it's lonely on jupiter

by skyestiel

Summary

"It isn’t often that someone comes along and surprises Iwaizumi. He’s not easily caught off guard, not at all. Or at least that’s what he likes to think. So, when Oikawa Tooru shows up, a living, breathing oxymoron strutting about on two solid legs, he must admit that he’s a little impressed."

or: Oikawa's always loved aliens but never thought he'd actually fall in love with one

Notes

guess who's back? that's right, I'm finally back to writing. this time, I've decided to venture into the wonderful world of haikyuu and, more specifically, iwaoi. there are so many marvelous fics and writers in this fandom, and I'd been wanting to join in on the fun for a while

the rating will probably go up in later chapters, but I'm sticking with T for now. I hope that I do these amazing characters justice, and I plan on posting chapters once a week or once every two weeks. of course, college may interfere sometimes, and there's not much I can do about that. also, just a heads up, this first chapter switches between iwa's pov and oikawa's pov. that's normally how things will go in each chapter
anyway comments and kudos are always appreciated and keep me motivated. also, a big thanks to my two incredible betas for helping me out! please enjoy this first chapter and iwaizumi's failed attempt at eating in a college dining hall

See the end of the work for more notes.
It’s seven o’clock in the morning, and a pillow smacks Oikawa Tooru squarely in the face.

This is isn’t the first time, and, considering the unpredictable mood swings of his roommate, it probably won’t be the last. Instead of retaliating like any sane person might, Oikawa merely shoots his disgruntled roommate the fieriest glare he can muster at this early hour.

“What is it now, Tobio-chan?” he grumbles. He doesn’t enjoy Kageyama’s spur of the moment tantrums, but he’s grown used to them for the most part. Unfortunately for Kageyama, it’s the first day of spring semester classes, and Oikawa is not in the mood. Plus, thanks to the dorm’s shitty excuse for a heating system, he woke up several times throughout the night, tossing and turning.

“When’s your first class?” Kageyama asks. He runs his fingers through his tousled black hair, attempting to smooth it back down to its normal state, and yawns, face screwing up as he rubs his eyes.

“You’re kidding me. Was throwing the pillow really necessary?” Oikawa tosses the offending object onto the floor, glaring at it.

Kageyama shrugs and, heaving one gigantic sigh, sits up. “It seemed like the best way to get your attention. I wanted to catch you before you started prancing in front of the mirror.”

“I don’t prance, Tobio-chan,” Oikawa insists, pushing back his blankets, “Not everyone cares so little about their appearance that they only spend five minutes getting ready in the morning. Some of us like to actually look presentable when we go to class.”

As usual, Kageyama starts to tune out Oikawa’s words, peering out the window behind Oikawa’s head instead of meeting his furious roommate’s gaze. Even like this, Kageyama possesses a certain charm that words cannot begin to explain. Of course, he’s clearly too dense to notice how attractive he actually is. Probably because he rarely checks his reflection in the mirror. Although Oikawa would never admit it out loud, not in a million years, he has a pretty good feeling that Kageyama would attract just as many girls as he did if he put a little more effort into his morning routine.

Hoping to reclaim Kageyama’s attention, Oikawa brings the conversation back to the topic at hand. “Anyway, my class is at 9:30. Calc two.”

Kageyama’s lip curls in disgust. “Ew.”

Oikawa shrugs. He’s used to that reaction. “I don’t mind it. But that’s beside the point. There’s no way I’m going to be late on the first day.”

“I’m sure you wouldn’t be the only one,” Kageyama sighs, cracking his neck. “A lot of people don’t give a damn about how late they are.”

“No, Tobio-chan, I think you’re mistaken. There’s a big difference between ‘a lot of people’ and ‘you.’”

“Well…” Kageyama’s face scrunches up. “Not everyone is a goody two shoes like you.”

Oikawa considers retaliating, but it’s Kageyama; his comebacks aren’t worth it. He stands, stretching his arms high above his head. His shirt hikes up, boxers sitting low on his hips, and his bare abdomen is suddenly exposed to their frigid room.
The chill hits Oikawa like a freight train. He’s struck by a full body shiver, the awful kind that starts at the nape of his neck, works its way through his chest, and ends at the tips of his toes. As much as he hates thick, bulky jackets, it’s obviously freezing outside, and the weather doesn’t give a damn about what Oikawa wants to wear.

“You’re pissed because it’s too cold outside to wear the clothes you picked out last night, aren’t you?”

Now it’s Kageyama’s turn to take a pillow to the face.

To Oikawa’s relief, the bus’s heater functions a lot better than the one in their dorm. Oikawa sinks into the seat cushions, ignoring the scratchy, hideous material he scowled at countless times last semester. They’re warm and comfortable and, well, in this kind of weather, that’s all that matters.

The trip to his first class goes by fairly quickly. Other students peer down at their phones, earphones snugly in place, layers upon layers shrouding their frames. The bus driver has settled on a rock station, and, although Oikawa’s focused on the upbeat pop playlist he chose to lift his spirits, he vaguely registers something resembling classic rock filtering through the bus’s speakers.

The short ten or fifteen minute ride gives him some time to sit back and think. Finding a nice, quiet place to do such a thing is remarkably challenging these days. He thinks about the few weeks he spent at home, visiting his high school, socializing with the volleyball club, reminiscing with old teammates. He thinks about his classes, about how they’re likely to be more difficult than most of the courses he’d taken in the fall.

And, as the bus finally comes to a stop in front of its destination, Oikawa thinks back to the conversation he had with one of his teammates the day before break ended. Fixing Oikawa with a pitying stare, mouth set in a thin line, his old friend repeated a phrase that had haunted Oikawa from the moment he decided he’d attend college: “Are you sure you can handle it?”

Are you sure you can handle the curriculum? Are you sure that’s what you want to do with your life? Are you sure you wouldn’t rather do something else? Maybe sports medicine? Maybe business? Are you sure?

Are you sure?

Oikawa wanted to scream, to tear all his hair out and run until his lungs burned. He wanted to storm into the gym and serve, spike a ball against the nearest wall, until his hand stung. He spent the last few months listening to the same questions, the same concerns, voiced by his friends and, worse yet, his own parents. He loved college, and, contrary to popular belief, he wasn’t some mindless airhead who only cared about himself.

A group of students suddenly pushes past, jostling Oikawa around and dragging him back to reality. He shakes his head, quickly trying to shake the uncomfortable feeling that had settled over him. Calm, he needs to calm down. He glances at his phone to double-check the room number of his calculus class, struggling to focus on something else. Thankfully, it functions as the momentary distraction he wanted. His class is on the ground floor and not hard to find.

Oikawa pulls open the door and steps inside, pleased to see that the classroom is awfully small, clearly suited to no more than thirty students. Some have yet to remove their earphones and keep to themselves, broadcasting a silent Leave me alone to anyone that comes near. Others are gathered
together in tiny groups, talking animatedly.

Sadly, most of the seats at the front of the room are already taken. Oikawa grudgingly settles for one in the back instead. Weird, he muses. He’s always made it his mission to avoid sitting in the back. He feels off, this far away from the board. He sets down his backpack and slides into the black plastic chair, pulling out a notebook and pencil. Like many of the students in the surrounding area, he turns up his music and continues to drown out nearby conversations.

His gaze sweeps around the room, seeking out any familiar faces. A few seats over, he recognizes a tall girl with cascading chocolate brown curls and, off to her right, a boy sporting a haircut eerily similar to one of Oikawa’s old teammates.

Oikawa’s about to call out to him, curious as to whether he actually does know the guy, but someone slides into the seat next to him and completely eclipses the girl and his target.

The nerve of some people. It’s the first day of class, and he’s trying to function on very little sleep. And that can only mean one thing: terrible decisions abound. His mouth opens of its own accord before he can think better of what he’s about to say.

But the words die in his throat before they even have the opportunity to surface.

The first thing Oikawa notices is the stranger’s jawline. Smooth and strong, it seems perfectly suited to the confused grimace taking shape on his lips. His gaze is off-putting, dark brown eyes that possess the kind of intensity Oikawa recalls seeing many times on the opposite side of the net during games, an unspoken challenge present in the furrow of his brows and intent stare.

“I’m sorry, something wrong?”

Oikawa draws back, caught off guard by the sudden question. Apparently he needs to work on his subtlety. “Oh! Well, no, I suppose not. I’m just… a little surprised you didn’t ask if anyone else was sitting there.”

“Are they?” He sounds disinterested, as if he could care less about taking someone else’s seat.

“Um, no…”

“Good. Glad that’s settled then,” the stranger decides with a shrug. As if that’s enough and the matter’s now resolved, he turns his attention back to the textbook he’s pulling out of his backpack, paying no mind to Oikawa’s aghast expression.

Oikawa, of course, can’t leave it at that. “Actually, wait. I didn’t catch your name?”

His fingers, carefully poised on the zipper, stop and, slowly, he raises his head to meet Oikawa’s inquisitive gaze. “Iwaizumi. Iwaizumi Hajime.”

For some strange reason, Oikawa experiences an overwhelming sense of déjà vu. The name sounds familiar and yet he knows he’s never met this guy before. For a brief second, he considers asking Iwaizumi if he recognizes him but decides against it. The last thing he wants to do is creep out someone he’s just met.

“Well, it’s nice to meet you, Iwaizumi-kun,” Oikawa replies, flashing one of his most charming smiles. “My name is Oikawa Tooru.”

Iwaizumi’s smile seems a little forced, but Oikawa takes it as enough of an invitation to keep going. “So, what’s your major?”
“Engineering,” Iwaizumi offers. He’s flipping through the thick pages of his textbook, absentmindedly fiddling with the pencil between his fingers.

“Me too! Which department?” Oikawa feels his body lean closer to Iwaizumi, suddenly possessing a mind of its own. “I’m majoring in aerospace.”

Oddly enough, that comment appears to pique Iwaizumi’s interest. “Mine’s mechanical,” he explains. He casually closes the book, eyes flitting down to the large integral symbol on the cover and then back to Oikawa’s face. “I was almost tempted to major in that myself. Do you like it?”

It takes a moment for Oikawa to muster up a response. He’s still trying to process the fact that Iwaizumi has actually provided him with a lengthier response and question in the same breath. “Oh, I guess it’s alright. I’m only a freshman so I haven’t had to take some of the really challenging classes yet.”

Iwaizumi nods, seemingly satisfied with Oikawa’s answer. He glances away, drawing his bottom lip between his teeth, nibbling it anxiously. Oikawa gets the strangest urge to reach over and poke him, to beg him to stop taking out his apparent frustration on his poor, innocent lip. “Interesting,” Iwaizumi mumbles.

Oikawa waits for him to go on, but Iwaizumi simply returns to his earlier task of staring at his textbook and ceaselessly tapping his desk with the sharpened tip of his pencil.

“Yes, very,” Oikawa pipes up, hoping that he can encourage Iwaizumi to carry the conversation. Sadly, Iwaizumi doesn’t take the bait and instead provides Oikawa with a slight nod of acknowledgement, nothing more.

“I have a couple friends in the mechanical engineering department.” That statement isn’t exactly true, but oh well. Someone has to keep the conversation going.

“Yeah?”

“Sure. It seems uh… nice.” He feels like an idiot the second the last word leaves his mouth.

“I guess. I’m only a freshman so I haven’t taken a lot of classes yet either.” A small smile, the closest to genuine so far, graces Iwaizumi’s lips. Oikawa counts it as a little victory. Oikawa, 1. Iwaizumi, 0.

One by one, the students around them remove their earphones, claiming a definite seat before the last stragglers come filing in within the next ten minutes or so. Someone takes the seat on the opposite side of Oikawa, as well as the desk in front of him, both students too engrossed in their own thoughts to care about who they sit near.

“How do you have any other classes after this, Iwaizumi-kun?” Oikawa fights to keep the anticipation out of his voice. Please say no, please say no, please say no, he silently pleads. Iwaizumi’s disinterest makes Oikawa all the more anxious to get to know him, as twisted as that may seem.

Iwaizumi stills. His eyes drift to the board at the front of the room, narrowed. “No I don’t.”

He almost sounds reluctant, as if admitting so pains him. Instead of deterring Oikawa like he’d probably intended it to, it only excites him, curious to solve the enigmatic puzzle that is Iwaizumi Hajime.

“Great! We should go get some lunch together after this,” Oikawa offers eagerly.
To his delight, Iwaizumi responds exactly the way Oikawa hoped he would.

“Sure.”

Iwaizumi Hajime is confused.

It isn’t often that someone comes along and surprises him. He’s not easily caught off guard, not at all. Or at least that’s what he likes to think. So, when Oikawa Tooru shows up, a living, breathing oxymoron strutting about on two solid legs, he must admit that he’s a little impressed.

The moment he saw Oikawa, he found himself entranced. And no, it wasn’t because of his striking appearance, although that certainly did catch his attention. It had a lot more to do with the little smile on his lips as he surveyed the classroom, the glint of curiosity dancing behind his wide eyes, the carefree kick of his legs as he sat patiently waiting for everyone to arrive.

Everyone else in the room possessed an aura completely unlike Oikawa’s. Dim, dark specks of light, too afraid to venture out and spread their brilliance, while Oikawa, on the other hand, brightened the whole room, like the North Star on a cloudless night.

Oh, right.

That’s another thing; Iwaizumi isn’t human.

He’s from a planet a considerable distance away, a desolate place that went from a flourishing paradise to a rocky wasteland in the blink of an eye. Thanks to the sudden devastation, his people quickly vacated their world and have spent the last few centuries moving about and collecting data, hoping to find new places to call home.

After travelling through space for twenty years, Iwaizumi’s seen many stars. He enjoyed peering out at the universe as they sailed leisurely through the depths of inky black darkness known as space, an entire species crammed within the walls of a ship of staggering size, and often witnessed stars and suns that glowed bright enough to blind anyone irresponsible enough to admire them for too long.

That’s what drew Iwaizumi to Oikawa. His demeanor is light, carefree, and welcoming. He settled into the seat beside Oikawa immediately, feeling almost as if he had no choice in the matter, riveted by every flinch and every fidget. Why? Why is he so much different than his classmates? What makes him unique?

Yes, for some reason unbeknownst to even him, Iwaizumi had to join Oikawa in that classroom. It’s his duty to find someone worthy of being his Subject. And, even after only spending a little over an hour with Oikawa, Iwaizumi feels like there’s something special about him. Something that, hopefully, will make him the perfect person for the job.

But—there’s always a but—a small part of him wishes Oikawa hadn’t been the person to catch his attention. It’s not that he doesn’t like Oikawa. No, it’s more of a… gut instinct. His instincts are practically screaming at him to be careful. Oikawa’s dangerous; Iwaizumi knows it.

His reluctance to engage Oikawa had actually come in handy, though. He made sure not to make one of the most common mistakes in the book. Many Researchers show too much enthusiasm towards their Subjects, specifically during the first meeting. The thought of finally finding an actual human being to observe generally sends their brain into overdrive and lifts their spirits to
unbelievable heights. The poor things have no idea how to contain their excitement. Unfortunately, Subjects get suspicious when a person they’ve only just met starts gushing about how fortunate they are and begins worshipping the very ground their Subject walks on.

Iwaizumi’s no rookie. He handled the situation maturely and with the kind of poise expected of someone his age, someone of his status. And, to his delight, Oikawa walked right into his, for lack of a better word, trap.

His mentor always said human beings were drawn to a challenge. They flock to mysteries like mindless flies to a flame. Oikawa certainly isn’t “mindless”, not even close, but he is human. And that’s enough for Iwaizumi’s disinterest to work like a charm.

Class finishes and, as the two leave, Oikawa starts going on and on about what he claims to be “the ideal lunch spot.” Iwaizumi’s not all that surprised when it ends up being nothing more than a dining hall a couple buildings over. Iwaizumi’s new to the whole “cafeteria” thing, forced to blindly follow Oikawa’s lead as he advises him about which foods will destroy his digestive system and which will only cause mild discomfort in the near future.

He takes Oikawa’s word and ends up carrying away a tray topped with a hotdog, small bowl of fruit, and glass of water. It’s nothing exotic, but Iwaizumi vaguely recalls a few lectures he listened to in the past dealing with college campuses and eating choices. If you were searching for exquisite cuisine from across the globe, you’d come to the wrong place.

The very thought of a hotdog or hamburger makes Iwaizumi queasy, but he’d rather stomach some nasty food than discourage Oikawa. He can’t refuse; it’s too late now. Great.

After a bit of searching, they find an empty table in the far corner, plopping their backpacks into the extra seats. Almost immediately, Oikawa begins barraging Iwaizumi with questions.

“So, how are you liking the place? I’m guessing this is your second semester here like me.” Oikawa pulls out several napkins from a dispenser on the table but keeps his eyes locked on Iwaizumi.

“It’s nice. A lot bigger than I expected,” Iwaizumi says, snatching a couple napkins for himself.

“Ah, yes, I know. But I like the size a lot more than I thought I would,” Oikawa agrees.

“Yeah, you get used to it after being here this long.” Totally a bullshit answer. Iwaizumi’s only been on Earth for a month.

“I’ve noticed,” Oikawa replies. “Well, to be honest, Iwaizumi-kun, I’m happy I came here instead of going somewhere closer.”

Iwaizumi quashes the sudden flicker of curiosity. He wants to ask Oikawa about these “closer” schools, about where he went to high school and even his home life, but knows that it’s too early for anything like that.

Oikawa speaks up before Iwaizumi has a chance to say anything stupid and possibly detrimental to his mission. “Maybe I’m being too nosy”- Iwaizumi braces himself- “but where are you living? One of the dorms? Because I’m stuck in one of those sorry excuses for on-campus housing right now.”

Iwaizumi freezes up. Idiot, he silently berates himself. It’s the type of question he should’ve prepared for long before he set foot on campus, long before he set foot on this planet. It’s not even a difficult question! He wants to bash his head into the nearest wall for being so unprepared.
“No, I’m living in an apartment.” That much is true.

“Oh really? Lucky,” Oikawa drawls, leaning back in his chair, “I wanted one but my good-for-nothing friend thought they were too expensive. And my mother sided with him- not me, her own son- because ‘It’s your first year, Tooru-chan, you’re supposed to live in a dorm like everyone else.’”

Iwaizumi smirks. Oikawa’s completely clueless as to how much information Iwaizumi gathers from that single sentence alone.

“Anyway… who are you rooming with?” Oikawa wonders.

Okay, now this response is a lot tougher. He can’t possibly say that he’s living with his Mentor, another of his kind that, although he may not look it, just so happens to be twenty years older than Iwaizumi. No, Oikawa would probably ditch his sorry ass. The only reasonable responses are a “friend” or a “relative.” But, the more he thinks about it, the more he realizes that Daichi sure as hell doesn’t resemble him enough to be a “relative.”

“A friend,” Iwaizumi blurts mere seconds after the mental image of Daichi flashes before his eyes. “He doesn’t go here, though. Just lives in the area and offered me a place to live.” Iwaizumi wants to pat himself on the back for adding the last part.

“So very fortunate,” Oikawa whines, “Stupid Tobio-chan.”

Iwaizumi remembers what he learned about honorifics. Whoever this “Tobio” person is, he must be close to Oikawa to earn such a title. Again, Iwaizumi’s tempted to question Oikawa, but he stops himself before he accidentally finds himself in a rough place.

Oikawa then decides to change the subject. He begins drilling Iwaizumi about his classes, piping up every now and then with random comments concerning his own courses. It doesn’t take long for Iwaizumi to realize that Oikawa enjoys math, just as much as he enjoys talking about himself.

Shortly after, he dives right into a story that Iwaizumi admittedly loses interest in quite quickly. As he scans the surrounding area, more students file into the dining hall, and Iwaizumi can’t help but be spellbound, captivated by the sight of so many people in one place. He and Oikawa’s calculus class pales in comparison.

“And then he pulled a ladybug out of his salad. A ladybug, Iwaizumi-kun. Can you believe that?” Oikawa gestures, pretending to pull a ladybug out of his hotdog. Most of his stories seem to involve hand motions, wild and theatrical ones that remind Iwaizumi of the numerous plays he’d been forced to watch while in training.

Iwaizumi wishes he’d been paying more attention to the first part of Oikawa’s story, but from what he can gather, one of Oikawa’s friends found a bug in his cafeteria food. Which Iwaizumi readily agrees is disgusting. He suddenly feels queasy again. “At least he didn’t eat it.”

“Yes, but that means that all of the food here could have bugs in it. I may have eaten four flies by now, and I’d never know it!” Oikawa’s getting louder and louder by the second. Iwaizumi wonders if he should quiet him down before they get kicked out of the cafeteria, possibly for good. “Is that why you haven’t touched your hotdog, Iwaizumi-kun?”

Shit. Iwaizumi glances down at the food in question, two snaking lines of ketchup and mustard untouched. He wants to say yes, that Oikawa’s gross story has stolen his appetite, but that’s not exactly true. The truth, though, is more embarrassing than that: he’s never eaten a hotdog before.
He doesn’t even know where to start.

“You shouldn’t tell stories like that when someone’s trying to eat,” Iwaizumi barks, frustration bleeding into his tone. He can’t let Oikawa know the truth. But he hates that his inadequacy forces the harsh words out of his mouth. It’s not Oikawa’s fault that he’s an outsider with no prior knowledge of cafeteria food.

Surprisingly, Oikawa doesn’t panic or frantically apologize like Iwaizumi thought he may. Instead, he folds his arms across his chest and purses his lips, a hint of frustration in his voice as he mumbles, “It wasn’t my fault, Iwaizumi-kun. We’ve been sitting here for thirty minutes, and you still haven’t touched your food. My story wasn’t that long.”

Had they really been sitting there for *thirty minutes*? “Well… still, you shouldn’t.”

Oikawa grumbles something unintelligible under his breath, something about Iwaizumi being stubborn, and brings his napkin up to his lips, wiping away a few ketchup smears. They sit in silence for a minute or two before Oikawa decides to call Iwaizumi out again.

“Are you going to eat it or not, Iwaizumi-kun? You’ve already proved your point. I get it; I’ve ruined your appetite with my story.”

Iwaizumi decides right then and there that he never wants to see or hear a disgruntled Oikawa ever again. To most, he’d sound like a petulant child, but, after seeing his warm and welcoming side, Iwaizumi knows that, deep down, he’s not. He doesn’t really know Oikawa, but he can already tell that he’s much more than just a pretty face. A lot more.

It almost feels like… Oikawa’s putting on an act for everyone.

“Of course.” Iwaizumi rolls his eyes to emphasize his point and reaches for the silverware beside his plate. “It takes more than that to get rid of my appetite.”

Iwaizumi pins down the bun and hotdog with his fork and cuts into it. He’s watched several videos in the past about how different human beings prefer to eat. Each region has its own style. The concept always intrigued Iwaizumi, long before he came to Earth.

He swells with confidence as his knife cuts easily through the meat and bun. All of his prior training prepared him for an occasion like this, leading up to the moment he’d be in the field and have to use something he learned in his studies. Once he’s cut off a sizable piece, he pops it into his open mouth, chewing it slowly and carefully.

The entire time, Oikawa hasn’t said a single word. Iwaizumi chooses to ignore him, too intent on the hotdog’s taste and his own pride to notice his surroundings. But, as he lifts his gaze, his stomach plummets to his feet.

Oikawa’s expression is hard to decipher. Iwaizumi hasn’t had much experience with interpreting human emotions, but Oikawa seems torn between laughing and crying.

“What… what the hell are you doing?”

Iwaizumi hesitates. Had he done something wrong? He’s almost certain he’s just displayed a textbook perfect use of silverware. And yet the hand covering Oikawa’s mouth and the crinkled skin around his eyes says differently.

“I’m eating the damn hotdog,” Iwaizumi grumbles, setting down his silverware, “Isn’t that what you wanted?”
Suddenly, Oikawa’s entire body is shaking with the force of his laughter, little tears streaming down his cheeks. He pounds on the table, filling the cafeteria with the clattering cacophony of bouncing silverware and his uproarious cackling.

“What? What’s so funny?” Iwaizumi feels blood rising to his cheeks. He’d done so well, and now he wants nothing more than to scurry under the table and hide.

“Y-you just ate a h-hot dog with a… a… a fork and knife!” Oikawa’s fist makes contact with the table surface yet again, his entire body bent at the waist as he snorts and laughs into his empty plate.

“And?”

“And? Oh, c’mon, Iwaizumi-kun,” Oikawa chides between chuckles, “Nobody cuts up their hotdog and eats it like that!”

Iwaizumi knows his entire face is beet red by this point. Embarrassment rolls off his body in waves, eyes drawn to the offending fork and knife that got him into this mess in the first place. “S-shut up! I forgot!”

Oikawa lets out the loudest guffaw yet. His eyes are squeezed shut, legs kicking under the table, striking Iwaizumi’s legs every now and then. Iwaizumi really wishes that he’d quit making a scene. He’d give anything for the laughter to stop and for people to go back to eating and gossiping with their damned friends.

“How… how-“ Iwaizumi can’t quite make out the rest of Oikawa’s question, but he can only imagine what it is.

He carries on for another minute before eventually settling down. Panting, clearly out of breath, Oikawa manages to string a few words together in a sentence. “Do you really eat your hotdogs that way? With a… well, you know.”

Iwaizumi has no idea how to answer. On one hand, if he says yes, Oikawa may think he’s weird and leave. And then Iwaizumi would have to find a new Subject. The chances of finding someone equally as unique and enthusiastic on such short notice were awfully slim. Even if Oikawa’s flawed, even if he’s basically the polar opposite of Iwaizumi and may, in fact, drive him crazy by the end of his term on Earth, he’s the best option.

If Iwaizumi says no, though, Oikawa will have more questions. And how the hell is he going to explain why he “forgot” how to eat a hotdog? In other words, he’s screwed.

“Yeah, sometimes,” Iwaizumi sighs. It’s the only (and first) thing his frazzled mind comes up with.

“Only sometimes?” Oikawa’s sporting one of the biggest shit-eating grins Iwaizumi has ever seen. He can’t decide if he’d rather smack it off his smug face or hug the absolute shit out of him. It’s an odd feeling, that’s for sure.

“You’re so damned nosy.” Iwaizumi lifts the hotdog to eye level. “Would it make you feel better if I ate it like this?”

“Iwa-“

“Actually, better question. If I eat it without cutting it up first, will you stop asking me questions?” Iwaizumi mirrors Oikawa’s smug expression and, to his delight, manages to render his meddlesome companion speechless.
Satisfied with Oikawa’s reaction, Iwaizumi shoves the hotdog into his mouth and bites into it, savoring every burst of flavor. It’s not only the first time he’s eaten finger food but also the first time he’s eaten in the presence of a human.

Oikawa’s jaw snaps shut, and he cocks his head to the side, silently observing Iwaizumi as he enjoys his first foray into cafeteria food. Iwaizumi can’t help but observe Oikawa, too. His gaze traces the slight crinkles at the corner of his eyes, wondering if they’re the result of many years filled with laughter similar to the outburst from earlier. Meanwhile, Oikawa does the same, watching Iwaizumi as if it’s the first time he’s ever seen another person eat before. And, slowly, Iwaizumi glimpses the same warm, welcoming demeanor from earlier.

“You’re something else, Iwaizumi-kun.” Oikawa’s tone matches the fondness in his gaze, soft and prodding, curious but not too forceful.

Iwaizumi’s grin widens, hotdog still perched in his hand. “Look who’s talking.”

Kageyama is definitely a genius on the volleyball court, Oikawa will give him that, but, when it comes to offering advice, he’s far from it.

“I don’t get what the big deal is,” Kageyama repeats for what feels like the millionth time since Oikawa slammed open their door and flopped down onto Kageyama’s bed.

Oikawa isn’t sure why he expected a different response, let alone a helpful one. “There’s something different about him, Tobio-chan. I don’t know what it is but… he’s interesting.”

“Are you trying to get into his pants?” Kageyama deadpans.

Blood rushes to Oikawa’s cheeks. “Oh, hush.” He turns over onto his stomach and buries his face in Kageyama’s pillow. “Do you really think that little of me?”

“I’m just saying, that’s all. I wouldn’t care if you did,” Kageyama insists. Oikawa can’t see his face, but he sounds sure of himself. Plus, Kageyama is a terrible liar; Oikawa could easily sniff out one of his lies from a mile away.

“Well, if you don’t want that, what do you want?”

“Friendship, Tobio-chan,” Oikawa sighs, rolling over onto his back. He raises one of his arms and closely examines his hand, watching each knuckle as he bends and extends his fingers. “That’s still a thing, you know. Fooling around isn’t a requirement when you’re talking to someone. I mean, look at us. We’ve known each other for years and we’ve never-”
“Fuck no,” Kageyama interjects, looking utterly scandalized. “That’s never going to happen.”

“And I never said it would, geez, calm down.” Oikawa giggles. It’s just like Kageyama to jump to conclusions like that. “It’s the same with Iwaizumi-kun. I just want to be friends.”

Although Kageyama stares at him like he’s sprouted another head, Oikawa’s being completely honest. The last few relationships he was involved in didn’t exactly turn out well. A couple of them came to a screeching halt when Oikawa explained his passion for volleyball and that it came first. Another ended when his girlfriend started stalking his house over the weekend after he stopped replying to her texts, something that had sufficiently crept him out and kept him from dating for a solid month or so afterward.

And then there’s… well, he doesn’t like to think about his last relationship.

Several break ups later and Oikawa doesn’t quite feel like finding someone new. What he really needs is another friend. Someone other than Kageyama, someone other than- he hates to admit it- his teammates, even Kuroo.

“Alright.” Kageyama sighs and moves away from the door, choosing to perch on the edge of Oikawa’s bed instead. Considering the fact his own bed is taken at the moment. “Alright, I get that.”

“Mmm,” Oikawa agrees. He lets his hand fall back to his side, clutching at Kageyama’s blanket. “There’s something there, Tobio-chan, I swear. He feels… familiar. And I need to know why.”
investigation on the court

Chapter Summary

In which Iwaizumi begins to understand the appeal of homemade breakfast food and the dynamics of a team.

Chapter Notes

chapter 2, here we go! so, after consulting my lovely twitter followers, I decided to add another character (and ship) that I’d debated including from the beginning. after all, everyone needs more lev and yakulev in their life. I also decided to write kageyama the way I hc him: aro and demisexual. hence the new tag, if you didn’t already catch it. lastly, a note about oikawa's volleyball team: oikawa, bokuto, kuroo, kageyama, hinata, and lev are all freshmen but yaku is a sophomore

anyway, a quick thanks yet again to my betas, adri and kristi, and all of the sweet people who encourage me to keep writing! thank you for the kudos, comments, and such! now, on with the show. I hope you have as much fun reading this chapter as I had writing it

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Beep, beep, beep.

Iwaizumi hates his life.

“Whoever invented the alarm clock is an asshole,” he grumbles and, without even cracking open his eyes, reaches over and attempts to turn the damned thing off. He misjudges the distance, though, and ends up knocking it over. The sound is fucking awful, droning on and on and Iwaizumi is going to strangle Daichi when he sees him because that bastard is the one who bought it for him in the first place.

Somehow, he manages to get his hands on the monstrosity and shuts it off, kind of wishing he could crush it instead and end its wailing forever, and takes a second to soak in the beauty of the resulting silence. He grudgingly opens his eyes.

The morning light bathes his bed, the walls, everything in the immediate area, in its soft yellow glow, ephemeral and beautiful. Even the potted plant Daichi picked up at the grocery store, stem and leaves fighting their way out of the soil, looks like something straight out of a dream.

It’s nothing at all like his previous room. The floors are coated in a synthetic material designed to keep the space as free of germs as physically possible. The walls of the room are metallic with a single set of drawers on the far wall. He hasn’t actually seen a hospital room firsthand, but the smell, the stale air and hard surfaces, had always reminded him of his dismal home.

Admittedly, waking up to this is a welcome change.
The fresh smell of baking food wafting in from the kitchen, the brush of soft cotton against his bare skin, the faint warmth of morning light streaming through the window, all coaxing him to stay in bed rather than rushing off to morning classes. He inhales and slowly exhales, rolling onto his side. Iwaizumi has no idea how humans do it, this whole “getting up in the morning” thing.

Eventually, he crawls out of bed and trudges into the kitchen. The delicious aroma is stronger the closer he gets. The overpowering and tantalizing scent of whatever the hell Daichi’s decided to cook envelops Iwaizumi, curling around his arms and legs, dragging him toward the nearest chair. He settles into his seat, perching his elbows on the granite breakfast bar. “Morning.”

Daichi turns briefly, spatula in hand. “Good morning.” His gaze sweeps over Iwaizumi. “You look… rested.”

Iwaizumi snorts. “I wouldn’t say that.”

“Well, I certainly slept well. I haven’t slept that well in a while,” Daichi comments, shrugging his shoulders. He turns back to the stove, zeroing in on the golden brown disc-shaped food in the pan. If Iwaizumi remembers correctly, he believes it’s what humans call a “pancake.”

“Oh, I hate you, by the way,” Iwaizumi says, nonchalant, as if he’s discussing something mundane like today’s weather, not his newfound hatred towards his Mentor.

“Oh?”

“Yeah. That fucking alarm clock you forced me to buy? I’m pretty sure that… thing is the reason humans wage wars.”

Daichi doesn’t respond. He slips the spatula underneath the pancake and carefully flips it, watching as it strikes the pan with a satisfying sizzle, filling the surrounding area with its mouth-watering aroma.

“There has to be a better way. I’m going to go crazy if I have to hear that ‘beep, beep, beep’ every single morning we’re here,” Iwaizumi mumbles, scowling as he mimics the alarm clock’s godforsaken howling.

“A lot of college students use their cellular devices,” Daichi explains, pressing the flat side of the spatula into the top of the pancake. “But, sadly, the substitutes we’ve brought with us don’t come equipped with an alarm. A flaw in the design, in my opinion. They completely forgot that the chips don’t work here.”

Every member of their kind has a chip implanted in their skin at a young age. It has many capabilities ranging from simple tasks, such as producing a signal in the brain when its wearer has to wake up in the morning, to more advanced things, primarily providing the framework for any disguise they may need on a planet with species possessing bodies and physical appearances far different from their own.

“Besides, it’s not my fault that we had to buy alarm clocks,” Daichi quickly adds as an afterthought. If it were anyone else, Iwaizumi would smack them upside the head for being a smartass. But this is Daichi; he’s stating a fact, not trying to piss Iwaizumi off.

“Yeah, sure,” Iwaizumi says, “Doesn’t change the way I feel about it, though. I want to get rid of that piece of trash as soon as possible.”

Daichi sighs and scoops the pancake out of the pan, adding it to the small stack on a plate beside
the stove. He brings it over to the bar area and smiles weakly. It’s a sad attempt; he looks more constipated than anything else.

Iwaizumi decides to do the poor guy a favor and change the subject.

“Anyway, what about those?”

“Pancakes,” Daichi explains. The pained grimace immediately transforms into a triumphant grin, lighting up his entire face. Daichi’s not necessarily a morning person, but he definitely fares better than Iwaizumi who hates the early hours of the day with a burning passion. He’s already styled his hair, dark brown locks tamed, and his work clothes (button-down, tie, slacks, the whole nine yards) look pressed and ready to go. The apron—*he actually spent money on a ‘Kiss The Cook’ apron, incredible*—seems strangely out of place coupled with Daichi’s formal attire.

“Huh, pancakes.” Iwaizumi peers down at the food in question and leans a little closer. He can’t help but be skeptical of something Daichi’s whipped up. From what he remembers, his Mentor isn’t graced with the fine culinary skills of a chef. Not even close. He’s pretty sure he heard rumors that Daichi can’t even fry an egg properly.

“This isn’t something we had back on the ship so how the hell did you know how to make them?”

Suddenly, Daichi’s cheeks flush. Iwaizumi blinks, under the impression that his eyes are deceiving him. There’s no way that Daichi, his Mentor for some time now, is blushing. Especially at the mention of pancakes, no less.

“I was at the grocery store just down the street and ran into someone. I wanted to try something new, this breakfast food called a ‘bagel’, but couldn’t find any so this man helped me out. And, well, to make a long story short, he gave me his pancake recipe. He said they were to die for. I’m not quite sure if I want to eat a pancake worthy of someone else’s death, though.”

*A pancake that kills?* Iwaizumi thinks back to the hotdog incident and shivers. But, more importantly, a grocery store? Apparently his Mentor’s in the business of making small talk with random, villainous strangers at the supermarket. Somehow, Iwaizumi isn’t surprised.

“Well, I hope they’re as good as this friend of yours claims they are,” Iwaizumi comments. “And they better not fucking kill me. Food here doesn’t really agree with my digestive system.”

It’s true. His last run-in with human food didn’t quite turn out the way he’d planned. First, he found himself confronted with one of the few terran foods he promised himself he’d never eat. Then, his most promising Subject candidate had to go and make fun of his perfect—*Iwaizumi will swear up and down that it was perfect*—use of eating utensils. And, to top it all off, later that evening, the damned thing made his stomach grumble and ache as if it were about to burst. So much for Oikawa’s dining hall expertise.

“I hope not,” Daichi replies.

Iwaizumi’s brow furrows. Something about Daichi’s voice, something about the way he quickly turns away and stares at the stove as if it’s the most fascinating thing he’s ever laid eyes on, instantly sets off warning bells in Iwaizumi’s head. The second he gets back to the apartment after class, he’s sitting Daichi down and having a nice long chat about this mystery man of his.

Hesitantly, Iwaizumi reaches for his fork and knife and repeats his technique from yesterday, sticking a small piece of the warm breakfast food into his mouth. His eyes slip shut and-
Wow.

The buttery morsel tastes sweet and delicious and so much better than that fucking hotdog.

Iwaizumi crams another larger piece of pancake into his mouth and somehow manages to speak as he chews. “Do you think I can take the rest of this with me and eat it in class?”

Oikawa’s about to go crazy, he’s sure of it.

After yesterday’s events, Oikawa hoped to have a nice, long, fulfilling conversation with his fabulous new friend. But no. No. He and Iwaizumi sit in the same seats- after exchanging one of the most awkward greetings Oikawa’s ever had the misfortune of experiencing- and haven’t said a single word to each other since class started.

Oikawa hates it. He positively loathes the uncomfortable tension that hangs in the air between them, especially because he’s almost positive he’s done nothing wrong. The other day, lunch ended, and they both went their separate ways. Phone numbers weren’t exchanged or anything so it’s not like he flooded Iwaizumi’s inbox or sent him embarrassing, nonsensical snapchats in the middle of the night. They aren’t quite to that stage in their friendship yet.

He glances over, watching carefully as Iwaizumi scribbles down whatever the professor’s written on the board. His nose scrunches up when he’s focused like this, torso bent over his desk, close enough to squish his nose into the paper if he leaned over just a bit further. *Iwaizumi-kun, so intense.* Oikawa can’t help but find it endearing.

“*Iwaizumi-kun?*” he whispers cautiously.

Nothing. Iwaizumi remains intent on jotting down the equation on the board.

But Oikawa Tooru’s not a quitter, no way. “*Iwaizumi-kun?*”

This time, he swears he catches Iwaizumi falter. He refuses to acknowledge Oikawa, and continues on as if he hasn’t heard a thing. Oikawa sighs because of course Iwaizumi’s just as stubborn as he originally thought.

Oikawa’s about to repeat Iwaizumi’s name, scratch this strangely incessant itch, but stops. *You leave me no choice,* Oikawa muses disappointedly, shaking his head.

“Iwa… Iwa-chan?”

The pencil immediately slips out of Iwaizumi’s slackened grip, rolling off the desk and on to the floor. Oikawa stifles a laugh. He looks like a bristling porcupine with his spiky hair and narrowed eyes. He also looks like he’s five seconds from clawing the mischievous smirk right off of Oikawa’s face.

“What?” Iwaizumi hisses.

Oikawa’s raises his hand to his mouth, shielding his moving lips from the students in front of them and, more importantly, their professor. He inhales, holds it, and, fighting every urge to giggle, whispers, “Hi.”

Iwaizumi blinks owlishly at him and, okay, now he really seems like he wants to hit Oikawa.
“You’ve got to be-“ He mumbles more curses and frustrated gibberish under his breath and bends over to scoop up his pencil. Oikawa is promptly forgotten again as Iwaizumi settles back into his chair and squints at the board, picking up right where he left off.

“I wanted to ask you something,” Oikawa continues. If only their seats were a little closer. He’d reach out and pluck that stupid writing utensil right out of Iwaizumi’s hand. He wants nothing more than to snap the infernal thing in half and toss it in the trash.

Iwaizumi ignores him. Again. Apparently he doesn’t find Oikawa’s antics as funny as Oikawa himself does. A shame, really.

“Iwa-cha-“

“Can’t it wait?” Iwaizumi says and, no, he’s definitely not amused. “I’m surprised you’re able to take notes when you keep… shit, I can’t believe this. Just ask me after class.”

He huffs and turns his attention back to the board. Unfortunately for him, Oikawa’s never been the most patient person.

“T-take notes!”

“What?”

Everything goes silent. Nearby students glance over their shoulder, abandoning their notes. Oikawa feels the most irrational impulse to burst out laughing at the sight of Iwaizumi’s dumbstruck expression. It reminds him of the times his mother teased him about making faces and about how his face would get stuck like that if he weren’t more careful.

“Something wrong back there?” Their professor looks livid, all 5’6” of him poised to give Iwaizumi a piece of his mind. It’s getting harder and harder for Oikawa to control himself. He can’t recall the last time he’s had this much fun in class.

“N-no, sir,” Iwaizumi blurts. He’s tomato red and clearly mortified.

“Good, save that for after my class.” The wrinkles on his forehead intensify, and he clicks his tongue disapprovingly. “I expected more from students at this stage in their educational careers.”

Iwaizumi apologizes at least ten more times- Oikawa loses count after the first five times- before the professor finally urges him to calm down and, flashing Oikawa one last disbelieving look, returns to his teaching. Thankfully, the other students follow suit a few seconds later.

Oikawa hesitantly peaks at Iwaizumi out of the corner of his eye. His flushed cheeks have yet to return to normal, and he’s gripping the infamous pencil with enough force to break it if he so wished. ‘Iwa-chan’ certainly suits him, Oikawa decides right then and there.

The rest of the class surprisingly passes without incident. Iwaizumi refuses to acknowledge Oikawa’s presence, acting as if he’s not even there, and Oikawa manages to keep to himself. He’s had his fill of embarrassing Iwaizumi- at least for the next couple hours.

The second the professor dismisses them, Iwaizumi throws his stuff in his backpack and climbs to his feet. He clearly plans to get out before Oikawa can catch him, but, oh, is he wrong. Oikawa has other plans for him.

“So, Iwa-chan,” Oikawa says, leaning against Iwaizumi’s desk, “about that important question I wanted to ask…”
“You mean the one that almost got me kicked out of class? That question?”

Oikawa, of course, chooses to ignore the bitterness in Iwaizumi’s voice. “Well, I wondered if you wanted to come watch our volleyball practice tonight?”

The idea is actually Kageyama’s. Apparently he can’t come up with any advice that doesn’t involve or center around volleyball. Not that it’s a bad plan or anything. Oikawa wanted to make new friends and what better way to do that then introduce said friends to one of the things he loved most?

Iwaizumi stills, eyes widening. “Volleyball.”

“Volleyball,” Oikawa repeats, a bit confused. “As in the sport? I’m sure you’re well aware of what that is, Iwa-chan.”

For a split second, Oikawa thinks Iwaizumi may not know what volleyball is after all. Recognition doesn’t cross his face. But who in their right mind hasn’t heard of volleyball?

“You do know what that is… right?”

“Of course,” Iwaizumi snaps. His voice wavers, though, and Oikawa cocks his head, regarding Iwaizumi curiously.

“But?”

“But…” Iwaizumi scratches the back of his neck, eyes flitting around the room, avoiding Oikawa’s questioning gaze. “I’ve never actually watched it. In person.”

Fantastic. Oikawa can’t believe his luck.

“Oh, Iwa-chan, there’s nothing quite like it!” he gushes. He brings his forearms together, bends his knees ever so slightly, assuming the perfect passing position. “The ball makes contact with your arms and sails into the air and—” Oikawa quickly raises his arms—“the setter, yours truly, sets it to the hitter who scores. It’s so exciting!”

Iwaizumi listens quietly, but Oikawa doesn’t miss the brief flicker of interest in his eyes.

“It’s incredible, Iwa-chan! You should really come.”

“Maybe…”

“Iwa-chan,” Oikawa whines. He wants Iwaizumi to see his team in action- to see him in action.

“Will you stop calling me that if I do?” He’s fishing for an excuse at this point; Oikawa knows he’s already won.

“Seven o’clock tonight.” Oikawa takes a step closer, jabbing Iwaizumi’s nose playfully. In typical Iwaizumi fashion, he flinches and scowls at Oikawa’s fingertip. “Don’t be late.”

Iwaizumi would be lying if he said he didn’t form certain expectations when he agreed to sit in on Oikawa’s practice.

He imagined a gym similar to the one’s he’s seen in videos, with its high ceilings, squeaky floors,
and towering net. He pictured a stern coach, hands poised on his hips as he shouted commands and offered constructive criticism to his players. And, to be honest, he thought he’d walk in and find a team full of stubborn, overexcited athletes. Or, in other words, a team full of Oikawas.

The gym, at least, stays true to his preconceived notions. The smell of rubber and something Iwaizumi can’t quite place fills the space. He tilts his head back, surveying the large light fixtures that line the ceiling, illuminating the court and the bright red pads wrapped securely around the net’s poles.

Oikawa directs him to the bench situated on the court’s sideline. “They should be here any min-“

“Well, well, well.”

Both Iwaizumi and Oikawa turn their attention to the doorway. Tall- that’s the first thing Iwaizumi notices about the looming figure as he steps inside the gym. The second is his hair, which from this distance at least, appears jet black and spiky, effortlessly casual, and, well, messy. And then there’s his eyes, narrow and cat-like and certainly reason enough for Iwaizumi to feel on edge.

Behind him, roughly the same height, another person comes into view and a gasp slips past Iwaizumi’s lips. His hair… it’s the strangest hairstyle Iwaizumi has ever seen. It’s spiky like his friend’s, but, as if that wasn’t weird enough, the wild mess atop his head is gray. Gray. Wide golden eyes, not half as unsettling as his companion’s narrowed pupils, meet Iwaizumi’s watchful gaze. He’s immediately reminded of the fluffy nocturnal birds Daichi told him about. What were they called again? Oh, right. Owls.

“I can’t believe I beat you here, Tetsu-chan,” Oikawa laughs. Tetsu-chan?

“You know how it is with this one.” The scarier of the two, ‘Tetsu-chan’, gestures at his owlish friend. “Better look out, Oikawa. I think you have competition. He spends more time on that damn hair of his.”

“Hey, hey!” The owl boy digs his elbow into his friend’s side.

“Hmmm good point. I think Kou-chan has me beat,” Oikawa agrees, nodding enthusiastically. The three of them start chuckling, and Iwaizumi suddenly wishes he hadn’t come. There’s something intimate about the way they gently nudge each other, about the arms slung across each other’s shoulders, the infectious sound of their combined laughter. Iwaizumi feels like he’s intruding on something personal.

An earthly idiom comes to mind. He’s never really understood its meaning until now. As he watches them, obviously very close, he feels like a fish out of water, desperate to return to the comfort and familiarity of its home.

“Oh, I’m sorry. How rude of me.” Finally, they separate. “Iwa-chan, this is our dependable vice-captain and, eh… somewhat dependable ace!”

The ‘dependable vice-captain’ smirks and extends his hand out to Iwaizumi. “Kuroo Tetsurou.”

Hesitantly, Iwaizumi accepts the hand. His grip is strong and sure, gaze piercing, and Iwaizumi suddenly understands why Oikawa appears to get along so well with him.

The aforementioned ace shoves Kuroo gracelessly out of the way and snatches Iwaizumi’s hand before he can withdraw it. His shake is enthusiastic and excitable and, alright, Iwaizumi is really
beginning to see why this friendship works. “Bokuto Koutarou. But you can just call me Bokuto.”

“Nice to meet you both,” Iwaizumi says, struggling to hide his grimace as he fights to regain the feeling in his fingers.

“And who’s this?”

A few more people file into the gym, shoes squeaking across the floor as they make their way over to where everyone else has gathered. The shortest of them all, the one who spoke, leads the group and stops right in front of Iwaizumi, looking him up and down. “Oikawa’s friend, I’m guessing.”

Oikawa flushes. “What’s that supposed to mean, Mori-chan?”

Another –chan.

Iwaizumi gets a closer look at him now that he’s closer. Golden brown hair and chocolate brown eyes, he’s certainly tinier than every other player in the room, and yet he carries a sort of presence that makes him stand out, makes him seem several times bigger than his actual size. And, as Iwaizumi stares back into this ‘Mori-chan’s’ wide expressive eyes, he realizes that Kuroo’s not the only one with feline qualities.

“Mori-chan is our libero,” Oikawa pipes up helpfully.

“Yaku Morisuke.” The libero’s handshake differs from Kuroo and Bokuto’s but still possesses the same amount of strength and certainty, the careful and controlled grip of someone who’s used to supporting others as well as himself.

Iwaizumi doesn’t quite know the guy yet, but he can already tell that he’s going to like Yaku.

“Yaku-san, Yaku-san!”

Whiny and shrill, Iwaizumi figures it’s Oikawa who’s calling out for Yaku, using another of his many nicknames.

But it’s not.

A fucking giant materializes out of thin air with smooth hair a shade darker than Bokuto’s and sharp green eyes that seem to stare directly into Iwaizumi’s soul. He’s huge, towering over Yaku and Iwaizumi both. He grins at Iwaizumi, bouncing on the balls of his feet, as if he can’t bring himself to stop moving- not even for a second.

“Hey there,” he trills and snatches Iwaizumi’s hand. He squeezes it, shaking it with enthusiasm that puts even Bokuto’s handshake to shame. “I’m Lev Haiba. The future ace!”

“Um, nice to me-“

“Oi, calm down,” Yaku scolds, glaring up at Lev. “You’re going to scare Iwaizumi-kun away. He’ll never want to come back.”

Lev, surprisingly, doesn’t argue. As a matter of fact, he ceases his jittering and nods, shyly lowering his head. “Sorry, Iwaizumi-san.”

Iwaizumi doesn’t really understand what the hell just happened. But Yaku looks pleased with himself, and, although Lev seems dejected at first, he recovers from the reprimand awfully quickly. He sticks close by Yaku’s side as they make their way toward the court. It’s a little odd, but the
staggering height difference and familiar way Lev falls into step beside Yaku brings a smile to Iwaizumi’s face.

Just like Yaku and Lev, the other players are slowly moving away, breaking off into pairs so they can begin stretching. Iwaizumi surveys the team, surprised by the varying heights and builds of everyone present. Honestly, he’s intrigued. He knows little to nothing about volleyball.

Seeing so many muscular people in one place, each carrying an aura similar to Oikawa’s, is overwhelming. The unwavering confidence, the sheer power, the combined force enough to bring someone to their knees. *There’s strength in numbers,* Iwaizumi recalls.

And yet… there’s something missing. He can’t quite put his finger on it, but the group seems incomplete at the moment, like an important piece of the team, this seemingly mismatched athletic puzzle, has been misplaced.

Suddenly, the front door to the gym slams open, the resounding clash ringing in Iwaizumi’s ears. He starts, but no one else appears fazed by the chaos that’s literally come crashing into their gym. Two people tumble to the floor, a flailing mess of limbs and angry yelling, wrestling for control in a fight that makes absolutely no sense to Iwaizumi whatsoever.

“Finally,” Oikawa breathes. He rests his hands on his hips and glares in the direction of the newcomers who, upon spotting the furious look in Oikawa’s eyes, cease their fighting. “I was about to call you. I should’ve known you were with Chibi-chan.”

The taller of the two fixes Oikawa with his sharp gaze, frustration evident in his depthless blue eyes. Smooth black hair hangs down in a fringe, tickling his forehead, and his lips are set in what appears to be a permanent scowl. He’s about Oikawa’s height and possesses a similar build, equally as muscular and equally as- maybe even more- intimidating.

“We got a late start.”

Iwaizumi cringes. Yes, there’s definitely something distinctive about this player that sets him apart from Oikawa. His voice carries authority, deep and commanding, perfectly suited to the fire dancing behind his eyes.

“I guess it can’t be helped.” Oikawa sighs again, and Iwaizumi gets the feeling that this is a common occurrence when these two are involved. *Especially* the disgruntled one.

And then there’s the other player.

He’s glowing, just like the sunshine filtering through Iwaizumi’s window earlier that morning, and Iwaizumi’s gaze is instantly drawn to the shock of orange hair and round golden eyes. He steps in front of his angry companion, although he’s a good four inches or so shorter, and folds his arms across his chest.

“Tobio-“ he points at the tall, dark-haired boy behind him and Iwaizumi freezes because he knows that name- ”couldn’t find his gym bag so we had to go back to your dorm and look for it but he forgot his key back at my dorm so we had to go all-“

“Who’s that?”

Tobio loses interest in his defender’s ridiculous retelling of their afternoon and faces Iwaizumi. The walking sunshine’s hand shoots out to grab his arm, but Tobio is already striding toward Iwaizumi.

So this is the infamous ‘Tobio-chan.’ He’s a great deal more ominous in person, that’s for sure.
Oikawa made him sound like a slob, maybe a bit heartless, but he never mentioned his incredible presence.

“Oikawa Hajime.” He blurs before Oikawa can interrupt. “Oikawa’s friend.”

“I see.”

His friend chooses that moment to bound over and join the conversation. “Hi, Iwaizumi-kun! I’m Hinata Shouyou, and this is my, uh, friend. Kageyama Tobio.”

Oikawa’s thankful that Hinata stepped in when he did. Kageyama looks uncomfortable, as if he’s not used to introductions or talking to strangers. Which, if the calloused fingers wrapped loosely around Kageyama’s wrist are any indication, is most likely the case.

“It’s nice of you to come to Oikawa’s practice like this,” Kageyama says, and, to Iwaizumi’s astonishment, sounds genuinely pleased by the development.

Hinata sidles a little closer to Kageyama and nods. His mouth opens, still smiling, but then his jaw snaps shut. His eyes flit to Oikawa and back to Iwaizumi. He brightens, grin so wide that Iwaizumi fears his face may split, and turns, tugging Kageyama in the direction of the court. “Nice to meet you, Iwaizumi-kun!”

“You too,” Iwaizumi replies. Strange.

Hinata’s an open book, the kind of person that wears his emotions proudly on his sleeve. He has nothing to hide. So Iwaizumi can feel that something’s off as soon as he averts his gaze, as soon as he drags Kageyama toward the other stretching players.

Kageyama, on the other hand, is a different story. He’s the antithesis of bright and cheery Hinata, the kind of person who strives to keep every emotion, every secret and unspoken concern, bottled up inside. Iwaizumi enjoys challenges- just look at fucking Oikawa- but Kageyama’s emotional state is nearly impossible to read. Iwaizumi can only hope that he’s made a decent impression considering the fact that Tobio and Oikawa appear to be close.

From then on, the players seem to forget Iwaizumi’s there. They practice several techniques, things that Iwaizumi vaguely remembers reading about. The first twenty minutes are spent on serving the ball over the net, while the rest of the players stand on the receiving side, passing the ball up to Oikawa and Kageyama who take turns catching it.

Iwaizumi gapes at Yaku, at the effortless way he situates his body in front of the ball as it flies over the net, smacking directly into his forearms before making a perfect arc in the air and landing in Oikawa or Kageyama’s palms. The others do a decent job, but Iwaizumi can tell that Yaku has spent countless hours perfecting his technique.

Next, the players practice something called blocking. On either side of the net, they move, varying their steps and hopping straight up in the air, stretching their straightened arms high above their heads. It looks absolutely exhausting; Iwaizumi doesn’t envy them at all. Kuroo and Lev, with their long ass legs, take the least steps but cover the most ground, expansive palms creating a roof of sorts above the net. It, too, seems like the result of extensive practice.

After working on a drill involving diving, the players then arrange themselves in lines: one along the left side of the court, another along the right side, and a significantly smaller line in the middle.

Again, Oikawa and Kageyama alternate, each jumping in to set the ball up for each of the three waiting spikers, switching after each has taken their turn. Iwaizumi picks out Bokuto and Lev first.
Each carefully watches the ball’s trajectory and times their steps based on its height and speed, jumping at precisely the right moment. They, too, make the movements look effortless, palms contacting the ball and slamming it down on the opposite court where Yaku receives, diving across the floor when the attack falls outside of his immediate area.

*They must score the most points,* Iwaizumi resolves, enthralled by their fluid movements.

But that thought process doesn’t last for long. Everything changes when Kageyama steps up to set and, zipping across the court from the middle to the far right-hand side in a few quick strides, Hinata leaps and steals the ball right out of the air. It lands completely out of Yaku’s range with a loud, satisfying *smack.*

Iwaizumi’s jaw drops. Did that really just happen?

Everyone offers a “nice kill” and, as if something magnificent and out of the ordinary hasn’t just happened, return to their normal routine. But Iwaizumi’s attentive; he pays close attention to his surroundings. He is a Researcher, after all, and that’s what they do best.

Quick enough so that no one seems to catch it, Kageyama and Hinata exchange a look that Iwaizumi knows he’s not privy to. It’s special, fond, and definitely the product of years of trust.

Iwaizumi clasps his hand over his mouth.

The playful shoves as they fell to the floor when they arrived, not an ounce of violent intent in their “fighting.” The way Hinata stepped between Oikawa and Kageyama, the way he curled his fingers around Kageyama’s wrist to soothe him, the silent communication and incredible cohesiveness on the court— it finally clicked together in Iwaizumi’s head.

*Oh.*

Iwaizumi really needs to sharpen his skills in the field. Daichi won’t let him live this down if he finds out. Which is why he most certainly won’t.

“Good work, everyone!” Oikawa claps his hands together. “Time to cool down!”

“Alright!” Everyone choruses back, grouping together in the same pairs from earlier. They stretch just like before, talking quietly amongst themselves. The atmosphere changes from one of intensity to one of calm and a startling degree of tranquility.

Iwaizumi is about to stand, maybe even grab Oikawa’s bag for him— only so that they can get out sooner, of course— but stills when Oikawa beckons him closer, jerking his head in the direction of the court.

There’s no way he’s offering…

“What?” Iwaizumi calls back, regarding Oikawa cautiously.

“Why don’t you give it a shot, Iwa-chan?” His smile is playful, teasing, and yet it feels real, the kind of pure smile that few people are fortunate enough to be on the receiving end of. “I’m sure you’re curious.”

He’s got a point; Iwaizumi’s curiosity is most certainly piqued. It’s a common weakness that most Researchers grapple with. Iwaizumi’s logical side decides to conveniently step out whenever he’s given an opportunity like this.
“Dumbass, I told you,” he grumbles, planting his feet, “I’ve never played before.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Oikawa insists. It’s too late. He’s made up his mind and will do anything it takes to get Iwaizumi on the court with a ball in his hand.

“Sure it does.” Iwaizumi’s growing desperate. “I’m terrible.”

“You don’t know that if you’ve never even tried, Iwa-chan.”

Iwaizumi really, without a single doubt in his mind, wants to smack Oikawa because, fuck, his logic is actually sound, and Iwaizumi’s rapidly running out of excuses.

Oikawa’s teammates choose that moment to call out their goodbye’s before slipping out of the gym. He swears that Kuroo and Bokuto wink at him as they leave, possibly Lev as well, while Yaku rolls his eyes and, when Iwaizumi’s eyes meet his, shrugs. Yeah, he likes Yaku.

Kageyama and Hinata are the last to file out, lingering in the doorway. Kageyama is staring both he and Oikawa down, an unreadable expression on his blank face. He looks like he wants to say something, but Hinata latches onto Kageyama and yanks him out the door before he can speak.

“Come on.” Iwaizumi’s limbs feel like stone, heavy and unmoving, and, before he can come to his senses, Oikawa’s right there and grabbing his arm and dragging him onto the court and, oh gods, he feels sick to his stomach.

“Stop,” he protests weakly.

Before Iwaizumi can toss out another pathetic complaint, Oikawa’s placing his hands on his shoulders and pushing down. When Iwaizumi remains stiff and unyielding, Oikawa exhales loudly and changes tactics, circling around to stand behind Iwaizumi instead.

“You have to loosen up a bit,” he encourages, fingers sliding down from Iwaizumi’s shoulders, slowly making their way to his waist. Oikawa’s breath, warm and a lot closer than he’d initially thought, ghosts across the shell of his ear. “Stiffening up like this makes it hard on your joints, especially when you jump and land. The chances of blowing out one of your knees are a lot higher.”

Iwaizumi merely nods. Words have escaped him.

“Now, I’ll demonstrate the three step approach, and then you try it. What do you say, Iwa-chan?” The name flows languidly from Oikawa’s lips, breathed softly against his flushed skin. The feeling’s odd and new but far from unwelcome. A part of him really likes the sensation, the sudden flood of heat through his veins.

“Okay,” he agrees and, thankfully, doesn’t stutter or lose his composure.

Oikawa does exactly as he promised. With the practiced ease of someone who’s performed the steps hundreds, probably thousands, of times before, he strides to the net in three efficient and carefully timed steps. On the final step, he jumps and swings his right arm as if he’s actually hitting a moving ball.

The movement doesn’t quite strike the same cord as Kageyama and Hinata’s bizarre set and spike combination, but it’s impressive, nevertheless. Oikawa’s a setter, after all, and truly shines when he’s tossing to his hitters. That’s when he’s the most incredible, the most breathtaking.

He lands gracefully and makes very little noise for someone of his build and height. It’s
surprisingly beautiful, and Iwaizumi is again reminded of the stars, exploding into brilliance. Powerful and flashy, filling the depths of space with color and light.

“Your turn,” Oikawa encourages, stepping aside.

Iwaizumi feels awfully dull, having to follow up an act like that, but inches toward the attack line anyway. He stares down at his feet. The shoes don’t fit perfectly, a little too big since they actually belong to Oikawa, and Iwaizumi worries that he may trip over his own feet or a wayward shoe lace.

He’s about to take his first step but hesitates. His pride is at stake here, and, well, he’s not thrilled by the idea of gambling with something so precious.

A light touch, fingers pushing right between his shoulder blades, forces him forward, nearly losing his balance. He glances over his shoulder, knowing full well that Oikawa will be right there behind him. And, of course, he is.

“I never pegged you as the nervous type, Iwa-chan,” Oikawa laughs, shaking his head. “There’s nothing to be worried about.”

Iwaizumi knows that- he honestly does- but that doesn’t stop his overactive imagination from conjuring up frightening scenarios, all ending in mortified silence or accidental injuries. If it’ll make Oikawa happy, though, or keep him from whining in the days to come, Iwaizumi decides he should probably do it anyway. Only the resilient survive on alien planets. He’s resilient, right?

He breathes in and acquaints himself with the space between the attack line and net, glancing once more at his feet before assuming position. He thinks back to Oikawa’s form, to Bokuto’s, Lev’s, and, of course, Hinata’s.

Oikawa clears his throat and that’s Iwaizumi’s cue. He takes the leap- literally. With three swift strides forward, he moves, trusting his legs to carry him toward his destination in the proper fashion. And, by some miracle, they do.

There’s more squeaking when he lands than when Oikawa did, but he feels surprisingly confident about his footwork. He tries not to let it show, though; the last time he felt confident in his efforts, he was ridiculed and laughed at.

“Iwa-chan?”

Iwaizumi is immensely happy that he hid his excitement because he doesn’t know what the hell to make of Oikawa’s tone. He tries to ignore the irrational urge to cover his face and slowly turns.

“What now?”

“Are you… are you sure you’ve never played before?” Oikawa’s reaction is easier to interpret now, but it does nothing to settle Iwaizumi’s nerves. He almost sounds scared.

“Of course I’m sure, dumbass,” Iwaizumi growls, “This is the first time I’ve ever set foot on a volleyball court.”

Oikawa fixes Iwaizumi with that intense gaze of his, the very same one from the first time they met, but doesn’t question him further. “Alright… Well, you don’t seem to need any extra help with the approach. So do you want me to set you up? With an actual ball?”

Iwaizumi readily accepts because why not?
A half an hour and several ball carts worth of spikes later, Iwaizumi’s body is practically begging him to stop and give it a chance to relax. He tells Oikawa so, and, although, as a young athlete, he seems like he could easily go for another hour or two, he agrees to call it quits for the night.

Iwaizumi sits heavily on the floor and lays back, staring up at the fluorescent lighting overhead. His lungs burn from exertion and his limbs ache but not in a bad way. Adrenaline continues to pump through his spent body. Sweat slickens his skin, gathering on his forehead, the crooks of his elbows, his chest and small of his back. It’s the weirdest feeling, but he’s starting to understand the appeal of sports the longer he lies there.

“I know this may sound crazy, but you should think about trying out for the team, Iwa-chan,” Oikawa comments, stretching out beside Iwaizumi. They’re less than an arm length apart, and Iwaizumi’s aware of every scant inch between them.

“You’re right, it does sound crazy.”

“So? You’re a fast learner,” Oikawa says, rolling over onto his side to face Iwaizumi, “And I’m the captain so I could always ask the coach. He couldn’t come to practice tonight, but the next time I see him-“

“Oikawa,” Iwaizumi warns. He’s not sure, though, if he’s referring to Oikawa’s rash decision to get him on the team or whether it has more to do with their proximity. Possibly both.

“What’s the worst that could happen?”

“The coach says no,” Iwaizumi replies, casually trying to scoot over so that Oikawa’s not so damned close.

“Exactly! There could be a lot worse.” As if he’s only just realized their nearness, Oikawa inches back a little, a light flush dusting his cheeks. “And I’m sure the rest of the team will love you!”

Iwaizumi groans. There’s just no stopping Oikawa when he’s on a roll. “I can’t believe you.”

“I get that a lot,” Oikawa giggles. He cocks his head to the side, lips quirked in small satisfied smirk. “It’s settled then. I’ll talk to our coach tomorrow and see what he says.”

Iwaizumi’s tired and sore and opts for silence instead of an intelligible response. The second stage is nearly complete, and, as ridiculous as it may seem, joining Oikawa’s team would bring him one step closer to finishing stage two and initiating the notorious stage three.

Chapter End Notes

come cry with me about kageyama and space on tumblr or twitter: @tobiologist
glimpsing the past

Chapter Summary

In which Iwaizumi learns about college scheduling and Oikawa's childhood.

Chapter Notes

first off: I’m so so sorry! I’ve been really busy with school work, especially because it’s almost the end of the semester and finals are coming [shudders]. but I still managed to push through and here we are! earlier than I expected! the next one hopefully won't take as long since summer's right around the corner

also BIG shout out to my two lovely betas, kristi and my crazy ass sister, and everyone who continues to read this and encourage me to keep going. you know who you are! and thanks for all the kudos, comments, and bookmarks! I hope you all enjoy this glimpse into oikawa’s childhood and iwaizumi’s usual dorky antics

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first snowfall of the year comes quietly, bringing with it an inch or two of soft and fluffy white flakes, just as it should.

As much as he may loathe the cold, Oikawa loves snow. Especially harmless flurries that transform the campus into something far more beautiful and scenic, flakes clinging to the sidewalk, to buildings, to cars, to blades of grass and tree branches, as if, even dead, they’ve suddenly sprouted thousands of tiny white flowers.

Oikawa steps out, into the picturesque winter morning, and eagerly lifts his head to the sky, tilting it back and immediately opening his mouth to catch any nearby drifting flakes and let them melt on his tongue. They don’t have a flavor, of course, but he’s been doing it ever since he was a child, when his mother would tease that they tasted like ice cream. Once she’d convinced him that it carried the delicious taste of vanilla, he’d taken it upon himself to catch as many as he could. Sometimes, he and Kuroo went so far as to make a competition out of it. Kageyama, naturally, has always chosen not to participate.

While passing the bus stop, two girls take notice of Oikawa’s game of snowflake catching and join in. They twirl in little circles, arms outstretched, flashing Oikawa secretive smiles, as if they’re also privy to tasting the snow’s hidden flavor, before turning and making their way down the sidewalk once again.

Amazing, how winter seems to bring out a person’s inner child.

During the brief time he waits on the curb, Oikawa manages to catch several flakes. Around twenty or so- yes, he kept track -land on his tongue, which isn’t too bad but certainly has nothing on his current record of one hundred and thirty. And Kuroo’s record of one hundred and thirty-two, the bastard.
Oikawa starts to shiver, as if his body only just realized it’s freezing outside, and buries his face in the plush blue scarf looped around his neck. Thankfully, the bus arrives seconds later.

His earphones sit snugly in his ears, as they always do, and he softly hums the tune to an old pop song, one of his favorites, under his breath. It’s about aliens, more specifically about a girl who falls in love with one, which is probably- okay, it is - the main reason he likes it so much. Oikawa fawned over it for weeks when it first came out, and, needless to say, his friends weren’t the least bit surprised.

The tune carries him all the way from the bus to the classroom. For some odd reason, Oikawa feels more refreshed today. His body doesn’t seem quite as heavy, limbs moving with ease regardless of the hard work they were put through the previous night at practice.

Even Kageyama had noticed. Kageyama. Still bleary and half-asleep, he had mentioned it earlier that morning as Oikawa skipped out the door, laughing at the noticeable jump in Oikawa’s step.

Is all of this… this energy… is it because of Iwa-chan?

He isn’t quite sure but he can’t think of anything else that’s happened recently worthy of such a drastic change in his demeanor. The last time Oikawa remembers feeling like this, Kuroo and Kageyama were stretched out on his bedroom floor, celebrating their university acceptance letters. For weeks, they’d worried over whether all of them would be accepted; and when their acceptances finally arrived, the overwhelming relief, the realization that their plan may actually work out, had them cheering and dancing around Oikawa’s room for about thirty minutes straight without stopping.

But being accepted into college and meeting a mysterious new person in your calculus class are two completely different things.

Iwaizumi’s interesting; he’s unique and quirky and nothing at all like the other students Oikawa’s encountered in the last few months. And, although it makes no sense to Oikawa whatsoever, he feels comfortable around Iwaizumi- as if he’s known him for years. The assortment of athletic shirts he wears even though he’s never played on a sports team a day in his life, the way his brows set when he works on a challenging math problem, the faint smell of fresh cut grass that lingers on his skin- it reminds Oikawa of the nights he set up his telescope in the backyard at home to look for UFO’s.

It’s scary, really. Scary because he has no clue why Iwaizumi feels so familiar. And absolutely terrifying because Oikawa’s not concerned about the whole thing half as much as he should be.

Oikawa tries to focus on humming once again, to drown out the unsettling sensation that follows that particular thought.

Thankfully, the bus pulls to a stop before he can worry over he and Iwaizumi’s sudden closeness for any longer. He steps off and trudges into the building. He yawns, longing for his bed and a couple more hours of sleep, and opens the classroom door, slipping quietly inside. Iwaizumi’s already there, in his usual seat, but-

No one else is there.

Oikawa can’t believe it. He’s a fool, an Iwaizumi-obsessed fool. His stupid one-track mind betrayed him. The second Iwaizumi glances in his direction, Oikawa burns with embarrassment. I don’t have this class on Wednesday’s.
“Oikawa? What’s wrong, dumbass? You look like you’ve sprung a leak,” Iwaizumi teases. His notebook sits proudly on his desk, already open and ready to be scribbled in. Oikawa grudgingly notes that the dumb pencil has made a guest appearance again.

“We don’t have this class today.”

Iwaizumi’s brow furrows. He suddenly doesn’t look quite as pleased with himself. “What?”

“It’s Wednesday. We don’t have class on Wednesday’s, Iwa-chan,” Oikawa reiterates.

“Oh... oh, yeah that’s right.” Iwaizumi laughs, but it sounds a bit off. He bows his head, oddly reminiscent of a disobedient child caught red-handed with his chubby little fingers in the cookie jar. “I forgot.”

Oikawa wants to scold Iwaizumi, tease him for his carelessness, but he’s there, too, so he has no room to talk. Iwaizumi’s clever and won’t pass up the opportunity to call Oikawa out on his bullshit. So Oikawa does the wise thing and keeps his mouth shut.

“Putting together my schedule for the semester was a total pain in the ass. I might have, uh, mixed certain classes up or something,” Iwaizumi blurts, quickly jumping to his feet. He’s obviously rushing and nearly spills all of his backpack’s contents in the process, almost sending his notebook and that pencil flying. Oikawa watches the whole thing intently without saying a word and wishes he’d brought some popcorn along for the show.

“I see,” Oikawa says, employing his best mock serious tone.

“You’re here, too. Why the hell are you picking on me?”

“I didn’t say anything, Iwa-chan.”

“Yeah, but... you were definitely thinking something nasty. I can tell.” Iwaizumi narrows his eyes, shrugging on his backpack. “It’s written all over that smug face of yours.”

Oikawa gasps, exaggerating the gesture as much as possible. “I would never. How dare you accuse me of such a treacherous act, Iwa-chan!”

Iwaizumi’s practically begging to be teased when he gets all frazzled like this. And Oikawa can’t help but seize the opportunity to push Iwaizumi’s buttons, taking pride in all of his taunts.

“Anyway, since you’re here,” Oikawa says with a shrug, “Do you want to come over to my place? I don’t have class until four.”

Iwaizumi glances at the door but doesn’t move. “Well, I...”

“That is,” Oikawa interjects, “if you actually know your schedule for the rest of the day? Iwa-chan doesn’t appear to know where he’s supposed to be.”

“S-shut up! I know exactly where I’m supposed to be.”

“Oh? And where’s that?” Oikawa grins. Iwaizumi’s shoulders tense, marking the grand return of Porcupine Iwa, and Oikawa can’t help but love every second of it. Again, he muses, if Iwa-chan doesn’t want to be teased, he should stop being so cute when he’s flustered.

“Nowhere...” he mumbles.

“No more classes today, how nice,” Oikawa coos.
“I had chemistry earlier.” Iwaizumi’s nose twitches, fingers tensing around his backpack strap.

“That’s no fun.”

“No, it sure as hell isn’t.”

Oikawa gestures at the door, right behind him. “So… if you’re done…?”

“You want to go back to your place?” Iwaizumi replies, a slight tremor in his voice.

Oikawa wonders if he’s nervous about setting foot in the dorms, considering the fact that the apartment he shares with his generous friend is probably far more luxurious. Any place with an individual bathroom and separate bedrooms would seem like the Taj Mahal in comparison.

“Sure, why not? Tobio-chan won’t be there to annoy us, and it’s a lot better than walking around campus until Economics.” He doesn’t actually know whether Kageyama will be gone but chooses not to mention that to Iwaizumi.

Iwaizumi’s not quite as standoffish as before, when Oikawa first asked. He’s settled considerably, shoulders visibly relaxing, hands dropping to his sides. As a matter of fact, if Oikawa looks at just the right angle, the beginnings of a smile almost appear to be taking shape on his lips.

Another victory for Oikawa, possibly?

Oikawa gets in one more dig—because why the hell not— but Iwaizumi’s snappy retort doesn’t have the same bite as usual. Still, Oikawa acts as if it’s the nastiest thing he’s ever heard in his life, trailing behind a much happier Iwaizumi as they make their way out to the bus stop.

This is the first time Iwaizumi hasn’t been surprised by something related to Oikawa.

He and Kageyama’s room practically screams volleyball. Every inch of available wall space is taken up by volleyball posters or some sort of movie or television series poster that Iwaizumi doesn’t recognize. A couple lone balls are stowed away in their shared closet with a few more sitting idly in the space between their beds. And each side (because Oikawa and Kageyama have made it clear there are separate sides) has its own set of drawers and a desk.

He never would’ve expected Kageyama’s drawers to be neater than Oikawa’s, what with the way Oikawa talks about “lazy little Tobio-chan,” but, when he glances at Oikawa’s drawers, there’s no mistaking it. A shirt or two pokes out from the bottom drawer, as if they’d been hastily shoved into place, while Kageyama’s looks… well, it’s spotless, really. Not a single thing is out of place.

The difference in desk cleanliness is basically about the same. Oikawa’s workspace doesn’t appear any neater than his drawers. An imposing stack of notebooks and books are pushed up against his chest of drawers’, next to a printer and what can only be Oikawa’s laptop, covered in assorted stickers ranging from the school’s emblem to a volleyball to a green misshapen head that Iwaizumi’s almost certain is supposed to be a…

No. No. He’s being paranoid.

“Iwa-chan?”

Iwaizumi stills but successfully manages to play it off, as if he hasn’t just had a minor freak out
about a fucking sticker, of all things. “Yeah?”

“My bed doesn’t bite, you know,” Oikawa teases, “Go ahead and sit down.”

His words are meant to soothe but have the opposite effect. Iwaizumi doesn’t know what he was thinking, agreeing to come here like this. Their calculus class is the longest Iwaizumi’s ever been around humans without Daichi by his side, and he sure as hell hasn’t been stuck alone, in a confined space for an extended period of time, with one. What are they supposed to do for the next few hours? There’s no way they’ll spend all that time talking. Of course, it is Oikawa so who knows.

“Sure,” he mumbles awkwardly and perches himself on the edge of Oikawa’s bed. He hadn’t noticed the sheets when he first walked in, but now he can’t take his eyes off of them. It’s adorned with more of those bulbous heads and tiny… fuck, are those planets?

“Ah, let’s see,” Oikawa says, stepping over to his desk, “We certainly have a lot of choices here. I pretty much have all of the lines memorized so it’s more of a matter of what you want to watch, Iwa-chan.” He turns back to Iwaizumi, using his hip for leverage as he leans against his creaky desk chair. “Preferences?”

“Oh, um, I don’t know. I’m not much of a movie person, to be honest.” He really isn’t. His people don’t have a flourishing movie franchise. Or, well, a movie franchise in general.

“Goodness,” Oikawa sighs, shaking his head, “You need to learn to expand your horizons.”

Iwaizumi rolls his eyes. “Can’t we do something else instead? Like… I don’t know.”

Come on, dumbass, think. Iwaizumi knows to tread lightly. Oikawa’s a human being, after all. A human being that absolutely can’t find out about his true identity.

“We could just… talk?”

“Talk,” Oikawa deadpans.

Brilliant, just brilliant. Of course there’s no risk of disclosing important information during a conversation. Iwaizumi wants to bury himself ten feet under the ground for being such an idiot.

“Yeah like…”

“Don’t think too hard, Iwa-chan, you might hurt yourself.” Oikawa grins as if it’s the funniest thing in the world. Which it definitely isn’t.

“Hey, watch it!” Iwaizumi feels his cheeks reddening. “I was trying to say that we should take this time to… get to know each other better?”

Surprisingly, Oikawa doesn’t shoot another insult his way. From where Iwaizumi’s sitting, he’s almost certain he sees an enormous ship and the Milky Way galaxy on the cover of the nearest DVD case. Oikawa freezes, hand poised over the extensive collection Iwaizumi couldn’t believe he didn’t see sooner, and glances over his shoulder, expression neutral. “Really?”

“Well, yeah, we’ve only known each other for a couple days.” Iwaizumi shrugs, suddenly feeling embarrassed and very small under Oikawa’s scrutinizing gaze. “It’d be nice to get to know you better. Like maybe something about volleyball. Since you’re so into it and everything.”

Before Iwaizumi can say another word, Oikawa’s there, right there, practically throwing himself
onto his bed. Iwaizumi’s lucky enough to avoid the jumble of flopping limbs that comes crashing right into his personal space.

It’s the reaction he hoped for, but, damn, Oikawa looks downright thrilled by Iwaizumi’s idea. Like a lazy cat, he stretches out on the bed, resting on his stomach, elbows bent with his face resting in his palms. Iwaizumi’s seen him smile before but not like this.

“Iwa-chan’s interested in my volleyball career? I must say, I’m a little surprised.”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” Iwaizumi bites back defensively.

“I’m teasing you,” Oikawa replies lightly. He bends his legs, kicking his feet idly. “You take me too seriously sometimes, Iwa-chan.”

“Dumbass, it’s not like I’ve known you all my life or something.”

Oikawa’s legs suddenly stop moving. His lips purse, as if something about the comment doesn’t sit well with him. Weird. “Ah, good point,” Oikawa agrees, his entire expression quickly shifting.

The easy atmosphere quickly dissipates without warning, and the two are left to deal with an uncomfortable silence the likes of which Iwaizumi’s almost certain he’s never had to deal with before. Smoothing things over really isn’t his forte either so he just… sits there, trying not to stare at Oikawa, silently hoping he’ll be the one to fix this strained situation.

To his relief, Oikawa does just that.

“So, volleyball?” Oikawa finally asks, lazily, seeming to savor the word.

“Uh, yeah,” Iwaizumi replies uncertainly, “Volleyball.”

Oikawa’s smile widens, eyes bright and expressive. “Well, I guess it all started when I saw my first game…”

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Oikawa’s only six years old, very impressionable and very fascinated by the world around him, when he sees his first volleyball match.

Wide-eyed, gaping at the television screen in his family’s living room, he can’t bring himself to look away. Players dart across the court, quick on their feet, every movement fluid and carefully calculated. The game play appears to be ingrained in their bodies, and Oikawa’s totally entranced.

The flashy hitters catch his attention first. Unlike the defensive players, their actions are explosive, powerful, bodies leaping into the air as their arm swings, slamming the ball down. There’s something graceful about the way they move, especially their footwork, and Oikawa briefly pictures himself in their shoes. It’s certainly a nice image. The rest of the team would praise his attacks, an incredible burst of energy and enthusiasm spurring them on to score more points. The crowd shouts his name, choruses of “Let’s go, Tooru!” echoing throughout the gym.

But, as he watches one of the wing spikers approach the net, Oikawa’s gaze is drawn to the team’s setter. His father had played as a kid so Oikawa knows about the positions and has a pretty good grasp of each player’s designated job on the court. From what he remembers, setter’s play a major role in controlling game play and can, essentially, make or break a team.
Before, he hadn’t thought much of them. Their duties seem awfully boring. Why wouldn’t someone set out to be a hitter? Why wouldn’t you want to be the person who scored the most offensive points for the team? At the time, his thirst for attention was at its peak, and he’d happily accept any opportunity to be in the spotlight.

And yet… as the game unfolds, his attention slowly but surely turns from the attackers to the setter.

He’s tall with legs that seem to stretch on forever and equally long arms, fingers wrapped in several layers of tape, sandy blond hair plastered to his sweaty forehead. The ball deflects off of the libero’s forearms, sails in to the air, and briefly settles between his fingers before connecting with the waiting hitter’s palm.

The footwork is different and definitely not as eye-catching, but Oikawa’s still enraptured by the beautiful arc of the ball as it flies toward the spiker, the elegant bend of the setter’s fingers and curve of his spine as he backsets to the wing spiker behind him. He receives every pass sent his way- or at least those that he can- and carefully monitors the ball’s path, never once taking his eyes off it.

He’s calm and collected and- at least to Oikawa- very cool.

Amazing… Setters are amazing! Oikawa excitedly scoots closer to the screen, disregarding his mother’s angry pleas from the kitchen.

Right then and there, he sets out to become a setter. But not just any setter. He wants to become the mastermind of the team, the schemer, the player who knows their hitters like the back of their hand.

