**I'm Right Here**  

by *seredemia*

**Summary**

Guren struggles to face the future after a recent divorce. Shinya's desperate to run away from his past. Yuu just wants a family, whereas Mika's absolutely terrified of his. Nothing's as easy as it looks on the surface and all four of them have definitely got issues to face before they can even grasp a semblance of happiness in their lives.

Somehow, a chance meeting at the local supermarket puts into motion a set of events that will finally change their lives. Whether it's for the better or for the worse is another matter entirely.

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**Notes**

Gureshin and Mikayuu modern AU? Why not.

BTW, please mind the warnings. I'll never go into detail or describe the noncon scenes but what you will be getting is how it affects the character and the emotional aspects of it, so just a heads up.
Guren’s convinced he's having some sort of mid-life crisis at the age of twenty-four. Seriously, he has a mental checklist of all the stressful shit he's going through right now:

1. He owns a company he never even wanted in the first place. Check.
2. His sister recently died. Check.
3. Her son, Yuu, has no one left to live with because his dad's an asshole. Check.
4. Guren's stuck looking after him for now. Check.
5. Yuu's a fucking *brat*. Check. Check again for added emphasis. Italicize the word *brat* because it's true.
6. It's started snowing out of nowhere and Guren hates snow. Check.
7. And last but not least, he's currently stuck in a supermarket, wondering what the fuck do twelve year old brats like eating anyway. Check.

Guren grips the trolley, glaring at all of the microwaveable meals on the shelf. Why was he doing this? Why, out of everyone in the entire world, was he chosen to look after a pubescent boy? It's not that Guren hates his nephew; it's just that he has enough on his plate. Being the boss to a company you inherited from your father can stress anyone out, after all.

He really doesn't need to babysit a kid on top of that.

Eventually, he sighs and grabs the nearest meal he can reach, chucking it into the trolley. Complaining about it won't change anything.

As he makes his way to find some vegetables, his phone begins to vibrate. He reaches down into his jeans, fishing it out and almost groaning when he sees the words "Brat calling" on his screen. He's tempted to hang up.

He doesn't.

“Yuu, what is it?” he says, surprising himself that he manages to restrain the irritation in his voice. “I’m busy right now. Don't call me.”

“Hey, could you get me some of those spicy chicken nuggets?”

Yuu's voice is muffled by the sounds of machine guns and screaming. Guren doesn't even need to guess twice that his nephew's probably playing on his PS4 again.

Guren frowns. “What?”

“Spicy chicken nuggets.”

“Are you seriously calling me just to tell me this?”

“Yeah.”

Guren hangs up. His hand grips around his phone, part of him imagining it was Yuu's neck and the other part imagining it was his own just so he could leave all this stress behind. After a minute or so of glaring at microwaveable meals and ignoring the looks he received from other people, Guren turns
his trolley around and proceeds to make his way towards the frozen food area. Spicy chicken nuggets. Right. Get the spicy chicken nuggets before the last remaining ounce of his patience runs out.

*Calm down*, he tells himself. It's not Yuu's fault. Yuu's still coping with the death of his mother, one way or another. It's not Yuu's fault.

Still doesn't stop him from being a brat though.

He sees the chicken nuggets as if his eyes are drawn into it. A tiny, celebratory smile tugs on his lips as he reaches for them—

Someone else grabs it.

Guren, already holding one side of the packet, tugs back. And glares at the person.

His gaze comes into contact with bright, blue eyes and for a second, Guren's scowl falters as he takes in the man standing before him.

White hair. He's never seen anyone with hair as light as that before but Guren's surprised to say it doesn't look half bad on this man. His bangs sweep over his eyes, royal blue peeping through white locks, and Guren notices that the man is staring straight at him. He can't bring himself to look away. The man is smiling, not fazed at all by Guren's reluctance to let the nuggets go.

Silence carries on as both of them hold the packet in mid-air.

The man's smile grows. Then, he laughs and pushes the packet towards Guren.

"You can have it," he says. His voice is soft, which only makes Guren feel like a tyrant for forcing him to abandon the nuggets.

"Thanks," Guren mutters. Yuu's smug grin flashes across his mind as the nuggets are dropped into the trolley.

"My name's Shinya. Nice to meet you."

A pale hand is thrust into his face and Guren eyes it for two seconds before shaking it. He tries not to react, but this man's hand is warmer than he expected considering it's the middle of winter.

"I'm Guren. Nice to meet you too."

To be honest, Guren doesn't really care. But he can't exactly say that out loud.

The man—or Shinya, whatever his name is, lets go of his hand and bobs on his feet, still beaming at Guren as if he's expecting something. Guren can only blink. He wants to walk away and pay for his things, but there's something about Shinya's smile that refuses to let him move.

So he just stares back and frowns at the strange man.

"What? What is it?" he says after a while. "Why are you staring at me?"

Shinya scratches the back of his head. "Nothing. Nothing."

Guren takes a deep breath and shakes his head. He doesn't have time to ponder about odd people; not when he still has a bunch of paperwork waiting for him back home.
“Right, well, uh, see you around,” Guren mutters, sparing a half hearted smile at the leaner man.

Shinya nods with a little wave of his hand. “See you!”

Guren walks away, knowing full well that he'll never see him ever again. By the time he gets home, he'll probably have forgotten his name.

When Guren steps out of the supermarket, he swears out loud. The snow's gotten heavier—heavy enough to actually cancel the bus routes today. Luckily, he's got his car but he knows it'll be a pain in the ass to drive through all that traffic.

He sighs in relief as soon as he enters his car, turning on the heating as far as it can go up and burying his face into his scarf.

The faint smell of roses still cling onto the wool.

His eyes widen and everything stops.

_Mahiru laughed as she pulled on his scarf, reeling him closer and closer until he drowned in her brown eyes. And Guren laughed with her, circling his arms around her waist, leaning his forehead against hers. She smelt of roses; strong and delicate at the same time. Addicting._

_“I love you, you know,” he said, peppering kisses onto her nose, her cheeks._

_Her eyes danced. “How can you not?”_

The warmth of the car leaves him. Guren unwinds the scarf and throws it to the back seats, trying very hard to ignore the returning ache he should have gotten used to by now.


Try to forget Mahiru.

So, he starts driving.

Thankfully, the traffic is enough to get his mind away from her for the time being. Instead of being pissed off about his ex, it doesn't take Guren long to be pissed off about the fact that he's stayed on this lane for over five minutes and nothing has moved yet. He taps on the steering wheel, glaring at the car in front of him as if it's the cause of all this traffic. At this rate, he's never going to get home.

The thought of Yuu being alone in his house is enough to send a shiver through his spine. There's only so much that brat can be trusted with.

That reminds him; he really should call his nephew and tell him he's currently stuck in traffic. Guren fishes through his pockets, but stops the search for his phone when something catches the corner of his eyes.

Or someone.

It's Shinya.
Before he can stop himself, Guren's already opened his window and stuck his head outside.

“What are you doing just standing there?”

Shinya jumps, the pompom of his beanie hat wobbling in a way that actually makes Guren want to smirk. His eyes widen as soon as he spots Guren, relaxing himself into a smile a second later.

“Waiting for the bus. Some of us don't have fancy cars like some people.” He raises an eyebrow at Guren's sports car.

Guren ignores that last remark. “The buses have been cancelled for today because of the snow. Didn't you hear?”

Shinya's smile falls and Guren has his answer.

Well, he can't exactly just leave this man standing out in the snow with a bunch of shopping bags. Especially not when he'd feel awkward driving away after this conversation... Guren leans over and opens his car door.

“I can give you a lift,” he says. “Unless you want to walk home in this weather.”

He can see Shinya hesitating, white brows frowning at the unexpected offer, before grabbing his bags and entering the car. The faint smell of vanilla wafts in as Shinya sits beside him and Guren slowly breathes it in. At least it drowns out the scent of Mahiru's roses.

“Just put your bags at the back,” he tells him.

Shinya does just that, taking off his coat and beanie hat as well when he's done.

“Thanks for this,” he says. “You didn't have to offer.”

Hmm. He's right. Guren isn't usually this nice to strangers but he convinces himself that this is no big deal.

