Red Letter Day
by rosevtea

Summary

The letter itself, through all the exclamation marks and scribbled out words, is an earnest plea for love like the rest. Though this person is considerably less desperate, lacking the usual melodramatic *I see couples around me and wish for love myself* in his letter.

No, his letter is more along the lines of *even my volleyball coach is dating someone! I make good owl puns, when will I have someone to share them with??*

In which Akaashi is an angel (both literally and figuratively), Bokuto makes a wish for love, and the entire world won't stop asking them if they're dating.

Notes

for @catcactusoww on twitter!

ty to lynn and v for beta reading and dealing with my strange syntax choices :')

See the end of the work for more notes
Less than twenty minutes after he sits down, a red envelope appears on the corner of his desk. Akaashi doesn’t bother holding back a sigh.

He has just come back from an exhausting two month assignment. One week has been spent observing his client’s chemistry with others, and the remaining seven have been devoted to convincing her to ask her best friend out.

Akaashi’s almost convinced he’ll never have another client who could miss such an obvious, burning look of longing like she did. Almost being the operative word, because underestimating how dense a human could be landed him in the grief of that assignment to begin with.

(And yet, despite all the grief she caused him, her enchanted smile at her best friend’s confession was satisfying to witness.)

He shakes his head, adamant to deny any sort of emotion towards that irritating case, and picks up his new assignment.

The envelope is tattered, like someone had clutched it too hard and tried to smooth it back with mixed results. The heart sticker taping the envelope shut is already peeling off at the edges and the front is adorned with a drawing he can’t decipher no matter how hard he looks at it.

The letter itself, through all the exclamation marks and scribbled out words, is an earnest plea for love like the rest. Though this person is considerably less desperate, lacking the usual melodramatic I see couples around me and wish for love myself in his letter.

No, his letter is more along the lines of even my volleyball coach is dating someone! I make good owl puns, when will I have someone to share them with?? before launching into a list of ways he would ask someone out.

(Akaashi has to admit, he would like to see the method where his client comes in on a unicycle and serenades his partner-to-be with a love song. But that is neither here nor there.)

Continuing in this fashion, the letter jumps from pick-up lines to his alleged volleyball skills, with barely a coherent thought stringing the subjects together.

Despite this, the bizarre structure of the letter makes sense.

Checking the attached file, Akaashi learns several things in ten minutes:

1. The excitable writer with the messy handwriting is named Bokuto Koutarou.
2. He’s 23 years old and a professional volleyball player.
3. He’s loud (probable),
4. unpredictable (foreseeable),
5. and prone to speaking before thinking (perhaps the most unsurprising trait listed).

A picture is attached.

Gold is his first, uninvited thought, which should be ridiculous. Because Akaashi’s seen palaces lined in opulence, elaborate high ceilings decorated with swirling yellows and oranges; he’s glimpsed shades of gold in the sunrise, hesitant oranges skating across the mild waters of the lake as muted clouds border the horizon; he’s witnessed skyscrapers during the sunset, watched as
brilliant, dying rays of amber—and the shimmering ombre of reds and blues and purples afterward—echoed across the glass.

It should be ridiculous, yet there is something undeniably regal about the determined look in Bokuto’s bright, golden eyes; the amused set of his mouth; the cocky, almost confident eyebrow raise he directs to the camera.

Akaashi takes out his notebook with some reluctance. It’s been a long time since he’s taken an active role in analyzing a person, but this client—whose energetic train of thought stops for no one—may require a close level of scrutiny.

Sticking the photo into the next empty page, he automatically takes out his pen before his hand stalls. None of his observations concerning Bokuto’s appearance are anything close to coherent. In fact, the level of poetic detail Akaashi has given would be defined by most as embarrassing, so he puts his pen away without much fanfare.

Now, to meet his client.

He could fly, but there is far too much room for error in doing so, no matter how fun Saeko insists it is.

(While feeling the wind against his back is a sensation that tempts him more than he’d like to admit, flying is the more cumbersome option in almost every scenario.)

So Akaashi closes his eyes, counts to three, and disappears.
Akaashi will always assert the fact that the best part of being an angel is the ability to teleport.

He does not lack benefits: he isn’t dragged down by human needs like sleeping and eating. He can fly and summon or retract his wings at will, and he doesn’t have to worry about navigating crowds.

But teleporting is efficient. Within seconds, Akaashi finds himself in a park when he opens his eyes.

Bokuto is on his phone when he gets there, legs stretched out in front of him as he leans back on the grass. His blazer, rumpled and unbuttoned, shifts with every exuberant movement (which happens to be many, Akaashi learns, watching him swing his arms as he talks), and his tie hangs loosely from his neck.

Akaashi’s caught him in the middle of laughter, eyes closed as the widest grin he’s ever seen stretches across his face. Grey strands of stylized hair catch in the early afternoon light as he tilts his head upwards and places a hand on the ground to steady himself.

(Akaashi distantly recognizes the fact that he’s staring and elects to ignore it.)