So, after playing volleyball for a couple years in elementary school, it doesn’t come as much of a surprise when Oikawa decides to continue in middle school.

It’s his third year, and, although he wished for better, his team emerges as the prefecture’s runner-up, second only to the middle school that’s consistently won for the past few years. He positively detests the reigning champions’ ace so the loss hurts even more than it normally would.

But, by some miracle, a surreal moment quite like something from his recent dreams, Oikawa’s awarded the “Best Setter” award. His fingers tremble, his legs momentarily forget how to move, and, to his embarrassment, he nearly drops the plaque when the announcer hands it over.

He peers down in amazement at the glistening surface. This is what he’s wanted. This is what he’s been hoping to get his hands on from the moment he first set foot on a volleyball court, from the moment he settled in front of his television screen and watched his first match.

His teammates cry over their loss, and Oikawa’s tears flow freely, too, but he can’t bring himself to completely break down the way he might’ve if not for the plaque clutched to his chest. He’s not leaving the stadium empty-handed. Plus, he knows that his team fought hard and has nothing to be ashamed of.

The following summer, as it always seems to, flies by. Oikawa doesn’t remember much, but he’s almost certain there was a sand court, a group of local boys, and an innocent outdoor volleyball that took quite a beating.

But, before he knows it, the sweltering heat gives way to cooler weather, and high school swallows him whole. He joins the school team as soon as possible and eagerly accepts the setter position.
A couple weeks of practice later, and things seem normal enough. That is, until the first match. That’s when things get… interesting.

His name is spoken in whispers, a name that Oikawa vaguely recalls hearing tossed around even in middle school. “A prodigy,” they call him. “A genius.” “The King of the Court.”

Of course, he doesn’t remember competing against a player of this caliber before. And he’d definitely recognize someone like that. Another formidable setter? In the same prefecture? Although they’ve never actually met, they might as well be rivals already.

And, during that match, the first of Oikawa’s high school career, they finally do meet.

It’s only a scrimmage, but Oikawa senses Kageyama Tobio’s presence almost instantly. He walks by Oikawa’s team as they warm up, spares them nothing more than a passing glance, and takes his place near the net as he, too, begins to stretch.

Oikawa feels himself staring, but there’s just something about this “genius.” It’s as if he’s been made to stand on the court, as if he were designed specifically for the setter position. The thought’s incredibly unsettling- especially because it crosses Oikawa’s mind before he’s even seen Kageyama play.

Usually, he tells his intuition to piss off. But not this time. He should fear this player; he’s right to be worried. Oikawa’s always loved to play, but Kageyama’s arrival excites him in an entirely new way, urges him to compete, to play to his full potential.

His mind drifts to the reigning champions in middle school. Was that the same? No… somehow, this is different. Kageyama’s his own unique threat. And Oikawa can’t wait to crush him.

The game, just like the scorching heat of summer, seems to fly by right before Oikawa’s eyes. One moment, he’s setting up a quick for his middle blocker and, the next, he’s trapped in the huddle as his team celebrates their win.

It’s not a landslide of a win. The point difference in all three sets ranges from a measly two points in the first to a more staggering (and yet still miniscule) five in the final set. The closeness shows how evenly matched they were and makes their victory all the more satisfying.

Oikawa’s practically giddy when he reaches for Kageyama’s hand. He wants to shake the King’s hand. He wants to scare him, to prove his worth and teach this bratty competitor what it really means to be a winning team’s setter.

“Good game,” Oikawa trills, shaking Kageyama’s hand. His palms are sweaty, fingers long, grip strong. Oikawa expected no less.

But it’s not the handshake of an arrogant King.

“Good game,” Kageyama echoes and pulls his hand back.

Oikawa’s left gaping at the space Kageyama had previously filled. It doesn’t make sense. He’s supposed to embody a heartless dictator. He’s supposed to treat his other players like meager peasants. By no means whatsoever is he supposed to accept defeat this easily.

It's frustrating- infuriating- and Oikawa spends the next few weeks practicing harder.

The next time they face off, Oikawa’s sure that he’ll see the wicked, selfish side of Kageyama people spoke of in the past. He’ll have a legitimate reason to dislike him, a reason other than his
own fear. But that’s not the case at all. Not even close.

As a matter of fact, it’s worse than he could’ve ever anticipated.

Sunshine, that’s the first thing that comes to mind when Oikawa sees the new middle blocker. The second is that he’s positively annoying, almost as much as Kageyama, and that, also like the stubborn child prodigy, he’s the kind of person Oikawa feels compelled to crush.

With thick orange hair and wide golden eyes like that of a baby crow, he’s jumpy and quick and, unfortunately, seems to possess an unlimited supply of stamina. It’s as if he could play for hours and hours on end without getting tired. Terrifying… just as scary as Kageyama.

And, because Oikawa obviously has the worst luck in the world, things don’t get any better from that point on.

Kageyama’s team has always been solid. Their defense is reliable, their offense is aggressive- they truly have the makings of a successful team. A year or two of playing together will likely do wonders for them.

Then, only a few minutes after game play has begun, it happens. Yes- it.

The libero, an exceptional player, passes the ball up to Kageyama. Oikawa expects him to set the outside hitter, a much stronger attacker than the tiny middle blocker, and urges the blockers to get into position.

But Kageyama- stupid little genius Kageyama- sets a quick toss to the middle instead. The little fiery hitter comes out of nowhere, leaping into the air and spiking the ball straight down, directly into the center of the opposite court. Oikawa’s side of the court.

Slowly, Oikawa turns, eyes wide and bulging out of his skull. He’s seen a lot of unbelievable things, volleyball or not. He’s watched his friend Kuroo pull off the kind of things teenage boys dream of. Like the time he raided his parents’ alcohol cabinet and dragged Oikawa and several other volleyball players to their own “party” since they hadn’t been invited to the one down the street. Or the time he helped rescue a cat from a tree, receiving gifts in return from several women in the neighborhood who now adore him and see him as some sort of young feline hero.

Nothing, not even Kuroo’s uncanny ability to accomplish the unexpected, can compare to this middle blocker’s agility, to the graceful way he contacts the ball and sends it smashing down, down, right between two defensive players. Neither of them, experienced as they are, have the chance to react and stand gaping at the ball, just like Oikawa and every other player on their side of the net. Even the spectators go silent.

A few seconds of stunned silence later, Kageyama’s team explodes with sound and movement, surrounding Kageyama and the surprisingly formidable middle hitter, drowning them in praise and encouraging pats on the back.

Oikawa scowls in their direction. Meanwhile, the rest of his team attempts to recover from their shock, shooting confused glances at each other, and, of course, at Oikawa. He’s the captain so they expect him to explain this ridiculous situation. Which- lucky him- he has absolutely no semblance of an explanation for in the first place.

Who was this guy? Where the hell had he come from?

Sadly, Oikawa loses to Kageyama and this new volleyball monstrosity who he’ll later come to know as Hinata Shouyou or- as he likes to call him- Chibi-chan.
A couple years later and both Oikawa and Kageyama are both nearing the end of their high school careers. As crazy as it may sound, they’ve somehow gone from childish bickering and name calling their first year to civilized conversations. Or at least as close to that as two people in their situation can get.

It’s weird and doesn’t really settle well with Oikawa, but he chooses to accept the odd friendship they’ve formed, likely the result of years of volleyball camps, competitive matches, and random meetups. He’s seen more of Kageyama than he would’ve cared to had someone asked him when he began his career as a high school athlete.

But, in a strange way, Kageyama’s sort of grown on Oikawa. They certainly don’t have the same relationship as he and Kuroo, who lived next door to each other since before elementary school. And yet this twisted love-hate relationship with Kageyama still works, this ebb and flow of rage and pride, even if it makes little to no sense. Oikawa himself doesn’t understand how they’ve managed to stick together for this long.

There’s no point in worrying over it, though; it is what it is, he supposes.

It’s a warm day when they decide to meet. The sun hangs high in the midday sky, shining with dazzling clarity. Summer is right around the corner, looming over every student’s head. It calls to them in the late hours of the night through the cicadas and locusts, through the toads, through the heat soaking into everyone’s skin during the day.

Oikawa craves summer almost as much as he craves feeling a volleyball in his hand. Which, strangely enough, is another thing Oikawa apparently has in common with Kageyama.

“Remember what Kuroo said the other day?” Kageyama drawls, and, for once, is the first to speak.

“About next year? Of course I remember, Tobio-chan.” Oikawa’s popsicle is beginning to melt, the sticky blue syrupy substance gliding down the stick and over his fingers. He glares angrily at it.

“He wants to get an apartment.”

“But your mom won’t let you do that.”

“Well… no, I know that. She wants me to live in one of the dorms.” At this, Oikawa shudders. And not because of the popsicle.

“So does mine. At least that’s what she said the last time she actually came home,” Kageyama mumbles. His own icy treat- an ice cream cone- doesn’t seem to be making quite as much of a mess.

“Looks like we’re in the same boat then, Tobio-chan. Why do you look so glum? You get to room with me!”

Kageyama leers at Oikawa- actually leers at him. “I thought I’d be able to room with…” He stops midway through the sentence, face scrunching up.

“With?” Oikawa encourages.

“Sh… Shouyou.”

Ah. So that’s what it is. Now Kageyama’s pouting made a lot more sense.

“Oh, Tobio-chan, I’m sure you can still room together.”
“That’s the thing.” Kageyama charges on undeterred. “I think it’ll be better if I don’t room with him. Not yet.”

Oikawa blinks. Had he heard that right? “I don’t think I follow.”

“Isn’t it true that you can get tired of someone if you live together too soon after you… you know.”

“No, I don’t believe I do.” Oikawa honestly has no idea what the hell Kageyama’s getting at.

“After you get together.” He hesitates. “And stuff.”

Oikawa can’t help the little giggle that slips out. “’Stuff,’ Tobio-chan? Don’t you just mean dating?”

“It’s not like that,” Kageyama quickly adds. “We’re not like that. It’s weird. You probably wouldn’t get it.”

_He has a point_, Oikawa muses. He rarely understands what’s going on between those two. “If you say so,” Oikawa sighs. He doesn’t have time to delve into Kageyama’s personal life. He has enough trouble with his own.

“So, what you’re saying,” Oikawa wonders, “is that you want to room with me because you already know I drive you insane?”

At first, Oikawa thinks Kageyama may deny the accusation. He seems thoughtful, turning the question over in his mind for a few seconds, before responding, the closest thing to a wicked grin quirking up the edges of his lips.

“Yeah, basically.”

If there’s one thing Iwaizumi has learned so far since coming to Earth, it’s that he doesn’t like feelings.

Not that he didn’t like hearing about Oikawa’s childhood or about how he got into volleyball; quite the opposite, actually.

What he _doesn’t_ like is the ache in his chest, the yearning, the desire to be a part of Oikawa’s story, like Kuroo and Kageyama. He doesn’t like being jealous of others, especially two people he barely knows, and he definitely doesn’t like the sense that something’s missing from the story—something important. And, as if all of that weren’t bad enough, he has the strangest and most irrational fear that not even Oikawa himself knows what’s missing from his brief excerpt from the _The Life and Times of Oikawa Tooru._

_What the hell?_

Iwaizumi needs alcohol, a strong, knock you flat on your ass drink. He’s so glad humans created a beverage to momentarily numb your pain and dull your senses. The idea of sitting in his apartment, alone, drinking all of his worries away, seems awfully tempting at the moment.

If he could just make heads and tails of these random floods of uncertainty and confusion, he wouldn’t feel like this—like shit. This is exactly why his people don’t fuck with emotions. _Way_ too much trouble. Unnecessary trouble.
Suddenly, Iwaizumi remembers that he’s not actually in his fantasy world, alone with a glass of scotch or even a nice cold beer. He’s in Oikawa’s dorm room. Sitting right next to him—on his bed. And the person in question is staring at him like he’s gone insane.

“Iwa-chan? Are you okay?”

Quick, you have to come up with something quick, dumbass. Frantic, Iwaizumi scans the wall he’d been absentmindedly staring at. There, right above both Oikawa and Kageyama’s chests of drawers, is a poster.

“Oh, yeah,” he manages to respond, “just wondering whose poster that is.”

Oikawa quirks his eyebrows, clearly skeptical, but turns anyway. He follows the direction of Iwaizumi’s gaze and, once spotting his target, grins. “Mine, of course. It’s from one of the old Star Wars movies.”

Iwaizumi stills. Wait…

“What’s that about?”

Oikawa’s jaw drops. It’s melodramatic and so very Oikawa. If Iwaizumi weren’t freaking out, he’d probably find it kind of endearing. “What’s Star Wars? Oh, Iwa-chan, it’s only one of the greatest science fiction franchises of the twentieth century!”

Iwaizumi tries not to bolt right then and there. Fucking Oikawa. He’s screwed. Why—why—did it have to be science fiction?

“The movies are amazing. There’s aliens and action and science and— you need to watch it, Iwa-chan!” Oikawa gushes. The mattress bounces beneath them as Oikawa speaks.

He keeps going, too, but Iwaizumi stops listening the second the word “alien” passes Oikawa’s lips.

Don’t panic. Don’t fucking panic.

Aliens—really? What would Oikawa say if he knew Iwaizumi were one? What would Oikawa say if he knew Iwaizumi had chosen him to be his Subject? What would Oikawa do?

You need to get the hell out of here. It kind of sounds like Diachi’s voice, which is totally, absolutely, normal and not weird at all.

He should’ve known when he saw those damned stickers on Oikawa’s laptop, when he noticed his bed sheets, and the extensive collection of science fiction posters lining the walls and movies stacked on the shelves above Oikawa’s desk. How could he have been so careless?

Iwaizumi’s lungs seem to collapse, every new breath suddenly much harder to draw than the last. His heart pounds rapidly in his chest. Adrenaline pumps through his veins, and the room’s tilting, spinning, like he’s already indulged in the alcohol he’d been fantasizing about earlier.

“Oh, shit,” Iwaizumi blurs, abruptly jumping to his feet. “I just remembered.” He smacks his forehead for emphasis. “I’m such a dumbass. I do have another class today.”

Oikawa stares up at him, still gaping. “Iwa— you do?”

“Yep. Totally forgot. Probably because I can’t keep track of a schedule to save my life. Right?” He
chuckles weakly. Oikawa, sadly, doesn’t find it funny.

“Oh…” Oikawa’s voice is little more than a whisper.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” Iwaizumi says. He grips the door knob in hopes that it’ll ground him. And that it’ll help force him out the door before Oikawa manages to convince him to stay.

But apparently there’s no need.

Instantly, Oikawa transforms right before Iwaizumi’s very eyes. The dejected college student becomes the exuberant dreamer, the vibrant young star, almost immediately. The grimace becomes a grin (but it doesn’t quite reach his eyes), the slumped shoulders raise (definitely forced), and the hand lying in his lap raises, fingers unfurling to offer Iwaizumi a wave (his hand appears to tremble).

For once, Iwaizumi wishes he were more oblivious, that he didn’t notice everything.

“Bye, Iwa-chan!” Oikawa chimes, but, to Iwaizumi’s ears at least, it’s lifeless and cold, rough around the edges.

Grudgingly, Iwaizumi waves back and slips out of the room. And, as much as he wants to, he doesn’t look back.

Thankfully, he knows where he needs to go.

*Daichi will know what to do.*

Chapter End Notes

*come cry with me about kageyama and space on tumblr or twitter: @tobiologist*
the two week lull

Chapter Summary

In which Oikawa worries and Daichi is one hell of a Mentor.

Chapter Notes

finally, here’s chapter 4! I’m so so so sorry that this took me so long. a little thing called finals interfered and, sadly, there’s nothing I can do about those. but it paid off in the end because I came out with the grades I wanted. aaaand, better yet, it’s summer now so problems like that won’t come up again for the next couple months this chapter is kind of a filler chapter of sorts. but there’s a lot of important information! especially regarding the aliens. there’s also some more Kageyama and some dorky volleyball players and, for the first time, some Daichi POV (aka the last scene)

yet again, I’d like to thank my fabulous beta’s for always looking my work over and thank my readers who have stuck around even though real life likes to keep me from consistently posting chapters. you all are the best, and I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Aliens? Really?”

Iwaizumi stalks past the couch for what’s probably the hundredth time that night. The barely audible squeak of his shoes on the hardwood floors fill the otherwise silent room. Silent only because, surprisingly enough, Daichi hasn’t said a single word since the whole pacing thing begun. Mentors are usually known for being overly opinionated, outspoken to the point of annoying the absolute shit out of anyone that’s stuck with them. Daichi’s no exception.

“I can’t believe this!” Iwaizumi carries on.

“This is ridiculous!” Iwaizumi passes the coffee table yet again.

Daichi nods.

“I can’t believe… why does it have to be fucking aliens, of all things?”

Another nod.

“Why couldn’t he just stick to volleyball? Why couldn’t he like something normal? Like…”

Iwaizumi pauses, eyes narrowing. “I don’t even know. I feel like I’m going insane.”

Daichi, attempting to act the part of the wise sage, says nothing and merely pats the empty space beside him on the couch. Iwaizumi falters, looking like he’d rather continue to pace for the next couple hours instead, but eventually concedes to sinking into the brown leather cushions.
“Are you done now?” Daichi asks, but it’s more of a command than a question. More of a “that’s enough” or maybe a harsher “be quiet and sit the hell down.” Daichi’s practically a pro at this by now; he knows how to handle Iwaizumi’s bitching and moaning.

Instead of answering Daichi, Iwaizumi buries his face in his hands and slowly drags his fingers through his hair. He draws in a shuddering breath and settles even deeper into the couch, if at all possible. The room feels a lot warmer than it usually does, like every nearby light has decided to focus its unwelcome heat on him. Iwaizumi’s skin itches, and he gets the strongest urge to stand back up and resume his pacing. If he’s not moving, he worries that his body will cave in on itself and implode, turning him into a small-scale version of one of the supernovas he loves so much.

“I feel like I say this a lot but,” Daichi starts carefully, “I think you’re overreacting.”

“I wish,” Iwaizumi grumbles miserably, briefly closing his eyes. “I’m so screwed.”

“And why’s that?”

Iwaizumi hates when Daichi does this. He answers with another question instead of getting straight to the point. He dances around his argument as if it’s some ferocious beast he worries may devour him if he gets too close too soon, like the scary brutes on distant rocky planets. Typical of Mentors, turning every conversation or piece of advice into a challenge or riddle.

Iwaizumi’s hands drop heavily into his lap. “Because Oikawa’s my best option. He’s intelligent, athletic, dynamic, healthy… well, okay, he seems booksmart, and I think he’s healthy. I don’t really know that last one for sure. I leave that shit to the Medics. But still—”

“Ah, so you don’t want to consider a different Subject.”

_Wipe that smug look off your face._ Iwaizumi glances away. “No… no, Oikawa’s the perfect Subject for this.”

“For this? I think what you mean to say is that he’s the perfect Subject for you.”

Immediately, Iwaizumi turns on Daichi, eyes wide. “What?”

Daichi merely sighs, and Iwaizumi knows that he won’t like what his Mentor has to say.

“I mean,” Daichi continues, grudgingly, as if he hates the words just as much as Iwaizumi does, “that I think you’re looking at this wrong way. I don’t think it’s a matter of whether Oikawa’s the right Subject. It’s more of an issue of you accepting the fact there are other people out there.”

Iwaizumi purses his lips and regards Daichi suspiciously. “But finding another Subject that fits all the criteria… at this short notice… that’s a gamble I don’t think I’m willing to take.”

“You have around ten thousand potential candidates to choose from, Hajime.” Aggravation creeps into Daichi’s voice. “I’m sure you’ll find someone else.”

“But what if—“

“There are always ‘what if’s.’” Daichi interjects. “You’re trying to avoid the real issue here.”

“Daichi…”

Iwaizumi and Daichi rarely ever fight. It’s probably been a year since they last fought. And Iwaizumi knows for a fact it was over some ridiculousness that didn’t actually matter in the grand
scheme of things. As a matter of fact, none of the other passengers found it suspicious or weird when they returned to their normal routine a couple days later, as if nothing had happened.

So there’s nothing to worry about. Iwaizumi knows better; they won’t fight. Daichi absolutely hates conflict.

“Well, I suppose it’s too late,” Daichi mutters, cryptic as ever. He turns away as he says it, averting his gaze to the painting on the far wall, staring intently at the brushstrokes as if they hold the solutions to their problems.

“Please, not tonight, Daichi. I need your help.” Iwaizumi feels the desperation seep into his voice, but he can’t seem to stop it. He really is desperate. And Daichi’s the only person he can turn to.

Daichi heaves a sigh heavier than the invisible weight bearing down on his shoulders. He quietly climbs to his feet, finally taking his eyes off the greens and blues of the room’s only art piece, and glances at Iwaizumi.

“I know that you haven’t known him long, Hajime,” he intones, and, for the first time since they settled here on Earth, Iwaizumi notices the dark circles beneath Daichi’s eyes. “But this isn’t the only mission I’ve ever taken on. I’ve taught several people, just like you, and I know how this goes.”

The room suddenly feels smaller, colder, nothing at all like the welcoming space Iwaizumi remembers from the sweet and softer morning hours.

“I said it’s too late because it is.” Daichi hesitates. “You’re already too attached.”

As if on cue, Iwaizumi’s “phone” vibrates in his pocket. He doesn’t expect it, and the sudden sound nearly sends him jumping out of his own skin. Guiltily, he reaches into his jeans and pulls out the traitorous device.

He stares down at the displayed name for what feels like an eternity before he registers Daichi’s voice.

“Oikawa?”

“Well…” Iwaizumi wants to scream. He doesn’t even remember giving the pesky bastard his number. But, considering what Oikawa’s number is saved under, Iwaizumi can only assume that he somehow got a hold of it while Iwaizumi was over at his dorm and added it without his newest “friend” knowing. Probably when he went to the bathroom. Fucking Oikawa.

To: Iwaizumi

From: Oikawa aka Your Fave Person

*look who has your number now, iwa-chan (¬_¬)~*

Why, just why, did he have to pick Oikawa again?

“Oh, Hajime.” Daichi’s response oozes with pity, like Iwaizumi’s some helpless animal, the kind that can barely get from place to place because of a gimpy leg. He then has the audacity to smile at
Iwaizumi.

“It looks like you’re stuck with him.”

Two weeks.

Oikawa sets Kuroo a quick in the middle. It’s a bit short, not quite synced with Kuroo’s movements, but he hits it nevertheless, like the consistent hitter he’s known for being.

Two weeks.

That’s how long it’s been since that awful night, the night Iwaizumi came back to Oikawa’s dorm and ended up running off early, offering a weak and completely unbelievable excuse about having class as he practically sprinted out the door.

The unfamiliar pain in Oikawa’s chest nearly forced him to chase after Iwaizumi, but he quickly stifled it. Rather than potentially make a fool out of himself, Oikawa stayed sitting on his bed and drew his knees in against his chest, peering down at the distorted alien heads scattered across his blanket.

He’d never intended to scare Iwaizumi off. As a matter of fact, he’d hoped that Iwaizumi would see his collection and be the first to… well, it didn’t matter. His wishful thinking had gotten him nowhere.

He hadn’t expected Iwaizumi to talk to him again after everything that happened. Oikawa had anticipated the curt nods exchanged between old friends, the kind who had a sudden falling out and never managed to sort out the unspoken problems that had destroyed their relationship.

The day after, though, Iwaizumi amazed Oikawa by shooting a quick “hey” his way as he slipped into his usual seat. Oikawa stared and gaped and, okay, he probably should’ve said something back like, oh, “Hi” maybe, but words had totally escaped him. Worse yet, as class started, Oikawa couldn’t help but notice that the conversations they exchanged were short-lived, a little awkward, as if the bizarre sense of familiarity Oikawa had felt around Iwaizumi had been nothing more than a figment of his imagination. It was incredibly disconcerting and did a surprising number on Oikawa’s ego.

And, although no one on Oikawa’s team seems to have noticed yet, the tension between he and Iwaizumi has been affecting his playing.

Subtle differences, that’s all they are. Like the intensity of his jump serves and the effectiveness of his tips. Like the height of his quick sets, a height that he’s become quite accustomed to.

Long before Oikawa settled on the same college as Kuroo, back in middle school when they still grappled with gangly limbs and the newness of every technique, Oikawa had needed help with his sets and, with no one else to turn to, constantly dragged Kuroo down to the sand court at the end of the block to practice.

Many sets later and the height’s basically ingrained in Oikawa’s body. He doesn’t even have to consciously think about it anymore.

“Back!” Kageyama calls. As the team’s other setter, he has to practice hitting from the right side. On occasion, they may use him as an attacker depending on the plays they decide to run.
Two weeks. The words echo in Oikawa’s head.

Two weeks of stilted conversation, weak attempts at bickering, and uncomfortably brief chains of text messages, all spanning the entire fourteen day period. Fourteen long, long days without any sort of progress. Their friendship had hit a wall of sorts. A tall, looming wall much like the block of the dreaded Date Tech from Oikawa’s high school years.

But Oikawa’s the setter, isn’t he? He’s supposed to help others get around that wall. What good is he if he can’t do the same when his relationships encounter an obstacle?

He sets the ball back to Kageyama. He knows from experience that the other setter prefers it closer to the net, a shorter set but not as low as the quicks Oikawa normally sets to the middle.

The warm weight of the volleyball settles in his fingers for a few seconds and his spine curves, knees bending and extending, as he sends it to Kageyama. He doesn’t have to turn to know that Kageyama effortlessly spikes the ball. It’s in his nature as a prodigy. Oikawa struggles not to roll his eyes at the thought.

Kageyama lands softly, just as a hitter should, so Oikawa barely registers the sound of his feet touching solid ground once again. Once he detects the telltale squeak of Kageyama turning on his heel, Oikawa pivots to face him.

“Was that high enough? I’m always worried I set you too low, Tobio-chan.” Oikawa flashes Kageyama one of his trademark grins, bright and cheery with a side of asshole- only if you squint, of course.

“Yeah, maybe a little lower.” Kageyama shrugs.

Oikawa takes that as a “great job, you just keep doing you” and assumes his position, ready for the next pass from Yaku. But Kageyama, a man of very few words, isn’t done yet.

“I’m actually more worried about your other sets,” Kageyama continues, taking a step closer. Sweat slicks his forehead and droplets cling eagerly to the greasy strands plastered to his face. Oikawa reluctantly notes that it still doesn’t make him look any less attractive. “The middle sets, especially for Lev, are off. So are your sets to the outside.”

“Oh? Is that so?”

“He has a point, you know,” Lev interjects.

Oikawa’s head whips around so fast that he’s surprised he doesn’t get whiplash. “What?”

In typical Lev fashion, he flushes, embarrassed for a grand total of maybe ten seconds, before he schools his features, trying to appear as nonchalant about the whole thing as possible. “It’s nothing. You’re probably just tired since you’re getting back into the swing of things, getting up early for class and all that fun stuff.”

Lev’s argument, oddly enough, makes a lot of sense. Sadly, Oikawa knows it’s not the only reason his playing’s been off. He chooses to keep that information to himself, though.

“Oh, probably so, Haiba-chan.” Oikawa clenches his jaw, struggling to maintain his smile. And Lev, in all of his naïve glory, buys it.

“Yeah, see? You’ll be fine,” Lev chimes, clearly proud of himself, “I wouldn’t worry about it, Kageyama-kun.”
Yaku meets Oikawa’s gaze through the net. They’re not all that close, considering they only just met the previous semester, but Yaku’s big, round eyes still seem to know everything, whether you say it out loud or not, whether you want him to or not.

As if reading Oikawa’s mind, Yaku reaches for Lev’s arm and grumbles something about “lanky idiot” before dragging him away. This is precisely why everyone loves Yaku Morisuke. Oikawa restrains himself from hugging the little guy- mostly because he values his life too much.

Kageyama also has yet to take his eyes off of Oikawa. Those wide, blue eyes stare into Oikawa’s soul, scrutinizing and studying Oikawa’s every move.

But Kageyama keeps his mouth shut and practice carries on as usual.

Well, that is until everything’s over, and their coach makes a beeline for Oikawa.

Shit. He knows what the coach will ask before the words even leave his mouth: why hadn’t Iwaizumi showed up to his first private session?

That’s the deal Oikawa and the coach had devised. Considering Iwaizumi’s apparent affinity for the sport and incredible ability to pick up new skills in little to no time at all, the coach had been happy to give him a chance. After careful consideration, he’d agreed to offer Iwaizumi a position on the team as long as he trained with Oikawa twice a week in the weeks leading up to their first scrimmage. As long as he showed improvement and ended up clicking with the rest of the team, of course.

Oikawa had been absolutely thrilled by the agreement. This meant he would be able to spend even more time with Iwaizumi. More than just an hour a day in class, more than a few extra hours here and there whenever their schedules matched up. The more Iwaizumi, the merrier.

“Ah, about that,” Oikawa replies cheerily, hoping to mask his anxiety, “Iwaizumi-kun told me he was sick and wouldn’t be able to make it.”

“Really?” Their coach doesn’t seem to believe it. “He didn’t show up to the first practice because he was sick?”

“That happens a lot this time of year, Coach. A lot of the students catch things and then spread it around when they come to class.”

“Yeah… yeah, I guess you’re right. As long as he comes to the next one, it’s fine.” Their coach smiles but it’s clearly strained, as if he’s just tasted a lemon or accidentally swallowed one of Lev’s favorite sour candies.

“Oh, course!” Oikawa bows slightly at the waist. “You have my word.”

Their coach snorts, mumbling something about “this kid” under his breath, before offering his thanks and stalking off in the direction of the players taking down the net.

Oikawa slowly straightens back up again. He breathes out a sigh of relief, eternally thankful for his acting skills. He feels bad about lying to their coach point blank like that, but there’s no way in hell he’s going to tell him the truth.

Oh, well, you see, Iwaizumi-kun and I had a really uncomfortable encounter the other night in my dorm, and I think he chickened out and decided not to show because he didn’t want to see me. Yes because of course that story would go over well.
One by one, the rest of the team files out of the gym, bags slung over their shoulders, jackets pulled tight around them, chuckling about whatever shenanigans their friends had managed to get themselves into that day.

Oikawa usually walks back to the bus stop after practice with Kageyama at his side. Sometimes, Kuroo comes along, too. And, if his power of persuasion just so happens to be at its peak on that particular afternoon, he typically convinces Bokuto to join them, too.

Just as Oikawa is about to turn and call out to Kageyama, he and Kuroo appear beside him with matching looks of concern on their faces.

“Goodness, Tobio-chan,” Oikawa gasps, clutching his chest, “at least give me some kind of warning before popping up out of nowhere like that!”

Kageyama rolls his eyes, and Kuroo merely laughs. “I was waiting for Kuroo. He was taking forever. You should be bitching about him- not me.”

“Well excuse me for not wanting to freeze my ass off in this weather.” Kuroo shoves Kageyama’s shoulder teasingly. But Kuroo doesn’t quite know his own strength and nearly sends Kageyama falling flat on his face. Oikawa tries- and fails miserably- to stifle his laughter.

“Anyway,” Kageyama growls, flashing Kuroo an absolutely murderous leer that, if circumstances were different, might have actually scared Oikawa. “I was about to ask what you and Coach were talking about.”

Oikawa falters. He has the grace and presence of mind to catch himself before he trips over thin air and puts on his best this is fine grin. “Oh, well, he wondered why Iwa-chan didn’t come to his first private lesson.”

“That’s right… he didn’t,” Kuroo repeats, as if to clarify the matter for everyone present.

“And why didn’t ‘Iwa-chan’-” Kageyama raises the pitch of his voice a few octaves, attempting to mimic Oikawa- “show up to his first private lesson?”

Again, Oikawa has to focus his attention on each step that he takes, hoping that he doesn’t misstep or do anything obvious that’ll give himself away.

He hadn’t been lying when he told their coach that Iwaizumi claimed he was sick. A brief text about an hour before they were supposed to meet- that’s the only warning Oikawa was given. It was vague and weak and made it abundantly clear that Iwaizumi was suffering from a case of cowardice instead of a cold.

“He was feeling under the weather,” Oikawa explains, shrugging his shoulders.

If it weren’t Kageyama and Kuroo, Oikawa might’ve had the chance to end the conversation right there. Bokuto or Yaku probably would’ve dropped it- Lev definitely would’ve. But no, not these two.

“Okay, what happened?” Kuroo prompts. The usual trickster and playful troll that Oikawa’s known since childhood has vanished and, in his place, stands the conscientious friend, the same boy who, in the past, had embraced Oikawa and held him close as he cried, had swooped in whenever Oikawa was in trouble.

“Nothing, Tetsu-chan.”
“You’re full of shit,” Kageyama says as they finally arrive at the bus stop.

“So crude, Tobio-chan,” Oikawa chides. He’s ready to lecture Kageyama about his potty mouth, as per usual, but never gets the chance. Kuroo’s hand on his arm is like a vice-grip, and he’s being dragged toward the nearest bench with enough force to quickly shut him up.

Sighing, he sinks on to the bench between Kageyama and Kuroo. It’s a terrible place to be- the absolute worst, actually- because there really isn’t anywhere for him to look besides into one of the two sets of prying eyes watching him.

Kuroo and Kageyama, in many ways, are polar opposites. While Kuroo is social and outgoing, the kind of person who makes friends at the drop of a hat, as if it’s the easiest thing he’s ever done, Kageyama is the type that will do anything to avoid interacting with other people. It’s not that he doesn’t like them. Well, Oikawa doesn’t think that’s the problem. Kageyama just doesn’t know what to say to them. He has no idea where he stands with strangers.

Over the years, though, Kuroo and Kageyama have found common ground: volleyball and, more importantly, Oikawa.

They’ve always been there for Oikawa, in their own special way. Kageyama’s methods aren’t quite as obvious, but Oikawa knows he means well. Plus, Kuroo has an unfair advantage. He’s known Oikawa for twice as long. Probably three times as long.

“Just tell us,” Kuroo insists, nudging Oikawa in the side. The gesture’s playful, but Kuroo’s expression is anything but. It’s been a while since Oikawa’s seen Kuroo look this serious about something other than volleyball.

So, Oikawa does just that.

Kuroo and Kageyama are remarkably good listeners. They sit quietly the entire time, gazes fixed intently on Oikawa as he recalls the events of the past couple weeks.

…it’s not like he hasn’t been talking to me or anything. But he definitely doesn’t seem like he wants to come over again any time soon,” Oikawa finishes softly.

A cool wind rustles the leaves of the nearest trees. Winter carries the strangest and most absolute silence, especially when a blanket of snow covers the ground. The world appears to be caught in a vacuum, a soundless void, as if the very chill of winter has truly frozen time.

And, of course, Kageyama effortlessly shatters the illusion.

“Maybe he’s afraid of dorks,” he deadpans.

Oikawa can’t help it; he laughs. He snorts and guffaws and, alright, he’s sure it isn’t a pretty sight, but who cares?

Thankfully, Kuroo joins in and, eventually, Kageyama hesitantly chuckles along with them, too. It’s nice and does a great job of alleviating the stress that’s been plaguing Oikawa’s thoughts recently. His chest feels lighter already, limbs looser, like he can finally breathe and move as he wishes, like he can really play volleyball to his full potential again.

“He has good reason to,” Kuroo jokingly adds. Oikawa tries to glare at him, but even he knows it must look ridiculous. And Kuroo does what he does best and keeps going. “They’re scary people. I never know whether to trust Oikawa because he might be plotting everyone’s death or something.”
“Tetsu-chan!”

“Hell, he probably has an alien hotline that lets him keep in touch with the guys that’ll deal the final blow to us pathetic little humans!” Kuroo cries out, like the standup comedian he thinks he is.

Kageyama, the same Kageyama who Oikawa’s almost certain has no sense of humor whatsoever, joins in. “I wouldn’t be surprised if Oikawa’s an alien, too.”

Kuroo loses it.

Only Bokuto has managed to make Kuroo laugh this hard, which Bokuto never fails to remind Oikawa of whenever they get together, right after he’s reduced Kuroo to a hysterical mess, rolling around on the floor, clutching his stomach like he’s nuts.

Oikawa’s finally stops his gaping—although he still wonders if Kageyama’s body has been taken over by one of the aliens from Invasion of the Bodysnatchers—turns on his tormentors. “Tobio-chan—"

“But really, Oikawa, I think you’re exaggerating.”

And, for a groundbreaking second time in the same day, Kageyama renders Oikawa speechless.

“W- you do?” Oikawa babbles, eyes wide.


Oikawa bristles. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means,” Kageyama says, punctuating the words with a heavy sigh, “that you should just ask Iwaizumi about it instead of losing your shit. Talk to him.”

No witty retorts come to mind, and Oikawa can’t help but be frustrated. Before he can speak up, though, Kuroo butts in.

“I never thought I’d say this but… Kageyama’s right.” Kuroo sounds just as confused as Oikawa by the whole turn of events.

Kageyama is as proud as a peacock, though, and seems to revel in their confusion. Oikawa doesn’t know what bizarre alternate universe he’s been sent to, but he’s had his fill. There’s no way he’s going to spend the rest of his life in a world where Kageyama’s the voice of reason.

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Daichi isn’t a hateful or pessimistic person.

He can’t think of anything off the top of his head that he hates. For example, while most people have at least one food they dislike, Daichi enjoys a variety of cuisine, even the unique flavors he’s been confronted with since coming to Earth. Honestly, if someone were to ask what he hated, his immediate answer would probably be “nothing.”

Nothing.

That’s what he used to think.
But there’s something Daichi detests. It’s not an object, not another living creature or sentient being. No, it’s something far more elusive and yet far more dangerous than any human being or carnivorous extraterrestrial could ever be: lies.

Lies are the ruin of many good souls.

Lies are the reason Daichi’s species nearly met its fate at the hands of an “unexpected series of natural disasters.” Lies are the reason Daichi feels guilty every time he stares into Iwaizumi’s lively, inquisitive eyes. Lies are the reason Daichi loses sleep at night, the reason he dreads contact with the government officials associated with Earth’s exploration, the reason he wants to stay as far away from the Mothership as possible.

Daichi loathes liars, and the very thought of being called one makes him sick.

Most importantly, he refuses to lie to Iwaizumi. Not again, not after everything that’s happened.

That’s why he has to do this. As much as he doesn’t want to, as much as he’d rather tell many of their superiors to, in Iwaizumi’s words, “fuck off,” he reaches for his Cellular Substitute and pulls up his Supervisor’s contact.

Mentors are supposed to check in with their Supervisors at least once a week. They explain their recent findings and point out any unusual behavior that may be detrimental to their mission. Usually, the conversation’s brief, and the Supervisor merely listens. It’s more like having a short chat with yourself; Daichi’s always found it to be a bit peculiar and uncomfortable.

He’s never enjoyed making these calls to begin with, but, after recent events, he really doesn’t want to make this call.

“Mentor #212, Earthly alias Daichi Sawamura,” a voice drones, droll and lacking any sort of enunciation, “confirm or deny?”

Daichi sighs and scratches nervously at the back of his neck. “Confirm.”

“In order to fully confirm identity, please provide the name of your current Student.”

“Mentor #432, Earthly alias Iwaizumi Hajime,” Daichi recites. He sounds cold and robotic, just like the Supervisor. An unpleasant shiver travels down his spine at the thought.

A few seconds of silence pass before the voice on the other end speaks up once again. “Identity confirmed. Are you contacting us to provide further information about your Subject?”

Daichi hesitates. He’s not sure why, though; it’s not like he has anything to hide. He chalks it up to the sour taste in his mouth from speaking to a Supervisor.

“Sugawara Koushi appears to be an ideal Subject. I’ve only met with him several times and have yet to garner any additional information that may be pertinent to our studies,” Daichi says, “however, I do believe he possesses unique and admirable qualities.”

“Such as?” The voice practically oozes disgust, as if the prospect of an “admirable human being” is abhorrent.

“I will outline these traits in my next written report,” Daichi explains, hoping that he can keep this conversation as brief as he originally planned, “I plan to meet with Sugawara at another time in the near future. I’m sure I’ll obtain better and more concise results then.”
“Very good.” The Supervisor’s tone has yet to waver, not belaying the slightest emotion. They view it as a special skill, something to strive for, like some twisted perfection. Their people feel that emotions get in the way and serve as unnecessary interference. Feelings don’t serve a valuable purpose and instead corrupt the brilliant minds of officials and leaders.

Daichi’s heard hundreds of stories in the past of “trustworthy officials” who “lost their way” or “abandoned their pride” or some other ridiculous phrasing that certainly overdramatized the person’s decision. He’s sick of it, honestly, and, deep down, he has nothing against being in touch with his emotions. But that’s information that no one, not even Iwaizumi at this point, is privy to.

One day, though… maybe one day Daichi will tell him. Maybe one day he’ll work up the guts to tell him everything.

“And your Student?”

Well, well, well. There’s the hint of inflection Daichi’s been waiting for.

“He appears to be handling his first case well,” Daichi answers honestly, “I’m quite pleased by the progress he’s making.”

The Supervisor doesn’t answer right away. “I presume that he has been too busy this week to check in?”

Wait… Iwaizumi still hadn’t performed his weekly check-in yet?

“Yes, his terran university seems to occupy a great deal of his time. He’s put a great deal of effort into adjusting.” Daichi tries to stay calm. He simply assumed that Iwaizumi would remember.

“I suppose that makes sense,” the Supervisor replies but spits the words. No two members of their species look exactly alike, but Daichi’s had the pleasure of seeing this particular Supervisor’s face before. He can just picture the swirling colors dancing behind his superior’s triangular pupils, pointed teeth bared in a grimace, tiny nostrils flaring.

“I’m sure he’s informed you about his Subject?” Daichi silently prays that Iwaizumi at least had the sense to provide that much.

“Yes, yes he has.”

Daichi has a couple seconds to catch his breath and thank the stars that there’s still hope for Iwaizumi Hajime yet. Until the Supervisor’s sharp tone cuts through the blissful silence like the sharpened edge of a deadly blade.

“But”- and Daichi swears his life flashes before his eyes- “we’re a bit concerned about him. Personally, I would advise that he be careful. Earth is a dangerous place, especially for our kind, and I’d hate for him to lose his way at such an early point in his career as a Researcher.”

Daichi knows a threat when he hears one.

“Of course,” he replies because, really, what more can he say? “I’ll make sure to inform him immediately.”

“That’s what I like to hear.” For once, the Supervisor sounds genuine and, scarier still, genuinely pleased. “Thank you. We shall speak again soon.”

Daichi politely offers his own farewell and ends the transmission. He can barely believe he made it
through the conversation alive and has no problem letting the Substitute drop gracelessly from his grasp, tossing it carelessly on to the couch.

The Supervisors have threatened Iwaizumi. They’ve threatened him, and he and Daichi haven’t been on Earth for more than a few weeks. At this rate, they’ll be ordered back to the Mothership in a matter of days.

Daichi can’t- flat out refuses- to go back to that ship right now. If he had it his way, he’d never set foot on that monstrosity ever again.

But Iwaizumi… that’s the bigger issue.

The warm leather seems to call to him, and Daichi wastes no time in joining his Substitute, flopping down unceremoniously into the plush cushions. He buries his face in the armrest and exhales slowly.

Iwaizumi’s never seen him following a call. Daichi’s made sure that he’s alone at times like this because, well, he’s a Mentor, which means he’s Iwaizumi’s chief role model. He’s made himself out to be a calm and collected figure, compassionate to an extent but strict when he needs to be, honest to a tee. He wants to embody the ideal Mentor and, for Iwaizumi’s sake, carefully hides the cracks in his already weakened armor.

Without biological parents (at least not in the earthly sense of the word), many of their people grow up to be lifeless shells, much like the artificial intelligence tasked with running and monitoring most facilities aboard the ship. That’s the last thing Daichi wants Iwaizumi to become. The latest generation is full of emotionless robots, and Daichi can’t stand it.

He’s not a revolutionary, but he sure as hell won’t let the Supervisors ruin Iwaizumi Hajime.

Chapter End Notes

come cry with me about kageyama and space on tumblr or twitter: @tobiologist
Everyone loses their cool sometimes.

For some people, it’s a common occurrence. Words spill freely from their mouth without any regard to whether the speaker actually wants to voice them or not. And, usually, it’s the sort of information they most certainly don’t want to voice. On a daily basis, the poor souls end up commiserating and regretting mistakes their body makes without first consulting their brain or moral compass beforehand, left to bury their heads in the sand after saying such mortifying things out loud. Awful, really.

Then, there are those lucky enough to think before they speak. Oikawa Tooru just so happens to be a member of that fortunate group.

Or at least that’s what he thought until stupid Iwaizumi Hajime came along and ruined everything.

This whole thing, this urge to totally destroy his impeccable public image and make a fool of himself in front of countless classmates and peers- it’s all Iwaizumi’s fault. He’s clueless to it, though, and probably better for it. Oikawa would rather drop dead than admit it to Iwaizumi’s face. He can’t possibly explain that the source of his trouble takes the form of a certain someone with spiky porcupine hair and surprisingly broad shoulders and strong-looking arms and…

No.

If it weren’t for craziness like that, Oikawa wouldn’t be in this position.
To the outside observer, to any of the people wandering throughout the building at this hour, Oikawa and Iwaizumi’s current situation probably seems harmless. Just two typical college students, going about their day, leaving class with backpacks securely in place, sights set on their next destination.

Oh, but little do they know what they’re missing.

Oikawa’s shocked he hasn’t torn every lock of his luscious hair out by now. If this carries on for any longer, he’ll make Iwaizumi pay for every strand he pulls out and for whatever wig he eventually buys, no matter what the price. And why is his carefully styled and gelled hair in danger? Because, a little over two weeks later, he and Iwaizumi still have yet to talk things over.

He’d had some ridiculous notion that he’d walk into calculus class this morning, see Iwaizumi poised and ready to learn, and would have the balls to confront him, right then and there. He’d smile and explain everything concisely, so as to avoid further issues, and Iwaizumi would just sit and listen like the angelic little closet athlete he is. But, when the time came, he couldn’t muster up the courage to mention it. Present Oikawa can’t help but laugh at yesterday evening Oikawa’s optimism and naivety.

But now that he’s gone and blown that chance, too, he’s left with some pretty limited options.

1. He could wait until class tomorrow. Maybe bring it up before their professor started teaching like he’d planned to do today. Of course, look how that turned out.

2. He could text Iwaizumi later and flat out ask. But that’s the “easy way out,” as Kageyama would likely say.

3. He could invite Iwaizumi over later and hope for the best? Yeah, there’s absolutely no way that’d turn out well.

Which brings Oikawa to his last option:

4. Just talk to Iwaizumi now.

Good old option #4. No, he doesn’t like it either. But that’s what it’s come to.

In the time it has taken Oikawa to reach his reluctant conclusion, Iwaizumi’s managed to unintentionally- or, considering recent events, maybe intentionally- put a few feet of space between them. He walks with purpose and makes no move to check and see whether Oikawa’s still following him.

Blissfully unaware, other students mill about in the hallways. There are a plethora of different math courses held in the rooms on this floor ranging from college algebra to the dreaded elementary differential equations, otherwise known as calculus four. Many of the students in this particular section are engineering majors. The university provides separate math courses for people in the field, for those that, as Bokuto says, “clearly don’t love themselves if they decide taking four semesters of calculus sounds cool.”

Oikawa struggles not to make eye contact with anyone he passes. Thankfully, he doesn’t know many of them. Outside of the volleyball team and Iwaizumi, he hasn’t made the effort to acquire any additional friends. Acquaintances are fine, the kind of people he enjoys occasionally speaking
to around campus. But they never talk outside of class so they’re certainly not as close to Oikawa as, say, Kageyama, for example.

What… what do I say? What can I say with all of these people watching? What will they think?

Each step feels heavy, as if his legs may actually give out at any moment. He can barely focus on Iwaizumi. He can barely focus on the surrounding people, on steadying his breathing, on holding his body upright. The simple act of walking suddenly feels a lot harder than it should.

“Iwa… Iwa-chan?”

“Mmm?” Iwaizumi replies noncommittally. He doesn’t turn, and in no way other than verbally reacts to the abrupt call.

Oikawa watches his shoes, staring them down as he continues to make his way down the hallway, step by agonizing step. “I think we need to, uh… talk.” A group of male students stalk past at that moment, and Oikawa catches himself staring at the nearest boy’s “MAY THE (m x a) BE WITH YOU” shirt. He quietly files the information away in the back of his head for later. One can never have too many Star Wars shirts.

“How?” Iwaizumi asks. The one word response stings, but it’s not like Oikawa expected differently.

“Things? Important friend things? I don’t really know how to put it,” he says through gritted teeth, barely able to make eye contact with Iwaizumi.

“Later,” Iwaizumi replies curtly, “we can talk about it another time.”

“But Iwa-“

“This hallway’s full of people, Oikawa. Let’s wait.”

Iwaizumi’s voice wavers. He’s right. The people loitering in the hallway are already looking their way.

“I know but-“

“Oikawa,” Iwaizumi says, a hint of frustration tinging the single word, and Oikawa’s sure that he’ll turn around now. He’s sure that Iwaizumi will have enough sense to stop and hear him out. But a few seconds pass and nothing happens.

Oikawa knows it’s not the best time. Really, he knows. He wishes it didn’t have to be this way. He’s even willing to shoulder some of the blame although he has no idea why their relationship’s become so strained in such a short period of time.

It’s his fault for not saying something sooner- he’ll admit that. But Iwaizumi’s far from innocent. He could’ve easily explained his weird behavior from a couple weeks ago the day after it happened. Most people aren’t granted the privilege of seeing Oikawa’s room, of seeing the full extent of his passion, but Iwaizumi is special enough, and, granted, he may not understand how much it meant to Oikawa but that doesn’t justify his actions.

Oikawa feels himself beginning to panic. And, as if that’s not unsettling enough, the fact that he rarely panics certainly doesn’t help.

Let’s wait.
For what, Iwaizumi? For things to completely fall apart, once and for all?

The thought makes Oikawa sick. He wants to run or scream or, fuck, just do something to release the anger boiling beneath his skin. It’s bubbling up, about to spill over, and Iwaizumi continues on his way as if nothing’s wrong and the exit door is only a couple strides away and-

“I’m sorry for being a nerd!”

*Oh.*

*Well.* There goes Oikawa’s spotless track record when it comes to remaining calm and collected.

Everyone in the immediate area stops talking and turns to face Oikawa and Iwaizumi. A small group of girls frantically work to help their friend gather her recently dropped books. A pair of adults- professors, probably- shoot Oikawa judgmental looks as they pass, quickening their paces. Students lining the walls, waiting to get into their classrooms, gape at Oikawa and, a few minutes later, start muttering and gossiping amongst themselves. Oikawa’s not an idiot; he knows exactly what they’re chittering about.

Iwaizumi, on the other hand, has yet to move. Not an inch.

He stands as if frozen to the spot, and Oikawa can practically feel his heart crawling up his throat. What the *hell* had he been thinking, blurt ing that out? Talk about word vomit. It’s been so long since he’s lost control like that.

He’s just about to open his mouth, to apologize, when Iwaizumi swivels around and stomps down the hallway- in Oikawa’s direction.

Oikawa hasn’t quite recovered yet and can only watch as Iwaizumi snatches his wrist, dragging him around the corner. The tittering gets louder, and a nearby girl, the clumsy one, chortles like a hyena.

The only rooms at the end of this particular hallway are bathrooms, which means, luckily enough, many students are long gone by now, already having trudged into their respective classrooms with the enthusiasm of zombies. They should be alone for the next fifteen minutes, at the very least, and Iwaizumi apparently knows that.

“What the fuck was that?” Iwaizumi growls. He’s in Oikawa’s personal space, close enough that each tiny bead of sweat gliding down his forehead glistens in the sad excuse for fluorescent lighting overhead. Red colors his cheeks, hopefully from embarrassment and not from an oncoming fit of rage.

Oikawa’s skin burns everywhere Iwaizumi touches him, specifically where his fingers rest, wrapped securely around Oikawa’s wrist to hold him in place. But it’s not forceful or overbearing and certainly doesn’t hurt. “I… I don’t know.” And that’s no lie.

Iwaizumi takes a step closer. Oikawa instinctively takes a step back, only to find that he’s boxed in, pressed up against the wall with only a foot or so of space between his body and Iwaizumi’s. “Did you honestly just apologize for being a ‘nerd’?”

“…Yes?” *Wasn’t that the problem?*

“Okay, okay,” Iwaizumi says, shaking his head, “I have no idea where *that* came from. But I bet it has something to do with the night I came over, doesn’t it?”
The ground seems to shift beneath Oikawa’s feet. He forces himself to stay upright and smiles weakly. He shrugs his shoulders. So he wasn’t the only one who’d noticed.

“I knew it… fuck,” Iwaizumi groans.

This is Oikawa’s opportunity to jump right in and begin his little speech, complete with his own rendition of “Why Can’t We Be Friends?”, and yet his mouth refuses to move. Iwaizumi’s calloused hand feels nice against his wrist and the ruffled athletic shirt draped over his torso smells clean and, most importantly, at least to Oikawa, his skin radiates heat like a fucking furnace. He’s like some sort of miniature Sun, and Oikawa can’t get enough of it. His touch is light and yet it sears Oikawa’s skin. He’s frozen in place, captivated by the heat of Iwaizumi’s breath as it ghosts across his face and travels down his neck.

And, unfortunately, he can’t stop the thought before it crosses his mind: he craves more of that warmth.

It’s awful. The itch to reach out and draw Iwaizumi closer, to surround himself with that all-encompassing and unexplainable warmth. Oikawa hates it. He’s aware that every living creature exerts body heat. But this…. He can’t place it. Somehow, this is different.

To test the waters, he shifts his arm a bit higher up the wall as if trying to escape. The movement pulls Iwaizumi a little closer and, in no time at all, the foot of space becomes a mere few inches. And, shit, it’s irresistible.

He thinks back to the nights on the hill. His friend who, after years of speculation, Oikawa still can’t put a face to, offered to wrap him in the blanket he brought along. He insisted that Oikawa would get sick, and that if that were to happen, the aliens would come and leave Oikawa behind, afraid of bringing foreign viruses aboard their ship.

Oikawa furiously nodded his head in response, almost to the point of giving himself a nasty headache, and quickly snatched the edge of the blanket, already draped over his friend’s shoulders, hurriedly pulling it over his own tiny body. It was such a wonderful feeling, being pressed up against someone else.

Iwaizumi, as if only just realizing their closeness, instantly goes silent. Oikawa watches in fascination as his jaw clench and unclenches, watches his eyelashes flutter, watches his tongue slowly drag over his chapped lips.

Oikawa wants to say something, but he doesn’t know what exactly that something is. The last thing he wants is to blurt out more nonsense. But, before he can even consider speaking up, Iwaizumi’s drawing away.

He pulls back his hand as if he’s been burned, fingers curling and uncurling at his side, and takes a hesitant step back. For a second, Oikawa gets the irrational urge to pull Iwaizumi against him and say something daft like, “I don’t mind” or “I like your warmth.”

I’m losing it, Oikawa muses bitterly.

“I really did have other commitments,” Iwaizumi finally mumbles but keeps his gaze fixed on the floor. “I didn’t want to tell you because it’s kind of embarrassing.”

“O-oh?” How could anything be more embarrassing than what Oikawa had thought and even said in the past few minutes?

“Daichi doesn’t like me being out late. Plus, we, um, usually eat dinner together. It’s just a weird
unspoken agreement we have. I didn’t want to hurt your feelings or creep you out so I just sort of left. Which is rude, I guess, and I apologize.” The whole explanation seems to coalesce into one massive run-on sentence, and Oikawa desperately tries to keep up.

“It’s okay,” Oikawa interjects. He worries that Iwaizumi may explode if he keeps babbling, which would be a hell of a waste after all this hard work and awkwardness. Even if he doesn’t quite believe Iwaizumi’s reasoning, he’ll accept the apology. And, looking down into Iwaizumi’s wide eyes, Oikawa gets an idea.

“Well, I know how you can make it up to me, Iwa-chan,” Oikawa coos.

That gets the desired reaction. “Make it up to you?”

“Why don’t we go do something really interesting tonight?”

Iwaizumi blinks. “Wait, what does that even mean?”

“It’ll be a surprise, Iwa-chan,” Oikawa explains, rolling his eyes. “And, since only a handful of people are lucky enough to come along and partake in this ‘something,’ you should feel honored.”

Oikawa grins, hoping it looks genuine, and cocks his head to the side. He waits patiently for his answer, and, to his relief, Iwaizumi doesn’t immediately reject him. “Will it land me in jail?”

“No, of course not.”

“Will my life be at risk?”

Oikawa rolls his eyes. “Really now, Iwa-chan, who do you think I am? It’s nothing like that.”

Apparently, that’s what Iwaizumi needs to hear because, without interrogating Oikawa further, he sighs and, albeit reluctantly, agrees to tag along.

___

So this is public transportation…

Iwaizumi shifts nervously, eyes flitting around the bus, skimming over the weary faces of other passengers. They look about as happy to be there as Iwaizumi does. And, to make matters worse, he swears that the bus driver knows he’s an alien or has his suspicions because he keeps glaring daggers at him.

Oikawa, on the other hand, seems completely unfazed.

Well, it figures. He’s the one who dragged Iwaizumi down to the bus stop in the first place. Oikawa had instructed him to meet him outside the mathematics hall at seven o’clock sharp. And that’s when he had done the dragging. He refuses to tell Iwaizumi where they’re going and, after the incident in the hallway, Iwaizumi can’t help but be a bit nervous.

Something really interesting, huh? Iwaizumi can’t get the words out of his head. What the hell did that even mean? He may not know Oikawa all that well, but he still knows the phrasing’s ominous and far from comforting.

They sit wedged together, and, after glimpsing Iwaizumi’s puzzled expression, Oikawa explains it’s actually for the best. Iwaizumi watches more passengers file on to the little bus and realizes that Oikawa’s right: not everyone gets a seat.
He hadn’t really expected the crowd, though. There are a few rows of seats in the back and two longer rows alongside the front section of the bus, all shrouded in a scratchy olive green material. Those without a seat stand in the aisle, fingers hooked around the nearest pole for support, staring blankly out the windows instead of into the eyes of other passengers.

Now that Iwaizumi thinks about it, this is a college town and, from what he remembers, many of the students are short on cash. It’s a lot cheaper to use public transportation.

Curious, he glances over at Oikawa. They haven’t really talked since climbing on, and Oikawa stares intently out the nearest window, just like the other standing passengers. From this angle, Iwaizumi can tell Oikawa’s eyes are drawn to the night sky, namely the stars.

There it is again. The same focus, the same child-like wonder Iwaizumi witnessed when they first met. The light from street signs pass illuminate Oikawa’s entranced expression, painting the slope of his nose in brilliant whites and yellows, highlighting the length of his dark lashes.

Iwaizumi blinks and quickly turns away.

*Get a hold of yourself,* Iwaizumi quietly reprimands himself. He can’t believe he’d just been staring at Oikawa. Eventually, he gives up and tentatively returns his gaze to Oikawa. Who, of course, chooses that exact moment to look his way.

They stare, unflinching, for a few seconds before Oikawa finally breaks the tension. “Looks like we’re here!” he chimes brightly, like they haven’t just exchanged one of the most awkward “oh, hey, I caught you ogling” looks. Iwaizumi’s starting to think Oikawa has a knack for acting like nothing’s wrong when, in actuality, it most certainly is.

As they exit, Iwaizumi steadily meets the bus driver’s gaze. He doesn’t break eye contact, and Iwaizumi silently hopes he hasn’t come across another Researcher. To his relief, the stare down doesn’t last long. The man, all two hundred and so pounds of him, seems completely human, and, although he smiles at Iwaizumi as he leaves, appears to pose no immediate threat.

Before he can call out to the driver, maybe double check and make sure he’s not being watched, Oikawa’s tugging on his wrist. “Come on, Iwa-chan, hurry!”

Iwaizumi does as he’s told. Mostly because he has no other option but, admittedly, also because it’s Oikawa. And because the whole bus driver thing has left him feeling on edge.

They step out into the night and, well, Iwaizumi doesn’t know what he’d been expecting, but this isn’t it.

A… park?

A sign sits proudly in front of them, a simple “Community Park” inscribed in thick, slanting letters across the front. Behind the sign lies a hillside, the bottom bathed in soft white light from the one or two streetlights along the sidewalk.

“Hey…” Iwaizumi’s brain fights to catch up with what he’s seeing. The temperature is steadily dropping, and Iwaizumi watches a small puff of white air leave his parted lips. Why has Oikawa chosen this place? What’s he planning?

Even if he wanted to head back, though, the bus has already pulled away in the time it’s taken him to regain his composure, and Oikawa clearly has no intention of walking back in the direction they came. In other words, Iwaizumi’s screwed.
“Oh, hold on,” Oikawa mumbles, reaching into his jacket pocket. He rummages for a few seconds, face screwed up, before pulling out a pair of black gloves. Iwaizumi’s hands, buried in his own pockets, prickle at the sight.

Instead of slipping them on like any normal person would, though, Oikawa holds one in front of Iwaizumi’s flabbergasted face, dangling it around. At first, Iwaizumi thinks he’s taunting him. A “wow, your life sucks because I have gloves and you don’t” kind of thing.

He considers knocking the damn thing out of Oikawa’s grip but, before he can even withdraw his frozen fingers and make a go at it, Oikawa’s pulling his hand out of his pocket for him. Heat floods Iwaizumi’s face, and he can hear his pulse pounding in his ears.

“H-hey, what the hell are you doing, dumbass Oikawa?” Iwaizumi stutters but makes no move to shove him away. “Those are your gloves. You’ll freeze your ass off without them.”

Oikawa rolls his eyes like the very thought of frostbite is too farfetched for a person like him and carefully maneuvers Iwaizumi’s fingers to make his job easier. “I appreciate your concern, Iwa-chan, but I don’t think you get it.” Slowly, he slides the black fabric over Iwaizumi’s fingers, lightly grazing his knuckles and the sensitive underside of his wrist as he outfits his newest friend in one of his own gloves.

It fits Iwaizumi’s palm, but Oikawa’s fingers are certainly longer than Iwaizumi’s and it shows. He used to think he had fairly large hands and yet his Subject has somehow managed to dispel even that universally accepted fact.

With an almost shy glint in his eyes, the first display of bashfulness Iwaizumi’s seen, Oikawa releases Iwaizumi’s now gloved hand and turns away. The gesture leaves Iwaizumi baffled because who the hell is this guy?

“You better not lose that glove, Iwa-chan. That pair’s my favorite. Black goes with almost everything,” Oikawa adds in that playful yet commanding tone he appears to have down to a science, as if sensing Iwaizumi’s bewilderment.

He then continues to be his enigmatic self when, as opposed to handing Iwaizumi the other glove or drawing a second pair from the folds of his jacket, he slips glove number two onto the hand opposite Iwaizumi and turns in the direction of the hillside. “You just wait,” Oikawa suddenly blurts, reaching for Iwaizumi, grasping the hand unfortunate enough to remain gloveless. Both of their clasped hands are bare and exposed to the night air, but Oikawa’s grip is strong and firm and why the fuck is it so warm?

For what feels the thousandth time that day, Oikawa’s dragging Iwaizumi along behind him. They’re scaling the hillside at a surprisingly fast pace. The grass is a little wet and, several times, they nearly trip. In typical Oikawa fashion, he merely laughs it off as if the prospect of rolling down the hill doesn’t scare him at all, which, knowing him, it probably doesn’t.

Just when Iwaizumi feels like telling Oikawa he’s changed his mind, that he’d rather head back to his apartment before it gets too late and that they should forget this whole crazy charade, Oikawa abruptly comes to a stop. To Iwaizumi’s relief, he avoids colliding bodily with his overly exuberant companion.

“Hey, what are- oh. Oh, shit.”

Darkness.
It surrounds them from every side, a pitch black blanket filled with tiny specks of brilliant white light. The moon, currently in its waning crescent phase, hangs in the sky, serving as the only light source at the top of the hill. Craters dot the rocky surface, and Iwaizumi notes his lack of knowledge in regard to Earth’s only satellite. He thinks back to the vibrant displays from his classes, back to the seemingly inconsequential celestial body’s history, and, for a second, he feels like he’s on the mothership once again, peering longingly out at the surrounding universe.

“Oikawa…” Iwaizumi can’t seem to come up with a better response. His tongue feels heavy, immobile, just like his limbs. So he settles for doing nothing instead.

“Ah, I’m so excited, Iwa-chan!” Oikawa cries from off to Iwaizumi’s left.

Somehow, Iwaizumi manages to move his head, just enough to see what Oikawa’s doing. His eyes widen.

Oikawa kneels a couple feet away and shrugs a gigantic duffle bag off his shoulder. It’s immense, bigger than any collegiate backpack Iwaizumi’s seen around campus, even the kind strapped to the backs of “hikers” and “nature lovers”, and, at the back of his mind, he can’t help but wonder if he’s going crazy because how had he missed that? Oikawa ignores Iwaizumi’s stupefied expression, gaping maw and all, and unzips the giant duffle, withdrawing its contents. Iwaizumi waits patiently for the onslaught of supplies Oikawa’s likely brought along for the occasion, but, oddly enough, he pulls out nothing more than a huge navy blue blanket.

That’s it? Why did he need such a large bag?

Completely oblivious to Iwaizumi’s mounting confusion, Oikawa climbs to his feet and straightens out the blanket. He spreads it out across the grass and, huffing a big sigh, flops down on to it. When Iwaizumi makes no move to follow suit, Oikawa shoots him a questioning look and eagerly pats the empty space beside him.

Iwaizumi hesitates. But, with those big dark eyes peering up at him, his resolve crumbles.

He hates to admit it, but Daichi’s totally right: it looks like he’s stuck with Oikawa.

“And… what exactly are we supposed to be doing right now?”

Oikawa feels like a kid again, a childish little smirk tugging at his lips. “We’re looking for UFO’s, Iwa-chan.”

Iwaizumi remains silent, face expressionless. No disgust or uncertainty. No shame or embarrassment. Just blankly staring at the sky overhead as if the idea of searching for aliens doesn’t bother him in the slightest.

This could very well be a horrible idea. At any second, Iwaizumi could easily curl his lip in disgust, stand up, and leave, not turning back once to look at the freak he’s made the mistake of befriending. Iwaizumi may never talk to him again after this, and Oikawa is completely aware of that sad fact. He came here knowing full well that this may be the last time he and Iwaizumi ever hang out together. Alone, just the two of them.

Maybe it was a rash decision. Maybe he’ll regret it later. But right now, with Iwaizumi stretched out beside him, plush blanket beneath them and strikingly beautiful stars above, Oikawa could care less.
“UFO’s, huh?” Iwaizumi mutters offhandedly.

He’s been relatively quiet since lying down so Oikawa doesn’t expect the sudden rhetorical question. He glances down between them where their hands lie only a couple inches apart. His hand dwarfs Iwaizumi’s. He can’t help but imagine what would happen if he stretched his pinky finger out to brush against the back of Iwaizumi’s hand, what would happen if he took advantage of his long, slender fingers and reached over, placing his hand over Iwaizumi’s. What would their intertwined fingers look like?

Before he can get sidetracked further, Oikawa turns his attention back to Iwaizumi. “I’ve been doing this since I was little, you know. Heading out to the park down the street, scaling the biggest hill there. That’s the only place you could go to escape the light pollution.” He laughs. “All so I could sit out and watch the sky like this.”

Oikawa waits, wondering if Iwaizumi will comment, but he keeps quiet, as if he knows Oikawa isn’t quite finished yet.

“I didn’t have many friends in elementary school. I mean, not that I was alone or anything. There was Tetsu-chan, of course, and this other boy. I can’t remember his name, but he used to like to come along whenever I decided to… well, go hunting for aliens, I guess. We were kids so it sounded a lot more exciting when we put it that way, more adventurous, even if my mother thought we were silly for it.”

Oikawa pauses. This is the hardest part. He doesn’t understand why he can’t remember the name of his other childhood friend. Oikawa recalls spending a great deal of time with him when he was young and yet he can’t picture his face anymore or what his voice sounded like. He can’t even remember when they first met. They were together for a few years, close as could be, until, completely out of the blue, the boy moved away. It was the middle of the summer when he left— the weekend before Oikawa’s eleventh birthday. His mother was the one to break the news to him, and, sure, he was upset, but he couldn’t bring himself to cry. Even now, the whole thing feels a bit off to him.

“Why did he stop?” Iwaizumi asks softly.

Oikawa closes his eyes, breathing in the night air.

“He moved away.”

The telltale rustle of Iwaizumi adjusting his jacket fills the momentary silence. “Oh. Sorry.”

A gust of wind lightly tousles the nearest blades of grass. His mother’s face looms in the back of his mind, weak smile and everything. A brief flash of a memory dances before his eyes. The words gliding over her lips: He’s moving away, Tooru-chan.

Oikawa’s other hand, the one not temptingly close to Iwaizumi’s, curls into a fist.

“It’s alright, though. I talked Testu-chan into going with me sometimes,” Oikawa blurts, worried Iwaizumi may think he wants sympathy or pity or something of the sort. Which is the last thing he wants from anyone, especially Iwaizumi. “He doesn’t believe in aliens- he told me- but he still likes looking up at the stars.”

“Most people do.”

“Do you, Iwa-chan?”
“Yeah. Yeah, I do.”

“What about aliens?”

Iwaizumi stiffens at Oikawa’s side. Finally he gets a reaction. “The universe is fucking huge. Who knows what’s out there.”

Wow. Oikawa really likes Iwaizumi’s response, for whatever reason. Probably because that’s how he’s always felt. The probability of there being alien life is greater than there not being any; how can you dispute a statistic like that?

“I completely agree,” Oikawa says, smiling to himself. “We just haven’t met them yet. I’m sure they’re busy studying more advanced species. Not that they couldn’t learn a thing or two from us, huh, Iwa-chan?”

He throws in a dash of cheek and sass for good measure, hoping he can get a rise out of Iwaizumi, but the resulting silence is heavy. Oppressively so, to the point of making Oikawa uncomfortable. He’s managed to keep his anxiety at bay, but he can already feel it creeping back up on him again.

“Can I… can I ask you something?”

Oikawa swallows, throat suddenly dry. “Of course, Iwa-chan.”

“How did you get interested in all of this? You know, space and aliens and everything.” He sounds a little exasperated as he asks, and Oikawa doesn’t quite know what to make of it. He can only assume, with nothing else to go off of, that it has something to do with the whole “too much of a nerd” issue.

“Well… I don’t know,” Oikawa answers honestly, “It feels like forever.”


“Hush now, Iwa-chan. I have my reasons,” Oikawa scolds.

“Yeah?” His tone is a lot softer, a lot less accusing, than Oikawa expects.

“I wouldn’t walk around saying that I loved something if I didn’t. Space is absolutely fascinating and to think that there could be intelligent life out there… I mean, just think of what we could learn?”

Oikawa swears that he hears Iwaizumi mumble something under his breath, but he continues unperturbed. “And just think about what they would look like! Maybe they’d be giants compared to us, maybe we’d dwarf them. Maybe they would have two legs, maybe four.”

He’s totally gushing now, spouting every space and alien-related thought that crosses his mind, but Iwaizumi brought this on himself. One doesn’t simply ask Oikawa about his interest in the universe and extraterrestrials and expect a short explanation.

“Oh, and space travel, Iwa-chan,” Oikawa carries on, raising his hands to the sky. “I would love to find a civilization that’s mastered the art of space travel. I can’t even imagine how life as we know it would change if a species like that were willing to share their secrets with us. We could travel to the farthest corners of the universe, and, ah, the things we could learn!”

Iwaizumi mumbles his approval but says nothing more. He’s strangely quiet, even for him, and Oikawa doesn’t like it. You’ve gone too far, he chastises himself. He went too far and scared poor
Iwaizumi in the process. Who in their right mind would want to be friends with someone like him?

And it hurts. It hurts so badly because he’d hoped that Iwaizumi would be the one to understand. Oikawa had hoped he would be the one to pass no judgment, to take an interest in his reasoning, to possibly even join in and babble about space with him.

For a second, Oikawa considers telling Iwaizumi that the whole obsession thing’s a joke. That’s what he’d tell anyone else. He’s Oikawa Tooru, captain of the university volleyball team, an attractive and smart young man on the brink of a bright future. No matter Iwaizumi’s social standing, Oikawa can’t have the rest of the department finding out about this.

I’m weird. Too weird for them. That’s what he’s always told himself. About the engineering department, about the other students.

This isn’t the kind of ‘passion’ they want.

And, a bit harsher: I’m a freak.

“Why?” Iwaizumi abruptly growls, and Oikawa squeaks, literally squeaks like a terrified mouse at the mercy of a clever house cat. Stunned, he looks over at Iwaizumi. But he’s staring up at the stars as if Oikawa’s not there.

The other shoe is about to fall. Or, as Kuroo would probably say, in his lovely colloquial language, the shit’s about to hit the fan. Iwaizumi’s going to call Oikawa out. He’ll ask him why he’s so strange, why he has to sully his “good looks” and “charm” and whatever the hell else he supposedly has been gifted with.

Oikawa can’t bear it, can’t bear the thought of Iwaizumi saying those horrible things to him. Those are the same nasty words spiteful people hurled at him in high school when his team beat theirs. Those are the venomous insults spouted by jealous classmates and frustrated ex-girlfriends. They don’t belong on Iwaizumi’s lips. He may be temperamental at times and, sure, maybe he has a short fuse, but that doesn’t mean Iwaizumi’s mean or hateful.

Oikawa can’t lose him.

Grin and bear it, that’s what he has to do. He’ll laugh and make a comment about how silly his younger self was. He’ll promise to hide any of his science fiction paraphernalia whenever Iwaizumi comes over if it bothers him, promise to never bring it up again, as long as Iwaizumi agrees to stay. It’s irrational and, yes, this will be the first time he’s made such a compromise, but it’ll be worth it.

“Iwa-chan, I-“

“Why did you want to show me this?”

His breath catches in his throat. Here it comes. “W-why?”

“Yes, why me?”


Iwaizumi sighs and, suddenly, warmth spreads up Oikawa’s arm. He somehow manages to stop himself from panicking any more than he already is and, slowly, lets his gaze wander to where their hands lie, now joined.
It’s the same warmth Oikawa’s noticed several times before, including their argument in the hallway earlier that day. Iwaizumi’s touch is gentle, reassuring, the perfect place to focus and keep himself grounded. Every fear of floating away, far from the comfort of Iwaizumi’s familiarity, fades in that instant.

“I don’t get it, that’s all,” Iwaizumi continues, voice equally as soothing as his touch. “Why did you bring me, of all people, out here? I can tell this isn’t something you invite every new person you come across to do.”

*Why, indeed…* Oikawa still hasn’t sorted out his own feelings on the matter yet. He’s certain that Iwaizumi’s the perfect person to share this with, though, and, well, that’s about as far as he’s gotten in figuring out this whole mess of a relationship.

“You’re my friend,” Oikawa finally responds quietly. “I don’t understand it either. I wish I did and maybe I will eventually, but I just get this feeling that… you could become my best friend, Iwa-chan.”

Iwaizumi silently tilts his head back, looking to the sky once again, and, this time, Oikawa’s sure that he’s petrified him. He sighs resignedly because, deep down, he knows this is where his pitiful attempt at friendship ends.

But no.

Iwaizumi offers a heavy sigh of his own and, squeezing Oikawa’s hand, sits up. He turns his head to face Oikawa, worrying his lip, and stares, moonlight glinting off his eyes and illuminating his cheekbones.

“Oikawa, I think there’s something I need to tell you.” He inhales, holds his breath for a second, and exhales. “About… well, about me.”

Chapter End Notes

come cry with me about kageyama and space on tumblr or twitter: @tobiologist
the big reveal

Chapter Summary

In which Iwaizumi thinks back to an important conversation with Daichi, and Oikawa learns (part of) the truth.

Chapter Notes

hello again! looks like this chapter didn't take me quite as long to post, which I'm thrilled about. it's partly because I sat my ass down and actually wrote and partly because this chapter's not as long as others

even so, important things happen so make sure you read iwa and daichi's flashback closely! lots of cool stuff there. oh and in case you're wondering what the tapestry looks like, it's basically along the lines of this. I loved studying them in art history

as always, shout out to my lovely betas who put up with my indecisiveness. I also would like to say again that I appreciate all of my readers so much!! every kudo, comment, etc helps so know that I am thankful for the attention this fic's already gotten. now, on with the show~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

a year prior to current events, in terran alias Daichi Sawamura’s office aboard the BC Ambition

Iwaizumi knows this is going to be one of those talks the moment he receives the message to meet in Daichi’s quarters.

His office is fairly large, probably twice the size of Iwaizumi’s room, which comes as no surprise. As someone with more than thirty years of experience under his belt, he’s been gifted the numerous privileges granted to higher rank government officials. And one of those privileges just so happens to be a big ass room.

However, even at this size, there’s very little filling the spacious office. There’s a desk near the wall farthest from the entrance, metallic with a projection display built into its semicircular shape. A huge tapestry depicting a terran landscape painting hangs on the wall behind his desk. It dates back to the Tang Dynasty, a Chinese kingdom known for being one of the greatest empires in Earth’s history. Daichi also chose a leather chair as his “work chair” and selected two seats fashioned from a new age alloy for his guests.

Hands resting on his thighs, Iwaizumi glances over at his Mentor who, oddly enough, hasn’t said a single word since he sat down. The strange material coating every surface aboard the ship, whether it be the floor or furniture, hasn’t necessarily bothered Iwaizumi in the past, but now it feels… weird. Well, weirder than usual. And Iwaizumi can’t seem to sit still. He wants to pace- badly. Daichi constantly insists it's his worst habit to which Iwaizumi always quips, "there are far worse habits to be had."
“So you want me to go to Earth?” he prompts, keeping his tone neutral like any proper visitor would.

Daichi sits ramrod straight in his fancy recliner instead of assuming a more relaxed position—because apparently reclining is frowned upon—and regards Iwaizumi with obvious concern.

“That’s been your plan for a while, right? You decided on an Earthly name ages ago and most of your classes focus on terran history, culture, technology…” he trails off, fingers twitching in his lap.

Yes, he’s definitely concerned.

“That’s the idea,” Iwaizumi confirms, hoping to lighten the mood. The Mentor and Student dynamic requires cohesiveness, understanding, and, most importantly, trust. They won’t get anywhere if Daichi acts the part of the cold, stone-faced teacher encouraged by his superiors.

“I had to double check, just to be sure,” Daichi says, cocking his head to the side. “For all I know, you could’ve decided on a terran name because of me. A lot of Researchers do that once they’re placed with a Mentor.”

Iwaizumi’s heard this argument before. A few of his friends admitted to choosing their current names after hearing that of their appointed Mentor. It’s pretty common, now that Iwaizumi thinks about it. Maybe Daichi’s not too off base with this whole interrogation thing.

“You don’t have to worry about that with me.”

“I didn’t think so,” Daichi echoes back fondly. “And your dreams of becoming a Soldier? You’ve long since nixed that particular idea, yes?”

“Yes,” Iwaizumi snorts, “Quite some time ago.”

Soldiers are tasked with missions involving hand-to-hand combat. From a young age, they learn how to handle a variety of weapons and receive the most physically taxing of any training regimen. They're not to be messed with, that's for sure.

When combat training came around, Iwaizumi quickly caught on to the basic artillery and swordsmanship techniques required of all students. Firing a gun became second nature to him, and he was overwhelmingly successful in his Mastery of Blade Weaponry class. For a while, he thought the Researcher position wouldn’t let him work to his full potential. He was obviously better suited to the role of a Soldier, skillfully wielding his weapon of choice as he courageously faced their enemies.

Those were the fantasies of a child, though, and, by the time he began to mature, he’d tossed the crazy notion to the side. Researchers were more valuable and ranked higher in the social hierarchy. Plus, contrary to popular belief, he lived for the acquirement of knowledge, for the venture into the unknown.

“Again, I figured as much, but I was ordered to ask,” Daichi laments. His eyes keep drifting over to the projection panel off to his left, and Iwaizumi’s curiosity nearly gets the better of him. To stop himself from doing anything rash, he focuses on the small holographic image of Earth hovering in front of him. “Especially because we’re sending you out to the field at such a young age.”

This again. Since he was little, Iwaizumi’s heard instructors whispering amongst themselves, sneering in his direction as if he can’t see the way they glare daggers at him. Some are kinder than others and try to at least be subtle about their disgust. It isn’t until he was bumped up two learning
levels before the start of his sixth year that someone made the grand decision to diagnose his, for lack of a better word, problem.

Medics carted him off and immediately got to work, piercing his skin with a plethora of needles, strapping a strange-looking helmet to his head. They studied him for what felt like months before concluding that the issue wasn’t quite as serious as they’d initially thought. Apparently, he learns at an “accelerated pace”- whatever the hell that means- but it’s not caused by any sort of disease or disorder so they let him return to business as usual soon after completing the final set of tests.

Which leaves him, a Researcher about twenty human years younger than most, poised and ready to head out on his first field mission.

He hates it when someone brings up his age, as if it’s a legitimate reason to hold him back or make a big deal out of his achievements. It’s only a number- a species lucky enough to live for centuries should know that all too well. And, more importantly, age among their people isn't a straightforward matter.

Years are based on the annual cycles of various planets, which makes determining someone’s “age” quite challenging. Someone may base theirs on the Thyrian cycle, while another bases theirs on the Drypson cycle. Iwaizumi finds it awfully strange (and a bit pathetic) that a society of their caliber and prowess can’t even agree on the same age system.

His own age is based on the Earth’s revolutions. A few particularly snotty superiors blame his proclaimed genius on that choice, claiming that he wouldn’t seem quite as brilliant if he were aged based on what they call the Central Planets, a handful of titan-sized planetary bodies from across the Milky Way galaxy, including the gas giant known as Jupiter.

_Fucking prudes._ Iwaizumi could care less what they think. Genius, mastermind, prodigy- they’re merely titles. Labels are overused and ruin countless reputations. What really matters is his work proficiency, what he achieves, his results and success rate.

Iwaizumi leans forward in his seat and gently prods the tiny model of Earth levitating above Daichi’s desk. “You’re coming, too?”

“Of course. It’s my job.”

The phrasing is cold and so very unlike Daichi. “Yes. Yes, of course it is,” Iwaizumi bites out. His Mentor rarely refers to his position as his “job.” He’s always said that it sounds too formal.

“It’s one of the safest grounds in the galaxy. Researchers rarely sustain any injuries, and it’s been awhile since I’ve heard of any casualties. They usually return in due time with little to no interferences.”

“I can’t believe they would want to leave.” Iwaizumi slides his finger to the right and watches the miniature Earth turn. “That place is a lot better than this piece of junk.”

“You’re just getting antsy, Hajime,” Daichi scolds lightly. Iwaizumi likes the sound of his terran name on Daichi’s lips. Not many of his kind agree to call him by the name, shortening it or changing its arrangement- mostly as a slight to Earth and its people. They’ve always been bitter toward the blue and green planet and those that wish to study it. “This will be your first time off the ship for an extended period of time. You want to experience the outside world, and I totally understand that. I’ll admit, it’s quite surreal. But you mustn’t forget how astounding and groundbreaking this vessel is. Insulting it is crude and uncalled for.”
The question bubbles up to the surface before Iwaizumi can snap his jaw shut. “Why do we hate Earth so much?”