“Is this your way of showing gratitude because I let you have the nuggets?” Shinya's laughing to himself, although Guren isn't too sure if that was meant to be a joke or not. Just to be safe, he keeps his face stoic at all times. Nothing safer than a straight face, after all.

He averts his eyes back to the road and drives forward when the traffic moves. “Like I said, you can always walk home in this weather if you really want.”

“I think I'll take being warm in a nice car over walking through snow any day.”

“I thought you would,” Guren pauses, remembering that he's forgotten a pretty important question if he's going to give this guy a lift. “Where do you live anyway?”

“Lindsay Flats.”

It's amazing that Guren doesn't flinch at the mention of that name. Lindsay Flats was infamous for being a rough, shitty area. He's surprised someone like Shinya is still alive after living there. One look at the man beside him and you'd think he was either living in a cottage or forever by his mother's side until one of them died.

Shinya fiddles with the sleeves of his cardigan.

“So,” he starts, “what do you do for a living?”
Guren winces at the inevitability of small talk. He should have thought about this before offering someone a lift when they're stuck in endless traffic.

“Nothing special. I just work in an office all day and do paperwork. And complain about teenagers and the snow. How about you?”

Alright, he leaves out the part where he actually owns the company of the office he works in all day, but figures that Shinya doesn't really need to know that.

“Well, that sounds more productive than me, at least. I'm just an artist and a part-time waiter.”

“Artist, huh?”

Shinya nods. And they talk about... well, anything and everything for a while. Shinya tells him that he likes sculpting better than painting; he’s not as good at painting, he admits, and Guren says that the last time he drew something, his mother threw it in the bin. The artist laughs at that and Guren tells him to shut up. Guren complains about the snow, wondering when the fuck spring would start so he can actually arrive home in time. The snow isn't so bad, Shinya argues, but sheepishly adds on that he'd prefer if it didn't cancel the bus routes.

“Hey, did you know that you tend to orgasm faster if you're wearing socks?”

Guren turns to Shinya with a curled lip. “Why are you telling me this?”

“I heard about it a few days ago and I just thought I'd share it with a new friend. Might come in useful, you know?”

Guren's not sure if he'll classify Shinya as a friend just yet and he's definitely not sure if friendship is concreted with the exchanging of sexual facts, but he shrugs it off.

“Did you also know that Oxford University is older than the Aztec Empire?”

“...I went there.”

Shinya raises an eyebrow. “The Aztec Empire?”

“No! Oxford!”

A laugh fills the car and Guren resists the urge to scowl at the artist. “Wow, I'm impressed. You must be really smart, huh?”

Guren shrugs.

“What's seven thousand and sixty two divided by five hundred and four?”

He doesn't resist scowling at Shinya now. “Going to Oxford doesn't make me a human calculator.”

“Aaw, come on, that's no fun! I'm sure you can figure it out if you think about it now.”

“Shinya, I'm driving.”

“We haven't moved for nearly ten minutes.”

“I'm going to throw you out of the car.”

Another laugh. Guren wishes he can understand how one man can be so cheerful in a gloomy day
such as this. He's only known Shinya for less than an hour and Guren's already convinced that he's
the type of person who thinks funerals are still an optimistic thing.

“So, does that mean you've lived here all your life then?” the artist asks after a while. He's sank
lower into his seat, using his own coat as a blanket and making himself quite at home. Guren's
tempted to roll his eyes but decides that keeping them on the road will be far more useful.

“More or less, yeah. My family and past relatives have always stayed here, so I guess it's just natural
to do the same.”

Shinya nods. He doesn't say anything afterwards, although Guren was sort of waiting for him to talk
about himself too. Not that it matters. He doesn't really care enough to dwell on it. The traffic starts
moving and they fall into silence once more; Shinya snuggling into his coat whilst Guren lightly taps
his fingers against the steering wheel. It's not uncomfortable; Guren appreciates that this hasn't been
too awkward. You'd think being stuck in traffic with someone you've just met would be worse than
this.

He turns the music on, letting the instrumental jazz fill the car. Half expecting Shinya to make some
snarky comment on it, Guren's surprised to find that he's closed his eyes, lips parted as he takes even
breaths. He can't help but smile at the sight of the artist fast asleep and turns down the music slightly
so as to not wake him up.

The heavens smile down on them as traffic speeds up and Guren no longer has to wait ten minutes to
drive per yard. They're nearing Lindsay Flats too and thankfully, the roads there are much emptier
and calmer. Or as calm as this area can get, anyway. He still doesn't know why someone like
Shinya's stuck in a shithole like this, but it's not his business. For all he knows, Shinya can be a gang
leader underneath that pompom beanie hat and white cardigan—

Suddenly, the entire world starts screaming.

Like, actually screaming. Shrieks that may as well be tearing someone's vocal chords at the same
time fill the air, piercing straight through Guren's ear drums. He almost swerves the car by instinct—
but really, killing them in a car crash would probably be less painful than listening to this.

Shinya jolts awake, hitting his knees on the dashboard and yelping in pain.

“What's going on?” he yells over the screeches of utter torture and pain. “Did you run over
someone?”

“W-What? No!” Guren cries back, fumbling over the dashboard to turn off the speakers.

“Is this...? Is this screamo?” Shinya looks horrified and if possible, his fair skin actually turns a shade
paler. “You actually listen to screamo?”

Guren slams his hand on the speakers and kills the music. “No! My fucking nephew added his shitty
music into my phone!”

Shinya pauses. A good three seconds pass before he bursts out laughing.

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music into my phone!”

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“God, I love your nephew.”

Guren glares at him from the corner of his eyes. “Listen, fuck off.”

He doesn't receive a reply, but he knows that Shinya's got that damn smile on. Gritting his teeth,
Guren drives faster before he's tempted to wipe it off his face himself.
“Ah, there's my block.”

Shinya points to a block on their right. There's nothing special about it; the only thing Guren can say is that the walls look like the colour of a corpse and that he hopes Shinya at least knows self defence if it's going to explain how the hell he survives living in this area. He watches as the artist gathers all his items again.

“Thanks again, by the way. I really appreciate you going through all that traffic just to help me out.” Shinya gives him a large smile; the type of smile that's big enough to make his eyes dance.

Guren nods at him, inwardly revelling at how nice his eyes are.

Wait, what?

He brushes that off. Ugh. He probably needs to go home. He's too tired for this.

“It's no problem. You're welcome.” He returns the smile, or at least tries to.

Shinya doesn't leave. He has his hand on the door handle, but he's still staring at Guren.

“Um…” He looks away and Guren can see him chewing on the inside of his cheek. “Well... I guess I'll... see you around?”

“Yeah, I guess you might.” Guren tries to make his voice sound convincing. He's sure it failed.

For a second, Shinya's lips part as if he's about to talk again, but then he laughs to himself and turns away. He leaves the car before Guren even has time to wonder what that meant, sparing one last wave before walking into the flats.

Guren's not sure why, but it's only until he can no longer see Shinya does he finally start driving again.

When Guren returns home, he nearly has a heart attack at the sight of Yuu holding a butcher knife before him.

“Yuu, what the fuck are you doing?”

The kid's eyes widen. “Oh, stupid Guren's back.”

Guren makes his way to the kitchen, horror descending on him when he sees Yuu about to butcher four slices of bread.

“Kid, I asked you a question, but I'm not sure if I really want to know now.”

Yuu sends him a glare that looks like a strangled puppy instead. “I was hungry because someone took his sweet time to get home with all the food. I wanted some toast.”

“That doesn't explain the knife.”

“I hate crusts.”
“So you're cutting them off with a butcher knife?”

Yuu throws his hands in the air. Guren has to duck in order to avoid getting stabbed straight in the face.

“I don't know where shit is in this place! You've barely shown me anything! You're always out!”

Guren sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Yuu, I'm trying to sort out the forms for your new school first, as well as your medical information and do my own job and get your damn spicy chicken nuggets.”

At the mention of the blasted nuggets, Yuu's eyes practically sparkle and he sets the knife down. “Did you actually get them?”

Guren sighs again, but makes his way to the shopping bags.

“Just wait in the living room and I'll call you when I'm done making dinner.”