He stays in his spot as he listens to the tail end of an enthusiastic phone call, his cry of **yeah, I won’t forget the book next time!** audible even from this distance. Relative silence settles in the area and Akaashi takes a second to look around for stragglers before taking steady steps forward.

When he walks into the clearing, Bokuto’s scrolling through his phone at an absurd rate, biting his lip at whatever’s on the screen. He looks up at the sound of his approaching footsteps, and the effect is as instantaneous as it is astounding: the hand on his phone stalls. Bokuto’s eyes are trained on him, his eyebrows scrunched in confusion. Akaashi can’t help but marvel at the fact that he’s encountered him for all of twenty seconds and Bokuto’s already proved how powerful his facial expressions were.

He maintains eye contact, watching the look in Bokuto’s eyes go from murky wariness to a dangerous type of curiosity.

“What’re you looking at me like that for?” Bokuto asks, tilting his head.

It dawns on Akaashi that he has no idea what his expression looks like. He hurriedly schools his features into something more appropriate and shrugs.

“Like what?”

“Like—like you couldn’t believe what you were seeing!” Bokuto bursts out. “Oh, are you a fan? I
“Fan?” Akaashi asks.

Bokuto wilts a little.

“You don’t, uh, recognize me? I was on the cover of *Monthly Volleyball* last month! Or was it two months ago? Hey, how long ago was—”

Ah, right. Pro-volleyball player.

“Apologies.” Akaashi needs to get to the point. “But I have to discuss something important with you. Do you have a moment?”

“No way,” Bokuto says, for the fifth time.

“This is real, Bokuto-san,” Akaashi repeats patiently.

Akaashi’s seated on the grass, one leg drawn to his chest as he stares straight ahead. Bokuto has gone stiff next to him, eyes darting to the sky every so often.

“So, what, you’re an angel?” Bokuto asks, for the sixth time. “Like, a living, breathing angel? Here to help me?”

“You wrote a letter, didn’t you,” Akaashi states, raising an eyebrow.

“Wait, does this mean you’ve gotten every letter I’ve ever sent? Listen”—Bokuto propels himself upwards, having worked himself into a panic for no apparent reason—“what I wrote when I was seventeen isn’t true anymore, I swear.”

Akaashi doesn’t want to know. “Only letters signed to Cupid are delivered to us. Did you sign your previous letters?”

Bokuto shakes his head mutely.

“Then you’re fine.”

He beams. “Good! I wouldn’t want you to have a bad first impression of me, uh. What’s your name again?”

“Akaashi Keiji.” Akaashi’s not sure why he adds his given name. “And I should probably get to work.”

“How does this work, anyway?” Bokuto says, far too loudly. “Do you just—?”

“Bokuto-san.” Akaashi meets his eyes and manages a small, smug grin. “Take me around the city.”

Chapter End Notes

i rewrote this scene like five times, save me
By the time they stumble into a cafe, Akaashi’s on number 15 in his notebook.

“Akaashi, when are you going to tell me how this works?” Bokuto asks as they take their seats, leaning over the table.

15. He is extremely nosy if the topic concerns him.

“You’ll know in due time, Bokuto-san.”

Akaashi shuts his notebook.

Generally, finding a match isn’t difficult (unless one is willfully ignorant, which was the case with his last client). Physical proximity is key. It’s why he had suggested exploring the city to Bokuto in the first place.

No one has struck him as compatible so far, but his gut tells him it would be a bad idea to voice this aloud. Not that a lack of compatibility is much of a concern at the beginning, but Bokuto’s temperament could escalate the situation to needlessly dramatic levels.

“Do you just look at people and know? Or do you, like, shoot an arrow to make them fall in love, like in the movies? Hey, hey, can you shoot an arrow, Akaashi? Because that’d be cool! Although, wouldn’t it be even cooler if they fell for my charms instead? You read my letter, you know I have great owl puns, isn’t that right, Akaashi?”

There’s a lot to unpack, so he settles for, “Not quite. And I can, in fact, shoot an arrow.”

Surprise flashes across Bokuto’s face. “Really? You should show me sometime!”

“I’m not sure I can show you, Bokuto-san.”

“You could video record yourself shooting an arrow.”

“There are many things wrong with that statement. Besides, when would I have the time to do this?”

“No time like the present!”

“Bokuto-san, why would I be carrying a bow and arrow with me.”

“I don’t know. You seem like you’d always be prepared!”

“You’ve known me for three hours.”

“Three very important hours!”

(Bokuto had dragged Akaashi to the local side of the city. Most streets had been tagged, artwork sprawled as far as the eye could see. Bokuto’s hands drifted along the walls, his smile wistful as he recounted exaggerated tales of the taggers. One, apparently, had scraped enough money to go to college. Another had left town one day, only leaving behind his journal entry and some spoons.)
Halfway through the story of how a tagger ran away to join the circus because he fell in love with the ringmaster—at least, that was what Akaashi understood from the constant switch to the ringmaster’s point of view—he had opened his mouth to ask to head back to the main street.