The model ceases its spinning. Daichi tracks the movement with his gaze. His body has been tense this entire time, taut like a string about to snap, and his room smells of antiseptic and cleanser. Iwaizumi imagines that he probably went on one of his infamous cleaning sprees earlier to try and dispel his anxiety. Unfortunately, it doesn’t seem to have helped.

“Well… I guess they don’t tell you everything in class,” Daichi finally starts, uncertainty underlying every syllable. His fingers visibly clench, knuckles white. “You know about their pathos-heavy culture, yes?”

Iwaizumi nods. He most certainly does. Every class he’s ever taken has mentioned it.

“That’s the main reason. As you know, our society doesn’t rely on such a thing. Logos, the logic and reason behind every choice and plan of action, is paramount.” Again, Daichi sounds like he’s reciting lines from a textbook, and Iwaizumi feels a bit uncomfortable. “A civilization that relies on emotional responses and stimuli… it’s considered deplorable in the eyes of many.”

Leave it to Daichi to pull words like “deplorable” out of his ass. “So basically the human race is seen as a bunch of worthless, emotional basket cases?”

Daichi shrugs. “If you want to think of it that way, yes.”

“And are you one of them? Do you think human beings are useless?”

“No,” Daichi answers immediately without a second of hesitation. Iwaizumi’s a bit taken aback by how sure he sounds. “I don’t.”

He reaches out and places his palm on the center display. His fingers come together and then stretch out, expanding the formerly small text to about three times its original size. He squints, eyes flitting across the screen as if he’s intently reading what’s written there. Iwaizumi, of course, knows it’s an act, all in an attempt to keep him from asking any additional questions, especially the kind he can’t easily answer.

Unable to read the text from this side of the display, Iwaizumi returns his gaze to the holograph and pays no mind to Daichi’s evasive behavior. “And love…”

Right on cue, Daichi goes rigid, slowly meeting Iwaizumi’s gaze from across the desk. “What?”

“It seems to be the worst,” Iwaizumi continues, undeterred by Daichi’s steadily widening eyes, “but none of the explanations I’ve heard seem to make any sense. What the hell is it?”

He’s being completely serious. The professors treat the word like a ticking time bomb that could explode in their face at any moment. Most of them skip any lessons dealing with it, complaining extensively about the word’s connotations and possible impact on the younger generation. All Iwaizumi knows is that it’s a human emotion.

“That’s a… that’s a tough one, Hajime,” Daichi laughs nervously. But instead of apologizing or changing the subject, Iwaizumi simply stares at him, clearly expecting some sort of answer.

“Okay, well, if you really must know, I can at least try to explain.” Iwaizumi doesn’t miss the emphasis on the word try. “The closest thing I can think of- at least in our society- is the bond between a Mentor and their Student.”
Iwaizumi blinks owlishly, still uncomprehending. Daichi sighs and shakes his head. “As you know, a child is forbidden from learning the identities of their biological parents, right?”

“…Right?”

“But a young person has to have a role model. Someone who teaches them how to properly live their life, someone who protects and watches over them. And someone to look up to,” Daichi finishes with a small smile on his lips.

“So… are you saying… we love each other?” If at all possible, Iwaizumi’s more confused than he’d been before getting a response. “What’s wrong with that?”

“I said that’s the best example I can come up with,” Daichi says, “but that doesn’t mean there aren’t other kinds of love. Human beings are well-versed in such a thing.”

“There has to be a shitty kind of love then.” Iwaizumi purses his lips. He’s thinking out loud, musing about issues that have bothered him for what feels like forever. “A dangerous kind.”

Daichi groans once again, but it’s more strained this time, pained almost. “Well, I suppose there’s a love that could be considered ‘dangerous.'”

“Yeah?” Iwaizumi perks up at the mention.

“Dangerous because people die. Humans are willing to put their lives on the line to save someone they ‘love.’ They will do just about anything to please that other person- their ‘significant other.’ And want to share their time with them, share their lives with them.”

“That sounds just like the other love you described. What’s the difference?”

Weariness rolls off of Daichi in waves. It’s strange seeing him look so out of place in his own quarters. “There’s a big difference. This kind of love usually leads to… well, mating.”

Mating…?

It’s a lot to take in all at once. Iwaizumi sinks into his chair, brows furrowed. He can’t quite wrap his head around Daichi’s explanation. He can’t possibly imagine why anyone would go to such lengths for someone other than themselves. And why would they ever risk their lives like that? Didn't they fear death? They don't live for long as it is.

And why the hell would love ever lead to mating?

Deciding on the first thing that comes to mind, Iwaizumi mutters, a tad disapprovingly, “Love sounds like too much trouble.”

Oikawa snatches his hand away from Iwaizumi’s grasp as if he’s been burned. “Is this some kind of joke?” he snaps, quickly sitting up.

His chest and head both ache. The cool night air suddenly feels frigid, and the natural grassy smell in the air carries a more noxious odor than before, like rotten vegetables. Oikawa’s vision is tinted red. He can’t even bring himself to look at Iwaizumi. He climbs to his feet and takes a couple steps away on shaky legs.

I’m an alien.

What the hell? Who does that? After going to all this trouble of trying to make Iwaizumi feel more
relaxed around him, after inviting Iwaizumi to go “UFO hunting,” something only a grand total of two people have ever been asked to do before, the bastard turns it into some sort of cruel, twisted joke.

“Oika-“

“I bet you think this is funny, huh? You get a glimpse of my private life, hear me go on and on about aliens, and think ‘hey, wouldn’t it be hilarious if I fucked with this guy and told him I was secretly one of those things?’” Oikawa’s throat burns from the intensity of his voice. The words tear their way out of his mouth. “Y-you probably thought a nerd like me would be thrilled. Well, guess what: I’m not.”

The echo of blood pounding through his veins drowns out his surroundings, muffling outside noises. Oikawa wishes it’d block out everything so that he wouldn’t have to hear the pathetic excuses Iwaizumi has in store for him. But he can just barely make out the supposed alien's pleas and the rustle of his fingers bunching up in the blanket- Oikawa’s blanket- as he stands.

“Please, just look at this. I promise I would never do that, no matter how much of an asshole I can be sometimes,” he reassures, voice getting closer with every word. “Seriously, here-“

Oikawa contemplates turning and slapping him, but Iwaizumi’s phone is being shoved in his face before he can make another move. He has no problem with swatting the cell phone away either. The shattered screen would certainly be satisfying.

But he resists the urge and that’s enough time for Iwaizumi to unlock the screen.

Oikawa stares at the damn thing as if he’s never seen a cell phone before. There aren’t any recognizable apps on the screen except for a tiny blue speech bubble that Oikawa guesses is a messaging app. The labels are in an odd language that Oikawa doesn’t recognize. It’s not English, that’s for sure, and it’s too swirly to be Japanese or Russian or anything of the sort. He’s at a loss and can only stare at the strange application icons, ranging from a weird green triangle to a little round thing resembling a dial or compass.

Alright. So Iwaizumi has a weird taste in apps. And speaks a language Oikawa isn’t familiar with. That doesn’t mean anything.

“So?” Oikawa huffs, voicing his skepticism.

“I should’ve known this wouldn’t sway you,” Iwaizumi grumbles, pocketing the mobile device. When no other weird objects are thrust into Oikawa’s face, he decides that maybe he’s just the slightest bit interested. If nothing else, it’s amusing to watch Iwaizumi plead his case.

Letting his curiosity get the better of him, Oikawa grudgingly turns to face Iwaizumi who, as expected, is looking around frantically and pacing like a chicken with its head cut off. He stifles his laughter and tries to hide his emerging smile behind his forearm. This isn’t a laughing matter, by any means, and Oikawa still wants to smack Iwaizumi upside the head for inventing such a nasty and underhanded joke. But the whole thing is just so out there and unexpected that he can’t help but giggle.

“Shit… shit…” Iwaizumi’s mumbling to himself like a crazy person, which shouldn’t be half as funny as it is. “Well… Is that too much? Fuck… okay… will Daichi kill me if I… well…”

“I’m waiting for my proof, Iwa-chan,” Oikawa interjects after watching Iwaizumi make his seventh and hopefully final lap around the blanket. “You’re not doing a very good job of
convincing me that you’re not a complete jerk. Or a nut job.”

“No, no!” Iwaizumi rounds on Oikawa and strides toward him. He has the decency to step around Oikawa’s blanket instead of walking over it with his dirty shoes, though, and Oikawa can’t help but feel his heart flutter at the subconscious display of kindness. “I’m not an asshole! And I’m not crazy! Well, not totally.”

Oikawa rolls his eyes. “Then how do I know you’re really an alien? Your phone is weird, Iwa-chan, but that doesn’t mean much in this day and age.”

“I…” Iwaizumi stares at the ground, idly kicking the grass with his scuffed shoes. “I don’t want to scare you, but there is one thing I know humans don’t have.”

Oikawa blanches. “I’m sure you have a lovely physique and everything, Iwa-chan, but getting naked in this weather just so you can show off your kinky alien junk—”

“No!” Iwaizumi shouts, his entire face now redder than a ripe tomato. He holds up his hands and shakes his head vigorously. “There’s no way in hell I’d do something like that! I’m talking about—” he comes closer, stopping a foot or so away from Oikawa—“these.”

He blinks and at first Oikawa doesn’t notice anything different. They’re the same dark irises he’s witnessed many times before. But Iwaizumi’s lashes flutter once more and, just like that, his irises change shape.

One moment, they’re circular, a beautiful combination of copper and honey, and the next, they’ve adopted a diamond-like shape. The irises themselves are a pulsating mass of rich colors, the brown now tinged with flecks of crimson, honey yellow, lavender, and several other unidentifiable hues. It’s like staring into the depths of a lake, watching long and elegant eels of varying colors twist and intertwine, moving in and out of Oikawa’s line of vision.

There’s no other word for it: the sight’s breathtaking. It steals the oxygen from Oikawa’s lungs and, for a minute or two, he can’t seem to regulate his breathing. Oikawa catches the small smirk taking shape on Iwaizumi’s lips but his eyes refuse to focus on anything other than the bizarre irises.

“I-Iwa…” he eventually manages to splutter. Those eyes… they’re absolutely beautiful and unlike anything Oikawa’s ever seen before, more vivid and otherworldly than those of fictional aliens from any of his beloved science fiction films or television shows.

It isn’t until Iwaizumi clears his throat that Oikawa realizes he’s cupping Iwaizumi’s face, gently stroking the soft skin beneath his eyes with the pads of his thumbs, the caress featherlight and gentle. He stills. He doesn’t relinquish his hold on Iwaizumi’s face, though, caught in the intensity of his stare like a deer caught in a car’s headlights.

Iwaizumi slowly exhales, his breath, warm and equally as light as Oikawa’s touch, fans out over Oikawa’s slightly parted lips and exposed wrists. The air’s charged with palpable tension, enough to render both completely immobile.

It isn’t that Oikawa hasn’t noticed Iwaizumi’s attractiveness before. He found his gaze lingering on Iwaizumi on several occasions in the past, back when he had no clue that his newest friend wasn’t human, but now that Iwaizumi’s offering a glimpse of his extraterrestrial self, Oikawa finds him far more beautiful than any human being he’s ever encountered before. And, not to toot his own horn or anything, but he usually attracts some gorgeous specimens of human. To say that Iwaizumi’s looks put theirs to shame is saying a lot.
“Oikawa,” Iwaizumi whispers, and Oikawa can’t tell if he’s pleading or warning him to stay away. The tone’s weak, barely audible, and Oikawa can’t look away. He itches to touch more, explore more.

Somehow, he finds the willpower to pull away and lower his hands to his sides. He immediately shoves his clenched fingers into his jacket pockets and takes a giant step back. He still feels feverish, even with that much space between he and Iwaizumi, but it doesn’t hurt, doesn’t make him want to run or escape. Rather, it makes him want to collapse against Iwaizumi and stay there for as long as he’ll let him.

“You’re… you’re not kidding,” Oikawa mumbles.

“Like I said, I may be an asshole sometimes, but I wouldn’t joke about this,” Iwaizumi says. The flush dusting his cheeks is slowly but surely fading away, and Oikawa doesn’t know whether to be pleased or disappointed by the development. “That’s what I’m trying to tell you.”

He should believe Iwaizumi. After the whole impromptu body horror show, he has no reason to doubt him. Oikawa's seen his fair share of colored contacts— even the wilder cosplay ones— but none could transform a person’s eyes like that. They’re absolutely inhuman.

But the idea of an alien Iwaizumi seems too good to be true. To think that the very object of his obsession for the past fourteen or so years could be standing right in front of him, in the body of someone he’s been trying his hardest to befriend— it hasn’t quite clicked in his brain yet.

“Iwa-chan is an alien.”

“Basically, yeah.” Iwaizumi’s expression is positively mischievous. It looks awfully nice on his face, especially coupled with those ethereal eyes. “Looks like all of your UFO hunting has finally paid off, huh?”

Oikawa can’t believe his luck.

He squeals enthusiastically and, in a couple massive strides, closes the space between them, bouncing on the balls of his feet. The excitement won’t let him be, won’t let him stand still for more than a few seconds at a time. A full-fledged extraterrestrial for him to have conversations with and learn from and interact with and what the hell is his life anymore?

“How… how do you…?”

“Make my eyes look normal? It’s all thanks to this chip implanted in my skin. It does a lot of things and camouflage is one of them.”

It’s like something straight from the pages of one of his favorite science fiction novels. Not in a million years would he have predicted this. He’s waited so long to make contact with an alien. So long.

“I can’t believe it! This is amazing, Iwa-chan! Just think of all the incredible things you can teach me,” Oikawa babbles, staring up at the sky wistfully. Immediately, he’s hit with an idea. He lifts his arm and points at the stars overhead. “Which one is closest to your home?”

Iwaizumi chuckles weakly, looking in the direction of Oikawa’s trembling pointer finger. “It’s hard to pinpoint, honestly. And I don’t remember much since I’ve spent my entire life in space.”

“That’s so sad,” Oikawa gasps, covering his mouth. He mumbles from behind his hands, “I feel so bad for you, Iwa-chan. You’re like E.T.’”
“I’m like who?”

“E.T.! He wanted to ‘phone home,’” Oikawa explains, making air quotes with his fingers. Then, as if only just remembering one of the movie’s biggest plot points, corrects himself in a whiny voice. “But you better not get sick, Iwa-chan! I’m not going through what that sweet little boy had to deal with.”

“Right… of course,” Iwaizumi concedes, eying Oikawa warily. “Sounds like a plan.”

More questions come to mind, all from a list of inquiries Oikawa’s kept stowed away in the back of his mind for an occasion just like this. He doesn’t plan on giving up anytime soon. “Oh, but that’s only if our sicknesses affect you. I’m guessing they do, yeah?”

“Ah, well-”

“Or maybe you can’t get sick at all. Maybe your species has evolved past that?”

“Dammit, Oikawa-“

“Such foul language. Where did an alien like you even acquire such a horrid vocabulary, Iwa-chan?”

“I can’t answer all of your questions, dumbass Oikawa,” Iwaizumi counters with his arms crossed, “There’s only so much I’m allowed to share.”

*Whoa.* The comment only serves to make Oikawa more eager, but he decides that Iwaizumi probably has his reasons for remaining so tight-lipped. “This is our little secret, isn’t it?” Oikawa asks, quickly adopting his most serious tone.

“Definitely,” Iwaizumi intones gravely. “You can’t share this with anyone. Understand?”

Oikawa likes the sound of that. *Our little secret.* It reminds him of he and Kuroo’s secret missions as kids and of his promise to not tell anyone about Kageyama’s… well, sexual preferences. He wonders if having a secret- a secret just between he and Iwaizumi- means they’re getting closer to becoming actual friends, and he can’t help but smile giddily at the thought.

“You’re one of the coolest friends I’ve ever had,” Oikawa blurts and feels like a complete fool the second the words leave his mouth.

But the flush returns to Iwaizumi’s cheeks as he smiles shyly, flashing Oikawa an expression he’s never had the pleasure of receiving from anyone before, not even Kuroo. And, just like that, his concern dissipates because how can he possibly feel like an idiot when Iwaizumi’s giving him a look that can only be described as unbearably tender?

**Chapter End Notes**

> come cry with me about kageyama and space on tumblr or twitter: @tobiologist
Chapter Summary

In which Iwaizumi's a paranoid ball of nerves and Oikawa's a cute sleeper.

Chapter Notes

time for more iwaoi and some good old fashioned fluff- 6.5k words of it, to be exact. I mean, I don’t have much to say about this chapter. it’s pretty straightforward: these boys need to learn how to use their words. to summarise, there are movies, a sleepy oikawa, a scared iwa, and lots of other good stuff! on a side note, the rating should go up pretty soon so look out for that

here's oikawa’s sleep shirt and pants, if you’re interested (I know I am) AND A SPECIAL ANGEL MADE A WONDERFUL MIX FOR THIS STORY!!! PLEASE GO LISTEN! IT’S GREAT AND OH MY GOD I JUST LOVE THEM SO MUCH FOR DOING THIS!!!!

as always, thank you to my marvelous betas and everyone who continues to read this! you all are the best!! now, let’s carry on with the story. enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Iwaizumi Hajime is the king of grand ideas.

Seriously, it’s a problem. Not many sane people would be able to follow his current thought process, and he kind of wants to smack himself in the face for being so rash. After admitting to being an alien to the one person he swore he’d never tell, Iwaizumi somehow got it in his mind that inviting that same person over to his apartment was a good plan.

Yeah, it’s crazy. Absolutely nuts. But it’s one of probably a thousand ridiculous decisions Iwaizumi’s made throughout his life. At this point, he figures he might as well just keep racking them up. Maybe there’s some kind of award for the person who makes the most stupid choices in the shortest amount of time. He could give an acceptance speech and everything. “I, terran enthusiast and master of stupidity, Iwaizumi Hajime accept this honor and, in turn, would like to thank Oikawa Tooru for inadvertently convincing me to make more questionable decisions than I could’ve ever imagined possible. Really, I appreciate it.”

Would Daichi laugh or cry? Or both? Iwaizumi knows he’d be doing both.

More than anything in this world and his own, Iwaizumi wants to call this whole thing off. He and Oikawa are sitting on the bus, which, to Iwaizumi’s relief, is under the direction of a completely different driver at this hour, someone less imposing and less inclined to randomly shoot him death glares, when the thought suddenly rears its ugly head before he can push it back down. He’s still not quite sure what overcame him in that moment, what pushed him to flat out tell Oikawa. It was a mistake, something he can now easily blame on the “heat of the moment,” on the twinkle in
Oikawa’s wide eyes as he peered up at the stars.

How could he say no to a face like that? How could he tear down the only human being possessing an imagination and sense of wonderment on par with himself? Oikawa stares at the sky as if he lovingly created each and every planet and star in existence, as if he sculpted and combined the necessary elements with his own bare hands. His eyes trace their way slowly across the whole expanse of the visible universe and, eventually, settle on Iwaizumi, filled to the brim with the unabashed curiosity he reserves solely for the cosmos. It makes Iwaizumi feel special, to be lumped in with the spectacular planetary bodies and stars that, to this day, spark a flame in his chest just as they did in his youth.

Still, that doesn’t excuse Iwaizumi’s selfishness. He did it purely to satisfy Oikawa and, indirectly, satisfy his own guilty conscience. Their people have rules, and he had just broken the most important one: revealing his true identity to a Subject. His Subject, at that.

*Daichi’s going to kill me,* Iwaizumi muses with finality, already having accepted his fate. He glances down at the single black glove in his lap, smoothing his thumb over the soft wooly fabric. He’ll have to tell those pretentious jackasses, and I’ll be forced to return to the ship. I doubt they’ll let me continue to do research.

Similar thoughts fill his head the entire bus ride back. It figures that when Iwaizumi actually needs Oikawa’s enthusiasm and big mouth, he decides to act very out of character. He keeps to himself for most of the trip and says little to nothing. But, out of the corner of his eye, Iwaizumi catches his shaking knees and fidgeting hands. Oikawa doesn’t have many tells. They’re easy to miss, and Iwaizumi thanks his keen senses for noticing the subtle jerks and twitches, the shifting of bone beneath skin as his fingers curl and uncurl against his thighs.

That’s how Iwaizumi knows Oikawa’s really been affected. It isn’t often that he lets other people see how he’s truly feeling, and, when it comes to expressing emotions in a straightforward manner, Iwaizumi can only count the number of occasions Oikawa’s used his words like a mature and responsible adult on one hand. He’s a closed book, sealed with a lock and key and, hell, probably layers upon layers of duct tape that would take years to peel off. But Iwaizumi will solve the enigmatic puzzle that is Oikawa Tooru. Even if- especially considering his latest slip up- it’s the last thing he does.

They finally pull up to the bus stop outside of Iwaizumi’s apartment complex before his thoughts can venture further into dangerous territory. Anxious to get inside and out of the cramped space, Iwaizumi stands and follows closely behind Oikawa who, hopefully, knows where he’s going. They climb off along with a group of people who don’t look old enough to legally drink but still clearly have drunk a considerable amount in the past couple hours. A tall, gangly guy nearly trips going down the steps, and Iwaizumi can’t help but sigh.

This must be why Daichi refuses to buy alcohol for the apartment.

Oikawa and Iwaizumi are the last off the bus. The temperature seems to have dropped considerably, even since their last time on the hill, and icy wind cuts through their thick jackets as if they’re paper thin. Anything other than standard room temperature, a comfortable 290 or so degrees Kelvin, feels strange to Iwaizumi. He’s used to being holed up in a space ship all day; it’s not as if the onboard atmosphere control system created temperature fluctuations to simulate seasons.

The tipsy group of young men sluggishly stalk off, and, the moment Oikawa’s feet touch solid ground, his head whips from one side to the other, eyes squinted. He looks absolutely comical, but Iwaizumi keeps quiet, calmly watching the spectacle unfold. Curious, he clears his throat,
wondering how Oikawa will react.

He continues to scan the surrounding area, though, ignoring Iwaizumi’s obvious call for attention. After swiveling his head around once more, bouncy hair swaying in the breeze, he stops and deadpans, “Do aliens live in like… weird futuristic apartments?”

Ah. Right.

Iwaizumi doesn’t know why he still expects Oikawa to ask reasonable questions.

“It’s a normal apartment, Asskawa,” he chides, trying out a new nickname he’d thought of on the way over. Oikawa’s jaw drops, and Iwaizumi silently pats himself on the back for coming up with it. “And what the hell do you mean by futuristic anyway?”

“Like everything is… shiny and electronic,” Oikawa manages between breaths as he struggles to catch up. His dress shoes click pleasantly on the pavement. “Oh, wait, I bet you have a robot that does all the housework, right?”

“A… robot?”

“Of course.”

Iwaizumi stares blankly at Oikawa.

“I don’t even know where you come up with this shit. Is that like a normal thing in those movies and books of yours? Does every alien have a robot handmaid? Or is that just your imagination running wild?”

“I mean, not always, but I’m sure you have the technology to build a robot capable of mundane tasks like cleaning around the apartment,” Oikawa huffs almost angrily, as if Iwaizumi’s lack of an android house slave personally offends him.

Iwaizumi turns in the direction of his apartment. He needs to get inside soon because this weather really doesn’t agree with him. Well, namely the additional hypothalamus mechanism built into his chip, but he chooses not to mention that to Oikawa who will likely interrogate him about why he needs an additional organ anyway.

The sidewalk’s end is in sight, and Iwaizumi picks up his pace slightly. From here, he can clearly make out the staircase that’s attached to the side of his apartment building. Thankfully, no one seems to be there or they’d be very confused by Oikawa’s interest in artificial intelligence and the cleanliness of Iwaizumi’s bedroom.

“Maybe you don’t need a maid because you and your friend are neat freaks,” Oikawa contemplates. “I don’t know much about your lovely roommate, but I doknow you pretty well. Iwa-chan doesn’t strike me as the overly organized type.”

He’s already halfway up the stairs and sneaks a glance over his shoulder. “You’re one to talk,” he shoots back, grinning devilishly when Oikawa nearly loses his footing. “Don’t forget that I’ve seen your room, too, dumbass.”

Oikawa’s too dumbfounded to offer a clever insult in return. That’s a first. Not that it’s a bad thing. Iwaizumi can only handle a certain number of these weird questions.

Out of habit, Iwaizumi normally tries to block out Oikawa’s running mouth. Sometimes he thinks the other talks simply to hear himself speak. Admittedly, Oikawa has the sort of melodic voice
that’s smooth and professional, perfectly suited to someone with his level of confidence, while also light and teasing. Iwaizumi hates how much he enjoys the incessant chattering. The background noise is strangely soothing.

Just when he’s starting to enjoy the quiet, Iwaizumi hears a gasp, a hitch in Oikawa’s breathing, and knows there are more questions to come. Probably a mountain of them, too, if Oikawa continues to be his naturally inquisitive (read: nosy) self.

“Oh, Iwa-chan, there are so many things I can’t wait to ask you,” he starts gushing, just as he’d done at the park. “I’m still trying to get over the fact you’re from a different planet and that you spent your life in a spaceship and…”

He carries on undeterred. Apparently he could care less whether Iwaizumi’s listening or not. There he goes again, proving another of my theories, Iwaizumi thinks, reflecting back to his earlier realization about Oikawa and his ranting.

Eventually they come to his apartment. Iwaizumi quickly unlocks the door and ushers Oikawa inside. Of course, not even the door is up to Oikawa’s standards. “No fingerprint scanner? Or voice recognition lock mechanism? Lame, Iwa-chan,” he remarks, shaking his head disappointedly.

Iwaizumi’s about to snap at him, maybe address the underlying fact that science fiction is, in fact, fiction, but the words die in his throat. Sitting casually with his shoes propped up on the coffee table is none other than Daichi or, in other words, the last person he wants to see right now.

“Ah, I was beginning to wonder where you were. And you brought a friend over,” Daichi comments by way of greeting. He flashes Iwaizumi a look out of the corner of his eye that effectively silences him. “This must be Oikawa-kun.”

He’s dressed casually but not his usual kind of casual. The navy blue pullover and dark wash, tighter-than-necessary jeans make that abundantly clear. Iwaizumi doesn’t have the best sense of fashion—mostly because his people are limited to uniforms—and knows little to nothing about terran fashion, but even he recognizes the outfit for what it is: Daichi has a “date.”

What the hell is a “date” anyway? He’s overheard countless conversations around campus, but the term’s meaning still eludes him. From what he’s gathered, it has something to do with two people meeting in a non-platonic way. But that makes no sense in this situation because… Daichi’s not interested in a relationship like that. Actually, he’s not technically allowed to have that sort of relationship, especially with a human being.

Iwaizumi’s head hurts. Why do terran customs have to be so damned confusing?

“Nice to meet you, sir,” Oikawa greets politely, adopting the tone he uses when speaking to his seniors and superiors. He then seals the deal with one of his thousand watt smiles, eyes glittering, and Iwaizumi wonders if Daichi’s buying his act. While most people seem to accept Oikawa’s effortlessly casual and carefree façade at face value, Iwaizumi sees right through it, sees it for the humongous lie that it is.

“Nice to meet you, too, Oikawa-kun.” Daichi nods his acknowledgment and stands, approaching the doorway. Iwaizumi stiffens, feeling as if his entire being is rooted to that particular spot. At his side, Oikawa doesn’t seem bothered, but, knowing him, he’s probably thinking of all the outrageous things he wishes he could ask Daichi concerning space travel and robots and who knows what else. He’s too scared to find out.

Daichi stops right in front of Iwaizumi and, carefully, sets a heavy hand on his shoulder. Iwaizumi
wants nothing more than to sink through the floor and disappear. “Well, I’ll be heading out. I left the
stir fry out for you so just make sure you clean the dishes afterwards. Oh, and there should be
enough for your friend, too.”

So I was right after all. He is going out.

“Where are you going?” Iwaizumi asks, an unspoken “at this hour” implied in the furrow of his
brow.

They lock eyes and, for a moment, Iwaizumi wonders if Daichi can see through his lies the way he
sees through Oikawa’s. He wonders if he can smell the betrayal on his clothes or can hear the
litany of “Iwa-chan is an alien!” that’s likely running on a loop inside Oikawa’s head. But nothing
significant happens. Iwaizumi doesn’t catch on fire, and, from what he can tell, Oikawa seems
unscathed.

Instead, Daichi’s lips stretch into a smile, and he explains his plans quickly as if he’s in a rush.
“Sugawara and I are going bowling. But don’t worry. I’ll be back by tomorrow morning.”

There’s a glint in Daichi’s eyes, though, that sets Iwaizumi on edge and practically screams that
there’s more to his brief explanation. A meaning that Oikawa’s certainly not allowed to know
about. The silent communication isn’t anything new, and the two of them make use of the skill
often. They used it several times in the past when Iwaizumi’s professors came to Daichi’s quarters
to complain, when Supervisors got too nosy about the research they did in their spare time and
decided they needed to brief both on their fields of study.

Iwaizumi can’t turn a blind eye to Daichi’s unspoken request. “Actually, I might need your help in
the kitchen before you-“

“You’ll be fine, Hajime.” Daichi cuts Iwaizumi short without batting an eye. Leveling a strange
and indecipherable look in his Student’s direction, he tightens his hold a bit before drawing his
hand away. Iwaizumi’s shoulder burns where Daichi’s fingers had previously rested. He tries and
thankfully succeeds to cover up the resulting wince from the contact.

Yeah, I’m dead, Iwaizumi decides.

Daichi turns to Oikawa then, and his face transforms. The happiness reflected in his smile appears
genuine, and the dangerous twinkle vanishes from his eyes. He looks the part of the conscientious
roommate once again. “It was very nice meeting you, Oikawa-kun.”

“Ah, well, the pleasure is all mine, Sawamura-san,” Oikawa chirps, a little too enthusiastically. “I
hope that you have a fantastic time this evening with your friend.”

Iwaizumi wants to stop that damn mouth from moving before Oikawa embarrasses the hell out of
both of them, but Daichi chuckles good-naturedly and steps through the doorway.

“I appreciate your kindness. Same to you, Oikawa-kun,” he says, lips still quirked up at the edges.
But he glances at Iwaizumi, and the faint difference in his tone sends an unpleasant shiver down
the other’s spine. “And you, too, Hajime. Have fun.”

The word “fun” sounds bitter on his tongue, and Iwaizumi hopes he’s the only one who catches the
ominous undertone. To his relief, Oikawa saves him with a charming, “We most certainly will. See
you later, Sawamura-san.”

Daichi waves and pulls the door shut behind him as he heads out into the night. The lock clicks
into place, and both Oikawa and Iwaizumi are left staring at the door. Although Oikawa remains
clueless to what really transgressed just now, Iwaizumi knows full well that Daichi somehow
detected his guilt.

And, for the first time in his mostly emotionless life, Iwaizumi Hajime’s genuinely afraid.

Oikawa narrows his eyes, glaring down the television.

It looks normal enough, but he won’t take any chances. For all he knows, the remote on the table
may have a button that transforms the display into a three-dimensional projection. Or maybe has a
direct connection to the mothership… now that’s an interesting thought.

He wonders what other hidden treasures could be found within the walls of this seemingly
harmless apartment. From his spot on the couch, he can see both residents’ bedrooms as well as the
bathroom and small dining space at his back. It’s fairly simplistic with furniture that likely came
with the lease. He hasn’t quite determined whether the several landscape paintings and tapestries
adorning the walls were also included, but he can’t imagine the complex’s decorators shelling out
the money for all of them, especially the largest one that hangs on the wall opposite the television.

His next question: are they Iwaizumi’s or Daichi’s? For some reason, he can’t possibly see them
belonging to Iwaizumi. He’s too… well, Iwaizumi to care whether something’s pretty or nice to
look at. Oikawa laughs softly to himself.

Propping his arm along the back of the couch, Oikawa stretches his neck to peer into the tiny
kitchen, curious as to whether they’re eating there or at the breakfast bar. Iwaizumi’s standing in
front of the stove, the strong plane of his back facing Oikawa. He serves stir fry on to two separate
plates and then hesitates.

Odd…

Oikawa watches closely for more, but Iwaizumi turns and quickly makes his way to the living
room without further interruption. His shoulders seem tense, though, and his usual stride looks a bit
stilted, as if the wind’s been taken out of his sails. He’s not an especially chipper person, but
Oikawa can tell something’s wrong.

He slumps onto the cushion beside Oikawa and sets down both plates. Amazingly enough, he also
managed to tuck the silverware under each plate so as to avoid a second trip. For some reason, it
doesn’t surprise Oikawa. Silly Iwa-chan.

Worried about what he’d just witnessed, Oikawa opens his mouth, ready to resume his
interrogation when-

The delicious aroma wafting up from the food roughly shoves Oikawa’s anxiety back for the time
being. He can smell the cooked broccoli and peppers and can practically taste the salty tang of soy
sauce on his tongue. Exercising every ounce of self-control he has left, he slowly picks up his fork
instead of digging in like he wants to. I never knew aliens could make such good chefs. He hopes
Iwaizumi’s cooking is just as delectable.

“Dig in,” Iwaizumi urges, waving at Oikawa’s plate with his fork. “The faster you eat, the faster
we can get to the important stuff.”

Oikawa almost drops his silverware. Would he divulge more secrets? “What ‘important stuff?’”

“T’ve never about you, but I’ve neglected my calculus homework for the past couple days.
Tonight’s basically the only chance I have left to get it done before another professor shoves more
homework down my throat,” Iwaizumi comments drily, spearing a green pepper with his fork tongs.

He’s always had his suspicions about Iwaizumi, but now Oikawa knows for sure that he’s a lot nerdier than he lets on. Even with a friend over, he wants to do school work. They’re college students now so assignments pile up a lot quicker, but Oikawa can’t believe it’s the first thing on Iwaizumi’s mind when his incredible best friend’s paying a visit. Oikawa usually just stays awake late into the night and works on homework while his friends sleep. Not that he and Kageyama invite many people over. Other than the usual suspects (Kuroo, Bokuto, and Hinata), only Yaku has been asked to spend the evening there before.

“Homework, Iwa-chan?” Oikawa pops a piece of chicken into his mouth and mumbles as he chews, “I should’ve known you’d turn out to be an even bigger nerd than me.”

“Hey, wait a-”

“But your species must be more advanced than ours to come up with those chips. Under your skin, right?”

Iwaizumi snakes his fingers beneath the sleeve of his shirt and lightly rubs a darker patch of skin that could easily be mistaken for a mole or birthmark. “Right here. They implant it almost immediately after we’re born.”

“Interesting… and they do more than just camouflage your body?”

“A lot more,” Iwaizumi echoes back. But his lips curve into a frown. “They perform many different tasks at once, but that’s about all I can say about them.”

“Synthetic, lightweight, performs various functions simultaneously… Are you geniuses? Is Iwa-chan secretly an alien mastermind hoping to take over the world?”

“Trust me, world domination isn’t our goal,” Iwaizumi scoffs. “Especially when it comes to Earth. A lot of my kind resents humans and this planet in general so the last thing they’d want to do is set up shop here.”

That makes no sense. “Resent us? Why?”

“It’s a long story. Suffice to say that we have different priorities and a lot of big shots envy how carefree the human race seems.” Iwaizumi picks out another green pepper, and, distantly, Oikawa wonders if they’re his favorite food. “Anyway, I guess you could say we’re pretty advanced. But no, I’m not like the freaky mad scientists from your weird ass books.”

What does he think I read? I have far better taste in literature than that.

“So are you super smart? For your kind, I mean.”

Iwaizumi sets his fork on his plate and scratches at the back of his neck. “Kind of. I just learn at a faster rate than most.”

Oikawa almost chokes on the onion he’s munching. He says it so nonchalantly, as if being superior minded in an already superior minded civilization isn’t a big deal at all. Oikawa works hard on a daily basis to make decent grades, and, although he’s fairly smart himself, that doesn’t mean he could hold a candle to an extraterrestrial capable of learning an entire species’ customs and lifestyle habits in a matter of a years.
“I feel like you’re more of a genius than you think, Iwa-chan.”

“And what gives you that idea?”

Oikawa honestly has no idea and says so. Instinct? A gut feeling? Most of his feelings regarding Iwaizumi are just that- gut feelings.

“Maybe we shouldn’t work on calculus after all,” Iwaizumi sighs, moving his half-finished dinner to the table. “There’s no way I can deal with you gushing over me for the rest of the night. I’ll go crazy.”

“Not a fan of compliments, huh?” Oikawa still has most of his stir fry left but feels weird eating when Iwaizumi’s already finished. He sets the plate next to his host’s.

“Any suggestions about what we should do?”

“Ah, changing the subject. I see, Iwa-chan,” Oikawa coos, “You really are a genius.”

They go back and forth like this for a bit longer before Oikawa eventually concedes that, yes, he does have a suggestion. The tote he’d brought along for the UFO hunt earlier sits alongside the couch, and Oikawa reaches over to sneak his hand under the giant navy blanket. He first withdraws his overnight clothes and, ignoring Iwaizumi’s startled protests, darts into the bathroom.

He quickly pulls his shirt over his head and shimmies his pants down until he can step out of them. The shirt and lounge pants he brought are lighter, looser, and leave Oikawa feeling more at ease. He checks his reflection, specifically the state of his hair, and tries to smooth the wrinkles in his t-shirt. Why does it matter what I look like? It’s not like I’m trying to impress anyone. Denial snorts derisively from its place in the very back of Oikawa’s mind.

Oikawa slips back into the living room with his original outfit tucked under his arm. Iwaizumi looks suspicious, maybe a tad scared, but doesn’t say a word. Oikawa excitedly wriggles back onto the couch and stretches his body across the side, digging around inside the giant tote again for a couple minutes before his fingers brush the plastic DVD case at the bottom.

Before heading out, Oikawa spent about an hour arguing with himself about what to bring. Kageyama wasn’t much of a help either, lying in Oikawa’s bed, completely immersed in the latest issue of Inside Volleyball. The blanket, though, was a must. It was the blanket, the one that, even as a child, he’d brought along when he scurried down the street on a clear night, hoping to catch a glimpse of an actual spacecraft. The fraying edges and assortment of moth balls are the best indicators of its years of service.

He’d shoved it into his bag without a second thought. But whether to bring more still posed an issue. Finally, after snapping at Kageyama to lay in his own bed if he didn’t plan on offering input, he decided on three DVD’s: Alien, the first Men in Black, and Close Encounters of the Third Kind.

Now he’s absolutely thrilled he brought the movies along. Deep down, he worried that it would be his last night with Iwaizumi and wanted to make the most of it. He’d never, not even in his wildest dreams, thought Iwaizumi would be an alien or that he’d invite him to spend the night.

“Ta-da!” Oikawa withdraws the Alien DVD case with a flourish. Ignoring Iwaizumi’s audible gulp, he slides closer and taps the egg oozing green goo on the cover. “How about we watch this first?”

Iwaizumi narrows his eyes, which, to Oikawa’s disappointment, are back to being hidden behind some sort of biological camouflage. “Alien...?”
“Alien,” Oikawa confirms, waving the case around.

“You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“Oh, Iwa-chan, it’ll be funny.” He taps his chin thoughtfully with the plastic case, covering his smirk. “I mean, a sweet little alien watching a movie about another bigger and scarier alien that likes ripping people’s faces off? Should be a good laugh.”

“You sure have a twisted sense of humor. Who laughs at someone getting torn to shreds by a- Wait, ‘sweet little alien’? Who the hell are you calling sweet and little?”

“Compared to this guy, you’re pretty tiny.” Oikawa explains with a shrug. He moves the DVD just in time to avoid Iwaizumi’s swinging arm. “And I don’t imagine that you make a habit of killing people. Unless of course you do… then we may need to have a talk about how this whole ‘friendship’ thing is going to play out. I’d rather not go to jail, thank you very much.”

The food long forgotten, Oikawa notices that there’s barely a foot of space between he and Iwaizumi. To try and physically force the movie’s content into Iwaizumi’s brain, he had slid closer and hadn’t even noticed the way his hand naturally came to rest on Iwaizumi’s jean clad thigh. His fingers tighten reflexively, liking the feel of denim and muscle that twitches beneath his touch.

Oikawa inhales and, everywhere, everywhere, there’s Iwaizumi. The lingering scent of detergent and aftershave, the warmth of his body, the rise and fall of his chest- Oikawa can’t escape it no matter where he lets his eyes rest or where he focuses his attention.

Slowly, he lifts his head to gauge Iwaizumi’s reaction. And he doesn’t seem to be faring any better.

For a brief moment, Oikawa imagines what it would feel like to slip his hands under Iwaizumi’s shirt, how it would feel to softly press kisses to his jawline, to his neck and down to his collarbone. Iwaizumi would shudder and whisper Oikawa’s name, utterly confused but wanting more. Then Oikawa would finally kiss Iwaizumi fully, would push and push until there’s no space between them, until their bodies melded together with legs intertwined, breathing in each other’s air, tasting each other…

You can’t, Oikawa reminds himself. You absolutely can’t do this to yourself. Or to Iwaizumi. He hates that side of his brain, the logical side that never fails to rain on his parade. Grudgingly, he leans back the slightest bit. He’s not sure whether he’s imagining it or not, but Iwaizumi’s face seems to fall.

Almost like he’s upset.

“So, the movie?” Oikawa’s voice cracks and, fuck, he wishes he could put an end to this whole personal space issue they have.

“Yeah… yeah, sure.” There’s a slight break in Iwaizumi’s voice, too. It makes Oikawa feel a little better but only a little. “We can watch that, I guess.”

Before he can embarrass himself any more than he already has, Oikawa scrambles off the couch with the DVD in hand. His legs aren’t half as shaky as his hands, and he manages to load the disc player and make it back to the couch without dropping the case or, worse, falling headlong into the table.

Tucking his feet under his body, he crawls back into his spot by Iwaizumi’s side. All of the blood seems to have rushed to his head, and he can barely keep his thoughts straight, can feel them darting frantically around his skull. The sensation is insufferable and far worse than it’s ever been.
with any of the numerous girls he’s been involved with in the past. He knows he’s blushing. Iwaizumi could probably reach out and wrap his hands around Oikawa’s embarrassment, as if it’s some tangible creature snaking around their seated figures, wrapping itself around their limbs like a snake. And, after sneaking a glance over at Iwaizumi, he finds that he isn’t the only flustered one in the room.

*What the hell was that?* Oikawa blinks, zeroing in on the television screen as the trailers play. *This is getting to be annoying. If I don’t stop this now, I’ll end up doing something stupid like... well, something that will likely scare Iwaizumi away for good. Maybe if I just get it over with and kiss him, I would know for sure that I’m not interested...*

Oh no. No, no, no. He needs to forget that outlandish idea, and he needs to forget about it fast.

Thankfully, the movie starts and silences the maelstrom in Oikawa’s head. It’s hard to think about potentially kissing your newest friend when people onscreen are screaming in terror.

He’s seen the movie enough to quote most scenes line by line. After about the fifth time, he stopped squealing and squirming during the most suspenseful parts. They were certainly well done, but he mainly watched the film for pure enjoyment at this point. Back when Kuroo and a few other neighborhood boys reluctantly agreed to join him for a biweekly “movie night” in elementary school, the entire film had Oikawa on the edge of his seat, eyes glued to the screen. At that age, Oikawa had only just begun his journey into the science fiction genre. To this day, *Alien* remains his first and, quite possibly, favorite alien movie.

Iwaizumi’s surprisingly quiet. The parts that scared Oikawa in the past don’t seem to faze him, and, whenever the Alien appears, he snorts softly under his breath. He comments here and there, pointing out little nuances and scientific impossibilities. Oikawa bristles with pride when Iwaizumi mentions mistakes he already picked out in recent viewings. Some, though, he admits are new, and his theory about Iwaizumi the Closet Genius resurfaces.

Advanced species or not, Oikawa suspects that Iwaizumi’s intelligence surpasses most of his kind. It’s a hunch, at best, but the feeling is another gut instinct he can’t seem to shake.

*Not only did I find an alien- I found a special one.*

Halfway through the movie, right after Oikawa quotes yet another section of dialogue, Iwaizumi breathes, “How many times have you watched this?”

The sudden question makes Oikawa jump for the first time since the film started. “Huh?”

“You seem to know it pretty well. So I was curious,” Iwaizumi explains, shifting slightly in his seat. Normally, Oikawa would chalk it up to Iwaizumi getting him back for his earlier smart ass comments. But there’s nothing harsh about his tone and, when Oikawa turns to check his expression, the barely there smile and softness of his gaze confirm his suspicions. Iwaizumi’s genuinely curious.

“None of your business,” Oikawa grumbles because he needs to break the tension that’s settled over them. It’s not uncomfortable. Actually, it’s far worse. The mood’s too comfortable and dangerously close to the feeling that had overcome Oikawa on the hill a couple hours ago, the feeling that had crept under his skin when he’d accidentally crowded against Iwaizumi on the couch.

“More than once.”
“Hey, don’t say that like you know for sure, Iwa-chan!”

“Oh, but I do.”

“You wish!” Oikawa huffs and looks back toward the movie. *Stupid alien and his stupid face and stupid brain.*

Ten or so minutes pass before Oikawa feels himself drifting off. The screen begins to blur around the edges, and the actors’ voices sound distant, like they’re stuck at the far end of a tunnel, shouting and hoping that Oikawa can hear their pleas. His eyelids feel heavy, and he knows he’ll be asleep soon. But Iwaizumi seems fine.

“How about *Men in Black* next?” He doesn’t want Iwaizumi to know just how tired he really is.

“Okay,” Iwazumi agrees, a small laugh slipping past his lips.

And that’s the last thing Oikawa remembers before everything goes dark, body cushioned by something firm and warm as sleep overcomes him.

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*Thump.*

Startled, Iwaizumi turns his head only to find Oikawa slumped against his shoulder. He sighs, shaking his head in disappointment. Oikawa’s the one who had such big plans for the evening to begin with, and he’s already passed out? Only seconds ago, they’d been discussing their movie schedule for the remainder of the night. The drowsiness in Oikawa’s voice now made a lot more sense.

*I can’t believe this.* Iwaizumi glances at the digital clock perched on the little side table. The boxy numbers and letters “11:47 PM” glare back at him as if they’re mocking the irony of this situation. His life is apparently a gigantic cosmic joke. The person who’s all gung-ho to watch science fiction films is fast asleep, while the subject of basically every movie belonging to said person is wide awake.

There isn’t any point to keep going now that Oikawa won’t be able to join him. Iwaizumi cracks his neck and readies himself to stand. He’ll take the DVD out and pack the rest of the cases back into Oikawa’s monster of a tote bag. That way, he won’t have to deal with Sleeping Beauty’s bitching the next morning.

But…

Has Oikawa’s hair always smelled so good? The faint aroma of apples seems ingrained in every soft strand of hair that tickles the underside of Iwaizumi’s jaw, and Iwaizumi has to fight back the urge to lean a bit closer, to bury his face in the thick mass of chestnut hair, and inhale. It’s intoxicating. He’s familiar with the odor, and, since it’s likely artificial, he knows all too well that it shouldn’t smell as incredible as it does.

As if that’s not bad enough, the angle of his face gives Iwaizumi a clear view of Oikawa’s fluttering lashes and closed eyelids, of the slope of his nose, of the gentle swell of his lips, of the jut of his chin and powerful jawline. He’s the very image of tranquility and peaceful slumber. Pictures from his textbook didn’t do the real thing justice, the human face, concrete and less than an arm’s length away, as the REM cycle slowly kicks in.

*Where did all of that energy go? That cocky attitude?* Iwaizumi laughs quietly to himself. In all honesty, he likes that Oikawa’s far from perfect. No one’s meant to be “perfect.” As a matter of
fact, Iwaizumi’s gone from tolerating Oikawa’s imperfections to, well, embracing them. They suit him, and Iwaizumi can’t imagine him being any other way.

Still, the silence is a pleasant change, and the opportunity to just sit and, without interruption, admire Oikawa’s features is certainly nice. He would never tell Oikawa this– for fear the jerk’s head may actually explode if his ego grew any more– but, as humans go, as all extraterrestrial species known to Iwaizumi’s species go, he really is beautiful.

Inside and out, Iwaizumi thinks and, unable to resist the urge any longer, raises his hand to lightly brush his knuckles across Oikawa’s forehead, pushing a few wayward pieces of hair to the side. Thankfully, he doesn’t stir. But he does mutter something about “robots” and, oddly enough, “chicken” that forces another small chuckle from Iwaizumi’s parted lips.

Up until now, Iwaizumi’s forgotten that Oikawa changed clothes before the movie started. The ratty-looking gray shirt has a grainy photo screened on the front, a tiny aircraft of sorts levitating above the trees along with the words “I WANT TO BELIEVE.” His sweatpants have little bulbous alien heads similar to the ones adorning his bed sheets, and they also look worn from years of use.

Fuck.

This is incredibly risky. Even more risky than he’d originally surmised the first time he saw Oikawa.

I just have to go grab a blanket and get my ass to bed. The longer he stays on this couch, pondering over and studying Oikawa, the more he runs the risk of lying down and staying with him for the rest of the night. Which could be a potentially horrible decision on his part.

He’s strong; he can handle one measly human.

He’s not just any human.

A human is a human. Letting himself get too attached is completely out of the question.

You’re already too attached. Too late to fix that.

Wow. He needs to get rid of the inner Daichi crammed inside his brain. The imaginary bastard annoys Iwaizumi almost as much as Oikawa does.

Eventually Iwaizumi talks himself into moving from his spot on the couch. He manages to shift Oikawa on to his back without disrupting his sleep. He heads to Daichi’s room and retrieves the spare blanket they keep stowed in his closet. Carefully, he places it over Oikawa and, realizing that the poor human’s neck will be incredibly sore in the morning based on his current position, sneaks one of the cushions from another chair under Oikawa’s head.

To his relief, Oikawa’s a heavy sleeper. He remains motionless throughout the whole rearrangement. Once or twice, his eyelids twitch and, right after Iwaizumi pushes the seat cushion into place, he mutters about robots again.

Iwaizumi is satisfied with his work and decides that he really, really, needs to go to sleep. He’s a couple steps from his bedroom door when the soft whine stops him in his tracks.

“Nnn…”

Confused, he glances over his shoulder in the direction of the couch and slumbering houseguest. Nothing seems out of place. Oikawa’s probably dreaming about androids and stir fry; Iwaizumi’s
just overreacting. Content, he scoffs at Oikawa’s crazy imagination and turns around.

“Iw… Iwa…”

Time seems to freeze. Iwaizumi’s feet refuse to move.

“Iwa… chan… Iwa-chan…”

Oikawa practically whimpers the last part, and Iwaizumi forgets how to breathe.

Without a second thought, terrified and rattled to the core, Iwaizumi dashes into his room and buries his face in the nearest pillow.

Fuck.

Chapter End Notes

come cry with me about kageyama and space on tumblr or twitter: @tobiologist
the monthly blood bath

Chapter Summary

In which Sugawara unintentionally helps Daichi fight his demons and Iwaizumi earns the title of suspected assassin.

Chapter Notes

h-hi…. so it’s been a while... sorry about that. I worked on a couple other projects in between as well as watched a few new animes. note: don’t watch daiya because it could potentially consume you whole

now, this is the longest chapter yet (yeah, I know, I’ve said this before) at a solid 7k. but you’ve probably already noticed that heh. also want to say that the past ikedai actually came to mind with the help of some of my friends [side eyes] you know who you are ryan shann samkate anne and thank you for unintentionally giving me the idea

OH OH also I made a mix for the fic!! this is the first set and there will probably be another by the time this is done. ALSO OH MY GOD THIS SWEET ANGEL MADE SOME ART FOR THIS FIC BASED ON THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER!!!!! I HAVE YET TO STOP SCREAMING ABOUT THIS

enough of that, though. as usual, shout out to my lovely betas and anyone who continues to read this!! comments are always appreciated and enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Restaurants are truly a clever human invention, Daichi supposes.

This particular one, a hole-in-the-wall kind of place that Daichi would’ve never known existed if not for Sugawara, reaffirms his growing hope in the terran food industry. An array of multi-colored chairs, wooden with long legs, surround small round tables, including the one’s outside along the tiny cafe’s front. Old signs and other assorted antiques line the walls and adorn the counter where several people wait to place their orders. A chalkboard hanging behind the counter displays the menu, a delicious and eclectic selection of sandwiches, wraps, drinks, and other lunch foods. A mix of instrumental and calm, slow music filters through the speakers, setting a sort of tranquil ambiance.

Considering this is his first visit, Daichi consults Sugawara about his selection. Chances are, left to his own devices, he’d come across the worst thing on the menu and unknowingly order it (that’s how his luck has been recently).

Sugawara has no problem ordering for both of them. He eventually decides on a chicken wrap stuffed with lettuce, cheese, onions, and something called sun-dried tomato pesto. Apparently, it’s his favorite wrap on the menu. The lemonade isn’t half bad either, and, after a tentative sip, Daichi begins to settle into his seat.
Sugawara may be many things, but “scary” certainly isn’t one of them. And yet still, here Daichi sits, restless as ever. Every time Sugawara’s wide and inquisitive gaze falls on him, he can practically feel his heart crawl up his throat.

Last night, the bowling alley provided the icebreaker the two sorely needed. It gave them the opportunity to talk about a plethora of random subjects without covering anything too serious, skirting around heavy topics, especially considering it was their first- dare Daichi even think it- date. Sugawara rattled on about his lacking bowling skills, while Daichi listened and tried not to die from embarrassment when his ball spent just about every turn hurtling down the gutter. Not that Sugawara didn’t mind, pointing this out by the end of the night, after significantly outscoring him.

“There’s no way you’re not a professional,” Daichi commented, a bit red in the face as he recovered from the embarrassment of losing by such a large margin.

“Professional bowler? I’m afraid not.” Sugawara adjusts the thick pewter blue scarf wrapped around his neck and steps through the bowling alley entrance ahead of Daichi. “I used to play volleyball, though. A long time ago when I was still in my prime.”

“College?”

“You flatter me, Sawamura,” Sugawara laughed, face bathed in the soft white luminescence of the nearest streetlight. “I played in high school. But I appreciate the compliment.”

Daichi was sure he’d catch on fire at any moment if Sugawara continued talking like that.

Although bowling and volleyball are completely different (yes, he knows that much about Earth’s sports), both require reflexes and the strategic mindset required of any athlete. Really, he was simply pleased to hear Sugawara had some sort of advantage. It made him feel a bit better.

Regardless, he needs to pay attention to the present Sugawara if he wants to avoid any additional humiliation.

“Do you like the wrap?” Sugawara smiles, wide and radiant. “Sun-dried tomato is sort of an acquired taste.”

Daichi’s knees strike the bottom of the table as he startles, torn forcefully from the chaotic storm of thoughts swirling around his head. He immediately tries to cover up the resulting wince of pain. “It’s delicious. This is the first time I’ve ever eaten something like it.”

“Ah, I probably should’ve picked something simpler. Less…” He waves his hand around. “You know. Sorry about that. Sometimes I just assume everyone likes the same foods as me. I have to stop doing that,” Sugawara laughs, vaguely flippant. He lifts the wrap to his mouth and takes a surprisingly large bite, chewing slowly as if pondering each burst of flavor.

“Well, I did tell you last night that I wasn’t picky.” Daichi snatches a chip from his plate. “Speaking of last night, you never told me where you work?”

“Yes, yes, you’re right. I’m a sign language interpreter.”

Daichi blinks. Sign language, huh? “Interesting. And what does that entail?”

“Well, I work for the university not too far from here. I sign- with my hands, of course- for special events and classes, like during lectures. You know, for any of the deaf or hearing-impaired students. They can look towards me instead of the speaker.” Sugawara scoffs and shakes his head.
“Wow, okay. Sorry about that. I don’t know why I went into that much detail. It’s not like you’re an alien or something and have never heard of someone in my line of work before.”

Daichi is amazed his heart doesn’t catapult out of his mouth and onto his plate. “Of course not. Aliens, how ridiculous.”

“You’re not a believer either? Glad to hear we’re on the same page. I wouldn’t want to think you’re one of those looney people that watches that alien show on the Discovery Channel or screams at the sky hoping for a UFO to show up and—” Sugawara shudders—“probe them.”

“Oh, yeah. Wouldn’t want to be lumped in with those nutjobs,” Daichi replies hoarsely, cramming a chip into his mouth. *This could be bad. Very bad.* He chews angrily, miserably, and swallows, cringing as the half-chewed sharp edges of the potato chip scrape his esophagus. Desperate for a subject change, he blurts, “That’s amazing, though. The sign language. How many signs are there?”

“Well, too many,” Sugawara teases. “Thousands. It’s a wonder I managed to learn them all.”

“Did someone teach you or are you self-taught?”

“Oh God, self-taught.” He rubs a chip between his thumbs, making it dance from side to side. Daichi finds himself entranced. “A cousin of mine was deaf so my aunt taught me most of the signs.”

“That’s… that really is incredible. It sounds like a very specialized profession.” Daichi stifles the urge to gush like he wants to. Sign language, human languages in general, have always fascinated Daichi and here Sugawara is, addressing the issue casually as if it’s not even the slightest bit impressive. As a matter of fact, Daichi’s beginning to think Sugawara has trouble taking pride in any of his abilities.

It’s incredibly irksome.

“What about you?” Sugawara prompts, effortlessly changing topics. “I saw the briefcase you brought along. If I’m not mistaken, it was stuffed with papers.”

“No, you’re not mistaken. I’m a physics professor.” Daichi leans back a little in his seat and points out the window. “At the college down the… str…” The words die in his throat. Hadn’t Sugawara just said—

“Wait, wait, don’t tell me we work at the same university but have never, not even once, run into each other? That’s crazy.”

“I just started working there this semester,” Daichi admits. “So I guess I just haven’t been working there long enough for us to run into each other.”

“Suppose so. Physics, though… That’s definitely more impressive than what I do.”

“You’re too hard on yourself, Sugawara. Skills are skills. Talents are talents. Can we just agree that both are challenging? And make us want to tear all of our hair out?”

Sugawara takes another bite of his wrap. He squints, as if seriously considering Daichi’s ultimatum. “Okay, fine. Sounds like a fair enough compromise. Oh, and I forgot to ask. How’s Iwaizumi-kun doing?”

“Hajime?”
“Are there any other Iwaizumi-kun’s in your life that I should know about?” Sugawara lilts, taking a sip of his iced tea and watching Daichi over the rim of his glass.

“No!” Daichi replies all too quickly, and, predictably, Sugawara laughs softly into his napkin as he wipes his mouth. “I mean, no. There’s only Hajime. He’s a family friend, and his parents suggested he live with me since he’s attending the same university I teach at.”

“How sweet of you. That will save him a lot of money in these next few years.”

“That’s what I- what they hoped.”

Sugawara’s brow furrows. “You seem worried. At least you did last night when we were talking about him.”

“Well, that you can tell, you two are awfully close.” Sugawara taps his chin thoughtfully, gaze fixed on one of the many marbled lamps overhead. “I don’t know your history together. But I listen to the way you talk about him, the way you talk about his intelligence and tenacity, and I wonder what it must be like to have someone who makes you happy, makes you smile like that.”

Suddenly, an old face surfaces, and Sugawara is no longer Sugawara. Instead, he is there, sitting across from Daichi, with his similarly light hair and a dusting of freckles scattered across the bridge of his nose, the apples of his cheeks. The smile is also the same, fleeting, painfully sweet because Daichi knows there’s little substance to the curve of his lips. This person, this significant figure in his past, rarely expressed genuine happiness. Because, for most of his life, until the last day Daichi knew with certainty he was alive and breathing, his poor companion was far from happy.

Mentor #230, terran alias Ikejiri Hayato.

A friend. Or, as Ikejiri persisted, more than just a friend.

“It’s a shame we never meet our biological parents,” Ikejiri sighs, memory shockingly clear as if it only happened yesterday. “It’s lonely without someone to love.”

“Hayato, please, you can’t talk like that. It’s bad enough that you and I...” Daichi hesitates just as he’d done back then. “Love isn’t worth all the trouble. You know that.”

“Ah, but I can tell when you’re lying, Daichi.” Ikejiri- or maybe Sugawara, their faces are beginning to overlap— retorts. “You’re enjoying this. I’m enjoying this. And nothing those government snobs say will change that.”

But he was wrong. They could change it; they did change it.

A few days later, Ikejiri mysteriously disappeared from the cruiser. Nobody had a legitimate explanation for his sudden departure. Nobody had any idea where he had gone. His superiors only said that he was moved to a different sector, but Daichi had his suspicions.

He wouldn’t be seeing Ikejiri again any time soon- if he ever saw him again at all.

“Sawamura?”

The distraction comes along at exactly the right moment. The gray locks of hair return, replacing golden brown, and round hazel eyes search Daichi’s own. For what, he isn’t sure. “Sorry, just got
lost in my thoughts there for a second.”

“Totally understandable. We’ve all been there,” Sugawara concedes and, now, his grin looks full, genuine, and nothing at all like the weak ghost of a smile that usually graced Ikejiri’s face.

“Anyway, as I was saying, it’s nice seeing you happy. Professors- especially physics professors- need to find an outlet, something to keep them grounded and relaxed and, most importantly, content. Iwaizumi-kun seems to be that for you. It’s really… really nice.”

He and Iwaizumi have their issues, but Sugawara’s right; his life has changed significantly since becoming his Mentor.

“Yeah. Yeah, it is, isn’t it?”

It’s the weekend, sun hanging high in the sky, just short of sweltering heat, and Iwaizumi, by some sick and bizarre cosmic joke, is here.

He’s outfitted in a specially made tracksuit, knee pads (not the volleyball kind, unfortunately), elbow pads, gloves, helmet, and, clutched against his chest, a paintball gun. An ex-Soldier-hopeful, a natural born fighter, has been dragged along to a game that involves weapons. Weapons, of all fucking things.

The volleyball team, along with two guests invited by Kuroo and Bokuto, are engaging in what Oikawa calls the “Monthly Blood Bath.” Except that no blood will actually be shed. Not that it makes a difference to the participants who all- even the more level-headed Yaku- seem to get a thrill out of calling it that.

“Iwa-chan!” Oikawa cries delightedly, and, really, how is this what his life has become?

“Oh yeah, everyone is so surprised,” Kuroo mock gasps, hand perched on his waist. He’s already a bit angry that Oikawa got to pick first anyway, being captain and everything, but Iwaizumi’s almost positive that he’s more upset that he and Oikawa couldn’t be on the same team.

“You’re just jealous because Iwa-chan is clearly going to own this match.” Oikawa glances over at Iwaizumi, silently imploring him to back his claim up. Iwaizumi wants to- he really does- but it’s been a few years since he handled firearms. And a paintball gun is completely foreign to him so he can’t guarantee anything special.

Uncertain, he shrugs. “Sure.”

“See?”


“Everyone is so surprised,” Oikawa echoes, smirking impishly when both Bokuto and Kuroo flash him a “you better run like your ass is on fire once this match starts” sort of collective glare.

Kuroo nudges Bokuto in the side and leans over to whisper something in his ear. Bokuto snorts, looking pointedly at Iwaizumi. Alien or not, he’s thankful he can’t make out the words. He knows well enough by now that with those two, it’s better to just not ask questions and move on.
Iwaizumi glances to his left and right. The two newcomers are certainly perplexing. The first, a tallish young man with messy dark hair emanates a capable and reliable aura, observing others with a silent, watchful gaze. If Iwaizumi remembers correctly, he goes by the name Akaashi (or as Oikawa calls him, “Kei-chan”). To Iwaizumi’s right stands a young man exhibiting a nearly identical attitude, a similar unspoken sense of power, so aware of his surroundings that it’s a bit eerie. Round eyes, feline, seem to track Iwaizumi’s every movement. Kenma- that’s his name.

“Now, let’s see…” Oikawa taps his chin thoughtfully, giving the lineup of potential team members a once over. “How about… Kozume-chan!”

Kozume-chan? Confused, Iwaizumi looks around for the person in question and comes face-to-face with none other than Kenma.

Iwaizumi jogs his memory, trying to recall who invited who. But it makes no sense because hadn’t Kuroo been the one to-

“What the hell?” Kuroo interjects, practically spitting out the words. An accusing finger gestures between Oikawa and Kenma. “He can’t be on your team. He was my next pick!”

“Well, if you wanted him that badly, Tetsu-chan, you should’ve picked him first.”

“He has a point,” Kenma agrees, shoulders rising and falling in a nonchalant shrug. Casually, he steps out of line and joins Oikawa, flashing Kuroo an indecipherable look. Iwaizumi feels immensely awkward because the tension is high, far higher than it was when they first arrived.

“You know I was going to pick you.” Kuroo’s hands still rest securely on his hips. At his side, Bokuto nods along. “It’s just that I already promised Bokuto we’d be on the same team.”

"It's fine, Kuro," Kenma intones, grinning as if everything really is alright. "Just don't expect me to go easy on you."

Kuroo's jaw drops. Actually, everyone gapes- even Iwaizumi.

“What about me? You promised me, too,” Lev suddenly chimes, bouncing excitedly in place. Not so quietly fuming, Yaku knocks his heel into Lev’s shin, and grins when the human giraffe winces and whines in response.

A few minutes later, Lev gets his wish. Beside Iwaizumi and Kenma, Oikawa chooses Kageyama and Hinata. Apparently, they’re a package deal. You want Kageyama? Then you get Hinata. You want Hinata? Then you better be willing to take Kageyama. Meanwhile, Bokuto basically orders Kuroo to pick Akaashi (“I can’t be on a different team than Keiji!” “I had to settle for you instead of Kenma so who’s really suffering here?” “Kuroo!”) as well as choosing Yaku and Lev who, although they aren’t as vocal about it as Hinata, also seem to come as a joint deal.

Once the teams are sorted out and each participant has a paintball gun in hand, helmets secured, they head to the field. Trees surround them from every side and, on top of the nearest hill, sits a small wooden shack, dilapidated and covered in paint splatters. The air smells of grass and the noxious odor of what Iwaizumi can only guess originates from the guns or, more specifically, the paintball pellets. Leaves crunch beneath his feet, and, distantly, he catches Hinata teasing Kageyama for his heavy footfalls.

Oikawa jogs alongside Iwaizumi and lowers his voice. “So… we’re going to win today, right?”

“Why are you asking me? It’s not like I’m the resident paintball expert.” Iwaizumi sidesteps a particularly large hole in the ground and ducks to avoid a tree branch. “You’re the one that’s
played before. Plus, I lived all of my fucking life on a spaceship. I don’t know a damn thing about nature or plants or whatever.”

“‘Nature or plants or whatever.’ Very eloquently put, Iwa-chan.”

“You know what I mean,” Iwaizumi grunts, struggling to scale the hill and keep pace with the rest of his team at the same time. Kageyama and Hinata have turned the climb into a race, shoving each other in their haste to reach the safehold first.

“We need to take stock of our surroundings once we reach the base,” Kenma explains and scares the absolute shit out of Iwaizumi because where had he even come from? “I know how Kuro’s brain works. He’ll organize a single attack. The whole team will surround the base and won’t waste any time picking us off one by one.”

“Kozume-chan’s right. And we should definitely send out Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum first.” Oikawa points at Kageyama and Hinata just as they let out matching war cries, tumbling gracelessly through the safehold entrance. “They’ll provide the perfect distraction with their… well, you know.”

“I do know,” Kenma sighs. “Their antics should buy us some time.”

Iwaizumi, Oikawa, and Kenma reach the shelter moments later. The door hangs open, and Oikawa quickly draws it shut behind them. The room carries the very essence of the woods, musk heavy and overbearing, and the hideous aroma of the paint bullets seems to cling to everything, toxic enough to permeate through Iwaizumi’s visor. The space is small, just big enough for the five of them, with not a single piece of furniture.

Kageyama and Hinata are far too preoccupied with each other to notice their teammates. Although he’s a few inches shorter, Hinata has Kageyama up against the far wall, yelling something about “I beat you the last time we raced here!” and “You owe me so many pork buns after all those cheap tricks, Tobio” and, honestly, Iwaizumi is beginning to understand Oikawa’s confusion regarding their relationship. If he didn’t know better, Iwaizumi may have suspected-

Reeling back, Hinata goes silent as Kageyama places a quick kiss on his forehead. He guffaws, face bright red, and shoves Kageyama away. But there’s not much force behind the push. Kageyama gives Hinata space, though, and flashes him a knowing look, almost as if this isn’t the first occasion he’s had to use this method.

Iwaizumi almost gives himself whiplash as he turns away.

“Alright, calm down over there. Geez, Tobio-chan.” Oikawa leans against the wooden pillar smack dab in the middle of the room. “Now, Tetsu-chan will probably be here soon with his team. Kozume-chan pointed out that they’ll probably surround the safehold, hide out in the trees and wait for us to come out. Then, just as we show our pretty little faces, they’ll attack. Keeping that in mind, I’m going to send you two— he nods his head in the direction of Kageyama and Hinata who have since settled down—out first. You’ll be in charge of leading the counterattack.”

That certainly piques Kageyama’s interest. “Who goes first? Should I take out Kuroo since he’s the leader?”

“Anyone will do,” Kenma replies. His eyes look even creepier through the crimson plastic.

“Then, once they’ve taken out a couple targets and let us get an idea of the situation we’re dealing with, Iwa-chan and I will head out.” Oikawa catches Iwaizumi’s gaze and winks. Iwaizumi
considers smacking him upside the head once they’re alone. “Kozume-chan will stay close to the base to make sure no one gets in.”

“Does it matter if they get in?” Iwaizumi asks, brows raised.

“Yes, Iwa-chan, because this is our base and not theirs.”

“But… it’s not like the goal is to seize the base. Plus it doesn’t give us much of an advantage to begin wi-”

“The base belongs to us, Iwa-chan.”

“…You’re ridiculous.”

“Seriously,” Kageyama interjects and Hinata laughs, covering his mouth to try and lessen the blow.

“I knew I should’ve never introduced you two,” Oikawa pouts, folding his arms across his chest. “You’re both so mean. I have no idea why I chose you for my team.”

“Neither do I.”

“Just go, Tobio-chan! Both of you, go!” He practically shoves Hinata and Kageyama out the door. The clamoring thud of it slamming closed echoes throughout the little space and seems to shake the very foundation. “Well, I certainly hope they both get shot, whether they’re on my team or not.”

Iwaizumi shifts the gun in his grip, getting a feel for the weapon. It’s lightweight and, regardless of the odor, seems suitable enough for this kind of game. Every weapon he’s handled in the past puts this gun to shame, but those were intended to kill humongous creatures, interstellar monsters the likes of which would readily swallow the human race in one giant gulp; they’re not to be trifled with, that’s for sure.

“Lets check it out,” Kenma calls out to Oikawa and Iwaizumi. He flags them over to the hole in the wall that serves as the base’s only window. Squeezing in between Oikawa and Kenma, Iwaizumi crouches low enough to peer out at the surrounding field, sweeping his gaze across the hill’s slope. He doesn’t see anything weird at first until he catches sight of Kageyama and Hinata.

They stand overlooking the woods below, both leveling their guns at nothing, absolutely nothing.

That is until Kuroo and Lev and- holy shit- his entire team comes sprinting out from behind the towering oak trees, galloping up the hill like a pack of wild horses. Iwaizumi wants to cry out to them, but it’s too late. Lev fires and Hinata’s body jerks back, forcing him back and flat on his ass. He scrubs at the quarter-sized yellow mark adorning his shoulder, angrily grumbling something under his breath as Kageyama darts away.

“Shit! Shit!” Kageyama takes cover behind the nearest tree. “Shit!”

Lev cackles and high fives Kuroo, turning to Bokuto who wraps his arm around Lev’s neck, laughing like a band of giggling hyenas. They’re a hysterical mess, and Iwaizumi has no idea how they manage to make it the rest of the way up the hill. Kuroo sends Lev, Bokuto, and Akaashi in the direction of the base while heading off to confront Kageyama himself.

“He’s done for,” Oikawa drawls.

“Kuroo or Kageyama?” Iwaizumi drops beneath the window, mirroring Oikawa and Kenma.
“Kageyama,” Kenma deadpans, and Iwaizumi completely believes him.

“What about us, then? Should we still leave?”

“Of course, Iwa-chan, we’re sitting ducks if we stay here.” Oikawa adjusts his gun and rises to his feet, silently encouraging his teammates to do the same. Kenma cocks his head, motioning for them to step away from the window. Standing in plain view like that will end the game in an instant. “The plan hasn’t changed. We figured that would happen, remember?”

“Yeah but still-”

“Those two always get shot first.” The distant cries of Kageyama, likely being shot, ring through the afternoon air just on cue. “They’re too busy competing to notice anything around them. I’m surprised they’ve never accidentally shot each other instead, to be honest. But you and I are a thousand times more mature so we should be fine. Right, Iwa-chan?”

“You’ll be fine,” Kenma answers for Iwaizumi. Those eerie eyes fix on Iwaizumi, and he can’t help but flinch, feeling a bit shaken under such a powerfully unsettling gaze. Scrutinizing, taking him apart piece by piece, they sweep over Iwaizumi languidly. For a moment, he considers asking, in the most casual manner possible, if Kenma happens to be from another planet. Because there’s no way such a unique and subtly powerful aura could belong to a human being. At least not in Iwaizumi’s experience.

Oikawa and Iwaizumi quietly slip out the safehold’s exit, darting for the nearest tree. Thankfully, there’s one only a few feet away from their position, and Oikawa dives for cover, tugging Iwaizumi down with him. Pressed against the bark, rough and brittle even beneath his gloved fingertips, Iwaizumi huddles close to the trunk. He’s all too aware of Oikawa behind him, warm and ever present, knees digging into his lower back. But it doesn’t hurt although it does hinder his ability to focus on Bokuto and Akaashi who stand proudly in the middle of the field.

“Kenma is totally going to go for Kuroo first and take his ass out,” Bokuto laughs, poking Akaashi in the side with his gun. “He’s done for.”

“Wouldn’t shock me,” Akaashi concedes. “He should be happy we’re all on the same team. I’d gladly hunt him down.”

“Same.” Bokuto says, dragging out the “a,” and reaches over to pat Akaashi on the back. “I bet you wouldn’t shoot me, huh, Keiji?”

“I would.”

“What? No way!”

“You’ve known me for all these years and yet you really don’t think I’d jump at the chance to-”

“Duck!” Bokuto squeals and immediately grabs hold of Akaashi’s arm. They both drop low to the ground and somehow manage to avoid Oikawa’s warning shot.

“So close,” Oikawa whines. He lowers the gun and drops his head on Iwaizumi’s shoulder. There’s a helmet and an awfully thick couple layers of clothing between Oikawa’s face and Iwaizumi’s bare skin, but it feels more like there’s nothing, like that soft and upturned nose is pressed against his bicep.

“Hah, you missed!” Bokuto cackles and Iwaizumi can hear Akaashi’s sigh as if he were crouched right next to him.
“A shame, really, I was worried I’d accidentally hit Kei-chan instead,” Oikawa shouts back, teasing, completely in his element.

“You know how this game goes. I never would’ve let you live that one down.”

“Is that a threat, Kou-chan?”

“You better believe it is!”

Iwaizumi rolls his eyes. They’re like a couple of children. And he and Akaashi are the unwilling babysitters. Or, he reflects with a bitter laugh, maybe a little too willing.

“Killshot!” Oikawa yodels, reaching back around the tree trunk.

The loud thump of a body- likely Bokuto’s- hitting the ground shakes the mostly silent forest. Oikawa’s hysterical laughter gets louder and louder and, really, the guy seems to get one hell of a power trip from this paintball thing. Iwaizumi’s seen his competitive side before during their private volleyball lessons, on the occasions Bokuto or Kuroo comes to help, but this is entirely new. Light-hearted and yet equally as bloodthirsty, Iwaizumi doesn’t know what to make of it. It reminds him of his early days in weapon training classes.

**Be more serious about this, Hajime.**

How do you expect to win any fights like this?

You won’t last a day in the field.

“Iwa-chan, get down!”

Iwaizumi falls to the ground, skull bouncing painfully around the inside of his helmet as his head hits the ground below. He tries to remain calm, but he has every reason to panic. Face down, in the middle of the woods, playing a game he’s never played before, a game involving guns, with a group of competitive and hot-blooded human athletes. And, to make matters worse, there’s another body hovering over Iwaizumi’s. He glances over and a gloved hand, nearly identical to his own, rests on either side of his head. Thighs press in on either side of his, warm and solid, and it has to be, has to be, Oikawa.

“Oikawa…?” Iwaizumi’s thankful for the cover of the helmet. His cheeks, as well as the waver in his voice, are a dead giveaway of how much Oikawa’s proximity affects him. “What are… you doing?”

“Saving you, of course.”

It’s soft, honest, matter-of-fact as if it’s the only plausible answer. As if anything else is unthinkable. Iwaizumi barely hears it through the helmet’s visor since they’re both outfitted in bulky gear. But it’s just loud enough, achingly situated on the border between a whisper and a breath.

“Who… who shot you?”

“Kei-chan,” Oikawa admits, leaning his helmet against Iwaizumi’s back for the second time since the match started. “Getting revenge for Kou-chan, I suppose. I guess I deserve it.”

“That sounds weird coming from you. What makes you think you deserved it?”
“Well, I would’ve done the same if he shot you.”

Oh.

“Hah, Keiji got you back for that cheap shot!” Bokuto hollers. Another audible sigh from Akaashi follows soon after along with a mildly exasperated, “I would’ve shot him either way.”

Iwaizumi expects Oikawa to move right away because, obviously, Akaashi could easily make a beeline for the competitor who still has yet to be shot. But he shifts slowly, almost too slowly, kneeling next to Iwaizumi for several seconds, gathering his bearings. Iwaizumi quietly watches the whole thing, a little concerned, but Oikawa jumps to his feet in an impressively graceful maneuver that has Iwaizumi gaping behind his visor.

“Well, looks like I’m out, Iwa-chan. I guess I’ll just have-”

“Iwaizumi-san, Oikawa, get down!”

Kenma comes bounding around the corner of the shack, running full-tilt. He’s waving his arms frantically in the air as he runs, and leaves crackle and break under the weight of his boots. Oikawa and Iwaizumi stare and, upon seeing the reason for Kenma’s panic, Iwaizumi dives for his original spot behind the tree’s thick trunk.

Not far behind, Kuroo and Lev are heading straight for them, sprinting. At nearly the same height, the combination is a lot more intimidating than it should be, considering the people in question. Iwaizumi thought they were a bit scary at first but now, after meeting Akaashi and Kenma, he recognized that the quiet ones are the ones he should really worry about.

“Hurry, Kozume-chan!” Oikawa beckons and cringes as Kuroo shoots him in the thigh. “Also, in case you idiots haven’t noticed yet, I’ve already been shot.”

Kuroo and Lev burst into laughter and falter, giving Kenma enough time to join Iwaizumi, sliding across the grass like he’s stealing a base out on the baseball diamond. He brushes some of the dirt from his shoulders and turns to Iwaizumi. “I shot Kuro.”

“Already?” Oikawa gasps, body propped up against the tree trunk. He might as well be modelling the blue and black tracksuit. “He didn’t last long this time around.”

“You and I both know he’s all talk. Even Lev has outsmarted him before.”

“I remember that! He and Kou-chan. Didn’t they corner him?”

“Pretty sure. They had him trapped between two trees, and the only way out was through them.”

Iwaizumi silently amends to give Bokuto and Lev a wide berth when he’s finally able to attend regular volleyball practice.

“We can’t have the same thing happen to us,” Kenma decides, surprisingly adamant about their survival. “Oikawa-san is already out of the game, but you should be able to-”

In a burst of yellow and pinkish smoke, Kenma jerks forward, slumping against Iwaizumi. Oikawa cries out, looking utterly mortified by the turn of events, arms flailing helplessly because, well, there’s nothing he can do. Kenma’s been shot.

“Kozume-chan!” Oikawa wails as if Kenma has really been shot, struck by an actual bullet, and falls to his knees. He grasps Kenma’s shoulders and drags him away from Iwaizumi. It’s strangely
funny since they’re both still wearing helmets, and Oikawa’s screaming about a measly paintball pellet. “Oh no, not you, too!”

“Don’t shake him too hard, dumbass.” Iwaizumi places a reassuring hand on Kenma’s back. “Are you alright?”

“It’s only a paintball. Calm down.” He shoves lightly at Oikawa. “It’s him that we need to watch out for. If we’re not careful- wait, Iwaizumi-san, behind you!”

Just in time, Iwaizumi drops, rolling to the side. It’s been awhile since he somersaulted, but he quickly regains his footing, gloved fingers digging into the dry dirt, gun slapping against his thigh. Certain combat techniques are second nature to him by now. They’re reflexes, practically instinctual. He lifts his weapon and levels it at Lev, frozen in place. He wishes he could see the expression he wears.

“W-what the hell? Where did you learn to do that?” It’s Kuroo that speaks, but Lev’s head bobs, also seeking some sort of confirmation for Iwaizumi’s recent stunt. “Are you like a… ninja? Or-holy shit, are you an assassin?”

“An assas-” Iwaizumi pauses. Well, he supposes that’s not too far-fetched. Most of his people would qualify as assassins by terran standards. “No, I just took some martial arts and self defense classes back in high school.”

Nice, Hajime.

Lev has yet to move. His gun is still poised and ready to fire, though, so Iwaizumi can’t take his chances. Adjusting his grip, Iwaizumi’s lips quirk up into a grin, hidden beneath the crimson translucent cover of his visor. “Of course, that doesn’t mean I’m not qualified to be an assassin.”

“Save us, Iwa-chan, you’re our only hope!”

“Is that a Star Wars reference?” Kenma groans, clearly suffering.

“When will I have another opportunity like this again, Kozume-chan? Never. Never.”

“In a volleyball match…?”

“That’s different.”

Iwaizumi tries to tune out the side conversation, smile not fading, and squeezes the trigger. Seconds later, the resounding smack of the paintball pellet striking meshy material echoes briefly, quick and sharp. Lev and Kuroo both yell, Bokuto guffaws, Kenma snickers, and Oikawa cheers, throwing his hands up to the sky.

But…

The realization hits him hard, and, instantly, elation gives way to fear.

Where the hell did Akaashi go?

A pellet stirs the grass to the left of Iwaizumi’s boots, and he jumps back, eyes darting around the surrounding forest. There are other trees, stockier and better for hiding, something that Iwaizumi could kick himself for not noticing sooner. Suddenly, he catches movement out of the corner of his eye. A gun disappears behind the tree a couple feet away from Bokuto and Akaashi’s earlier hiding place, a soft click resounding as the person adjusts their weapon.
“Holy shit!” Kuroo and Lev chorus.

“Keiji, nice!”

“Akaashi-san can be ruthless.” Pride fills Kenma’s voice.

“Iwa-chan!” Oikawa wails, heartbroken and melodramatic as always. “Goodness, be careful!”

“I’m fine, damn.” Iwaizumi shifts onto his toes. Lighter on his feet, it’ll be easier to evade any more spur-of-the-moment attacks. He lowers his head and moves toward the tree, weapon poised to shoot if need be.