For once, Yuu listens to him. Guren shakes his head to himself, wondering how his sister even put up with her son.

But then he stops and flinches at that train of thought.

It's no secret that his sister had drinking problems, and it didn't help that her bastard of a husband was equally just as fucked up. Guren has to admit that he hasn't kept in contact with his sister over the years, having been too busy with the company, but that doesn't mean that he didn't care when he heard the news about her killing herself.

To be honest, he just didn't know how to react. For as long as he can remember, he's never had that close relationship you see in those cliché family shows. Those moments where the whole family hug and say goodnight to each other? No. Eating around a table together? Never. Giving each other birthday presents? Guren can barely remember his own birthday, let alone someone else's.

He's ashamed to admit that he felt more stressed rather than upset over his sister's suicide.

He just didn't expect Yuu to be the same.

Well, perhaps not exactly the same. It's just that Guren expected Yuu to be a broken mess when he moved into the house, but all the kid's done is complain and play Grand Theft Auto all day, every day. At first, it worried Guren, but it didn't take him long to realise that life with his sister as a mother must have been shitty, to put it lightly.

“Where were you anyway?” Yuu's voice breaks his train of thought and Guren looks up to see his nephew lounging on the sofa. “I didn't see you driving down the usual road.”

“Oh, that. Yeah, I had to give a friend a lift home because of the snow.”

Yuu smirks. “I didn't know you had friends.”

Guren grabs a plastic bottle from the counter and sends it flying towards the back of Yuu's head. When the kid cries out in pain, Guren laughs and begins to make dinner.

His mind travels back to Shinya as he cuts open the pack of nuggets. There's no way he'll be able to find one person again in this city without any other way to contact them... Not that it really matters. Guren Ichinose's not the type of person to care too much about friends—and why was he even
thinking about this anyway? So what? He met one guy and gave him a lift home? Nothing special.

That's what he tells himself as he prepares dinner, but even when he's called Yuu over and had them both sit down to eat, he's still wondering if he'll somehow see Shinya again the next time he goes shopping.

Chapter End Notes

So idk how long this will be exactly? Probably about 10-15 chapters but we'll see. I've got the basic plot planned out, but god knows I never stick to my plans so yeah... I'm excited to work on this so I hope everyone enjoys it~
Shinya doesn't know how long he's been scowling at this canvas but no matter how many mental threats he sends towards it, inspiration just won't hit him. This is precisely why he prefers to sculpt statues rather than paint. With sculpting, it's easier for him because he can feel the artwork taking shape. With painting, he just looks at the canvas until he hates it and gives up.

He groans, sinking back to his seat and averting his eyes to the window instead.

At least the snow seems to be settling down for now. Sure, the streets are still covered in it, but it's no longer causing a disruption to the roads, much to Shinya's relief. Life sucks when bus routes are cancelled and you're too broke to get your own car.

Although... He remembers the really nice man who gave him a lift last week. There are definitely benefits to this snow.


A smile spreads across Shinya's face. He's lost count of the amount of times he's thought back to that day.

Who'd have thought a pack of chicken nuggets would make him meet such an attractive guy? *And* he was nice too—at least when he's not pissed off. (Shinya recalls Guren's face when he told him about the orgasm fact. Hahaha, *cute.* ) He can't remember the last time he's actually enjoyed speaking to someone so much. It felt nice to forget about his troubles and just focus on irritating the uptight man.

But damn. Shinya regrets not asking for his number. He nearly did, before he left the car, but chickened out at the last minute. He wasn't even sure if Guren was single, let alone interested, and it's been too long since Shinya's bothered to go through the whole *flirting-until-you-have-permission-to-fuck-someone* thing.

Damn it. You don't meet someone like that everyday though. He's not sure if he'll ever bump into Guren again too, not when the city they live in might as well be its own country.

His thoughts are halted when he hears a knock on his door.

There's only two people in this city who visit him—and one of them never knocks, so Shinya knows who this visitor is in an instant.

He opens the door, smiling down at the blond twelve year old who's bundled in a coat that's too big for him.

"Hey, Shinya," Mika walks into his apartment, already making his way to the sofa as if this is his second home. Considering the amount of times he visits Shinya, it might as well be—not that it's a problem. The company's certainly appreciated and Mika's a smart kid; they often spend hours pondering the existence of extraterrestrial beings in other planets. (Shinya's convinced that aliens exist, but Mika can slam down some pretty logical facts to destroy his beliefs.)

Shinya sets down his palette and paintbrush, giving up on producing something decent for now. "I'm guessing Krul's with that Fenris guy again?"
Mika sticks out his tongue in distaste. “Ferid Bathory.”

“Battery?”

“Bathory.”

Shinya shrugs. “Same thing. I hope you won't be taking in that surname if your mother ever chose to marry that dick.”

The blond kid looks so disgusted that Shinya walks over to him and pats his head.

“You know my apartment's always open for you if you need it,” he reassures, ruffling Mika's hair so that it's even poofier than usual.

“Thanks, Shinya,” Mika spares a smile. “I mean, I'm happy that she's happy... I-I guess.”

Slowly, the artist nods. He can't blame the kid for being wary about his mother's new boyfriend. He's only met him once, but something about the lilac haired man just doesn't sit well with Shinya.

He's not so bad, Krul would always tell him. He's just odd, apparently. Shinya just nods, knowing it's best not to get in the way of a woman in love. Especially not when her boyfriend is as pretty as that. At least she has good taste.

“Your mother's a twenty-eight year old woman who's finally gotten over her divorce. I'm not surprised she's so taken by this Ferill guy. Maybe she just wants to settle down,” Shinya says, but even he's not convinced by his own words.

“Ferid.”

“Fenris, Ferill, Ferid.” Shinya waves a hand. “Anyway, enough about your mother's love life. Let's talk about something else.”

“What about your love life?”

Shinya nearly chokes on air, which only makes Mika raise his eyebrows at him. A stupid grin stretches over the kid's face. Suddenly, Shinya wishes they can talk about Krul's love life all day. Hell, he'd even describe Krul's sex life to her son if it saved him from this.

“Ooh, who is it? Who is it?” Mika kneels up from the sofa, looking at the artist as if he's about to announce world peace.

Please tell him he's not blushing. Please, no blushing.

Mika points at him. “Hahaha, you're actually blushing!”

Well, fuck.

Shinya turns around, forcing out a laugh that sounds more like a sob. “Shouldn't you be getting back to Krul, Mika?”

“Nuh uh, it's more fun here.”

There's nothing more ruthless than a nosy child. Shinya shakes his head, defeated. There's no stopping Mika once he wants to find out something and god knows that he'll do anything to pester it out of Shinya. As he tries to come up with a lie that'll miraculously convince the child, Shinya gets an epiphany which might just save him from Mika's curiosity. He grabs his coat and keys, motioning
a hand towards the door when Mika frowns at him.

“Where are you going?”

“We're going out.”

“Out? Where?”

Shinya shrugs. “Anywhere. Come on, maybe I'll let you play with the snow in the park.”

That gets Mika's attention. His eyes light up, following Shinya as he opens the door.

“You're only doing this to distract me, aren't you?”

Shinya tilts his head. “I don't know what you mean, Mika.”

Whatever possessed him to think that dragging Mika to the park just so he could stop asking embarrassing questions was a good idea, Shinya will never know. By the time they arrive there, his fingers already feel like falling off and not even his beanie hat can save his poor ears from the ruthless weather. Mika shivers beside him and the artist prays to the heavens that Krul won't kick him in the face for getting her kid ill.

“S-S-So, th-this person you l-like... A-Are t-they h-hot?”

Even on the verge of hypothermia, Mika's still not dropping the subject.

Shinya pretends to look around. “Hmm, I don't think anyone can be hot in this weather. It's freezing.”

Mika sends him a look. “Th-That's n-not e-e-even f-funny.”

Oh dear. The poor, little thing looks like he's about to pass out from the cold. Shinya almost feels bad. He takes his scarf off and winds it around Mika's neck, rubbing the kid's cheeks with his hands in a futile attempt to warm him up. Mika breathes into his hands, the tip of his nose already red from the chill. And he sneezes. Twice.