Bokuto had turned towards him, eyes twinkling as he narrated a story he could barely follow. Akaashi’s hands tingled with an odd anticipation.

Odder still was the warmth that had flooded his chest, the type of emotion he’d associate with his clients. The only other people in the hallway were himself and Bokuto, whose arms had been raised in a poor imitation of the ringmaster, and on second thought, the warmth in his chest wasn’t similar to what he felt with his clients at all. The feeling was slow, had steadily seeped through his bones and left him content.

Those hadn’t been favorable work conditions. He ignored them.)

Exploring the city had been interesting, certainly, but not as important as Bokuto claims.

“Sure they were, Bokuto-san.”

“Why do you sound so doubtful, Akaashi!”

“Why, indeed.”

Bokuto continues to talk, but the timing is opportune. Akaashi scans the cafe as discreetly as he can, propping a menu in front of him as his eyes jump between drinks he has never heard of before and strangers trickling in. Bokuto follows his superficial lead (Hey, Akaashi, have you ever had coffee?) and surely, in a cafe as close to the heart of the city as this, there must be a match—

Aha. The rush of adrenaline in his veins, the spark of warmth spreading through his chest; the giddy energy thrumming through his whole body; the urge to giggle so overbearing and uncharacteristic that he swallows it down with a cough.

Akaashi turns around and locks on to the man that had just passed their table.

At the very least, he’s found a match.

Chapter End Notes

the identity of this match is the best part of the fic :’)

also apologies, it's still the 18th in my timezone i swear;;
Bokuto’s voice cuts through his concentration.  

“‘Kaashi! Are you okay?’”

“Akaashi,” he corrects, “and I think I should tell you how I do my job.”

There’s no other way to describe it but as the feeling of infatuation, intense and overwhelming, filling his chest with annoying certainty when he’s in proximity of a match. He’s felt the staggering adrenaline rush tens of hundreds of times, to the point where the emotions are as familiar as they are foreign, old friends he has never experienced himself.

“So you do just look at people and know!” Bokuto shouts. “I was right!”

“That is vaguely correct, yes,” Akaashi says, distracted. “Do you know who that man is?”

“Who?” Without missing a beat, Bokuto shoots out of his seat with obvious urgency.

Akaashi lays a firm hand on his shoulder and pushes him back down.

“It would be a better idea to not garner so much attention,” he admonishes. There’s not as much heat in his voice as there should have been, but he supposes it doesn’t matter.

“Right.” Bokuto has the sense to be embarrassed.

“He has dark brown hair, swept to the side,” Akaashi continues. “He’s wearing a blue jacket—”

In front of him, Bokuto’s hands have stopped drumming an uneven cadence on the table. His entire demeanor can only be described as complete despair.

“Akaashi.” Bokuto’s voice is subdued. “Please don’t tell me you’re matching me up with Oikawa Tooru.”

Akaashi risks a glance. The infamous Oikawa Tooru is at the counter. He’s smartly dressed, wearing the aforementioned dark blue jacket and black slacks, and he’s talking to a group of people with a confident grin.

Oikawa is conventionally attractive, he can admit. It must be his personality.

“He’s so obnoxious!” Bokuto says, confirming his suspicions. “He calls me Kou-chan and glares at me just because I was on Monthly Volleyball instead of him! I can’t help that they liked my straights better than his! I don’t end up with him, right, Akaashi? Right?”

“Relax, Bokuto-san.” Akaashi sighs. “You’re compatible with multiple people. If Oikawa is not who you want, we can find someone else.”

“You can’t hide from me with that hair, Kou-chan!” Oikawa yells, chasing them outside the cafe, and that’s how it starts.
Akaashi suffers through a conversation of (one-sided) thinly-veiled barbs about *Monthly Volleyball* and (mutual) petty remarks on volleyball jargon he can’t begin to dissect. Bokuto’s in the middle of bragging about his straight shots when Oikawa’s eyes slide over to Akaashi, and everything becomes infinitely worse.

“Oho,” Oikawa says, and Akaashi sets his mouth into a hard line. “Who’s this, Kou-chan?”

“Don’t call me that!” Bokuto snaps. “And this is, uh—”

“I’m a photographer,” Akaashi jumps in. “My company scouted him. We were finalizing logistics.”

“In a cozy little coffee shop in the middle of the shopping district?” Oikawa’s smirk grows wider. “Interesting choice for your company to make.”

“What?” Bokuto mumbles. He goes ignored.

Akaashi’s voice is astringent. “Those are unprofessional implications.”

Oikawa’s eyes narrow.

“Am I incorrect?”

“Entirely,” Akaashi says. “With all due respect, I am pressed for time. Now if you’ll excuse us—”

Oikawa laughs. “Gladly, photographer-chan. Have fun on your date, Kou-chan!”

With one last hand wave, he disappears into the cafe. Akaashi resists the urge to bury his head in his hands.

