them, making Atsushi laugh and wave at him saying they were leaving. Just like he said he would, Atsushi paid for the food and they started to head to outside the place.

(Not before Akutagawa say goodbye to all the cats he could see.)
Right when they were about to leave, someone accidentally bumped into Akutagawa. He quickly turned to apologize to them at the same time the person also did, only to notice the person that bumped into him was the redhead from before; he frowned once again as he stared at the boy, touching the place where they bumped and feeling like electricity was running through his body, noticing the boy was doing the exact same thing. The boy narrowed his eyes in a suspicious way and then shook his head, apologizing for Akutagawa and then turning on his heels to leave the establishment with his date.

Before he could leave, Akutagawa grabbed his arm when his instincts started to scream to stop him, “I’m sorry,” he said, frowning at the boy, “but do I know you?”

And then the redhead smiled brightly, sighing in relief with big blue eyes shining towards Akutagawa, in a way that sent a wave of reassurance through Akutagawa’s body, as if he was facing an old and very good friend, “you know, I have the exact same feeling.”

He smiled back at the boy, feeling his whole body warm up in a cozy way, then dropped the boy’s arm and let him go. The boy watched him over his shoulder until he disappeared from view, waving at Akutagawa one last time and making him smile at him before turning again to Atsushi, who was staring at him with an arched eyebrow.

“What?” he asked, following Atsushi to outside the establishment as the boy scoffed, “he looked familiar.”

“Of course he looked familiar, he’s here every morning,” Atsushi rolled his eyes, then stopped in front of Akutagawa. They both stared fondly at each other for a moment before Atsushi glared at the comic book store, his kaleidoscopic eyes turning sad when he noticed it was time for them to split up.

Akutagawa mirrored the action, catching Gin’s eyes through the window when he glanced at the comic book store, biting his lip to hold up a smile when she gave him a nod and thumbs up, indicating he stay with Atsushi longer.

“You know,” he said with a crooked smile, making Atsushi look at his face, “I have two tickets for the Minato Mirai’s park that will expire sooner and I don’t want to lose them,” he extended his hand to hold Atsushi’s, intertwining the fingers and giving a soft squeeze, “wanna go on a date?”

“We just had a date,” Atsushi pointed, raising an eyebrow and crooked smiling.

Akutagawa smiled even larger, “yeah, but we didn’t do what people are supposed to do on dates, did we? So I guess we need to go on another one.”

Atsushi scoffed, shook his head and leaned towards Akutagawa, quickly pecking him on the lips, “there,” he said, giggling at Akutagawa’s expression, “we just did.”

“I have feelings for you,” Akutagawa said with a blank expression, then grumbled and facepalmed with his free hand when he noticed what he just did, “goddammit!”

“You’re the most adorable person I’ve ever met,” Atsushi giggled, then pulled Akutagawa’s hand for him to walk beside him, “yes, I will go on a date with you.”

“Oh thank God,” Akutagawa sighed in relief, “because I thought you thought I was the stupidest person you’ve ever met and didn’t like me.”

Atsushi snorted, “I could never not like you. I’m already too involved with this to deny I also have feelings for you. Positive feelings,”
Akutagawa looked at him for a moment, surprised by the boy’s words, then smiled widely, heart beating so fast inside his chest that he was actually afraid he would have a heart attack, with a warming and cozy feeling in the bottom of his stomach that made his whole body shake and sweat with happiness, so much stronger than the insecurity and fear he always felt when he started to know new people; the fear of things going wrong, his brain telling him that he should avoid feelings and run away and never come back because he would end up terribly hurt, but he wasn’t feeling any of these things this time.

This time he thought that, maybe, this could work. For once in his lifetime.

Chapter End Notes

PLEASE PLEASE COMMENT!!!! I'm really proud of this one!

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