He’s faced a lot worse in his time. Most sparring partners were downright merciless and had no problem with taking down someone as young as Iwaizumi, a child by their standards. Of course, toss in the fact that it was Iwaizumi, and they were all too happy to help. An excuse to fight with the little genius, the kid that spent most days fantasizing of Earth instead of far grander planets inhabited by far more advanced civilizations? Nobody, in their right mind, would turn down an opportunity like that.

“Sticks and stones, Hajime. Sticks and stones,” Daichi constantly lectured him, but how could he, an experienced and respected Mentor, possibly know what it felt like to be loathed by nearly all of your superiors? By all of your peers? Daichi wasn’t popular on board, by any means. Many government officials had no serious qualms with him, though, and paid no mind to him unless Iwaizumi was involved. It always came back to Iwaizumi and everything he had done wrong.

Yeah, woe is you. Wallow in self-pity later. Right now, you need to focus on this match, Iwaizumi chides himself.

As if reading his thoughts, Akaashi emerges from behind his cover, taking aim at Iwaizumi’s chest. Deciding that no one will actually see his eyes, Iwaizumi blinks back the iris concealer, revealing the biological masterpieces lurking beneath. The bark and blades of grass, the veins lining the leaves hanging from the branches overhead, all come into startling clarity. He can practically feel every color seeping through his suit and into his skin.

Green, there’s so much green, and Iwaizumi inhales, finger tightening on the trigger until, in another small burst of smoke, the satisfying snap of the pellet making contact bursts into life.


“I guess. I mean, it’s been a while since I actually used a weapon.”

“Um. Iwaizumi-kun?”

“Yeah?”

“Don’t… well, not to scare you or anything, but you probably shouldn’t turn around.”

Iwaizumi stills. He wishes he could at least get a glimpse of Akaashi’s face because it’s the most foreboding and absolutely ominous phrase he’s heard since game-play begun. A nervous chill courses down his spine. Frantically, he grapples for the name, for anyone else that may still be “alive.”

The other team consists of Kuroo, Lev, Bokuto, Akaashi, and…
“No. Fucking. Way.”

“You’re a nice guy, Iwaizumi-san, and you’re one hell of a competitor. No doubt about that. But I know this field like the back of my hand. There are a lot of places for a person of my, well, stature to hide.” The gun butts against the back of Iwaizumi’s helmet, a faint clink. “Looks like this is the end of the line for you.”

Iwaizumi feels like he’s on the set of one of Oikawa’s sci-fi movies. A ship, maybe a battle cruiser, could pass overhead, and it wouldn’t seem out of place. *They really take this paintball shit seriously.*

The gun draws away then because there’s no way in hell shooting someone at this close range, in the back of the head, paintball or not, helmet or not, is a wise idea. It would jar his head around and hurt like hell.

Acting purely on instinct at this point, Iwaizumi turns, but he’s not quite fast enough.

Out of all the first impressions he had concerning Oikawa’s teammates, Yaku’s may be the impression he really needs to reevaluate the most. The libero just cornered and defeated an alien with several years of combat training: he’s more than amazing.

Yaku fires and, just like that, Oikawa’s team takes their second consecutive loss.

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Oikawa flops on to Iwaizumi’s couch, feeling pleasant and warm, sated, at ease.

Wet strands of hair cling to his forehead, but it’s not uncomfortable and, for once, he foregoes his usual styling rituals. His body is a little sore from the running and crouching. Volleyball certainly takes a greater toll on his muscles and joints. Back in high school, he ignored the protests of teammates and, namely, Kuroo and trained constantly. He trained and trained until his fantasy world crumbled apart and the pain started, hovering on the precarious edge of crippling. A doctor's visit, as per his mother's demands, revealed the scary truth, the consequence, of his actions: he overworked his body. Beginning his second year, he dealt with a minor knee injury that, according to his physician, could've been far worse had he waited any longer to pay the office a visit. It didn't permanently keep him from playing but occasionally prevented him from competing for several weeks here and there throughout their season.

The ache is a battle scar- a reminder.

*But enough of that.* Oikawa tucks his chin against his chest and gives his current outfit a once-over. The loose gray sweatpants are a personal favorite of his. On the rare occasions he knows he won't be leaving the dorm, they’re his go-to. Well, other than his alien lounge pants, but those are a given. And his shirt... well, that’s a funny story.

After their team had lost the "monthly blood bath," Iwaizumi, albeit reluctantly, invited Oikawa over since he had a working and individual shower. Unfortunately, Oikawa hadn’t packed with the intention of going back over to Iwaizumi’s apartment and only had the sweatpants with him. Why? Not even he knows.

But when it came to a shirt, he had nothing. Zilch. Nada.
“Here,” Iwaizumi mumbled, tossing a classic “ATHLETIC DEPT.” t-shirt at a half-naked Oikawa. He’d been a fantastic host and let Oikawa shower first. “Just give it back in class.”

Then he stalked off, a change of clothes draped over his arm. Oikawa watched in dumbfounded silence, barely making out the light flush creeping up the nape of Iwaizumi’s neck, until he disappeared behind the bathroom door. Oikawa slowly looked down, brushing his fingers over the soft cotton fabric, lingering on the rubbery letters across the front that had yet to start peeling. How did an alien even get their hands on shirts like this to begin with?

...Daichi?

Oikawa huffs and fiddles with the hem of his borrowed t-shirt. It smells as if it’s just come from the laundry, the pleasant aroma of detergent lingering in its fibers. Oikawa’s fingers drift down to his sweatpants, tapping out a random rhythm on his thighs.

The match earlier had gone even better than Oikawa planned.

Frankly, he had high hopes for Iwaizumi. After hearing of his genius reputation (“I’m not a genius, Assikawa!”), Oikawa assumed that, even if he’d never fired or wielded a weapon before, he’d pick up the basic skills in no time at all, as if it were mere child’s play. And, to his relief, Iwaizumi hadn’t let him down on that front.

They still lost, which Kuroo and the usual suspects will likely remind Oikawa of for the next month until the rematch rolls around. He could care less. Unknowingly, Iwaizumi revealed several potential clues about his history and character.

Oikawa’s recent deductions:
1. Iwaizumi has combat skills; used to fight; either a soldier or assassin
2. Quick on his feet; so yes definitely a soldier or assassin
3. Outsmarted by Yaku; not an infallible genius after all(?)

It’s short and sweet, straight to the point. But now that he thinks about it… he really doesn’t know much Iwaizumi. And the realization hurts, stings, because he wants to, would love nothing more than to have an unparalleled understanding of Iwaizumi that only Daichi’s own could rival. The side of him no one else sees, the side Oikawa sometimes glimpses in class or on the court, the side carefully buried under years of emotional trauma.

What would that be like?

“Wow, that felt incredible,” Iwaizumi sighs contentedly, bathroom door still hanging wide open as he steps out, a small cloud of steam following in his wake.

And, just like that, Oikawa loses all ability to think rationally.

Droplets cascade over Iwaizumi’s bare collarbone, pooling in the dips of his abdominal muscles. His lightly bronzed skin looks warm, the perfect balance of soft and firm, still damp and a little slick. Instead of being spiked up in his usual style, straight from the pages of Porcupine Chic, Iwaizumi’s dark hair lies flat, and more water droplets trickle over his cheeks, over his jawline, before travelling down his neck to join the others gathered on his chest, on his pectorals and midsection. His eyes have regressed to the dazzling display of hues from the night of their UFO hunting excursion. The colors flicker, bright and luminescent, before fading, giving way to the chocolate brown camouflage irises rises beneath. And, as if that isn’t bad enough, Oikawa gets a full
view of Iwaizumi’s arms which, to be quite honest, are the real treat. They look strong, strong enough to lift Oikawa, rippling with muscles, biceps and triceps working as he reaches up to push some wet strands of hair out of his eyes. When it comes to his lower body, he has a towel wrapped around his waist. It reaches his knees, covering only what it has to. The material swishes back and forth as Iwaizumi crosses the room, as if mocking Oikawa.

_Friends_, Oikawa amends sadly. _It’s better for both of us if we just stay friends._

Then, Iwaizumi has to go and do that thing where he _smiles_ and, even though it doesn’t reach his eyes, Oikawa can tell it’s real, that it’s not forced or faked to please Oikawa.

Remaining friends is safer, but Oikawa knows what he’d prefer.

The question is, how did Iwaizumi feel?

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**Chapter End Notes**

_come cry with me about kageyama and space on tumblr or twitter: @tobiologist_
Chapter Summary

In which Daichi reminisces about his emotional epiphany and Iwaizumi takes a huge leap of faith.

Chapter Notes

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, OIKAWA, MY BEAUTIFUL SON!!!! I’m absolutely thrilled that this update is finished in time for his birthday. I was hoping it would be!

now… [glances at rating change and new tags] there’s a reason for those. things heat up a little more in this chapter and, chances are, this won’t be the last time this sort of, um, “action” happens. there are 2 scenes like that in this update, and one of those is likely the scene you all have been waiting for heh

here’s a link to the shirt oikawa wears and, yet again, this fabulous mix as well as my own for your listening pleasure. thanks to my fantastic betas who put up with my nonsense all the time and to everyone that has shown their support! I appreciate every kudo, comment, etc!! anyways, enjoy!

“Do you love me?”

A sincere question, breathed through slightly parted lips into a mostly silent room, hangs in the stagnant air. Ikejiri peers up at Daichi with the vulnerable stare of someone expecting the worst, someone resigned to a difficult and inescapable truth. Dark circles mar his sweet face. They don’t belong there, and Daichi hates himself for being the chief reason they’re there.

This has become a habit of theirs, meeting in Daichi’s room to sit around and talk. They waste time for several hours discussing anything and everything, from new Students to what they’d eaten for lunch to the latest stories about Earth. Ikejiri thrives on interesting terran technology advancements as well as customs, while Daichi prefers arguing over the freshest terran cuisine and what tasted the best. His not-so-secret infatuation with food always made Ikejiri laugh because everyone, everyone, knows Daichi’s cooking skills are severely lacking.

Today’s conversation has somehow (and unfortunately) circled back around to Ikejiri’s greatest passion, an infatuation that puts even his friend’s culinary obsession to shame: love.

“Hayato…”

“Ah,” Ikejiri sighs, and Daichi’s self-loathing increases tenfold. “I see.”

“No, please, you didn’t let me finish.” Daichi moves forward and lays his hands on Ikejiri’s shoulders. They’re tense, far too tense, and Daichi presses his fingers harder, hoping to work out the unseen knots and kinks, to smooth as much of the tension from Ikejiri’s body as he can. “You
can’t always jump to conclusions like that.”

“T’m allowed to when those conclusions are legitimate.”

“They’re far from legitimate. Here.” Daichi slides one hand along the curve of Ikejiri’s neck, pulse fluttering beneath his touch, and lifts his chin. “You’re so stubborn sometimes. Those ridiculous ideas will be your ruin. Is something wrong?”

Ikejiri laughs, bitter and listless, and his eyes flit away from Daichi. “Is something wrong? Oh, Daichi. You don’t need to say anymore. I have my answer now.”

The atmosphere carries the foul taste of Ikejiri’s disappointment as if it’s a tangible thing Daichi can reach out and grab, as if it’s something he can squash now and force from the sanctity of this space— their space. It’s heavy, overbearing, and Daichi leans forward before he can think better of it, resting his forehead against Ikejiri’s. The man in question freezes instantly, fingers bunching in the blanket beneath. Daichi’s room has never felt so cramped.

“Stop.” A fragment, a broken protest.

“Stop what?”

“You know exactly ‘what.’”

Of course. Daichi sighs and smooths his thumbs over Ikejiri’s cheekbones, soft, careful not to shatter the already precarious hold he has on the situation. “There you go again, jumping to conclusions.”

"You wouldn't understand. The Supervisors like you. They're always excited to provide you new Researcher hopefuls. Strong, competent, loyal... how could they not like you?"

"Because traits like that make me dangerous." The bridge of Daichi’s nose lightly brushes against Ikejiri’s and he draws in a shaky inhale. Flickers of teal erupt around his pupils, vibrant and intertwining in a mellow sort of dance. "Because I make decisions like this."

"Like what?"

"We're not made to love, Hayato. It isn't in our genetic makeup. As much as I know you want to be human, you're not. And neither am I."

"That's where you're wrong." Ikejiri’s fingers are now on his forearms, holding tight as if he worries they may slip out of his grasp at any second. "We may not be human, but we're capable of love. It's simply frowned up. Regarded as useless, bothersome, trivial- a hindrance. I can feel everything, Daichi. Even the things I'm not supposed to."

"Are you-?"

"Remember when we were younger? Crammed into that classroom together for years, bonding over whimsical and childish dreams. We dreamed of teaching others, of nurturing reliable Researchers and Soldiers. Doctors. Every sector, we wanted to be their role models. Why not bring those dreams back? We felt so many things at that age so why, why, did we have to strip ourselves down to cold and robotic shells?"

"That's... we're mature and responsible Mentors now. Those would be-"

"Interferences. Yes, of course."
Daichi is speechless. For some reason, although Ikejiri's deduction should be right, there's something missing. A crucial aspect that Daichi can't quite place. Emotions are useless. It's better not to feel than feel too much and allow it to drag you down. Efficiency, control, power. Those are of the utmost importance.

Suddenly, Ikejiri's speaking again, but Daichi misses the whispered words. "What?"

Instead of answering, Ikejiri acts, quickly bringing his hands up to trap Daichi's head and keep it steady as he seals their lips together in one fluid motion. Firm, uncharacteristically sure of himself, fingers quivering from the release of pent-up frustration and need, Ikejiri clings to Daichi like a lifeline, like a drowning man lost at sea, reaching for a life raft.

Then, seconds later, he draws back. Uncharacteristically cheeky, he hums, "Is that an interference?"

Daichi doesn't cry. He never cries. But he's almost tempted because this is Ikejiri, the brazen classmate who captivated him all those years ago. This is the unbreakable boy, the fiery and spirited daydreamer. This is his Ikejiri Hayato.

"You know," Ikejiri continues, undeterred. "It’s kind of funny. You were always the one to motivate me. To keep me grounded and moving forward. And now look at us."

“I’m still trying to be the voice of reason in all of this,” Daichi quips weakly. He’s losing this argument, and he knows it. He’s not giving up, though. A last and, even to his own ears, pathetic effort. “I can’t… I can’t love you, Hayato.”

“I know.”

“If I could love anyone, though...” Daichi pauses, tongue heavy like a lead weight in his mouth. “It would be you.”

I want to love you, he thinks desperately as Ikejiri lightly pulls him closer, fingernails scratching along and tickling the sensitive area at the nape of his neck. Maybe I do. I could. I could because it’s you, and you deserve to be happy for once. I really would give anything to understand the way you feel.

Soft lips, untouched by the merciless heat outside the ship’s walls, press against his, clearly inexperienced. Not that Daichi knows a thing about kissing. Affection, kissing, anything remotely romantic in nature - it’s uncharted territory for both of them. But he can feel Ikejiri’s enthusiasm, feels his body being dragged down, let's Ikejiri push him back so that he lies flat. Ikejiri isn’t small or frail by any means, but he seems even bigger now, hovering over him expectantly. He straddles Daichi’s waist, knees pressing into the plush mattress below, and stills for a moment.

Enthralled, Daichi watches the brilliant show of reds in Ikejiri’s irises. It steals his breath away because it’s brand new, a marvel, an emotional reaction that he’s never witnessed in the eyes of another before. There’s a lurking warmth in that hue, desire and passion and want and literal flames dancing in his eyes. For a moment, Daichi wonders if his are the same, but Ikejiri moves forward and purposely stops with only an inch between their faces, mouths curious and eager to explore.

“Hayato?”

“Hmm?” The low hum makes Daichi’s lips tingle.

“This is going to sound really... ridiculous, I suppose, but, since you seem certain about your own
feelings—"

“I am.”

“-right, well. Both of us are Mentors. We specialize in teaching.”

“Oh no,” Ikejiri sighs and drops a little closer, pressing a shaky smile against Daichi’s flushed cheek. “You’re about to make an embarrassing comment, aren’t you?”

“No!”

“Really?” Ikejiri carefully brings his lips to Daichi’s ear, the question, a single word, breathed like a promise.

“Yes. I was just going to ask if…” The words catch in his throat as Ikejiri turns his attention away from the shell of Daichi’s ear to his waiting mouth. “If you would…” Daichi’s a ticking time bomb, taut like a wire about to snap, and, as his hands come to rest on Ikejiri’s hips, he realizes that he’s not the only one.

Ikejiri is probably right about condemning Daichi’s next question because, yes, it’s definitely one of the cheesiest things to come from his mouth. “Teach me?”

A beat.

Daichi expects Ikejiri to call him out, to laugh or seize the opportunity to turn this situation into a joke. But he does the complete opposite.

“Ohayo,” he whispers and, just like that, he’s kissing Daichi again. This time is a bit harsher, almost angry, and there’s desperation evident in the fingers buried in his hair. Little whines, indistinguishable in nature, slip past Ikejiri’s lips as they cautiously part Daichi’s.

They ebb and flow like the waves of an ocean they’ll never see with their own two eyes. Ikejiri clings and claws and, really, it’s an entirely new side of him. There are the soft sounds of intermingled breathing and apologetic chuckles when teeth collide or noses bump, when Ikejiri gets too excited and bites Daichi’s bottom lip.

“You’re not—” Daichi gasps, Ikejiri’s mouth wandering to the corner of his lips, his only chance so far to talk- “a very good teacher, you know?”

“Rude,” Ikejiri laughs, light and so happy that it makes Daichi ache. “I choose to teach by… example.”

“Example, huh?”

“It’s the most effective method.” Fingers tug just a little at Daichi’s hair, and he hisses. Logically, it should hurt, but it doesn’t. Pleasure, a curious spike of excitement, shoots down his spine, and he finds himself leaning into the touch. “A worthy student will take notes and learn from the experience. You should know that by now, Daichi.”

Is he… challenging me? Daichi speculates. And Ikejiri’s back to providing an “example” before he can speculate further. Daichi tries to ignore the sinking feeling in his chest, tries to skirt past any negative thoughts of potential consequences. Focus on Hayato. Focus on how right this feels.

But does it? He cares about Ikejiri immensely, and, admittedly, the contact is far from unwelcome. Doubt lingers on the periphery of Daichi’s mind, though, and there’s a sick, ominous sort of
finality settling in his abdomen. A lone and sickening thought shoves its way forcefully to the forefront of his mind.

*This won’t end well.*

For who? Ikejiri? Both of them? The answer evades him, but there’s no denying the uncomfortable itch just under his skin. Luckily, Ikejiri seems to sense Daichi’s concern and slows his movements. He places one last gentle kiss on Daichi’s lips, chaste and sweeter than any prior, and rolls over to lie beside him. The fingers lightly grazing up and down the length of Daichi’s forearm gradually curb the adrenaline pounding through his veins.

“Daichi?” Ikejiri whispers the name into the heady silence, the charged air, with a sense of urgency.

“Yeah?”

“I know I said it before, but… you don’t have to love me. Our kind has gone centuries- millennia- without encouraging physical intimacy outside of mating, and I realize I can’t force you to be something you’re not. The whole ‘teach me’ thing is really considerate of you and everything, but I get it. Maybe some of us are born seeking an emotional connection, while others aren’t. Humans are that way, too, after all.” He stops for a second, releasing a solemn huff of amusement. “But at least promise me this.”

“…Alright.”

“Promise me you’ll give your next student the option to… to feel.”

“I don’t understand,” Daichi responds in earnest because this is yet another matter he wants to understand but, for some reason, can’t seem to. “The option to feel what?”

“Everything.” Ikejiri’s fingers glide down to join their hands, and he squeezes. “At least help them know whether they’re predestined for this. Whether they’re capable of loving the way I do.”

*But I think I am capable of love. I think I could love you if you’re willing to show me what it means.* His subconscious practically screams the words at him, but Daichi opts for silence instead, reaching over to card his fingers soothingly through Ikejiri’s sandy brown hair. “I will.”

“Good. I… I’m glad. Thank you, Daichi.”

“Of course,” Daichi mumbles, voice suddenly thick with emotion. “Oh, and Hayato?”

Ikejiri hums his assent, thumb tracing lazy circles on the back of Daichi’s hand.

“About loving you.”

Everything goes still, time pausing expectantly to watch the following events unfold. Ikejiri gasps, a quiet and uncertain noise, and Daichi rushes on, planning to avoid further misinterpretation.

“I’m not giving up yet.”
It’s been about two months since Iwaizumi first met Oikawa and, since then, things have taken a
turn for the… not for the worst, exactly. Interesting is probably more fitting.

Of course, it’s mostly speculation on Daichi’s part because Iwaizumi doesn’t mention Oikawa all
that often around the apartment. He’ll make a passing comment about class or private lessons,
about something “that dumbass” did or something “Assikawa” said. And, like clockwork, Daichi
responds by asking how that’s relevant to Iwaizumi’s research to which he always replies, “You
have to know everything about your Subject in order to be successful, right?”

He’s not wrong. But he also isn’t right either.

There’s a difference between regarding your Subject purely as a case study and regarding them as a
friend, a clear distinction between a professional relationship and something more intimate and
personal. And Iwaizumi is dangerously close to stepping over the line separating the two.

Iwaizumi crosses the threshold from his bedroom, catching Daichi’s watchful stare as he moves
toward the front door, tracking his movement. A black duffel bag slung casually over his shoulder,
he stops behind the couch, never once breaking eye contact. It must be guilt that forces him to
refrain from looking away.

“Why aren’t you trying to stop me?” Iwaizumi prompts, confirming Daichi’s suspicions. He still
has yet to end their eerie staring contest; it’s impressive. “After two months of-” He hesitates,
fingers tightening around the strap of his bag. “You know exactly where I’m going so why haven’t
you ever tried to stop me?”

“If I had been trying to stop all of this from happening, Hajime, I would’ve done it a lot sooner.”

Iwaizumi laughs, but it’s wavering, shaky. “I guess you’re right.”

He throws a quick “bye” Daichi’s way and proceeds with his Walk of Shame, acting as if this little
impromptu exchange is over. The soft scuffing of his shoes against the hardwood floors sounds
loud, thunderous, echoing throughout the apartment. It mirrors Daichi’s thought process which, at
the moment, grapples desperately for some sort of advice, anything to keep Iwaizumi safe.

“Hey, Daichi?”

Pleasantly surprised and grateful for the excuse to speak, Daichi glances over his shoulder in the
direction of the door. The steaming cup of coffee on the table sits idly, a lone observer, an innocent
bystander in this whole charade. “Yes?”

“You said before that love is dangerous. And our people consider it to be one of the biggest
taboos,” Iwaizumi begins, reciting his question slowly and carefully. “Romance is forbidden, and I
know that.”

Romance is forbidden. Ikejiri comes to mind immediately. But it doesn’t take long for another face
to eclipse Ikejiri’s. Silvery hair, round hazelnut brown eyes, a tiny mole tucked beneath one of
those enchanting eyes. Daichi hates his subconscious immensely for the reminder.

“But how true is that? Do you feel that way?”

No. Not at all.

Daichi evades the subject with practiced ease. “Make sure you make the most of these next few
weeks, Hajime. Otherwise, you’ll regret it when we return to the ship. A month may seem like a
lot of time now, but it won’t when we actually reach the end.”
Iwaizumi has yet to turn and face Daichi. It’s better this way. It’s better if Daichi speaks in vague terms, better if he lays the foundation instead of coming right out and telling Iwaizumi his honest opinion. Although he’s completely unaware of the fact, Iwaizumi is the Student Ikejiri spoke of. He’s the Student that Daichi promised to teach the full emotional spectrum.

So a concise explanation isn’t necessary here; Iwaizumi, a prodigy, is certainly smart enough to pick up on the underlying meaning.

Silence stretches between them for what feels like hours before Iwaizumi eventually responds. Boots squeaking faintly, jacket rustling, Daichi soaks in every sound as he focuses all of his attention on Iwaizumi, now standing in the open entryway.

“We’re a couple of the universe’s biggest idiots.”

Iwaizumi lets the door slam unceremoniously behind him, leaving a dumbfounded Daichi alone with nothing more than a ceramic mug of hot coffee and his confusion.

“What the hell is an ‘X-File’ anyway?” Iwaizumi settles back against the wall, sinking into Oikawa’s mattress.

The smartass comment is meant to distract him from the all too real pressure of Oikawa’s body pressed up along his side, the warmth of his bare arm, smooth and strangely soft skin. The huge black eyes of the alien decals plastered to Oikawa’s laptop seem to flash Iwaizumi judgmental stares, as if they know exactly what he’s thinking every time Oikawa shifts, their shoulders bumping and knees knocking as he moves.

“It’s a top secret file, Iwa-chan,” Oikawa quips, flipping open his laptop, unknowingly sparing Iwaizumi from more distracting thoughts of alien stickers. “As in the kind that deals with-” he jabs a finger into Iwaizumi’s thigh- “little guys like you.”

“Little? I can’t think of a single part of my fucking body that’s close to being ‘little.’”

Oikawa clears his throat and glances down at where the laptop sits, zeroing in on none other than the crotch of Iwaizumi’s pants. “Well…”

“S- Shut up!” Iwaizumi cries. Immediately, his hands fly to the place in question. He suddenly feels self-conscious, as if Oikawa’s eyes are burning holes through his clothes, as if he has x-ray vision and can see everything. Technically, there’s nothing to hide because their biological camouflage is just short of perfection. To the outside observer, at least, there are no visible differences between that of an actual human being and an extraterrestrial traipsing around in a human disguise. “There’s nothing wrong with that either, dumbass.”

“Nothing wrong with being ‘little’ down there, you mean?”

“So fucking obnoxious,” Iwaizumi grumbles, cheeks hot. “Can we just watch your damn television show? And forget this whole conversation ever happened?”

“Whatever you say, Iwa-chan.” Oikawa shrugs. And, thankfully, he does as he says and slips in the
first disc. “‘The truth is out there.’”

Predictably, the show’s portrayal of aliens is far from ideal. There are aspects that are close to being right—frighteningly close, actually—but it’s nothing groundbreaking in comparison to the countless other science fiction movies and television series stowed high on the shelf above Oikawa’s desk. But, the more he watches, the more Iwaizumi realizes there actually is something strikingly different.

“Hey,” he finally speaks up, letting his curiosity get the better of him. “What’s their deal?”

“Who?”

“You know, them.” The theme music plays ominously in the background, and Iwaizumi taps the screen with his finger. “The main characters or whatever.”

“Oh, you mean Mulder and Scully,” Oikawa drawls knowingly. “Their relationship is awfully, well, complicated.”

“Yeah?”

“Definitely. They’re both pretty stubborn, dancing around each other’s feelings like they do. But, more importantly,” The bed shifts under Oikawa’s weight as he breaches the barely there gap between them. “Are the aliens realistic in this show, Iwa-chan?”

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Iwaizumi sighs, drawing his face away just the slightest bit. “No. They’re not quite as fucking ridiculous as the one from Alien or whatever the hell that movie was called. It’s not like humanity has any references to go off of. Most species won’t even come within a couple light-years of this galaxy.”

“Yeah, that’s the way it seems. I guess I can see why some wouldn’t like us. But not all of us are bad news, you know.”

"I do," Iwaizumi admits. "I know alright. Why do you think I chose this place?"

"True..."

"That’s one thing my people love to conveniently forget. There’s no such thing as a ‘perfect civilization.’ No matter what, there will always be jackasses lurking in the crowd, good and bad eggs."

"Interesting word choice. And where do I fit into all of this, Iwa-chan?"

For the first time in what feels like weeks, Iwaizumi takes the chance to look at Oikawa. And not just the usual sideways glance from calculus class, not the fleeting looks given between drills during private lessons. No, Iwaizumi savors this opportunity. He really looks at Oikawa, surveying his unlikely companion, and thinks back to earlier impressions of him.

He’s still, undoubtedly, a star. A pulsating quasar with a brilliance that puts the Milky Way’s luminescence to shame. Ancient and stunning spectacles, dating back to the universe’s staggering beginnings, with black holes at their center, eager to envelop anything that comes too close. Iwaizumi feels like a piece of galactic debris, like a lone asteroid moments away from being sucked in.

Enticing. Dangerous.
"The in-between," Iwaizumi settles on. "That's where most human beings seem to fall."

"Aw, how sweet. That's practically a compliment, coming from my grumpy little Iwa-chan!"

"What is it with you and calling me 'little'-'"

Iwaizumi freezes. The flicker dancing behind Oikawa's eyes is absolutely deadly.

"Hey, Iwa-chan? Can I ask you something?"

No, he wants to say. **Definitely not.** But the word yes claws its way from his gaping mouth all too quickly.

"Well, I was thinking about some of the conversations we've had in the past couple months. And about that girl who was totally hitting on you at that party Kuroo dragged us to."

"She wasn't 'hitting on me,' dumbass!"

"-and about how you haven't shown interest in any of the lovely ladies in our class. Or guys, for that matter."

Oh no.

"So, it got me thinking, 'I wonder if Iwa-chan has ever been in a relationship with anyone?' which then led me to ask, 'I wonder if aliens even go on dates?'. The intensity of his stare is increasing rapidly, eager to spread and swallow Iwaizumi whole- like a quasar. "And that's my question. Does... do your people fall in love?"

"They're not supposed to. No," Iwaizumi croaks, voice suddenly hoarse.

"I see. That includes you, too, right?"

"Yes."

"Very interesting. Iwa-chan has never been in love?" The expectancy is painfully obvious to Iwaizumi, and, yet again, Oikawa unknowingly makes him curse his perceptiveness.

"Not that I know of."

"Mmm."

That single hummed response, that one unintelligible answer and mumbled sort of understanding and acceptance, gives Iwaizumi the worst idea. Literally the *stupidest* and most outlandish thought snakes its way into his conscious mind, and he wants to scream at himself for ever coming up with something so reckless.

What if...

What if he took it upon himself to start a completely new kind of research? What if he, terran alias Iwaizumi Hajime, takes a gigantic leap of faith and dives straight into the murky depths of intimacy?

His mental fortitude should be able to withstand a staggering task like that, but any emotions other than anger and, recently, fear are foreign to him. Love... well, he knows little to nothing about that.
Well, I suppose there’s a love that could be considered ‘dangerous’... Dangerous because people die. Humans are willing to put their lives on the line to save someone they ‘love.’ They will do just about anything to please that other person- their ‘significant other.’ And want to share their time with them, share their lives with them.

For someone who claimed they had no prior or firsthand experience with love, Daichi sure knew an awful lot about it. But how? The only logical explanation is that he had experienced some form of love before in the past.

Which means this, a bit of experimentation and risky research, wouldn’t be all that big of a deal.

Right?

“Hey, dumbass?”

“Really, Iwa-chan? Really?”

“Fine,” Iwaizumi acquiesces, tucking his chin against his chest as he tries to hide his flaming cheeks. “Hey, Oikawa?”

“Yes?” He singsongs, tone lilting and gliding across Iwaizumi’s skin like honey.

“Have you ever been in love?”

There. Iwaizumi said it. It’s out there, and he can’t take it back now.

“No, I don’t think so,” Oikawa responds, slowly, cautiously. A shaky hand settles on Iwaizumi’s thigh, warmth seeping through his sweatpants. Everything below his waist feels like it’s on fire, extending all the way down to the tips of his toes.

“I see,” Iwaizumi replies tersely. “And have you ever… you know. Been like that with someone?”

“Like that?” Use your words, Iwa-chan.”

“Hey! I mean, have you ever... are you…”

“Poor thing,” Oikawa sighs, fingers lightly skimming over the swells of Iwaizumi’s tricep, over his bicep, caress featherlight as if he worries the bones may shatter beneath his touch. All the air seems to rush out of Iwaizumi’s lungs at once, and he watches the wandering appendages with interest. “I guess I don’t mind helping you out. No, Iwaizumi. I’m not a virgin.”

Virgin… wait. Oh.

Oh.

“Oh,” he repeats out loud.

“Is that a problem?” Warm and calloused skin slides over the curve of Iwaizumi’s neck and, yes, there’s no way in hell he can continue breathing if those fingers venture further. “I’ve only been with maybe two girls before. Geez, what’s gotten into you? I didn’t think aliens had any interest in that sort of thing. Especially if they never fall in love.”

Iwaizumi lets his gaze wander to Oikawa, which is a huge mistake. A gigantic mistake of epically fucked up proportions.

There’s wicked intent behind that hooded stare, and Iwaizumi has no idea how to handle it, how to
will his body to function properly, how to slow the adrenaline pumping through his veins, how to
school his features and mask his anxiety.

“No, I was just, um. Curious.” Which is mostly true. Maybe. Hell, he can barely remember his
own name at this point, let alone the reason for this conversation.

The usually sound cracks like a whip, erupting to life in the silence, and Iwaizumi stiffens,
reacting purely on instinct. Oikawa sets the now closed laptop aside. Alien heads crease beneath
Iwaizumi’s fingers and he watches, mystified, wondering why he thought instigating something of
this nature was a good idea.

“Iwa-chan… do you want to maybe…” Sweltering heat engulfs Iwaizumi and yet the breath
ghosting across his jawline feels even hotter, burning, searing but deceptively calming at the same
time. “Try something?”

Words have totally escaped him by this point. Iwaizumi feels himself sinking into the soft blanket
beneath his fingertips, practically melting already, even though Oikawa has yet to progress past
light caresses. When- or rather, if- Oikawa gets more adventurous, Iwaizumi will be in big trouble.

As opposed to verbally expressing his interest like he wants to, like he probably should, Iwaizumi
nods, sharp, a quick jolt of a movement.

“Good,” Oikawa whispers, and, well.

That’s it.

Gently, fingers slide up and under Iwaizumi’s chin, turning his head so that, finally, his eyes fall on
Oikawa. He nearly topples over at the sight of that much unbridled yearning and want and, in all
honesty, he can’t believe he never picked up on any sort of concealed desire in the past. Has
Oikawa always been… interested in him?

No, absolutely not.

This is all just to please Iwaizumi, to help out a clueless alien.

Oikawa laughs, breathy and genuinely amused. “Just close your eyes, Iwa-chan. It’ll be hard to do
this when your eyes are all glittery and red like that. I’ll get distracted.”

Obediently, Iwaizumi does as he’s told and tries not to think too much about the color comment.
This is the first time crimson bursts have materialized. Up until now, the hue has been nothing
more than a myth.

His eyelashes flutter, darkness enveloping his vision, and Iwaizumi waits.

And waits.

A second, a minute, maybe even an hour passes, before something soft and chapped presses against
his lips. A calloused palm slowly makes its way up to cover Iwaizumi’s cheek, while the other
rises to rest on the back of his neck, drawing him closer, and there’s a sigh, a contented noise, of
unidentifiable origins that cuts through the comfortable quiet of the room.

This… is really. Nice.

Of its own volition, Iwaizumi’s body turns and Oikawa moves with him, as if changing positions is
only natural, and now they’re fully facing each other, knees tucked beneath their seated figures.
Oikawa pulls back an inch, and Iwaizumi follows, delirious enough to ignore the potentially embarrassing implications of his actions, hungry for more but not entirely sure of what exactly “more” is. All he knows is that he’s burning, needing, and can’t stand to separate himself from Oikawa now that he understands what it feels like to be at the mercy of his more experienced ministrations.

Oikawa alters the angle of his approach and, this time, when their mouths slot together, it’s even better. Perfect, it’s just right, and Iwaizumi gladly lets his mouth fall open, lets his bottom lip be sucked softly into Oikawa’s mouth.

_Wet,_ is Iwaizumi’s first thought, followed closely by, _warm_, and, _yes._

A small whine wrenches its way from Iwaizumi’s throat. Apparently, that’s what Oikawa had been waiting for because the curious and slick slide of a tongue glides over his lips and brushes along the roof of Iwaizumi’s mouth. _God, that feels... incredible_, Iwaizumi muses, and, suddenly, he gets the urge to slip his hands up and under the back of Oikawa’s threadbare “HUMANS AREN’T REAL” shirt.

Why the hell didn’t his people ever do this? Why didn’t they at least give it a chance? How much did they _hate_ themselves?

Feeling a bit hazy, desperately sliding his palms along the wide and warm expanse of Oikawa’s back, fingers digging into the firm flesh between his shoulder blades, Iwaizumi shudders. Unfortunately, Oikawa seems to misinterpret the shiver as disgust and pulls away just a couple centimeters.

“Is this… okay?” Oikawa breathes, a hoarse mumble, far huskier than before, against Iwaizumi’s lips.

“Y-yeah.” His response is immediate because, honestly, he’s impatient and wants to get back to this whole kissing thing as soon as possible. “It’s, um. More than okay.”

Eyes still sealed firmly shut, Iwaizumi can practically hear the delighted smile in Oikawa’s voice. “Fantastic.”

This time, Oikawa tilts Iwaizumi’s face instead of angling his own, and curiosity quickly turns to wonder, hesitance to anticipation, as his tongue delves deeper into the wet heat of Iwaizumi’s mouth. The tip curves along the sensitive area behind Iwaizumi’s teeth, along the insides of his cheeks, and Iwaizumi gingerly attempts to mimic the movements.

“Holy shit.”

There’s no stopping the moan, mortifyingly lewd and loud, as it slips past Iwaizumi’s lips, and he’s physically aching, the sensation overpowering Iwaizumi like the powerful swell of a wave as it crashes into shore. What the _hell_? Amazing, it’s so amazing, and Iwaizumi is sure he’s dead or maybe daydreaming and this is all just a figment of his imagination.

“Iwaizumi,” Oikawa growls and it absolutely _tears_ through Iwaizumi, crushes his logic and reason in its merciless grasp.
Before his mind can even catch up with what’s happening, Iwaizumi is being eased backward. Oikawa flops in the space between his bent knees, spread to accommodate the other’s torso, and presses his palms into the mattress below, resolute and steadying.

Kissing takes an unexpected (but inevitable) turn then as Oikawa fully claims Iwaizumi’s mouth, passion and satisfaction radiating from his body, seeping into the heavy air around them. Heady, intoxicating, Iwaizumi’s head spins, and he can barely focus, torn between mulling over the incredible feel of bare skin under his fingertips, puzzling over how Oikawa learned to do this, and brooding over the ugly and unexpected flare of jealousy at the thought of someone else being permitted to touch and see and taste Oikawa like this.

_This is something I could definitely get used to. I really want this._ Dazed, Iwaizumi’s thoughts run around in wild circles inside his head. _I really want this. I want. Want._

They continue, wrapped in each other, until Iwaizumi gives into the electrifying impulse to assume control now that he’s learned most of the basics.

Working fast, anxious for the thrill, Iwaizumi’s eyes snap open, and he’s rising, moving, flipping Oikawa over until their positions are reversed, until he’s hovering over Oikawa.

The full force of Iwaizumi’s desire hits him in that moment because, fuck, _Oikawa._

His hair is disheveled, adorably tousled, splayed out across the black cotton pillowcase and looks so soft, begging to be ruffled more. Wide-eyed, he stares up at Iwaizumi like he’s never seen him before, like he’s come upon something beautiful and amazing and _rare._ Pink and swollen lips part around soft breathy noises and pants, sounds that Iwaizumi decides should be outlawed in every fucking corner of the universe. Cheeks flushed, chest rising and falling, he looks incredible. Iwaizumi cowers under the power of his gaze, a speck of dust caught in the orbit of a massive star, a red or blue giant dazzling the gazes of every observer.

“Well?” Oikawa teases, light and flirtatious, snaking his arms around Iwaizumi’s neck.

Iwaizumi crashes—_hard._

He crushes his lips against Oikawa, kissing him as if his very life depends on it. The fresh and clean scent of his clothes, the lingering smell of sweat that seems to be ingrained in his skin—Iwaizumi inhales every last bit of it, savors each aroma. He tastes Oikawa’s cherry bubble gum, a hint of the pasta they had for dinner a few hours ago, and a flavor that’s purely and indescribably Oikawa. Everything is smooth and soft, whether it be the blankets, clothes, or Oikawa’s skin, specifically the plush swell of his lips, and he grabs at every inch of available skin, frantic and frenzied. Stars, smaller and far less dazzling than Oikawa, dance across the inside of Iwaizumi’s eyelids, little flickers of colorful light amidst the darkness. The room is filled with the soft, wet sounds of their mouths, and the barely audible rustling of cloth.

_I really, really, really want this._

Iwaizumi clings to the coattails of his sudden burst of confidence for as long as he can. Instinct only lasts for a short while, and, minutes after it began, embarrassment comes crawling back.

He slows his movements, returning to the chaste kisses from before, and presses forward once more. Elated and overwhelmed, he shifts onto his elbows and sinks down, using Oikawa’s body as a massive, living pillow.

_Oh shit._
So. He’d just made out with Oikawa. Just experienced his first fucking kiss- with Oikawa Tooru, his Subject.

*My Subject? Really?* Iwaizumi buries his face in the curve of Oikawa’s neck. His cheeks burn, and he can only imagine how ridiculous he must look. Nuzzling closer, he tries to cover up the instantaneous rush of humiliation.

Oikawa’s arms tighten their hold, drawing Iwaizumi even closer against his spent body, and sighs, brimming with calm satisfaction. “You really do learn fast, Iwa-chan.”
Chapter Summary

In which Iwaizumi finally meets the “pancake guy” and Oikawa overthinks major life decisions.

Chapter Notes

it’s been less than 2 weeks, and there’s already another update?? [gasps]

but, seriously, I wanted to try and get at least one more update (besides this one, obviously) posted before fall classes start. it’ll probably be tougher to update on a regular schedule so I want to take advantage of these last couple weeks of summer. so there’s another spicy meatball scene in this chapter mhmm good shit. also, some mild iwasauga I guess?? if it can even be considered that?? I just wanted to mention it since it’s not tagged. I don’t want anyone to get upset!

SO here are the mixes again if you need some bg music (\x\x) and SOME FABULOUS OIKAWA ART THAT SOMEONE DREW FOR THIS FIC OH MY GOD LOOK AT HOW CUTE HE LOOKS!!!!!!!! other than that, thanks again to my dorky betas and fabulous readers. comments, kudos, etc are always appreciated and enjoy this chapter!

Wow.

The phrase, short and concise, plays in Oikawa’s head like a broken record. Sort of like one of those pop songs with catchy and monotonous lyrics that get stuck in your head for weeks before eventually going away. It’s been that way all morning, ever since Iwaizumi left.

At the crack of dawn (or at least that’s what it felt like to Oikawa), Iwaizumi nudged him lightly in the shoulder and leaned close. “Hey, sorry to wake you up. I have to go or Daichi will be an ass to me for the rest of the day,”

“Why’s tha’?” Oikawa slurred, only half-understanding the implications of Iwaizumi’s remark.

“Because he’s weird like that. But I’ll see you around, okay?”

Their eyes met for the briefest moment, and, all at once, there were fingers tangled in Oikawa's hair, softly pushing flyaway strands out of his face. He barely registered the touch before they were briskly drawn away, missing the comfortable familiarity of the gesture the second Iwaizumi retracted his hand.

“Sure. See you around, Iwa-chan,” he murmured back. It was far too early for him to be awake. He was still trapped in the astral world between wakefulness and sleep and struggled to string together legible sentences.
He didn’t ask any further questions as he watched Iwaizumi leave the room through bleary eyes. He merely lied there, tucked in bed, lethargic and gratified. Peeking out from beneath his blanket cocoon, he watched as Iwaizumi slipped into a change of clothes, scooped up his bag, and left without another word. A smile took shape on Oikawa’s lips. Iwaizumi never ceased to amaze him.

But it didn’t take long for reality to smack him in the face. The force struck like one of Kageyama’s hastily tossed pillows.

Last night…

It still feels like a dream. Every second, every minute, seemed too good to be true. In startling clarity, Oikawa easily recalls the events in their entirety.

Iwaizumi’s body, his fingers and lips, and his scent, fresh with a hint of a musk specific to Iwaizumi. Their mingled breathing, Oikawa’s racing heart and a thundering pulse beneath his fingertips as his hands skittered across Iwaizumi’s neck and up into his thick dark hair. The memories make Oikawa yearn to go back in time and do it once more. From start to finish, from the instant he decided to kiss Iwaizumi to the last few moments before sleep claimed them both. He remembers curling around Iwaizumi in hopes of soothing his anxiety, moonlight streaming in through the dorm room window, bathing Iwaizumi’s slumbering visage in soft white light.

To be honest, falling asleep afterwards was close to impossible. It’s pretty difficult to relax in that situation. As if kissing strangers wasn’t bad enough, he’d just kissed his friend. Toss in the fact said friend is also an alien, and well. Of course he couldn’t stop thinking about it.

Idiot, he chided himself, you’re going to get hurt. Both of you are. Iwaizumi merely went along with it because he needed a teacher, because his curiosity got the better of him. Practice, that’s what it amounted to. All in the name of research. Iwaizumi took an interest in the mechanics of kissing, and Oikawa chose to help him out. Like any decent friend would.

But did that mean... Oh God. Had he forced Iwaizumi?

Cautiously, he runs his thumb over his bottom lip, remembering how it felt to kiss him. Slightly chapped lips fueled by enthusiasm moving against his, wandering hands, labored breathing, the taste of Iwaizumi’s mouth and the whispered murmurs of Oikawa’s name.

Definitely not. If Iwaizumi hated it, he would’ve shoved him away or told him to stop. He hadn’t done either. As a matter of fact, he more or less encouraged Oikawa, urging him to take things further until he eventually hit a mental block and sagged, embarrassed.

That didn’t change the fact the kisses were a test run. Purely some firsthand experience for an extraterrestrial who had zero knowledge on the matter. Yes, that’s it. Oikawa provided Iwaizumi with an example, should he ever need a reference. Almost like a business partner or coworker would.

Simple as that.

Which brings Oikawa to his next issue: he can’t let anyone know he’s worried. Not Kuroo, not Kageyama, and especially not Iwaizumi. His friends may assume the worst and seek Iwaizumi out. And, if Iwaizumi were to find out, he’d immediately blame himself. So, for the time being, Oikawa needs to do what he does best. In other words, he needs to reconstruct his mental barriers and strengthen them to withstand even greater pressure. He’ll smile and laugh and captivate because that’s what Oikawa does.
That's what he's always done.

“Hey.” Kageyama steps into the room with his volleyball bag slung over his shoulder. Skeptical, he eyes Oikawa from the doorway and, when he doesn’t get a reaction, grimaces. “Wow, someone looks happy.”

“Shut up,” Oikawa mumbles, burying his face in the secure cover of his mini blanket fort.

“So what’d you two do last night? Probably a good thing I went over to Shouyou’s, huh?”

“Rude, Tobio-chan! I’ll have you know that Iwa-chan and I watched the first season of The X-Files, and then went to bed. That’s all.”

Kageyama snorts derisively. “You’re so full of shit.”

“I’m serious!”

Flopping down beside his volleyball bag, Kageyama lets out a satisfied hum and leans against the wall. He reaches under the bed and pulls out a ball, one of many they keep stowed throughout the dorm room. It sits in his lap as if it belongs there, which, considering it’s Kageyama’s lap, it does. He presses his fingertips into the worn surface, memorizing every contour. Complacent, he lifts the ball over his head and sets it a couple times in quick succession. The gesture is a habit Oikawa picked up on years ago. Although strange, Oikawa understands the implications: Kageyama is perfectly calm right now. And dead serious.

“Oikawa, what really happened last night?”

There’s no mistaking that tone. Steady and conclusive. Oikawa has no choice but to come out and tell the truth. Kageyama usually refrains from nagging Oikawa the way he nags him, and, amazingly enough, rarely passes judgment.

“I kissed Iwa-chan,” Oikawa deadpans and wishes he, too, could reach a volleyball. Just like Kageyama, the familiarity of setting generally puts his mind at ease. “We finished the last episode, and he looked so happy and ugh. I don’t know. I asked him these ridiculous questions about love and relationships. And then I… I kissed him.”

“I see.”

“God, I can’t believe I did that. We were making out on this bed. My bed, Tobio-chan.”

“Well, better yours than mine,” Kageyama comments dryly.

“I practically attacked him. Our first kiss- his first kiss- and I stuck my tongue down his poor throat.”

“Oikawa-”

Just then, a trap song, Bokuto’s recent favorite, starts playing from his phone. Oikawa doesn’t know whether to punch Kuroo in the jaw or kiss the jackass the next time he sees him.

Snaking his hand out from under the covers, Oikawa snatches his phone. Kageyama has yet to lower his gaze and watches Oikawa’s every move. He looks sort of sad, even disappointed. But Oikawa doesn’t have time to worry about that right now. He’s got enough on his plate.

“Well, good morning, you sly dog,” Kuroo chimes all too cheerfully. A college student should
never sound this chipper in the morning, whether it’s the weekend or not. “I heard your date went well last night.”

Date?

“Bokuto and I both woke up to texts from Hinata, saying that you and Iwaizumi had your first real date night.” Right on cue, Bokuto shouts unintelligible commentary in the background. Something about “scoring” and “getting lucky.” The usual.

“It wasn’t a date,” Oikawa sputters indignantly. “We grabbed pasta at the dining hall and came back to my dorm to watch The X-Files. Nothing romantic about that, Tetsu-chan.”

“Oh yeah? So that’s what the kids are calling it these days? Interesting. I’m not sure what aliens have to do with se-”

A voice that sounds like Lev’s cries, “Nice, Oikawa-san!”

“What the- No! You’re so crude. I’m telling the truth! And is that Haiba-chan?” Oikawa turns to shoot daggers in Kageyama’s direction. He holds the phone away from his face and lowers the volume of his voice. “I know for a fact that you’re the one who told Chibi-chan. What on Earth did you tell him? And who all did he tell?”

Kageyama shrugs, nonchalant. “Just said that you and Iwaizumi had dinner together and then came back here. I guess I never thought he’d go around talking about it. Or that he might twist the words around.”

“That sounds so suspicious, Tobio-chan. No wonder they think it was a date,” Oikawa fumes and brings the phone back to his ear. He’ll deal with the resident lovebirds later. “Anyway, no. That’s the full story. Nothing weird happened.”

“You’re no fun,” Kuroo sighs, as if Oikawa’s love life is his own, and it’s far too boring for his tastes. “No kissing? Or, well, you’re sort of romantic in your own fucked up way. So maybe you stuck to something more PG like… oh. Did you hold hands?”

“Ask if he kissed him on the cheek!” Bokuto crows.

“No, Bokuto-san, he should ask if they slept in the same bed,” Lev yells, trying to drown out Bokuto. “Iwaizumi-san spent the night, after all.”

“You all are insufferable.” Cheeks flaming, Oikawa drops his head and closes his eyes. “We hung out as friends. Just friends.”

“Friends with benefits?”

“Friends that sometimes share platonic kisses like Kuroo and I?”

“Friends that share not-so-platonic kisses like Kenma and I?”

“Friends that hold hands because the shorter one gets cold in the winter and his gloves aren’t warm enough?”

The line goes silent, and, for a second, Oikawa thinks the universe is giving him a break, that Kuroo hung up. But it crackles back to life seconds later.

“Holy shit,” Kuroo says incredulously, a hint of pride, while Bokuto cackles as if he’s finally lost
his mind. “Lev, you are so fucking gay. Is that an actual excuse Yaku uses or…?”

“I-It’s the truth! His hands really do get cold. I don’t want him to get frostbite or something.”

“Aw,” Bokuto coos, “that’s kind of cute. I wonder if Keiji’s hands freeze like that in the winter.”

“Kenma’s hands stay nice and warm. Whenever we go out, my hands are ice blocks compared to his.”

“Maybe he wears the same kind of gloves as-”

“Well, this has been an enlightening conversation,” Oikawa interjects. “Thank you, Testu-chan. Kou-chan, Haiba-chan. But I have some unfinished assignments to attend to. They take precedence over your… fascinating love lives.”

“Okay, yeah. Enough about us. What about your love life, Oikawa? Did you and Iwaizumi swap spit last night or what? Is he a good kisser? Fucker looks like he could tie a cherry stem with that tong-”

Oikawa presses the "END CALL” button hard enough to shatter his phone screen. He’s too close to threatening his perverted friends.

A lot can happen in a week.

For Iwaizumi, these past couple weeks have certainly lived up to that expectation.

Kissing, he’s learned, is a bit like a chain reaction. The first thing Iwaizumi discovers is that there isn’t necessarily a time and place for a quick kiss. Apparently, when it comes to etiquette, the unspoken rules are flexible. A select few have permission to bend them. Namely? Oikawa.

He takes it upon himself to strike at the most random moments. And his only stipulation is that they can’t be caught.

The most recent incident, as Iwaizumi has come to dub the spur-of-the-moment kisses, happened after Oikawa received an A on their last calculus exam. Once class was over, he dragged Iwaizumi into the nearest bathroom and planted a quick, sloppy kiss on his lips. Iwaizumi ignored the noxious odor of antiseptic and toilet bowl water and focused instead on the ecstatic noises and laughter spilling from Oikawa’s lips. That's usually the way it went when they were in public.

It’s sneaky and, honestly, Iwaizumi doesn’t know how he feels about the arrangement. On one hand, he’s happier this way because things would get far too convoluted and messy if anyone found out, whether it be Oikawa’s friends or (worst case scenario) Daichi. Although he already seems to have an idea of what’s going on between he and Oikawa, Iwaizumi doesn’t plan on discussing it openly with him.

He doesn’t need someone else to tell him how risky and foolish this arrangement is. And Daichi would be all too happy to outline everything for Iwaizumi.

Plus, if he’s perfectly honest with himself, he isn’t quite sure what to call this thing with Oikawa. Iwaizumi had just started accepting the title of “friend” and now, they’re dancing dangerously close to the edge of yet another precipice, another fork in the road. Iwaizumi isn’t really an expert on relationships, but he’s almost positive that “friends” don’t occasionally kiss. Especially the
heavy kind of stuff they usually settle into. Tasting and devouring each other’s mouths... that
definitely feels reserved for romance.

Iwaizumi’s not adverse to the idea of pursuing a romantic relationship with Oikawa except that he
actually is, mostly because there’s no way in hell he could pull it off without getting in huge
trouble. Like the sort reserved for revolutionaries and traitors. In other words, the kind that results
in months of torture and interrogation, possibly solitary confinement depending on the crime’s
severity.

He’ll admit that he’s attracted to Oikawa and, now that they’ve chosen to get, well, physical,
there’s a certain level of sexual attraction lurking beneath the surface that Iwaizumi knows he
should fear. There’s “dangerous” and then there’s “wow, you’re going to get your dumb ass
killed.”

Currently, Iwaizumi is sitting comfortably on the border between the two.

He slips on his outdoor shoes and grabs his volleyball bag. In about thirty minutes, he has to be at
the gym for one of Oikawa’s private lessons. And, if he remembers correctly, Bokuto and Kuroo
are supposed to be there, too. That means it’ll be another interesting lesson with plenty of
suggestive winks aimed in his direction whenever Oikawa bends over or lifts his shirt to wipe away
sweat. Always a good time.

Reaching for the refrigerator door to retrieve his water bottle, Iwaizumi stills.

Someone’s here.

“There’s Daichi?” The voice sounds unfamiliar and, instinctively, Iwaizumi glances over his
shoulder to identify their visitor.

He blinks owlishly, hand clenched tightly around the plastic bottle.

Only a couple inches shorter than Daichi and not quite as stocky, the newcomer stands prone in the
entryway. A bulky black coat broadens his frame slightly, while slim jeans make his legs look
thinner. The white scarf around his neck draws Iwaizumi’s attention to the fluffy sort of gray hair
atop his head, to the red coloring dusted across his cheekbones from the cold, and round eyes that
reiterate the soft smile curving his lips. There’s uncertainty in his first step through the door, as if
he isn’t sure he belongs.

This guy is... um. Iwaizumi’s at war with himself. He can’t decide whether he wants to shove the
stranger back out into the night or whether he wants to beckon him closer. Well, actually, he knows
for a fact he’d rather do the latter. Stranger or not, there’s something about him that screams
nonthreatening and Iwaizumi trusts his gut enough to listen to it. That and, to be quite honest, in his
completely and totally unbiased opinion, the guy is gorgeous.

He thinks harder, racking his brain for a name, and probes the farthest corners of his mind because,
for some odd reason, he feels like he should know this person.

Wait.

Could it be...?

“Are you the pancake guy?” Iwaizumi blurts and immediately regrets his existence, hoping he’ll
sink through the floor.

Surprisingly, the stranger doesn’t take offense and laughs, a light and airy sort of laugh that,
although different from Oikawa’s, still renders Iwaizumi speechless. “Excuse me?”

Desperate to save face, Iwaizumi charges forward. “Are you… Sugawara-san?”

If possible, his smile widens. “I sure am. That means you must be Iwaizumi-kun.”

“Ah, well…”

“No need to be so formal,” Sugawara insists, “You can just call me ‘Suga.’”

The name tastes weird on Iwaizumi’s tongue, but not necessarily in a bad way. “Oh. Um, okay.”

He steps away from the fridge, shoving his water bottle gracelessly into one of the pockets of his bag. “It’s nice to meet you.”

“It’s nice to meet you, too, Iwaizumi-kun. I’ve been wanting to meet you for a while, but, as you know, Daichi and I usually leave campus together on the nights we go out so I haven’t had the chance to pay a visit.”

“I understand. You aren’t missing out on much, to be honest. This place isn’t all that special,” Iwaizumi says with a shrug. Slowly and as inconspicuously as possible, he inches toward the front door. He doesn’t want to come off as impolite, especially since this is the first time they’ve met, but he can only imagine the punishment awaiting him if he shows up late. Kuroo and Bokuto can be downright evil when they want to be.

“I don’t know about that. Everything seems nice and neat.” Sugawara’s gaze sweeps across the apartment before coming to rest on Iwaizumi. “I’ve heard so much about you. From Daichi, of course. You’re very important to him, you know.”

Iwaizumi feels the telltale warmth of his cheeks flushing and quickens his steps. “Y-yeah, I know.”

“He’s always singing your praises around campus. I hear that the physics department is practically in love with you thanks to him,” Sugawara pauses to chuckle, burying the sound in his scarf. “And, now that we’ve actually met, I’m pleased to see that you live up to those compliments.”

“I appreciate it, Suga-san. And I’m sorry to cut things short, but I have a private lesson that I need to get to. My instructors aren’t exactly, um… lenient with their tardy policy.”

Another trill of laughter, this time louder, echoes throughout the apartment. Sugawara moves out of Iwaizumi’s path and gestures toward the doorway. “Sounds fun. You should probably get going then.”

“It was nice to finally meet you,” Iwaizumi repeats because he can’t think of anything better to say, trying to avoid eye contact. Sugawara isn’t intimidating like Oikawa, but, nevertheless, his apparent kindness and compassion sets Iwaizumi on edge. He doesn’t know how someone of Daichi’s emotional capacity- incapacity, really- handles it.

“Yes, yes, now go on.” The stern tone shocks Iwaizumi but only momentarily. Strangely, it fits Sugawara’s character.

“Right,” Iwaizumi concedes, flashing Sugawara a small apologetic grin. “I’ll see you later then, Suga-san.”

In response, Sugawara fixes Iwaizumi with the full power of his stare and waves, all smiles and rainbows and fucking benevolence incarnate. “Of course. Goodbye, Iwaizumi-kun.”
Sweaty and shaky, stumbling around on sore legs, Oikawa and Iwaizumi burst through the door to Oikawa’s dorm without a care in the world.

Kageyama could be there, and they wouldn’t care. The entire team could be perched on Kageyama or Oikawa’s bed, watching the two, and they still wouldn’t stop, still wouldn’t take a second to relinquish their hold on each other.

“Sorry, Iwa-chan,” Oikawa apologizes, lips pressed to the junction between Iwaizumi’s neck and shoulder. Except that he’s not sorry at all. “I didn’t intend for this to happen, but it’s hard when you’re all sweaty like that. You look really… sexy.”

“What the hell are you saying?” The inquiry doesn’t sound half as harsh as it normally would, considering the circumstances. “I’m-” Iwaizumi gasps as Oikawa sucks at a patch of skin and bites down on it, worrying it over with his tongue afterwards to soothe the quick burst of pain and, undeniably, pleasure.

“You’re what?” Oikawa teases, fingers sneaking beneath Iwaizumi’s shirt.

“So cute.” Oikawa giggles and slides closer. A sweaty Iwaizumi is far from gross. Excited, he presses Iwaizumi up against the door, skirting his fingers along Iwaizumi’s sides. Muscles jump beneath his touch, warm skin against his palms, toughened skin worn down from years of setting.

“W-wait, are we really going to… just…” Iwaizumi pauses, working around a long and shaky exhale, breath tickling Oikawa’s neck. “I mean, shouldn’t we… Oikawa…”

Now it’s Oikawa’s turn to freeze. He has such a weakness for Iwaizumi panting his name, hands grasping at the back of his shirt, skimming over his shoulder blades, lingering on the divot above the hem of his pants, brushing over the pronounced curve of his ass. Oikawa feels like he’s on fire, burning slowly from the inside out. “Shouldn’t we what?”

“The fucking bed, you asshole,” Iwaizumi growls. To emphasize his point, he rolls his hips against Oikawa’s, moving with purpose, and, really, that’s all the encouragement Oikawa needs. “Thanks to your douchey dictator friends, my legs are like jello.”

Willingly, Oikawa backs away from the door and guides Iwaizumi in the general direction of his bed. “Nice to see you taking control for once, Iwa-chan.”

Iwaizumi’s back hits the mattress with a soft thud, and Oikawa is on him in seconds. He settles on Iwaizumi’s lap and toys with the hem of the other’s shirt, damp with perspiration. “Though I’m not sure where you learned to do this,” he pants, moving his hips against Iwaizumi’s. Delighted, he smirks as Iwaizumi winces and groans, getting progressively more breathless and frenzied. Oikawa loves it.

“I… checked… there were some…”

“Mm?” Oikawa hums.

“ Websites,” Iwaizumi choke out weakly. His fingers dig into the smooth sliver of visible skin near the waistline of Oikawa’s sweatpants, the difference in their complexions evident even in the low lighting. Uncertain, they skim over the bunched fabric. “I was curious so I did what any Researcher would do and- hey!”
“This needs to go, and it needs to go now, Iwa-chan,” Oikawa explains. He continues his earlier task of removing Iwaizumi’s shirt, totally unfazed by the hitch in Iwaizumi’s breathing or the frustrated outcry. He finishes the job, working quickly and tossing the now useless garment to the floor, not giving a damn about where it lands. “And don’t worry.”

Eagerly, Oikawa tugs at his shirt and disrobes in one quick, practiced motion. Iwaizumi, lying prone beneath him, gapes and, reflexively, the fingers at Oikawa’s waist tighten their hold. It doesn’t hurt, though, and Oikawa relishes in the anticipation in Iwaizumi’s eyes, watching as they gradually change over to their dazzling originals. The brilliant reds and oranges swirl and dance like they usually do when Iwaizumi is really starting to get excited.

As much as Oikawa would love to stay in this position, he has other plans, plans that Iwaizumi will surely agree to. They fall together, Iwaizumi wedged underneath Oikawa, half-naked bodies joined together in a desperate tangle of limbs. This is Oikawa’s favorite part, other than the incredible light show in Iwaizumi’s irises before their mouths meet. Strong as he may be, Iwaizumi practically trembles in the moments before they come together, clearly at his most vulnerable. It’s humbling and also exciting to think he has that effect on Iwaizumi.

“Fuck, I’m already-”

“Me too,” Oikawa echoes and dives right in, sealing their lips in a firm kiss, leaning fully into Iwaizumi’s space, carefully nudging Iwaizumi’s knees apart so he can more comfortably slot their legs together. Hips flush, Iwaizumi keens, grunts, and it’s the tacit permission Oikawa needs, knowing that Iwaizumi wants this just as much as he does.

Oikawa sneaks his hand between their bodies. He eases his hand carefully down the sweat slicked planes of Iwaizumi’s chest, brushing past the smattering of hair leading from his navel to the waistband of his boxers, dancing teasingly over the heat between his legs. Iwaizumi wasn’t lying; he really is hard.

“You weren’t kidding,” Oikawa muses out loud, relaying his thoughts. He shifts his attention to Iwaizumi’s collarbone, focused on any sweat gathered there, tongue licking lightly over skin stretched over bone. Blood courses through his veins like hot magma, and the irrational urge to touch Iwaizumi everywhere, to map out every curve and contour with his fingertips, is overwhelming.

This is the furthest they’ve ever taken things, and, already, Oikawa decides he could really get used to this.

“Oikawa, I-” Iwaizumi jerks as Oikawa skims his fingers along the tent in his pants. “What the hell is t-this?”

“Something incredible. You’ll see here in a… couple seconds.”

“This feels so- ah. It’s weird,” he gasps, burying his fingers in Oikawa’s hair. Fingernails scrape roughly along his scalp, and it’s absolutely intoxicating. “I feel hot all over, like I’m going to e-explode or something.”

“That’s the point.” Oikawa chuckles softly, lips moving hungrily to the long line of Iwaizumi’s neck. *He tastes amazing, especially here.*

Meanwhile, Iwaizumi continues to babble about how strange he feels, about how he’s confused yet aroused and, all-in-all, a fucking mess. Apparently he’s the type to speak his mind in heated situations. Not that Oikawa minds. It’s sort of endearing and unexpectedly hot.
“Shit, I—”

“I know.” The hand stroking Iwaizumi through his pants moves away, and Iwaizumi whines disappointedly. Oikawa begins to gyrate his hips in small circles, his own hardness brushing Iwaizumi’s with every languid turn. Torturously slow, Oikawa brings his mouth to Iwaizumi’s ear, purposely letting his lips and teeth graze the sensitive flesh, voice low and heated. “Just let go, Hajime.”

And he does.

Oikawa isn’t far behind, as embarrassing as it is for someone with his experience to admit. Eyes sealed firmly shut, he buries his face in the hollow of Iwaizumi’s neck as he releases, spurred on by the trembling body beneath him.

This is practice.

Warmth envelops him, toes curling and uncurling against the covers. Bare skin has never felt this good before, and he eagerly sinks into Iwaizumi, hands coming up to card through strands of dark hair.

This is practice.

Iwaizumi sighs, content, and Oikawa rolls to lie by his side. He keeps their legs tangled, though, not quite ready to relinquish the skin contact. It’s been awhile since he’s been intimate with someone. He’s forgotten what it’s like to be close like this, what it’s like to rest his hands over another’s chest as their heart pounds, thrumming and full of life.

This is only practice.

But what if it isn’t? What if Iwaizumi really could fall in love? And what if he could love Oikawa?

No, there’s no way. It’s wishful thinking at its finest (or worst, depending on how you look at it). This isn’t a fantasy land. This isn’t a fictional world where the protagonist and his edgy alien companion run off into the sunset together after thousands of words of character development and slow burn romance. Reality is far crueler.

Although Iwaizumi isn’t much of a cuddler, his hands rest on Oikawa’s hips, a solid and grounding weight against his skin. The pressure is nice. And Iwaizumi’s full-body flush is even nicer, a brilliant red against olive. “That was pretty, um. Different,” Iwaizumi pipes up.

“The good kind of different or the bad kind?”

“The good kind,” Iwaizumi mumbles, eyes darting away even though there’s nowhere else to look. “I… I liked it.”

Pride unfurls in Oikawa’s chest. “Well, I’m glad to hear it. That’s the kind of feedback I was hoping for. And I’m always happy to give you lots of juicy research material.”

Iwaizumi visibly cringes at the word “juicy,” hips shifting in an attempt to hide the wetness seeping through the front of his pants. “Yeah, there’s been plenty of that lately.” Iwaizumi’s arms stretch further and wrap loosely around the other’s waist, bringing their bodies a little closer. “We’re making a habit out of this, aren’t we?”

“All in the name of science, Iwa-chan. You’ve improved, too. Not that I ever doubted you would.”
“I guess so,” Iwaizumi grumbles. “This is definitely new territory for me. I have no idea what the hell just happened, but I really need a shower.”

“That’s supposed to happen. If it didn’t, that would mean I’m not much of a teacher. And then you’d have to find someone else to help you with—” Oikawa gestures between the two of them—“this.”

“You’re the only person I’d ask, dumbass.”

Oikawa tenses. He really wishes Iwaizumi wouldn’t say things like that. It makes this whole “kinky scientists turned friends with benefits” arrangement a lot more challenging and a lot more soul-crushing than it already is.

“This is going to seem pretty random, but, well, how did you choose to be a…” Oikawa stares pointedly at the crotch of Iwaizumi’s pants.

“Why did I want to be a male instead of a female?”

“So formal, Iwa-chan. But yes, that’s my question. Since your body is basically just one giant disguise, I wasn’t sure how much of it you were able to, you know, choose? Your skin color, facial structure, gender—all of it.” It’s a question that’s been bothering Oikawa since finding out about Iwaizumi’s true identity.

“Well,” Iwaizumi sighs, “I didn’t really have a say in the matter. My, um. Gender and physical appearance were both designated at random.”

“Hm, that sucks. So you were only able to choose a human body?”

“Right. Then a group of superiors sat around and decided on all the other stuff for me. Bastards limited me to this.” Iwaizumi rolls his eyes. “But I can change my hairstyle and shit, just like other humans. And my personality, of course. I don’t have to worry about those pricks messing with my brain.”

“And your eyes…”

“Yeah, I definitely don’t have a say in that.” At this, he blinks and magenta flickers around the periphery of his irises. “We’re all born with these. So other than the corneal covers, we can’t really make them look completely normal.”

“Good,” Oikawa concedes. They’re positively beautiful; Iwaizumi shouldn’t be ashamed. “I like them, Iwa-chan.”

Of course, in typical Iwaizumi fashion, he flushes to the tips of his ears. “Thanks,” he mumbles, embarrassed, and his eyes flutter shut, as if that will make Oikawa forget about what lies beneath his eyelids. Which it certainly doesn’t.

It would take decades of brainwashing to make him forget about those spectacular ocular light shows.

“Hey, um…” Oikawa starts, caught off guard by Iwaizumi’s tone. “There’s actually something I’ve been meaning to tell you.”

Oh no.

The possibilities are endless, and Oikawa knows for a fact that most would shatter him. He’s going
to tell Oikawa they need to stop this or that he can’t carry on under the pretense of “research.” If so, he’s completely right. There’s no point in continuing this charade if it means nothing to either of them.

Well. Even if it means something to one of them.

“Don’t make that face,” Iwaizumi scolds. “It’s nothing too serious.”

A sour taste fills Oikawa’s mouth and courses down his throat. Liar.

“I just wanted to let you know that, once finals are over, I have to return to the ship for a couple weeks.” Oikawa’s concern must be evident because Iwaizumi only pauses for a second before charging onward with his explanation, a hint of desperation in his voice. “Seriously, I won’t be gone for a long time. Some findings have to be reported in person, and they’ll give me a quick checkup before sending me back. That’s all.”

Why are you lying to me? Oikawa almost asks Iwaizumi out loud. He can’t, though. Because, deep down, he’s scared of the answer. He’d rather stay blissfully unaware of the whole truth and stomach a partial lie than unearth the real reason for Iwaizumi’s secrecy. Hell, he can’t even pinpoint the lies. Does it have something to do with Iwaizumi’s departure? Is the ship Iwaizumi’s real destination? Will he only be gone “a couple weeks” or will it be longer?

Or… is it the part about coming back?

It stings, and Oikawa recoils away from the very thought of Iwaizumi leaving for good. But, for the sake of this person who’s somehow wormed his way into Oikawa’s heart, he’ll swallow the words, grin, and act as if everything is alright.

Because that’s what Oikawa does. That’s what he’s always done.

Vibrant as ever, painting on his best smile, he chimes, “You better take me with you next time, Iwa-chan.”
smells like team spirit

Chapter Summary

In which Iwaizumi realizes where he truly belongs and Daichi fights to stop the oncoming storm.

Chapter Notes

here we are with chapter 11! unlike prior chapters, there’s a lot of action in this update. and you know why? that’s right: A VOLLEYBALL MATCH. also added the ukatake tag because there’s a bit of it now heh

I’m thrilled because I managed to update again before fall classes started- just as I planned. on that note, I would like to point out classes do, in fact, start on august 17th. from there on out, I can’t say whether I’ll be able to update every two weeks. the way I work, it could be down to only one week because once I’m busy, I get shit done. either way, never fear! I certainly don’t intend to abandon this story so keep that in mind.

different mixes (x x) and THERE’S MORE ART FOR THIS FIC LOOK!!!!! HERE’S ALL OF IT!! NEVER HESITATE TO TELL ME IF YOU’RE MAKING A THING FOR THIS FIC!!!! other than that, thanks to everyone that’s stuck around for these 11 chapters. I hope you continue to enjoy my little story! as always, shout out to my marvelous betas and equally marvelous readers. kudos, comments, and the like are always appreciated. here we go!

Locker rooms really do stink.

This is Iwaizumi’s first visit, at least for an extended period of time, and the strong odors hit him the second he steps through the door. The stench of sweat, clinging to knee pads and volleyball shoes, fills the air and nearly knocks Iwaizumi out. Unfortunately, his body has mistaken the adrenaline spikes and sharpened focus, all in preparation for the scrimmage, for the physical reactions that usually precede a fight. Which means every single one of his senses is heightened at the moment. Which includes his sense of smell.

Fun stuff.

To his relief, Oikawa prefers beating the rest of the team here. Their opponents are nowhere to be seen, and Iwaizumi has yet to hear the infectious laughter and banter that follows their teammates wherever they go. In other words, they’re alone.

Walls the color of mandarin oranges and buttercream frosting, bearing a strange resemblance to an orange dreamsicle, surround them on every side. At least one hundred lockers line the periphery, each suited with a nameplate over its storage compartment. Their light gray hue fits in surprisingly well with the rest of the décor, including the wooden benches arranged in the center for seating. Iwaizumi, oddly enough, feels less anxious when he claims the empty nameplate-less locker beside
Oikawa.

“How are your grades for the semester, Iwa-chan?” Oikawa prompts and, far too casually, pulls down his sweatpants. They drop to the floor and all that’s left is Oikawa standing there in his black boxers and, okay, yeah. When has that ever been a problem before?

“Not too bad.” Iwaizumi turns away to pull down his own pants. “Probably should be able to finish with a 3.5 GPA.”

“Aw, not a 4.0? I thought you were supposed to be the resident boy genius.”

“I told you,” Iwaizumi sighs, “I’m not a genius. That’s just another label those jackasses tagged to my forehead to keep anyone from sympathizing with me. Not that my people ever would feel sympathy.”

Hesitantly, he glances over his shoulder to check Oikawa’s state of dress (or undress). His shorts, jet black with two orange stripes a shade darker than the locker room walls, are securely in place. But, as Iwaizumi’s gaze continues its path upwards, he notices that his torso-

Cheeks flaming, Iwaizumi looks away and goes back to pulling up his own shorts. It’s weird, really weird. He’s seen Oikawa half-naked on multiple occasions since their little arrangement started. Hell, he’s even rutted against the guy when he’s clad in nothing but boxers. But now, in this fucking locker room, with no sort of sexual tension in the air whatsoever, his body decides to betray him like this?

I’m so fucked.

“Well, in case you were wondering, which I’m sure you were,” Oikawa drawls from behind Iwaizumi. “I’m shooting for a 4.0. I somehow managed it last semester, and I don’t see why I shouldn’t be able to do the same thing again.”

Iwaizumi listens intently, suddenly grateful for his heightened senses, and detects the soft rustling of Oikawa tucking his jersey into his shorts. He slowly turns and, surely enough, Oikawa is fully dressed. “That’s pretty amazing.” Wait. “Dumbass.”

“Rude,” Oikawa mumbles, but it’s fond, gentle. He fiddles with his knee brace, and Iwaizumi zeroes in on the movement.

“You should be more careful, you know.” Iwaizumi rubs the stretchy fabric of a kneepad between his thumbs. “There’s no way you can keep playing if you destroy your body. And clearly you’ve already put it through a lot already.”

Iwaizumi lifts his head, and Oikawa wears one of his most devilish grins. “Are you my mom, Iwa-chan?”

Grimacing, Iwaizumi tosses one of his outdoor shoes at Oikawa who laughs and dodges the footwear projectile. “I’m just kidding. But don’t worry. I do a lot of strength training and the like to make sure it doesn’t get worse.” He shrugs. “I’ve learned a lot since high school.”

“Are you sure about that? I would’ve never guess-”

“Iwa-chan,” Oikawa scolds. “Anyway, I should be more worried about you. Are you nervous?”

“About?”
“The scrimmage, of course. It’s not an official match, but you’re an—“ he switches to a conspiratorial whisper- “alien so I know you’ve never played in a game like this, especially in front of other people. Must be at least a little scary, right?”

Yes. Iwaizumi has no idea how this scrimmage will play out. Last week, he finally got the chance to practice with the whole team instead of the assorted pairs that came to help during private lessons. There weren’t any glaring issues, but that’s because, as Oikawa said, they didn’t have to perform in front of strangers.

He’s about to engage in a terran sport, one that he only has a couple months’ worth of experience in, on a court in front of faceless human strangers. The crowd won’t be quite as staggering since it’s just a practice match but still. A group of people is a group of people. Will they have expectations of him? Will they criticize his every move or yell insults at him?

Well, that’s something he at least has years of experience with.

“I don’t know,” he answers instead. He tugs his jersey over his head, trying to move as quickly as possible. Although he can’t see it with his own two eyes, Iwaizumi can feel Oikawa’s gaze burning holes in the back of his skull. It’s more unnerving than usual. “Maybe?”

“That’s not a legitimate answer, Iwa-chan.”

Suddenly, there are arms draping over Iwaizumi’s shoulders. Soothing fingers lightly skim over his chest, while the comforting warmth of body heat envelops Iwaizumi. Warm huffs of air ghost across the nape of his neck, and he shudders, clenching his hands uncertainly at his sides. Oikawa buries his nose in Iwaizumi’s hair.

“I think I know what will make you feel better, though,” Oikawa whispers. And, in an instant, Iwaizumi is facing Oikawa, lips only a hairs breadth apart.

Oh. Instinctively, Iwaizumi opens his mouth to respond, to ask what the hell Oikawa thinks he’s doing, and Oikawa swallows the inquiry before it can surface.

Soft and warm and familiar. Oikawa kisses Iwaizumi lightly, carefully, as if he’s a fragile thing he fears may break, as if he’s worthy of the utmost care. Sure and solid, he cradles Iwaizumi’s head in his hands as he slots their mouths together and sighs contentedly. Oikawa is real, completely tangible, and he cares enough about Iwaizumi to provide him with this small and simple gesture of compassion. All in an effort to soothe his nerves.

Is this… Could this…

Iwaizumi kisses back, but the kiss doesn’t last much longer after he starts reciprocating. With a tiny wet pop, Oikawa pulls away, just enough to rest their foreheads together, noses brushing with every exhale. His fingers burrow deeper into Iwaizumi’s hair.

“Just remember, Iwa-chan,” Oikawa mumbles, quiet and adoring, and there’s a throbbing pain in Iwaizumi’s chest. “If you ever get worried, I’m out there on the court, too. Never shoulder all the blame for a bad play because we’re a team, and we make mistakes as a team. And, if you ever get scared or discouraged, look to me because, trust me, you’re not alone. I won’t let anyone make you feel like you don’t belong, okay?”

His heart physically aches, and, although Iwaizumi hears the words clearly, their meaning doesn’t immediately sink in. Oikawa is willing to… look out for him? How the hell does he even respond to an honest declaration like that? A simple “thanks” or “okay” seems rather lackluster in
“Okay,” Iwaizumi blurts because his brain has yet to reboot and catch up with the current discussion.

Oikawa, in all of his glory, grins and accepts. He presses one more quick kiss to Iwaizumi’s lips before pulling away, stepping over to his own locker once again. “Good,” he chimes, practically bouncing on the balls of his feet. It reminds Iwaizumi of Lev, which is quite possibly the funniest comparison he’s ever made.

Seconds later, the rest of the team comes bustling into the locker room. As always, they trickle inside in their standard pairs. First comes “the lovebirds,” as Oikawa so fondly calls Kageyama and Hinata. They somehow manage to squeeze through the tiny entranceway together, racing to their lockers which, of course, are right next to each other. Next comes the boisterous duo known for kicking Iwaizumi’s ass into shape when Oikawa couldn’t get the job done on his own. Bokuto is teasing Kuroo about some song he likes, while Kuroo criticizes his horrendous taste in… shoes? Yeah, it’s an interesting argument. Then comes the notorious Yaku and Lev who, oddly enough, are caught in a quiet conversation with one another as opposed to the typical uproarious banter.

The rest of the team quickly files into the room behind them. As voices fill the air, bouncing off the walls, freely flying from every players’ mouth, Iwaizumi feels himself slowly but surely calming down. The almost crippling anxiety from earlier that morning is gone and any lingering worry from before his talk with Oikawa has, for the most part, faded away. He gradually joins different conversations, even the ones that don’t include Oikawa, and settles into the easygoing atmosphere of the group.

For the first time since waking up, since going to class and leaving campus, Iwaizumi wants to play. He really wants to play.

Shortly after the team finishes getting ready, the coach comes into discuss their strategy as well as the lineup. Iwaizumi learns that he’ll be playing as the outside (or left-side) hitter in the second set. The information only serves to increase his excitement. He won’t be a constant fixture on the bench after all; he’ll be an active participant in the game and, hopefully, a part of their victory. Scrimmage or not, he still wants to help.

The coach throws in a brief pep talk before sending the players out to the court. Screaming and whooping, they rush through the door, jumping up to slap the wall above the entryway. According to Oikawa, it’s for good luck.

Joining in a huddle, Iwaizumi finds himself wedged between Oikawa and Kageyama. When Oikawa’s slings an arm casually over his shoulder, shooting him a quick wink, Iwaizumi isn’t surprised. The butterflies fluttering nervously within his stomach are far more disconcerting than the gesture itself. But, when Kageyama places a reassuring hand on his back and clenches the fabric in his fist, well. That definitely comes as a shock.

He turns to gauge Kageyama’s reaction, and the sight nearly steals his breath away. He’s smiling, a sincere smile the likes of which Iwaizumi has never witnessed before. He’s used to suspicious stares and unintentional leers. Noticing Iwaizumi’s gaze, though, his eyes widen and turn to sweep over the rest of the team. All fifteen of them, standing together, laughing together, as they lower their heads.

“We play together!” Oikawa cries.

“We play together!” everyone else echoes.
“We fight together!”
“We fight together!”
“We stand together!”

The team repeats the battle cry in unison. Iwaizumi feels the energy as if it’s a living thing, a voracious creature emerging right before his very own eyes, ready to take action.

“We win together!” Oikawa yells, and the arm around Iwaizumi’s neck tightens its hold.

Caught up in the moment, Iwaizumi laughs a little as he screams the final line. “We win together!”

All at once, they raise their heads and reach out to create a pile of hands in the center of the circle. Oikawa immediately covers Iwaizumi’s hand with his own. Iwaizumi suppresses an excited shudder.

They lift their arms to the ceiling as one and cry, “Win!”

Loud and proud, brilliant and exuberant, Iwaizumi lets the powerful swell rush over him, lets himself be swept away by the current. Even though he’s not a starter this set, he can’t keep the smile off his face. Both teams line up along their respective end lines. Iwaizumi takes the moment to check out the competition. There aren’t any players that stand out to him, but they carry the sort of confident attitude that clings to a decently consistent team.