“Date?” Bokuto’s voice is quiet in the night air. “Is that what we looked like, ‘Kaashi?”

“Akaashi,” he amends mindlessly. “And I wouldn’t worry about it, Bokuto-san. Oikawa-san seems like the type of person to dig into things he knows nothing about. We should move on.”

(A part of him is glad Bokuto isn’t going after Oikawa, if only so that he doesn’t have to see him again. The relief blooms in his chest, steady and soft, and Akaashi wishes to move on from this, too.)

This is what Akaashi knows by the end of the first day: the stars are beginning to come out, they have yet to explore the main streets, and Bokuto’s grin is blinding in the dark.

He’s on track.

Chapter End Notes

you ever just almost forget to post bc yeah

"photographer-chan" killed me to write but it's oikawa so
“Say, Akaashi,” Bokuto says at the library after dismissing yet another compatible person (a boisterous girl whose wide smile matched Bokuto’s). “Are you gonna help me after I find a match?”

“If you find a match,” Akaashi mutters. Bokuto pouts, and he adds, “There’s no particular magic to it. I can give you advice on how to naturally build up the relationship once you’ve found someone.”

Bokuto nods like he understands.

(Akaashi’s stopped carrying his notebook with him, not wanting to condense Bokuto down to simple observations, but he doesn’t need a reference to anticipate another question.)

“Advice on what?” There it is. “Like, how to impress my match? Hey, Akaashi, will you—”

“No, Bokuto-san, I will not give you feedback on your owl puns,” Akaashi says, for the seventh time.

“Then what other advice can you give me!”

Akaashi turns a page in his book without looking up.

“How to communicate, I suppose. General tips for a healthy relationship. I leave a week after you find someone.”

“A week?”

“Did you expect me to stay?”

Bokuto falls silent. Akaashi gets through three more pages before he speaks again.

“So if I don’t find anyone, you stay here?”

“That would be the logical conclusion.”

“Interesting,” Bokuto chirps, and gets hushed.

Akaashi closes his book. “There’s something you want to say.”

Bokuto tilts his head, genuinely clueless. “Is there?”

“Just say what’s on your mind.”

Bokuto traces a pattern into the desk. “Do… d’you wanna go to one of my volleyball matches? Not that you have to! I mean, all I’ve been doing is talking about volleyball—”
“Sure,” Akaashi says, reaching over to still his hand.

“Your client’s Bokuto Koutarou?” Saeko shouts from the couch.

Akaashi expects this reaction. Since neither of them have clients at the moment, Saeko has the time to keep a religious watch on the Nationals line-up. Alisa is inevitably roped into keeping track of the line-up as well, and while the confusion is clear on her face, Alisa grins at Saeko’s obvious enthusiasm and cheers alongside her.

“Oh!” Alisa exclaims, holding a bowl of popcorn as she closes the apartment blinds. “Isn’t he the pro-volleyball player with the grey hair and the intense cut shots?”

Evidently, she’s now familiar with the players as well.

“Yeah.” Saeko moves over to make room for her on the couch. “His team’s full of impressive players. My money’s on Nishinoya’s team, though.”

“The short libero with the spiked-up hair?” Alisa tucks her legs under a pillow, leaning against the cushions.

Saeko hums, putting her head against her shoulder. “He’s made some amazing saves.”

“How do you know all of these people?” Akaashi says, perched on the spare chair.

“Alisa said two names, Keiji,” Saeko chides. “Anyways, Bokuto Koutarou? What’s he like off the court?”

“Exactly as you’d expect him to be,” Akaashi deflects. “I thought you wanted to watch the volleyball match.”

“The volleyball match doesn’t start for another 30 minutes,” Alisa adds helpfully.

“Hmm, is there something you’re too embarrassed to tell us?” Saeko chimes in.

“I would turn to Alisa-san if that was the case, not you,” Akaashi retorts, ignoring the responding scoff. “And I came here to learn about volleyball terms, Saeko-san.”

“Right, right.” Saeko grabs a handful of popcorn. “As soon as you tell me why you’re interested.”

“Is it so hard to believe I have interests?”

“Not to cut in, Akaashi-kun,” Alisa says gently, “but Saeko’s going to keep asking until you tell her.”

Akaashi knows this better than anyone. “I’m going to one of his volleyball games next week, and it would be unbecoming of me to be ignorant.”

Saeko’s stopped chewing. Even Alisa seems like she’s invested, hands folded in thoughtful astonishment.

“You’re going to one of his games?”

“Don’t say it like that,” Akaashi grumbles. “It’s to see if I can find anyone compatible there.”
(That hadn’t been what he had in mind when he accepted, but no one needs to be aware of that.)

“Sure it is, Keiji,” Saeko says. “Volleyball’s how it starts. You go to one of his games and suddenly you’re attending all of them, screaming with the rest of the world.”

“You say that like I’m going to fall for his form,” Akaashi says dryly.