“Maybe we should find a warmer place,” Shinya suggests. “You're going to get ill at this rate.”

“No, no, I-I want to play i-in the sn-snow!”

Sighing, Shinya pats him on the head and gently pushes on his back. “Go ahead then, I'll watch you. You'll probably warm up if you run around.”

He takes a seat on the bench and watches as Mika runs off. It hasn't even been five seconds yet and the kid's already tripped and fallen face flat into the snow. Shinya winces, one hundred percent certain that he's going to get more than a kick in the face once Krul finds out what Mika's gone through today.

Oh well. He might as well make use of his time out here. The park's beautiful; covered in a thick sheet of pristine white. They're the only people here too. Everyone's probably sane enough to realise that it's too cold to be outside today.
The artist fishes out his sketchbook and a pencil from his bag. Forget the fact that he's so cold his hands are trembling; he's going to draw something even if it kills him—

A snowball smacks straight into his face.

Ouch.

"Mika!" Shinya wipes the snow away from his eyes, pouting at the kid's direction.

Mika blinks at him. "I-I didn't do it..."

"Wha...?" Shinya's voice trails off when he hears footsteps behind him.

"Oh, shit. Sorry about that, I didn't know it would hit anyone..."

A kid, probably about the same age as Mika, sheepishly walks towards him. His black hair sticks in all sorts of directions, covered in a light smattering of snowflakes. Large, green eyes look at Shinya with an innocence that he's not sure even existed before this moment. Shinya finds himself forgetting about the snowball.

"It's okay, no harm done," the artist reassures.

The kid rewards him with a large grin.

"Shinya? Shinya, you okay?" Mika runs to his side, slowing down when he notices the other kid with him. He's no longer shivering, but his cheeks are still a bright colour of red.

"Yeah, I'm alright. It was an accident." Shinya turns to the other kid. "Are you on your own? Where's your family?"

Something about the kid's response puzzles Shinya. His lips curl and he looks away, pouting at the snow before kicking it with the wrath of someone who looked like they just had their dog run over by a car.

"Well... I was looking for where my uncle worked, but I only moved here about a month ago so I'm kinda lost now." The kid groans, kicking the snow again. "I wouldn't be lost if he actually took the time to show me around. That asshole..."

Shinya exchanges looks with Mika, who's just as confused as he is.

"First things first, what's your name?" Shinya questions, trying to put on his friendliest smile.

"Yuuichirou Amane," the kid replies. "But everyone calls me Yuu."

"That's a lovely name. I'm Shinya. This right here is Mikaela—"

Yuu frowns at Mika. "Isn't that a girl's name?"

Mika frowns back. "Everyone calls me Mika."

"Still sounds pretty girly if you ask me."

Before a bloodbath is ensued over names, Shinya pats the two kids on their head and stands up. Yuu jolts, swatting his hand away whilst Mika snickers at his reaction. Both of them are practically the same height as each other. It's kind of cute. They're wearing scarves that are too big for them, and Yuu's cheeks are as red as Mika's—but Shinya's convinced that's a blush and not because he's cold.
Shinya pats Yuu's head again, just because his reaction is funny.

“We can show you where your uncle works, right, Mika?”

Mika eyes the dark haired boy and something flashes across his eyes. He smirks.

“I'm okay with showing Yuu-chan the way!”

Yuu shakes his fist. “D-Don't call me Yuu-chan! I barely know you!”

“Oh, does that mean you want to get to know me?” Mika laughs, dodging the fist and hooking his arm around Yuu's elbow instead. “You should have asked!”

“W-What the hell are you doing, you freak! G-Get off me!”

Shinya laughs as he watches the two kids bond with each other. Or something like that, anyway. He's not sure how friendship between kids work these days, but Yuu seems to be telling Mika to kill himself so maybe it's a start.

“Yuu-kun, where does your uncle work?” Shinya says.

Yuu pauses from his tirade and scratches the back of his head with his free arm.

“Er, like one of those big companies. I think it's called Ichinose or something?”

Shinya whistles. Ichinose Company... Fancy that.

Out of all the places, it had to be that one. Part of him wishes he never even offered to help the kid, but it's too late now. All Shinya can do is pray that no one will actually recognise him.

“Yeah, I know where it is... We can take you there.”

Yuu nods, and then narrows his eyes at Mika.

“Thanks, but can you tell him to let me go?”

“It's cold, Yuu-chan. This will help keep us warm.” Mika turns to Shinya, nothing but evil mischief in his eyes. “Right, Shinya?”

The artist can only laugh. It's time like this that he can really tell Krul and Mika are related. Both of them are too sadistic for their own good.

He leads the two kids to the Ichinose Company, having fully memorised where it is because he's cemented it into his brain that it's an area he's to avoid at all costs. Yuu and Mika's bickering is background noise in his head; he's too preoccupied with the possibilities that someone in that company will actually recognise him and...

Well, what? It's not like they can drag him back to his family. Ichinose Company hates his family. Actually, hate is a very weak word for that, but he's too anxious to come up with a better verb for hating-a-family-so-much-that-you-want-to-ruin-their-lives-and-their-ancestor's-lives-and-probably-kill-their-pets-in-the-process-too.

It's not a reassuring thought that Ichinose will still consider him part of the family, despite the fact that Shinya actually left them a year ago.

Oh dear.
“Yuu-kun, why do you need to find your uncle anyway?” Shinya asks, needing the distraction. “Can't you wait?”

For some reason, Yuu blushes.

“Er, yeah... about that... Um, I was having a bath, but the water was taking ages to heat up so I got pissed off and punched the boiler.”

Shinya stops walking. “You punched the boiler?”

“Yeah, and now there's a flood in our house and my uncle won't pick up his damn phone, so finding him myself seemed like a good idea.”

Good lord.

He starts walking again, literally grabbing Yuu's other hand and hurrying them along.

“Maybe we should find your uncle as quickly as possible then.”

Yuu nods. At this point, Mika's now holding the dark haired boy's wrist and the three of them run to the Ichinose Company as if it's the dawn of the coming apocalypse.

---

When they arrive at the entrance of the Company, Shinya already feels his life about to fall apart. He eyes the massive building and lets go of Yuu, scanning the area for anyone that might see him. No one so far, thank god. The entrance looks pretty empty too, but he can see a few guards standing inside the building, waiting to check anyone if they entered.

Amazingly, luck is on his side today.

“Thanks, I think I can take it from here,” Yuu tells him.

Shinya actually lets out a sigh of relief. He wants to pick Yuu up and spin him around in the air.

“Are you sure? Will they let you in?” he says, even though he's not looking forward to having to help Yuu into the building if he has to.

“Yeah, it's cool. My uncle gave me one of his IDs in case I ever needed to get him like this.”

“I guess this is goodbye for now then, Yuu-chan,” Mika whines, letting go of Yuu. “I'm sure we'll see each other again!”

The dark haired kid eyes Mika with fire in his expression. “I sure hope we don't.”

“Aaw, you don't mean that!”

Yuu doesn't reply, but sends one last scowl in Mika's direction before making his way into the building. Shinya has enough patience to make sure he makes it in, and then grabs Mika by the hand and hauls both of them away from that place before anyone sees him.

He's panting by the time they stop two streets later. Mika's cheeks are red again, gulping in large breaths of air and wobbling on his little feet until Shinya has to hold him up.
“Sorry about today, Mika,” Shinya says. “Your mother's going to kill me. Slowly.”

Mika shakes his head, giggling. “It's alright. At least I got to meet a new friend today.”

“Yuu?”

A nod. “I wonder if he'll be in the same school as me when the term starts again...”

“Who knows? He did say he just moved here, so he's going to need to go to a new school, right? Maybe he'll go to Seraph’s High too. It is the best school we have here.”

Shinya checks his phone, his instincts telling him that it's probably getting late.

He doesn't know what makes him panic more; the fact that it's nearly seven PM, or that he has nine missed calls from Krul, probably wondering if he's finally abducted her precious son.

“Shit, I need to take you back to your mother. Now.”

Mika pouts. "Aaw, but I never got to play in the snow."