Iwaizumi slides over to the bench, while the starters assume their rightful positions on the court. He sits next to the coach as per his request and tries to not let his concern show. As much as he wants to sit beside Oikawa, currently sandwiched between Lev and another player he doesn’t quite know by name yet, this is the coach. And Iwaizumi is the newest addition to this eccentric and dysfunctional family, after all.

Most coaches from Iwaizumi’s short-lived classes on earthly sports appeared sort of… scary. Intimidating. But this man, Takeda, is different. He certainly knows how to control his players, knows how to assume a commanding presence. That’s not what throws Iwaizumi off, though. To be honest, it’s his physical appearance that confuses Iwaizumi.

A couple inches shorter than him, Takeda looks to be only a few years their senior when, in reality, he’s already in his early thirties. There’s a youthful quality to his softened features. Glasses frame his wide and curious eyes, held in place by a pert nose. He’s not all that muscular, at least not in the way most athletes and even ex-athletes are, but it makes sense. From what he’s heard, Takeda didn’t play in high school or, rather, at all. He learned everything from the head coach he worked alongside at a high school several miles away. After five fulfilling years of managing the club team, he decided to take on the challenge of head coach at a university. He’s been there for nearly six semesters now, still a newbie, and yet he’s already renowned for his fabulous work.

And, according to Kuroo, you don’t want to piss the guy off. He has a hidden “crazy switch” that can be triggered at any moment. Rumor has it that it developed in his last couple years as team manager. Another rumor says it’s all thanks to the head coach who, apparently, is “romantically involved” with Takeda. Iwaizumi assumes it’s the man he’s occasionally seen outside the gym when Takeda leaves. With blond spiky hair that rivals Bokuto’s fiery style, donning a tracksuit from what appears to be an extensive collection, he looks like the kind of person Iwaizumi would rather not mess with.

They’re rumors, but… Iwaizumi has heard stories. He believes most things regarding Takeda.
“You should keep an eye on Hinata and Bokuto,” he remarks offhandedly. Iwaizumi jerks to
attention and looks over at their coach. “Well, and Kuroo. They’re three of our most aggressive
attackers.”

“I’ve noticed,” Iwaizumi agrees. His fingers fiddle with the hem of his shorts. “I’ll definitely
watch their plays, Coach.”

A soft smile quirks up Takeda’s lips, and he nods. He turns his focus back to the court as game
play begins.

The first big hit happens after the ball comes back to their side of the net. Yaku is his usual
dependable self and receives the opposing attack smoothly. The pass goes to Kageyama who, after
exchanging a quick glance with Hinata that Iwaizumi nearly misses, sets to the middle. In the same
effortless fashion from practice, Hinata leaps into the air and forces the spike past the blockers.

The crowd, small as it may be, cheers. Every player on the bench also offers up encouragement,
and Takeda grins. “Nice quick!”

Iwaizumi keeps his gaze glued to the attackers for the remainder of the set. Their competitors are
competent, clearly skilled, but can’t seem to shut down the offense. Bokuto and Hinata have a
certain unspoken understanding and execute plays beautifully. Occasionally, they cross paths and
Bokuto comes to the middle to attack, sending the blockers into a wild tizzy. They’re impressive
hitters; Takeda’s advice is completely justified.

When Kuroo moves up to the front row and takes Hinata’s place as middle blocker, Iwaizumi
wonders if it’ll hurt the offense in any way. Which, of course, it doesn’t. If possible, Kuroo and
Bokuto are a more menacing force to be reckoned with. Their combined height and matching evil
smirks, as well as the smoothness of their plays, frighten even Iwaizumi. And he’s only a spectator
at the moment.

But, at the center of it all, is Kageyama. He’s the real mastermind. His signals to the attackers are
quick and inconspicuous enough that Iwaizumi, someone trained to observe his surroundings and
search for the smallest of details, the most discreet nuances, can’t seem to follow along. Hell, all
Kageyama has to do is look at Hinata, and he understands. They share some kind of telepathic
connection, Iwaizumi is sure of it. It’s absolutely insane and to say he’s impressed is an
understatement.

If Kageyama is the mastermind, Takeda is the puppeteer working from behind the scenes. He uses
Kageyama to move the players around, like an orchestrator conducting an instrumental
masterpiece. Two time outs later and the competition has yet to figure out their strategy.

Time seems to fly and, shortly thereafter, it’s game point. Kageyama is up to serve, which
guarantees them at least one point. Other than Oikawa, Kageyama is the most dependable jump
server on the team.

As expected, the serve sails over the net, moving with incredible speed and precision. The
opposing defense manages to receive and set up a play, sending it to their ace. His spike skirts past
the blockers and Yaku squats, passing the ball to Kageyama. Iwaizumi catches the barely
noticeable signal for a “ladder” play just before the receive.

It’s one of Iwaizumi’s personal favorites. Bokuto comes into the middle from the outside position,
right on the heels of Hinata who’s already made his way toward the net. The blockers on the other
side of the net blanch, and both Iwaizumi and Takeda grin maniacally.
Hinata and Bokuto jump at the same time, and the blockers hesitate. Kageyama seizes their lapse in focus and sets a short set to the middle—a set intended for Hinata instead of Bokuto. The two towering players across the net grimace as the ball skims their fingertips, having passed moments after they jumped.

The block was a little too early.

The spike smacks the floor with a resounding and satisfying *thwack*, and the referee blows his whistle, signaling the end of the point.

Not wanting to overreact, the team gathers in a huddle, heads bowed as they graciously accept their victory. There’s some cheering but nothing over the top.

“The easiest way to spoil a win,” Takeda abruptly comments, startling Iwaizumi. “Is to get too excited and let down your defenses in the next set. A single win doesn’t guarantee overall victory. You know what I mean, Iwaizumi-kun?”

“Of course,” Iwaizumi concedes. This is his first real experience with volleyball— with any sport whatsoever— and already Takeda’s words ring true.

They switch sides, and Takeda pulls the team aside to repeat the new lineup. “Everything’s the same except Iwaizumi’s going in for Bokuto, Lev’s in for Kuroo, and Oikawa’s in for Kageyama. Other than that, just keep playing like you have been!”

Face flushed red, practically oozing pride, Takeda makes eye contact with each of the starters before urging them onto the court. Suddenly, there’s a hand grazing his lower back. Iwaizumi would have dismissed it as an accident because it happens all the time at practice. Totally common and not weird. Except that he knows for a fact it’s intentional.

There’s a voice right by his ear, light and soothing, and Iwaizumi identifies the speaker immediately: Oikawa. “Just breathe, Iwa-chan. You’ll be fine.”

Then, just like that, he’s gone. The hand, the warmth and relaxing tone, disappear, and Oikawa’s striding past him. Iwaizumi pauses, entranced by the shifting of shoulder blades and the sway of hips. He can’t seem to move, frozen in place. He stays that way until Lev ushers him along with a powerful pat on the back. It hurts a little, and Iwaizumi winces. But, once he gathers his senses, he lifts his head, and Lev is at his side, flashing him a knowing look.

Shit, does everyone think we’re-

“Let’s go!” Oikawa orders, hands perched on his hips. The commanding and vaguely terrifying presence is back; Iwaizumi instantly tunes in and shuts down the unsettling train of thought.

The set starts and, predictably, the opponents’ serving ability hasn’t depleted one bit. Still consistent, still strong, defense busts their asses to make effective passes to the setter. Like Kageyama, Oikawa watches the ball like a hawk, while maintaining an unprecedented awareness of his attackers and the other team’s players.

Lev makes the first few kills, effortlessly racking up points. Although his style differs from Kuroo, he’s equally threatening. He’s more willingly to make risky plays, and the special whip-like swing often confuses blockers.

Five points later, though, Oikawa changes tactics.

“Psst, Iwa-chan,” he whispers, hand shielding his mouth. “You’re next.”
Iwaizumi blinks. And blinks again.

“Me? Are you sure?” Shoes squeak, loud and filling his eardrums as the server on the other side of the net pulls back his arm, waiting for the whistle. “Lev’s been racking up points like crazy.”

Oikawa brushes the comment off. “Haiba-chan is supposed to.” He hides his mouth and lowers his voice again. “Mixing up the sets messes with the blockers. Let’s not make it too easy for them, right?”

There’s something predatory about the look in Oikawa’s eyes. Like a shark or maybe a jungle cat, a mountain lion stalking the unsuspecting prey that roam its territory. Or, in Iwaizumi’s experience, he reminds him of the species native to Kritha, a planet in the Cassiopeia Galaxy. As one of the most ferocious empires, they not only conquer planets but feast on the most powerful members, cutting through flesh easily with rows of razor sharp incisors.

Well, minus the sort of cannibalistic nature, Oikawa’s drive is equally authoritative and alarming.

Iwaizumi nods and creeps back to the ten foot line, ready to receive the serve if need be. The whistle bursts to life and the ball comes gliding over the net, straight for the defenders in the back row. It contacts a solid platform before rising into the air. Oikawa takes a few steps away from the net and raises his arms, slightly bent and ready to set.

For the briefest moment, their eyes lock and Iwaizumi knows; the set is definitely coming to him.

His feet seem to move on their own. They guide him to the proper place, and he bends his knees, tracking the path of the ball the entire time. Oikawa’s hands cradle it for a couple seconds before it rises again. Once it hits its peak, the top of its arc, Iwaizumi breathes in the smell of sweat and rubber, the lingering aroma of salted pretzels from the concession stand, and moves. It’s now or never.

He executes the first step, second step, and the smaller final step that ends in a low crouch, building up all the power he can before springing into the air. Oikawa’s advice floats through his head. He uses his left hand to place the ball in the air, right arm pulled back, and, tightening his abdominal muscles, releases. Energy courses through his arm as his hand contacts. He can’t fight back a smile because he really did it- he scored a point for the team.

Except...

There’s something he forgot, something Kuroo will likely reprimand him for later. He paid no attention to the placement of the blockers.

A harsh snap and the volleyball strikes the court a foot or so away, off to his right. Iwaizumi’s first hit. Blocked.

“You’re fine!”

“It’s okay, Iwaizumi!”

“You’ll get them next time!”

His teammates cry words of encouragement, and, although disappointment clings to him, adheres to his stinging pride and sullied ego, he feels the praise sink into his skin. It’s… unlike anything he’s felt before.

Oikawa is at his side in an instant. “It happens to everyone, Iwa-chan.”
“Just stick with Lev,” he mumbles hoarsely. The words crawl up his throat, and he’s not quick enough to stop them. “I’ll help on defense.”

“Nonsense,” Oikawa chides, hushed, and squeezes Iwaizumi’s shoulder. “I know you’re upset, though, so I’ll go to the middle next. After that, I’m going to you again.”

“But-“

“No ‘buts,’” Oikawa snaps, making his way to his position. “Remember what I said earlier.”

Never shoulder all the blame for a bad play because we’re a team, and we make mistakes as a team... I won’t let anyone make you feel like you don’t belong, okay?

Right, he should listen to Oikawa. He has far more knowledge concerning sports- concerning volleyball- than Iwaizumi. And, more importantly, they… they’re friends, aren’t they?

The next set goes to Lev, just like Oikawa promised, and it’s another kill. Iwaizumi glances at the scoreboard. 9-6 in favor of them. Their playing has been solid throughout or at least that’s what Takeda tells them during the next time out.

Several plays later, and Oikawa sends the toss Iwaizumi’s way. More determined than before, Iwaizumi repeats the same approach. This time he’s careful to watch the blockers but, unfortunately for him, experience and height are on their side. And, yet again, he’s blocked.

Discouraging doesn’t even begin to describe it. It’s more menacing, knowing that his competitors possess something he can’t magically conjure up in the short span of a few months: capability. They’re confident and aggressive and, moreover, effective because they have years of practice to back it up.

Oikawa tries to reassure him and, jaw set, mumbles beside his ear before darting off, “I promise, you’ll get it next time.”

Iwaizumi wants to believe him- he really does. So, instead of shutting down the way he would like to, he holds his head high and, with the help of his teammates, prepares to defend their court.

It’s his last chance when Oikawa makes true to his words. Iwaizumi rotates to the next position and realizes that he’ll be in the back row the next time they lose the point. I have to do this now, he decides. There’s no way in hell I’m walking over to that bench without a single kill under my belt. Whether this is my first fucking match or not.

Unfortunately for their competition, the serve goes to Yaku who, as usual, receives it as if it’s the easiest thing he’s ever done. It ricochets off his forearms with ease, and Oikawa has no trouble getting beneath the ball. Seconds later, it settles in his palms, his spread fingers, and is heading straight for Iwaizumi.

I have to do this. Iwaizumi strides to the starting point of his approach and summons every ounce of remaining power. Strong and more sure of himself than earlier, he thinks back to his first visit to the university gym. He remembers watching the others play, remembers Oikawa attempting to teach him, and, finally, remembers the way it felt to hit the ball. Its texture and weight as he made contact, the sound it made as it struck the ground. Final. Rewarding.

He uses those memories to will his body to move. Certainty drives him forward, and he takes the three strides to the net in quick succession. He leaps, poised like a wire about to snap, and checks his surroundings- there’s a hole in the block. Smackdab between the two players. A smile tugs at his lips.
Ecstatic, he swings through and watches in rapt fascination as the ball goes exactly where it’s supposed to. It grazes the blockers’ hands because, well, they’re in its path. A defender leaps into action but isn’t quick enough.

A moment of stunned silence follows in the wake of the attack. Iwaizumi slowly turns, still standing by the net, and what he sees… there are no words. Everyone looks ecstatic, almost as if they scored instead. The players on the bench, the managers, Takeda— they’re all thrilled. And all because of something Iwaizumi had done.

Finally, after his gaze sweeps their side of the court, it comes to rest on Oikawa. Iwaizumi can’t believe his attention wasn’t drawn their first because holy shit. He’s practically glowing, radiating pride, and it’s almost too much for Iwaizumi to stand. He’s tempted to avert his gaze, but it’s no use; there’s no way anyone can avoid Oikawa when he’s grinning like this. The expression is completely genuine, and Iwaizumi’s certain it’s one of only a handful of real smiles he’s ever seen grace Oikawa’s face.

A star, really.

He strides toward Iwaizumi and lifts his hand for a high five. All too willingly, Iwaizumi follows suit. Their palms connect and it stings but it’s amazing. For once, Iwaizumi feels like part of the team.

Iwaizumi leaves shortly after because of a missed serve. But the following three rotations fly by, and he’s back. From there on out, more sets are sent to him on the outside. He and Oikawa adopt a rhythm of sorts and are virtually invincible. Point after point, they dominate offensively. It doesn’t take long for game point to roll around and, overcome with joy, Oikawa cries out Iwaizumi’s name as he sends him the last ball.

And, sure enough, it’s over.

Iwaizumi can hardly breathe, overwhelmed by the myriad of emotions swirling around inside his head, and his teammates flock to him. He’s surrounded by sweaty athletes, yelling enthusiastically and trapping him within their muscular cage of arms and torsos. With Oikawa at his side, looking happier than everyone else combined, Iwaizumi feels a strange pang in his chest. He thinks maybe he’s on the verge of tears, but he can’t tell because shouldn’t he be sad if he’s crying?

Confused and a bit dazed, he lets the rush of victory, even this little and mostly insignificant victory in the grand scheme of things, overtake him. The urge to sob is just as strong, though, and now he’s sure there are tears trickling down his cheeks.

Iwaizumi doesn’t belong on the ship; he belongs here.

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Daichi is awfully patient when he needs to be.

So, when he checks Iwaizumi’s Substitute and finds that it’s been almost two weeks since he last filed a report, he clutches the device in his grasp, sits heavily on the couch, and waits for him to return home from his scrimmage. They need to talk.
It’s his fault. His fault that Iwaizumi has chosen this path. His fault that Iwaizumi is following in his footsteps. His fault that Iwaizumi will likely end up like he and Ikejiri.

There’s no doubt in Daichi’s mind that officials will ground him after this stunt. He’s already come to terms with his blossoming feelings for Sugawara and knows exactly what will become of him when he returns to the ship. With Sugawara, it started as interest, pure curiosity because he reminded Daichi of Ikejiri. But a couple months later, and he knows for a fact it’s more than just that.

Daichi wishes Ikejiri were here. He wants to tell him that he’s almost certain he’s found it. That he thinks he may finally know what love is. And isn’t that ironic?

Thankfully, he doesn’t have to wait long for Iwaizumi to come home. He steps through the front door within an hour or so of Daichi’s discovery.

There’s no time for pleasantries. Usually, Daichi avoids getting straight to the point without at least a formal greeting beforehand. But this is serious. Too serious to dance around the question aimlessly until eventually caving and dropping the subject entirely. “When are you going to tell him?” he asks.

“No ‘hello’ first?” Iwaizumi fires back. Answering a question with another question is one of his greatest distraction techniques. “Harsh. And what do you mean by that anyway? Tell who what?”

“You know exactly what I mean, Hajime.”

Iwaizumi eyes the device in Daichi’s hands warily as he makes a beeline for the kitchen. He tosses his bag down beside the couch on his way, shoulders hunched. “I don’t think I do. Oh, you should’ve come to the match today. It was something else.”

Daichi remains silent.

“We should celebrate. Maybe go buy some beer? A six pack of Coronas? It’ll be our first time drinking together,” Iwaizumi laughs. It’s weak, and Daichi recoils from the sound. “I don’t want to get completely trashed or anything. I’ve heard stories about people passing out or falling over railings, falling down the stairs, breaking bones and all that shit. No fucking thanks.”

“I’m happy that your team won.” Daichi sighs. As much as he’d love to humor Iwaizumi, he no longer has the privilege. This is the best he can do. “And maybe we can go down to the liquor store tomorrow. You deserve to celebrate.”

Daichi watches quietly from the living room as Iwaizumi, his back to Daichi as he aimlessly searches through the fridge, visibly tenses. He never has been much of a liar.

“How long have you known?” Daichi changes tactics, hoping the new approach will at least get some sort of answer.

A broken, barely audible response is what he gets. “Since… since the first time we kissed.”

Daichi bows his head. Even when Iwaizumi was younger, any pain he felt, Daichi experienced tenfold. He can’t bear to see a reliable Researcher, a willing Student, and an all-around fantastic individual crumble before his eyes. If there were something he could say, something he could do, to placate Iwaizumi and lift the invisible burden from his shoulders, he would. No matter what the cost, Daichi would act without a second thought.

But, although Ikejiri changed him, helped to expand his emotional spectrum, he’s limited.
Another heart-wrenching remark from the kitchen nearly tears Daichi in two. Gruff, as if the inquiry sears his throat as it rises to his lips, Iwaizumi whispers, “What kind of Researcher am I?”
chasing waterfalls

Chapter Summary

In which the plot thickens for Iwaizumi and Suga is forced to believe aliens exist.

Chapter Notes

OH MY GOD IT’S BEEN FOREVER!!! well, not really. unless you consider three weeks to be “forever.” which in fic updates terms… basically is… forever heh oops

all joking aside, sorry this short chapter took so long. as a sophomore, my classes are getting tougher and more major specific. in other words, i’m busier than last year. that doesn’t mean i plan on abandoning this fic, though. i’ll probably say that in every author’s note from now on just to make sure people know my intentions. the official chapter count [cough, 20, cough] is up now, too, so that should be a good enough reminder

now, concerning this chapter, i don’t really have any additional comments. there’s a good ole baby iwa flashback in the beginning and the end is… yeah, you’ll see, here are the mixes to listen to while you read (x x) and MORE NEW ART WOW LOOK AT THE ART, ALWAYS LOOK AT AND APPRECIATE THE ART!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! never hesitate to let me know if you’re making something for this fic

thanks to my awesome betas who always help me out and thanks to all you incredible readers! kudos, comments, bookmarks, etc are always appreciated, and i hope you continue to enjoy this story!!

ten years prior to current events, in Combat Room #10 aboard the BC Ambition

A psychological tornado rages inside Daichi’s head upon Iwaizumi’s return.

Only a little more than ten terran years of age, Iwaizumi is the youngest Researcher to ever go out in the field. Or, in other words, the youngest to set foot on another planet outside the ship’s walls; he’s unknowingly made history. Toss in the fact he departed several years ago and is returning at this ridiculously young age, and the accomplishment seems even more staggering. But Daichi doesn’t see it that way- not at all.

He doesn’t give a damn about the majority vote or popular opinion. No matter what they say, what they try to convince Daichi, the choice of Subject was cruel and unprecedented.

Superiors sugarcoated the experience, calling Iwaizumi a “pioneer” and “prodigy.” Some went so far as to dub him a “hero.” It’s sickening to think about, to think a group of officials put someone with little to no life experience through such an ordeal, and Daichi tries to avoid the subject at all costs. Thinking about the study, filing reports on it, discussing it- Daichi won’t go anywhere near the topic. He has no problem turning away anyone that brings it up in his presence, whether that
means ignoring them or physically removing himself from the room.

And now, seeing Iwaizumi once again, the surge of guilt is overwhelming.

What the hell was wrong with him? How could he have let them send Iwaizumi out? How did he justify such a decision? He still doesn’t know. It’ll probably haunt him until the day he eventually dies, which, well, he deserves. He deserves every last bit of regret.

The combat training room—just like every combat room on the ship—is considerably large. A variety of weapons from thousands of different galaxies line the walls, ranging from rifle-like guns to light sabers to simple wooden spears. Not every culture is as technologically advanced as others, and it shows in their artillery. Their civilization, however, decided a long time ago to learn the fighting styles of foreign cultures in order to expand upon them and develop unique techniques.

Standing amidst several other trainers and students, Daichi crosses his arms over his chest and watches Iwaizumi’s ongoing fight silently from the sideline. He’s just as good as—if not better than—he was before leaving, which makes absolutely no sense. Most of the training he thinks he’s received is nothing more than an ugly set of fabricated memories, crammed back into his skull where it doesn’t belong. Every false memory shrouds the truth from Iwaizumi’s conscious. As much as he may try to access it, he’ll never actually unearth anything real, anything borne of experiences outside.

*Disgusting.*

The people responsible for creating the illusion, that sector, that entire wing of the ship—positively disgusting.

Suddenly, a flash of movement catches Daichi’s eyes, and he blanches. A few feet away, Iwaizumi sits astride his opponent, the wooden tip of his practice blade pressed to the trainer’s neck. Strands of hair, unnaturally straight, stick up like a giant blue spike atop the trainer’s head. It’s said that the people from that particular planet, his area of study, style their hair into spikes in order to intimidate their victims; Daichi can see now why it’d have that effect. Several seconds of silence pass before the trainer officially declares the results of the fight. He grimaces and bites the words out, but that’s not uncommon when it comes to Iwaizumi’s sparring partners.

Iwaizumi, however, looks downright *thrilled* by his victory.

“Daichi! Daichi!” Iwaizumi trills, skipping over to where his Mentor stands beaming, proud as ever. “Did you see that fight?”

“Of course I did,” Daichi laughs, and it’s fantastic because there’s nothing fake about the delighted twinkle in Iwaizumi’s wide eyes.

“Well, what’d you think? He’s the first one I wanted to defeat when…” Iwaizumi trails off. He blinks, glaring at the floor as if it’s wronged him. The baggy white outfit worn by all Students hangs off his tiny frame and makes him appear even smaller in stature and build than he already is. Just as Daichi is about to ask what’s wrong, Iwaizumi smiles and moves on as if nothing happened. “I’ve wanted to beat him for a while. I think? And, I don’t know, today was the day.”

“Yes, obviously you were right about that.” The trainer standing to Daichi’s right shoots him and Iwaizumi a glare. Sharp teeth glint in the light. *Scary.* Daichi leers back and sets a hand on Iwaizumi’s shoulder, lightly prodding him in the direction of the room’s exit.

Daichi musters up every ounce of self-control he has left to keep from punching the bastard in the
They step out into the corridor, and Daichi silently leads Iwaizumi towards his office. The corridors are strange. Each one is a bright and seemingly never-ending passage with spotless white walls, engulfing every wandering pedestrian in fluorescent light. Officials and Students alike file past Daichi and Iwaizumi. While the Students sport the traditional wear of their area of Research, from Earth to planets from the Palioxis Nebula, the Superiors don drab gray suits. They wear identical grimaces, all regarding their inferiors with disdain as they pass.

Thankfully, Iwaizumi takes no notice of the questioning looks shot his way as Superiors walk by. It’s not unusual, especially after word of his mission spread throughout the Battle Cruiser like wildfire. But that doesn’t mean Daichi likes or condones it.

Daichi and Iwaizumi skirt past a group of Students and slip into Daichi’s office. The door hisses softly before sealing shut. His room is still incredibly bleak and synthetic from floor to ceiling except for the sprawling tapestry art hanging on the far wall. And yet Iwaizumi’s eyes bug out of his skull, face lighting up, like he’s just been told the universe’s greatest secrets.

“Wow,” he gasps, wandering over to Daichi’s desk. “Did you change things around?”

Before he can even take another step, Daichi’s feet refuse to move any further.

“No.”

“What do you mean?” he ventures, trying to keep his tone as neutral as possible.

“I don’t know.” Cupping the tiny holographic model of Earth in his palms, Iwaizumi shrugs. “It just seems a little different from the last time I was here. But that was just… yesterday…”

This is exactly what Daichi feared would happen. The brainwashing process has far more flaws than most are willing to admit. Perfected- that’s what the administers claim. After centuries of practicing the method, they’ve made hundreds of changes and little adjustments that supposedly render the “patient” free of unnecessary or harmful memories.

But there’s no way in hell, even after all this time, that the process is flawless. Daichi knows there must be holes, and Iwaizumi’s confusion at the moment just serves to prove his point.

“I moved a few things around earlier today,” Daichi lies and immediately hates himself for the sour taste of the words on his tongue. “I needed a change of scenery.”

“Change of scenery, huh?” Iwaizumi’s brow furrows, and he gently retracts his hands. Plopping down in Daichi’s desk chair, he kicks his feet up and spins in a circle, giggling softly under his breath. Daichi feels his heart drop.

Iwaizumi never deserved any of this.

“So, what have you been doing lately? You seem awfully busy,” Daichi prompts, swiftly changing subjects.

“The usual. Going to classes, combat training, studying… nothing exciting.”

“I heard they put you in a new class.” Daichi takes the less comfortable seat opposite Iwaizumi. “One concerning terran sports?”

“Oh yeah,” Iwaizumi replies, grinning widely. “That’s right. I’ve been in it for a few months. Actually, now that you mention it, they’ve stuck me in a couple new courses. They’re sort of interesting, I guess.”
“Sports are fascinating.” The monitors on Daichi’s desk flicker to signal an incoming message. Daichi tenses, worried it’s about Iwaizumi’s questionable mental state following the procedure, but Iwaizumi stares blankly at the largest of the three monitors. He certainly doesn’t seem troubled by whatever the officials have to say. “Do you have a favorite?”

“I can’t tell yet. But Bas… Basketball seems fun. And volleyball—” Iwaizumi falters mid-sentence. His face screws up, and Daichi recognizes the expression right away: bewilderment.

It’s extremely dangerous allowing Iwaizumi anywhere near triggering thoughts at this point in time. Several visits to the clinic should clear up and mend any loose threads. But now… not now, not this soon, not a matter of days after the procedure. And, worse still, Daichi has no clue what words or images may spark the memories.

He has no way of steering the conversation away from potentially dangerous topics.

“Did you meet anyone new?” Daichi blurts. The question comes out stilted, but he hopes Iwaizumi will take the bait regardless. He’s never had any reason to distrust Daichi so why start now?

The monitor to Daichi’s left displays a live image of a rain forest, a live feed of some of the Earth’s most spectacular flora and fauna. Iwaizumi casually swipes his finger over the screen. He lingers on a toucan, watching with curiosity as it cocks its head to the side, bright orange beak opening as it lets loose a call. At first, when Iwaizumi continues to stare, Daichi worries he didn’t hear him.

“Yeah,” Iwaizumi finally replies. Seconds later, his fingers cease their absentminded movement. “Actually, no. I didn’t meet anyone new.”

It’s dark.

Well, of course it is. Nighttime is usually a pretty dark time. No, it’s more than just “dark.” The murky depths of black feel unnatural, but that’s probably just Sugawara being paranoid. He’s not really what you’d call an outdoorsy person. The closest he’s ever come to going camping is spending a single night out in a friend’s tree house during a sleepover. It’s not that he hates nature or anything ridiculous like that. He just never had the occasion when he was younger. And, even if he were itching to go hiking or backpacking or the like as an adult, not many of the other professors at the university are close enough to him for such an endeavor.

Yet here he is. All thanks to Daichi who, for some reason, has gone to these lengths to reveal some deep and dark secret.

If it were anyone else, Sugawara probably would’ve said no without a seconds hesitation. But, to be completely honest, Daichi is the only professor Sugawara has taken the time to get close to since starting his job.

Daichi possesses the sort of magnetic personality Sugawara craved back in high school, when his self-esteem was at its worst, when the slightest glance from his peers felt more like a steely glare. Regardless, he managed to survive adolescence and grew into a mature and (mostly) confident adult. Shoulders back, head held high, he strolls through campus like the (again, mostly) self-assured man he is.

When he and Daichi first met, before Sugawara even knew they shared the same workplace, he was drawn to him, compelled to start a conversation in that moment. And so what if it was about something as mundane and off-topic as pancake recipes?

It worked, didn’t it?
They’ve been together for a couple months, and Sugawara still has mini epiphanies throughout the day. In the morning when he wakes up next to a drowsy Daichi, bedhead and all, or in the afternoons when they go out for lunch and Daichi makes little appreciative noises when trying a new hamburger or club sandwich. Food, Sugawara has learned, is the easiest way to Daichi’s heart. And he has no qualms with exploiting that fact.

On a more serious note, though, Sugawara worries every day about where he stands with Daichi. It’s not like he makes remarks or acts in a way that hints at him disliking Sugawara. No, it’s more complex than that. Over the years, Sugawara has been in several relationships. All with men. All ending abruptly. All disastrous. Each, in its own way, served to empower Sugawara, while simultaneously breaking down his ego. One second, they were setting him on a pedestal, catering to his every need and gushing over how “amazing” he was, and the next, they were criticizing him for not paying them enough attention. Thankfully, none went so far as to physically threaten him, but a couple certainly scared him, trapping him in corners or gripping his wrist too tightly. There’s nothing compassionate or loving about that sort of treatment.

So Sugawara let go.

He let go of every last two-faced scumbag and settled into a comfortable life on his own. The time alone taught him how to be independent, how to better appreciate his assets and give less thought to insecurities.

Regardless of his past, Sugawara refuses to let a few assholes ruin his perception of Daichi. He’s a nice guy. Genuinely kind, wise beyond his years, and, quite honestly, very easy on the eyes. He’s the kind of person Sugawara hopes to keep in his life for as long as he can.

As much as he hates admitting it, as much as it scares the hell out of him, Sugawara really cares for Daichi. More than he’s ever cared about someone… possibly ever.

Daichi’s steady presence and gentle smile, especially when pressed against Sugawara’s warm skin, all keep him sane, keep him from sinking into depression. Daichi makes Sugawara feel useful. He makes Sugawara feel appreciated and important and, most importantly, loved.

And, well, when’s the last time someone did that?

Daichi popped the question at lunch a few days ago. No, not that question. The second the word “camping” slipped out, Sugawara readied himself to either turn Daichi down or suggest alternatives. But the rest of Daichi’s request stopped him cold. “I have something important to tell you,” he finished, voice dispassionate.

Ah. Sugawara had heard that exact statement on several occasions and knew their implication: Daichi wanted to break up.

Realistically, there are other possibilities, but Sugawara knew better than to naively assume the best. He prepared once again to turn Daichi down. He was smiling, though, and expectancy hung heavy in the air following his request. In the end, Daichi’s anticipation won, totally overshadowing Sugawara’s concerns. Mirroring the sunshine-y grin, he trilled, “Sounds like fun.”

Those feelings, the depth of his affection, are the reason Sugawara walks through the woods at this ungodly hour.

“I appreciate you inviting me and everything, Daichi,” Sugawara intones, a bit nervous. “But how much further do we have to go before reaching this ‘special place’ of yours?”
“Not far. It’ll probably be another twenty or so minutes.” He sounds totally unconcerned, as if the thought of getting lost in the wilderness is preposterous. But, no matter how reliable Daichi’s navigation skills are, it could pose a real and very serious problem.

“And you still won’t tell me your secret?”

“Don’t worry,” Daichi sighs, adjusting the straps of his backpack. “You’ll understand when we get there. I know it doesn’t make any sense right now, but it will. I promise.”

Sugawara rolls his eyes. Him and his promises. If Daichi weren’t so damned trustworthy, Sugawara would automatically accuse him of luring him to the deepest corners of the woods, taking the precautions necessary to hide his corpse from any nosy authorities. But it’s Daichi; the man doesn’t have a single violent bone in his body.

“If you say so.” The food they brought along is starting to feel heavier with every step Sugawara takes. “It better be magnificent or we’re never coming out here at this time of night ever again.”

Right on cue, the bushes ahead rustle. Sugawara nearly trips over a rock as he tries to put more space between himself and the carnivorous beast lurking within the cover of leaves. “Of course, that’s if we make it out of here alive.”

“We’ll be fine,” Daichi laughs, a soft and warm presence in the chilly spring evening. “Bears aren’t native to this region, and that’s really the only plausible threat.”

“And I’m sure our destination is totally safe, too, right?”

Daichi’s footsteps falter. A twig snaps beneath his boots. “You’re scared.”

“Any sane person would be at least a little concerned in this situation,” Sugawara explains frankly. “I trust you and everything, but…”

“I get it,” Daichi replies, voice barely more than a whisper. “Uncharted territory can be terrifying.”

Sugawara squints, trying to get a better glimpse of Daichi’s expression. The moonlight isn’t quite bright enough to see his face. Sugawara can only make out the grim set of his lips and the furrow of his brows. It’s disconcerting seeing Daichi like this. He sometimes gets cryptic and brooding, and Sugawara doesn’t know how to handle it. He’s not the type to pry for answers, as much as he may want to.

They walk in silence the rest of the way. Occasionally, Sugawara peeks at Daichi, but he never speaks up about the odd behavior.

Ten somewhat uncomfortable minutes pass before Sugawara sees it.

He knows the second he spots the clearing up ahead. He knows by the hitch in Daichi’s breathing, the sudden quiet as he comes to an abrupt halt and the contents of his backpack clink together. He knows by the heaves in the air, completely unrelated to the weather or atmosphere. He knows because the sight before him is absolutely breathtaking.

Tall and brilliant even in the dark, frothing and full of life, a waterfall.

“Oh my God,” Sugawara blurts because, really, this is the last thing he expected to find. It’s the last destination he had in mind when Daichi laid out their plans for the night.

“I know,” Daichi mumbles appreciatively. His fingers, a bit cold from the lowering temperature,
curl around Sugawara’s. “Just follow me.”

Gaping, Sugawara looks down at their joined hands. His grip is firm and sure. It’s so like Daichi, self-assured even in odd scenarios like this, and Sugawara feels as if he has no choice but to obey. After all, he trusts Daichi more than anyone else. What could possibly go wrong?

Well, other than falling prey to the animals that see him and Daichi as tasty nighttime snacks. Yum.

Daichi tugs him along as he steps over brush and rocks, heading straight for the waterfall. Surprised, Sugawara wavers. His eyes flit down to his sweatshirt. “We’re actually going into the water? Isn’t it too cold for that?”

“No,” Daichi retorts, far too blasé, and starts walking again. “You’ll see.”

Sugawara laughs uncertainly but allows himself to be pulled along. “I think there should be a limit on how many times you can say that in one day.”

A short huff of laughter bubbles up on Daichi’s lips but nothing more. He exudes a sort of seriousness at the moment that steals Sugawara’s words away. His jaw snaps shut, and he turns his attention back to the waterfall ahead. They make it to the bank of the outlet and climb onto the nearest rock. There’s a collection of huge stones, all clumped together, that they scale in order to reach a narrow grassy pathway. Insects chirp and hum as they pass. The trees and plants sway with the wind, everything caught in an ethereal world of silence and tranquility, almost otherworldly in nature. Other than the animals, only the rushing water can be heard, and it drowns out most of the woodland creatures that wander the surrounding area.

Less and less of the woods is visible the further they go. Minutes later and the fall blocks their vision like an enormous aquatic curtain. Before they lose all sources of light, Daichi stops to retrieve his flashlight. He brandishes it proudly and switches it on, slowly sweeping the area with its luminescence. Sugawara gasps.

In front of them lies a cavernous tunnel, extending into the distance, no end in sight.

“Daichi…”

“Here we go,” Daichi cries, and Sugawara considers smacking him across the face.

*What the hell?* “What are you talking about? You can’t possibly mean-“

“This is the place.” He points the flashlight at the cavern and reels it back in, bathing his face in white light. To Sugawara’s dismay, he looks just as serious as he had earlier when they first stepped behind the cover of the waterfall.

“You can’t possibly be serious.”

“Sit,” Daichi urges and lowers himself to the ground. The humidity and faint smell of mold don’t seem to bother him. “It’ll all make sense if you just listen to what I have to say.”

*He’s definitely going to dump me,* Sugawara decides but does as Daichi says. As expected, the cave floor is cold, unforgiving, and damp. It’s not comfortable in the least. “Alright,” Sugawara concedes and situates himself, hugging his knees against his chest. He pulls out his own flashlight, and the two arrange them so their faces aren’t shrouded in darkness.

“So, um.” Daichi scratches the back of his neck, looking everywhere but Sugawara.
He waits for Daichi to elaborate, but, of course, he doesn’t.

“So?”

“Yeah. So…” Daichi trails off. He’s uncharacteristically nervous, and Sugawara suddenly feels queasy, sitting in this musty cave.

“The ‘important thing’ you wanted to tell me? That you had to drag me into the woods to explain?” Sugawara can’t help but snap the words. He’s getting frustrated, which he has every right to be, considering the circumstances.

“Right. Yes.” Daichi inhales and exhales, slow and purposeful. Sugawara watches as his hands clench into fists. “Well, I guess I should get straight to the point. I’m sure that’s what Hajime did.”

_Huh?_

Apparently, Sugawara had spoken aloud. “Sorry, I never meant to scare you or anything. But I couldn’t risk anyone else hearing this conversation.”

Oh God. Daichi is insane; he has to be. Sugawara thinks of Russell Crowe’s character in Beautiful Mind, how he was convinced he was employed by the United States Department of Defense and had to escape armed pursuers. Did Daichi think he belonged to a secret government organization?

“Like who?” Sugawara teases. It comes out harsher than planned, though, and Daichi narrows his eyes.

“Are you-“

“Suga, I’m an alien.”

Silence. Sugawara stares and stares, but Daichi is still there, looking at him expectantly. Before he can think better of it, Sugawara drops his head into his hands and laughs.

He was right; Daichi is nuts.

“Right, and I’m a mermaid,” Sugawara jests amidst hysterical bouts of laughter. “I’m a mermaid that turns into a unicorn on land. I should’ve told you sooner. S-Sorry-”

“I’m serious.”

The hysteria dies down instantly. Hesitantly, Sugawara lifts his head to meet Daichi’s gaze. And what he finds baffles him.

He isn’t angry. Or frustrated or even puzzled. He almost looks like… he feels sorry for Sugawara.

“What the hell are you talking about? You honestly expect me to believe that you dragged me all the way out here because you don’t want anyone else finding out you’re an alien?” Sugawara yells incredulously.

“That’s exactly right,” Daichi confirms, pushing his backpack closer to the wall behind him. “You’re not supposed to know.”

“Not supposed to- What?” Unable to stand it any longer, Sugawara jumps to his feet. He takes a furious step forward and glares down at Daichi. “You must’ve lost your mind, Daichi. I don’t get it. Why are you lying to me like this?”
“I almost wish I were.”

“Yeah right.” Sugawara bends over, leaning into Daichi’s personal space. He stifles the urge to grab Daichi by the collar. “Do you think I’m a joke? Is that all I am to you? Is that all we are?”

“Suga,” Daichi warns, climbing to his feet. Sugawara refuses to back off and holds his ground, their faces only an inch or two apart. “I would never do that. You should know that by now.”

“Like I haven’t heard that one before.”

“Listen to m-“

“You know how I feel about you! Why would you do this?”

“And you know how I feel about you.”

“Do I?” Sugawara growls.

“Please, Suga, I lo- shit.” Daichi murmurs the last words through clenched teeth, leering at his watch. “We have to go.”

“Wha-“

For a split second, the cave vanishes, fading into a bizarre translucence that Sugawara only has a brief moment to ponder over before the scene changes.

The strange void is quickly replaced by metal walls, covered from floor to ceiling in electronic panels. Each displays something different. The largest one appears to show a global map, a vibrant green and blue except for a single speck of brilliant red. Already small to begin with, the room seems even more cramped since practically every inch is covered in technology. It smells strongly of cleaning supplies, specifically ammonia.

They’re definitely not behind the waterfall anymore.

*Toto, I don’t think we’re in Kansas anymore,* Sugawara thinks, standing in the center and gawking at their surroundings. As much as he’d love to continue yelling at Daichi, to figure out what the hell is going on between them, his prominent fear overrides any lingering anger. Frightened, he turns to make sure Daichi is there. This odd turn of events is alarming enough as it is.

To his relief, Daichi is there at his side. And… appears perfectly content.

Daichi opens his mouth, and Sugawara waits. He waits for an explanation or an apology or just some kind of reassurance. But a voice, sharp and menacing, cuts through the air like a blade before either of them have the chance to speak.

“We’ve been waiting for you, Daichi.”
going home

Chapter Summary

In which Iwaizumi goes UFO hunting for the last time and Oikawa realizes a frightening truth.

Chapter Notes

I. AM. SO. SO. SOOOOO. SORRY. this update took far longer than it should’ve. college work is partly to blame, but i also had to send my laptop away for a little more than a week to get rid of a nasty trojan horse. it was annoying as hell, but now my baby is back! and I can write to my heart’s content (when i’m not swamped with work). updates will hopefully go back to being every two weeks tops [crosses fingers]

anyway, this chapter is the painful one i’ve been dying to write. sorry to put you all through this angst, but i promise it’ll be worth it in the end. maybe get yourself a NASA shirt like oikawa? also here are the mixes for your listening pleasure (x x) and MORE NEW ART WOW LOOK AT THE ART, ALWAYS LOOK AT AND APPRECIATE THE ART!!!!!!!!!!!! again, never hesitate to let me know if you’re making something for this fic!

thanks, as always, to my fantastic betas and all you incredible readers! kudos, comments, bookmarks, etc are always appreciated, and i hope you continue to enjoy this story!!

Finals sweep into Oikawa’s life faster than he anticipated.

They’re never fun, but that goes without saying. Unless you consider sitting in a lecture hall for two hours straight, filling pages with equations and shading in a shit ton of multiple choice bubbles fun. In which case, it’s a blast.

To Oikawa’s delight, since their relationship started its shift, Iwaizumi emerged further and further from his shell. Oikawa could barely stand being apart from him. Although he wasn’t “clingy” by any means, he couldn’t help but want to spend as much time with Iwaizumi as he could. There was a certain atmosphere that seemed to settle around the two when they were together. A soft and warm sensation, much like a blanket that pushed away negative thoughts and anxiety, distracting them from the harshness of the outside world. Besides the nights of shared bed space, heated kisses, and exchanged stories, Iwaizumi started smiling more, loosening up and conversing with Oikawa like they’d been friends for years.

Oikawa, of course, wishes that were the case.

With Iwaizumi at his side for the past few weeks, the remainder of the semester glided by effortlessly, slipping through his fingers like running water. Somehow, without even meaning to, Iwaizumi made challenging things like calculus enjoyable. Well, about as enjoyable as such a
After laboring through the final, they rush down to the bus stop and clamber onto the next shuttle. Other passengers eye them warily, while the driver (the same man that usually runs the bus at this hour) smiles knowingly. He has to be used to these excursions by now.

Unlike the first time, the trip doesn’t pass in awkward silence. Iwaizumi and Oikawa bicker over the answers to exam questions. Being the diligent math student he is, Oikawa doesn’t take well to accusations. His solutions are often correct. *Always*, according to the mathematical deviant himself. The “alien genius” card is also pulled a few times- and not by Oikawa, surprisingly enough. Iwaizumi may hate the title, but he hates listening to Oikawa talk about how wrong he is more.

Eventually, the bus ride comes to an end, and they’re scaling the side of the hill, just as they’ve done on several occasions since Iwaizumi revealed his true identity. The sky is equally stunning, stars equally entrancing, and blanket equally relaxing. Stretched out in the grass, peering into the inky black depths of space that lie above them, Oikawa gently scoots his hand over to rest on Iwaizumi’s. Their fingers intertwine of their own volition; the gesture has become as natural as breathing.

“Remember when I first took you out here?” Oikawa muses softly, sliding a bit closer to Iwaizumi.

“How could I forget?” The question rolls easily off Iwaizumi’s tongue, and Oikawa smirks. “*Someone* thought I was lying to them.”

“Oh, that’s totally justifiable! I love the ideas of aliens- you know that- but it doesn’t mean I knew they were really out there, Iwa-chan. Those jealous brats from high school teased me about it all the time, so it wasn’t that far-fetched to think maybe you’d do the same.”

“I’m like one of the ‘jealous brats’ from your high school?”

Oikawa jabs Iwaizumi playfully in the side and chuckles. He doesn’t know if he’ll ever get used to this Iwaizumi. This easygoing and astoundingly carefree person who used to eat hotdogs with a knife and fork, that bristled and snapped at even the slightest and most good-humored insult. Now he actually jokes back?

And kind of, sort of, *flirts*?

“Ugh, you’re ridiculous sometimes,” Oikawa mumbles, tightening his grip on Iwaizumi’s hand. “It’s a good thing you’re cute.”

“S-Shut up!” The blanket shifts as Iwaizumi tries to turn his flushed face away. “I’m not-“

*Ah.* There’s the reaction Oikawa’s looking for.

Quickly, before he can be intercepted, Oikawa dives in and presses a kiss to Iwaizumi’s downturned lips. He’s rewarded with an immediate cry of confusion and, if at all possible, an even redder Iwaizumi.

“So cute,” Oikawa confirms and ignores the string of frustrated gibberish that spills from Iwaizumi’s mouth.

After another minute or two of complaints, Iwaizumi finally settles down and silently turns his gaze back to the evening sky. Oikawa can’t bring himself to look away either. Now that he knows aliens exist, coming out to this hill in search of UFO’s seems legitimized, as if a few hours may actually grant him the spectacular sight of a cruiser flying overhead. He no longer feels crazy or
childish, no longer feels guilty or ashamed.

Being one of probably only a handful of people aware of extraterrestrial life, potentially the only person… well, it’s thrilling. Absolutely incredible.

“I really wish I could remember who I dragged along with me when I was younger,” Oikawa blurts and instantly regrets it. The topic makes him uncomfortable, and he can only imagine how it makes Iwaizumi, who clearly had a lonely childhood, feel. “Sorry, I-“

“No, you’re fine.” Underlying tension colors every word, not at all befitting of the response itself. What should sound light and reassuring comes out sharp and unsettling. “That must be tough for you.”

“It… is,” Oikawa replies uncertainly. The calloused palm pressed against his moves, fingers squeezing down on Oikawa’s. “I just… I can’t believe we were so close and yet I can’t even remember his name. Practically inseparable and yet- Not even his damn name, Iwa-chan.”

“That is pretty weird.”

“His face is hazy, too. Dark hair, dark eyes, around the same height as me- everything else is just a blur. It’s almost like someone accidentally spilled water on a picture of him and tried to blot it up with paper towel. Or like a painting someone smudged with their thumb before the paint could dry.” Oikawa’s nose scrunches. “What the hell does it mean, Iwa-chan? I feel like there’s more to his story than just moving away.”

“Maybe your brain wants to protect you. Maybe it’s hiding some of those memories from you on purpose,” Iwaizumi whispers, never once making eye contact.

“But why? Something bad must’ve happened if my brain wants to hide it from me.”

“A death in his family? That would’ve fucked with your head, especially at that young of an age.”

“Yeah… I guess,” Oikawa grudgingly agrees. It’s a sound argument, but he still can’t accept it. Every time he digs around in search of the answer, the fuzzy images and half-stories are the only things that surface. It’s fucking annoying.

“No matter how it happened,” Iwaizumi mutters unexpectedly. “It’s a shame. He was your best friend, after all.”

Oikawa hates this topic. Even years later, he can’t help but cringe at the mention of his past. Whenever it’s brought up, without fail, he questions his entire childhood.

Were the two of them even friends? Did they really spend all that time together, staring at the sky in companionable silence, exchanging whispered secrets and dreams? Were he and Kuroo friends? Hell, did he have any friends?

Is everything from his past a lie?

“Do you think I’ll ever get the chance to visit your ship, Iwa-chan?” Oikawa mutters offhandedly. Although meant to lessen the tension, it only seems to make it worse. Stilted and nervous, Oikawa bites down on his tongue immediately after his mouth snaps shut.

“Maybe.”

The short response, a quick one word answer, cuts through Oikawa, right down to the very core of
his being. Again, Iwaizumi’s tone of voice is off, distant, as if he’s slowly drifting away into the cold and depthless void of deep space from which he came.

Iwaizumi doesn’t want to be here.

No, it’s not because of Oikawa. The location itself doesn’t bother him either. It’s the situation, the context of this visit that has him wishing he were anywhere else.

His stomach feels heavy, a lead weight inside his abdomen that makes every progressive step into Oikawa’s tiny dorm room more excruciating than the last. The faint smell of grass lingers on their clothing, mixed with the even fainter aroma of Oikawa’s cologne, the same one in the bottle Iwaizumi stares down as he steps through the doorway and stops. He can’t bring himself to walk any further.

Oikawa, on the other hand, doesn’t appear to notice. He practically skips across the room to his dresser and pulls out another outfit. He changes quickly, tossing clothes carelessly around. It makes Iwaizumi’s chest ache in the worst way.

How the hell is he going to go through with this?

How will he force out the words?

_Oikawa doesn’t deserve this_, he realizes with startling clarity. This is all his fault; he dragged poor Oikawa into this hellish nightmare of an attempted experiment. Oikawa deserves so much better than Iwaizumi. And yet there’s a selfish part of him that wants Oikawa regardless. The long nights on the hill or curled up in bed, the study sessions in the library, the private lessons and practices and outings with the team- Iwaizumi doesn’t want to let any of it go.

And, most importantly, he doesn’t want to let Oikawa go.

“I know I told you about it earlier, Iwa-chan,” Oikawa gushes, oblivious of Iwaizumi’s internal struggle as he sits quietly on his bed. “But look!”

Brandishing a cellophane-wrapped DVD case, he bounds up to Iwaizumi. His hair bears the brunt of his rushed outfit change. Chunks of thick brown hair curl and perk up at weird angles. It defies physics, which is strangely fitting for an engineering hopeful like Oikawa.

Iwaizumi turns his gaze from Oikawa’s bedhead to the case. The thickness catches him off guard, but upon closer inspection, he finds that it’s the complete ninth season of _X-Files_. A limited edition copy with bonus footage and interviews. Something that Oikawa’s been wanting since he and Iwaizumi first met.

And Oikawa makes sure Iwaizumi sees it before anyone else.

“Oikawa.” The name, breathless, slips into the charged air.

“There’s supposed to be a couple hours’ worth of bonus footage and extra scenes,” Oikawa carries on. “Can you believe that? Hours! That’ll keep us occupied for a while, huh, Iwa-chan?”

“Oikawa… you know I’m leaving soon.”

“Yes, but when you get back, Iwa-chan. Originally, I thought about forcing Tetsu-chan to watch it with me, but I don’t have to worry about that anymore. I’ve got you! We’ve already watched the other eight seasons, and now we can finish it. Together!”
Iwaizumi’s fingers clench into loose fists at his sides. This hurts a lot more than it should.

“And you just have to ignore Tetsu-chan. Well, the team in general. They’re going to make fun of me because I actually spent money on this, but Netflix just wasn’t good enough. I mean, *bonus footage*, Iwa-chan.”

*Please stop.*

“Oh, then we can start *Battlestar Galactica!* The new one first because, well, yeah. And then there’s *Firefly* and *Star Trek*. So many great shows.”

*Please.*

“After all that, we can watch more of the movies over there.” Oikawa pauses to gesture at the collection Iwaizumi noticed the first time he visited. “The possibilities are endless!”

“Oi-“

“It’s not like we don’t have the time. Maybe I can get around to watching-“

The dam finally breaks.

“I’m not coming back.”

Pain laces every syllable. They cut like knives, slicing their way up Iwaizumi’s throat. He watches silently as Oikawa’s face transforms, excitement giving way to confusion. Clutching the case against his chest, massive “NASA” t-shirt hanging off his broad frame, ratty volleyball lounge pants sitting low on his hips, he looks smaller than usual, almost frail. For someone as strong, someone with such an incredible presence on the court, the sight is incredibly disconcerting. In that moment, he’s a white dwarf, the dimly glowing remains of a staggering red giant. A small star bereft of its brilliance.

Iwaizumi has never seen Oikawa cry, but he expects it. Even though he doesn’t feel worthy of Oikawa’s tears, Iwaizumi knows he won’t take the news well. Iwaizumi will be just like the young boy who left Oikawa’s side all those years ago without a reasonable explanation. He’ll be no better than that sorry excuse for a best friend.

But the tears never come.

Instead, Oikawa laughs. The skin around his eyes and mouth crinkle charmingly as he giggles, the light and carefree sound sending Iwaizumi’s mind into even more of a tizzy. He’s torn between stressing the truth behind his admission and keeping quiet. If he refuses to push the issue, Oikawa will continue to smile and laugh. He’ll be far happier this way.

So Iwaizumi says nothing.

“You’re hilarious, Iwa-chan.” Oikawa sidesteps a lone volleyball shoe and moves closer. “Trying to get out of watching all of these marvelous shows and movies- I can’t believe you!”

“R-Right,” Iwaizumi mumbles. His heart thumps a melancholy beat in time with Oikawa’s fluttering lashes.

“But I’m glad you mentioned it. I almost forgot you’d be leaving soon. I’ll miss you, but a week or two isn’t all that long. Some coupl- I mean, some friends go months without seeing each other in person.”
Some couples. They’re a couple- that’s right. They moved past “friends” the second their lips touched. The research excuse no longer holds any truth, if it ever did. Although he has yet to grasp love’s true meaning, Iwaizumi is sure he’s on the brink of something big.

There are several things he knows with complete certainty.

First, Oikawa is special. He’s a unique presence in Iwaizumi’s life. Different than Daichi, than his other superiors and old classmates back on the ship. He cares a lot about Daichi, but it definitely isn’t the same as his feelings toward Oikawa. He wants to protect him, to know him fully. Irrationally, a part of him almost wants to be closer to him than anyone else.

Secondly, Iwaizumi enjoys touching Oikawa. He loves the feel of Oikawa’s body against his, the smoothness and warmth of his skin, the scent of his aftershave and shampoo, the timbre of his voice, the distinct taste of his mouth- all of it. Iwaizumi’s never understood the meaning of an addiction until now.

And, lastly, he wants to stay with Oikawa for as long as physically possible. The thought of being separated, of going back to the ship for good without the other at his side, makes him sick.

“All right.”

Startled, Iwaizumi blinks back the trance of his reflection. There, inches away from his nose, Oikawa holds the DVD case.

“What…?”

“I’m sure you won’t be busy all the time,” Oikawa says by way of explanation. “When you get bored, just kick back and watch these.”

When I miss you, Iwaizumi’s mind supplies. That’s when I’d watch these damn videos.

“I can’t.” Because Iwaizumi really can’t. Lightly, he pushes the case away, smirking as Oikawa’s fingers curl protectively around the edges.

“Why not?”

“Because you’re the one that’s been dying to see them, dumbass. Not me.”

“But, Iwa-chan, I can’t watch them without you!”

Iwaizumi really hates his life sometimes.

“Then how about this,” Oikawa rushes on, clearly concerned by what he sees written in Iwaizumi’s expression. “We can watch them when you get back. Satisfied?”

Iwaizumi’s body screams for him to say no. Every instinct urges him to tell Oikawa the truth. The guilt will eat away at him if he leaves now with the taste of the lies poisoning his system.

“All right, alright. Fine.” But it’s not fine by any means. The complete opposite. As far from “fine” as possible.

Regardless, Oikawa appears to buy it. His lips lift into the softest smile and, in typical Oikawa fashion, he steals a quick kiss before Iwaizumi can step away. The brief touch means more than every kiss they’ve shared in the past and yet Oikawa has no idea.

Iwaizumi’s lips tingle pleasantly and, as they exchange goodbyes, he presses his fingers to the
swell of his lower lip. Once the door shuts behind him, he slowly leans against it. He soaks in the atmosphere, the feeling of the dorms, the memories he and Oikawa have shared in this building, on this campus.

When did Earth become his home? When did he let humanity change him? And when did he decide to readily accept that change?

The rush of emotions almost overwhelms him but, somehow, he pushes away and, dragging his feet, stalks out of the building. Even with the encroaching summer heat, Iwaizumi feels cold. Ice pushes through his veins and encloses his heart in a frozen cage.

_It hurts_, he realizes. _It hurts._

The moment the door falls shut behind Iwaizumi, Oikawa sinks onto his mattress.

Lying on his back with the DVD case still in his grasp, he stretches his arms toward the ceiling. He examines the cover, gaze lazily sweeping over the bold writing and familiar faces of the actors. But he barely registers what he’s looking at. His mind is elsewhere at the moment.

Had Iwaizumi really said he wasn’t coming back?

Yes, but he hadn’t meant it. There’s no way. A week or two tops- that’s how long his briefing and research submission were supposed to take. Then they’d send him back, suggesting new studies. As an engineer, Oikawa understands the importance of science so he has no real qualms with Iwaizumi leaving for a while.

But that’s not completely true; he actually has a _huge_ issue with it.

He and Iwaizumi were finally getting somewhere. Their relationship feels realer to Oikawa than any past girlfriends. He doesn’t have to “act” any particular way around Iwaizumi, doesn’t feel compelled to try and impress him. Besides Kuroo, it’s the closest he’s ever come to having someone he can be himself around. His imperfections and overzealous enthusiasm when aliens are brought up. His hopes and dreams of exploring space, no matter how childish- Iwaizumi listens and accepts it all.

Oh _God_.

Did he… no, it couldn’t be.

Oikawa will go to any lengths to avoid falling in love with someone. Hell, even thinking the word makes him cringe. But somehow, if the tears pricking the backs of his eyes are any indication, he’s gone and done one of the few things he promised himself he’d never do.

He’s in love with Iwaizumi Hajime.

That’s it; plain and simple.

And it’s actually the worst because Oikawa doesn’t want Iwaizumi to leave, even if it’s no longer than a month. He wants to keep him here on Earth, to curl around his body and tell him that, yes, he’s fallen in love with him and, yes, he’s sorry for letting such a thing happen. He would take it back if he could, knowing that Iwaizumi’s species are strongly against love and intimacy, but it’s not quite that easy. There’s no magical switch inside Oikawa’s head that allows him to get rid of these pesky feelings.
Frustrated, Oikawa clenches his fingers tighter around the DVD case. He really really doesn’t want Iwaizumi to leave. What if he doesn’t come back? What if, by some miracle, Iwaizumi feels the same and Oikawa ends up losing the one person he’s ever truly loved?

What if he’s stuck alone for the rest of his life?

He’ll deserve it, considering the way he holds people at a safe distance; that doesn’t mean he’s happy about it.

He wishes he weren’t afraid of people hurting him. He wishes he felt comfortable showing the world his true face. Regret simmers dangerously beneath the surface of his skin. But, if there’s one thing he doesn’t regret, it’s falling for Iwaizumi.

Out of the billions of people on Earth, out of the billions of other intelligent life forms throughout the universe, Oikawa wouldn’t replace Iwaizumi with anyone else. They fit together effortlessly, like they were made for each other. Like they’ve always been together, whether it be romantically or not.

Fuck. *Fuck everything.* Oikawa’s lip curls into a snarl, and he sits up. The full fiery force of his glare zeros in on the case in his hands. He pulls back one of his arms, just like he would before spiking a ball, and, really, he considers throwing the damn thing. He can’t bear to look at it when all he sees reflected in the cover is Iwaizumi’s face.

For a second, he thinks he’ll actually go through with it.

His arm shakes, teeth digging painfully into his bottom lip, and he envisions the DVD crashing into the wall, what it’d look like as it made contact, the sound it would make.

Moments later, though, it drops onto the bed with a soft *thud.*

He can’t do it.

A single tear crawls down the side of Oikawa’s face. He can’t remember the last time he actually cried.
Iwaizumi hasn’t been this angry in years.

As if returning to the ship isn’t bad enough, he comes back to this?

The room is fairly small, and Iwaizumi sits at the end of a long rectangular table, facing his superiors. The gathering includes a few familiar faces. Iwaizumi hasn’t been assigned a particular Supervisor yet so he goes through the one assigned to Daichi. An unnaturally thin being with a body bearing an eerie resemblance to Voldemort, a character from one of Oikawa’s favorite fantasy series, watches Iwaizumi carefully. Oval-shaped eyes filled with striking triangular pupils, tiny pointed teeth bared in a permanent grimace. The little nostrils at the center of his unsettling visage flare as his gaze sweeps over Iwaizumi.

“Where the hell is he?” Iwaizumi demands. He’s had enough of this skirting around the truth bullshit.

“I see that your Research report is quite short.” The Supervisor’s wraith-like fingers flip through the stack of papers on the table in front of him. He pays no mind to Iwaizumi’s baffled expression. “Based on your Mentor’s earlier reports, I expected more findings. This is an unpleasant surprise.”

“You can’t possibly- where are you keeping him? Why did I come home to an empty apartment today?” Iwaizumi combs his hands roughly through his hair. “He better not be dead.”

“I am also surprised by these recorded accounts. This… Oikawa Tooru sounds fairly average, as far as human beings go. He does not seem like the ‘perfect Subject,’ as we were led to believe,” the
Supervisor carries on. He visibly sneers when the words “Oikawa” and “human beings” stumble over his lips.

“Yeah, sure, he doesn’t fit all your ideal qualities. Great. Sorry that I didn’t pick someone that lived up to your standards. Now, where’s Daichi?”

“He is still quite young. Our records show that he is in school at the moment. His scores are far from outstanding, and his athletic career is fairly standard for a… college student. So, as you can imagine, I am having trouble determining why you selected him. You had thousands of candidates to choose from.”

“He’s the kind of Subject I was looking for. The real question here is where-”

“Hajime,” the Supervisor purrs, honey sweet and deadly. “I think you may be interested in what we have to discuss.”

“Doubt it. Where-“

“Were you romantically involved with your Subject?”

Iwaizumi blinks slowly, uncomprehending. The floor seems to drop out from underneath him. This can’t possibly be real.

“What?” he croaks.

Silently, the ghastly figure reaches into his pocket and withdraws a recorder. Iwaizumi has heard plenty of horror stories about Researchers returning to the ship only to be banished to the deepest and darkest corners of the universe. Some were brought down with photographic evidence of false practices, while others were condemned by audio evidence.

The Supervisor flashes Iwaizumi a quick smirk before setting the recorder on the table and pressing play. A tiny red light at the top of the device flashes a couple times. Then, it starts.

“Hey, hey, watch it. You’re going to knock your laptop off the bed.”

Iwaizumi immediately recognizes his own voice.

“So?” Something rustles in the background. “Calm down, Iwa-chan.”

There’s more rustling followed by a little noise of frustration. Definitely Iwaizumi.

“Assikawa. You’d think the laptop would be your top- mfph!”

Iwaizumi feels his entire body tense, coiled tight like a spring. The distinct sound of lips meeting, soft and wet, a warmth underlying each breathy exhale and occasional snicker of laughter. Iwaizumi’s stomach is queasy. He never wanted to share something so intimate, so personal, with these bastards. This is a moment that belongs only to him and Oikawa.

The recording continues on. Things are clearly heating up, but the Supervisor makes no move to silence it. His pupils flash a dangerous mix of crimson and orange. The other Supervisors keep their gazes locked on Iwaizumi, as if they have to be absolutely sure the audio makes Iwaizumi uncomfortable. As if there were still suspicions regarding the identity of the speakers.

“And what do you have to say to this?” The Supervisor tilts his head and talks a bit louder to compete with the barrage of noises coming from the recorder.
What can Iwaizumi even say to combat that? The voices are undeniably his and Oikawa’s. And, even if he were to make a case against it being Oikawa, the decision to be intimate with a human being will doom him either way. Not a single argument comes to mind.

He’s stuck.

Daichi isn’t there to help back him up. Oikawa isn’t there to kiss and hold him, to take his mind off the potential death sentence already set into motion. The volleyball team isn’t there to chuckle and spout inappropriate jokes, to playfully shove him around. Iwaizumi is left to settle this matter on his own.

And he can’t think of anything to say.

“I…”

“Your case will have to be exceptional if you wish to convince us of your innocence. The Supervisors gathered here today are ready to handle this situation before it gets out of hand.” His lips curl into the twisted ghost of a smile. It’s incredibly disturbing. “I am sure you understand.”

Oh, he understands alright. He understands the government is filled to the brim with robotic assholes. He understands that he’s giving the officials more trouble than he’s worth. The “boy genius” guise will only get him so far; he’s not infallible. They’ll do whatever it takes to keep this case under lock and key. The ship’s population is liable to turn against the government if they hear of Iwaizumi’s actions. At least that’s what the Supervisors believe.

“What the hell do you want me to say?” Iwaizumi peers down at his hands and watches as his fingers reflexively curl into fists.

“Tell us the truth. That is all.”

The truth, huh? That’s what they want?

Iwaizumi isn’t sure they can handle “the truth.” Most of the nihilistic pricks would never be able to wrap their brains around the concept of romance. If he told them he loved Oikawa, they’d scoff and banish him, far away from the curious and spiteful eyes of other citizens. Of course, that’s what they’ll do regardless of what he says. Admitting to having sexual relations—minus the actual sex—is enough to get his ass excommunicated.

So, Iwaizumi obeys the Supervisor’s request.

“I love him.”

There, he’s said it.

Even if he never gets the chance to say it to Oikawa’s face, never has the opportunity to see him again, he wants someone to hear how he feels. Letting it out in the open like this lifts a massive weight off Iwaizumi’s chest. He’s finally admitted to his feelings. And, although it sucks because Oikawa isn’t there to hear it, he still takes pride in the fact he actually vocalized it. Out loud. He doesn’t give a damn who knows, not anymore.

The Supervisor’s smile quickly transforms into a repulsed grimace. He stands without a second’s hesitation and turns to the guards posted at the door. His bony arm swings around, one disgusting claw pointing in Iwaizumi’s direction.

“Please,” he growls dryly. “I want him removed from the premises immediately.” The other
Supervisors climb to their feet, chairs automatically sliding back into place on their own. They all wear identical masks of revulsion.

Iwaizumi goes without a fight. There’s no point. Regardless, the guards pull and jerk his body around, unnecessarily rough. Many knew Iwaizumi back during his years of training so they’re not big fans of his. They jump at any excuse to bully him. But, at the door, the Supervisor commands them to stop.

"If you miss Daichi so much, you can stay with him," he hisses. It’s obvious that he takes great delight in being able to say it. And, although Iwaizumi can’t see his expression, he can hear the smug satisfaction in his voice.

Iwaizumi stays quiet. The guards drag him from the room and down a narrow corridor. Instantly, Iwaizumi knows this isn’t a public pathway. Any corridors open to average citizens are wider, brighter. The higher clearance you have and higher your position, the darker and narrower your walking path is.

Every time Iwaizumi turns to look at rooms they pass, the guards jab him painfully in the side, forcing him to face forward. From what he can gather, they’re heading for the prison cells. The kind of notorious galactic offenders kept on this level are carefully guarded government secrets. Only a handful of individuals are privy to that sort of information, from their names to their crimes to their physical appearances. Apparently the guards haven’t forgotten Iwaizumi’s societal status. They know he isn’t allowed to even glimpse a profile.

“So, you’re the sorry assholes that get to carry me away, huh?” Iwaizumi jests.

“Shut up,” the one guard growls. White bangs swish with every turn of his unnaturally round head. The other chooses not to answer and opts to yank Iwaizumi’s arm until it feels like it may pop out of its socket instead. Iwaizumi winces and stifles a groan.

“Fine.” Their holds loosen ever so slightly, just enough to not cause Iwaizumi constant pain. But he can’t help but push their buttons a bit more. “Guess you’re only smart enough to do the dirty work-”

This time, the speechless guard tugs his arm even harder and holy shit.

Iwaizumi’s had his fill for now; he’d rather make it out of this hellhole in one piece.

After what feels like forever, the guards jerk Iwaizumi to a jolting halt. The door before them resembles basically every other door in this section of the ship. Instead of knocking, the white-haired atrocity to Iwaizumi’s left presses his thumb to the scanner. A second or two later, and it opens, revealing a room shrouded mostly in darkness.

A barely visible fluorescent light overhead bathes a pathetically small bed in white. Everything is spotless and white, just like the cheeky guard’s ugly ass hair. The floor, the ceiling, the walls, even the furniture. Iwaizumi shivers at the sight, but lets the guards shove him inside. He has no energy left to protest.

He glares at their retreating figures. The next time Iwaizumi sees the jackasses, he’ll give them a piece of his mind. Oh, and the Supervisors, too. Definitely the Supervisors.

After everything they’ve done, Iwaizumi can’t wait to destroy every last snooty official on board. Years of combat training have prepared him for this moment. He can see it now, the way he’ll strike. A dangerous maelstrom of fiery red and indigo dance inside his irises, heart racing excitedly.
in his chest. They better hope they never run into Iwaizumi again. Or they’ll certainly regret it.

“Well, what a surprise,” a tired voice mumbles from behind him, distinct and undoubtedly pissed. Iwaizumi grins and swivels around, confirming his suspicions.

Daichi is alive after all.

The silence doesn’t last long.

There’s no grand reunion, no hugs or crying. Daichi and Iwaizumi aren’t touchy-feely individuals to begin with and, although they’re both trying to get more in touch with their emotional sides, still have yet to get comfortable with casual touches. Like hugging. Especially hugging.

“We need to get out of here,” Daichi deadpans.

“Oh obviously.”

Iwaizumi steps further into the room and eyes the bed warily. The room is a dismal and sorry excuse for a living space. It looks a lot like the rooms they stick hospital patients in back on Earth. Daichi is forbidden from having personal items or anything that may allow him to escape. In other words, he has nothing more than a shabby white scrub suit, leftovers from his earlier meal, and a book on the history of spacecraft architecture. The book, of course, doesn’t actually belong to Daichi.

“So, what do you have in mind?” Hesitantly, Iwaizumi leans against the nearest wall.

“You say that like I’ve already devised a plan of action,” Daichi scoffs.

“Because you have, Daichi. I’ve lived with you for most of my life; I think I have a pretty good understanding of how that brain of yours works.”

As the closest thing to a prodigy their society has ever had, Iwaizumi has many shining moments of brilliance. He’s one of the most gifted minds. Centuries have passed without a Researcher like him out in the field. But this, his knowledge of Daichi’s mannerisms, is what impresses Daichi more than any of his other accomplishments.

He’s no supercomputer or new breed of artificial intelligence. He’s a living creature with a beating heart. And, unlike a solid ninety or so percent of their society, he’s learned to care about those closest to him. It’s unheard of.

Daichi couldn’t be more proud.

“You knew we’d end up here, didn’t you? Stuck in one of these creepy fucking prison cells?” Iwaizumi’s eyes flicker yellow. He doesn’t need biological camouflage here, and his irises reflect the fluctuating emotions raging on inside his body.

“I had a feeling,” Daichi answers honestly. “Better than being executed on the spot. Once I figured out what was going on between you and Oikawa, I knew the Supervisors would find out sooner or later. They basically track our every move. And they don’t hand out decoy smartphones to every Researcher and Mentor out of the kindness of their hearts.”

“What hearts?”

They both snicker, little bouts of laughter, nervous but genuine. Daichi kind of likes the sound.
“Speaking of which, how did they catch you?” Daichi pauses, swallowing nervously. “Pictures of you two in compromising positions? A recording?”

Iwaizumi nods, sporting a pained grimace. “Yeah, no pictures. Just some audio. I had no idea they had any evidence. And then you were missing and just—” He shakes his head. “I’m sorry for being so careless. I should’ve been more careful.”

“You’re not the only one at fault. I’m just as guilty as you are.”

“No,” Iwaizumi insists, vehement. “You’re not. And I won’t let you take the fall for my childish mistakes.”

Daichi lets out a heavy sigh. He can’t believe Iwaizumi doesn’t already know, considering how perceptive he is. After all, Daichi put two and two together and uncovered the truth behind he and Oikawa’s relationship ages ago.

“Hajime, neither of us are innocent.”

“Honestly, you don’t have to do this.”

“We’re both guilty of the same thing,” Daichi interjects. Suga’s mischievous smirk and bright eyes flicker to life, a memory as clear as day. The curve of his lips and slope of his nose, the warmth of his skin and delicious heat of his touch, each detail coming back with startling clarity. Daichi wants to forget it all, but it doesn’t seem possible.

How do you forget someone like that?

“What?” Iwaizumi blinks, slowly, processing Daichi’s words with visible disbelief. “What the hell is that supposed to mean… Oh.”

At almost exactly the same time, they turn their eyes to the floor. A few seconds of charged silence pass before they meet each other’s gaze once again. Daichi can feel the guilt radiating off of Iwaizumi’s body.

“I really am sorry,” Iwaizumi murmurs. The earnestly sorrowful expression makes Daichi’s heart clench painfully. “About, um. You and Sugawara. Did they catch him, too?”

Daichi’s shoulders rise, and he swallows down the urge to cry or, worse, vomit. Suga is stuck on the Ambition with them, trapped somewhere amongst thousands of extraterrestrials, a species he never even believed to exist until now. Everything about this place is foreign, and Daichi isn’t by Suga’s side to comfort or protect him. Daichi can’t imagine what it’d be like to be stranded on an alien spaceship without a familiar face nearby.

“Right, uh.” Something about the look on Daichi’s face pushes Iwaizumi to keep talking. “Now, I’m guessing your plan involves hacking?”

*He knows me too well.* Daichi is eternally grateful for the topic change.

“The code is simple enough,” Daichi answers, stepping toward the door. Iwaizumi silently follows.

“I looked it over before you got here. It shouldn’t take you more than an hour to crack. Tops.”

Sidestepping Daichi, Iwaizumi presses his palm to the metallic surface. He swipes his pointer finger a certain way, and a small computer panel materializes. Grinning, Iwaizumi places a hand on either side of the panel and skims over the green blinking digits on the screen. He scrolls down until he reaches the end of the code and turns to Daichi.
“This is all of it?”

“From what I can tell, yes.”

Iwaizumi nods knowingly and stares intently at the tiny panel. Daichi watches a smile blossom on his face and waits for the good news. He’s truly in his element, poring over code and tinkering with electronics. As if reading his mind, Iwaizumi looks over his shoulder and beams.

“Let’s get the hell out of here.”

The corridors are surprisingly easy to navigate.

Several lefts and a handful of rights later, Iwaizumi and Daichi return to Iwaizumi’s bedroom. Everything looks the same, exactly the way he left it. Of course, it doesn’t take much when your “personal items” consist solely of a bed, a few changes of clothing, and several shelves loaded with books.

Although their society strongly discourages the acquirement of souvenirs and personal belongings, they’re fine with books. Whether it be digital or physical copies, approved textbooks and memoirs are the only acceptable sources of entertainment. Movies, video games, television shows— they’re completely out of the question. Especially any with terran origins. Those are the worst offense.

Surveying the space, Iwaizumi can’t help but notice how bland it looks after living several months in a warm and comfortable home. He misses the carpets and hardwood floors and Daichi’s tapestry paintings. He misses the kitchen, the cupboards and silverware, the smell of Daichi’s homemade pancakes and brewing coffee. He misses the clothing he bought, forbidden within the walls of the Battlecruiser, and the shirts Oikawa loaned him after a long night of practice. Hell, he even misses the strange collection of decorations they kept throughout the apartment, ranging from potted plants to weirdly plushy couch cushions.

And, even more than that, he misses Oikawa’s dingy little dorm room. The wide variety of science fiction memorabilia, the messy drawers and marginally neater desk space, the random volleyballs scattered here and there. If at all possible, he even yearns for Kageyama’s company. He misses the freakishly neat side of the room that belonged to him and only him. Well, and Hinata, but that’s another story.

This place? This room he spent the first twenty terran years of his life stuck in? He never missed it for a second when he was on Earth.

Slowly, he stalks across the room to where his bag sits. It’s his last connection to planet Earth. He reaches a shaky hand out and brushes his fingertips across the material, toying with the zipper. There isn’t much inside. He can remember every single item he tossed in hours earlier when he frantically made the decision to return to the ship in search for Daichi.

“This is fine,” he tries to convince himself and carefully unzips the bag.

Sitting at the very top, still wrapped in cellophane, is the DVD case.

It takes a moment for Iwaizumi to process what he’s seeing. Because he definitely didn’t pack them.

_Dammit_. He isn’t supposed to have these. Only items with “educational value” are allowed back on the Ambition. Terran textbooks and even certain novels are alright. A fictional television series without a single shred of factual information or “real” importance? Yeah, definitely not okay.
The only logical explanation for having them involves a sneaky human student-athlete with the beautifully deceptive appearance of a god. A human star.

He sets them aside and continues digging. The rest of the bag consists of clothes he brought along for his stay. They’re all from Earth, but he purchased them from dealers on other planets. The market for clothing from neighboring galaxies is vast and flourishing. Terran fashion is a favorite of basically every species other than Iwaizumi’s.

Scooping up each t-shirt and pair of pants, he tosses them into the basket by the doorway. It’s pointless to keep the stuff. Besides, Daichi is waiting patiently outside. He decided to let Iwaizumi go back and grab anything important or pertinent to their escape. In other words, grab the DVD’s and get the fuck out before they’re caught.

Iwaizumi glances at the boxset on his bed. He thinks back to the first time Oikawa dragged him into watching it. The night they’d watched the pilot episode and, consequently, the night they’d kissed.

“Hey,” Iwaizumi speaks up, letting his curiosity get the better of him. “What’s their deal?”

“Who?”

“You know, them.” The theme music plays ominously in the background, and Iwaizumi taps the screen with his finger. “The main characters or whatever.”

“Oh, you mean Mulder and Scully,” Oikawa drawls knowingly. “Their relationship is awfully, well, complicated.”

“Yeah?”

“Definitely. They’re both pretty stubborn, dancing around each other’s feelings like they do.”

The exchange hadn’t meant anything then, but now, looking back on it, the partners in the show kind of resemble him and Oikawa. At first, Scully is merely the spy sent to monitor Mulder, just as Iwaizumi was sent to seek out and study a human Subject. And Mulder is totally Oikawa, enthusiastic and passionate about pursuing extraterrestrials and uncovering the truth. Scully thought Mulder was crazy when they met but gradually came to understand him. Meanwhile, Mulder eventually learned to respect Scully and overlook the original reason for her tagging along on his cases.

Bickering, putting distance between themselves, refusing to confess their feelings for each other—it’s unsettlingly reminiscent of his relationship with Oikawa.

After a quick analyzation of the show, Oikawa went on to ask Iwaizumi about love in their society. Which led to the inevitable.

"Iwa-chan has never been in love?" The expectancy is painfully obvious to Iwaizumi, and, yet again, Oikawa unknowingly makes him curse his perceptiveness.

"Not that I know of."

"Mmm."

Which led to Iwaizumi asking if Oikawa had ever loved someone or been intimate with someone and, really, the whole thing fell apart after that. One second, they were talking, having a legitimate conversation, and the next, Oikawa was pressing Iwaizumi into the mattress with his broad frame
and soft lips.

His first kiss, there in the dark of Oikawa’s dorm, mapping out each other’s bodies with curious fingertips and hungry mouths. He could remember everything, from the feeling of skin on skin to the comfortable press of alien sheets against his spine. Oikawa treated Iwaizumi with the utmost care when they kissed. Clear intention underlied each touch, the warm slide of their lips and heated energy building between their undulating bodies, all purposeful and enticing. The very thought of a kiss, let alone “making out,” had always grossed Iwaizumi out. But not anymore.

The thought brings to mind another talk they’d had, one with less kissing and more actual talking. Solemn, a genuine spark of interest in his wide eyes, Oikawa had asked the even bigger question: where was Iwaizumi happier?

And, well. Iwaizumi hadn’t known what to say.

It’s a great question. One that Iwaizumi thinks he finally knows the answer to.

“Hajime?”

Iwaizumi startles, nearly dropping the DVD case. His eyes flit to the door. Daichi stands at the ready, leaning his weight against the doorframe. He cocks his head and stares pointedly at the boxset in Iwaizumi’s hands.

“Those belong to Oikawa, don’t they?” Daichi speculates, clearly afraid of Iwaizumi’s response.

“Yeah. Yeah, they do.” Iwaizumi’s fingers curl around the DVD’s, just as Oikawa’s had done before he left the dorm. “He must’ve snuck them into my bag before I left his place.”

Instead of prompting Iwaizumi with another invasive question, Daichi lowers his head and closes his eyes. His entire frame shifts as he breathes in a giant gust of air and exhales, eventually looking up to meet Iwaizumi’s confused gaze.

“I think there’s something I need to show you.”
**cognitive reformation**

Chapter Summary

In which Sugawara meets an important stranger and Iwaizumi approaches a terrifying secret.

Chapter Notes

looks like it’s time for chapter 15! and, amazingly, enough, i’ve just about kept my promise. i said this would take no more than two weeks and, well, i was almost right. yay for tiny, practically nonexistent lulls in the engineering workload!!

anyway, this is a fun and interesting chapter, in my opinion. it's shortish but that's because the next chapter will probably be a MONSTER. i hope you enjoy the occasional funny moments and omg yes the return of a character from earlier chapters!! that’s all i’ll say so i don’t ruin the surprise for anyone. here are all 3 mixes for your listening pleasure (x x x) and ART WOW LOOK AT THE ART, ALWAYS LOOK AT AND APPRECIATE THE ART!!!!!!!!!!!!!! again, please don’t hesitate to let me know if you’re making something for this fic!

thanks, as always, to my incredible beta for sticking around this long and helping me out!! also a HUGE thanks to you fabulous readers. i always appreciate your kudos, comments, bookmarks etc and i hope this last stretch of story doesn’t disappoint

**Cold.**

Sugawara has no idea where he is. Daichi had been rattling on about being an alien and about showing him something that would change his perspective and then- then they were in a room. A small and totally white room lined with computer monitors and panels. Then, shortly afterwards, a stranger walked in. Sugawara only managed to catch a glimpse of their suits and lab coats.

That’s the moment everything went a little hazy.

He clearly remembers the terrified look in Daichi’s eyes, the set of his shoulders, even the way he stepped in front of Sugawara as if to protect him. He remembers wanting to reach out to Daichi as the strangers inched closer. He remembers colorful, pulsating irises and pain. But nothing more.