Saeko loops an arm around Alisa’s shoulders, her expression fond. “You never know, Keiji. You never know.”
“Oh, just a heads up,” Bokuto says, his hand clammy as they walk down a street, “one of my best friends is coming to the game. You’re probably gonna meet him.”

(Bokuto’s taken to grabbing his hand and swinging it in the space between them, citing a lack of focus as a reason why. Akaashi’s too tired to turn him down.)

“I’ve, uh. Talked about you? Just a bit! So he might, uh, ask you weird questions, Kuroo’s like that —”

“You what?” Akaashi blurts. “What have you said?”

“I said your name while telling him about Oikawa, it was an accident, I’m sorry—”

“Bokuto-san, I’m not mad.” This is slightly untrue. Bokuto doesn’t need to know. “What did you say?”

“I told him we weren’t together, so he won’t get weird, don’t worry!”

Bokuto’s eyes are scrunched shut. The sight’s almost cute.

(Akaashi shrugs it off. The thought is absurd.)

“His boyfriend’s not coming to the game—said he was busy with his job, or something—so he might talk to you. And he’s kind of…”

“Why do you sound so nervous if he’s your best friend?”

“Oikawa’s called him shrewd before.”

Akaashi seriously re-evaluates the merits of going.

In the end, he’s learned too many terms from Saeko-san to back down.

For the first twenty minutes, he watches the team warm up as he settles into his seat. The gym is vaguely uncomfortable: his jeans are glued to his legs and every spike sounds like a gunshot, yet Akaashi finds himself relaxing.

Someone with ridiculous hair sits down next to him, and he feels a rush of adrenaline, deep and unrepentant, and Akaashi thinks no, this isn’t right.

(“His hair looks like bedhead, it’s unmissable, don’t worry!”

“That’s not what I’m worrying about, Bokuto-san.”)
For starters, this is Bokuto’s best friend.

“Wow, are you okay?” Kuroo says, leaning over with a water bottle in hand. “You look like you’re going to pass out.”

“I’m fine,” Akaashi grits out.

Kuroo watches him for a moment, gaze flickering between concern and intrigue. Akaashi, prepared to combat a persistent line of inquiry, readies his tongue, but Kuroo simply nods and turns to the match.

Akaashi figures it’s the most reprieve he’ll get for the afternoon. Kuroo’s eyes track the game with an unusual amount of focus, reading movements from both sides with a level of attentiveness only one who’s been on the court before could possess.

“Have you played before, Kuroo-san?” Akaashi asks after the fourth comment Kuroo mutters under his breath.

“You know my name?” Kuroo raises an eyebrow.

Akaashi’s been slipping up more and more as of late.

“Apologies, Kuroo-san. Bokuto-san’s talked about you before.”

“I figured.” Kuroo’s grin is entirely too self-satisfied. “Bo’s talked about you too, you know.”

“I figured,” Akaashi echoes back, disregarding the bemused look on Kuroo’s face.

“And I have,” Kuroo says eventually, pride evident in his voice. “Was captain of my high school team, in fact. What gave it away?”

“The way you watch the match.” All Akaashi can take in is the ball flying through the air. Kuroo’s looking into another world when he observes the plays made. “Like you were on the court too, in the past.”

“You’re a perceptive one, aren’t you?” Akaashi refuses to give in to Kuroo’s stare, unnerving and insistent as it is. “Wonder how Bokuto met a guy like you.”

The attempt at needling is both obvious and embarrassing. “You should probably ask him, Kuroo-san. He’d give a more lively report.”

“Ah, but I like to hear both sides to a story,” Kuroo says, his mouth lifting upwards. “Gives me the whole picture.”

“I don’t think anyone needs the whole picture but the two of us.”

“You’re remarkably obstinate.”

“I’m trying to watch the match, Kuroo-san.”

Kuroo snorts and turns back to the game.

(Akaashi replays the events of the conversation: the conniving grins, the subtle insinuations, the way Kuroo takes advantage of any small miscalculation. He tries to imagine any of this directed at Bokuto, who could likely dismantle it with an honest grin and his usual enthusiasm. He knows they could work, but—
His personal feelings rebel against the possibility; he can’t fathom why.)
Bokuto takes Akaashi to a restaurant after his team’s win.

“What’d you think, ‘Kaashi?” Bokuto asks, before shoveling meat into his mouth.

Akaashi (who has long given up on correcting him) casually slides the pitcher of water to Bokuto’s side of the table. “You were quite impressive, Bokuto-san. You’re very good at…cut shots.”

(He won’t tell him about Kuroo. The mere thought of the adrenaline rush makes him sick, even now.)

“Did you see that last shot I made? I blew right past their blockers.” Bokuto’s voice is so full of genuine glee that Akaashi cracks a small grin.

(How anyone could have missed his last shot is the real question: the gym had been holding its breath, Bokuto’s team one point away from winning. Two blockers were in front of him, the other team’s libero and defensive specialist covering the angles for cross court and straight shots. The setter’s toss was bad, somehow—an offended gasp from the crowd told him all he needed to know—and Bokuto had already started his run up.