Shinya ruffles his hair, wishing that Mika didn't have to give him that look because it makes him feel like a heathen whenever he refuses it. This kid's too cute and cunning for his own good.

"I'm not sure I want to get murdered by your mother today. Sorry, Mika."

With that, he takes Mika's hand and the two of them start walking again. It's peaceful in the streets. Almost empty, save for a few cars that rush their way back home. Shinya likes it; it's a clear contrast to the chaos that's been today. Mika's already a handful when he comes to visit, but along with Yuu-kun, Shinya's certain he's not cut out to look after any kids of his own in the near future.

Ha. Like he'd actually find someone he wants to start a family with though... Things like those seem like a dream instead of reality these days.

Things like that can't happen to a Hiiragi, after all.

“So...” Mika starts, the tone in his voice already making the artist wary. “Who's the person you're crushing on then?”

Shinya groans out loud.

“Listen, Guren, how the fuck was I supposed to know that punching the boiler would make it explode and flood the house?”

Guren pinches the bridge of his nose, ignoring Yuu's stupid excuses. Killing the kid would be illegal. And it would reflect badly on him. And jeopardize his job. Killing the kid would not be the right answer.

But as he walks ankle deep into water in his own house, he finds himself caring less and less about his morals and instead caring about the fact that Yuu is still alive and well.

Breathe.
Breathe in.

And out.

Don't kill Yuu.

How the fuck did he manage to flood the house with just the boiler though? Guren's not sure he even wants to know.

He shoves his hand into his pocket, preparing to call a plumber, a repairman and... shit, he doesn't even know where to start. He might as well get a therapist on the way too; god knows he needs it.

“You know, I had to get a stranger to help me find you, you ungrateful bastard.”

Yuu's still sulking and it takes all of Guren's strength not to yell at him that he really wasn't grateful for the fact that he has to return to the sight of his house turned into a fucking swimming pool.

“He even had an annoying kid who wouldn't let go of me,” Yuu carries on. “You're lucky someone nice helped me! I could have gotten kidnapped in the city if I asked someone shady.”

Ugh, he hasn't got time to argue with the kid today.

“Who helped you anyway? They must have been a saint because I'd have probably just ignored you if I were them.”

Yuu throws his shoe at him, but the businessman dodges with ease.

“Uh, I don't know. He told me his name but I can't remember it now...” Yuu taps his chin. “Shi... Shit? Shitya? Shit! Ha!”

Guren would have judged the kid for laughing at his own joke if the name didn't sound so familiar. He walks closer to Yuu.

“Shinya?”

Green eyes widen at him. “Yeah! That! He had white hair and all.”

Amazing. Out of all people, it was him. Fucking amazing.

Guren laughs, running a hand through his hair and imagining how Shinya managed to deal with Yuu. He'd have liked to see that, just for the laughs.

Over the past week, he's almost forgotten about the supermarket incident, convinced himself that it's unlikely that he'll ever bump into Shinya again—especially in this huge city—but this makes him reconsider. Maybe it is a small world, after all.

“So, what's for dinner tonight?” Yuu asks, rising from the sofa to look at him.

They're standing, ankle deep in murky water, in their own living room and Yuu's asking about dinner. Guren's actually speechless.

“Nothing,” he hisses out. “Nothing.”

“Eh?”

“Kid, you've fucking flooded my house. I'm not cooking shit for you today.”
Yuu clenches his fists, slamming them on the sofa. “What the fuck! You can't do that! I'm just a kid!”

“I can. Fucking watch me.”

Guren ignores Yuu's string of curses and starts punching numbers into his phone. Just when he thinks he's finally getting used to having the kid around his house, he goes and does this. Typical. There's no possibility of him catching a break these days.

As he listens to the phone ringing, Guren can't help but look outside his window, towards the city before him, and think about a certain white haired man who keeps popping up at unexpected times.

The phone stops ringing and the person on the other side begins to talk. Guren brushes Shinya out of his mind and proceeds to try and sort this mess out.

Chapter End Notes

Shinya with kids... Too cute. Too. Cute.

(Also, btw, I think it goes without saying that Krul looks much older in this fic than she does in the manga/anime. It'll be kinda weird if Mika's mother looked way younger than him bye)

Mikayuu will get their own moments in this story, but Gureshin will be the main focus as I'm thinking of writing a separate story for Mika and Yuu afterwards. Buuuut that's ages away and I still gotta finish this story first, haha.

Thank you for all your comments so far!
Guren has no idea what the fuck was wrong with him when he decided that bringing Yuu along to go grocery shopping was a good idea. He has never regretted anything so much in his entire life—and trust him, he’s regretted a lot of things in the past but nothing comes close to this.

“Yuu, how many fucking nuggets do you need?” Guren asks as he counts the sixth pack on the trolley. “You do know we can buy more next week, right? I go shopping weekly. These nuggets aren’t going to run out.”

The brat glares at him and puts out his short arms over the nuggets, actually thinking that it will protect them.

“Don’t touch them! It's a three for two deal!”

Guren tries to pry his hands off the trolley.

“Just get three then!”

“That's not enough!”

“Then get four!”

“Three. For. Two. Deal.”

Confused strangers pass them by, probably wondering why on earth an adult is currently trying to wrestle a little kid off a trolley. In the end, Guren resists the strong temptation to whack Yuu with the Pringles tube and takes a step back instead.


This is becoming a habit of his. Maybe he should look into yoga and see if that'll help him stop feeling the need to strangle his own nephew.

Realising Guren's defeat, Yuu sends him a smug smile and walks down the biscuits aisle. Guren glares at his back. Fucking demon child.

He sighs, turning back to the eggs and grabbing one of the larger packs. Yuu's very particular about his breakfast; he likes having his eggs ‘sunny side up’ (that's what he calls them), his toast with no crusts, his bacon crispy to the point where it's almost burnt and... nuggets. Yes, the kid has nuggets for breakfast as well. And lunch. And dinner too. Guren's a bit worried for his diet but the last time he suggested cutting back on the nuggets, Yuu threatened to punch the boiler again.

Guren hasn't suggested it again since then.

“Shit!”

The businessman looks up to see Yuu skidding on the floor, running for his life. Before Guren can say anything, Yuu's hiding behind him, using him as a human pillar.

“What are you doing?” Guren tries to move out of the way.
“Wait, no, stay—”

“Yuu-chan!”

Yuu groans like his life is over. Guren's honestly confused. He's never seen the brat look so deflated before and he wants to congratulate whoever made this possible.

He doesn't have to wait long because one second later, a blond kid materialises out of nowhere and tackles Yuu to the floor. His nephew’s scream echoes throughout the supermarket, attracting the attention of strangers who already thought they were fucked up to begin with.

Guren's not sure what to do.

“Yuu-chan! Fancy seeing you here!” the blond kid sits up, still pinning Yuu to the floor.

“G-Get off me! You're heavy!”

“That's not a very nice thing to say, Yuu-chan...”

Guren’s half tempted to just leave him there, but he is a bit freaked out over the fact that a kid he doesn't know is currently straddling his nephew in the middle of a public place. He's sure this is meant to be something he should be stopping but he can't move a single muscle. They didn't warn him about the possibility of his nephew being harassed in front of his eyes when they forced him to take Yuu into his home.

“Mika...? Mika, where are you? Mika—oh.”

That voice. Guren freezes, recognising it.

He spins around and comes face to face with someone he's been unable to forget. It's only been... what? A little more than a month? His face is just as he remembers it, but it's the eyes that always catches his attention. Guren doesn't think he's ever seen eyes so bright and blue.

“It's you,” Shinya beams at him. He's wearing black jeans and a light blue jumper that compliments his eyes, but the pompom beanie hat he wore last time is nowhere to be seen. Instead, one side of his hair is tucked behind his ear whilst his bangs sweep over his eyes.

“It's me.” Guren nods. And then wonders why he said that. He could have said a simple Hello instead. Nothing kills a conversation more than what he just said.

Coughing, Shinya looks away, craning his neck to look behind Guren. He raises his eyebrows.

“Mika?”

The blond kid finally rises before he suffocates Yuu with his weight. He drags Yuu by his wrist, grinning from ear to ear and presenting him to Shinya as if he's a human sacrifice.