The smell of cleaning supplies is even stronger in this new place. Before he opens his eyes, he inhales the horrendous odor. Definitely real. Still skeptical, he tries to move his limbs. His fingers clench and unclench at his sides, and he spares a quick second to celebrate these small victories. At least he knows his body is functioning properly.

*I’m alive. That’s a start.*

But that doesn’t mean Daichi is.
Sugawara struggles to open his eyes. He’s weaker than anticipated so the action takes longer than usual. His heart pounds solidly in his chest, and, although his brain persists that he look for Daichi immediately, he can’t seem to muster up the strength to break free of his restraints.

Wait… restraints?

The thought gives him the extra oomph he needs to open his eyes. He cautiously surveys the surrounding area through a thick, tired fog, blinking back the milky film skewing his vision.

“Well, look who’s awake.”

Startled, Sugawara flails, cringing at the ache in his wrists and ankles. His gaze settles on the unknown speaker. The man— at least he thinks it’s a man— stands over him, dressed in a white suit reminiscent of a nurse’s scrubs. A quick scan of the room tells Sugawara that, yes, this place certainly resembles a hospital. But not the usual kind. More like the freaky sort from cheesy science fiction movies.

Sugawara opens his mouth to speak but freezes when he takes another second to examine the stranger’s face. His irises are a pulsating mass of melancholy teals and resigned lavenders. The kaleidoscope eyes from his memories are real.

“No answer?” The corners of the man’s lips lift ever so slightly into a sad smile. “I’m not surprised. As a human, this must come as quite a shock to you.”

Sugawara stares back at him blankly. As a human?

“Anyway, I just checked your vitals and you seem to be alright. I hate how they insist on using those weapons on human beings. Your bodies are far too frail to withstand a shock like that. At least they didn’t pump more than ten milliamps of current into your system. Sometimes they use 100, even 200.” He steps toward a panel near Sugawara’s head. “But, luckily for you, they decided to let you live.”

Okay. When had his life become an option rather than a given? Who the hell is he dealing with? The man referred to Sugawara as a “human being,” almost as if he, this bizarre excuse for a doctor, were something completely different.

Shit. What if Daichi had been telling the truth after all?

Sugawara feels a massive migraine approaching.

“I hate that this is the compromise, and I’m not sure why your memories are important enough to warrant this procedure but… it doesn’t take long. And you shouldn’t feel any side effects. Other than the memory loss, of course, but that’s obvious.”

The pounding in Sugawara’s head worsens with every word out of the strange doctor-nurse-whatever’s mouth. He just wants to know where Daichi is. And he has a sinking feeling that he owes him a huge apology. Something along the lines of, “Sorry I was a dick, and I’m sorry I didn’t believe you about aliens being real. Also, I’m sorry that most of the aliens turned out to be bigger dicks than me.”

Daichi would love it.

“Wh… Where is he?”

This time it’s the man who looks startled. “You spoke. Oh. Um, who now?”
“Dai-“ Sugawara clears his throat, fighting against the sudden constriction. “Daichi.”

He expects several reactions. Revulsion, pity, anger- but not this. The man’s entire face contorts and shifts, lighting up, coming to life right before Sugawara’s eyes. The dismal hues dancing inside his irises flicker and change to happier shades of orange and green. It’s like a totally different person stands before him.

“Daichi Sawamura?” he asks, far too excited about the development.

“Where is he?” Sugawara repeats. He doesn’t have time for jokes or whatever nonsensical game this guy’s playing at.

“How do you know him?”

*Good question.* Sugawara can’t think of a proper answer. He knows more about Daichi than he ever thought possible. He knows what Daichi’s voice sounds like first thing in the morning, how his hair curls and splays across the pillowcase when he rolls over to meet Sugawara’s gaze. He knows what Daichi’s face looks like when he cooks, how the muscles twitch and skin creases as he struggles but pushes forward regardless. He knows what Daichi’s clothes smell like after a quick visit to the laundry. Sugawara feels like he knows everything there is to know.

And yet he still wants to know *more.*

“I just want to see him, okay?” Sugawara’s irritation rings clear in the eerie silence. “I’m worried about what the rest of your… people did to him once they threw me in here. I have to know if he’s alright.”

The stranger moves back, away from the panel at Sugawara’s bedside. His hands shake, and, noticing Sugawara’s curiosity, he jams them into his jacket pockets. The lights overhead brighten his now pale face. He looks like a spooked deer caught in the headlights of an oncoming car.

“So… you’re the one?”

*Maybe the friendly doctor is actually a mad scientist.*

This situation keeps getting weirder and weirder. “What? I don’t understand.”

The man laughs, a hearty chuckle that effectively drowns Sugawara’s sass before it can even surface. His smile is brilliant and wide and, for the first time, Sugawara realizes that his “doctor” is, well, *pretty.* Freckles dot the bridge of his nose and stretch across the expanse of his cheekbones. Long lashes splay across his skin, which is finally regaining its healthy tint. Sandy blond hair frames his soft features, drawing all attention to his compelling facial structure. Sugawara is absolutely mystified.

“You’re the lucky one,” he eventually explains. He wipes stray tears from his cheeks and clears his throat. Sugawara can’t tell whether they’re tears of joy or tears of sadness. Possibly both. “Really quite lucky.”

“I still don’t get it…”

“Are you Daichi’s Subject?” The man circles back to his bedside. He withdraws his hands from his pockets and sets them on the restraints constricting Sugawara’s ankles. A strange sort of sadness dictates his movements like a morbid puppeteer. “You are, aren’t you?”

“Listen, I really don’t think-“
“I see,” he interrupts. “I had a feeling. When I heard Daichi was back, with a human in tow, and then saw you in the ward- Of course he got his poor Subject into trouble. He’s become quite the rebel.”

Sugawara bristles. He wishes more than anything he could sit up or something because his back is killing him. These beds aren’t comfortable at all. And it doesn’t help that his overseer, the King of Cryptic Conversation, wants to drive him insane.

“Daichi would never hurt someone,” Sugawara insists defiantly. “There’s no way.”

“Ah.” The stranger nods knowingly and, pretty or not, Sugawara wants to hit this guy. “You’re in love with him.”

Sugawara’s reaction is immediate.

“What?! H-How could you imply that- I would be- and that he would-” He pauses to breathe. “Why would you even say that?”

Instead of answering, the man simply stares back at Sugawara, a pleased smirk toying with his lips. A few seconds of uncomfortable silence pass with the two caught in an intense staring competition. Eventually, Sugawara breaks and heaves a long suffering sigh. “God, I feel like a third grader confessing their crush to the nosy playground gossips. I don’t know. Maybe I like him. A lot. Probably a lot. Happy?”

“Very happy,” the man trills, “You seem like the kind of person who deserves Daichi’s love. And I’m sure he deserves yours.”

Oh.

Sugawara feels the telltale warmth of a flush spreading across his cheeks and neck, making him want to crawl out of his own skin. He just insinuated…

“I think you have the wrong idea. Daichi doesn’t… there’s no way he loves me-“

“I suppose it’s time to let you go,” the stranger interjects, turning his attention to the restraints. Ignoring Sugawara’s grumbled complaints, he quickly and methodically undoes the cuffs around his ankles and wrists. They hiss and part, humming softly as they spread.

Without a seconds’ hesitation, Sugawara bolts upright. He groans loudly and rubs at his sore wrists. The cuffs seemed tighter than necessary. It’s not like Sugawara would even know where to run had he actually escaped. His back cracks loudly as he leans forward to rub his equally sore ankles. He’ll be in a lot of trouble if he has to run anytime in the near future.

A little skeptical, mostly because life is never this easy, Sugawara observes his unlikely savior, frozen in place. He’s watching Sugawara with the oddest expression. A small wrinkle tugs the skin between his eyebrows and yet he is smiling, both with his mouth and his eyes. His shoulders have returned to their rightful height, limbs loose and free, and his entire body sags with visible relief.

Sugawara doesn’t know whether to trust him.

He did release Sugawara and appears to know Daichi… it’s ridiculous to think an acquaintance or friend of Daichi’s would be untrustworthy. Of course, Daichi is also the one who kept the truth about his identity a secret for months.

That’s because he knew you wouldn’t believe him, Sugawara’s subconscious pipes up. And the
smug asshole is right.

“Sorry, but. You seem to know Daichi but… I never caught your name?” Sugawara hesitantly climbs to his feet.

The man’s lips quirk into a smile, and Sugawara can’t read the emotions buried beneath the gesture. Content, pleasantly surprised, with an unsettling hint of listlessness.

“Mentor #230. But most people know me by my terran alias.” He pauses briefly and glances away, finishing softly, “Ikejiri. Hayato Ikejiri.”

If asked in the future, when this whole mess is over, Iwaizumi will readily admit this was his idea. Their people are disgustingly observant. They pride themselves on it, after all. Years spent training so they can dissect every little detail in their respective missions as Researchers or Mentors or whatever career they decide to pursue. Iwaizumi and Daichi both know it goes; this monster of a ship basically raised them.

So, that can only mean one thing: they have to disguise themselves as someone else.

It’s a classic plan. Iwaizumi has seen it done countless times in Oikawa’s movies- the movies his people are discouraged from ever watching. Chances are they won’t catch on because people on board are too afraid to ever do something as mutinous as disguise themselves and parade through top secret hallways. Yes, it’s a stretch, but, at this point, it’s their best option.

That’s why, after disabling the locators on their chips, Iwaizumi had to tinker with their biological camouflage and, well, it’s the reason why Daichi keeps complaining about his breasts.

“I never knew it would make this much of a difference,” Daichi rattles on for what feels like the hundredth time. Hugging close to the wall, Daichi keeps fiddling with the buttons at the front of his suit. His hair is styled in a bob, bangs tickling his eyebrows, and he stands about two inches shorter than usual. Daichi’s fingers smooth over the hem of his jacket and over the swell of his hips, which are just a little wider.

Thanks to Iwaizumi, he and Daichi are traipsing around the ship as female terran Researchers.

To ensure they wouldn’t raise suspicions, Iwaizumi suggested they readjust their already terran biological camouflage to a different gender. A new hair color or even face shape may not be enough to throw any pursuers off. Plus, any sort of significant bone restructuring would’ve taken just as long without the added bonus of guaranteed deception. And, admittedly, Iwaizumi wanted to know what it felt like to be inside the body of another human gender. Specifically a female.

Daichi went through several adjustments before Iwaizumi finally agreed his disguise wasn’t “over the top.” Because apparently he didn’t understand how big, bouncy curls, a super curvaceous figure, cherry red lipstick, and a skimpy suit that left little to nothing to the imagination made him stand out too much.

“Damn.” Iwaizumi whistled appreciatively. “Looks like someone paid close attention to terran fashion during our little stay.”

“It’s fun.” Daichi peered down at the ground dejectedly but stepped back over to Iwaizumi for the next round of adjustments. “Don’t you dare lie and say that it wouldn’t be fun to try something new, Hajime. We wouldn’t be given that privilege on this ship.”
Iwaizumi, on the other hand, settled on a different look. He kept his basic facial structure the same and added a pleasant hint of curvature to his figure. It’s not quite as pronounced as Daichi’s, but he likes it anyway. He’s always been fascinated by long hair so he lengthened his and, as per Daichi’s suggestion, tied it up in a bun. It’s nice, being able to fix his hair as he pleases instead of dealing with the coarser and less cooperative head of hair that Oikawa says resembles an angry porcupine.

The thought sends a chill down Iwaizumi’s spine. Oikawa…

Dammit. He really needs to get off this ship.

Iwaizumi peers around the corner. The corridors in this sector are surprisingly empty. It’s almost too easy to navigate them. But, of course, citizens wouldn’t dare stroll down these corridors, lest they be banished to some desolate planet, like the barren wastelands throughout the Lost Galaxy. Insubordination is basically unheard of. As a matter of fact, Iwaizumi didn’t know his people were even capable of dishonesty or trickery. Until now, of course.

They seem to be alone, but one can never be too sure. Although there aren’t supposed to be hidden cameras under ceiling panels, Iwaizumi wouldn’t be shocked. The jackasses had the nerve to record his makeout sessions with Oikawa; he wouldn’t put much past them. “I checked the detainment cells, and Suga wasn’t there,” Daichi whispers.

Iwaizumi nods. “Yeah, I didn’t see him either. Bastards probably don’t know what to do with an actual living and breathing human being.”

“There may just be the first human to set foot on this spacecraft in the last several hundred years.” Daichi muses. “Actually, he may be the first human to ever board this ship.”

“And chances are he’ll be the last.”

After a final scan of the surrounding area, Iwaizumi motions for Daichi to follow. They stay close to the wall and low to the ground, constantly watching for guards, and step behind the cover of the next space in the smooth wall paneling. Iwaizumi almost misses Daichi check himself out in the reflective surface of a panel as they pass. Rolling his eyes, he jabs Daichi in the side and urges him to keep moving. There will be plenty of time for that later.

Well, hopefully. If all goes according to plan.

“Where would they send him then? This place is huge, but most of it’s off limits to civilians, let alone a ‘dreaded terran.’” Iwaizumi fidgets nervousy, making air quotations with his fingers, and stops his wandering hands before they can mess up his hair. He worked hard on that bun, dammit. “They’re going to punish all of us, you know. Including Suga.”

Daichi groans, frustration creasing his forehead. “I wish I knew where he was.”

“You’ve been trapped in this hellhole for longer than me,” Iwaizumi hisses. “What would they want with Suga? Why wouldn’t they just send him back to Earth?”

“Maybe they did send him back… Suga wouldn’t be of any help to them. He didn’t even believe in alien life until I tried to-“ Daichi’s irises flicker, flashes of indigo and royal purple. His entire face locks up, and Iwaizumi stares, waiting impatiently for more of an explanation.

“Until you tried to what?”
“Hajime, I think I know where Suga is.” Cold and lifeless, Daichi speaks slowly.

“I knew you had it in you,” Iwaizumi teases, hoping to lighten the mood. But Daichi is determined now. They can praise each other’s success once they actually make it back to Earth. “So, what do you have in mind?”

Daichi answers in a hushed whisper. Iwaizumi can’t decipher the words and cups his hand around his ear. “One more time? Speak up a little.”

“The… The cognitive reformation facility.”

The words appear to strangle Daichi, and Iwaizumi feels the oppressive weight of the phrase. He’s never heard of such a chamber. There are many facilities throughout the Ambition that remain closely guarded secrets, only shared between a small, elite group of Supervisors, Medics, and other professionals. Iwaizumi will have to work another fifty or so years before he gains entrance to most of them. Some he’s sure will stay just as they are now: dirty little government secrets.

And this particular facility just so happens to be one of them.

Professors and officials have been cramming information and knowledge into Iwaizumi’s cranium since he learned to walk. It doesn’t take him long to figure out the facility’s main purpose.

“Cognitive reformation,” Iwaizumi mutters. He suddenly feels like he needs to sit down, needs to return to his bedroom to hide all of his personal belongings. Vulnerable and exposed, two feelings Iwaizumi has rarely experienced and immediately hates. “Cognitive reformation?”

Daichi doesn’t even attempt to hide his own disgust. “Yes.”

If Iwaizumi isn’t mistaken- which he’s almost certain he’s not- people are taken to the facility to have their thoughts and cognitive processes tampered with. It’s a place where memories are manipulated, possibly replaced, and become nothing more than irretrievable threads of information lying just out of the unsuspecting victim’s grasp.

Reformation, fucking reformation- they literally tamper with brains. It’s a delicate organ, one that every intelligent species of sentient beings must possess in order to survive and evolve. And his people have been tinkering and toying with them like children’s playthings, pressing buttons and twisting levers to see what happens? Have they conducted experiments? Who’s been subjected to the treatment?

Better yet, has Iwaizumi been there before?

No, not that he can remember. But it doesn’t make a difference; they’d make sure he wouldn’t remember the visit anyway.

“Calm down.” Iwaizumi blinks back to reality, startled by the firm yet reassuring pressure of Daichi’s hands on his shoulders. He leans close, mussing the fringe of dark hair hanging over his eyes with every breath he takes. “I know you’re confused, probably scared, but we need to save Suga. Wouldn’t you do the same for Oikawa?”

The softened features of Oikawa’s genuinely smiling face flashes before Iwaizumi’s eyes. He would do anything to save Oikawa. He would fight every worthless totalitarian prick on this ship if it meant he could save Oikawa’s life.

“Yeah,” Iwaizumi replies, voice scratchy. “Yeah, you’re right.”
“Okay, good. Then we need to keep moving. As long as they haven’t rearranged the ship’s layout in the last few months, this passage should lead us to the facility. It isn’t far from the prison ward. I should be able to guide us there.” Daichi pushes his way in front of Iwaizumi, who can’t do more than quietly watch.

*Cognitive, cognitive, cognitive,* echoing inside Iwaizumi’s skull, trailed by the hideous din of, *reformation, reformation, reformation.* Lies, there are so many lies floating through this dry, compressed space. He can’t believe this, but, at the same time, he believes everything.

“We need to go down one more floor.” Daichi quickens his pace and takes another left before pressing his back against the wall. One of the numerous turbo elevators aboard the ship lies several feet away. To be quite honest, Iwaizumi had no idea there was a floor beneath this.

The list of secrets just keeps piling up.

Daichi gives the passageway one final sweep before lightly tugging on the sleeve of Iwaizumi’s shirt. His fingers are shaking. He tugs Iwaizumi to a jolting stop. A keypad and screen are mounted on the panel right beside a tall, metallic door. Daichi types in a lengthy set of numbers and symbols, certainty guiding his fingers.

“What about that thing you wanted to show me?” Iwaizumi wonders, simply because he has to speak in order to remain sane. Because any sustained silence will make him feel like he’s spiraling out of control. Because, as much as he wants to save Sugawara, as much as he knows he would do the same for Oikawa, he doesn’t want to go to this fucking facility.

Because his irrational and passionate hatred for the cognitive reformation facility scares him more than anything else.

Daichi finishes typing and silently motions for Iwaizumi to come closer. His quivering fingers snag Iwaizumi’s bicep. The hold is just short of painful. “That’s where we’re going, Hajime.”

Iwaizumi ignores every instinct telling him to turn back now and steps into the elevator chamber.
trading tomorrows for yesterday

Chapter Summary

In which Iwaizumi relives the past.

Chapter Notes

OKAY LISTEN. I’M REALLY SORRY ABOUT THE WAIT FOR THIS CHAPTER. yes, it’s longer than the last couple updates, but that’s not what kept me busy. finals are right around the corner, and my professors are loading us down with work in this last stretch of the semester. hopefully, i’ll be able to get the next chapter up before the new year but i can’t make any promises…

anyway, this was one of my favorite chapters to write. it’s bittersweet and nostalgic and will hopefully kick everyone’s ass like it did mine. also here are all 3 mixes for your listening pleasure (x x x) and ART WOW LOOK AT THE ART, ALWAYS LOOK AT AND APPRECIATE THE ART!!!!!!!!!!!!!! again, please don’t hesitate to let me know if you’re making something for this fic!

my betas are absolutely amazing and i love them to death. also a big thanks to all my incredible readers. your kudos, comments, etc keep me motivated and inspired. enjoy the (worthwhile) pain!!

Iwaizumi Hajime is five terran years of age when he’s sent away.

His Mentor even then, Daichi spends the first several months on Earth, just to make sure he can survive. Earth is new territory, and, sometimes, a terrifying place to live. Iwaizumi could easily be overwhelmed. Once acclimated, he is placed under the care of a sweet couple who remains oblivious to Iwaizumi’s origins for the remainder of his stay.

Roughly three hundred and sixty-five long days after Iwaizumi moves into an actual home, he starts his schooling at a little elementary school down the street.

The other kids treat him differently because, put quite simply, he’s far smarter than most and doesn’t see any issues with his superior intellect. Not that he gloats or flaunts it or anything. He ignores all the nasty glares when he curls up in the big leather chairs in the library, nose buried in the pages of a four hundred page novel. He refrains from pushing or shoving if provoked. He pays no mind to the bullies and carries on with his life.

It should come as no surprise that it’s hard being sent on a Research mission at such a young age.

Iwaizumi is an alien. An alien that isn’t allowed to tell a single soul his true identity. He’s on a completely new planet, surrounded by non-believers and skeptics. In other words, he’s alone in the truest sense of the word. Loathed by peers and feared by parents.
That is until he enters the first grade.

The local playground is usually the quietest on Tuesday’s. A couple kids may hang around, climbing up ladders or careening down slides, but it’s definitely less crowded than it is on Monday’s and Friday’s. Parents sit and gossip on nearby benches, occasionally shouting at their children and urging them to be careful.

Meanwhile, Iwaizumi preoccupies himself with something more important.

Unlike most Researchers, he doesn’t necessarily have to find a human Subject. He’s been advised several times to observe humanity, but it’s not a must. To ensure his stay has purpose, he is supposed to study some form of life and record data. It can be anything, a living creature of any shape or size. So Iwaizumi decides on the small yet fascinating animals that crawl across the ground and zip through the sky: insects.

They’re easier to catch and, therefore, a lot easier to study. Recently, Iwaizumi has taken an interest in ants and beetles. Beetles because of their variety and ants because of their surprisingly high level of intelligence.

The playground just so happens to be one of the most convenient locations to search for bugs. They skitter across the jungle gym and other equipment, trudge through the grass and over protruding tree roots. Iwaizumi has been pretty lucky lately and hopes that he’ll have the same kind of luck today.

Forecasted rain keeps Iwaizumi from lingering too long. He withdraws the tiny plastic container from his backpack and stalks toward the nearest tree, eying the base of its trunk for any ant colonies. A few stray worker ants quickly crawl across a root. Iwaizumi smirks and sets down the box. He pulls a net from his back pocket and bends down, waiting for the perfect moment to-

“Ew, ants are so gross.”

The net drops from Iwaizumi’s fingers, and the ants scatter, moving to avoid the object dropping from the sky. He turns immediately to face the source of disturbance and pauses.

Wide brown eyes meet Iwaizumi’s, tousled hair sticking up at odd angles, and the boy grins, revealing a snaggletoothed smile. A couple of his bottom teeth are missing and his nose twitches. Khaki shorts stretch to his knees, a single Band-Aid stuck to one of his wobbly kneecaps. He wears a pair of ratty baby blue sneakers and white socks hug his ankles. But that’s not what really catches Iwaizumi’s attention.

It’s the baggy purple shirt adorned with a bulbous alien head that nearly stops his heart.

“What are you doing? Don’t you wanna climb the big windy slide?” The boy motions toward the playground. “I’ve climbed to the top four times, you know.”

“I don’t like slides too much,” Iwaizumi admits quietly and snatches up his net. “The swings are cool, but I don’t want to swing right now.”

The boy cocks his head to the side. “What’s your name?”

“Iwaizumi,” he mumbles, suddenly feeling self-conscious.

“Nice to meet you! I’m Oikawa.” He’s practically bouncing on his feet with excitement. Flickers of interest dance in his big, inquisitive eyes. “So what are you doing?”
“Bug hunting.”

“Bug… hunting?”

Iwaizumi clutches the net tighter against his chest. “Yes.”

“Why are you doing it alone?” Oikawa asks in the most painfully earnest tone. “I’m sure some of the other boys would like to look for them, too.”

A breeze sweeps through the park, ruffling the leaves overhead. Iwaizumi turns his attention to the lone ants who struggle to catch up to the rest of their companions. One in particular fidgets and flails in its haste to scale the veiny surface of a leaf.

“They don’t like me…”

“Huh?”

“They don’t like me,” Iwaizumi raises his voice a little. Heat creeps up his neck. “So I just go by myself.”

Oikawa wears an almost comical look of shock at the answer. “That’s crazy! How mean!” He shakes his head disappointedly. “So mean.”

“I don’t care.” Iwaizumi shrugs. He feigns indifference and turns to walk away, bending to scoop his container off the ground.

“You should!” Oikawa insists. A set of tiny fingers snag the hem of Iwaizumi’s shirt and keep him from going any further. “I’ll go with you. Bugs are nasty but… um, I’ll hunt with you.”

The admission comes out quiet and shy. Iwaizumi hasn’t known Oikawa long, but he still finds it out of character, as if this small boy in all his childish glory would take on the world all by himself if he could. As if he would tackle the wildest beasts and most maniacal people head-on if need be.

Iwaizumi wants to tell him no- should tell him no- but can’t seem to say the actual word.

“Okay,” he mutters instead.

Oikawa relinquishes his hold on Iwaizumi’s shirt and happily skips over to stand at his side. “Yay!”

For the next hour or so, Oikawa obediently follows behind Iwaizumi as he skims the surrounding trees for insects. The same unbridled excitement Iwaizumi glimpsed earlier comes out full force. Oikawa is loud and boisterous and the poster child for curious young boys. He looks at everything as if he’s seeing it with new eyes, giggling at the sight of scuttling beetles, yelling excitedly at the sound of chirping birds and crunching fallen branches.

Oikawa’s eyes glow with a happiness Iwaizumi has never seen before in another human.

“You know what’s more fun than bug hunting, Iwa-chan?” Oikawa prompts. The pet name was bothersome at first, but Iwaizumi has actually come to like it. “UFO hunting.”

Crunch.

Iwaizumi stops dead in his tracks. Slowly, he pivots to face Oikawa, heart slamming against his ribcage. No, this couldn’t be happening. There’s no way Oikawa believed in aliens. His mother bought his shirt. Oikawa wasn’t supposed to have any say in the matter, wasn’t supposed to have
any interest in the extraterrestrial.

“What?”

“UFO’s, Iwa-chan.” Oikawa rolls his eyes, leaning against the nearest tree trunk. He grins impishly. “Like with aliens and stuff.”

Iwaizumi swallows down the rush of dread crawling up his throat. A small part of him wants to just tell Oikawa his secret. He’s young, naïve- adults won’t believe most of the words that come out of Oikawa’s mouth. So what would it hurt? And why does he feel so inclined to tell Oikawa in the first place?

“I’m one.” Iwaizumi blurts and squeezes his eyes shut immediately afterwards. He’s too scared of what he’ll see.

“Really?” Tiny hands grab Iwaizumi’s and he can’t help but open his eyes. Oikawa stands a foot away, a huge grin plastered to his round face. Ecstatic is the only fitting word for the star struck expression. “You’re a…?”

“An alien,” Iwaizumi croaks out. He doesn’t pull his hands away but definitely considers it.

“Yeah.”

“That’s so cool! Aliens are real. Iwa-chan is an alien!” Oikawa takes a step back and stretches his arms toward the sky, spinning in a couple circles before stopping and mumbling something about getting dizzy. The distant cries of playing children echo throughout the forest, reduced to background noise.

After a few more turns, Oikawa stops. He skips over to Iwaizumi and insists they continue their search for bugs. But before they go, Oikawa announces his intentions to the world. Apparently Iwaizumi will be going UFO hunting with him soon.

Oikawa keeps true to his promise.

Most clear nights in November and December are filled with UFO hunts. Oikawa and Iwaizumi grow progressively more comfortable around each other and go from stretching across separate blankets to sharing one. It considerably lightens their load. No longer does Iwaizumi have to dig through his mother’s tote and travel bags. It’s a surprising relief.

Iwaizumi also becomes well-accustomed to the Oikawa household. The two often go there straight from school and spend a couple hours together. Oikawa likes to play some bizarre version of Cowboys and Indians that he likes to call Cowboys and Aliens. The title makes very little sense to Iwaizumi but he goes along with it anyway. Oikawa’s territory generally consists of his bedroom as well as the kitchen, while Iwaizumi is stuck with the living room. The first time they play, Oikawa spends most of the game hiding behind his dresser because he’s worried Iwaizumi has an “alien gun” concealed somewhere.

(He actually has a few weapons stowed under his bed for protection, but he chooses not to mention that to Oikawa.)

During one of their daily playdates, Oikawa pulls out paper and crayons. He clears a spot on the floor in his room and eagerly explains that he wants to color. Confused, Iwaizumi stares blankly until Oikawa tugs him down and shoves a handful of assorted crayons into his hands.

Iwaizumi nods like he understands. Thankfully, Oikawa leaves it at that and turns to his own flimsy canvas. He quickly grabs a few crayons and gets to work. Without hesitation, he presses the barely there tip of a green crayon to the paper. His tongue pokes out from between tight lips, eyes narrowed, oozing concentration.

Of course, Iwaizumi has every intention to create his own masterpiece. But there’s something about the determination in Oikawa’s movements, the sureness in every line and the enthusiasm in his furious scribbling, that Iwaizumi can’t seem to tear his gaze away from. For what feels like the thousandth time since meeting Oikawa, Iwaizumi is entranced.

Oikawa eventually drops the crayons and shakes his hands out, complaining about them being sore. Iwaizumi nearly fires back with a joke, but stops instantly when he sees Oikawa’s picture. Although the artwork is far from perfect, Iwaizumi easily deciphers it. A hill, green and vibrant, takes up most of the page. Sitting atop the hill are two people, dressed in jackets, gloves, and hats. They lie on a messy blue square with their stick figure backs leaned against a smaller brown square that must be a tote bag. A bunch of little yellow stars fill the night sky, a mass of black squiggles, along with a tiny gray disk. It hovers directly above the two figures’ heads.

“That’s us,” Iwaizumi blurts. “You drew us.”

A bright laugh spills from Oikawa’s mouth, but there’s a hint of modesty in the sound that’s not normally there. “Of course, Iwa-chan. What else would I draw?”

A house? Your family? Things normal kids your age draw? Iwaizumi feels his cheeks redden and turns away, hoping to hide the condemning blush from Oikawa.

Iwaizumi is beginning to see why human beings love companionship.

Oikawa and Iwaizumi are eight years old and caught up in the blissful throes of childhood friendship.

It’s the same park where they met. Other than the ever popular playground and surrounding forest area, there’s a fairly large hill on the grounds. Oikawa has claimed on several occasions before that it’s his favorite spot. The jungle gym is cool- especially the slides and monkey bars- and the woods are alright, but the hill is where all the action happens. Again, that’s according to Oikawa.

Iwaizumi has lost track of the number of times he and Oikawa have come here together. It all started with the suggestion of “UFO hunting” and how “Iwa-chan has to go” and just sort of escalated from there. Iwaizumi never has the heart to say no and, recently, he’s actually enjoyed himself on their nightly adventures.

He’s never met someone so enthusiastic about the things they love. Oikawa’s passion for aliens and, as Iwaizumi later learned, volleyball are nothing short of impressive. He eats, breathes, and sleeps volleyball and, when he’s not playing, he’s blabbering excitedly about UFO’s and space. Iwaizumi is the perfect companion on those occasions, considering he’s an alien himself. And, consequently, he’s quite used to being interrogated.

This night is one of many filled with questions.
bodies, and heads adorned in knit hats rest against the massive tote they brought along for the journey.

“They’re so beautiful,” Oikawa drawls appreciatively, voice dripping with adoration.

“Yeah.” Iwaizumi still feels weird discussing the stars knowing how many are within distance of planets his people have visited. Worse yet, the planets they refused to save from destruction. He doesn’t like dwelling on those.

“Iwa-chan?”

“Hm?”

“I know I’ve asked this before-“ Iwaizumi braces himself for impact- “but what’s it like?”

A powerful breeze blows through, and their gloved hands inch closer, in need of extra warmth. “Huh?”

“Being an alien, Iwa-chan, what’s that like?” The nearest finger, a wayward thumb, brushes against Iwaizumi’s and he twitches. But not away from the contact. “Is it different? I bet it is.”

Iwaizumi shrugs, black jacket rising and falling with the movement. “I guess so.”

“Yeah?”

“Not too much. I feel like it’s kind of the same as being human.”

Oikawa scoffs, and Iwaizumi can practically hear the skeptical gaze in the one tiny noise. “Are you lying to me, Iwa-chan?”

“No, of course not.” I would never lie to Oikawa.

“I would never lie to Oikawa. “I mean, if it was a lot different, how would we get along? I wouldn’t even know how to talk to you.”

“Well, you’re pretty smart… probably smarter than you act-“

“Hey!”

“But I can see why you wouldn’t want people to know you’re a genius,” Oikawa admits, sadness underlying the words. “People can be really mean about that stuff. They’d be jealous of you.”

A flush creeps up Iwaizumi’s neck, and he sinks further into the safe, fluffy confines of his jacket. It’s strange hearing Oikawa say such a thing. Daichi said something similar before leaving, but that’s Daichi. He’s much older and has seen atrocities that Oikawa couldn’t even dream of. Wise— that’s it. Oikawa shouldn’t possess the same level of wisdom as a galactic traveler and Researcher who has seen numerous species, lived hundreds of odd places, and experienced far more throughout his missions.

And yet eight year old Oikawa Tooru knows about human jealousy and bullying?

The thought crosses his mind before he can chase it away: Oikawa would make the perfect Subject.

“I don’t know,” Iwaizumi answers honestly. “It feels the same.”

“But are you like… really old and I just can’t tell or?”
“No, I’m the same age as you.” Iwaizumi can’t even stomach the thought of lying to Oikawa. The boy in question props himself up on his elbow and leans in. The space suddenly feels hot, tight and cramped like being trapped in a microwave. “Our bodies are different but… it’s hard to explain.”

Which is the truth. Explaining what it’s like to be what he is- it’s the sort of philosophical issue better suited to those who have been around centuries longer than Iwaizumi. Oikawa is right, he’s considerably smart, but that doesn’t mean he’s wise. He still has a lot to learn.

“Okay, okay,” Oikawa sighs and, as if sensing Iwaizumi’s anxiety, gives him room to breathe. “Makes sense.”

Another gust of wind, and Iwaizumi watches tiny puffs of white slip past his lips. The temperature has dropped a few degrees since they arrived. It’s not too noticeable, but the wind isn’t easy to ignore. Silence sits patiently in the air, keeping a careful eye on the two boys and the evening sky above. The lull in their conversation isn’t weird or uncomfortable; it feels right. Like they’ve been having talks like this for ages and know the exact moments to pause and let each other relax.

“Do you have any friends back at home?” Oikawa finally prompts, soft and measured breathing strangely relaxing.

*My home is a ship.* Iwaizumi pictures the steel walls, the bizarre odor that lingers in every corridor and room, the plethora of computer panels and keyboards. Then, he wonders. He thinks back to the earlier years he spent aboard and of the classes he was subjected to even then. Did he have any friends? Anyone that listened other than Daichi? Anyone that wandered through the corridors or played with him like Oikawa?

“No.”

There’s an overbearing and powerful finality in his response. No room to argue or negotiate.

“No one?”

“No one.” Iwaizumi twitches nervously. He goes to draw his hand back, but Oikawa catches it in his tiny gloved hand. Both sets of eyes flit to their intertwined fingers. Oikawa’s return to his companion seconds later, but Iwaizumi can’t bring himself to look away.

“Why not?”

“They don’t have time for friends,” Iwaizumi recites. It’s been drilled into his head for as long as he can remember.

“Well, they should make time.” It comes out pouty and yet Iwaizumi catches the underlying maturity in such a bold proclamation. “They really should.”

Iwaizumi can’t think of a reasonable response so he chooses to say nothing. Oikawa is right. He’s right. In their society, life is dedicated to work and finding a new planet to live. Opportunities to relax or form bonds with others are few and far between. Plus, camaraderie is strongly discouraged unless it’s between coworkers or a Mentor and their Student.

“I’m your first friend.”

*Oh.*

“That means… I’m your first and only friend, huh, Iwa-chan?” Oikawa asks, repeating himself. Earnest and innocent and befitting of a child as inherently perceptive as Oikawa. It hurts. And not
because Iwaizumi disapproves of the idea.

Far from it.

“Y-yeah.” Acting on pure instinct, Iwaizumi squeezes the little hand caught in his own. It reciprocates immediately and, yes, it all feels right.

“Do you think we’ll be friends forever?”

Iwaizumi contemplates saying no. He doesn’t need to add fuel to the childish fire burning deep inside the core of Oikawa’s being. He shouldn’t encourage this impossible notion, this concept of their lives being connected in every sense of the word. It’s dangerous to lead on a bright mind like Oikawa’s; he isn’t the kind to forget something, even if ordered to. He won’t stand down should Iwaizumi’s people come to reprimand them.

But maybe, just maybe, Iwaizumi should take a page from Oikawa.

The winter sky is heavy with promise and a wild future. Iwaizumi feels it seep into his skin and push him in the direction he’s always secretly wanted to take.

He inhales sharply, tightening his grip on Oikawa’s hand. “Of course we will.”

The bullies are leaving Iwaizumi alone.

Some are still bold enough to shove him in the hallways, but the majority stick to spreading rumors or muttering insults behind his back. Nothing physical. The nasty stuff like hiding his books or stealing his backpack have completely stopped. Iwaizumi can’t pinpoint the reason at first. Nothing had changed so why?

Well, it doesn’t take long for him to get his answer.

They’re afraid of Oikawa. Maybe not afraid, but they have a healthy level of respect for him. Young athlete, growing taller and stronger with every passing day- Iwaizumi can see why he’d make brats like that nervous.

A particularly nasty kid is throwing erasers at the back of Iwaizumi’s head during class and earns a scathing glare. “Hey, stop,” Oikawa growls, nearly snapping the pencil in his hand.

That’s all he has to say; no more erasers are thrown for the rest of class. For the rest of the year, as a matter of fact.

“I’m so glad those gross people aren’t bothering you anymore, Iwa-chan,” Oikawa mentions one day over lunch. He pops a cherry tomato into his mouth and chews, humming as he does so.

“It’s because they’re scared of you.”

“Huh?” Oikawa almost chokes on his food. “Me?”

“Yes, you,” Iwaizumi scoffs, rolling his eyes. Leave it to Oikawa to not notice.

“Well, that’s fine then. As long as it keeps Iwa-chan safe.”

Iwaizumi is now the one to choke on his food, spitting out a piece of melon into the palm of his hand. Oikawa really is shameless. He just says what’s on his mind and could care less about how people interpret it.
They finish their lunch in companionable silence and never discuss the issue again. Oikawa continues to keep the bullies at bay, a constant presence at Iwaizumi’s side. School becomes a more pleasant experience. Iwaizumi stops ditching class to go the library or aquarium, stops pretending to be sick and finding excuses to leave early.

So, the bullying phase comes to an end and ushers in a new age.

After a couple years of playing on the volleyball team, Iwaizumi becomes closer to his teammates. Oikawa starts inviting Kuroo to join he and Iwaizumi for impromptu practices down at the sand court and, soon enough, get-togethers at Oikawa’s house. Oikawa has apparently known Kuroo for a while, living in the same neighborhood and everything, so Iwaizumi has no trouble learning to like the kid.

“Kuroo is different,” Oikawa whispers as he and Iwaizumi wait for Kuroo to arrive. It’s the first time they’ve met at the sand court as a group. “But I think you’ll like him.”

“Different?”

“He likes to annoy people, but he means well. It’s usually because of the reactions he gets.”

“So… he provokes people because he likes seeing them embarrassed?” Iwaizumi isn’t sure how to feel. Kuroo sounds like a bit of an upstart.

Right on cue, Kuroo comes strutting onto the court moments later. He’s confident and, honestly, acts and looks exactly as Iwaizumi imagined. A few hours pass, though, and Iwaizumi realizes Oikawa had a point: he does like Kuroo.

And so the three become a group. They take on the world, embrace existence, in all the ways they know how.

Aspects of terran culture that used to frighten Iwaizumi no longer do. He throws caution to the wind and explores, surveys his surroundings with a new perspective, and enjoys the many beautiful and exquisite things Earth has to offer.

For once in his short life, Iwaizumi is happy. And that’s what truly scares him.

Oikawa and Iwaizumi are ten years old when everything goes to hell.

The searing summer heat beats down on their backs, easily breaching the thin fabric of tank tops. Cicadas chirp wildly in the distance. A cacophony of sounds and sensations surround Oikawa and Iwaizumi as they head home from the neighborhood sand court.

“...And we won’t be the big kids anymore but just imagine how cool it’ll be,” Oikawa carries on enthusiastically. Dirt and sand stains cover the volleyball beneath his arm, crystals and specks filling the cracks. Iwaizumi is convinced the poor thing has been around since the dawn of time. “You and I can try out for the volleyball team. Can’t you see it now?”

“See what?” Iwaizumi struggles to stifle a grin. It’s impossible not to smile when Oikawa’s acting like this, like a shooting star dancing across the night sky.

“Us,” Oikawa whines, as if it’s common sense and Iwaizumi is the one in the wrong for not realizing it. “We’ll be the leaders of the team– I’m sure of it!”

It’s the opening Iwaizumi’s looking for; he can’t get enough of teasing Oikawa. “Always thinking
so highly of yourself, huh?”

“I included you, too, Iwa-chan.” The ball bumps into Iwaizumi’s side and he squeaks indignantly, leering at Oikawa. “I think highly of the two of us. Both. Together.”

Ah. Iwaizumi lets the word wash over him, soothing like the gentle swell of a wave near the shore. He loves when Oikawa talks about them as a set. One unit- Oikawa Tooru and Iwaizumi Hajime. Not that he’ll ever tell Oikawa, but he’s grown to like the idea of them as an inseparable pair. The intimacy is comforting and, regardless of whether he should like it or not, he does. Probably a little too much.

“You think you’ll walk on and get the setter position then?” Iwaizumi asks.

“Maybe.” Oikawa shrugs but still trots along happily at Iwaizumi’s side. “I’m definitely going to try hard so I have a better chance of getting the position. I’ll give it my best.”

Of course you will.

“And you, Iwa-chan? I won’t be half as good without you hitting my tosses,” Oikawa explains. Shameless, totally sure about what he’s saying.

“That’s not true.”

“But it is.”

“You’ll be fine either way,” Iwaizumi groans. But one look at Oikawa has him rushing to fix the situation. “But yes. I’m going to try out for the wing spiker position and go from there.”

“Not middle blocker?” The biggest shit-eating grin splits Oikawa’s face. Iwaizumi can’t believe how much he cares about this nerd.

“Yeah, yeah, very funny.” Iwaizumi pauses, glimpsing his house. They’re a block or so away, but Iwaizumi doesn’t want to leave just yet. An odd sensation crawls across his skin. He has the strongest urge to drag Oikawa along with him, right through the front door. The last thing he wants to do is exchange their usual goodbyes. “So, are you coming over today?”

It’s ridiculous because he knows for a fact Oikawa is busy today.

“No…” Oikawa eyes him skeptically like he’s finally turned into a mad scientist. It’s one of his favorite Iwaizumi theories. “I told you I have to go to that thing with my mom today.”

“Right.” Iwaizumi laughs awkwardly and starts to veer toward his front gate. “I forgot. I guess I’ll see you around then?”

“Of course, Iwa-chan.” A quick and nervous wave. “See you tomorrow!”

Iwaizumi stands there, rooted to the spot, and watches Oikawa leave, watches until he vanishes behind the cover of neighboring houses. The cicadas resume their chirping as if mocking Iwaizumi. He can’t shake the feeling that something is off. He wills his legs to move, but they only want to chase after Oikawa.

Eventually, after several more minutes of curious staring, Iwaizumi turns and steps through the gate. He slips quietly into the house and rounds the corner. Part of him hopes his mother isn’t there. He’d rather just be alone for the next couple hours.
Unfortunately, he doesn’t get his wish.

“Hajime, sweetie,” his mother chirps, still dressed in her apron. She holds a water glass in her hand and a spatula in the other. It comes as no surprise, considering how much she loves to cook. “How was school?”

“Good.” Iwaizumi rarely offers a different response. And rarely elaborates.

“Here.” She holds out the glass for Iwaizumi to take. “It’s awfully hot outside so I thought you might like a nice cool glass of water.”

Iwaizumi thinks nothing of it and accepts the drink. She has a point after all. It’s hotter than hell outside or, as Daichi would probably say, hotter than the surface of the Glyminian Sun. “Thanks,” he mumbles, lips pressed to the rim, and takes a quick gulp. The liquid glides easily over his tongue and down his throat, effectively quenching his thirst.

The first few seconds are amazing. But the satisfaction doesn’t last.

“W…. What is…”

Words- what are terran words? He can’t string them together. They fight him, dash away before he can snag any and put together full sentences. The room turns, spinning, rotating wildly, while he stands still in the center of it all. A ceiling fan on the floor, rug on the ceiling and paintings floating over the staircase railings. Everything is hazy. Iwaizumi presses his palms to the nearest wall (ceiling now?) and tries to hold his body upright.

This is insane. What’s happening? The world continues to fall apart around him as he does nothing, since his arms and legs have stopped functioning. His mother swims in and out of his vision. Slowly, he feels his body sink to the ground.

And, shortly after the chaos begins, it recedes, replaced by darkness.

No. No, no, no.

This must be a joke. A ridiculous and sad joke missing a punch line. The kind told by deadbeat officials without any semblance of a sense of humor.

“You can’t be serious,” Iwaizumi mutters dryly. He sits up immediately, tearing the neural cap off his head. It falls to the ground. Iwaizumi could care less where it lands. “You can’t be fucking serious.”

But the defeated look in Daichi’s eyes says it all: he’s serious alright.

“I never wanted it to come to this, but it’s for the best that you know.” Daichi steps out of the way as Iwaizumi climbs to his feet and strides past him toward the door. “They didn’t want us to tell you, but… I’m sorry, Hajime, I had to.”

Red fills Iwaizumi’s vision. Blood pounds through his body, thundering in his ears. He can barely hear Daichi through the rage clouding his senses. “I’ve known Oikawa all this time, and they didn’t want you to tell me? What the hell?”

“It’s a secret program,” Daichi admits. “They sent a small select group of Researchers around your age to different planets. You were the most controversial because you were not only the youngest but were sent to Earth.”
Iwaizumi thinks back to the memories he’d just relived. No matter what, he can’t reclaim any memories prior to his arrival on Earth. Although he does recall the nature of his visit, that he was sent to study life on Earth other than human beings. But the fact his mission was part of a program and that he wasn’t permitted to remember afterward…

“And Kuroo, too. Fuck, I even knew Kuroo,” Iwaizumi cries. “Why not tell us? Why not tell me?”

“But I was worried when you found Oikawa again that you’d… well, I didn’t really know what you’d do, but I was concerned. I didn’t want you to get hurt.” Daichi has yet to move away from the panel or the bed Iwaizumi had been lying on. “A lot of the others went on rampages or were put to death after reclaiming their memories.”

Maybe that’s what I should do- go on a rampage. Iwaizumi runs his fingers through his hair. The bun comes undone, but Iwaizumi gave up caring a long time ago. Hell, he’d tear every strand out right now if he could.

“So why are you telling me then? What changed your mind?” Iwaizumi hates that Daichi has to bear the brunt of his anger. It’s not entirely his fault. He considered the consequences, mainly the being put to death part, and decided it’d be best to stay quiet. In the past, Iwaizumi likely would’ve made the same decision.

A small listless smile curls Daichi’s lips. “Because up until now, it was only our lives at stake.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean they may choose to kill someone else to make us suffer more. Now that we’re here, like this, already on the brink of being killed…” Daichi bites his lip, a very uncharacteristic gesture.

“Could you give up Oikawa, Hajime?”

Iwaizumi’s stomach drops, heart sinking along with it. That name cuts through the air, ringing clear in the quiet space. The room is one of several on the floor reserved solely for cognitive reformation. Iwaizumi checked the scanner at the door thoroughly for company before breaking in. They’re completely alone.

I need to see him.

The floor lurches beneath Iwaizumi, much like in the last of his memories, but he pushes through the haze and blinks back the fear. He can do this. He’ll get everyone off this ship, and they’ll return to Earth. Oikawa, Daichi, Sugawara, even the volleyball team- Iwaizumi will find a way to keep them safe. He won’t let his people interfere once they return.

“I know how to get us back home,” Daichi interjects, beating Iwaizumi to it. “I’ll make it up to you, I promise. I know how to make sure they leave us alone from now on. We’ll be rid of every last official for the rest of our lives.”

Iwaizumi believes him. Fuck, he wholeheartedly believes him, despite all the secrets he’s been forced to keep, despite all the occasions he’s had to point blank lie to Iwaizumi’s face. He never meant to hurt Iwaizumi.

Love, the familial sort that has evaded Iwaizumi for quite a while, finally becomes clear in that moment. Daichi’s top priority is keeping Iwaizumi safe, it always has been. Because he loves him.

“What’s the plan?” Iwaizumi prompts, pushing pesky emotions to the back of his mind for now. He’ll confront that whole mess when they’re far away from this monstrosity of a ship. When they don’t have a bunch of nihilistic assholes on their tail with murder on the brain.
“It’s doable.” Daichi fiddles with a strand of hair, another new nervous habit. Iwaizumi can’t decide whether it’s because he’s in a changed body or because this is his way of coping with near-death experiences.

“I hope so.”

“I swear. We’ll need to tweak the code on our chips a bit, but I’m sure you’re more than capable.”

Daichi knows exactly how to push Iwaizumi’s buttons. Although he hates being put on a pedestal or receiving compliments, he hates being demeaned even more. Which Daichi, of course, is all too aware of.

“When do we start?”
In which Oikawa is optimistic and Daichi encounters an old friend.

Chapter Notes

hello, hello! i know that i said i may not have any more chapters written before the new year, but thanks to an influx of readers and good ole procrastination, this happened. the next few days will be filled with studying and final exams so i wanted to go ahead and post it before things got especially hectic since we're getting close to the end, lots of important stuff is going on, lots of angst but also hints of fluff so yay. here are all 3 fic mixes for your listening pleasure (x x x) and NEW ART!!!! THIS ART IS SO STUNNINGLY BEAUTIFUL AND I'M UNWORTHY BUT OH MY GOD LOOK!!!!! also while we're at it, here's the rest of the art for this fic (x) please don’t hesitate to let me know if you’re making something for this fic!

thanks as always to my amazing beta and equally amazing readers!! your kudos, comments, etc mean the world to me and always put a smile on my face. i hope you enjoy!

Summer engulfs everything, and Iwaizumi is nowhere to be seen.

“Possessed,” Kuroo mumbles behind the palm of his hand.

“Or sick?” Kageyama brushes clumps of wet hair off his forehead and grimaces as Kuroo leans into his personal bubble. Pool water sloshes around their torsos.

“No way. He’s totally possessed- just look at him over there.”

“He gets weird when he’s sick.”

“But even weirder when… he’s… possessed?” Kuroo speculates.

Oikawa focuses his attention on the sky overhead, tracking wispy clouds as they slowly drift across his line of vision. The Sun hangs amongst the wandering white puffs. Its heat beats down relentlessly on the pool goers, warming and darkening the bare skin of children and adults alike. So far at least, it’s been a nice summer, the kind with little rainfall and plenty of sunny days. Stretched out on a towel in the grass, Oikawa tries his hardest to ignore his friends’ discussion.

He knows full well that Kuroo and Kageyama are talking about him. He knows that they’ve been trying to debunk the “real” reason for Iwaizumi’s departure ever since he left. This, however, is new. Trying to figure out why Oikawa has been less talkative lately- even though he’s sure he
hasn’t been- is their most recent dispute. And Oikawa has no interest in playing another of their bizarre little guessing games.

“Possession isn’t real,” Kageyama retorts, propping his elbows on the concrete lip encircling the pool. “He’s obviously sick.”

“All this time? He’s been like this for weeks. No way.”

Suddenly, both are bombarded by a massive splash of water. Kageyama looks flabbergasted and ten seconds away from drowning the offender. Children in the area shoot glares in their direction and angrily swim away to the safety of the deep end. Kuroo squeaks, clearly caught off guard, and also seems upset until he sees the source of the disruption. Gray hair lying flat against his skull, chest glistening in the sun, Bokuto Koutarou stands proudly with his hands perched on his hips.

“You guys still trying to figure out what’s going on with Oikawa?” he chirps and squeezes himself between Kuroo and Kageyama. “Because it’s pretty obvious.”

Oikawa glances up for a moment. It’s just long enough for him to notice Kageyama and Kuroo exchange a significant look. Simultaneously, they turn and flash the same “look” at Bokuto. Who, of course, seems unperturbed.

“He misses Iwaizumi.”

Deadpan, as if he’s stating a commonly known fact. Oikawa watches a cloud glide by and notes its eerie resemblance to an elephant. He tries not to flinch or show any signs of distress at the mention of the name. A name that’s haunted him for many nights now. A name sitting prone on the tip of his tongue, ready to be spoken at any second. Even the syllables taste odd in Oikawa’s mouth.

“Why Iwaizumi Hajime?” Oikawa prompts, stretched out on Iwaizumi’s bed with a physics textbook tucked under his arms.

Oikawa likes crashing at Iwaizumi’s apartment on the nights they both have a lot of work to finish for class. Well, he likes being with Iwaizumi regardless, even if it’s just for a few minutes. Seeing Iwaizumi is usually the highlight of his day, whether they’ve spent several hours together beforehand or not.

“I don’t know.” Iwaizumi sits up and cracks his neck. They’ve been slaving over this assignment for the last two hours and are in dire need of a break. “I did some research, talked to Daichi, and… yeah, nothing exciting. So I just picked this name.”

Oikawa hums his assent and scoots across the mattress. He moves until he’s just over the edge and lowers his head next to Iwaizumi’s ear. “Well, I think you chose well, Iwa-chan. It suits you.”

A visible shiver travels down Iwaizumi’s spine. Oikawa smirks and inches even closer. He breathes, slow and purposeful, over the sensitive shell of Iwaizumi’s ear. Gently, he presses a kiss to his earlobe. A tiny noise of satisfaction slips past Iwaizumi’s lips, and Oikawa’s grin widens.

“I’m so happy you picked Earth,” Oikawa whispers. His arms snake around Iwaizumi’s neck, fingers tapping out a random rhythm on his collarbone. “Or you never would’ve had the privilege of meeting me.”

He’s teasing, eager to get a rise out of Iwaizumi. Normally, he would fire back with something like ‘I wouldn’t call it a privilege’ or the classic ‘Stop saying embarrassing things, dumbass!’ But he gets neither response.
“Me too,” Iwaizumi responds softly.

Oikawa has never heard Iwaizumi use this tone. It’s much sweeter and expressive than he’s used to. The change is certainly refreshing. Moved, Oikawa seizes the opportunity to lean down and-

“…so insensitive sometimes…”

“…can’t believe you…”

“…need to have some tact, Bokuto-san…”

The all too familiar sound of disappointed bickering drags Oikawa away from the memory. Kuroo and Kageyama are angrily reprimanding Bokuto, keeping their voices low so Oikawa can’t hear them. Sometime during Oikawa’s reminiscing, Akaashi appeared and has also joined in on the scolding. Bokuto doesn’t seem to know what he’s done wrong. Employing his best puppy dog eyes, owl eyes maybe, he turns to each in turn and quietly tries to make his case. None of them notice Oikawa is listening in on the whole thing.

“You shouldn’t bring up delicate matters right now,” Akaashi admonishes. “Be considerate, Bokuto-san.”

“I’m sorry! I didn’t-”

“I don’t know how you put up with this guy sometimes, Akaashi,” Kuroo whispers, jabbing Bokuto in the chest.

“Neither do I…”

“Keiji!”

Oikawa is about to interrupt, to end their pointless argument, but Kuroo steps in for him.

“Oh, Oikawa, did you want to watch the new X-Files miniseries thing when it airs? I figured you’d be all over that,” Kuroo wonders.

Oikawa plasters on his best smile. He appreciates the offer- he really does. When they were younger, he forced Kuroo to watch almost every single episode. Kuroo complained at first but eventually stopped. Oikawa still doesn’t know whether it’s because he grew to enjoy the show and didn’t want to admit it or because he gave up trying to fight the issue. Either way, Oikawa has always been thankful for Kuroo’s compliance.

“Sorry.” Oikawa clears his throat. He’s not used to hesitating when it comes to important matters like The X-Files. “But I already told Iwa-chan I’d watch it with him when he gets back.”

Another look. This time, exchanged amongst the entire group.

Looking uncharacteristically nervous, Bokuto peers down at the water. He wants to say something. It’s written clear as day on his face, but he keeps quiet. Oikawa is almost certain Akaashi is squeezing Bokuto’s hand beneath the surface, while Kuroo leans on his other shoulder to offer silent support. Kageyama, on the other hand, stoically meets Oikawa’s gaze.

“I thought Iwaizumi was only supposed to be gone a week.” Blunt, but it’s just Kageyama being Kageyama.

And he’s right. Before leaving, Iwaizumi had explained that he’d be gone for a week and then
come back. He and Daichi would go to the ship, file their reports, gather any new additional missions, and return. At the most, he said they’d be gone for two weeks. Never, not once, did he mention the process taking a month. Or longer, at this point.

The volleyball team has no idea why Iwaizumi really left. They think he went home for a week to visit his other immediate family members. Little do they know Iwaizumi actually did go home, but the only family he’s seeing—will probably ever be seeing—is Daichi.

“He’s probably just busy,” Oikawa mumbles. He’s sure that things have been hectic for both Iwaizumi and Daichi considering how long they’ve been away, carrying out their respective missions.

All Oikawa can do is lie back, stare into the same sky Iwaizumi fled to, and hope that everyone is alive and well.

Iwaizumi is surprised he and Daichi aren’t shoved back out the door the second they step through the entranceway.

After twenty minutes of frantically scouring the sector, Iwaizumi finally finds the right cognitive reformation chamber. Two figures stand flabbergasted on the other side of the opening door. Iwaizumi instantly recognizes the person on the right, the familiar, charming face of Sugawara. The person on the left, however, is someone he’s never met before. Much like Sugawara, he has soft features. The freckles dotting his cheeks make him seem more innocent, kinder. He looks completely out of place in the harsh and unforgiving light of this hell.

It’s the lab coat that reminds Iwaizumi of where exactly they are and the identity of this stranger. And what his job must be.

Both appear equally confused by the beings outfitted as female terrans and their sudden intrusion. No recognition flickers behind Sugawara’s eyes, which reassures Iwaizumi their disguises are functioning properly. He breathes a sigh of relief.

The stranger assumes a defensive stance as they approach, clearly ready to fight. But for what reason? For Sugawara? To protect him? Iwaizumi narrows his eyes suspiciously.

“Wh-“

“Hayato?”

Iwaizumi immediately turns to the source of the voice. At his side, Daichi stands frozen in place, gaping. His face is pale, frighteningly so, like he’s just seen a ghost.

Puzzled, Iwaizumi looks across the room to where the stranger stands. He flinches, and that’s all the confirmation Iwaizumi needs. Somehow Daichi knows this person, this deceptive monster in charge of wiping memories clean like erasers clearing chalkboards, robbing them of every piece of scribbled knowledge.

“How did you get in here?” The stranger, possibly Hayato, looks torn between fear and frustration. “How do you know my-“

“Daichi.” There’s a desperate edge to his voice. “It’s Daichi Sawamura.”

A heavy silence falls over the room. Sugawara’s eyes flit between the person at his side and Daichi, eventually coming to rest on Iwaizumi. They’re pleading for an answer, but Iwaizumi
doesn’t have one to offer. He’s just as lost is Sugawara is.

Daichi takes a hesitant step closer. His arm slowly raises, reaching towards Hayato. Lips parted in shock, brows furrowed, his trembling fingers don’t seem to know what they’re doing. They want to touch but also want to recoil. They want to know the truth but also dread it.

There’s no doubt in Iwaizumi’s mind that there’s history here between the two.

“Prove it,” Hayato whispers.

“After you took on your first Student, you came to my room and rattled on and on about how you weren’t ready to teach anyone.” Daichi drops his arm and smiles. It hurts to watch. “You said you were a terrible Mentor and that you’d be demoted in no time. And you asked for my advice so I wrote you a list of tips.”

“The… list…”

“I didn’t feel like much of a Mentor myself at the time,” Daichi carries on. “But after we made that stupid list, I realized we were both in the same boat. Neither of us really knew what we were doing. Then we decided we probably weren’t the only ones and spent the rest of the night-“

“-making fun of our Supervisors.” Hayato is smiling now, too, which just makes things worse, definitely worse. “And that’s when you-“

“-when I started calling you Hayato instead of Ikejiri.”

Ikejiri? Iwaizumi quickly digs through his subconscious in search of anyone by that name. He vaguely recalls hearing stories about another Mentor named Ikejiri Hayato. Daichi told him once that he’d vanished years ago after committing some sort of unforgivable crime. Iwaizumi never did get a better explanation.

Then, a thought strikes Iwaizumi. His gaze strays to Sugawara. As expected, his posture has shifted a great deal since Iwaizumi and Daichi walked in the room. Twiddling his fingers, eyes focused anywhere but the two former friends, shoulders tensed. Sugawara looks ready to bolt at any second. Iwaizumi can’t help but feel a little frustrated, even sad, disconcerted, on Sugawara’s behalf.

“That’s him,” Daichi turns from Hayato to Sugawara. His smile transforms from one of melancholy nostalgia to something brighter, hopeful. “He’s the one.”

Sugawara blinks and points to himself. “Me…?”

Poor Sugawara’s brain short-circuits after being deemed “the one.” And, if the barely there grin is any indicator, that single comment is enough to lift his spirits a considerable amount. Meanwhile, Iwaizumi continues to try and make eye contact with somebody, anybody, so that he can stop feeling so fucking confused. The situation keeps getting stranger and stranger by the minute. Iwaizumi feels like he’s watching a movie, stuck as an outside observer who has no control over the events unfolding on the screen.

“I see,” Hayato mutters cryptically. Acceptance is beginning to settle in and take its toll. Hayato visibly sinks into himself, darker shades of indigo and fuchsia flickering around the outer edges of his irises. “He already told me,” Hayato explains in a voice barely louder than a whisper.

Daichi’s eyes grow comically large and he splutters, barely able to respond. “He did?”

At first, Iwaizumi thinks this is the moment Hayato will finally shatter, will finally let emotion
overcome him. He ducks his head, sandy blond hair falling in front of his eyes. Iwaizumi waits for tears, but they never come. Hayato shatters the uncomfortable silence and tilts his head back, letting out a steady stream of laughter far more genuine than the phantom smiles of earlier. Tears gather and glide down Hayato’s cheeks as he cackles. Sugawara leans away in an obvious attempt to protect himself. He even crosses his arms in front of his chest like a shield.

“You’re Daichi alright,” Hayato chuckles. “Most definitely.”

Red creeps up Daichi’s neck. It’s weird, but not in a bad way. Sugawara is the only person Iwaizumi has ever known to embarrass Daichi like this. *To think Daichi can be brought down so easily*, Iwaizumi muses and almost picks up where Hayato’s maniacal laughter left off.

“You clearly know Daichi,” he comments. He and Hayato share a quick conspiratorial glance. Iwaizumi gets the feeling him and this Ikejiri guy would get along famously. Too bad they don’t have the time to stick around and chat.

“Please, Hajime.” Daichi sighs loudly, the usual long-suffering sound of disappointment reserved solely for his Student. “And Hayato?”

“Hm?”

“About Suga. Have you wiped his mem-“

Beep! Beep! Beep!

The hideous blaring of the security system interrupts the impromptu reunion. Daichi lunges for Sugawara’s hand without a second’s hesitation. Hayato doesn’t even react, eyes lifting sadly to the flashing red lights tucked in the upper corners of the room. He catches Iwaizumi’s gaze.

The expression speaks volumes, practically screaming at Iwaizumi: *Go.*

He hates having to do this. He hates the thought of leaving this seemingly innocent soul behind. He hates that he has to tear Daichi and Hayato away from each other after being brought together once again. But he hates the thought of getting every last one of them killed even more.

So, he obeys Hayato’s silent request and does the only thing he can. He moves toward the door and screams for Daichi and Sugawara to follow.

Kageyama has been knocking on the door for what feels like a solid five minutes. Five hours. Five fucking years.

“Oikawa? I know you’re in there,” he calls, pounding harder with his fist. Oikawa swears the door shakes in its frame, and he fears it may actually collapse under the force of Kageyama’s simmering anger. “I walked all the way down here to get you.”

Dazed, Oikawa slings his legs over the side of the bed and climbs to his feet. His entire body feels heavy. It’s like walking through campus on a foggy morning, pushing past every urge to toss his coffee in the nearest trash can and crawl back into bed. Covering the short distance without changing his mind is a surprisingly difficult feat. Far more difficult than it usually is.

“Yes, yes, calm down.” Oikawa scratches his lower back, fingers creeping underneath the loose folds of his shirt, and reaches for the doorknob with his other hand. He tugs it open and just barely sidesteps Kageyama’s fist as he goes to knock again.
“Finally.” Kageyama wastes no time and steps past Oikawa.

“‘Can I come in?’ ‘Oh, but of course, Tobio-chan.’ ‘Thanks, Oikawa-san,’” Oikawa mutters under his breath, mimicking Kageyama’s droll tone. He makes a mental note to talk to his mother later and ask her to not let a certain dark-haired, bullheaded young man into the house without Oikawa’s permission.

The sun streams in through Oikawa’s window, bathing his messy bed in soft white light. Clothes are piled up on his desk chair, poking out of dresser drawers and spilling out of the wicker laundry basket near his closet. His volleyball bag is tucked in the little space between the basket and his closet door, slightly ajar. Kageyama bends down to scoop it up and, suddenly, his face scrunches up. He sneezes loudly and hurriedly tries to brush away the dust.

“This is the longest I’ve seen you go without touching this.” Kageyama eyes the bag with a vaguely disgusted look and sets it back on the ground. He turns in a circle, surveying Oikawa’s room. He’s never been an especially neat person, but even Oikawa knows he’s let things go. “And when’s the last time you fucking cleaned?”

Oikawa shrugs and slumps back onto his bed. Cleaning bouts are few and far between. Soon, he’s promised himself. Soon he’ll take care of this mess. How else will he explain things to Iwaizumi when he comes over again?

“You know,” Kageyama starts, clearly straining to keep his tone as neutral as possible. “At this rate, you won’t be ready for the first scrimmage in August.”

It’s almost August? Oikawa feels like July only just began, like summer started yesterday. It seems like it’s only been days since he laid on the hillside with Iwaizumi.

“I’m not coming back.”

Oikawa cringes. A fragment of time digging painfully into his chest, puncturing his already aching heart. He conjures the image effortlessly. The way the words glided over Iwaizumi’s lips, the forlorn set of his mouth and downcast expression twisting his beautiful features. He refused to take the DVD’s, but Oikawa slipped them into his bag anyway. Had he watched them? Did he have the free time or even the means of doing so on the ship?

He hadn’t really given it much thought then, but now it’s the only thing on his mind.

“Well, if you don’t start going to the gym and practicing your setting, a freshman may come up and take your position,” Kageyama teases. He cautiously lowers himself onto the bed beside Oikawa. “Or, who knows? Maybe the coach will just promote me to full-time setter.”

He’s kidding, Oikawa knows this. Kageyama has one of the driest senses of humor Oikawa has ever experience. He’s dealt with the brat for years, but for some reason the joke stings more than usual.

It reminds him...

The gym is empty except for Iwaizumi and Oikawa. It’s been a week since the coach officially accepted Iwaizumi as a member of the team. He asked that Oikawa make their private lessons a bit more intensive, just to give Iwaizumi a glimpse of what it really means to be a team member. Matches will be more physically demanding than basic drills and scrimmages between teammates.

“I’m surprised you and Kageyama don’t fight more since you play the same position,” Iwaizumi points out.
“Tobio-chan and I have known each other for a while.” Oikawa sits on the gym floor, casually setting a ball above his head in tiny bursts as he speaks. “We used to fight more but not anymore. Both of us have changed a lot.”

“It’s nice. You guys have a strange relationship—” Iwaizumi shakes his head upon catching Oikawa’s affronted reaction—“but not in a bad way.”

Oikawa drops the ball in his lap. “What do you mean?”

Iwaizumi’s face begins to flush as it always does in situations like this, when his flustered little alien self doesn’t quite know how to explain his observations. He really is an incredible researcher. His attention to detail is incredible, but his modesty easily trumps any semblance of an overinflated ego.

“I don’t know. There are a lot of human relationships I never understood and friendship is definitely one of them.” Iwaizumi scoops a ball out of the cart and bounces it a couple times, concentration written in the lines of his face. “But your friends… they make me want a relationship like that. With someone.”

“With me?” Oikawa chimes.

The comforting thwack of the ball against the floor stops for a moment. Iwaizumi clutches it to his chest and turns away, staring at the net like it’s the most fascinating thing in the universe. “Yeah.”

A beat of silence.

“Yeah,” he repeats, slower this time. As if assuring himself of the truth in his words. “Yeah, something like that.”

The ball resumes its bouncing.

A firm shake jostles Oikawa out of his thoughts. “Hey, are you okay?”

“Huh?” Startled, Oikawa shrinks away from the contact. Surprise, hurt, and concern all seem to contort Kageyama’s expression at once. “Of course, Tobio-chan. Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Because I asked you three times if you wanted to go down to the gym and then watch that damn show of yours afterwards,” Kageyama replies. “And you never said a word.” Thankfully, he doesn’t shrink away from Oikawa when he slings his arm over his shoulder.

“I would, but they’re not here,” Oikawa laughs. He moves his arm and pats Kageyama’s head, pleased by the frustrated growl he gets in response. In one smooth motion, he jumps to his feet and skips over to his gym bag. “Such a kind offer, though.”

“Not… here?”

“Iwa-chan has them, of course,” Oikawa explains, rolling his eyes. “I’m not going to watch them until he comes back.”

Kageyama looks like he’s in physical pain. Oikawa can’t stand to see him like this; it doesn’t suit him at all. Oikawa dives for his gym bag and shrugs it over his shoulder. To his relief, everything he needs is already there. Clean pair of shorts and t-shirt, his knee pads and brace, volleyball shoes—he won’t have to go to the trouble of digging through the assorted piles of stuff strewn across his room.
“Let’s go then.” Kageyama doesn’t meet Oikawa’s eyes when he gets up, doesn’t even acknowledge his presence in the room. He steps out and closes the door solidly behind him.

Oikawa grudgingly goes to follow but pauses when he glimpses a paper sticking out of his desk. He hasn’t gone through the drawers in ages and has no idea what kind of childhood things may be left behind, shoved inside, never to see the light of day again. Bending over, he tugs at the wrinkled corner of the page until it pulls free.

It’s a normal sized sheet of paper, nothing extraordinary. Oikawa holds it closer to his face to inspect it better and nearly drops it.

*What?*

A picture. Crudely drawn, clearly the work of a child. Two stick figures sit on top of what looks like a hill, underneath a night sky with roughly sketched stars and a ridiculously large yellow moon. A small gray circle hangs above the figures’ heads, and, at first, Oikawa can’t make out what it is. He leans in until his nose is almost brushing the paper and gasps softly when he realizes what he’s looking at: a UFO.

The place depicted is an all too familiar relic of his younger years. It was the place.

He assumes the figure on the left is himself. At least it sort of looks like him, what with the hair and scribbled alien head on his shirt. He’s about to set it aside, maybe show his mother later, when something catches his eye.

The other figure has to be Kuroo, the only other person who came along on UFO hunts, and yet… Kuroo doesn’t have multi-colored eyes.
caught in the crossfire

Chapter Summary

In which aliens in disguise fight for their lives and Oikawa’s closest friends worry.

Chapter Notes

I AM SO SO SO SORRY FOR THE WAIT!!!!! the holidays were a lot more hectic than i expected so writing time was limited. i’ve also been changing a few things about the ending since i added details along the way to… make the story better? or at least that’s how i see my changes. another note: i think there’ll be a couple more chapters so i set the final number back to ?

anyway, here we go with the last chapter of 2015!!! there’s a lot of action in this chapter and, due to certain events, you’ll notice a couple new tags. just to be sure since i don’t want to accidentally trigger anyone. additionally, this is a longer chapter so i’m hoping it’s well worth the wait! as usual, here’s an awesome new mix as well as the other 3 fic mixes for your listening pleasure (x x x) and all of the art for this fic (x)

please don’t hesitate to let me know if you’re making something for this fic!!!!

thanks as always to my lovely lovely betas and readers. you’re the people that keep me going with your comments, kudos, etc!!!! i hope you enjoy and remember: laser guns are p cool

Kageyama Tobio is not a robot.

He’s been accused of it before, sure, but the truth is that he’s a living, breathing human being just like everyone else. You see, silence gives him the time to notice things. Little, minute details that others don’t catch onto. The kind of stuff disregarded as unimportant or trivial.

Except to Kageyama. He notices.

He doesn’t always mean to, and, sometimes, he wishes he hadn’t been paying attention at all. So, when Oikawa starts acting strangely after Iwaizumi leaves, Kageyama can’t help but spot the difference in behavior.

The first sign: Oikawa doesn’t talk quite as much.

It’s not glaringly obvious, and Kageyama has trouble pinpointing the change until the new Star Wars movie comes up in conversation one night. A few of their teammates, the usual suspects, were in town and wanted to go out for burgers. They flocked to a restaurant known for its french fries, which a certain Yaku Morisuke adored. Bokuto brought the new film up, clearly fishing for a reaction, and Oikawa’s nonchalant sort of shrug and calm, “it looks good” were enough to set off warning bells in Kageyama’s head.
As a matter of fact, each time something sci-fi related is mentioned, Oikawa hardly says a word. Which is so very out of character that everyone takes an interest. Kuroo is relentless, though, and tries on multiple occasions to coax out Oikawa’s enthusiasm.

The second sign: Oikawa doesn’t leave his room often.

If Kuroo or Kageyama encourage him enough, he’ll eventually come crawling out. But he never seems thrilled to go and only speaks when spoken to. There are moments he gets into little arguments with Bokuto or Lev, and Kageyama thinks he may be returning to normal. Although it’s always short-lived and the spark of excitement disappears in the blink of an eye.

Until recently, he stopped dropping by the gym to practice. Which, out of every change Kageyama has noticed, is probably the most unsettling. Oikawa loves volleyball. Science fiction is a close second but nothing has ever trumped his love for the sport. To think Oikawa doesn’t feel the desire to play… frankly, it scares Kageyama.

Maybe he’s overexaggerating. Oikawa isn’t a complete mess or anything. He still cares about his appearance, still keeps in touch with teammates and friends, still gets up every morning and goes for a run, still eats. Again, it’s the little things that Kageyama notices, and, although others are concerned, only Kuroo’s distress is on par with Kageyama’s. There’s a possibility- a very slim chance- that Kageyama is blowing the situation out of proportions.

Regardless of how big a deal it is, Kageyama wants to fix the problem. With the new academic year quickly approaching, he makes the decision to take Oikawa to the gym even if he has to drag him there.

Shouyou is in agreement, and that’s basically the final push Kageyama needs to act.

He shouldn’t be surprised when Oikawa earnestly explains his plans to catch up on X-Files and Star Wars when Iwaizumi returns. He’s faithful to a tee, willing to wait for something he’s likely been anticipating for months. In truth, his devotion frustrates Kageyama. The look on Oikawa’s face, the jump in his step at the thought of seeing Iwaizumi again- Kageyama is going to kick Iwaizumi’s ass when he gets back.

Once Oikawa finishes gathering his stuff, he meets Kageyama outside with the strangest sort of expression on his face. Is it confusion? Sadness? Kageyama can’t tell. He thought he’d seen it all, but he can’t put a name to this emotion.

“You alright?”

“Yeah, I’m. I’m fine,” Oikawa answers. His mind is a thousand miles away, somewhere Kageyama can’t see, so he drops the issue. Pester Oikawa won’t help, and it’s not like Kageyama will get a better explanation by interrogating him.

The birds continue to chirp, the bugs continue to hiss and hum, and the boys continue to walk on in silence. Kageyama is not a robot, and neither is Oikawa.

“This can’t be happening,” Sugawara cries out. “This is insane. And you- you!”

“I’m sorry… I really… am. I’ll explain when… we get out of… here,” Daichi replies between each bout of panting.

“You’ll explain why you look like this?”
“Yeah… yeah.”

Iwaizumi doesn’t have time to look back and diffuse the verbal explosion about to happen. Moments after setting foot outside the cognitive reformation chamber, a slew of Guards at the end of the nearest hallway starting yelling for them to freeze. Iwaizumi is almost certain a couple were Soldiers, which makes little to no sense. Soldiers are trained from a young age and, therefore, are more skilled fighters than Guards. Did a couple of rogue Researchers and weak human really pose that much of a threat?

Since they were spotted, they’ve been running, searching for the nearest teleportation chamber. There should be at least five or six on this floor, half of which are probably around this sector.

The alarms continue to blare, drowning out the sounds of their heavy footfalls. Daichi likely knows the area better, but Sugawara’s recent treatment has left him fatigued. He can’t run quite as fast and, considering that Daichi refuses to release his vice-like grip on Sugawara’s arm, the two are forced to follow behind Iwaizumi.

_How hard can it be?_

As if reading his mind, one of the Guards fires a warning shot. “Freeze!” Iwaizumi flinches as the heat of the careening projectile passes within inches of the side of his head.

“Shit,” he hisses under his breath. He never considered the possibility of their pursuers being armed. It makes things even more complicated than they already are. Which is pretty fucking complicated.

Sugawara lets out a surprised cry of panic as more shots are fired. Iwaizumi glances over his shoulder, watching Daichi tug Sugawara closer against his side. Forty or so feet behind them, a group of around ten or so Guards and Soldiers level weapons in their direction, legs working frantically to keep pace.

Acting on a whim, on some ridiculous instinct, Iwaizumi turns the next corner. “Turn!”

His shoulder bumps into the wall when he switches direction. A sharp spike of pain shoots through his arm. _Damnit._ He doesn’t have time to dwell on it right now. The adrenaline coursing through his system has a numbing effect, dulls the ache of the impact, and Iwaizumi continues to run, scanning any rooms they pass.

_Ping!_

The lackeys have switched to laser guns.

_Fucking fantastic,_ Iwaizumi thinks with a silent bitter chuckle. The rifles would have done less damage had they actually hit their target. His people work tirelessly to perfect their artillery, and the laser weapons are no exception.

_”They’re ray guns, Iwa-chan!”_

Iwaizumi’s breath catches in his throat. He can only imagine how differently Oikawa would see this situation. He’d be more excited about being caught up in laser warfare than worried for his own safety. Now that he thinks about it, Iwaizumi realizes how similar the weapons are to the guns used in Oikawa’s favorite sci-fi movie franchise. _Star Wars_, was it?

The loud crack of a laser striking the wall a few feet away is enough to reclaim Iwaizumi’s full attention. If he lets himself get distracted here, he won’t make it back. And, if he can’t get off this
damn ship, there’s no reason to be thinking of someone he’ll never see again.

“Hajime!”

Startled, Iwaizumi looks back, feet still moving. He catches a glimpse of the Guard’s weaponry and tries to remain calm at the sight of so many guns- all directed at him. “Huh?”

“If I’m correct, there should be a teleportation chamber if you make a right up ahead,” Daichi explains. He hurriedly tugs Sugawara to the side, just nearly avoiding a beam heading straight for his head. “Just be ready!”

Iwaizumi nods. They all have a job here and his is to keep everyone alive and on track.

Suddenly, a harsh cry fills the passageway. A piercing sound, loud and shrill, echoes off the walls. Iwaizumi almost loses his footing but catches himself before he can fall. His head swivels, terrified to find the source of the noise.

And one look is enough.

Daichi is frantic, far more jittery than usual, arm wrapped tight around Sugawara’s waist. The man’s eyes are squeezed tightly shut, teeth gritted. Iwaizumi’s gaze drifts down and, to his horror, finds the problem. One leg is slightly raised, a distinct circular area near the ankle singed.

Iwaizumi catches the pink tint of inflamed skin and immediately turns back to the path ahead.

Not good, this is definitely not good. Injuries were never part of this haphazard, thrown-together plan. Daichi hadn’t even considered the possibility and now, here they are, dragging along a wounded Sugawara.

Iwaizumi drops back and moves in closer, throwing one of Sugawara’s arms over his shoulder. Daichi peers over with panicked eyes, wide and pleading for some sort of easy solution to this issue, for some sort of relief. Iwaizumi offers a weak smile in return.

“Not much farther, right?” Iwaizumi prompts.

Daichi gapes, rendered speechless. But, after a particularly awful whine from Sugawara, blurts, “Around that corner.”

“Good, we can make it that far.”

Flashes of green erupt around them, and Daichi winces. Iwaizumi is seconds away from warning Daichi to be careful when he reaches into the pocket of his drab suit. He withdraws a tiny silver sphere. His thumb smooths over a white dot on its surface, and the orb expands to the size of a tennis ball. Daichi presses down more firmly on the same spot and, before Iwaizumi can ask any questions, tosses it behind them.

A robotic feminine voice chirps loudly, “Engage.”

Several loud bursts of metallic clangs sound, followed by the frightened gasps and screams of their pursuers. Iwaizumi cringes at the awful barrage of noises and looks to Daichi who- is grinning?

“What the hell was that?” Iwaizumi demands, feeling a bit guilty when Sugawara whines, chin dropping against his chest. They need to get him help and soon.

“I think I’ve earned the right to know the locations of secret artillery closets on this damned ship.”
“But those were—” Iwaizumi stumbles over the words—“holy shit.”

Daichi interjects, an uncharacteristically wicked smirk toying with his lips, “I don’t mess around, Hajime.”

To both of their surprise, Sugawara lets out the tiniest and most heart-wrenching laugh at the remark. “I guess… so.”

*Well, at least he’s still well enough to make his usual snarky comments,* Iwaizumi notes. A couple steps later and they turn as a group. Just as Daichi predicted, a tall silver portal lies twenty feet away, a large panel above the door emblazoned with the words, “Transportation Chamber.”

In the distance, Iwaizumi swears he hears the sound of approaching footfalls. It isn’t close enough to be a pressing matter yet, but, well, it’s far from reassuring. Iwaizumi drags the two along as they near the doorway. They come to a jolting halt, and Sugawara mutters a broken, “Daichi,” face contorted in pain.

“Hang on just a little longer,” Daichi quietly tries to soothe him. He reaches shaky fingers up to stroke Sugawara’s cheek, regarding him worriedly. Daichi has never been an open book but, in this moment, Iwaizumi can make out the obvious concern, each troubled thought apparent in the set of his lips and furrow of his brow.

What if it were Oikawa in Sugawara’s place? What if he were the one hefting a wounded Oikawa around the ship instead? The possibilities send a disgusted shiver up his spine. He’d learned months ago of Oikawa’s past injuries. The amount of strain he’d put on his body back in high school was ridiculous, and Iwaizumi had no issue with pointing this fact out to Oikawa. But torn muscles or twisted ankles couldn’t compare to the danger of a laser gun wound.

Oikawa being shot with…

Iwaizumi shakes off the nasty mental image and finishes entering the last sequence of numbers into the panel beside the door. It slides open with a low hiss, and Iwaizumi quickly walks through the entranceway, grabbing Daichi and tugging he and Sugawara behind him.

Pushing past Iwaizumi, Daichi heads straight for the chamber itself. A space lies in the center of the room surrounded by a short glass wall about a foot high. More computer panels line the wall with maps and real-time images of nearby planets including Earth. Iwaizumi knows exactly what to do and steps up to one of the control panels.

First, he disables the entrance panel on the opposite side of the door. They can’t have anyone interrupting once they start the process. Stopping a teleportation in mid-sequence can cause serious damage to the brain and other vital organs. Unfortunately, Iwaizumi can only keep the portal locked for a maximum of five minutes.