He pivoted his feet towards the center and jumped. Akaashi’s never seen anything like the way he soared over the top of the net, mouth curled upward as he drew his arm back and slammed the ball against the side of a blocker’s arms, skewing the angle just enough to mess up a potential receive.

It was nothing short of awe-inspiring.)

Bokuto’s hands freeze before he reaches his yakiniku. “Akaashi! You can’t just do that so out of the blue!”

Akaashi crumples the napkin he’s holding into a ball. “What am I doing?”

“Smiling! You never smile, it looks so…”

“If you don’t like someone’s smile, it’s more polite not to say so, Bokuto-san.” But Akaashi looks up, and Bokuto’s staring at him like he’s the one who made a decisive spike in the heat of the game, and words desert him for the rest of the meal.

———

In the third week, Bokuto decides they need to be going to more populated areas (like Akaashi couldn’t have told him that).
He’s never prepared for the sheer amount of noise malls have to offer.

Cold wind slams into his face as they enter. He rubs his eyes as Bokuto yelps next to him and grabs onto his sweater.

“‘Kaashi, look!’ Bokuto says into his ear. ‘There’s a 50% off deal in the sports store, and I’ve been meaning to get new shoes! D’you think they could tell I was coming today?’”

“I highly doubt it,” Akaashi says, but lets himself get pushed forward anyway.

They’re passing the bookstore when someone calls Bokuto’s name. He perks up, turning towards the shop’s entrance.

“Sawamura! Sugawara!” he calls, jumping and waving from the entrance.

Akaashi steers him into the store as the two mentioned figures walk up to the entrance.

“How have you been?” the one with dark hair asks.

“Great!” There’s nothing but confidence in Bokuto’s voice. “And this is Akaashi. He’s a freelance photographer, he’s really nice.”

They exchange polite pleasantries. Somewhere along the way, Bokuto’s draped his arm around Akaashi’s waist. He chooses to ignore it.

“And Akaashi, this is Sawamura and Sugawara!” Bokuto continues, gesturing accordingly. “I beat their team back in high school.”

“That’s the first impression you want to give us?” Sawamura asks, affronted, as Sugawara moves in to poke him. “Give us more credit than that!”

Bokuto’s laughing too much from Sugawara’s blows to respond. Akaashi makes no move to step in.

“Sorry about that.” Sawamura’s tone is sheepish. “We’ve known each other for years.”

“I understand,” Akaashi murmurs good-naturedly.

“How long has it been?” he continues. “I’m kind of surprised Bokuto didn’t tell us, considering he said he’d ‘rub it in our faces for being gross’ when he started dating someone.”

Akaashi’s first reaction is to laugh, because he can see it clearly: Bokuto stomping his foot indignantly, an action his companions likely hadn’t incited, crossing his arms as he declared war on a non-issue—

His mind catches up.

“Oh,” Akaashi says belatedly, “we’re not dating.”

Sawamura looks like he regrets the entire conversation.

Chapter End Notes
daichi is me in any given social situation
“Why did you think we were dating, Sawamura-san?” Akaashi asks, before he can think better of it.

He should figure out why people keep assuming they’re together; it could become an issue later.

“The way you looked at him,” Sawamura says eventually, shifting slightly. “It was fond. The way I look at Suga sometimes. But I’m not a love expert, I wouldn’t know how to really describe it.”


(How does he fix that? There’s a normal amount of fondness in his gaze when he looks at Bokuto, nothing more.)

“Why the long faces?” Sugawara chirps, materializing next to Sawamura like he had always been part of their conversation. “Let’s go eat! It’s been a while, and besides”—a quick glance at Akaashi—“there’s a lot to catch up on.”

———

Akaashi insisted on to-go food that he’d probably give to Bokuto later, leaving him and Sugawara at the table.

(“Yakiniku,” he had said when Bokuto and Sawamura were taking everyone’s orders.

“Yakiniku?” Bokuto asked reverently, grabbing his shoulders. “Kaashi, are you finally willing to try the food of the gods?”

“Something like that.”)

Sugawara’s sitting across from him, amusement evident in his face.

(Why does he get stuck with all the astute people.)

“Hello, Sugawara-san,” Akaashi says.

“Hi, Akaashi-san,” Sugawara replies breezily. “Have you been to this mall before?”

Despite the pervading sense of expectation in the air, they have a normal conversation; Sugawara may be perceptive, but his well-meaning smiles put him at ease. He talks about the scarves on sale at the other end of the mall and Akaashi asks about tagged walls on empty alleyways.

“Oh,” Sugawara mutters, mortified, “you know about those? I would have assumed—did Bokuto take you to see those?”

Akaashi wrings his hands under the table. “Possibly.”

“Huh, he doesn’t usually take people to the alleyways unless he really…” Sugawara trails off. “How long have you two known each other?”
“About three weeks or so.”

“Three weeks?”

“Is this significant?”