“I found Yuu-chan!” he says.

Shinya laughs, but then his eyes flicker to Guren and his smile disappears.

“Wait. Are you... Are you Yuu-kun's uncle?”

Guren nods. Why did Shinya look like he's about to start running away at any moment?

“I told you, didn't I?” Guren frowns. “I work in a company. Ichinose Company.”
For a second, Guren considers telling him that the company belongs to him, but Shinya already looks freaked out enough, so maybe not. Even so, he has no idea why the artist is reacting like this.

“Eh... Shinya... Is this...” The blond kid points at Guren. “Is this your crus—”

Shinya grabs the kid and covers his mouth with both hands. Guren blinks. What the hell is going on?

“Be quiet, Mika.” Shinya laughs and pats the kid on his head. “Or else I'll tell Krul you missed your dentist appointment today.”

Mika sticks out his tongue. “I'll just tell her you let me.”

Both of them glare at each other for what seems like a whole minute. Guren's not sure why he stayed to watch, but even Yuu's observing them with confusion on his face.

“Anyway,” Shinya says. “We should go—”

Mika manages to slip under his arms. Giggling, he skips to Yuu's side and literally jumps on his back. Yuu yelps, catching Mika just in time, and shouting a string of curses that Guren didn't even know the kid had in his vocabulary. He's not one to understand kids, but he has to admit he's never been more confused in his entire life. The Mika kid is laughing away into the next century and Yuu's wobbling on his feet, trying not to drop him and... wait, is Yuu blushing?

“Oh my,” Shinya mutters. He gives a nervous laugh. “They seem to be good friends...”

Guren will debate on the use of the word friends—especially when it looks like Yuu wants to stab Mika instead of befriend him—but he shrugs nonetheless, turning his eyes away from the kids and focusing on Shinya instead.

“Is that your kid?” he asks, nodding at Mika. “Somehow, I'm not surprised.”

“Mika's a really cute kid so I see what you mean with that.”

“Hahaha, what's that supposed to mean?” Shinya raises an eyebrow, challenging him.

Guren shrugs. “I just see the resemblance.”

“Mika's a really cute kid so I see what you mean with that.”

“That's not what I meant.”

Shinya laughs it off.

“Mika and I aren't related. He's my friend's son, but I look after him from time to time.”

Slowly, Guren nods, still very much aware of Yuu and Mika yelling at each other in the background. He wonders what the people around them are thinking; it's a pretty surreal scene.

“Oh, yeah. By the way, thanks for showing Yuu where the Company was the other day,” Guren remembers, smiling. “You saved my house from getting more wrecked than it already was.”

“Was it really flooded?”

The businessman grimly nods.

“Wow.”

Yuu stumbles to them, still carrying Mika on his back. Doesn't it occur to him that he can just drop
Mika...? Guren eyes the grip Mika has on his neck. Or maybe not. The blond kid looks pretty strong, considering how harmless he looks.

“Hello, Yuu-kun.” Shinya lowers down to his eye level, ignoring Yuu's tortured expression. “Mika's been talking about you nonstop these past few days.”

“C-Can... you... get him o-off me?” Yuu tries to shake him free, but only succeeds in choking himself into a coughing fit.

“Mika, you should get off him... At this rate, you're going to kill poor Yuu-kun.”

Mika pouts, resting his chin on top of Yuu's head.

“Shinya, you said we can eat in that café down the road afterwards...”

“Yeah, sure. We still can. Why?”

“We should invite Yuu-chan and his uncle! I want to eat with Yuu-chan and you can eat with Guren-san!”

It's hard to tell whose reaction is funnier. Shinya jumps, as if the blond kid physically slapped him, and Yuu finally collapses to his knees, groaning when Mika falls on top.

“W-Well... That's... That's only if Guren won't mind... He is Yuu-kun's uncle after all. We can't just drag his nephew away...”

Guren's about to decline because he has a pile of paperwork waiting for him back home, but he sees Yuu's face. His nephew pleads him with large, green eyes and mouths the word *No* repeatedly.

Guren smirks.

“Sure, we can come,” he says, grinning at Yuu when his eyes widen at this betrayal. “I'm sure Yuu will love that.”

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When he woke up today, Guren didn't expect to be sitting opposite Shinya in a café, eating cheesecake, whilst Mika and Yuu undergo an intense arm wrestling match beside them. He watches them with half the interest, stabbing his cake and popping it into his mouth. At least the food is nice. It's been a while since he's had time to visit any of the cafés around this city.

The table shudders as Mika slams Yuu's hand down.

“Ahaha! I win again!” Mika's hair bounces as he jumps up in his seat. Guren notices that he has a huge strand of hair that defies gravity and it's hard not to watch once you notice it.

Ever the sore loser, Yuu folds his arms and scowls at the table.

“You cheated! I don't want to play anymore. T-This is a waste of time!”

Typical. Guren returns his attention back to his cheesecake...

Just in time to see Shinya scoop a corner out of it.
“Hey!” Guren's not quick enough. By the time he snatches the plate away, Shinya's already popped the spoon into his mouth with a wink of his eye.

“Bastard, get your own,” Guren says. “And give me my spoon back!”

Of course, Shinya laughs. Of course he would. The bastard even has the nerve to wave the spoon in front of Guren's face, his blue eyes glinting with mischief. If he thinks Guren will be stupid enough to actually try to grab that spoon back then... he's completely right. Guren leans over the table and lunges for it—only to miss and grab Shinya's shirt instead.

Yuu groans. “This is so lame...”

Mika giggles.

“Guren...” Shinya makes a show of pretending to look flustered. “Not here. We're in public.”

In less than a nanosecond, Guren lets him go and sits back down. Fuck it. He can have the cake. Guren's lost his appetite anyway.

The artist hums to himself as he takes another scoop, waving the spoon in front of Guren's face.

“Do you want it?” Shinya says. Guren wants to rip the smile off his face.

A shrill ringing stops him from doing that though. Shinya frowns, setting the spoon down and fishing out his phone. The carefree manner in his eyes disappear in an instant as soon as he looks at the screen.

“What's wrong?” Guren asks.

He sees Shinya's shoulders begin to shake. The artist swallows.

“I-I'll be right back.” He rises from his seat, and then points at Mika. “Mika, stay there.”

Mika doesn't say anything, but something about the way his bottom lip trembles tells Guren that he knows why Shinya's so anxious. The temptation to ask is strong, but Guren barely knows Shinya. It's not his business to pry on his private affairs.

And why did he care anyway?

Whatever. At least he has his cake back. Guren drags the plate and spoon back to his side, sending one last look towards Shinya as he leaves the café.

Silence descends on the three of them.

Guren just eats the cake. Great. Now he's stuck with two kids. Just great.

“Yuu-chan, are you starting school soon?” Mika asks after a while, drumming his fingers on the table.

“Yeah, in a week...” Yuu nudges Guren. “I am, right? You've sorted things out?”

The businessman nods. “You'll be going to Seraph's High once the term starts.”

“Yay! That's the school where I go! We can see each other more, Yuu-chan!”

Yuu looks like he's been sentenced to death. He sighs and lets his head fall onto the table. It's only
been a little over an hour and Guren's already impressed with this Mika kid. He's done the impossible and managed to shut Yuu up. Guren has never felt so much respect for someone before.

“Guren-san, are you single?”

Guren chokes on his cake.

Forget that. Forget respecting Mika. The kid's looking at him with huge, eager eyes and an even bigger smile that terrifies Guren instead. Now he understands why Yuu can't deal with him.

“His wife divorced him a few months ago.”

Guren's eyes widen. He looks at Yuu, gripping the spoon tightly and resisting the urge to throw it at him.

“Yuu, shut up.”

His nephew just chews on his bottom lip. None of them say anything afterwards. That little reminder that Yuu so graciously gave him has made Guren's mood plummet. He butcher's the cake with his spoon, trying hard to forget about memories that refuse to be forgotten.

Shinya chooses this perfect moment to return to their table, sighing as soon as he sits down and completely unaware of the grim atmosphere he's come back to. One look at his face and it's enough to know that he probably didn't talk to someone pleasant over the phone.