“How long?” Daichi asks, right on cue. The arm around Sugawara’s waist visibly tightens its hold, desperation clear in the blue bursts dancing across the perimeter of his irises.

“Five minutes.” He doesn’t explain further, doesn’t say this is the time limit he’ll be working with. And he certainly doesn’t include that he’s not sure he’ll manage.

Daichi lowers his head and whispers something to Sugawara that Iwaizumi can’t make out. It elicits a hoarse chuckle, which Iwaizumi takes as a good sign, regardless of whether the muttered comment is at his expense or not.

Once the door is locked, Iwaizumi swipes his hand over the panel to bring up the next screen.
He’ll also have to disable any security that’ll alert the system of their location. The Supervisors could easily shut down the chamber in seconds flat without even having to lift a finger. Everything in the room is controlled by computers and, with the right personnel, they can manually override any scheduled teleportation requests. A certain Supervisor comes to mind, and Iwaizumi grits his teeth.

He has to do this.

Tricking the security is the hardest part. Once done, Iwaizumi heaves a loud sigh of relief. “Fucking technology,” Iwaizumi mutters angrily.

He swipes again and several small maps are displayed, each indicating the closest habitable planets. Iwaizumi pulls down the image of Earth and extends his fingers, expanding the image. A green outlined box appears and prompts Iwaizumi for the coordinates.

“Has it been… five minutes yet?” Sugawara’s voice cracks on “five,” and Iwaizumi flinches.

“It’s fine,” Daichi urges. “We’re going to be fine.”

The conversation forces some sort of unknown emotion to surge through Iwaizumi’s body. Compassion, worry, all feelings that Iwaizumi has become well-acquainted with over the course of the last several months. It reminds him of Oikawa back on Earth. Is he happy? Does he miss Iwaizumi?

Does he know Iwaizumi is the vanished friend of his past?

It’s the motivation Iwaizumi needs to work faster, to do a quick and thorough scan of the Earth’s surface to find their destination. When Iwaizumi returns- that’s when he’ll tell Oikawa. He’ll tell him everything, every last detail. He’ll try to explain why he left, why he wasn’t able to say goodbye before disappearing, why he didn’t tell him sooner.

And he’ll fix this mess once and for all.

Finally, he pinpoints the cave on the live image feed. His fingers fly across the keyboard as he enters the coordinates. A large blue oval fills the screen and asks the most important question: Set destination?

Iwaizumi presses his palm over the words and silently cheers when it turns green, confirming the command.

Then, just as quickly as the confirmation displays, the oval changes color. A nasty and foreboding red.

“Fuck!” Iwaizumi backs away from the monitor, turning to the door.

But it’s too late; the signal has been jammed.

The portal glides open and a Guard steps through. Iwaizumi charges forward, eying the weapon in the Guard’s hand as he moves. As expected, he fires a shot and Iwaizumi dodges, taking a quick hit to the shoulder. He cringes. *The same fucking shoulder.*

“Hajime!”

Iwaizumi leans out of the way of another strike and jabs the Guard in the stomach. He doubles over, grumbling in pain, and it’s just enough time for Iwaizumi to grab his gun and crouch down,
swinging the weapon right into the bend of the Guard’s knees. Instantly, he falls, skull cracking against the solid ground.

And, of course, the Guard isn’t alone.

Two more step through the portal, and Iwaizumi makes quick work of them. By the time both are sprawled out on the floor, Iwaizumi has a hold of both blasting rifles. He hasn’t fought in hand-to-hand combat in a while, but the movements come naturally to him, much like volleyball for Oikawa.

“You really could’ve been a Soldier,” Daichi pipes up, ever the proud Mentor.

“No, no, it never would’ve worked out.” Iwaizumi stumbles over to the wall panel once again to finish the job. “If anything, I belonged with the techies.”

The screen is rimmed in red, and the coordinate prompter has returned. Iwaizumi hastily types in the proper sequence of numbers. His hand hovers over the blue oval, ready to set the destination.

Clearly, the squadrons must want Daichi alive because, instead of taking aim at he and Sugawara, the Soldier leading the group wraps a muscled arm around Iwaizumi’s throat.

“Sh-!”

He can’t breathe, can’t seem to squeeze any oxygen into his body. Iwaizumi is tugged harshly away from the monitor and lifted from the ground, feet kicking out, searching for some sort of foothold. He flails and writhes in the Soldier’s grasp.

“Terran Researcher scum,” the Soldier growls right into Iwaizumi’s ear. “To think the Supervisors trust you to go to Earth. It’s pathetic, watching all of you get killed. Executed.”

“Release him!” Daichi yells desperately. “I’m the one at fault!”

“Dai-chi,” Iwaizumi manages to gasp.

“Enough, you both are at fault!” The arm around Iwaizumi’s throat tightens. “Traitors like you always meet the same fate. Go down, mingle with the disgusting humans, and come back here only to be sentenced to death. Just because you sympathize with ignorant, low-life creat-”

Iwaizumi lifts one leg and quickly jerks it backward, striking the heel of his boot right into the Soldier’s knee cap. He cries out and releases his hold, mostly out of shock. Iwaizumi lands solidly on his legs and tucks his head, rolling out of the Soldier’s reach. There’s a dull throbbing in his ankles from the force of the fall, but he does his best to ignore it.

His fingers find purchase in the trigger of the closest laser gun. Acting on pure instinct, a technique he learned after countless hours in the training rooms, he points the weapon and fires. The shot hits the Soldier in the chest, and he’s cursing, screaming, blood pouring over the fingers clutching his torn vest. He collapses and Iwaizumi drops the gun, sweat trickling over his brow and along the slope of his nose.

Arduously, Iwaizumi climbs to his feet and dives for the wall panel. He presses his palm to the monitor for what he hopes to be the final time, and nearly breaks down in tears when it turns green, confirming their scheduled transportation.

“We’re getting the hell out of here.” Iwaizumi reaches the chamber in three long and strained strides and squeezes in on the other side of Sugawara.
Sensing the newcomer, Sugawara’s head lolls onto Iwaizumi’s shoulder. He stares back through glosed over eyes, lips tugging into a reassured smile. Time seems to freeze for a moment, and Iwaizumi can’t bring himself to look away. Sugawara has always had a captivating air about him, an expression that encourages those around him to mirror his smile.

Chapped lips quivering around the words, Sugawara whispers, “Thank you.”

Oh.

Daichi had mentioned there being different forms of love. Iwaizumi understands his feelings for Oikawa, that they don’t fall under the category of “platonic” anymore. But, staring down at Sugawara, Iwaizumi realizes that he’s grown to love him, too. Not like Oikawa! Of course not. He loves Sugawara for the way he’s changed Daichi, for the kind of person he is.

Iwaizumi doesn’t want to lose him either.

The teleportation chamber begins to hum, preparing to send the three to Earth. Subconsciously, they crowd even closer together. And, just as the blue light falls around them, a low hiss fills the room followed by the return of the alarm’s blaring.

The portal door seals shut and everything disappears.

Maybe Kuroo cares too much.

Although most of his antics are fueled by a desire to fluster his friends, there are times he just wants to help them. It’s nice knowing you’ve been the one to influence someone or inspire their personal growth. And if it involves a considerable amount of teasing along the way, well, that’s just that.

Back in high school, there was a boy from a neighboring school who could care less about playing volleyball. Regardless of his indifference, he still stepped on the court every game and considered himself a part of the team. Kuroo had seen him before at matches but didn’t get the chance to spend time with him until a summer camp in his third year. His height was astounding, even as a first year, and Kuroo knew the moment he saw the boy: he would be the person to change him. And so he did.

It’s his crowning achievement, even to this day. Kuroo taught him, all 188 cm of this Tsukishima Kei guy, to be a defensive menace at the net. Enough to beat the bastards on Shiratorizawa, which was certainly good enough for him.

Not many people know this side of him. And Oikawa is one of very few that believes his concern is genuine.

Kuroo has known Oikawa Tooru for a while now. He’s seen him through his ups and downs, has watched him mature and overcome life’s greatest challenges- even puberty. But he’s never seen Oikawa act like this.

The first scrimmage of the season is soon, and, in preparation, the team has started practicing. Both entrance way doors are propped open to try and air the space out. Unfortunately, the air conditioning hasn’t held up in the oppressive summer heat, and the volleyball team bares the brunt of its dysfunction.

Kuroo leans against the fan, a large circular contraption that appears to have been tucked in the equipment closet since the dawn of time. It whirs along regardless of its age, though, and serves as
the team’s gathering place during water breaks. Or, in this instance, until Oikawa makes it to practice.

“When do you think he’ll figure out Iwaizumi-san isn’t coming back?” Lev wonders, back against the opposite side of the fan.

“Idiot!” Yaku reaches down and smacks Lev upside the head. “Have some tact! It’s a good thing he isn’t here right now.”

“S-sorry,” Lev mumbles dejectedly. Yaku sighs and moves to sit beside Lev, patting his thigh reassuringly. They never stay mad at each other for long, strangely enough.

“Do you think they were…” Hinata trails off, tugging his knees against his chest. He and Kageyama both sit along the wall nearest to the fan.

“Were what, dumbass?”


Kageyama leers at him. “We shouldn’t talk about them when they aren’t here.”

“Why? It’s not like I’m making fun of them or something!”

“Because we don’t know the truth!”

_Surprisingly mature for Kageyama,_ Kuroo notes with a little huff.

“B-but it’s not like I’m trying to be mean! I just want them to be happy.”

“Still…” Kageyama mumbles, and it’s enough to shut Hinata up for the moment. His features soften into an expression that has only ever been directed at Kageyama. The team heaves a collective sigh. It’s amazing how quickly they can go from wanting to tear each other’s heads off to… well, _this._

The argument sparks a curious train of thought inside Kuroo’s head.

Has Oikawa ever acted like this with past girlfriends?

Honestly, he hasn’t dated many people. Kuroo can only think of seeing two, maybe three, girls caught up in Oikawa’s orbit before. Plus, as far as he knows, Oikawa hasn’t been with anyone since graduating high school.

Each relationship ended the same way. A couple months of dating brought to an inevitable end once the girl in question realized volleyball would always be Oikawa’s top priority. They would usually yell, cause a scene in front of the student body, and storm away growling about how “selfish” or “uncaring” Oikawa was. Oddly enough, Oikawa never seemed to mind. He continued to smile and laugh and act like nothing was wrong.

But things were different with Iwaizumi.

Oikawa is well-versed in the art of putting on a happy mask for those around him. It rarely breaks and, when it does, Kuroo and Kageyama are the only two people who seem to notice. Years of dealing with the stubborn guy have taught them how to spot a genuine smile amongst the many fake ones. Kuroo knew something was off the second Iwaizumi announced he’d be gone for a short while. The cracks in Oikawa’s cheerful mask were hardly noticeable, but Kuroo caught them and
knew he’d be in charge of damage control.

Kuroo knows with certainty that Oikawa has never cared for anyone as much as Iwaizumi.

“What do you think will happen if Iwaizumi doesn’t come back?” The fan shifts a bit as Bokuto suddenly speaks up, elbow bumping into Kuroo’s side.

“But he will, right?” Lev answers with a nervous chuckle.

“We have to prepare for the worst, though.” Yaku takes a drink from his water bottle and looks up at Kuroo. “For Oikawa’s sake.”

“Yaku-san is right,” Kageyama says softly.

“Mmm,” Hinata mumbles in agreement, staring down at his shoes.

The elbow pressed to Kuroo’s side moves purposely, a playful jab. He turns and meets Bokuto’s eyes. “Do you think Oikawa will be okay?”

Wow.

Talk about a loaded question. Kuroo can feel everyone in the gym focusing their attention on him, can feel the expectancy hanging heavy in the humid air. Whenever something concerns Oikawa, the final say always goes to Kuroo. He’s known Oikawa the longest and, contrary to popular belief, he possesses a sort of perceptiveness that comes in handy in situations such as these.

How to answer… Kuroo isn’t sure. He can hope that Oikawa will be alright, and he can do his damndest to lift his spirits. But there’s no guarantee.

“Well, this is the first time something like this has happened to Oikawa.” Kuroo pauses and scans the room. The players appear to be holding their breaths, waiting anxiously for Kuroo’s verdict. “He’ll need us, but…”

The tension in the gym has reached its peak. Kuroo closes his eyes and quietly relays the last of his message.

“He’ll be okay.”
By some miracle, when Daichi reopens his eyes, they’re no longer standing in the teleportation chamber.

The cave is just as damp and cold as he remembered. A tiny shiver runs down his spine at the sudden drop in temperature, surrounded by air far thicker than that of the artificial and stale Ambition chambers. Sugawara, on the other hand, remains motionless and eerily silent at his side. Though one glance confirms that he’s still alive and conscious, which is really all Daichi needs at the moment.

The humidity engulfs them immediately, heavy and muggy from the waterfall at the cave’s opening. Daichi scans the area to make sure they’re alone. If any of the Guards or worse-Supervisors had managed to step through in time, the three of them would be done for. Sugawara is injured, and, although Iwaizumi’s body is used to withstanding the strains of fighting, Daichi knows he’ll start feeling the pain soon once the adrenaline wears off.

“Damn,” Iwaizumi grumbles, and Daichi peers around Sugawara to check on his Student.

As expected, his face seems worn, beaten down by the pressure of hand-to-hand combat. It isn’t the first time Iwaizumi’s fought a Soldier, but there’s a considerable difference between practice
and a real life-or-death situation. Guards are child’s play for trained fighters and pale in comparison to Soldiers. When a Soldier intends to kill its competitor, they are far more merciless.

Both Iwaizumi and Sugawara made it out alive — that’s enough for Daichi right now.

“Now what?” Daichi tries to laugh, but it comes out hoarse, syllables scratching along his throat as they surface. “We should be fine for at least the next 72 hours, yes?”

Iwaizumi nods. “168 hours, actually.”

*An entire week?*

“Impressive…”

“Thanks,” Iwaizumi mumbles, voice thick with embarrassment and likely relief. “It should give us just enough time to clear this mess up before they can find us.”

Iwaizumi closes his eyes and exhales, a soft whistle interrupting the silence of the cave as the air passes over his lips. A faint blue light flickers across his skin, and his appearance begins to change. His hair, hips, chest, everything gradually returning to its former state. Iwaizumi runs his fingers through his now shorter hair, as if to double-check, and blinks his eyes open. The flickering and dancing colors in his irises quickly give way to a darker, chocolate brown, and they return to their circular shapes.

Deciding it must be alright to do the same, Daichi lets his own eyes slide shut and repeats the process. He can’t help but miss the curvaceous disguise once it’s gone.

Iwaizumi slips his hand into one of the pockets of his shirt and retrieves what looks to be — a mobile substitute? How had he managed to…?

“How did you get that back?” Daichi squints in Iwaizumi’s direction, trying to get a better look at the device in his hands. “I thought the Supervisors confiscated it when they heard the recordings?”

Instead of answering, Iwaizumi smirks, already back to his snarky self. It’s been awhile since Daichi has seen this side of Iwaizumi, but he gladly welcomes it back.

“I have my ways,” Iwaizumi replies cryptically. He gestures toward Sugawara, and Daichi understands the unspoken meaning. Iwaizumi ducks under Sugawara’s arm, transferring all of the injured man’s body weight to Daichi. Wincing a bit, Iwaizumi clutches the device in both hands, fingers brushing over the screen.

A few moments later, he lifts the device to his ear, refusing to meet Daichi’s inquisitive stare. “What are you—“

“I need to see Oikawa.”

Daichi’s jaw snaps shut. He can’t think of anything to say to that.

The phone rings several times before someone finally answers. “Hello?”

“Kuroo?” Iwaizumi prompts, brows furrowed.

“No,” someone on the other end of the line responds, and even Daichi can tell it isn’t Kuroo.

Iwaizumi hesitates. “Kenma?”
“Yes?”

“Where’s Kuroo?” Shades of orange curl and unfurl along the periphery of Iwaizumi’s irises. “This is still his number, right?”

Kenma clearly doesn’t mean to sound rude- or at least Daichi hopes not- but he pauses before answering, considering the question. “He’s in the middle of a match.”

A match? If Daichi remembers correctly, volleyball season isn’t supposed to officially begin for another two or so weeks.


“It’s a scrimmage.” Daichi can practically hear Kenma shrugging. “The team has a couple of them before the season actually starts.”

Confused, Daichi waits for Kenma to ask why Oikawa hadn’t told Iwaizumi. But he doesn’t, which is infinitely more unsettling. Iwaizumi grits his teeth and stares resolutely at the wet cave floor. His hands are shaking, fingers tightening around the fake cell phone with every successive word out of Kenma’s mouth.

“Has it started yet?”

“Not yet,” Kenma responds. “But they’re warming up now so soon.”

Iwaizumi glances up at Daichi. His irises are caught somewhere between their rightful diamond shape and that of the human disguise. A wild kaleidoscope of colors swirl around inside, a mess of hues and unknown shades. Daichi knows what he’s thinking before he even speaks.

“Is there any way you can come pick us up?” Iwaizumi asks. But his tone indicates it’s a command, not a question.

“Us?”

Daichi is eternally thankful for Iwaizumi’s quick thinking. He tells Kenma most of the truth, explaining that the three of them got into some trouble and needed to be taken to the hospital. Of course, he leaves out the fact they just came from an alien spacecraft and definitely doesn’t include that they’re dealing with a gunshot wound. Daichi is also thankful that Kenma answered; from what he’s heard about Kuroo, he imagines the other boy wouldn’t have believed Iwaizumi’s story. Or at least he wouldn’t have come without first asking a million questions. And maybe a bit of scolding, too, for good measure.

Eventually, Kenma agrees to take Daichi and Sugawara to the hospital before bringing Iwaizumi back to the match.

“Thanks.” Stress and strain weigh on the single word. Iwaizumi hangs up seconds later and tucks the substitute back in his pocket. He turns on Daichi.

“He’s going to be suspicious,” Daichi cuts in before Iwaizumi can interrupt. Sugawara’s eyelids twitch, lashes fluttering, as if he’s listening along to the conversation. “You know that.”

Iwaizumi nods and steps toward the mouth of the cave. Loud and deafening, the waterfall drowns out the sound of his footsteps. His entire body is tense, taut like a wire about to snap, and Daichi can’t tell if it’s from his injuries or something deeper, something on a more emotional level.
“I do. But I won’t let anything happen to you,” Iwaizumi finally concedes, but it’s quiet, barely audible in the cramped space. Abruptly, he turns and flashes Daichi a smile. A broken and uncertain sort of grin that doesn’t reach his eyes. Shaky, right on the edge of collapsing and turning down into the unmistakable curve of a grimace.

“Either of you.”

Oikawa can’t focus.

He’s supposed to be getting ready for the scrimmage, mentally and physically, but he can’t seem to succeed in either regard. The pressure on his brain at the moment is completely ruining any chance he has of psyching himself up for the match today.

Every time he tries to draw his attention back to volleyball related things, his mind turns on him.

It’s impossible to shake the thoughts off. The memory of a crisp sheet of paper, sliding between his fingers before it drops to the floor. Crayon flecks, dried from years of being hidden away, scattering a bit on impact. The familiar figures on top of the crudely drawn hill. Specifically the one with roughly scribbled eyes of various colors-

No.

There’s no way. Oikawa knows without a doubt that the other person in the picture is Kuroo. It has to be, it simply has to. He was the only friend back then willing to brave the chilly evenings when the stars were most visible. There were no children with kaleidoscope eyes; Oikawa wouldn’t forget a person like that.

And yet he feels as if he has. As if there’s some vital detail in his past that his brain has suppressed. Scarier still, he can’t quite tell if the decision to shove the memories to the side was his own.

The morning passes by Oikawa in a blur. A quick shower after crawling out of bed followed by an even quicker breakfast of cereal and milk moments before he steps out the door, volleyball bag securely tucked under his arm. A brisk walk down to the bus station, claiming a seat near the back of the bus where no one will bother or potentially recognize him.

Oikawa is aware of the time passing, but it’s like someone else is possessing his body. He’s going through the motions, drifting, gliding along as he lets his body do the work for him.

Bokuto and Lev are the first to greet Oikawa as he steps through the gym doors, all big smiles and enthusiasm. Kuroo and Kageyama watch from several feet away. Oikawa tries not to make eye contact with either of them, worried about what he’ll see if he does.

“Ready to kick some ass?” Bokuto says by way of greeting, slinging a casual arm around Oikawa’s shoulders. “Heard this team isn’t anything to be too scared of.”

Oikawa knows they’re not; he looked them up the second he found out the name of their university.

“Yeah, just a bunch of tall guys,” Lev chimes in. It’s strange seeing him before a match without Yaku glued to his side.

“Says the tallest guy on our team!”
“So I can’t call them out for being tall just because I’m tall?”

Bokuto blinks, clearly not expecting Lev to shoot back with a reasonable response. “Uh… well, no, but—“

“Time to warm up!” Takeda appears directly behind the two bickering players. Frightened, they turn and immediately dash for the ball cart. It’s always amusing watching someone of Takeda’s stature scare human trees into submission.

After they scamper off, Takeda turns to Oikawa. There’s a hint of pity in his wide eyes that Oikawa is all too familiar with. “Will you be alright to play today, Oikawa-kun?”

Will he? Yes, he should say. So he does, but Takeda regards him skeptically. Suspicion dances behind the lenses of his glasses, gaze steely and piercing. Oikawa tenses. Takeda doesn’t show this side of himself often, but, when he does, it’s wise to take him seriously.

“If it becomes an issue, I’ll be forced to take you out,” Takeda cautions him. “Understand?”

Oikawa nods. Takeda isn’t afraid to do what it takes to win. He’s watched enough matches in his time to know that “playing it safe” never quite cuts it. And continuing to play someone hindering the team’s chance of victory fits that unsatisfactory bill.

“Good.” Takeda flashes Oikawa a quick smile and heads for the sideline.

Meanwhile, the rest of the team has spread out across their half of the court. Balls sail through the air, briefly cradled in fingers or striking off the firm cushion of forearms. Oikawa gets the strangest feeling watching his teammates warm up. It’s like watching the team as an outside observer, like an out-of-body experience. Maybe like something from *The X-Files*.

And, just like that, his thoughts have circled back to Iwaizumi and the picture from earlier.

*Focus,* he chides himself and bends down to retrieve a ball. For the next twenty minutes, he manages to shove everything to the back of his mind, tucking it as deep in his subconscious as he can. The team goes through the usual routine and, once done, gets in their respective spots on the court.

Oikawa shivers. He can feel his teammates staring at him, five sets of unrelenting leers all targeting his little area near the net. For a moment, he considers turning and reassuring everyone he’s alright. But he also knows the kind of people he plays with. They won’t even pretend to believe any of the words that come out of Oikawa’s mouth right now; they see through everything. It’s horrifying, especially to someone like Oikawa who’s determined to keep people from knowing his true intentions.

Iwaizumi is the only person who saw the real Oikawa.

Through a weird haze, Oikawa faces the net and regards their opponents with a critical eye. Even in his state, he takes stock of his competition. He notes the setter’s position as well as the number of available hitters.

And, just like that, the match begins.

Kuroo serves first, and the ball is set in motion. The other team receives, sets up their outside hitter, just barely makes it past the wall of blockers on Oikawa’s side of the net. It passes over and back to the defenders. They receive the hit, Oikawa sets to the middle, and Lev puts the ball away, scoring the team’s first point.
Play carries on in its usual way. Six players moving fluidly around their half of the court, shuffling and jumping, watching and adjusting, as the ball sails through the air. Oikawa continues to successfully set up plays for his attackers, throwing in the occasional dump to piss off their opponents. They’re doing quite well and have already managed a six point lead over the other team.

But Oikawa knows his heart isn’t in the match.

It’s a terrifying revelation, one that settles deep in the pit of Oikawa’s gut. He never plays half-heartedly. There’s a passion in his movements that has been there for as long as Oikawa can remember. Since he was young, he’s loved the game and everything about it. And he still does—most definitely. That’s why he forces a smile when his attackers raise their arms for a celebratory high five. Why he hides any worry under a careful façade of fake enthusiasm.

Oikawa loves volleyball through and through.

But Oikawa is only human. A distraction of disastrous proportions hangs menacingly over his head throughout the first set. Even when the final whistle is blown and the scoreboard very clearly proclaims their win, Oikawa thinks about Iwaizumi.

The loop of memories runs in reverse, starting from the last moments Oikawa saw Iwaizumi before he left. Smells, tastes, sounds—feelings surging to the surface after weeks of being ignored. Eventually Oikawa’s back at the first time he met Iwaizumi. The classroom packed with strangers, chatting amongst themselves as they waited for their professor to arrive. And Iwaizumi, with his sharp features and strangely soft smile.

“Actually, wait. I didn’t catch your name?”

*His fingers, carefully poised on the zipper, stop and, slowly, he raises his head to meet Oikawa’s inquisitive gaze. “Iwaizumi. Iwaizumi Hajime.”*

“Well, it’s nice to meet you, Iwaizumi-kun,” Oikawa replies, flashing one of his most charming smiles. “My name is Oikawa Tooru.”

Earsplitting, the repeated blare of the whistle draws Oikawa back to the present. He turns to the ref and steps off the court, taking the chance to apologize. The man still seems frustrated, but urges Oikawa to quickly join the rest of his team so they can carry on with the match.

He steps between Kuroo and Kageyama, offering a rushed apology to Takeda. Thankfully, their coach has nothing to say. The pity from earlier returns, though, when his eyes fall on Oikawa. And Oikawa wishes more than anything he could convince Takeda that, really, he’s fine.

“You alright?” Kuroo whispers, leaning closer to Oikawa in their huddle. The comforting weight of Kuroo’s hand pressed to his back calms him down a bit, as well as Kageyama’s arm resting along his shoulders. “Looked like you were zoning out there for minute.”

“It’s nothing,” Oikawa answers quickly. He doesn’t want even the slightest hesitation to give him away. “I promise, Tetsu-chan.”

Kuroo frowns but has the presence of mind not to push Oikawa any further. On his other side, Oikawa catches Kageyama scoff under his breath. Like Kuroo, though, he chooses not to interrogate Oikawa.

The second set, as with the first, starts without incidence. A serve, a pass, a set and kill. An occasional dump or block, a few outstanding digs and impressive saves. It’s nothing out of the
ordinary, though, and Oikawa is going through the motions.

Then, he has a thought. An awful thought that takes root in Oikawa’s mind and grows horrifyingly fast.

Would the game be different if Iwaizumi were there?

Oikawa missteps but manages to catch himself. Out of the corner of his eye, he notices Kuroo watching him. To his relief, the ball goes where it’s supposed to, setting up a nice clean hit from the outside.

What if Oikawa were setting to Iwaizumi instead? Would he smile, wide and genuine, when the team cheered? Would his cheeks and neck flush, red like a ripe tomato, when his teammates converged on him for high fives and pats on the back?

The mental image is there. Solid, plausible, and far too real for Oikawa’s liking.

Oikawa sends the next set to Lev who effortlessly scores the team’s next point. As the team circles around the two, Oikawa senses something. Something… strange. The hair on the nape of his neck seems to stand on end, and he gets the urge to reach back and scratch the suddenly irritated area. It feels like someone’s watching him. Other than Kageyama and Kuroo, who have both been not-so-secretly keeping an eye on him throughout the match. Unsettled, Oikawa turns to the bleachers.

For some unknown reason, his eyes are drawn to Kenma. He hasn’t moved since the match began. His bright, eerily concentrated gaze is focused on the court, more specifically his boyfriend who will soon move back up to the front row. Oikawa spares a second or two for Kenma before moving on. And that’s when he sees him.

Oikawa’s breath hitches.

He must be imagining it.

Dark hair that defies gravity, spiky like a porcupine. A defined jawline and sharp eyes, carefully trained on the very court Oikawa stands on. Dressed in an oddly familiar red t-shirt and sweatpants, arms folded across his chest, like he doesn’t know whether it’s alright to clap. Even from this distance, Oikawa can see the way his one leg shakes, foot tapping anxiously against the bleacher below, and the way his attention eventually comes to rest on Oikawa.

It’s Iwaizumi.

There’s no mistaking those features, those dark irises that conceal a myriad of bright, pulsating colors. The sight nearly brings Oikawa to his knees. His body is confused, grappling with the contradictory mix of emotions swirling inside his head. A burst of excitement followed by astonishment, joy, and, finally, a powerful swell of outrage.

A part of him wants to stop in the middle of the match and run immediately to the bleachers. He wants to wrap his arms around Iwaizumi and hold him close, breathe in the familiar scent of shaving cream, clean clothes, and something specifically Iwaizumi. He wants to stay there for minutes, hours, and assure himself that Iwaizumi isn’t an illusion. That he really is back- to stay this time.

But there’s another larger part that is angry. It’s irrational to be mad at Iwaizumi, and yet Oikawa can’t quell the feeling. Acting on a rash whim, Oikawa meets Iwaizumi’s eyes for a second and purposely looks away.
His chest aches. Why, *why*, can’t he just accept that Iwaizumi’s back and enjoy it?

*Because this is the second time he left you.*

Anger pools low in Oikawa’s gut, bitter and churning. That’s another thing. The boy in the picture… had Oikawa really drawn Iwaizumi? And, if so, if he had known the little alien all those years ago, why hadn’t Iwaizumi said anything about it?

Oikawa grits his teeth and focuses his attention on the game. He funnels every ounce of suppressed fury into his play. Usually, he avoids letting his emotions interfere with matches, but not today. Rage moves his legs, his arms, directs his eyes and train of thought. He never lets his resentment get the best of him, but the amount he lets through is just enough.

By no surprise, the set flies by, ending in a resounding 25 to 15 point victory.

A smirk slowly takes shape on Oikawa’s lips. But there’s a sour taste in his mouth that stamps out his pride.

Without looking toward the bleachers, Oikawa walks off the court with the rest of the team. Although he doesn’t check, he can feel Iwaizumi staring.

He wonders if Iwaizumi will follow. Not that he cares, of course.

Before leaving the gym, Takeda calls the team over for one of his usual post-game meetings. They won so he doesn’t have much to say. Normally, in these situations, he takes the chance to shower the team in praise and extensive, somewhat cheesy metaphors about victory.

“And Oikawa-kun? You performed exceptionally well the second set.” There’s a touch of pleasant surprise in Takeda’s tone. “Good job.”

A weak smile twists Oikawa’s lips. “Thank you,” he mumbles. Kageyama and Kuroo haven’t stopped sneaking glances at him since the match ended, and it's making Oikawa feel a little on edge.

Takeda offers a few more compliments to the players before dismissing them. Oikawa quietly files out of the gym with his teammates, sandwiched between Yaku and Bokuto. To his relief, no one mentions his strange behavior. No one questions his silence or abnormally aggressive playing style—not even Kuroo or Kageyama.

As they exit the building, Oikawa notes that he still has yet to run into Iwaizumi.

Of course, it’s not like he cares.

Sweat and knee pads.

They’re the first familiar smells Iwaizumi finds inside the gym. He and Kenma walk awkwardly side by side, heading for the bleachers to reclaim Kenma’s seat. Since Kenma came to pick him up, the two haven’t exchanged a single word other than “thank you” and “yeah.” He thankfully didn’t ask questions when he had to retrieve Iwaizumi from the side of the road. Hell, he didn’t even ask why Daichi and Sugawara were in their current state.

The three quietly arranged themselves in Kenma’s tiny sedan. Daichi and Sugawara climbed into the back seat, while Iwaizumi was stuck riding shotgun with Kenma. In silence, they drove into town. Kenma never once moved to turn on the radio, and, of course, none of his passengers were
going to try without their chaperone’s permission.

Even after they dropped Daichi and Sugawara off at the hospital, Kenma didn’t fish for explanations. His eyes remained fixed on the road ahead, lips caught between a grimace and indifferent line. Once they reached the gym, he reached in the back of the car and tossed a change of clothes at Iwaizumi.

That’s when Iwaizumi finally spoke to him. A quick “thank you.”

The clothes belong to Kuroo and, luckily, fit Iwaizumi quite well. They’re clean, too, and Iwaizumi wonders if Kenma keeps a change of clean clothes in the back of his car all the time for Kuroo. The t-shirt is just baggy enough in the sleeves to hide any cuts or scrapes from scuffles onboard the ship, and the sweatpants hang a little low on his waist but not uncomfortably so.

As they climb the stairs to the bleachers, Iwaizumi lets his gaze scan the gathered crowd. It isn’t a real match so he isn’t shocked to see only a couple handfuls of people at most.

Kenma leads Iwaizumi to a row of bleachers fairly close to the railing overlooking the court. Iwaizumi instantly recognizes the net and taped lines marking the bounds, the pads wrapped snugly around each of the poles, and carts filled with worn white volleyballs.

And then he spots them: the home team.

“The first set must be over already?” Iwaizumi prompts, hoping to start at least some semblance of a conversation. Sitting here in silence for another twenty minutes will be excruciatingly weird.

“Looks like it.”

*Not surprising.* Kenma isn’t usually a chatterbox, far from it, so Iwaizumi doesn’t take offense to the dry tone or curt response. But the words still seem colder, a bit harsher, than normal. It’s almost like Kenma’s… upset with him?

Iwaizumi tries to brush off his concern and scans the court for the reason he’s here in the first place. And, in such a small gym, it doesn’t take long to find him.

A giant block number three, screened on orange fabric stretched across defined back muscles and broad shoulders. Carefully styled hair, sweaty chestnut strands curling against soft skin, and long, toned legs. His head turns just the slightest bit and Iwaizumi gets the first glimpse of his face.

*Shit.*

Iwaizumi forgot how breathtaking Oikawa could be, especially during a volleyball match. And yet… there isn’t the usual glint of passion in his eyes. The smile on his lips is half-hearted, a tense and abnormally harsh line marring stunning facial features. Iwaizumi gets the weirdest urge to run down and kiss Oikawa until his familiar game face returns.

A few moments later, the players spread out and assume their respective positions. Iwaizumi takes note of Kuroo and Kageyama, of Lev and Yaku who bicker quietly amongst themselves. When the other team goes to serve, though, Iwaizumi’s gaze inexplicably strays back to Oikawa.

*At least he looks serious about the game.*

“How’s Oikawa been?” The words spill from Iwaizumi’s lips before he can stop them. *Stupid, stupid, stupid,* his subconscious chants mockingly. “Since I, uh, left.”
Kenma visibly flinches, and warning bells much like the obnoxious alarms on board the Ambition sound inside Iwaizumi’s head. He’s never seen Kenma make this expression before. Iwaizumi gulps, overcome by an impending sense of doom.

“I’m not really sure,” he eventually answers. “But Kuro’s been worried about him.”

For the first time since their reunion, Kenma turns and meets Iwaizumi’s gaze, staring straight into his soul. Now Iwaizumi sees it: anger.

“He seems to be getting better, but Kuro was pretty scared for the first few weeks after you left.” Kenma puts emphasis on the word left. “Hopefully whatever has been bothering him lately will be resolved soon.”

Woah.

Fury radiates from Kenma’s small frame, thick and heady in the already oppressive heat. The gym doesn’t have the best air conditioning as Iwaizumi knows all too well. Anxious, he turns his attention back to the court rather than Kenma’s simmering anger. Which he still can’t find the source of. Very comforting.

Of course, maybe he deserves it.

He’d been wary of leaving for a while. Deep down, he’d known his superiors wouldn’t be too keen on his… research methods, specifically regarding Oikawa. A little voice had been telling him he wouldn’t be coming back to Earth any time soon and, even though he’d told Oikawa, he feels like he’s in the wrong. Is there something he could’ve done to make this easier on Oikawa? Probably. Does he have any idea what that is? Not at all.

And now he feels like shit.

Right as the guilt starts creeping up on Iwaizumi, he notices movement from the corner of his eye. Oikawa’s team migrates from the bench to their half of the court, getting ready for the next set. Iwaizumi watches, transfixed, as Oikawa takes his usual spot near the net. Even from this distance, Iwaizumi can sense Oikawa’s presence on the court. The strong set of his shoulders and power of his gaze, muscles shifting and moving beneath taut skin. Sweat clings to his hair but, by some miracle of modern science, doesn’t make him look any less attractive. Nothing about the exertion of a match makes Oikawa appear any less striking.

Really, it isn’t fair.

Iwaizumi’s tongue feels like a lead weight in his mouth. He wants to call out to Oikawa, to wish him luck or tease him or, fuck, anything to get his attention. A second of eye contact- that’s all Iwaizumi wants. Just to make sure Oikawa knows he’s there, that he cares enough to be there. His body aches from the fighting and yet, instead of going home to recover, he came straight here. For Oikawa.

Slowly, Iwaizumi pushes past the nagging pain in his ankle and gets to his feet. It’s now or never. **Oikawa, Oikawa, Oikawa, please look**, his subconscious cries out.

Just as he lifts his hands, before a single word can slip out, Oikawa turns. And looks right at him.

Iwaizumi draws in a shaky breath. Wide eyes meet Iwaizumi’s and a tiny voice in his head worries over the possibility of his biological camouflage slipping up, but he could care less at the moment. Oikawa is real. He’s real and walking, talking, breathing and so very alive and-
Turning his back to Iwaizumi.

All possible words of encouragement die in Iwaizumi’s throat. No, this couldn’t be happening. They were back together again so why had Oikawa… His mouth slowly closes and, trembling, he lowers himself back onto the bleacher beside Kenma.

His entire body feels numb. Uncertainty and shame flood his system, and, as hard as he tries, he can’t force his eyes to focus on the match as it begins. Colors swim along the edges of his vision, angry scarlet and gloomy indigo, painting the court and players in bizarre hues.

Panicked, Iwaizumi covers his face and stands. He’s heard rumors about this, but never believed the ridiculous stories. Until now.

His camouflage is useless. It’s not strong enough to cover the tumultuous storm of emotions surging through Iwaizumi’s body. He can barely think straight, barely decipher whatever Kenma is calling out to him, can barely find his balance and walk away. Somehow, he makes it out of the seating area. He stumbles past several frightened looking spectators and slips into the bathroom.

Iwaizumi dives for the closest sink, fingers desperately grasping for purchase on the handles. He twists both and breathes out a sigh of relief when the water flows steadily from the faucet. With unsteady hands, he gathers some in his palms and splashes his face.

It’s okay.

He needs to convince himself things will be alright and fast. If he doesn’t calm down soon, he’ll be in greater trouble than he already is, what with the biological camouflage rapidly failing. Their technology has a certain emotional threshold, and Iwaizumi has clearly surpassed said threshold. He can’t have anyone seeing his true form, especially not the random strangers who’d love to get their hands on a hefty monetary reward for a “freak” like him. Or worse, someone higher up with the power to land Iwaizumi’s ass in a lab for dissection.

Iwaizumi blinks back the water clinging to his lashes and peers into his blurry reflection. Tired—that’s the first word that comes to mind staring into his own startlingly colorful eyes. Followed by afraid and hurt, definitely hurt. Iwaizumi sighs and runs his fingers through his hair. His irises are slowly returning to normal so he waits, just to be careful. He can’t risk it.

Oikawa is upset with me. Iwaizumi wishes he could dispute his subconscious. But it’s true. Also, from the quality time he spent with Kenma, Oikawa doesn’t seem to be the only one mad at Iwaizumi.

How the hell does he fix this?

Iwaizumi unfortunately knows the answer to that question: he needs to talk to Oikawa. He needs to find him after this scrimmage and sort things out before the situation can get any worse. In other words, chickening out and running now isn’t an option. In other other words, Iwaizumi has to return to the bleachers.

So stop being a fool and get back in there, the suspiciously Daichi-like voice inside his mind urges. Iwaizumi shakes his head and lets out a breathless chuckle. He’ll make it through this.

He’s survived living on a completely different planet, survived being relatively alone in a new place. He’s retained his personality after having his memory wiped years ago. He’s learned about human emotions, the importance of relationships and love in all its forms. He’s escaped a gigantic mothership packed with thousands of trained fighters and security.
And yet he’s scared of confronting Oikawa.

Iwaizumi steps away from the sink and stalks past a few more confused spectators, making a beeline for the bleachers. Kenma eyes him suspiciously when he returns but says nothing about Iwaizumi’s sudden disappearance. He does, however, nod toward the court.

“It’s over,” he says drily.

“Shit,” Iwaizumi curses under his breath and strides past Kenma. He leans as far as he can over the railing and searches the room for the familiar tousled hair and broad shoulders. Getting more and more frantic by the second, Iwaizumi clenches down on the cool metal bar pressing into his stomach.

Stepping through the wide double doors on the opposite side of the gym, Oikawa stands surrounded by his teammates.

*Oikawa!*

The team carries on, and Iwaizumi tries to make his jaw work, tries to make the word form on his lips. But he can’t and they just keep walking.

*Oikawa! Oikawa!*

Iwaizumi’s fingers ache, knuckles whitening the tighter he grips the railing, and his throat burns with the name he can’t seem to make himself say.

*Oikawa!*

He watches until the numbers on the backs of the team’s jerseys disappear from view. “Oikawa,” Iwaizumi mumbles softly and releases the railing. His arms go limp, hanging loosely at his sides, and a flash of azure slinks around the edge of his vision.

It’s there and then it’s gone.

But the feeling lingers long after Oikawa is gone.
Chapter Summary

In which Sugawara and Daichi finally have the much anticipated "Talk," concerning feelings and certain childhood friends.

Chapter Notes

HI HELLO WOW IT’S BEEN WAY TOO LONG!!!!!!!!!!! i finally had time to finish this chapter considering it’s spring break. my professors like to keep us constantly busy so that’s the reason for the long wait…. i’m really sorry but hopefully the next update won’t take as long, there are only a few weeks of school left.

i don’t want to make this a/n too long so i’ll keep it brief. this is a shorter chapter with lots of dialogue and lots of daisuga. here are all 5 mixes for your listening pleasure (x x x x x) and all of the art for this fic (x) a couple new arts have been posted since the last ch so definitely check those out and please don’t hesitate to let me know if you’re making something for this fic!!!!

as usual, thanks to my INCREDIBLE readers and equally amazing betas. you guys keep me going!!!! hope you enjoy!

Months ago, Daichi never would’ve guessed he’d be in this position right now.

Sitting in a hospital room, slumped in a plastic chair, watching over someone special to him as he sleeps off the side effects of an earlier procedure. A human, no less, who has somehow worked his way under Daichi’s skin over the course of the last few months. It’s the kind of crazy story he would’ve scoffed at when he was younger. His people were killed for far less than “fraternizing” with the likes of another lesser species, especially a human.

Of course, Daichi doesn’t regret meeting Sugawara. He doesn’t regret getting close to him, doesn’t regret the precious time they’ve spent together or the intimate moments they’ve shared. Far from it. What he does regret is putting Sugawara’s life in danger.

Daichi watches Sugawara as he rests. He wears a peaceful expression, a calm façade with skin free of creases or tension. His lips are tilted ever so slightly at the edges, curling into a small, contented smile. His eyelashes flutter occasionally, nose scrunching up a bit each time. Beneath the blanket, his arms lie limp at his side. The arm closest to Daichi, however, is exposed, pale hand lying flat and motionless only a foot or so away.

He really is beautiful, Daichi muses. His fingers itch to reach out and brush stray hands of hair from Sugawara’s face, to curl against his jaw, or maybe just rest on the top of his wrist. He craves some form of contact, anything that keeps him grounded and sure of Sugawara’s safety.

Daichi sighs and slumps forward, dropping his face in his palms. The hospital room feels stifling.
His shirt sticks to his sweaty skin, anxiety seeping out of every pore in his body. Not even the cool plastic of the chair alleviates the nagging pain skipping across his skin.

This is his fault.

He’s the one who allowed Oikawa and Iwaizumi to get too close. He’s the one who encouraged Iwaizumi to continue studying Oikawa, regardless of the warning signs, present from the start. If he’d stopped Iwaizumi, put his foot down and forced him to pick a new Subject, they could’ve avoided this whole damn mess of a situation. Iwaizumi never would’ve been held onboard the ship. Sugawara never would’ve been dragged down to the cognitive reformation chamber and, more importantly, never would’ve been injured.

Daichi is the root of the problem- the reason Sugawara got hurt.

The guilt churns in his stomach like a persistent ache. He wants nothing more than Sugawara’s and Iwaizumi’s safety. Unfortunately for Iwaizumi, the two are connected for the foreseeable future; danger is basically in their job description, in their DNA.

But Sugawara doesn’t deserve any of this.

Unfortunately, there’s no “easy” solution to their current dilemma. Years of failed missions and tough decisions have prepared Daichi for moments like this. Staring bleakly into the eyes of an ultimatum he’d rather ignore. No matter what Daichi chooses to do, someone is going to get hurt.

And he’d prefer it be him rather than Sugawara.

Which leaves Daichi with one option: returning to the ship. Alone.

If he goes back and turns himself in, Sugawara and Iwaizumi should be safe. Well, Iwaizumi may bear a small brunt of the charges, but, chances are, they’ll settle for assigning him a new Mentor and leave it at that. Of course... they’ll likely forbid him from seeing Oikawa ever again.

_Dammit._ Daichi’s fingers clench into fists and settle in his lap. He glares at the linoleum flooring, and then glances back at Sugawara. Who, thankfully, continues to sleep, blissfully unaware of the troubling thoughts swirling around inside Daichi’s head.

It’s a disaster. What if something worse had happened to Sugawara? Or Iwaizumi? What if- dare he even think it- one of them had _died_ during their escape?

Daichi would never have forgiven himself.

Hell, he can hardly forgive himself for the things that _did_ happen. He’s a disgrace, really. As a Mentor, as a friend. As a ‘something more.’ His plan nearly got the only person he’s ever loved killed. Their future together, nearly destroyed in an instant.

Every morning, curled around each other, exchanging lazy kisses as they reluctantly abandoned the warmth of their bed to go into work. Every afternoon, chatting over lunch. Every evening, going out or staying in to eat dinner as they told stories of interesting things that happened throughout the day. Daichi had almost lost it all.

And, on top of that, he put his Student in an even direr situation than before. Iwaizumi’s relationship with Oikawa put him in a dangerous enough place; the last thing he needed were more grave offenses for the Superiors to scrutinize. After all, whenever the government’s noose tightens around Daichi’s neck, it also tightens around Iwaizumi’s.
And, now that Daichi thinks about it, Hayato’s.

*Hayato is alive.*

Daichi still can’t believe it. He’d lived the last couple decades thinking Hayato, his closest friend, had been excommunicated or, worse, executed. When he’d stepped into the cognitive reformation chamber, the sight nearly brought him to his knees. That familiar head of sandy brown hair and wide, imploring eyes. The gentle curve of his smile, the freckles smattered across his cheekbones and bridge of his nose. He’d looked exactly the same as Daichi remembered and yet, on a deeper level, something had changed.

Hayato had looked… defeated. Broken.

It’s another item on the extensive list of Daichi’s Biggest Mistakes. Or as Iwaizumi would likely call it, Daichi’s Biggest Fuck-Ups.

He sometimes wonders if things would be different if he’d loved Hayato in return. Would they have been separated still, all those years ago? Would Hayato be stuck in the dark corners of the ship replacing and erasing memories?

Would Hayato be happier?

Daichi groans and shakes his head. Frankly, he feels like he’s managed to ruin multiple lives without even intending to. It’s frustrating—beyond frustrating. *Maddening.* Daichi wants to fix it, fix everything, but has no idea where to start.

“Looks like he’s still resting,” a sweet voice calls from the doorway, and Daichi turns, meeting the softened eyes of Sugawara’s nurse. A tiny smile tugs at her lips as she walks into the room and over to Sugawara’s bedside.

“Um,” Daichi starts, searching for something to say. “Yes. Luckily.”

She nods as she works, looking over Sugawara. Her hands are gentle, careful, with him, and Daichi can’t help but be reminded of the beauty of human kindness. “He’s certainly a trooper.” She pauses, smile widening. “And I’m sure he’ll be delighted to know you watched over him so intently.”

Warmth floods Daichi’s face. “I-“

“It’s okay, sweetie, I get it,” she chuckles, stepping away from Sugawara’s bed. “He’s clearly been through a lot. It’s not often we get this sort of injury.”

Daichi purposely avoids the nurse’s inquisitive stare. “I imagine so.”

Thankfully, she doesn’t prod further. She probably gets much weirder cases than this on a daily basis and has learned the repercussions of asking too many questions. It reminds him of the terran idiom, “Curiosity killed the cat.”

“We’ll take good care of him,” she promises, “But, you know, you have to take care of yourself, too.”

*Take care of myself.* Daichi tenses.

“I suppose you’re right,” Daichi trails off, deliberately fixing his gaze on a spot on the wall behind Sugawara’s head. The nurse has no idea the impact her words have. Daichi considers hugging her
as thanks for the unintentional reassurance. “Thank you.”

She flashes him a final knowing look before slipping quietly out of the room. Daichi watches her retreating form until she disappears from view and gives his full attention back to the soundly sleeping Sugawara. He sighs and stands, gritting his teeth at the sudden burst of pain from movement after sitting for so long.

Just as quietly as the nurse, so as to avoid accidentally disturbing Sugawara, Daichi sees himself out.

They’re running.

Bright, white light floods the narrow passage ahead. The plain walls pass by in a grayscale blur. At his side, Daichi has a firm grip on his forearm and, a few feet ahead, Iwaizumi sprints, leading the way. Sugawara wants to yell for him to be careful, to stay with him and Daichi. His mouth opens and throat works, but no words come out.

The thud of footsteps echo off the walls, surrounding Sugawara. Their pursuers shout and urge them to stop. Daichi pants, labored and heavy, right near his ear, and the frantic beating of his heart matches their strides. Fear, trepidation, morbid fascination, all circulating through his veins, urged on by the adrenaline rushing through his body.

Suddenly, the world bursts around him.

Pain courses up his leg, sharp and crippling. Sugawara tries to scream again and still, nothing. He’s falling, sprawling onto the cold floor with his face pressed into the ground. His limbs twitch, arms reaching, dragging himself along as his legs trail uselessly behind him. They’re disturbingly numb.

Sugawara expects Daichi and Iwaizumi to stop and help him up.

But they just keep going.

A group of their pursuers sprint past Sugawara, while the rest stop to keep an eye on him. One particularly nasty one presses his heel into Sugawara’s lower back, laughing as he winces and trembles.

Stop! Please, stop! He silently screams, but, of course, neither Daichi nor Iwaizumi hear him.

A flash of red fills the hallway and the other two drop to the ground just as Sugawara did.

But it isn’t the same.

Sugawara watches in horror as Iwaizumi is struck in the back. He crumples first, falling to the floor with a hideous thwump.

And, seconds later, Daichi is hit in the back of the-

“No!” The word comes out as more of a hoarse whisper than the intended scream. Sugawara’s eyes fly open, and he immediately regrets the action, forcing them shut. The fluorescent light overhead is unexpected, bright and blinding.

Disorientated, Sugawara slowly reopens his eyes.

There isn’t a hallway in sight. No violent pursuers or lasers. No Daichi or Iwaizumi. Only the light
and stale air remain.

*A hospital…?* Sugawara blinks and surveys his surroundings. It’s certainly a hospital room. The distinct lighting and strange scent associated with any medical establishment, the familiar beep and hum of machines, all make it abundantly clear. Thin sheets pool around his waist as he sits up, teal folds spreading like waves. He winces and glances down at his hands. His stomach turns at the sight of an I.V. tube protruding from his skin.

Since he was little, Sugawara hasn’t been overly fond of hospitals. They have a certain… air about them he just can’t bring himself to like. It makes him uncomfortable, aching to leave the building as soon as possible.

More importantly, though. Why the hell is he here in the first place?

From what he can see, it doesn’t look abnormal or like anything from a retro sci-fi film. In other words, he made it safely off the spaceship. Yes, the thing that shouldn’t be real. The thing packed with aliens, something else that shouldn’t exist. Right. *Those* things.

He’ll deal with that whole crisis later. Right now, he needs to figure out what could’ve possibly landed him in this hospital bed.

A tiny jolt of pain shoots up his leg as he wriggles and- oh. So that’s why.

In a rush, his memories return to him. Memories of the tiny chamber and Daichi’s mysterious old friend. Memories of Daichi and Iwaizumi in disguise, walking into the little room in more curvaceous bodies than usual. Memories of fleeing from the ship and fired weapons and, oh hell, his leg.

The room warps and spins as Sugawara leans back against his pillows. He closes his eyes and breathes slowly through his nose, trying to calm down.

Extraterrestrials are real. There are living and breathing beings that travel through space. And, as if that weren’t wild enough, Daichi and Iwaizumi just so happen to be extraterrestrials, too. Sugawara is recovering from a gunshot wound. And not just any gun. Some sort of weapon that fires lasers. A weapon the aliens use and likely invented.

So, yes, it’s a lot to process.

“Iwaizumi…” Sugawara mumbles through dry lips. He’d been the person to lead them through the ship, the one to guide them home safely.

*He deserves to see Oikawa again,* Sugawara decides. If anyone deserves to be happy, it’s Iwaizumi Hajime. The thought forms in Sugawara’s mind with a newfound firmness. He’s always thought highly of Iwaizumi but now- his respect has grown to monumental proportions. Iwaizumi fought valiantly, passionately, and managed to remain calm in a disastrous situation.

Sugawara doesn’t know how he’ll ever repay him.

His eyes flutter open once again and linger on the chair beside his bed. A very empty chair. The room suddenly feels colder. He was sure that Daichi would stay with him. He had convinced himself that, regardless of what happened, Daichi would be there at his side, would know exactly what to do to remedy the situation.

But now…
He isn’t obligated to stay with you, his subconscious snidely reminds him. No one is. It’s true, and yet the knowledge does little to soothe him.

Then, he has an even more unsettling thought: what if Daichi chose to stay on the ship with Ikejiri?

Of course, he knows Daichi came back to Earth with him and Iwaizumi. He vaguely recalls riding in the car of a boy named Kenma, someone Iwaizumi knows, and Daichi had still been there at the time. But maybe, just maybe, he’d left after making sure Sugawara was safe and treated properly. He could easily be long gone by now.

The mental image takes shape effortlessly inside Sugawara’s head. Daichi, dressed in the same drab attire as Ikejiri had been, both of them roaming the halls of the ship at a carefree pace. They would discuss their missions or jobs or whatever it is aliens did. Smiles stretched across their faces, focusing solely on each other and only each other.

Wouldn’t Daichi be happier that way?

He and Ikejiri certainly had more in common. They’d known each other for years, and, although neither explicitly said it, Sugawara felt the charged tension in the room that hinted at something more than friendship in the past.

Deep, deep down Sugawara had thought Daichi might have feelings for him. Now, he doesn’t know what to think.

“Good morning,” someone calls hesitantly from the doorway.

The delicious aroma of coffee lingers in the air. Sugawara’s heart crawls up his throat, and he turns, eyes widening at the familiar brilliance of Daichi’s smile.

There’s nothing quite like seeing Sugawara happy.

Daichi sports the biggest and stupidest grin as he steps into the room, quietly resuming his seat at Sugawara’s bedside. His eyes never leave Sugawara as he crosses the room. As irrational as it may seem, Daichi worries that Sugawara will vanish if he loses sight of him for even the briefest of moments.

Anxious, he peers down at the steaming hot cup in his hands and fiddles with the cardboard sleeve. He can feel Sugawara’s penetrating gaze and swallows the nervous lump in his throat.

“So you weren’t kidding,” Sugawara finally croaks when the silence gets to be too uncomfortable. “About being an alien.”

Cautiously, Daichi turns his attention back to Sugawara. A surge of guilt floods through his body at the sight of dark circles beneath Sugawara’s usually bright eyes, pain evident in the set of his jaw and slumped shoulders.

“No I… I wasn’t kidding.” Daichi shifts awkwardly in his chair. “I would never joke about something like that.”

A short pause follows in the wake of Daichi’s admission.

“And Iwaizumi is one, too.” Posed as a question, but tone indicating nothing of the sort. “An alien.”
“Yes,” Daichi answers softly, “he, um. He is.”

“What about that person from the ship?”

Daichi’s stomach churns, blood pounding through his veins. There’s only one person Sugawara could be referring to: Hayato.

His silence is clearly enough of an answer. Sugawara’s shoulders fall even further, chin dropping to his chest as he stares at the blankets bunched in his hands. He visibly sinks into himself, and the sight makes Daichi sick; Sugawara should never have to feel this way. Sugawara deserves to be loved, to be happy, truly and genuinely happy.

“I…” Daichi starts, forcing himself to look at Sugawara. “I want to be honest with you from now on.”

At that, Sugawara’s head shoots up, wide eyes fixing on Daichi. His lips are parted in a startled little ‘o.’

Spurred on by Sugawara’s accepting silence, Daichi rushes on with his explanation. “There shouldn’t be any more secrets between us. You know my greatest secret now, and…. You deserve to know what happened between Hayato and I.”

Sugawara’s lips purse into a thin line. In an instant, he goes from surprised interest to something sadder, more serious and wary. He says nothing, but maintains eye contact and nods.

So Daichi tells him.

He starts from the moment he and Hayato first met. In the midst of a classroom packed with other young Researcher hopefuls, Hayato had approached Daichi, his sweet expression searching for companionship. Daichi tells Sugawara about their teachers. Each Mentor’s strange quirks and habits, just like any terran teacher. Just like the professors Daichi has dealt with since getting a job at the university. He tells him about the day they were assigned Mentors of their own, a couple of uptight Supervisors who constantly nagged the fresh-faced rookies.

The story then progresses to their rise to Mentorship. He recounts the day they’d been appointed their numbers, the day the two were assigned their first Students. There are too many missions to count so Daichi glosses over most of his journeys to other planets and galaxies. Predictably, Sugawara seems disappointed, but Daichi promises to tell him more once everything settles down.

And then he reaches the most important part.

“Then Hayato… he made a strange proposal,” Daichi begins, choosing his words carefully. He doesn’t want to give Sugawara the wrong idea. “His stance on emotions differed greatly from that of our superiors. Specifically- specifically his opinions about love.”

“Love?” Sugawara blinks, brows drawn in confusion.

Daichi nods and pauses to take a deep breath. You can do this, he silently encourages himself. You can explain this in a way that doesn’t upset Sugawara.

“Love?” Sugawara blinks, brows drawn in confusion.

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“He didn’t understand why our people discouraged it. No familial love, no romantic love. All of it was taboo. But Hayato couldn’t bring himself to agree.” His lips shape into a fond smile. “He thought love was a beautiful thing. And refused to be influenced by the higher ups.”

“I’m guessing that got him into trouble,” Sugawara says, tone solemn.
Daichi flinches. He remembers the expression on Hayato’s face after they’d kissed, the desperation and hope. All in an effort to understand some unspeakable feeling towards Daichi. When their eyes had met on the ship, Daichi had searched Hayato’s eyes for that feeling, curious as to whether it remained.

“Yes,” Daichi answers quietly, smile fading. “Our superiors found out and… had us separated.”

Sugawara’s eyes widen. “That’s awful!”

“It was. I thought he was dead until… until now.”

“That’s even worse,” Sugawara growls between gritted teeth. “They’re monsters.”

Daichi certainly can’t disagree. He’s thought the same thing for most of his life. And Hayato… well, his terran studies had taught him plenty of other interesting insults. The kind Iwaizumi thoroughly enjoyed. *Asshats* was one of Hayato’s personal favorites.

“I could never love him back, though,” Daichi blurts, before he can think better of it. Any other words get stuck in his throat and panic creeps under his skin; he hadn’t meant for it to come out like *that*.

“That must’ve been tough.” Sugawara’s voice sounds strained. “For both of you.”

*It was*, Daichi almost answers. “At first,” Daichi says, “But-”

He hesitates. A cursory glance in Sugawara’s direction, though, and his resolve is renewed. He can do this. “But it was a lot easier for me once I met you.”

Tension hangs thick in the air. The click of shoes in the hallway overcomes the silence, the beeping of monitors and low murmur of staff conversing with patients outside. Strong and incessant, Daichi’s heartbeat pounds a steady beat, effectively drowning out all other sounds.

*Shit, shit, shit*, Daichi silently curses. His brain is in a bit of a panic. *I came out and said it. The truth, blunt and completely honest. I didn’t even try to sugar coat it. What an idiot!*

Abruptly, Sugawara laughs. It’s choppy and a bit broken but still undeniably his laugh, a melodic ring to it that Daichi has always loved. “Happy I could help,” he says, “I hope I’ve been a decent enough distraction.”

“Distraction?” Daichi glances nervously at Sugawara. He doesn’t like that tone.

“Of course.” Sugawara shrugs. “I’m sure it was hard dealing with all that confusion when he left. And considering how you felt about him-”

“Sugawara, you misunderstand,” Daichi interjects. Sugawara gasps, a small, surprised noise. “It was easier on me because… I fell in love with you.”

Instantly, pink dusts Sugawara’s cheeks. Daichi feels his own face color but tries to ignore the unmistakable warmth crawling up his neck. He decided before even stepping into this room that he would do the right thing, that he would be completely honest with Sugawara like he should’ve been from the beginning.

And there’s no going back on that now.

The silence this time is shorter and not quite as overbearing. Daichi’s eyes settle on Sugawara,
skimming over his face for any signs of relief or, worst case scenario, disbelief and anger. It’s not a smile on his lips, but it also isn’t a frown. And it’s enough.

“Where do we go from here?” Sugawara finally speaks up. Taken aback by the question, Daichi doesn’t have a decent answer right away. But Sugawara isn’t done yet.

“Is Iwaizumi… Are we all safe now? Do they know where we are?” The sheets shift beneath Sugawara as he moves around anxiously. “Will they come for us once they find out?”

Daichi smiles, cocking his head to the side. He reaches out and rests his hand carefully on Sugawara’s arm, lightly curling his fingers against his skin. It’s warm to the touch, soft, just as he remembered. “Don’t worry,” he soothes, lowering his voice to a near whisper. “Iwaizumi and I have it all figured out.”

Acting on impulse, Daichi stands and, before he can change his mind, leans over Sugawara. He ignores the startled expression Sugawara wears and lets his eyes fall closed. Gently, he presses his lips to Sugawara’s forehead. Daichi hasn’t realized how much he missed Sugawara, how much he missed the feel of his skin beneath his lips, the unmistakable comfort his touch provides.

It’s ridiculously nice; there isn’t a single word to describe it. Daichi wants to fully savor this short span of time. This is the sort of memory he wants to preserve in his mind for the rest of his life. A brief snapshot of this room, of this feeling, tucked safely away where no one can touch or tarnish it.

*We’ll protect you, Suga. Or at least I hope so.*
no quick fix

Chapter Summary

In which Iwaizumi tries to make amends and Oikawa makes mistakes.

Chapter Notes

woooo another update!! and before spring semester is even over, wow, i’m kind of shocked that i managed to finish this so quickly. well, there isn’t a lot of action in this chapter, kind of like in the last one, so it makes sense. plus it’s been a good source of stress relief so…

i don’t really have any warnings or notes to make on this chapter. it’s pretty straightforward! here are all 5 mixes for your listening pleasure (x x x x x) and all of the art for this fic (x). please don’t hesitate to let me know if you’re making something for this fic!!!!

a big thanks to my amazing betas and readers!!! i’ve been getting more asks on tumblr and people @ing me on twitter, which has been really nice. so if you want to ask something, go for it. I don’t bite!! anyway, enjoy this chapter and uh don’t kill me for ending it the way i did…..

If Kuroo had to pick his favorite guilty pleasure food, it’d probably be a cheeseburger. Melty cheese, oozing ketchup, crunchy lettuce- the thought alone is enough to make him salivate.

But today? Not so much.

Sandwiched between Bokuto and Yaku, he eyes Oikawa from across the table. The hostess stuck them near the back of the restaurant at a long cluster of shoved-together tables far from the other customers. Which, considering they’re regulars and considering they can get fucking loud, makes complete sense.

All of them somehow manage to squeeze in, tucking their bags under and around their chairs. Every inch of table space is taken up by plates, cups, and assorted condiment bottles. A couple stacks of extra napkins sit near the middle, along with two large pitchers of water.

Yaku’s stomach is a black hole so he focuses most of his remaining energy from the match on devouring his food. One burger- his second burger, mind you- remains on the plate along with half of his original portion of French fries. He alternates between snapping at Lev, urging Kuroo to eat, and inhaling his meal like a human vacuum.

On Kuroo’s other side, Bokuto is engrossed in his own food. He can eat a horrifying amount of fries in a single sitting, but, really, no one can match the local beast’s voracious appetite. Between bites, Bokuto chats excitedly with Lev and Hinata, who sit on the opposite side of the table, Kageyama at Hinata’s side.
And next to Kageyama, hardly touching his plateful of greasy food, is Oikawa.

Kuroo’s main goal right now: do whatever it takes to steer the conversation away from Iwaizumi coming to watch the game.

There’s a good chance only he and Oikawa noticed Iwaizumi in the stands. Well, Kageyama might’ve noticed, too. But, like Kuroo, he won't say anything about it. So they should be safe from a disastrous conversation? At least Kuroo hopes so.

He can count the number of times Oikawa has spoken since sitting down on one hand. And his silence has nothing to do with stuffing food in his mouth along with the current feeding frenzy, that's for sure. He hasn't eaten nearly as much as his other teammates. Hell, Hinata and Yaku are almost finished, and Oikawa still has half a burger and pile of fries left.

Kuroo doesn't like the expression on Oikawa’s face. Not at all.

The poor guy looks like he's seen a ghost. His complexion is paler than usual, fingers trembling a bit whenever he reaches for a fry or picks up his burger. Shoulders tense, he sits hunched over his plate, eying the meal with obvious disinterest. As someone who's known Oikawa for years, the strange behavior draws Kuroo’s full attention.

And, if the glances Kageyama keeps shooting his way are any indication, he isn't the only person who's noticed.

“Hey, are you gonna finish that?”

Kuroo jumps, accidentally knocking his knuckles into the underside of the table. He winces and grins weakly in Yaku’s direction, gesturing at his plate with the hand that doesn’t sting. “No, man, I’m not that hungry right now.”

Which is true. Oikawa looks like a heartbroken dog that’s been kicked by its beloved master; it’s enough to get rid of any semblance of an appetite Kuroo might have had.

“Really? That’s kind of we-” Bokuto clamps his mouth shut, shrinking at the quick death glare Kuroo sends his way. “We- We! We should get some onion rings or something to go, yeah?”

Yaku brushes the comment off and squints at Kuroo. “You usually eat twice as much as this when we come here after a match.”

“That was only a scrimmage, though.” Kuroo laughs and hopes he doesn’t sound as nervous as he actually feels. “Not everyone can eat enough to put a fucking restaurant out of business.”

Bokuto and Lev burst out laughing, the latter getting kicked underneath the table. Yaku bristles and points accusing fingers at both of them. “Hey, like you two have any room to talk!”

“You put my appetite to shame,” Bokuto answers back with a shrug.

Lev nods, mouth crammed full of French fries. “Yeah, Yaku-san, it’s amazing how much you can ea-”

Another kick and Lev squeaks. He's practically whining. “It’s impressive! I never said it was a bad thing.”

Everyone rolls their eyes in horrifying synchronization, and Kuroo sneaks another glance at Oikawa. He’s watching the conversation but is clearly preoccupied, choosing not to comment on
how the team teases Yaku and Lev for being “so gay for each other.” He’s paying attention, though, which is an improvement in and of itself. His complexion is also beginning to take on a healthier tint.

“The real beast here is Oikawa,” Yaku proclaims, using a soggy half-eaten fry to gesture at Oikawa. “Did you see him out there today? Crazy aggressive.”

Oikawa smiles weakly, and Kageyama noticeably flinches.

“Yeah, that one dump shot was ridiculous!” Lev leans around Hinata, a stupid grin plastered to his face as he gushes. “And that time you six-packed the other team’s libero?”

Hinata nods enthusiastically, bouncing in his seat. “You hit the ball and then ‘whoosh’— he swings his arm in a wide arc and nearly clips Lev in the nose—“and then it hit him in the face like ‘thwack’ and he had a big imprint on his face for the rest of the game and—”

“And he fell back and rolled and wasn't up in time to get Bokuto-san’s spike,” Lev finishes brightly. “It was awesome!”

They’re too absorbed in their own little world to notice Kuroo and Kageyama exchange looks. Hinata doesn’t even see it coming when Kageyama elbows him in the side.

“Hey!”

“You’re rambling, dumbasses.” Kageyama sports his trademark scowl as he lectures the two loudmouth spikers.

“Thank you.”

Everyone’s heads swivel to face Oikawa.

“It was a good match,” Oikawa trills, head cocked to the side.

Oikawa is wearing that same fake ass smile he always does when he’s lying through his teeth. He reserves it specifically for moments like this, when everyone is fine and he needs to convince them that he, too, is alright. Even when he’s definitely not.

Kageyama’s frown deepens, if at all possible, and he chews angrily. Hinata and Lev look stupefied, while Bokuto stares nervously down into his plate, poking at an onion that fell off his burger. Yaku eyes Oikawa warily, eyes narrowed skeptically, but goes back to eating Kuroo’s extra fries.

“Did anyone else see their middle blocker? His weird hair?” Kuroo blurts desperately. “He looked like one of those fucking Chia pets.”

“Look who’s talking, you spiky-haired bastard,” Yaku snorts. “Poor guy must go to the same barber shop as you.”

The group erupts into laughter and heated debates and, just like that, the subject is changed.

It comes as no surprise that Oikawa doesn’t speak again for the remainder of their meal.

Oikawa doesn’t know what to do with himself.

Of course, his stupor has nothing to do with the match like it usually does. This isn’t the same as returning to his room after a big loss, sitting on his bed and staring at the ceiling until it offers the
reason for his failure. No, this has nothing to do with volleyball. It does, however, have everything to do with a certain alien.

Exhausted, mentally and physically, Oikawa trudges into his dorm. He throws open the door and tosses his volleyball bag somewhere in the general direction of his closet. The thick comforter looks even more enticing than normal, and Oikawa flops onto the mattress. Thankfully, he doesn’t have to change into clean clothes and chooses not to bother with his shoes for the time being.

Oikawa can practically feel his brain tearing into pieces as it struggles to cope with the current situation.

So, first and foremost: Iwaizumi is back.

He’s back and safe and alive and- and yet it’s not enough for Oikawa to completely forgive him. Not just yet.

Regardless of how long Iwaizumi had been gone, Oikawa finds it hard to believe there was no way to get in touch with him back on Earth. The weird cell phone knockoff Iwaizumi always kept tucked in his pocket seemed like a pretty reliable means of communication. He’d used it countless times to call or text Oikawa in the past so why…

Oikawa rolls over and buries his face in his pillow. He inhales slowly, breathing in the pleasant aroma of his detergent and faint smell of his shampoo. There had to be a reason Iwaizumi couldn’t get in touch with him. Something legitimate, something important enough to keep Iwaizumi busy.

Wait.

The mattress creaks as Oikawa turns on to his side. He stares at his desk from across the room, eyes zeroing in on the bottom drawer. He thinks back to the day he found the drawing tucked in that very same drawer, the crudely sketched picture of him and a little Iwaizumi sitting on top of a hill.

Was Iwaizumi…forced to avoid contact with Oikawa?

But why? Oikawa huffs and closes his eyes. From the stories he’s heard, Iwaizumi’s people aren’t huge fans of the human race. They seem to be at the top of their “Galactic Wastes of Space” list. Or at least that’s how Iwaizumi and Daichi made it sound.

An unsettling thought strikes Oikawa, and he shudders. Maybe Iwaizumi got in trouble? Oikawa can’t imagine what he could’ve done to piss his superiors off, but, considering the assholes they were supposed to be, he imagines it wouldn’t be that difficult a feat.

What did he do?

Did they hear him insulting his own people?

Did they-

“Shit!” Oikawa bolts upright, knocking the tiny alien head plush off his bed. “Did they hear Iwaizumi and I when we were-“

There’s no way. There’s absolutely no way those pretentious dicks overheard his and Iwaizumi’s… intimate activities. Oikawa flushes at the very thought and covers his face, whining loudly through his fingers. Talk about embarrassing. Can it even be considered voyeurism in this instance? Or is it more like one of those phone sex hotlines?
“No, no, no,” Oikawa groans, lying back down and curling his body into a sad U-shape. “That can’t be it. It just can’t.”

Of course, even if they did somehow hear a snippet of that, Iwaizumi would easily be able to talk himself out of any punishments. From the beginning, they’ve been operating under the pretenses of practicing, of teaching Iwaizumi about intimacy. Every time they kissed or hugged or, say, decided to make out shirtless after volleyball practice—they were nothing more than lessons. Nothing more than chances to feel bare skin with anxious fingers, to taste expectant mouths and explore each other’s bodies.

Or at least they were to Iwaizumi.

Oikawa had stopped seeing them as “lessons” a long time ago.

A hesitant thunk distracts Oikawa, and he turns toward the door. Narrowing his eyes suspiciously, he stares it down. Had he imagined that? It sounded like knocking. A couple seconds pass before there’s a louder and more persistent thunk.

*Of course.* Oikawa heaves a frustrated sigh and climbs to his feet. Rolling his eyes, he reaches for the door handle. “Tobio-chan, seriously, I told you I’d be fine if you wanted to go over to-“

Oikawa nearly slams the door shut on instinct.

Iwaizumi Hajime is standing on the other side, staring forlornly at the ground like a dog crawling back with its tail tucked between its legs. Oikawa feels the guilt through the crack in the door. It hangs around Iwaizumi like a storm cloud.

“Hi,” Iwaizumi says, barely more than a whisper. His voice cracks, and it tugs at Oikawa’s heart in the worst way.

“Why are you here?” Oikawa steps back, refusing to open the door further. Iwaizumi keeps his gaze resolutely fixed on the carpeted floor. He’s wearing the same outfit from the game, the clothes that look suspiciously like Kuroo’s.

“Listen, I can explain everything.” Finally, Iwaizumi glances up at Oikawa. The faint outlines of colors swirl around inside his irises. “Why I didn’t come back, why I couldn’t get in touch with you- I can explain all of it.”

Oikawa grips the door handle tighter. He can’t convince himself to shut it and let Iwaizumi yell his apologies from the outside, can’t even bring himself to utter a simple ‘no.’ If he’s learned anything from volleyball, it’s that you have to face your problems head-on. Even if those problems center on your unrequited love for an alien, who isn’t supposed to love anything or anyone in the first place.

At a loss for words, Oikawa settles for staring back into Iwaizumi’s eyes.

He must see something there because, instead of trying to force his way inside, Iwaizumi grimaces and nods. “Right,” he mumbles and nervous laughter bubbles over his lips. “Right, of course.”

*I don’t want this. I don’t want things to end like this,* Oikawa silently pleads. The words are lodged in his throat, though, and all he can do is watch as Iwaizumi struggles awkwardly to fix things.

“Can I at least give these back?”

Oikawa can’t see them at first, but Iwaizumi hesitantly sticks his arm through the crack in the door. And Oikawa’s breath catches.
The *X-Files* DVD’s.

They’re in prime condition, just as they were when Oikawa handed them off to Iwaizumi. The plastic looks a bit worn around the edges. Normally, Oikawa would scream at someone for tarnishing something from his precious sci-fi collection. But he doesn’t have the heart to comment on the detail, let alone yell about it.

Hesitantly, Oikawa opens the door, moving away to make room for Iwaizumi. Excitement and uncertainty both flicker in Iwaizumi’s eyes, lips twisting into a hopeful smile. He accepts the unspoken invitation and steps forward.

But that one step is all he gets.


Silence.

Oikawa can pinpoint the exact moment Iwaizumi’s heart shatters. His fingers, still wrapped around the DVD case, quiver, and his eyes widen. His expression collapses into one of discernible pain, evident in the tight lines around his mouth and downturned lips. The colors in his irises darken, more visible, and take on a gloomy blue tint.

“Right,” he repeats, like it’s the only word he knows, and holds the case out towards Oikawa.

Their fingers brush and Iwaizumi flinches like he’s been burned. For a split second, their eyes meet, a silent plea in Iwaizumi’s flickering irises. He drops his arm back to his side and moves back, eying Oikawa timidly. Oikawa has never seen Iwaizumi like this before. He’s always been confident, tenacious, no matter how much pain he’s in. It’s always been something Oikawa admired about Iwaizumi and now, he wishes more than anything he could bring that Iwaizumi back.

*I really don’t want it to end like this.*

Oikawa is strong, prides himself on it, but isn’t quite strong enough to open his mouth and force the words out.

The door falls shut before Oikawa can catch a final glimpse of Iwaizumi. But he doesn’t have to; he knows exactly what he’ll see.

Faintly, the sound of footsteps can be heard from the other side. Oikawa leans heavily against the door, ear pressed against its cold surface. He listens to the steady rhythm of Iwaizumi’s strides until the hallway goes silent.

Breathing a shaky sigh, Oikawa sinks to the ground. His eyes flutter shut, and the world goes dark.

Maybe it’s better this way.

Iwaizumi still hasn’t found Oikawa yet.

*As per usual on a rainy Monday, the three boys have gathered for a heated game of hide and seek. It’s kept them occupied for the last hour or so. They’re all pretty clever about choosing hiding spots so it’s certainly made things challenging. But, even so, the previous rounds haven’t taken quite this long.*
Tired of kneeling behind the television stand, Oikawa darts over to the couch. He peeks around the other side, heart pounding in his chest, and cheers silently when he finds the space empty. Hair falls in his face, and he quickly pushes it back. There’s movement in the darkness, but he can’t tell if it’s Iwaizumi or just a figment of his imagination.

Maybe he went home? Oikawa speculates sadly.

He never said he would be leaving, though, so he has to be around somewhere.

The thought of Iwaizumi running back to his house without saying ‘bye’ makes Oikawa’s chest ache. Iwaizumi said he could play for a few hours! He said his family wouldn’t mind. So there’s no way he went home. No way.

Disheartened, Oikawa moves over and sinks to the ground, propped up against the back of the couch. The hardwood floor is cold on his thighs. Goosebumps raise on his bare arms, along his calves, and Oikawa shudders. He rubs his arms in hopes of warming himself up.

He huffs and draws his knees closer to his chest, propping his chin on his bent legs.

Iwa-chan would never ditch us like that.

After countless games, they’ve come up with a short list of rules. Not strict rules, but enough to keep everyone from cheating. Which traces back to the several times Kuroo has gotten bored waiting to be found and gone home— in the middle of the game, without telling Oikawa or Iwaizumi beforehand.

It didn’t take long for them to put a stop to that.

So, Oikawa doesn’t expect Iwaizumi to quit in the middle of the game or anything. But still… there’s a distant corner of his mind that worries. Like it always does.

“Oikawa?”

Oikawa yelps and lifts his hands in surrender. Turning, he expects to see Kuroo’s round face, lips quirked in a smug grin. Instead, Iwaizumi stands near the arm of the couch, peeking around the corner and down at Oikawa. Who has leapt to his feet and currently stands in the most ridiculous fighting stance. Because he’s cool.

Right.

“This is where you’ve been hiding?” Iwaizumi scoffs, hands planted on his hips. The band-aid on his cheek has lost its stickiness and hangs there; Oikawa wants to fix it. “How did I miss you?”

Oikawa giggles and sidles up to Iwaizumi. He doesn’t mind losing to him. “Iwa-chan must not have been paying attention.”

“O-of course I was!” Iwaizumi flushes scarlet. “I just wasn’t… looking in the right place.”

“Sure, sure,” Oikawa singongs. His self-control has worn thin, and he reaches up, tiny fingers pressing the bandage back into place as best he can. By some miracle, it stays. Well, at least for the moment. “You’d never leave me back there, right, Iwa-chan?”

Iwaizumi’s brow furrows. The expression makes him look older, more mature. It’s kind of unsettling. “Of course not. Why would you think that?”
“You were taking a while so I thought maybe-”

“No, I would never,” Iwaizumi interjects and pauses for a second, big eyes brimming with surprise. His vehemence startles even him. “I mean… that would be against the rules.”

“But Kuroo would never know. You found him a long time ago, yeah?”

“I don’t cheat!”

“I know, Iwa-chan, but-”

“I wouldn’t just leave you like that,” Iwaizumi mumbles. He folds his arms across his chest and glances away. “That would be… that would be mean.”

It’s Oikawa’s turn to be surprised.

He’s never seen Iwaizumi so flustered. And over something like this? Over a game?

“It would,” Oikawa agrees with a quick nod. “But it’s just hide and seek, Iwa-chan. No big deal.”

Iwaizumi turns on his heel. His neck is flushed the same pink color of his cheeks, and he runs his fingers nervously through his spiky hair. “Still. You don’t leave a friend behind.”

With that, he stalks away. Probably in search of Kuroo who is nowhere to be seen.

But Oikawa can’t will his feet to move. He’s rooted to the spot, staring at Iwaizumi’s back. A small smile tugs at his lips as he watches Iwaizumi look behind the bookshelves.

He always knew Iwaizumi was mature for his age. Spend more than five minutes with him, and it’s abundantly clear. He’s probably smarter than most adults Oikawa knows. Responsible, too. His home, spaceship, whatever, must have been strict.

Iwaizumi is alien in every sense of the word. And yet…

With every passing day, he seems more and more human.

So, this is what it’s come to.

Oikawa rolls over, groans echoing off the walls of his room. The bed creaks beneath him, and he watches in quiet fascination as his arm flops over the edge of the mattress. Bending and flexing, tendons and bone. He sighs and purses his lips, eyes flitting to the door.

Iwaizumi came back.

The realization still has yet to settle in. It sits in the middle of a maelstrom of crazy and confusing thoughts, all jumbled and tangled together. Oikawa has never been this conflicted before in his entire life.

You should’ve invited him in and talked it over. Instead of kicking him out like a brat throwing a tantrum, Oikawa’s subconscious chides. He wants to tell the little voice to shut up and leave him to wallow in his own self-pity, but it’s right.

When he’d seen Iwaizumi, every ounce of anger inside his body surfaced, rearing its ugly and heartbroken head. Any sense of rationality he possessed at the moment was shoved gracelessly to the back of his mind. Standing there, exhausted and desperate at Oikawa’s front door, Iwaizumi
had come to explain himself.

And Oikawa hadn’t let him.

“Dammit,” Oikawa mumbles, lips smushed against his pillow. “You should’ve at least let him come inside.”

Maybe, just maybe, Iwaizumi has a good reason for not staying in touch. Maybe he has a sound explanation for everything that’s happened, everything he has and hasn’t done. And what’d Oikawa do? He treated him coldly; he didn’t even hear him out.

_Shit._

He has to go fix this- immediately.

Frantic, Oikawa wiggles his body nearer to the edge of his bed and reaches for his backpack. Baby blue straps fall to the side as he unzips one of the smaller compartments on the front side. Tucked in a pocket inside, Oikawa pulls out the bus schedule.

He nearly drops it in his haste and curses, unfolding the wrinkled pages. His eyes quickly skim over the page. There should be at least one or two buses in the area at this time of day. Thankfully, his memory serves him right and there, labeled in red, is the bus he needs.

“I’m coming, Iwa-chan,” Oikawa calls out to the empty room and jumps to his feet. His foot gets caught in his blanket, though, and, all too fast, he’s falling flat on his stomach. Hard.