“Those alleyways were Bokuto’s favorite hiding spots when he was in high school.” Sugawara leans his head against his hands. “He and Kuroo spent a lot of time there. For him to take you there, he must really like you.”

“Sugawara-san, what are you getting at?”

Sugawara gives him a long look. “Can I get to the point?”

“I assume you’ll do so regardless of if I agree or not,” Akaashi says steadily.

Sugawara laughs. “Very well. Akaashi-san, I know you’re not dating him, but do you really not have any feelings for Bokuto?”

For some reason, it is this question, not any of the other imputations Kuroo or Oikawa have thrown at him, that makes Akaashi pause.

The answer should be an immediate no.

The answer is no.

(Why can’t he bring himself to say no.)

“I understand it’s hard to come to terms with it,” Sugawara continues, undeterred by the silence. “Sometimes, you just have to ask yourself if you can see him with someone else.”

Of course I can rests on Akaashi’s tongue, but he remembers Oikawa and the burst of relief that ran through his body (Oikawa is exasperating, it makes sense that he wouldn’t want to be around him), and he remembers Kuroo and the fact that he still hasn’t told Bokuto (Kuroo is taken, it makes no sense to introduce the possibility of a relationship when it won’t take off).

He has never felt the same type of relief for anyone else. He always informs his clients of a possible match, prefacing impossible choices with the fact that there are multiple matches in the world. There is no reason for Akaashi to keep Bokuto’s compatibility with Kuroo from him.

Nothing justifies the nausea that had slammed into him.

(This isn’t something he can shrug off, after all.)

“Thank you, Sugawara-san.” Akaashi’s voice is unsteady. Sugawara, predictably, catches this.

“Of course, you don’t have to think about it right away!” he adds. “It took me a couple months to realize I was in love with Daichi, but taking it at your own pace is perfectly okay.”

His situation is more than a little different, but he gives a grateful nod to Sugawara nonetheless.

Chapter End Notes
anyone ever accuse you of liking someone and you just say "thank you" be same


“Saeko-san, please focus.”

“Keiji!” Saeko throws her arms in the air. “You just told us you had feelings for your client!”

“This is important,” Alisa agrees, grabbing the TV remote.

“I said it was possible I had feelings for my client,” Akaashi tries.

“Don’t give me that. You wouldn’t have brought it up unless you spent a lot of time dwelling on it.”

Akaashi stays silent.

“I have the match pulled up.” Alisa’s crouched over the TV, holding a stack of DVDs.

“You have his matches saved?”

“Nishinoya may be my favorite player, but Bokuto’s a joy to watch on the court.” Saeko gives him a knowing look. “Speaking of—”

“No, I did not fall for his form,” Akaashi cuts in (though he still can’t forget about that last jump). “Why are we watching Bokuto-san’s matches again?”

(Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Saeko mouthing Bokuto-san? to Alisa.)

“Tell me one thing,” Saeko says aloud as Alisa hits play. “Who are your eyes drawn to during the match?”

After two games and an exasperated he’s not the only player on the court, Keiji, Akaashi comes to a sort of truth.

Bokuto drags him to his apartment to “brainstorm ideas for his match”. His statement is counterproductive, but Akaashi can’t bring himself to point it out.

The living room could be a volleyball shrine with how much Bokuto has packed in: the shelves are almost overflowing with trophies and posters are plastered over most of the surface area. A couple of volleyballs rest in the corner and a stack of magazines are scattered across the low table.

“Make yourself at home!” Bokuto babbles as he heads into the kitchen.

Akaashi folds his sweater and places it next to him on the couch, settling in as the loud clatter of pans fills the empty space.
“Don’t worry, I drop things all the time,” Bokuto calls before Akaashi gets up. “Everything’s fine! I’ll make the best noodles you’ve ever had!”

“Bokuto-san, I’ve told you multiple times that I don’t eat.” Akaashi’s voice is patient. “Just make them for yourself.”

A dejected okay, ‘Kaashi echoes from the kitchen.

There is less owl furniture than he had expected. He at least expected one statue sitting around somewhere. Maybe an owl-patterned curtain? Possibly some rugs.

His eyes drift over to the magazines and he pulls one out from the pile.

Akaashi stops. And stares.

Bokuto’s dropped into a crouch as he receives the ball, his eyes deadly focused. His hair looks especially messed up, sweat trails are visible on his face, and his entire body, clad in a black and gold uniform, looks like he’s ready to strike. *Up and Coming Players!* the title screams.

The feature article is on Bokuto, the header image focused on his run up. His arms are thrown behind him and his mouth is set in a radiant smile.

*Volleyball isn’t always easy,* Interview Bokuto says. *Sometimes, I keep receiving the ball weird, or I miss a spike, or I keep getting blocked, and it’s—it’s really frustrating! Some days, I’m on a roll, and I think ‘yeah, I could do this forever, keep the ball coming!’ and some days, I ask my setter not to toss to me anymore. He laughs. But there’s something about it that’s just…fun. It’s fun! That’s really why I play.*

“Done!” Present Bokuto says, sitting next to Akaashi with a bowl of noodles. “Did ya miss me—hey, hey! You’re looking at one of my magazines!”