Shinya checks the time on his screen. “We should go... We still have to catch the bus, right, Mika?”

Almost immediately, the blond kid groans.

“I could give you a lift again.”

Guren surprises himself more than Shinya with his own offer. He's barely thinking straight today, but it's too late to take it back now that he's blurted it out.

The artist's face softens. “If... If that's okay with you?”

Nodding, he finds himself smiling at the fact that Shinya sounds so shy.

“Yeah, it's alright. Besides, Mika looks like he wants to spend some more time with Yuu.”

At that, Yuu looks up and shows him his middle finger.

“Is finding you at the supermarket and you giving me a lift back home going to become a weekly thing?”

“Shinya, don't push your luck.”

“Hahaha, I'm just saying it can seriously cut me back on bus tickets.”

Guren pretends not to hear him, focusing his eyes on the road instead. He's definitely not paying attention to Shinya from the corner of his eyes at this moment. Definitely not.
From the way Shinya smirks, Guren knows that he thinks he's won for now. There's something about Shinya that makes every conversation feel like an argument; Guren hates the way his smile is almost always there, as if mocking him. How someone can smile so much, he will never understand.

The artist looks over his shoulder to check on the two kids at the back.

“Aaw, look!” Shinya pokes Guren's side.

“Shinya, I'm driving!”

“Yuu-kun and Mika have fallen asleep on each other's shoulder. That's so cute.” Taking out his phone, he shuffles on his seat to take a closer look. “I need a picture of this.”

Thankfully, the traffic lights show a red light and Guren spares a look at the kids. His mouth quirks up. The two of them are leaning against each other; Mika with a smile on his face, and Yuu with his mouth parted, snoring lightly.

“Send me that picture when you get home. I need to blackmail Yuu with that,” Guren says when he begins to drive again.

“But I don't have your number...”

“Wait. I'll type it into your phone when we get to your flat.”

Shinya doesn't say anything, but Guren can see him smiling. It's like the first day they met each other again, only it's not snowing (thank god) and he's actually known Shinya for longer than an hour. Like last time, they're silent for most of the journey, which Guren is perfectly fine with, but there's something that's been clawing at the back of his mind.

“What was that phone call? You didn't look too happy.”

At first, Shinya doesn't answer, making Guren wonder if it was a good idea to pry. He just can't forget how different Shinya looked after that call. Yeah, he's only known the artist for two days but Guren can't help but think it would take a lot for Shinya to be upset—or at least upset enough for it to show on the outside.

“Just... Just family problems.” Shinya's laugh doesn't even sound like a laugh anymore. “Nothing too big.”

Guren nods, not willing to press on. Fair enough. He has some family issues of his own, so he understands why Shinya's not in the mood to share them. Instead, he turns on his speakers and lets music fill in the silence of the car.

“Did you know that for seventy-five percent of men, ejaculation occurs within the first three minutes of penetration?”

Well, that was one way to change the topic. Guren looks at Shinya for a second, then rolls his eyes and drives on.

“That's weak.”

“Weak? Are you saying you can last longer?”

Guren smirks. “Can't you?”

It's a mistake to look at Shinya now because the smile on his face isn't something Guren's ready for.
“You bet.”

“Right.” Guren needs to change the subject. Now. “Where do you get these weird facts from anyway?”

Shinya shrugs. “When I'm bored, I just search them on the internet.”

“I don't know why, but I'm not surprised.”

The artist laughs at this and they spend the rest of the car journey exchanging weird facts—or in this case, it's Shinya giving the facts and Guren trying to come up with a suitable comment for them. Most of the time, he ends up shooting Shinya a look of absolute confusion, and the artist will only laugh some more. It's an odd way to pass the time but Guren admits that at least it's easy to talk to him. Even if he is a bit strange.

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*Lindsay Flats still looks like a shithole,* Guren decides as soon as he parks his car. He didn't really expect it to change since the last time he's been here, but a part of him thought that maybe he remembered it far worse than it is.

Well, he didn't. It actually does look like a shithole.

“I can't believe they're still asleep.” Shinya smiles at the two children behind them. “That's really cute.”

“Oh yeah.” He holds out his phone, unlocking the screen. “Do you still want me to send you the picture?”

“Sure.” Guren takes the phone and types in his number, then hands it back to Shinya who beams at him in return.

“I'll text you in a bit, then,” he says. “I should probably wake Mika up now...”

Guren watches as Shinya leans over and shakes Mika's leg, lightly whispering his name. It takes several attempts, but eventually, Mika groans and blinks back into his surroundings. He yawns, rubbing his eyes.

“We're here now, Mika,” Shinya tells him. “I texted your mum and told her to pick you up at my flat so you can sleep there some more, if you want.”

Groggily, the kid nods and leaves the car, stumbling out and nearly falling face flat onto the cement. Shinya laughs under his breath.

“Anyway, thanks again for giving me a lift,” he says. “And for going to the café with us. Today's been nice.”

“Yeah, it has been nice,” Guren agrees. “It's no problem. Tell Mika it was nice to meet him too. When he's actually awake properly.”
Both of them leave the car so that Shinya can get his shopping bags. Mika's literally fallen asleep leaning against a lamppost and the artist tells Guren to ignore it, reassuring him that Mika can fall asleep anywhere and everywhere if he's tired enough.

Guren opens the boot of the car and helps Shinya gather his bags, making sure he's gotten everything.

“I guess I might see you next week?” Shinya asks once they're done.

“Maybe. Probably.”

A laugh. Guren's grown to expect them by now.

“Right,” the artist grins. “I'll maybe, probably see you then.”

It's not until Guren's about to sleep does his phone begin to vibrate. He nearly ignores it, wishing that the person texting him will choose a better time to actually do it. Preferably not when he wants to sleep. But the phone doesn't stop vibrating and Guren gives in, already hating whoever this person is.

It's an unknown number.

He frowns, opening the message.

*They look cute, don't they?* the message says, and if it weren't for the picture attached to the text, Guren wouldn't have known who it was.

Damn Shinya.

He texts back anyway.

*Why are you only texting me this now? It's 1am.*

Shinya replies in less than a minute.

*Were you waiting for me to text you?~*

He can practically see Shinya's smile right now. And hear his laugh. Guren takes a deep, tired breath, rubbing his eyes and punching the keys of his phone.

*No, I wasn't. I was about to go to sleep but you're keeping me up.*

The plan was to leave it there, but Shinya's ridiculously fast at replying and Guren's too much of an organized man to ignore a text.

*It's only 1am. You're so weak~~~*

Guren narrows his eyes at his phone. Was that a challenge?

And so, instead of sleeping at one AM like usual, Guren Ichinose stays up until four AM, hating Shinya more and more with each passing minute and hating himself twice-fold for actually letting the artist get to him like this. In the end, he falls asleep with his phone on his chest, dreaming of days
without annoying nephews and artists.

Guren wakes up with a headache and a text from Shinya. He groans out loud, but opens the text anyway.

*Rise and shine Guuuuuuuuren~*

Chapter End Notes

This chapter turned out longer than I expected it to be... But then again, that's probably inevitable if you have both mikayuu and gureshin in it........

As usual, thank you for the comments on this fic so far! I hope everyone enjoys this chapter~
Numbers

Chapter Notes

Just a warning that the end of the chapter is quite dark and sensitive.....

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Shinya hasn't drawn anything in a while—not that he's even tried to because it's impossible to calm him down these days. When he draws, he likes to have his mind at peace, not drowning in worries about the possibility of his crazy family finding him. He doesn't even want to think about what will happen if they find him... He'd probably die. Literally. Or worse. Probably worse. Heaven knows the Hiiragi family can definitely deliver something worse than death.

His phone vibrates against his desk, the tremors too loud for his anxiety. Shinya jumps and picks it up as soon as he can.

Fuck off, the text says. He doesn't even need to look at who sent it to know who it is.

What did I do this time...? Shinya replies, honestly confused.

Guren's reply comes a minute later and it's enough to put a smile on the artist's face.

Your last text made my phone ring in the middle of a meeting. I forgot half of my speech because of you.