“You’ve got to be- why the hell-” The blow knocked all the breath out of his lungs. He grumbles his frustrations to no one in particular and grudgingly climbs to his feet, wincing at the pain.

“Oh thank goodness.”

Excitement tugs Oikawa to the door. His legs move effortlessly and, for now, the ache in his stomach is forgotten. Who cares about a little pain when Iwaizumi’s at his door? And, okay, there’s a possibility he skipped across the room but he could care less about that either.

“Iwa-chan, good, I was just about to…”

But it isn’t Iwaizumi.

Oikawa would know that face anywhere, and this particular face doesn’t belong to Iwaizumi. Not even close.

The figure, for lack of a better word, resembles a wraith. Some ghastly creature from the pages of a grisly horror novel or from the nightmares of a child whose imagination has run wild. Huge, oval-shaped eyes fix on Oikawa, a dangerous glint in its striking triangular pupils. The stranger’s skin stands out against the suit jacket hanging loosely off its thin frame, bruised purple shrouded in white.

Dread rushes thick and heady through Oikawa’s system at the sight of the newcomer. He swallows down the sudden lump in his throat.
“Ah, you must be Oikawa Tooru, the terran Subject,” the stranger purrs. His lips part to reveal a mouth full of teeth, filed to sinister points. “I’ve heard so much about you.”
nowhere is safe?

Chapter Summary

In which Iwaizumi isn’t even safe in his own apartment and worrying finally gets Kuroo into trouble.

Chapter Notes

spring semester is over so you know what that means: a new chapter!!!!!! I’m so excited for this summer and extra time to write! hopefully i’ll be able to finish these last few chapters within the next several weeks… this one is fairly short, but there’s a reason for that. i imagine the last ones will be longer.

there aren’t any warnings for this chapter… but i have another product link for you all!! here’s the welcome mat oikawa has outside his and kageyama’s dorm room if you’re interested. another mix, likely the last one, is in the works and here are the other 5 mixes for your listening pleasure (x x x x x) also, here’s all of the art for this fic (x). please don’t hesitate to let me know if you’re making something for this fic!!!!

as always, my betas are a fantastic help, and i can’t thank my readers enough!! there was a huge influx of comments after the last chapter, which thrilled me beyond belief. people i’d never interacted with were coming out of the woodwork and it was amazing ahhh [hugs all of you close] i hope you enjoy this update and heh… please don’t kill me for the ending…

So making amends with Oikawa certainly didn’t go as planned.

Iwaizumi lets his apartment door slam shut behind him. The loud thunk of it closing hardly registers in his mind, and he silently stalks past the kitchen, past the television and empty couch, pale blue blanket folded neatly on one of the arms. His bedroom feels farther away than usual, distant and yet so close.

He presses his palms to the door and it falls open. Everything is as he remembered, not a single piece of furniture out of place. The bed and nightstand hold their respective spots, the closet looks untouched, a pile of textbooks still sits on the small bookshelf near the entranceway. Iwaizumi heaves a sigh and starts undressing. He tosses Kuroo’s clothes on his bed in a careless pile and tenses at the chill hanging in the air, seeping through his bare skin and sinking into his bones.

You have to take your mind off this, he silently reminds himself. His body is running on autopilot, a machine fueled by frustration and guilt. Even his movements are robotic. Jerky steps and stiff back, glazed over eyes and listlessness. Not an ounce of motivation. He pulls a random shirt and pair of sweatpants out of his dresser and slips each on. His gaze slides to the mirror, and he checks his reflection.
There are bags under his eyes, and barely visible colors flicker around his irises. He watches, mystified, as his tongue slowly glides over chapped lips. Other than the purplish skin beneath his eyes, his complexion is paler than usual. Like a ghost.

“Food,” he mumbles. He should eat, but the last thing he feels like doing is ingesting something that’ll make his already queasy stomach burst.

Stumbling out of the room on unsteady legs, Iwaizumi makes his way into the kitchen. He opens the fridge and bends over, peering inside. The strong and noxious odor of rotten vegetables and mold hangs in the air, and Iwaizumi clamps his nose shut. A plastic case of blueberries, leftover fried rice in its original takeout container, a carton of strawberry milk-

Iwaizumi panics and the handle slips from his hand. The fridge closes with a solid, resonant sound.

Oikawa trudges out of the bedroom, scratching absentmindedly at the sliver of visible skin near the hem of his shirt. Hair sticks up at strange, gravity-defying angles, and the faint lines of a pillow can be seen clearly on his right cheek. He blinks the sleep from his eyes and walks toward the fridge, acknowledging Iwaizumi with a brief “morning.”

“Please tell me we’re not out of- oh thank goodness,” Oikawa says with a relieved exhale. He reaches into the fridge and pulls out the carton of strawberry milk from the top shelf. It holds a permanent position there and has ever since Oikawa started paying frequent visits to the apartment. The pink label is far too bright and cheery for this early hour.

Iwaizumi shudders.

“Want a glass, Iwa-chan?” Oikawa smiles, all innocent and equally as cheery as the sweet drink’s packaging. “You said you’d try it one day.”

“Not this morning,” Iwaizumi answers and goes back to pushing his scrambled eggs around the frying pan.

He doesn’t have to look to see the pout shaping Oikawa’s lips. “You say that every morning.”

“It would taste weird with eggs,” Iwaizumi quips weakly.

“And you always use that excuse, too,” Oikawa groans. He pads up to the oven and dangles his arms over Iwaizumi’s shoulders, fingers lightly skimming over his chest. “So stubborn.”

“I’ll try it one day, I promise.” Iwaizumi turns his head and places a quick kiss at the corner of Oikawa’s lips. He lingers for a second, just long enough to pull a satisfied gasp from Oikawa’s mouth, and then draws away. As hoped, the gesture puts a soft smile on his face.

“I’ll hold you to that.”

Iwaizumi leans against the refrigerator. His throat is suddenly tight, constricted, and he can hardly breathe.

He still has yet to try it.

“Shit,” he mumbles. For a moment, he stays there. Partly because he can’t will his body to move and partly because he forgets how. Tense limbs refuse to obey his brain’s desperate pleas, rooting him to the spot.

Eventually, he manages to straighten up and move away from the kitchen. It’s clearly not the safest
place for him right now. Food will have to wait. He isn’t even sure he could stomach a mere handful of crackers at the moment anyway.

His feet carry him to the living room. The couch is a welcome reprieve for his wobbly legs, and he sits carefully, perched on the edge of the cushions. It’s warm, comforting, and not nearly as cramped as the kitchen.

*T.V. is usually a good distraction, right? Maybe one of those weird reality shows is on.* Iwaizumi snatches the remote off the table and flicks the television on.

Without warning, a snarling face fills the screen. The elongated head, glistening black skin and rows of fangs-

Iwaizumi jumps and sinks farther back into the couch, knees pressed together. He knows this movie. Oh, he knows it all too well: *Alien.*

The universe really has a twisted fucking sense of humor.

A science fiction movie and one of Oikawa’s favorites— it figures. Iwaizumi quickly switches the television off and flings the remote toward the opposite end of the couch. Considering his luck, he’d start flipping through the channels and every sci-fi program known to man would be on.

Better not to chance it.

“So, no living room either. Good to know,” he comments dryly and stands.

Just when he thinks his only option is leaving, putting as much distance between himself and any Oikawa-related things as possible, a shiny object catches his eye. It’s sitting on the coffee table, within reach. Iwaizumi squints. It takes him a second to realize what it is.

“Oh, shit, that’s right.” His fingers grapple for his Substitute. Iwaizumi had forgotten he’d set it down on the way to his room.

Since he left Daichi and Sugawara at the hospital, he hasn’t had the opportunity to check in on them; it’s the perfect diversion.

Hastily, Iwaizumi types out a message asking about Sugawara. From what he saw of his injury, it could’ve been worse. A lot worse. But it also could’ve been better. Not that it makes a difference to Daichi. Iwaizumi can only imagine the worried, jittery mess the hospital has to deal with while Sugawara recovers.

To: Daichi

From: Iwaizumi

*hey, is suga alright? he looked pretty rough back there*

Iwaizumi stares intently at the screen, hoping his influence reaches through the phone. A couple seconds pass, and the device vibrates in his hands. Anxious, he opens his inbox.
To: Iwaizumi
From: Daichi

He’s fine, hopefully will be released soon. I’m more worried about you

Dammit. Iwaizumi glares down at the message. Leave it to Daichi to turn it around on him like this.

To: Daichi
From: Iwaizumi

i’m fine, i swear. just have to sleep off this exhaustion and everything will be fine. nothing to worry about

To: Iwaizumi
From: Daichi

We’re talking about this when I get home

The short, concise answer sends a chill down Iwaizumi’s spine. He knows that icy tone, even without hearing the words spoken out loud. The message is just another way of saying, “You bet your ass I’m going to lecture you for a solid hour about your life choices.”

Iwaizumi curses loudly. Seriously, is nowhere safe?

Once again, the device vibrates. Iwaizumi rolls his eyes and goes to check the incoming text- only to pause just as he reads the displayed notification. A gray face, the sort of contact photo that comes preinstalled on normal cell phones, fills the screen, along with a number he’s never seen before.

There are only a handful of individuals who have his Substitute information. And even fewer have their cell phone number stored in his contacts.

A quivering thumb slides over the screen, and Iwaizumi holds the device up to his ear. “Hello?”

“I’m surprised you answered.”

Iwaizumi’s blood runs cold. That voice. That voice.

“What do you want?” he blurts, fingers clenching tighter around his Substitute.

“Oh, nothing,” the voice hums, “I already have what I want.”

The room starts to turn around Iwaizumi. His hand, the one resting on the couch, clamps around the edge of the cushion. “What?”
“Something important to you.” A pause. “That’s all.”

“What’s important to-“

The Substitute drops out of Iwaizumi’s hand. His stomach turns along with the room, spinning, wild and disjoined. Eyes wide, he leans forward and props his palms on the table. Quick intakes of breath and his head joins the chaotic spiraling dance into panic.

He gasps, just as he manages to clamber to his feet, “Oikawa.”

“I’m sorry, the person you’re trying to reach is not-“

“Of fucking course,” Kuroo grumbles.

He’s been trying to get in touch with Oikawa for what feels like hours and still, nothing. The same voicemail every time, tinny voice mocking him. It’s frustrating. Maddening.

And has pushed Kuroo to this point.

Glancing down at the phone sitting in his lap, Kuroo groans. The bus is abnormally quiet today, not that he’s complaining. Usually at this hour, the damned thing is packed with people, oppressive body heat surrounding you from every side. Each passenger gets a square foot to themselves. Which, considering someone of Kuroo’s size, isn’t a lot. Far from it.

But not only does he have a seat this time around, he isn’t squished between other people. He can easily turn to look out the window and watch the scenery pass by. He can enjoy the trip instead of dreading every passing second like he normally does. Unfortunately, though, his brain is a fucking mess at the moment.

Kuroo has seen Oikawa upset hundreds of times- thousands, even. Oikawa mastered the art of concealing his feelings ages ago. Sometimes, he wonders if Oikawa was born wearing a carefully crafted mask of feigned indifference. If it’s reached the point where Oikawa can’t hide behind his fake smile, something is definitely wrong. No, scratch that. More dire than just “wrong.” Try “the world is about to end at any second” proportions of wrong.

Oikawa isn’t the type to wallow in self-loathing, isn’t the type to stay holed up in his room and, most importantly, isn’t the type to funnel his anger into his game play.

Since Oikawa stepped on the court, Kuroo knew something was off. He and Kageyama had both briefly discussed it before the game but, in the end, there’s nothing they could’ve done. If Oikawa wanted to play and had enough presence of mind to play well, there was nothing keeping him out of the game.

The source of Oikawa’s strange behavior is no secret, but it does little to comfort Kuroo. As a matter of fact, it only makes him worry more. Kuroo may not be an expert on love or matters of the heart or whatever the hell you wanted to call it, but he is an expert on Oikawa. He’s never felt this strongly about anyone before, not that Kuroo remembers. And to think the first person Oikawa cared for left him…

The bus eventually comes to a stop. Kuroo is up immediately, pushing past the few passengers onboard with mumbled apologies. “Sorry, just trying to save the world, people. Nothing to see here.”

The second his feet touch the ground, Kuroo is hit by a gust of wind. He curses and walks faster.
There’s a thunderstorm coming, no question about it. Dark clouds lazily cross the sky, the earthy scent of impending rain carried by the breeze. The last thing Kuroo needs is to get caught up in a torrential downpour.

He starts walking faster, practically jogging, and shoves his way into the dorm building. The hallways, too, are quiet. The oncoming storm has chased students back to their rooms for the time being, and Kuroo takes full advantage of the situation. He refuses to wait for the elevator and climbs the stairs leading to Oikawa’s dorm two steps at a time.

“You better thank me for this later, Tooru,” Kuroo yells. The words echo off the walls, resounding, lost to the world.

Kuroo pushes through another door and sprints down hallway after hallway, using muscle memory to navigate the maze of passages. A few wary students watch as he runs past, but they’ve probably seen far stranger things in these halls. They say nothing.

From this distance, nothing seems out of the ordinary. Oikawa’s door remains on its hinges, the “All Species Welcome” mat still sits in its rightful place. Kuroo silently hopes Oikawa is inside and simply fell asleep; it would explain the countless missed calls.

Hesitantly, Kuroo knocks on the door. He expects a delay or maybe an angry, “Come back later!” A small part of him even expects Iwaizumi to open the door.

But that’s certainly not what he gets.

The door opens, and Kuroo blanches. He opens his mouth to scream but never gets the chance. A burst of pain explodes through his body and he drops to the ground. Everything goes black.
striking a deal

Chapter Summary

In which Oikawa realizes something important and everyone is a bit self-sacrificing.

Chapter Notes

I’M ALIVE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! AND SO IS THIS STORY!! okay so quick explanation for anyone who doesn’t follow me on twitter: i injured myself and am currently trying to recover. considering it was a neck injury, it made writing very difficult. but things are looking up! the chapter is finally done!

now, speaking of this chapter, there is some mild violence? i guess you could say? and a few brief mentions of blood. other than that, no real warnings. another mix, likely the last one, is in the works and here are the other 5 mixes for your listening pleasure (x x x x x) also, here’s all of the art for this fic (x). please don’t hesitate to let me know if you’re making something for this fic!!!!

a big big BIG thanks to my betas for sticking around and helping out!! couldn’t do this without you! also a huge thanks to all of the readers who have stuck around this long. kudos, comments, and bookmarks are always appreciated and, as my one beta said, “good to see it's lonely on hiatus is back.” enjoy!!

Disorientated doesn’t even begin to describe how Oikawa feels when he wakes up.

The simple task of opening his eyes is far more trying than he anticipates. A thick haze hangs over everything and, for a moment, distantly, he wonders if he’s still in his dorm room. He remembers lying in his bed, worrying over Iwaizumi, deciding to hitch a bus ride to Iwaizumi’s apartment to try and-

Oh no.

There had been someone else at his door instead of Iwaizumi, someone very not Iwaizumi. Oikawa cringes inwardly at the memory of the stranger’s hideous purple skin and massive oval-shaped eyes. The wraith, standing in his entranceway as if he belonged there. Oikawa only had a few moments to absorb the intruder’s grotesque appearance before he was- yes, he had been knocked out.

The memory strikes a nerve, and Oikawa squeezes his eye shut. His head pounds, a new and throbbing pain. He goes to touch his face, but something scratchy resists the movement. Horrified, Oikawa drops his chin to his chest. The white cloud shrouding his surroundings, much like fog circling the mountaintops, starts to recede, just enough for him to stare into his lap.

Thick, tan coils of rope are wrapped around his wrists.
Oikawa’s instincts scream at him to fight against his restraints. It hurts, his subconscious protests, but the rest of his body pays no mind. His restlessness proves futile, of course, but gives him more clues about his situation. The jostling forces Oikawa backward, meeting further resistance. He goes to move again and hesitates, gaze caught on his legs.

Which are also secured in place by rope.

Awareness hits Oikawa like a slap to the face. As he blinks back the haze of disorientation, he notes the full extent of his bindings. He’s secured to what appears to be a wooden chair, and the ground looks like concrete. His gaze sweeps up and around to further acquaint himself with his surroundings.

Gray walls, streaked with grime, surround him. In several places, graffiti adds a splash of color in an otherwise drab space. Large block letters proclaim the names of visitors long past. The remnants of massive shelving units litter the floor, along with plaster pieces and other garbage. Light fixtures line the ceiling but Oikawa can only imagine the last time they had functioning bulbs.

The building seems old, likely abandoned, and Oikawa decides his chances of being rescued are awfully low.

Frustrated, he leans back and, just as he's about to try and cry out, he notices a figure beside him. They're in a similar situation, body also bound by rope. Oikawa looks the person over, starting from their legs, outfitted in gray sweatpants, up to their chest and over what appear to be strong biceps-

“Tetsurou?” The name slips out before Oikawa can silence himself. Disbelief and concern flood his system all at once.

To his surprise, Kuroo lifts his head. It lolls back against the chair, and he flashes Oikawa a groggy smile.

“Yo,” he answers, strained. A small patch of scarlet flakes- blood, Oikawa realizes with a start- are visible above his lip and around his nose. As if someone had hit him.

“What the hell is going on?” Oikawa immediately hates how afraid he sounds. “Where are we?”

“Both very good questions,” Kuroo scoffs, “Which I don't have the answers to.”

Oikawa resists the urge to scream. The stranger at his door must've brought him here. He hadn't seen or spoken to anyone else since that horrifying moment. But… if that were the case, did that also mean…

“Someone hit you,” Oikawa says, tone caught somewhere between matter-of-fact and questioning.

Kuroo snorts. “Just a little tap.”

Oikawa shudders at the thought of Kuroo getting smacked by the wide, rough palm of their kidnapper.

“I don't know what's going on,” Kuroo admits, “but I think we're both in deep shit. We need to-”

“Looks like you're both awake.”

Oikawa and Kuroo turn sharply in the direction of the new voice. Haunting, smooth with a hint of something eerie and commanding, the words hang in the air. A bright light streams through a crack
in the massive door on the opposite side of the room. Oikawa squints, trying to bring everything into focus.

The dark silhouette of a figure slowly comes into view. Tall and thin, the sight sends a nervous shiver down Oikawa’s spine. For a moment, he wonders if the Grim Reaper himself has finally come to take him away.

It walks purposefully toward them, each step deliberate and calculated. The movements are vaguely robotic. As it comes closer, Oikawa gets a better glimpse of their kidnapper.

The wraith.

“I hope you slept well,” the creature addresses them. He sweeps his arm around, motioning at the entirety of the room. “This makes for a suitable resting place, yes?”

“Who are you?” Oikawa asks through gritted teeth.

“I’m surprised he never mentioned me. Considering everything else he decided to tell you.”

“He…?”

“You know very well who I mean,” the stranger says, unwavering. And dangerous. Kuroo remains silent, but the weight of his stare, boring into the side of Oikawa’s head, doesn’t go unnoticed.

“And you know what he is,” the wraith continues. Again, the timbre of his voice is far from uncertain. The creature seems to be in the habit of asking questions he already knows the answers to. “Don’t you, Oikawa Tooru?”

Oikawa cringes at the ugly hiss of his name. “Yes.”

The stranger suddenly turns his attention toward Kuroo, neck snapping with a barely audible and unsettling crick. His lips curl in the grim ghost of a smile and both rows of neatly filed teeth gleam in the dingy lighting.

“Now, you,” he drawls, savoring each syllable, “are a different story.”

Oikawa shifts in his seat. Fear courses through his veins, and he can’t take his eyes off Kuroo. He doesn’t belong here, Oikawa’s subconscious complains. He doesn’t belong here, in this place. About to die like me.

“That’s what I’m gathering, Skeletor,” Kuroo answers with a surprising surge of conviction. Oikawa bows his head to cover up his smirk.

“Quite the tongue on this one.” The wraith takes a step closer and bends down until his face is level with Kuroo’s. A hand drops solidly on Kuroo’s thigh and squeezes. “It would be best for you to hold that tongue of yours, though. Or perhaps it would be easier to simply… remove it?”

Kuroo releases a tiny grunt of pain, and Oikawa tugs against his restraints. “Don’t,” he blurs.

The creature glances in his direction. Triangular pupils fix on Oikawa, searching for something. He probes into what feels like the deepest, darkest depths of Oikawa’s soul, gaze poignant and piercing. A few seconds of heavy silence pass before he releases Kuroo and stands. His eyes never once leave Oikawa. “He doesn’t remember.”

“No,” Oikawa says, “he doesn’t.”
“You haven’t told him.”

“Obviously not.” Oikawa is toeing a very narrow line; the wrong words could easily get them killed. “But you sound surprised.”

A strange noise—laughter—falls from the stranger’s mouth. If at all possible, it’s more unsettling than his usual speaking voice. Oikawa reflexively shrinks back against his chair, hands restless in his lap. There’s no doubt in his mind that this ghastly figure is connected to Iwaizumi— and not in a pleasant way. Kidnapping the people closest to Iwaizumi certainly hinted at sinister intentions. And Oikawa would love nothing more than to give this bastard a piece of his mind, especially after the few stories he’s heard about Iwaizumi’s past on the ship.

“Humans are such a clever species,” the creature guffaws, moving closer to Oikawa. “Well, their mouths are clever. Their intelligence, however, is lacking.”

Oikawa tenses. The word springs to his mind without warning: a Supervisor.

“You’re his boss,” Oikawa manages to say before the wraith can make another move to strike Kuroo. “You’re Iwaizumi’s superior.”

Something about the realization must spark Kuroo’s memory. The faint creaking of the chair beneath Kuroo’s shifting and cursing form follows in the wake of Oikawa’s words. “Son of a bi—”

“Ah, so he has at least told you a bit about his time with us,” the Supervisor sneers. “He seems to have forgotten his origins since rolling around in the dirt with terran apes. It’s a shame.”

“How did you do it?” Oikawa demands.

“How the hell did you wipe my memory?” Stale air filters through Oikawa’s nostrils as he draws in a shaky breath. “What… What’d you do to me?”

Purple, gnarled fingers curl against the Superior’s chest. He has the nerve to look offended. “You make it sound like we hurt you.”

Oikawa opens his mouth to speak, to scream and reprimand this hideous creature responsible for years’ worth of tampered memories. But some boisterous, phlegmy noise cuts him off. “Rather, I would say we saved you.”

A step forward, shoes clicking against cold concrete. “Poor human… you stumbled upon one of the universe’s greatest secrets. And at such a young age. An infant, really, considering the life expectancies of your galactic counterparts.” The Supervisor pauses, and Oikawa swears he can see his pupils pulsate. “There is no way we could allow such a monumental piece of information to fall into the wrong hands. We had to fix our— the young Iwaizumi’s mistake before more terrans learned of our interference.”

“So you messed around with some kid’s head?” Kuroo butts in. “To save your own sorry asses?”

Slowly, the Supervisor turns to Kuroo. There’s a split second of eye contact, a moment of Kuroo bravely (yet stupidly) facing the enemy, before the resounding smack of skin against skin cracks through the air like a whip. Kuroo’s head jerks back, face contorting in pain. “No!” Oikawa cries hoarsely.

Thankfully, he reclaims the Supervisor’s attention. His plea is met with the toothy grin of an
excited predator closing in on its prey. “But you,” he purrs, motioning at Oikawa, “you ask how we did it.” Bending at the waist, the wraith leans until there’s only a matter of centimeters between his face and Oikawa’s. His breath is acrid, like a chain smoker who miraculously lived to be ninety years old. “We toyed with your measly memories until they no longer included our little Researcher. Just as we did with your foul-mouthed friend over there.” A beat. “And Iwaizumi Hajime.”

The world stutters to a halt. It cradles Oikawa’s lungs in its expansive hands and squeezes, robbing him of every inhale, every exhale, he had yet to breathe. They tampered with Iwaizumi’s memories. They made him forget everything. They made him forget me.

All this time, he wanted to punish Iwaizumi for matters he had no control over. These weeks of worrying and wondering why Iwaizumi hadn’t told him about their childhood sooner- it all made sense now. Iwaizumi wasn’t being careless or rude. Hell, he wasn’t even withholding information to protect Oikawa. Although, the latter would’ve been an exceptional enough excuse in Oikawa’s book.

No, Iwaizumi never mentioned their past because he never knew he and Oikawa shared a past to begin with.

Oikawa jerks against his restraints before he can think better of it. “You-”

A loud clamor breaks through the conversation, and the Supervisor jumps back. Panicking, Oikawa glances from left to right, sweeping the area for the source of the sound. The unmistakable rhythm of footsteps echo throughout the room. Down at the opposite end of the dilapidated building, Oikawa catches two shadowy silhouettes against the sunlight filtering through the entranceway.

Oikawa recognizes the tone, the lilt and lull of syllables, the timbre and power of each word, immediately.

“Don’t touch him.”

Iwaizumi is motivated by one thing and one thing only: protect Oikawa.

It pulls every word from his mouth, controls every step forward. It’s the reason he finds the patience and presence of mind to retrieve Daichi. It’s the reason he’s able to formulate a plan (of sorts) and pinpoint the location of Oikawa’s kidnapper. And it’s the reason he bursts through the doors at the entrance of the abandoned warehouse, Daichi in tow.

The plan- if it could even be considered that- involved he and Daichi tracking Oikawa’s cell phone. Luckily, the Supervisor hadn’t thought to leave it behind when he took Oikawa. Iwaizumi had no trouble determining its location. Once he finished, he and Daichi decided the only way to address the Supervisor was confront him head-on.

No more dancing around the real issue. No more avoiding the truth of what he and Daichi had done.

So here they are, bursting through the warehouse doors. Operating without any semblance of a strategy.

Even Iwaizumi is surprised by his tone when he addresses the Supervisor from across the room.
Jagged, sharp around the edges. The single sentence cuts through the air like the fatal slice of a sharpened blade. As hoped, the Supervisor freezes.

His head snaps in Iwaizumi’s direction, snake eyes wide and almost... excited.

“You actually came,” he calls back, amused. “I was starting to wonder if you would.”

Iwaizumi feels his lip curl in disgust. “What the hell are you doing?”

“Cutting right to the chase, I see.” The monstrosity straightens back up and steps away from Oikawa. Long, knobby fingers curl against his clothed thigh. “And you brought the source of the corruption along with you. How pleasant.”

Daichi fidgets at Iwaizumi’s side but says nothing.

“You’re endangering the life of a valuable Subject and have the nerve to call us corrupt?” Iwaizumi moves- can’t stop himself from moving- until only a few feet stand between him and his superior. “Everything about our shitshow of a government is corrupt.”

“Lovely language, as always.” The Supervisor glances at Daichi, and Iwaizumi takes the opportunity to check on Oikawa. Head bowed, he sits slumped in his chair. The loud smack of a shoe’s sole on concrete reclaims Iwaizumi’s attention. “And still horribly rude. Are you not talking to me right now?”

“What have you done to him?” Iwaizumi hisses. Oikawa looks unharmed, but, considering the level of their technology, the bastard could’ve easily poisoned Oikawa in a way that exhibits no visible symptoms. And, for the first time, Iwaizumi realizes Oikawa isn’t alone.

**Kuroo?**

A spike of anger ripples through Iwaizumi’s body at the unmistakable sight of blood. While Oikawa appears to be unharmed, Kuroo looks like he’s at least been punched. If not worse.

“And him-” Iwaizumi gestures at Kuroo, fury trickling into his voice- “Why him? What the hell are you trying to do?”

The Superior grins, exposing his fangs. “Sadly, I believe this is the only way to get your attention.” His eyes flick to Daichi. “Both of your attention.”

“Kidnapping my Subject and his friend? That’s your grand solution?”

“Don’t try to act innocent,” the Supervisor growls, “You’ve made a mockery of our people. Not only did you form an-” he pauses, gritting out the next word as if it physically pains him- “intimate relationship with a human. Not just any species- a human! But you also attempted to have said human teach you about emotions. Unnecessary ones. Love.”

Iwaizumi cautiously inches forward. He doesn’t like the superior’s tone; the conversation is taking a precarious turn. And Iwaizumi isn’t letting this monster lay a hand on Oikawa.

“Well, this human has taught me more in the short amount of time I’ve been here on Earth than my own people have after *years* of training me,” Iwaizumi replies. The Supervisor recoils from the bold declaration. “He’s wise in a way the Supervisors can never be.”

“Take that back.” Icy, cold enough to make the room temperature drop.
“I would if I didn’t believe it.”


“You and I both know it’s the truth.”

“Another word out of your mouth and—”

Before the Supervisor can place himself between Iwaizumi and Oikawa, Iwaizumi steps to the side and darts past him. The building becomes a blur. A litany of **protect him, protect him, protect him** echoes around inside Iwaizumi’s skull. He stops and spreads his legs, lifts his arms, assuming a protective stance right in front of Oikawa. He’ll be a wall if he has to.

“You can take my head. But don’t touch them.” Iwaizumi glances to where Daichi still stands, jaw set and clearly terrified. “Or him. Don’t you dare fucking touch him.”

The Supervisor scoffs. “What are you trying to say, my dear Researcher? That you will return to the very ship you escaped from in order to- to save a couple of human beings and a faulty Mentor?”

Iwaizumi stays silent and stares back into the monster’s flickering gaze. Unblinking.

“What a shame it is to lose a brilliant mind such as your own,” the Supervisor says, voice thick with disappointment.

“You can’t!”

Iwaizumi’s brain short-circuits. Every head in the room turns to face the new voice. Surprisingly alert, eyes wide and frantic, Oikawa strains against his binds.

“Oikawa—”

“Please don’t do this,” he reiterates, desperate, “Please don’t hurt him!”

The last time Iwaizumi spoke to Oikawa, he was pissed. Beyond frustrated. *Hurt*. He’d been lied to for most of his life, walking around with tainted memories and no prior knowledge of his closest childhood friend. He had every right to be furious. And, although Iwaizumi was riddled of the same memories, he should’ve been strong enough in the past to prevent such a thing from ever happening to begin with. Oikawa deserved worlds better.

But now… Oikawa doesn’t seem upset with Iwaizumi anymore.

“You can kill me! I’m just a stupid human, right?” Oikawa laughs, choppy and broken. “But he’s one of the smartest people in the entire universe. If anyone should live, it’s him.”

Iwaizumi feels warmth spreading through his chest. It’s the same sort of feeling he used to get when Daichi complimented his work. It’s the same sort of feeling he used to get when he finally understood something in class. And it’s a feeling he’s only beginning to grasp after spending time with Oikawa: pride. And, quickly on its tail, a surge of fondness so powerful that it almost forces him to his knees.

“Foolish,” the Supervisor cries, “All of you!”

“A deal,” Daichi finally speaks, drawing their superior’s attention away. “Why don’t we make a deal.”
Silence descends upon the room. Iwaizumi holds his breath, torn between staring at Oikawa and keeping an eye on the only person in the building hell-bent on killing someone. Daichi stands taut like a bow about to snap.

“A deal.” The Supervisor tests the word. “A deal with… you.”

Iwaizumi half expects Kuroo to make a snide comment, but the poor guy hasn’t so much as opened his mouth since they arrived.

“Yes,” Daichi says, “Discipline me. Everyone else walks free. I’ll take the punishment.”

“Daichi-”

“Contrary to what you think, everyone here is innocent. I’m his Mentor. If anything, I should’ve stopped him long before the situation got out of hand.”

“I suppose you have a point,” the Supervisor hums, considering. “You are the root of the problem.”

“No, I’m the one at fault!” Iwaizumi shouts. He can’t take this. Daichi has to live; he’s finally found someone to share, understand and appreciate life with. He has to live. “Take me!”

“Iwaizumi, stop!” Oikawa’s chair screeches and scratches along the floor. “Stop!”

“Woah, woah, hold up!”

The sudden outcry shuts everyone up. And all focus turns to the most unlikely source.

“If we’re really having a competition to determine who’s the most ‘useless’ or whatever,” Kuroo carries on, undeterred by the four awestruck expressions directed his way. “It’s gotta be me. I’m just a college volleyball player.” He shrugs. “Easy peasy.”

Iwaizumi blinks. He’s never been more confused in his entire life.

“No, you are most certainly not volunteering yourself for this-”

“Kuroo-kun, please stay out of this-”

“Are you out of your damn mind-”

Everyone starts talking at once, and Kuroo shrinks back into his chair. “Fine, fine, holy shit. I was only trying to help!”

Then, it happens.

No less disgusting and grating than it normally is, the sharp sound snaps through the cacophony of noise, troubling, commanding of attention. The Supervisor is bent backwards, head tilted towards the ceiling with his arms clutching at his stomach. His entire body convulses from the force and all anyone can do is look on in stupefied silence.

“Insane,” the Supervisor manages between manic cackles, “Absolutely insane! I knew humanity was crazy, but not to this extent.” He shakes his head. “What am I supposed to do with this self-sacrificing nonsense?”

Iwaizumi opens his mouth to volunteer himself yet again, but the Supervisor lifts a silencing palm out towards him.
“Yes, yes, you would like to take the blame.” The Supervisor fixes Iwaizumi with his serpentine stare. There’s nothing menacing about it, though, and the almost child-like curiosity dancing in his irises catches Iwaizumi completely off guard. “You would sacrifice your own life for one measly human?”

Iwaizumi doesn’t even hesitate. “Yes.”

Oikawa’s gaze bores holes into the back of Iwaizumi’s head, but he remains facing forward, hoping his determination reaches the Supervisor. There isn’t an ounce of joking in his confession; he would die without any second thought if it meant Oikawa’s safety.

The Supervisor sighs. Long-suffering, it stretches on forever in the charged silence of the warehouse. “So it appears we will have to strike up a deal after all.”

Iwaizumi immediately perks up. On the other side of the Supervisor, he notices Daichi do the same.

“I will let everyone in this room live,” he starts, slowly, “if you abide by my conditions.”

At once, a resounding “yes” meets the Supervisor’s proposal. Iwaizumi would love to protest, never one to trust the officials, but there are no other options. This is his best chance at keeping the people he cares about safe.

“Firstly, you may never return to our ship. You will lose your titles and be stripped of all future responsibilities and missions.” Daichi and Iwaizumi both nod in agreement, Daichi with slightly more hesitance. “Secondly, you must not speak of our species to anyone outside of those who already know of our existence. We will surely know if humans catch word of us.”

Kuroo groans. “Well, damn, that sucks. The boys would’ve loved-”

“Tetsu-chan, please be quiet,” Oikawa interjects. It isn’t much but the familiar nickname soothes Iwaizumi.

“And lastly, you must never interfere. If you experience another of our workers here on Earth, you mustn't have any involvement with their mission.”

That’s an easy enough condition; Iwaizumi never had friends. Daichi is the closest thing to a friend he’s ever had.

“Alright, simple enough,” Iwaizumi agrees, and Daichi concedes a moment later. Neither of them know what to say. A Supervisor sparing lives is basically unheard of. With the officials, it’s either execution or excommunication. Of course… the more Iwaizumi thinks about the conditions, the more it sounds like they are being excommunicated.

Not that he cares.

“You’ll regret this, you know?” The Supervisor looks between Iwaizumi and Daichi. His gaze sweeps right over Oikawa and Kuroo, now poised at the edge of their seats. “One day, you will want to come back to us.”

I doubt it, Iwaizumi nearly says but holds his tongue. “Maybe.”

Snake-like eyes turn on Daichi. “And you. You’ll never be able to see-”

“I know,” Daichi cuts in, voice cracking. Even Iwaizumi flinches at the harshness of his tone. “It’s
better that way.”

The Supervisor snorts derisively and swivels to face the opposite side of the warehouse. His thin frame looks even more vulnerable, frailer, against the darker grays and browns of the surrounding walls. He takes a step, and Iwaizumi blurts, “Why?”

Jerking to a stop, the Supervisor pauses. “Why?”

“Why are you letting us go?”

“You are nothing more than fools.” Shoulder blades shift beneath the white cover of the Supervisor’s coat. “I have no reason to fear the two of you. I am merely doing our people a favor.” He pauses to chuckle. “Taking out the trash, as the humans would say.”

As much as Iwaizumi hates the phrasing, he doesn’t want to say anything that may change the bastard’s mind. He grits his teeth and watches, hoping silently that the humans in the room will keep quiet, too. The line they tread is getting thinner and thinner by the second.

“Besides, if either of you go against the conditions, I’ll be the first to come for your heads.” The Supervisor flashes a feral grin over his shoulder, appreciating the fear his words arouse. “You can be sure of that.”

And Iwaizumi is. He definitely is.

Without further comment, their wraith of a superior continues to move forward. To everyone’s relief, he doesn’t turn back.
the unbelievable and ridiculous

Chapter Summary

In which Iwaizumi and Oikawa both have a lot of feelings and amends are most certainly made.

Chapter Notes

OKAY SO FAIR WARNING THIS IS ABOUT TO BE A BIT OF A LONG A/N BECAUSE BASICALLY I SUCK AND YEAH

i don’t think i can apologize enough for the wait on this chapter?? uni has really been kicking my ass this semester. plus, i got into voltron. like... REALLY into it. and although this entire fic has been outlined for months, i found myself dealing with a little writer's block. thankfully, writing a couple klance fics helped me overcome my problem! yay klance!!! this is an important chapter, and i wanted to get it just right. I’m still not sure if i did but?? i’m not totally displeased with how it turned out.

this chapter is extremely fluffy and sappy so no warnings. another mix, likely the last one, should be posted by the time the next chapter is posted and here are the other 5 mixes for your listening pleasure (x x x x x) also, here’s all of the art for this fic (x). please don’t hesitate to let me know if you’re making something for this fic!!!!

a HUUUUUUGE thanks to my betas for sticking around and always helping!! there’s no way i would’ve gotten this far without you! also a big thanks to all of the readers who are still here after my longass hiatus. kudos, comments, and bookmarks are always appreciated and i really really hope everyone enjoys!!

Iwaizumi can’t believe it.

This isn’t even close to how he expected things would turn out. The Supervisor was supposed to storm into the room, guns blazing (maybe quite literally) and ready to put an end to rebellious outliers once and for all.

He most certainly wasn’t supposed to let him and Daichi off without consequences. And sure, there were consequences, but not suited to the magnitude of their crimes. Iwaizumi and Daichi accepted their fates long ago. They would be hung in front of a watchful audience or maybe excommunicated to the distant recesses of the known universe. That’s how their society handled betrayal, especially on this scale.

And yet the Supervisor had let everyone live. They’d even let Daichi and Iwaizumi stay on Earth. It made no sense. Iwaizumi will probably wonder why for the rest of his life, if he’s completely honest with himself.

After the Supervisor leaves the warehouse, everyone goes their separate ways. Daichi plans to
return to Sugawara’s side, as expected. His concern has become some palpable monster of a thing that everyone can feel just by being in the same space as him. And Kuroo—poor Kuroo—insists he head home.

“Kuroo, we really need to talk about what happened,” Iwaizumi urges, watching as Kuroo climbs to his feet and dusts off his clothes. “I know it’s a lot to process, but—”

“I’m not gonna tell anyone, man,” Kuroo says, “Don’t worry.”

“But…”

“Calm down, okay? I’ll be fine. I’m gonna go home, sit back with a bowl of popcorn and watch some ‘American Ninja Warrior.’” Kuroo shrugs. “We can talk about it some other time, but, uh, my brain needs a break.”

Well, Iwaizumi can’t say he blames him.

“Besides,” he starts, lowering his voice, “you need to talk to him first.” Cocking his head toward Oikawa, Kuroo waggles his eyebrows knowingly. Iwaizumi doesn’t have the energy to scold him for it.

Suggestive smirk aside, Kuroo looks like he’s seen a ghost, which he sort of has, the more Iwaizumi thinks about it. Wiping absentmindedly at the blood flecks on his face, muttering under his breath about “crazy alien bullshit,” he offers the three a half-hearted wave as he trudges out of the building.

An awkward silence falls on the warehouse as the door shuts behind Kuroo. Heart pounding wildly in his chest, Iwaizumi leads Oikawa outside and to the car. Daichi agrees to drive the two by Oikawa’s dorm and then head back to the hospital to check on Sugawara.

The silence doesn’t let up during the car ride and, by the time Daichi parks along the curb outside Oikawa’s dorm, the two are tense, hardly able to stand within a couple inches of each other without startling. At this hour, a decent number of people are milling around out front. A few students eye them warily, especially Oikawa. Although he hadn’t been struck by the Supervisor, his clothes are stained, hair a bit more tousled than usual.

Iwaizumi tries to ignore them and follows Oikawa up the stairs to his dorm room.

And that’s how they reach this strange stalemate.

“So.”

“So…” Iwaizumi repeats from where he stands, awkwardly leaning against the doorframe. “That was uh. A mess.”

The mattress creaks beneath Oikawa as he readjusts his position. Iwaizumi glances over, watching as Oikawa stretches languidly across his bed, face scrunching as he peers up at the ceiling. He’s surprisingly quiet, considering he’s… well, he’s Oikawa. He grunts noncommittally and squints.

“Oikawa—”

“We used to know each other,” Oikawa blurs, voice soft but with an unmistakable edge. The words are fragile. “When I was little, the boy I met… was you.”

Iwaizumi wets his lips. His throat feels dry, scratchy like sandpaper. “Yeah,” he settles on. “Yeah,
it was me.”

Oikawa hums, as if considering the idea. “But they wiped our memories. So you forgot.”

*What do I even say to that?* Iwaizumi leans forward and away from the doorframe, angling his body toward Oikawa. “I never meant for any of this to happen to you. The kidnapping, the wiped memories. They weren’t- the officials aren’t supposed to interfere with our missions like that.”

“It’s because you told me, Iwa-chan.” Oikawa smirks. “You don’t have to sugarcoat it for me. They didn’t want you telling me the truth.”

“That doesn’t make what they did right.”

“Well, no, of course not,” Oikawa answers with a little scoffing sound. “But it also isn’t your fault.”

*It is*, Iwaizumi thinks defiantly. *It really is.*

“No, it’s not!” Oikawa is sitting ramrod straight, eyes wide and boring holes into Iwaizumi from across the room. His fingers are bunched into fists in his comforter. Iwaizumi must have spoken out loud. “You’re not one of those… those *monsters.*” He shakes his head. “I know you would never do something so heartless.”

Iwaizumi distances himself from the doorway, carefully edging toward the bed. “If I had just left you alone or- or kept everything a secret from you like I *should have*, you would’ve been safe.”

“Iwa-chan, stop blaming yourself.”

“I shouldn’t have told you who- *what* I was,” Iwaizumi mumbles. He can’t decide where to look, gaze lingering on the new poster on the opposite wall. The giant robot—something from a show called *Voltron: Legendary Defender*—levels its sword in Iwaizumi’s direction in a vaguely threatening way. “It was a stupid move. I knew better.”

“But I wanted you to tell me,” Oikawa insists, turning his body to better face Iwaizumi. A matter of feet separate them now. “If anything, it’s both of our faults.”

“You were innocent. You were a *kid.*”

Oikawa shrugs, shifting his hands to his lap. “So were you.”

“No.” Iwaizumi shakes his head and takes another small step. “No, I was smart enough at that age to know.”

“You were upset when you found out, weren’t you?”

Iwaizumi blinks. “Obviously…?”

The smirk curling Oikawa’s lips transforms into a full-fledged smile. Wide and inviting, it’s the sort of smile capable of turning any respectable person to mush. Already the room feels brighter, a bit lighter, like the tension of earlier is inconsequential. Iwaizumi doesn’t know how Oikawa does it.

“Then that’s all that matters!” Oikawa spreads his arms out, like when he’s about to tackle an unsuspecting teammate in a hug. “There’s no way a monster would be upset about losing childhood memories with a gross human. And a monster certainly wouldn’t feel bad for what
happened to me.” His arms drop back to his sides. “Everything you’ve done, Iwa-chan, I know you’ve done it because you care.”

Iwaizumi can hardly breathe. He itches to do something, anything, whatever it takes to keep the smile on Oikawa’s face, to ensure he’s never put in harm’s way ever again. Protectiveness- is that what this is? This urge to keep Oikawa safe? He thinks back to his discussion with Daichi.

*Humans are willing to put their lives on the line to save someone they ‘love.’*

The ground seems to shift beneath Iwaizumi. He wonders for a moment if the Earth has, by some freak accident, tilted further on its axis. *I really do love him. Oh God. I love Oikawa Tooru.*

“I love you?”

Iwaizumi could kick himself for the pitch of his voice. It comes out as more of a question than a statement and, even though he may not know much about love, he knows this isn’t how a confession normally goes. Of course, it’s hard to say what’s “normal” when you’re dealing with aliens, altered memories, and amateurs in the wonderful world of emotions.

To his surprise, Oikawa doesn’t panic. And when he laughs, it isn’t cold. There’s no malicious intent or bitterness.

*This* is the laugh Iwaizumi would tear apart the universe to protect.

“You- You are ridiculous, Iwa-chan,” Oikawa manages between snickers. A few tears glide down his cheeks, and he quickly wipes away new ones before they fall. “Only you would confess like- like this.”

“I didn’t mean for it to come out like that, dumbass,” Iwaizumi says defensively. His cheeks are positively burning. “It was an accident!”

“So you didn’t mean to say it?”

“No! No, I did.” Iwaizumi buries his chin against his chest, silently cursing his hair for not covering his face properly. “I just…”

“Oh my God,” Oikawa whispers, voice dripping with pleasant surprise. “You’re embarrassed. The big, bad alien genius who snuck onto a spaceship just to save two silly humans and lived… is embarrassed by a love confession.”

“Don’t put it like that! Holy shit.” Iwaizumi is glaring holes into the floor and, soon, he’s sure he’ll catch on fire and burn real holes through the carpet. “I’m trying to be serious here!”

Iwaizumi chances a quick glance in Oikawa’s direction. The bastard is beaming, brimming with self-satisfaction. It’s unnerving and yet it’s a nice change from the stress and danger of the last couple weeks.

“Oh, of course, of course. Iwa-chan is a very serious person,” Oikawa hums, and Iwaizumi can only imagine the smug expression on his face.

“Iwa-chan,” Iwaizumi warns. He really is trying here, and, as much as he appreciates Oikawa’s effort to lighten the mood, he needs to get this off his chest before his own feelings eat him alive. “Please?”

The room goes quiet. Curious- and very much scared- Iwaizumi lifts his head, aching to see
Oikawa’s reaction. And the sight makes his stomach drop.

Oikawa is no longer smiling. Lips turned down into a grimace, he sits slouched on the edge of his mattress. He steadfastly meets Iwaizumi’s gaze, though, never one to back down from a challenge. There’s a glint there that Iwaizumi struggles to interpret. Something fierce, something resolute and unmistakably Oikawa.

“You love me,” Oikawa repeats. Iwaizumi nearly misses the words, hushed, barely audible even in the silence of the room. “You love me?”

“Yeah.” Iwaizumi puts on his most convincing smile. He needs Oikawa to believe this. Even if he never believes Iwaizumi again after everything that took place, he has to accept this confession as the truth. “Yeah, I do.”

“Iwa-chan, you’re new to this. It’s possible you’re just confused.”

Iwaizumi flinches away from the words. “I’ve known you for months now. And you’ve been teaching me about love, haven’t you?”

“I-”

“The date nights, the UFO hunting, the kissing- that was all to show me how to love. ” Iwaizumi inches purposefully closer. “Right?”

Oikawa gapes, mouth stuck in a flabbergasted little ‘o’ shape.

“I’ve never… had anyone like that before in my life. We’re not supposed to.” Iwaizumi scoffs. “Well, obviously. The Supervisor made that clear, the jackass. But guess what? I’m an idiot.”

Eyes wide, Oikawa slowly shakes his head. “Iwa-”

“I am- was- a total idiot because I was never supposed to love anyone and yet there I was-” Iwaizumi takes another step closer, bare toes now brushing against Oikawa’s socked feet- “asking you to teach me about love. The thing I vowed to avoid at all costs. I asked my Subject. Pretty much unheard of. But I didn’t care.”

The next words are difficult to manage, and Iwaizumi hesitates. “I… I didn’t think it’d be an issue. You were stubborn and cocky and, God, I honestly thought it wouldn’t be a big deal. But the more time I spent with you, the more I learned about you and the side you don’t let most people see…” He draws in a shaky breath. “There’s no way I couldn’t love you. And- the rescue mission just proved how much trouble my stupid ass had gotten into.”

A sudden surge of confidence urges Iwaizumi forward, pulls at his arms and lowers them to Oikawa’s shoulders. He squeezes gently, enjoying the feel of muscle and warm skin beneath cotton.

“Hajime,” Oikawa gasps and that’s it.

Iwaizumi presses his lips hungrily to Oikawa’s, insistent but not overly demanding. He’s been waiting months to experience this again. To feel Oikawa beneath his fingertips, very much alive and in the flesh. His fingers skitter timidly along Oikawa’s jawline, circling around to cradle the back of his head in his hands. He silently thanks every “kissing” lesson he and Oikawa shared as he buries his fingers in thick brown hair and changes the angle just so.

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Iwaizumi presses his lips hungrily to Oikawa’s, insistent but not overly demanding. He’s been waiting months to experience this again. To feel Oikawa beneath his fingertips, very much alive and in the flesh. His fingers skitter timidly along Oikawa’s jawline, circling around to cradle the back of his head in his hands. He silently thanks every “kissing” lesson he and Oikawa shared as he buries his fingers in thick brown hair and changes the angle just so.

Strong arms snag Iwaizumi around the waist and pull him down until he’s practically sitting in
Oikawa’s lap, gasping a little in surprise. Oikawa eagerly melts against Iwaizumi. Warm hands sneak over the curve of Iwaizumi’s spine, over his sides and shoulder blades, slow but with an underlying longing that drags a low, needy noise from Iwaizumi’s throat.

“You- love me,” Oikawa murmurs, yet again, as they pull apart for a quick breath of air. “You actually… love me.”

Iwaizumi hums his agreement. He gingerly presses their lips together, crooking his fingers to scratch along Oikawa’s scalp. This is the sort of kiss meant to be enjoyed, a sensual and unhurried exchange. There’s no rush or immediate danger. No one is going to walk in and pull them apart or whisk one of them away to an alien ship. No one is going to stop this—stop them.

Gradually, Oikawa tightens his hold on Iwaizumi and leans back, carefully pulling him down. They fall as one, mouths still connected, and Iwaizumi finds himself straddling Oikawa, their chests pressed together, dragging his hands away to settle on the mattress on either side of Oikawa’s head. His fingers hover at the tips of tousled strands of hair. Always so soft, Iwaizumi notes through his haze.

They separate for a moment, and Iwaizumi takes advantage of the opportunity to seal his mouth over the junction of Oikawa’s shoulder and neck. He knows how sensitive Oikawa is here and preens at the pleased noises spilling from Oikawa’s mouth. Good. Spurred on, he seals his mouth more firmly to the same spot and starts on what he hopes will be a sizable mark. Something dark and impossible to hide, so that everyone will clearly see it and know Iwaizumi was the one who sucked it into Oikawa’s skin.

“Iwa- hey, um,” Oikawa gasps and his tone is enough to stop Iwaizumi. Frightened, he draws back.

“I…” He trails off, and Iwaizumi puts a bit more space between them so that he can meet Oikawa’s gaze. Lower lip caught between his teeth, Oikawa peers at Iwaizumi through lidded eyes. Iwaizumi’s heart flutters.

“You?” Iwaizumi prompts and, wow, his voice is hoarse.

“I… I love you, too, you know?”

Oh.

“I mean, you said it and I didn’t want you thinking I didn’t feel the same way,” Oikawa continues in a hushed tone. “It’s just not… not something I make a habit of saying.”

Iwaizumi’s heart slams against his ribcage, as if begging to get out and escape this mess of a reunion. Subconsciously, his hands bunch in the folds of the blanket around Oikawa’s head. “Dumbass,” he mutters, “You don’t have to force yourself.”

“I’m not.” Spoken reverently, smoothly. Iwaizumi shudders as hands slip under his shirt, brushing along the bare planes of his lower back. “That’s not me, Iwa-chan. You know that.”

Which he really does.

“I don’t say it—” Oikawa pauses, breath hitching—“unless I mean it.”

Did Oikawa—“Wait, what?”

A light flush dusts Oikawa’s cheeks, eyes darting nervously away. Iwaizumi doesn’t think he’s ever seen Oikawa this flustered before, and the thought that he’s the one responsible for such a rare
reaction makes him... well, it's exhilarating.

“Of course you’d make me repeat myself.” Oikawa chuckles softly. “I said that I love you, too, Iwa-chan.”

Oikawa loves him. He can just imagine Kuroo, teasing them for being “sappy.” Iwaizumi doesn’t care how sappy it is. A rush of satisfaction, something new and all too welcome, floods his body as the words sink in. They trickle over his skin, curling protectively around him, and Iwaizumi feels Oikawa smile against his mouth as he moves in for another quick kiss.

Iwaizumi shifts his attention back to Oikawa’s jaw and collarbone, and the noises are like a delicious sensory overload. His fingers dance along the hem of Oikawa’s shirt before dipping under, dragging it up and over twitching muscles. Once he works the folds of cloth high enough, Oikawa shifts onto his elbows and helps Iwaizumi tug the shirt over his head. Fervently, the hands beneath Iwaizumi’s shirt pull and tug. Iwaizumi scoffs against the hollow of Oikawa’s throat before pulling back, discarding his own shirt.

Oikawa reels Iwaizumi in once his shirt is tossed to the side. The blankets rustle and move, playfully with the movement of their bodies, and their lips are caught in a frenzy. Oikawa seizes a brief window of opportunity to flip Iwaizumi onto his back, sliding effortlessly into his lap. Their lips reconnect with a soft, wet smack. It’s everything Iwaizumi has ever loved about kissing Oikawa— and more.

It’s like they’ve been apart for years rather than a matter of months. They’re wrapped up in each other, completely, and Iwaizumi can only imagine what this must look like to an outside observer. Like two desperate lovers, grappling clumsily at each other like they’ll never see each other again. Which, considering recent events, is a very real fear for both of them.

Oikawa shifts his weight, lips returning to the smooth curve of Iwaizumi’s throat. Each kiss is softer, though, more careful. Tender. Like a barely there caress, present one moment and gone the next. Iwaizumi’s skin tingles pleasantly with every tentative press. His fingers twist around Oikawa’s hair, drawing him even closer.

Suddenly, he’s laughing.

Little huffs ghost across Iwaizumi’s neck, and he trembles, the arm around Oikawa’s waist tightening ever so slightly. He’s... Oikawa is giggling. Oikawa stared death in the face and has dealt with more emotional turmoil in the last few months than anyone should ever have to. But he’s still giggling.

“What?” Iwaizumi mumbles into tufts of Oikawa’s hair. “Why are you laughing?”

“I just,” Oikawa manages between breathless laughter, “I can’t believe this is actually happening.”

Iwaizumi stills. Every worst case scenario tucked within his subconscious rises to the surface.

“I can’t believe you’re alright,” Oikawa rushes on. Iwaizumi heaves a quiet sigh of relief after the clarification. “I wondered for a while if... if you were even alive.”

The mood changes with those few simple words. Iwaizumi cards his fingers soothingly through dark, bouncy curls, his other hand busy smoothing over Oikawa’s back in comforting circles. “Of course I’m alive. Did you really think those dicks stood a chance against me?”

Oikawa lets out a tiny snicker at that. “Hmm I guess you’re right.” He may be a great actor and
very used to tricking people, but Iwaizumi isn’t convinced.

“I know I said it already but, uh. I really am sorry about everything that happened.”

Iwaizumi can practically hear the eye roll in Oikawa’s voice. “I know,” he sighs, resting his head comfortably in the crook of Iwaizumi’s neck. It feels ridiculously nice. “I’m allowed to be worried, aren’t I?”

“Well, yes. I was, too,” Iwaizumi admits. Heat creeps up his neck, coloring his cheeks a vibrant red. He silently hopes Oikawa doesn’t notice. “I never knew what those sick bastards would try to do. It was awful.”

Oikawa hums his agreement against Iwaizumi’s chest, and it sparks across his skin.

“But enough of that.” Iwaizumi wants to recapture the mood from earlier, from before Oikawa stopped kissing him, before the conversation took a turn for the somber. He wants to make sure Oikawa knows just how much he missed him. “Let’s pick up where we left off.”

“Oh?” Oikawa perks up, a devious glint in his eyes. “And where would that be?”

“We don’t have to worry about getting caught anymore,” Iwaizumi says, tone low and inviting. He loops his fingers around Oikawa’s neck and leans into him. “You know what that means.”

Oikawa’s eyes are practically sparkling at this point, a wicked smirk playing at the corners of his lips. He gladly follows Iwaizumi’s lead and moves until their lips nearly touch. Sparing just a second, listening to the mingled sounds of their labored breathing, time comes to a stuttering halt. Their foreheads touch, smooth skin against smooth skin, and they both stop.

It’s… peaceful. A little unbelievable. To think they’re together again, able to take a chance to pause and breathe. No prying eyes or sickening gut feeling from acting in the guise of “practice.” Iwaizumi can touch freely and enjoy every blissful second of contact, of Oikawa’s quiet laughter as they sit just like this for a moment longer.

Carefully, Iwaizumi lifts himself to reclaim Oikawa’s mouth, pliant and eager against his own. Iwaizumi thinks back to their past experiences together and carefully licks into Oikawa’s mouth, delighting in the enticing groan Oikawa releases into the millimeter of space between their parted lips. Impatient fingers grip at the nape of Iwaizumi’s neck, angling his head just right to fully meld their mouths together, slick, soft wet noises filling the room. Oikawa’s hips drag forward and- oh.

A gasp bubbles on Iwaizumi’s lips, unbidden. Everything is suddenly hot, unbearably hot, and Iwaizumi blurts, “Maybe we should-

“Yeah,” Oikawa agrees, tone deep and husky. It certainly doesn’t help the distinct heat pooling in Iwaizumi’s gut.

Oikawa reluctantly climbs off Iwaizumi’s lap and tugs off his pants. For a second, Iwaizumi can only stare because it’s not what he had in mind but you better fucking believe he’s on board. He slips his hands over the waistband of his own pants, anxious to get them off and somewhere far, far away.

Oikawa is back in an instant, and, if at all possible, with more fervor. Iwaizumi hums in amusement and hungrily trails his hands up strong thighs, hesitating on the hem of his boxers. He chances a glimpse and yes. The bulbous green alien heads and tiny purple planets shouldn’t even surprise him anymore. And yet he scoffs anyway.
“Hush, you know you love them,” Oikawa says, light and teasing. He sinks down fully on Iwaizumi’s lap, and it’s… yes. Iwaizumi struggles to stifle every embarrassing noise begging to be released. His fingers sneak up over Oikawa’s hips and settle on his sides, resting there as if to hold him in place.

“You’re really-” Iwaizumi quickly shuts his mouth. Now isn’t the time to embarrass himself. Actually, it’s the worst possible time.

“I’m?” Oikawa rolls the word around in his mouth, sneaking his arms around Iwaizumi’s neck, fingernails scraping along his nape. Iwaizumi shivers.

“A pain in the ass,” Iwaizumi decides.

“Liar,” Oikawa singsongs. “You were going to say something else.”

“An asshole?”

“That’s not it either,” Oikawa says, leaning forward so his lips brush the shell of Iwaizumi’s ear. “Tell the truth, Iwa-chan.”

If it weren’t for all the lies Iwaizumi had knowingly and unknowingly told Oikawa since they met, he might’ve resisted more. There are plenty of insults Iwaizumi could use to continue dancing around the issue. But… considering everything…

“Fine, you’re beautiful, okay?” Iwaizumi feels like his cheeks are on fire. “Happy?”

Oikawa lets out what can only be described as a whimper and reclaims Iwaizumi’s lips. Shocked, Iwaizumi yelps. What the hell? Oikawa is trying to suck the life out of him, and, oh gods, his eyes are rolling back in his fucking head because it’s incredible. He’s never been kissed like this before. Oikawa has never kissed him like this before.

“More than happy,” Oikawa manages between insistent kisses. He sounds wrecked, a gravely quality to his voice that sends heat directly to Iwaizumi’s groin. Oikawa really is beautiful. Powerful and all-encompassing, like the star Iwaizumi has always thought him to be. Stunning, otherworldly. And Iwaizumi has successfully reduced this human star to a persistent, groaning puddle on his lap? It’s quite a rush.

Iwaizumi is suddenly reminded of every reason he willingly left his old life behind on the ship. He grips Oikawa just the slightest bit harder.

Oikawa draws away, lips parting with an audible little pop. His usual smirk is gone and, in its place, is a soft smile. A barely there quirk at both edges that lights up Oikawa’s entire face, staring back with the sort of fond admiration Iwaizumi has only dreamed of.

Oikawa drops his forehead against Iwaizumi’s once again, and the hands curled around the base of his skull sneak around and settle on Iwaizumi’s shoulders. Iwaizumi gasps, swollen lips parting around a shaky exhalation, and moves.

Iwaizumi swears his brain short circuits. His fingers tighten reflexively around Oikawa’s waist. Were they really doing this?

“Are we…”

“Yeah.” Oikawa shifts again and the warmth of hard skin dragging along hard skin, the friction, is amazing. “Yeah.”
Okawa rolls his hips again, all lazy undulations, and quivers in Iwaizumi’s grasp, stuttering breaths warm against Iwaizumi’s lips. Their foreheads pressed together, Iwaizumi shifts his own hips, moving in small circles. The heat spreading throughout his body has grown just short of unbearable, sweltering, and he grips Oikawa like a lifeline.

“Oikawa,” he groans, desperate. For what, he isn’t sure. He just needs Oikawa closer, as close as possible, until it’s impossible to tell where one of them begins and the other ends.

“Yes,” Oikawa agrees breathlessly, fingernails scraping anxiously along Iwaizumi’s scalp. Shit. Iwaizumi moans, and it’s embarrassingly loud in the silence of the room.

Oikawa sinks lower, pressing harder, movements slow and delicious. Iwaizumi feels himself getting close and, as much as he’d love to preserve his boxers after already ruining a couple other pairs, there isn’t enough time.

Iwaizumi needs Oikawa, and he needs him now.

“I’m… I’m never leaving you again,” Iwaizumi manages. They’re the first words that come to mind as he grips Oikawa. “Never.”

And with that, something snaps. The precarious hold Iwaizumi had on his self-control slips, and the warmth pooling in his core finally bubbles over. He hasn’t had many orgasms in his life- obviously- but he’s almost certain this is the best he’s had to date. Liquid fire flows through his veins and white dances across his eyelids, body quivering with the force of his release. Above him, Iwaizumi hears Oikawa moan wantonly, a delighted cry of his name. He shudders and collapses against Iwaizumi’s chest, absolutely spent.

“We really,” Oikawa pants, “need to be naked next time.”

“That means you’ll actually have to see my-” Iwaizumi makes air quotations with his fingers- “’kinky alien junk’ up close and personal.”

Oikawa lifts his head just enough to make eye contact. “Iwa-chan… I thought you said it looked the same.”

“Did I?”

The adorable flush coloring Oikawa’s cheeks starts draining away, skin paling, and Iwaizumi sighs. “I’m just kidding,” he reassures Oikawa, “it’s basically the same. Although I’ve never tried to actually- you know. Use it.”

Oikawa blinks. “But if it works while we’re-”

“Oh!” Iwaizumi slaps a hand over Oikawa’s mouth. The movement feels sluggish in his current sedated state. “Yeah, yes. I know.”

“I could always show you mine later,” Oikawa mumbles against the palm of Iwaizumi’s hand. “So we can compare.”

Leave it to Oikawa. Iwaizumi rolls his eyes but wraps himself around Oikawa. A pleasant buzz makes his skin tingle everywhere he and Oikawa touch. The overwhelming sense of rightness, of coming together and finally being complete, encourages Iwaizumi to bury his face in Oikawa’s neck.

“You really are,” he hums, “ridiculous.”
not lonely anymore

Chapter Summary

In which the Supervisor has secrets and Iwaizumi makes an offer.

Chapter Notes

HERE IT IS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! THE LAST CHAPTER!!!

you could almost consider this an epilogue? if you want to? regardless, it is the end of this wild ride. i don't want to ramble here for too long so i'll probably make a separate tumblr post or maybe a thread of sappy tweets. but, to keep things brief, i want to thank everyone who's stuck with this fic along the way. i know school has kept me from updating as regularly as i had originally hoped. also a huge HUGE thank you to my beta's for helping me through every road block along the way. i love all of you so much!!

this chapter is mostly fluff (with a heavy dose of angst at the beginning) but there are no additional warnings. here's the last of my mixes for this fic for anyone who would like to listen! the entire collection of fic mixes can be found here, also, here are all the BEAUTIFUL art, mixes, etc, that have been made for this work! even though it's finished now, please don’t hesitate to let me know if you’re making something for this fic!!!!

as always, kudos, comments, and bookmarks are greatly appreciated. i ended this fic the way i did for any future oneshots i may decide to write in the future for this series so feedback helps! and, without further ado, here is the last chapter of this whirlwind of a fic

~a week later, aboard the BC Ambition~

The tablet is cool to the touch underneath the Supervisor’s fingers. Metallic and smooth, he brushes his fingers anxiously along the edges, lingering on the rounded corners. Four faces stare back, almost accusingly, from the screen. Two human and two all too familiar.

Harec, that’s the name he adopted for himself. His original name, the one provided at birth, was far too terran for his liking. Anything terran in origin made his skin crawl. The list presented thousands, millions, of names to choose from, and Harec was immediately drawn to the Vulominian section, a culture known for simple yet noble names.

But some people would never know his true name.

He’s known for a while now. Longer than he would like to admit. The information is top secret for a reason. If any of the files leaked to the civilian population, riots may break out, chaos, anarchy. Supervisors and other officials are warned from day one about the consequences of leaking
anything from the ship’s personal records.

Harec certainly wasn’t supposed to have glimpsed the files, let alone share the information with anyone. Not that it would be the first government secret he had uncovered over the course of his professional life.

To him, though, it felt like the most important piece of information he’d ever stumbled across.

There are numerous reasons why their people aren’t permitted to know the identity of their parents. Primarily, the familial ties are believed to interfere with work, with the exploration of the universe and expansion of their society. It was decided long before Harec’s birth that the concept of the “family” would die.

Regardless of the process, the true identities of each individual’s biological parents are held in the ship’s records. Only Medics are permitted to access these records, considering their duty to maximize the lifespans of citizens- specifically those with important roles, such as Researchers.

And Harec… he really hadn’t meant to see it.

He’d brought a criminal down to the medical bay for cognitive reformation. Every available Medic was preoccupied at the moment and could care less about Harec’s presence. One of the many screens was used for surveying a patient’s medical records. And it had captured Harec’s attention.

The files were unlocked, open, free to wandering eyes. Names filled the screen, bold black letters practically demanding his focus. Harec couldn’t look away. The damage was already done.

Iwaizumi Hajime was, biologically, his child.

It took every ounce of self-control to drag his eyes away from the screen. Staring didn’t change anything, and neither did averting his gaze, when he finally managed to do so. Harec probably had other children, but Iwaizumi was the only he knew of. And that made a considerable difference.

He’d never been tempted to break the law up until then. The very embodiment of an upstanding Supervisor, Harec was far too influential to let the news affect him. It didn’t stop the slew of ideas, though, that flooded his mind. Of families he’d met on other planets, images from Earth, and each hurt more than the last. If things were different…

Harec quickly shook these thoughts and acted as he should: like nothing had changed. Iwaizumi Hajime would be alright on his own. He had a normal Mentor, and, as he grew older, big aspirations and the sort of drive that would surely shape him into an upstanding citizen.

Then, everything went wrong.

Daichi Sawamura was more corrupt than anyone could have ever imagined. And he dragged poor Iwaizumi down with him

Once Harec heard of Daichi’s past shortcomings and the controversy surrounding his relationship with Ikejiri Hayato, he made a decision. He and Daichi would never get along. However, Harec wouldn’t allow emotions to cloud his better judgment and worked to convince everyone his distaste for Daichi stemmed from past mishaps rather than his own jealousy and rage.

Harec also made another decision. It wasn’t easy, but it would save Iwaizumi a great deal of trouble in the long run. Harec had always preferred an… aesthetically pleasing form. He enjoyed looking in the mirror, peering into round, bright eyes, fingers smoothing over soft skin and a sharp jawline akin to that of a terran “movie star.”
Iwaizumi would never care about Harec.

Harec would always despise Daichi for having Iwaizumi so close and choosing to ruin him. And, with the way Iwaizumi watched Daichi with starry-eyed admiration, it was impossible to imagine him liking anyone who wronged his beloved Mentor.

The realization sunk like a lead weight to the bottom of Harec’s gut. From that day forward, he chose a different form specifically for interactions with Daichi and Iwaizumi. The Nameerans were not known for their beauty. Many species found them to be unsightly, including Harec. With scaly skin, clinging to nearly visible bone, and thin pupils, grotesque rows of fangs, they were notorious for intimidating other species throughout the universe. Which was exactly what Harec wanted.

Iwaizumi grew to hate him nearly as much as Harec hated Daichi.

And then, just like that, Iwaizumi’s life was at stake. For the sake of a human, of all things. Harec wouldn’t have it. Iwaizumi may have made poor decisions, but he was Harec’s child. Emotions that had long lied dormant inside his chest came bursting to the surface.

Harec wouldn’t let Iwaizumi die.

“Harec Erusha,” a voice recites, from the opposite end of the room. The sharp tone drags Harec from his musings. “Supervisor #1222. Tasked with the reprimanding of Iwaizumi Hajime and Mentor, Daichi Sawamura.”

“Present. And, yes, the details provided are correct,” Harec mumbles. Golden strands of hair brush his forehead, and Harec flinches. It’s been ages; he isn’t used to this form anymore.

“It seems as if their chips have been disconnected from the mainframe.” A faint scratching sound fills the room as the Supervisor slides into the seat across from Harec. “We no longer have access to their location, health...”

“The chips were disengaged,” Harec answers bluntly.

His fellow Supervisor smirks. The tips of her pointed ears twitch ever so slightly, nearly translucent blue eyes focusing on Harec. “Disengaged?”

“I believe you know what I mean.” The words burn, almost as much as the thought of never seeing Iwaizumi again. Harec moves his hands from the tablet to his lap, fingers clenching into the spotless fabric of his pants.

“You dispatched of them completely. Yes?”

Harec swallows down the sudden lump in his throat. He can do this. For Iwaizumi, he will do this.

“Of course.”

“Good,” the Supervisor replies. They adjust the tablet on their side of the table, scrolling through what can only be Iwaizumi and Daichi’s mission logs. “Based on their crimes, both would have been hung once returned to the ship.”

Iwaizumi, presented before a crowd of professionals, crimes rattled off as the gathered officials proved their “point.” Iwaizumi, lying cold and unresponsive on a white, floating stretcher following the hanging. The mental picture makes Harec flinch.

“Most certainly,” Harec reaffirms. “Crimes of that severity need to be punished. And-” Harec
nearly chokes on the rest of his statement- “handled publically.”

The Supervisor nods, lime green wisps of hair falling in front of her eyes. Purples flicker around her irises. “I am glad you understand, Harec. An official of your standing knows how to handle these cases- I trust that.”

“And I am honored you do.”

Distaste colors his words, as much as he tries to hide it, but the Supervisor simply grins.

“You will be rewarded greatly for your work, Harec Erusha.”

“Unbelievable,” Kuroo grumbles, glaring at the globs of chocolate on his jeans.

Iwaizumi huffs out a little laugh and watches, amused, as Kenma quietly grabs a napkin and wipes the mess away. Bokuto, at his other side, is laughing so hard that tears are streaming down his face. Akaashi rolls his eyes and grudgingly offers Kuroo his stick, mostly charred marshmallow still clinging to the tip.

It’s been about two weeks since the Supervisor offered his ultimatum and, for some strange reason, let them live.

Once Iwaizumi recovered from his injuries, he returned to volleyball practice- even if Oikawa was the only one who considered Iwaizumi “injured.” It was difficult, to say the least, with the season swiftly approaching. Takeda refused to cut any corners; he was there to win. Even if that meant working Iwaizumi to the bone. He and Oikawa were at the gym most nights, practicing extra, to account for the time Iwaizumi lost while away.

Fun times, really.

Having Oikawa there with him along the way, however, made the situation a lot more tolerable. For every minute of training, for every hour of laboring through new homework assignments, there was another spent at Oikawa’s side. Whether it be curled up in bed watching a movie or eating questionable food at the cafeteria, Iwaizumi was more than happy to carry on as long as he had Oikawa.

In the midst of Iwaizumi’s readjustment, Daichi helped Sugawara through his recovery. He thankfully hadn’t had to stay in the hospital for long. Once he was released, Sugawara returned to his apartment. Daichi begged to visit more often to keep an eye on him, to make sure he didn’t push himself too hard.

For the most part, Sugawara followed the doctor’s orders. Iwaizumi overheard several phone conversations between the two, though, and could tell Daichi was driving Sugawara up a wall. Typical Daichi. He used to be the same way about Iwaizumi whenever he got sick or injured himself in a sparring match.

Of course, Daichi insists he’ll give Sugawara space after the first couple weeks he’s home; Iwaizumi isn’t so sure it’ll turn out that way.
Earlier today, Kuroo had called Iwaizumi and asked if he and Oikawa wanted to join the team for a campfire. Roasting marshmallows was apparently a favorite of... well, basically everyone. The team hadn’t had much free time lately, what with trying to reacquaint Iwaizumi with volleyball.

Plus, Iwaizumi worries about Kuroo. Alien kidnappings certainly aren’t common occurrences. It isn’t every day that a human gets taken by another galactic species. And no, the handful of legitimate “probing” cases don’t count. Worse still, the Supervisor had actually struck Kuroo. The cuts even warranted a few stitches, once Kuroo finally visited the doctor at Oikawa’s demand.

“Really, I’m fine,” Kuroo urged. “You’ve asked me, like, a million times already. Sure, it was rough, but it could’ve been worse, you know? Besides, people dig scars. If I’m lucky enough to have any.”

Well, he was right about that much. Not the scars part, of course. Iwaizumi rolled his eyes when Kuroo made that comment.

Iwaizumi hadn’t pushed the matter any further after that. He agreed to grab Oikawa and meet the rest of the team at the park later that evening. But then the call got a bit... weird.

“All,” Kuroo cut in, moments before ending the call, “You should bring your... well, whatever he is to you. The other-” he lowered his voice- “alien dude that was with you? The normal one. What was his name?”

Iwaizumi balked. “Daichi...?”

“Yeah! Yeah, I’m sure he’s been having a rough time lately with all that crazy bullshit that went down. He can come, too. If he wants.”

It was a strange request, but Kuroo probably had a good point. Daichi had been constantly on edge and needed something to help return at least some semblance of normalcy to his life. To Iwaizumi’s relief, Daichi agreed to come along, with Sugawara in tow. Initially, he was just as confused as Iwaizumi had been when Kuroo offered. But once he mentioned “s’mores” and “campfires,” Daichi’s curiosity got the better of him.

And that’s how they found themselves here, sitting under the stars, gathered around the flickering flames of a campfire.

“Iwa-chan,” Oikawa singsongs. “Do you want another marshmallow?” He scoots closer on their blanket, the same navy blue one from their nights of “UFO hunting.” Decked out in an oversized NASA sweatshirt and jeans, eyes framed by dark-rimmed glasses, Oikawa looks... dammit, why does he have to be so cute? Iwaizumi curses his flushed cheeks.

“I- um...”

“Quick, before Mori-chan finishes off the rest of the bag.” Oikawa takes the stick from Iwaizumi’s hands and spears a sizable marshmallow on the opposite end. Yaku flashes a dangerous smirk at Iwaizumi through the haze of smoke. “That’s the face of evil. Kind of demonic. Look, he’s over there plotting!”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Yaku scoffs. He lifts the stick to his mouth and slides two marshmallows off, cramming them between a couple graham crackers and- wow, that’s a lot of chocolate. “I’m just over here trying to enjoy myself.”

“Leave some for the rest of us,” Bokuto butts in, pointing an accusing finger in Yaku’s direction. “And don’t waste the chocolate like that, holy shit. You really are hiding a black hole in that
stomach of yours.”

“Yaku-san knows what he’s doing.” Lev crams a graham cracker in his mouth, chewing around his words. “Just let him be.”

“Yeah, I mean, he has the right idea,” Hinata chimes in. He draws his stick away from the flames, squinting at the now black, charred globs at the tip.

“Idiot.” Kageyama reaches over and carefully removes both globs. He motions for Hinata to come closer, popping one in Hinata’s mouth before eating the other. Wide grins split their faces as they savor the sugary flavor.

“Speak for yourself.” Kuroo gestures at Kageyama and Hinata, happily chewing away. “You two don’t even make s’mores! You just burn the marshmallows to crisps and inhale them like a couple of heathens!”

“Heathens? Alright, old man,” Bokuto guffaws and, surprisingly enough, Akaashi lowers his head, body shuddering with quiet laughter.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You know what he means,” Kenma mumbles. It’s the first time Iwaizumi has seen Kenma really smile. And, of course, it’s when he’s roasting his dork of a boyfriend.

“Why are you all like this?” Kuroo’s lips purse into a pout, and he jams his stick into the ground at his feet. “I’m a cool dude. I don’t deserve this kind of treatment.”

The rest of the team joins in the argument— if it can even be called that. Takeda scoffs loudly and shakes his head. But there’s an unmistakable fondness in his gaze. Daichi and Sugawara can’t help but laugh along with him, and the sight gives Iwaizumi the strongest urge to sidle over and hug them both. Stop that.

“They seem happy,” Oikawa whispers, as if he just read Iwaizumi’s mind.

“Yeah…” Iwaizumi feels a smile play at the corners of his mouth. “Yeah, they really do. I haven’t seen Daichi make faces like that in a while.”

“I’m sure he’s happy when he’s with you, too, Iwa-chan.”

Iwaizumi nods. “True, but that’s… that’s different. Sugawara is different.”

“Like you?”

Iwaizumi startles, caught off guard by the sudden weight against his side. Oikawa curls closer, as if he belongs there, as if he were made to fit in exactly that spot. Together with Iwaizumi.

“What do you mean?” Iwaizumi asks, a little confused.

“I mean,” Oikawa sighs, “that Daichi sees Sugawara like I see you.”

“Like you see—” Iwaizumi tenses, words caught in his throat. Oh.

“For an alien genius, you sure can be dense sometimes, Iwa-chan.”

Oikawa wriggles closer, if at all possible, and Iwaizumi instinctively secures an arm around his middle, holding him in place. It’s not like he’s going anywhere, Iwaizumi notes, a bit deliriously.
It’s still hard to wrap his head around the fact Oikawa is there, very much alive, and safe. For the foreseeable future, at least.

“He loves him,” Oikawa continues, resting his head on Iwaizumi’s shoulder. “All you have to do is watch for a couple minutes and it becomes pretty clear how he feels. How both of them feel, really.”

“It’s nice to see.”

“Mhm.”

Silence falls over the two. As they watch, Sugawara leans over to whisper in Daichi’s ear. A faint red dusts his cheeks, and Iwaizumi barely stifles a laugh as Daichi awkwardly stammers around a response Iwaizumi can’t hear from this distance. The two calmly climb to their feet, a movement that goes unnoticed by the rest of the group, and shuffle off together, out of sight. Ah, Daichi…

For a second, Iwaizumi closes his eyes, savoring the tranquility of their current situation. There’s no imminent danger or worry of being separated. There are no Supervisors waiting on the sidelines, eager to ruin the relationship Oikawa and Iwaizumi have started to build together. There are no chances of his teammates- his friends, if they can be considered that now- getting hurt.

“You know,” Oikawa mumbles, tone gone soft, “I was worried about you, too.”

“Me? I was fine. I knew what I was getting myself into when I went against the officials. Bunch of jackasses…”

“No, no, that’s not what I mean. I wasn’t worried that they would kill you or anything. Iwa-chan is tough and very very-” he punctuates the second “very” with a light jab to Iwaizumi’s thigh- “smart. I was worried… they would take you. Would keep you on that ship and I’d- I’d never be able to see you again.”

Iwaizumi’s heart clenches at the mere mention of being permanently separated from Oikawa. “I never would’ve-”

“I know that now, but, back then, when I didn’t know what had happened to you-” Oikawa takes a stuttering breath. “I wasn’t so sure. We didn’t even exchange proper goodbyes.”

“Well, you never have to worry like that again. I’m staying here with you,” Iwaizumi persists. And, panicking, tacks on a rushed “dumbass” at the end. Smooth, real smooth.

“You better,” Oikawa teases. “Or I’ll have to run to the arms of another subpar Iwa-chan wannabe.”

“Another alien?”

“Of course.” A breeze trickles through, and Oikawa nuzzles against Iwaizumi’s jacket. “Who do you think you’re talking to? I’m practically an alien magnet.”

Iwaizumi wishes he could dispute that fact. No one would pass up the opportunity to study a star trapped in a human being’s body. Iwaizumi knows from firsthand experience. Then, a thought strikes him.

“All jokes aside, would you like to meet other aliens?”

“Is that a rhetorical question?”
“Well, here’s the thing,” Iwaizumi says, unable to keep the excitement from creeping into his voice. “Daichi has a ship stationed on Ganymede. Technically, it’s mine, too, because most Mentor-Researcher pairs—anyway, whatever, the details don’t matter. Transportation chambers are more popular so it’s pretty easy to slip under the radar, undetected, if we travel by ship.”

“Ganymede… that’s one of Jupiter’s moons.” Oikawa narrows his eyes. “How do you plan to get us there?”

“The transportation chamber center there is deserted most of the time. Those assholes don’t care much about Earth. They hardly monitor teleportation traffic in this solar system, especially since every center has to stay hidden.”

“Iwa-chan…”

“Yeah, I know it’s a lot to process but—think about it. Just the four of us. Daichi, Sugawara, you, me,” Iwaizumi insists, “You would love it. There are so many places I want to take you. You wouldn’t believe some of the shit that’s out there. The ice volcanoes on Slyke, the walking trees on Peclade, the—”

Suddenly, there are fingers buried in Iwaizumi’s hair, impatient, and a set of warm lips pressing insistently against his own. Oikawa kisses Iwaizumi like he wants to swallow him whole, like he can’t believe he’s found someone capable of showing him the universe he’s always wanted to see. Which, really, is answer enough.

Even before meeting Oikawa, Iwaizumi had enjoyed exploring the universe. It went with the Researcher job description. But there had always been something… missing. Most missions didn’t include Daichi. And, considering Iwaizumi couldn’t seem to make friends, it was just him hitching rides on passing transport ships or travelling through teleportation chambers.

Adventures that should have felt extraordinary felt dry, stale… lonely.

He glances around the fire at every person he’s met since setting foot on Earth. Smiles illuminate their faces, dancing flames painting the group in brilliant reds, oranges, and yellows. The heat of the fire permeates Iwaizumi’s jacket in the most pleasant way, a comfortable warmth, and the tastes of chocolate and marshmallow linger on his tongue. Oikawa settles against Iwaizumi’s chest, rambling about the sort of aliens they may encounter on their journey, about the planets and stars they’ll hopefully see from the inside of the ship.

It’s everything.

Regardless of what he’s been through, Iwaizumi has no regrets. He isn’t lonely anymore.

End Notes

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