“I am,” Akaashi admits.

“That’s the first issue I was ever in,” Bokuto continues. “They asked me all sorts of cool questions, but my favorite one was about why I started playing. Everyone always talks about having to win, and of course, I want to make it! But I play because I enjoy it on the court, and I want at least some kids to take that away from me.”

“That’s,” Akaashi’s more endeared than he should be, “extremely thoughtful, Bokuto-san. It’s admirable of you.”

“Really?” Bokuto’s staring at him with the sort of disbelief that should be reserved for extra special news. “You think so?”

“I do,” he repeats, an unabashed smile on his face.
Looking for a match is a charade at this point.

“Any luck?” Bokuto asks. His head rests in Akaashi’s lap as he picks at stray blades of grass.

“I don’t think our appearance is doing you any favors,” Akaashi says without moving.

“I can’t help that my head’s tired, ‘Kaashi,” Bokuto mumbles.

“There are an abundance of trees for you to lean on, we’re at a park.”

“Yeah, but your legs are comfier.” Bokuto’s tone is oddly decisive.

Akaashi sighs and lets him be.

Twenty minutes later: “Hypothetically, if I wanted to ask someone out, should I write them poetry before or after I confess?”

“Why would you need to write poetry?”

Bokuto pushes himself upwards and shifts around to face Akaashi. One hand is near his hip, the sun is strong but not yet unbearable, and Akaashi’s so close he’s forced to stare right into Bokuto’s eyes.

(His first thought all those weeks ago had been correct: his eyes are golden, turned lighter in the inviting rays of the sun, and Akaashi can make out flecks of brown if he stares long enough. Objectively, it’s not much compared to the palaces and sunsets and skyscrapers of his past, but subjectively, Bokuto Koutarou is one of the most captivating people he’s ever met.)

“I need to impress them,” Bokuto says, drawing back, “and you never like my ideas about confessing after the team wins a game.”

“There’s something disingenuous about confessing on national television if you’re not sure what the response will be,” Akaashi rebuts, “and you would redirect attention from the game.”

“Geh,” Bokuto huffs. “You don’t want to hear my owl puns, either.”

“Not everyone is receptive to owl puns, Bokuto-san.”

“See! You shoot down my best ideas.”

“Why is poetry your third option?”
“Because Kuroo says it’s super romantic.”

“How far have you gotten in life based on Kuroo-san’s romantic advice?”

Bokuto says nothing.

“Bokuto-san, just go with what you feel is best.”

“What if I don’t know, ‘Kaashi?’”

“Generally, a spoken confession between just the two of you is best.” Akaashi’s expression turns contemplative. “It leaves little room for communication errors.”

“Huh,” is all that leaves Bokuto’s mouth.

———

Bokuto’s back to poetry the next day.

“You should stop going to Kuroo-san for romantic advice,” Akaashi says, flipping through one of the many magazines in Bokuto’s apartment as he leans back on the couch.

“Is saying their eyes look like the ocean a good sentence?” Bokuto asks, hunched over the low table.

“It’s been used before in many other love poems.”

Bokuto scowls down at the paper, already creased from the amount of times he’s erased on it. “I’ll change the line then!”

“That’s not fair, stop playing dirty, Akaashi!” Bokuto yells, putting the pencil down.

Akaashi hides the fond smile on his face.

He hoists himself onto the couch, leaning against Akaashi’s shoulder. “I don’t want to, like, mess up and say something I don’t mean, y’know?”

“Then just say how they make you feel,” Akaashi says. “Or why you have feelings for them to begin with.”

“But what if it comes out weird! Or wrong! What if I mean ‘you’re really important to me’ and I say ‘I care about volleyball only a little bit more than I care about you’! Which sounds really mean when I say it out loud, but I love volleyball more than anything in the—”

“Is this why you wanted the poetry.”

“Yes!”

Akaashi takes a deep breath. “Bokuto-san. You’ve been in interviews before. You play on national television for a living. What’s one person compared to the whole world?”
“But Akaashi, what’s the whole world compared to you?”

He blinks. Bokuto’s face is an impressive red as he tries to shuffle away, and Akaashi’s heart has never been this loud before.

His hands move up to cup his face and Bokuto stills under his touch, expression hopeful and terrified and confused in the same breath.

“That was passable, Bokuto-san,” Akaashi says, and closes the gap.

Chapter End Notes

you wanna hear a joke? my original projected length for this fic was 4 chapters. it was a simpler time, back then.

also tysm to everyone who checked this out! i really wasn't expecting anything and i'm really super touched :')

End Notes

i'll post every 2 days until the the story's finished (everything's written, i just need to edit)!

written for the Fantasy Haikyuu lovestruck mini-exchange, and the prompt was cupid ^^

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!