Shinya laughs, wishing he was there to witness it. The almighty Guren stuttering and messing up his speech just because of one text... Priceless.

It's lucky that despite working in Ichinose, Guren doesn't recognise who he is. Then again, Shinya should have expected this. It's not like the Hiiragi family ever bothered to showcase him to the world—quite the opposite, actually. Still, you can never be too careful. He's lucky he's adopted, because the trademark Hiiragi black hair and red eyes would have made life harder for him.

Shinya's about to reply, but the sound of sudden knocking on his front door makes him jolt. It's not even knocking. It's more like trying to break the door open.

He sighs, fetching his keys before Krul's impatience lands him in trouble again. Usually, he doesn't bother to lock his door because of her. The last time he did, Krul spent ages bashing on it that his neighbours actually called the police.

“It's open, it's open,” Shinya says, dodging Krul's fist as she prepares to batter the door again.

The pink haired woman doesn't even say hello. She makes her way into his flat, dropping her handbag on the nearest surface and sinking into the couch, feet propped onto the coffee table. Shinya only shakes his head. Between her and Mika, he's convinced they treat this flat as their home more than he does.

Today, she's wearing a black summer dress that reaches down to her knees. It fits her well and Shinya knows the dress is meant to make her look sophisticated and mature, but Krul still looks
young. Although twenty-eight, Shinya swears that she can easily pass off as being eighteen. (He’d never say this out loud though, not unless he wanted to die by her hands.)

“Why’s the door locked? You never lock it,” Krul asks. “Are you in trouble?”

Trust her to notice that. Shinya locks the door, ignoring the way Krul’s red eyes watch him. He knows she’s waiting for an answer, but he’s still debating whether or not to tell her the truth... but then remembers the last time he tried to lie to Krul. It ended up with her threatening to kick him in the groin, and knowing the fiery tempered woman, she probably wasn't kidding.

“Mika told me you got a call last weekend. He said you looked really worried.”

Ugh. Damn that kid.

“The Hiiragis are trying to find you again, aren't they?”

Damn Krul for not dropping the subject too.

In the end, Shinya makes his way to the kitchen and prepares to make themselves some tea. He knows he’d need at least something to keep this conversation pleasant.

“It was Shinoa,” he says, leaning on the counter.

Krul sits up. “Your younger sister?”

He nods. “She was warning me that Kureto was on his way to look for me.”

“Kureto? That asshole?”

Shinya considers reminding her that ninety-nine percent of his family members are actually assholes, but he guesses that Kureto is The Asshole; a form of supreme assholeness that transcends into the use of capital letters.

“Yeah. Turns out Mahiru went back to them in the end, so I'm the only one left they have to find.”

Once the kettle's finished boiling, Shinya makes their tea. Two sugars for him, none for Krul as usual. It's a well known fact that Shinya has a sweet tooth whilst Krul prefers the opposite. Often, the pink haired woman complains that he’s influenced Mika into gaining a sweet tooth too. Every time Mika has to get new fillings, Krul blames the artist for allowing him to give her kid so many sweets.

“I'm the one paying for these fillings,” she would complain. “I'd make you pay for them yourself if you weren't so broke.”

Shinya sits by Krul on the couch, handing her tea. She thanks him, blowing lightly on it for five seconds before sipping. And nearly dropping it when she realises it's still too hot. The artist tries to cover his laugh with a cough.

“Why did she come back? I thought she got married or something.” Krul asks, setting her cup down in defeat.

“I don't know. I haven't heard from her ever since she ditched our family to hook up with some guy.”

Krul smirks at this. “Speaking of guys... Mika's been telling me you met someone...”

Shinya groans. Damn Mika. Damn that kid so much.
“So, is he nice?”

As soon as Krul asks that, Shinya gets another text.

Krul leans closer. “Is that him?”

Before Shinya can react, the woman snatches the phone from his hands and unlocks his screen. Fuck. He shouldn't have trusted Krul with the knowledge that his password was the date she nearly got arrested for trying to strip a policeman.

(Long story short: Krul's a ridiculous lightweight and it didn't occur to Shinya that giving her one tequila shot would end up with the single mother trying to undress the nearest person she could see. Rest assured, Krul is now reluctant to go clubbing with him in the future.)

“Guren, huh? Sounds manly,” Krul giggles as she scrolls through their texts. And Shinya just watches her, wanting to die.

“I'm so sick of Yuu and his fucking nugget obsession. I swear I'm going to throw away all these nuggets today. This can't be healthy.” Krul bursts out laughing as she reads Guren's texts aloud.

Not knowing what else he can do, Shinya just shakes his head and laughs softly under his breath.

“Jesus, you two text a lot... You text him more than you text me!”

“Maybe 'cos I don't have a crush on you,” Shinya teases, snatching his phone back.

Krul raises her eyebrows. “Is he single?”

“Mika said he was...”

“Are you using my son to get information about this guy?”

“Hahaha, Mika did it by himself... I promise!”

Krul narrows her eyes at him, but shrugs it off and picks up her drink. It's cool enough for her to drink without burning herself now and Shinya allows himself to sigh for the silence that soon follows as the two of them enjoy their tea.

“Where's Mika, by the way? Didn't school start today?”

“Ferid said he'd pick him up,” Krul answers. “He's been meaning to get to know Mika more, so I let him.”

Nodding, Shinya doesn't say anything. He never knows what to make of that Ferid person, but he won't stop Krul from dating him.

“Speaking of which, how are things going with that guy recently?” Shinya asks, smiling when he sees Krul's eyes widen in anticipation as she prepares to launch into full detail about her love life, as usual.

“I never expected Ferid to actually be into bondage, but you'd never guess what happened last night...”

Shinya nearly spits out his tea.
Yuu won't admit it, but his first day at school was actually pretty nice. It beats his old school anyway, where everyone stayed away from him because they thought he came from a rough family. At least here, everyone thinks stupid Guren is his dad and that he's rich.

“Yuu-chan!” Mika the idiot appears out of nowhere, skipping by his side and ignoring the glare that Yuu automatically gives him. Ugh. There's no getting rid of this boy...

“What did you think of the school, Yuu-chan?”

“It's nothing special,” Yuu grumbles, looking away.

“I'm glad we're in the same class! I didn't expect us to be, but I guess this is lucky, isn't it?”

“Not lucky.”

Mika only laughs, poking him in the ribs. Hard. Yuu yelps, stumbling back. He has the strong urge to whack the idiot across his head, but refrains when he sees a teacher walking past them.

He settles for the deadliest glare he can muster instead.

“Is your uncle picking you up today, Yuu-chan?” Mika asks, not even fazed by Yuu's super-deadly glare.

Sighing, Yuu continues walking, although deflated that no matter how much he tries, Mika's just as cheerful as always. Seriously, did this guy even have any negative emotions? It's freaky how constantly cheerful he is. Yuu feels tired just by looking at him.

“Yeah, he said he would,” Yuu answers, scratching the back of his head. “How about you?”

“Usually, my mum picks me up. Maybe Shinya if he's not busy.”

At the mention of the artist, Yuu rolls his eyes. Ugh. He's had enough of seeing Guren texting on his phone to last him a lifetime. One day, Guren actually burnt his dinner because he was too busy texting Shinya instead of paying attention to the oven.

“Stupid Guren won't stop texting Shinya,” Yuu grumbles.

Mika's eyes sparkle. “Oh? Does he like him?”

“Like him? No! Guren doesn't like anyone. He's miserable.”

“Shinya likes him.”

Yuu's eyes widen. “Like... like him?”

The grin on Mika's face says everything.

Yuu gasps. Oh. Oh.

“Don't tell Guren-san though!” Mika waves his hands. “I'm not meant to tell anyone.”

Even though the temptation is strong, Yuu swears an oath not to tell Guren. Let the adults handle whatever it is they're doing... Yuu's not sure he even wants to get involved with... that.
“What about you, Yuu-chan?”

Yuu frowns, waiting for Mika to elaborate.

“Do you like anyone?”

His answer is instant. “W-What? No!”

Mika laughs, his blond hair swaying when he tilts his head. “You're blushing, Yuu-chan…”

Even if that isn't true, Yuu soon feels his face warming up and Mika's grin only widens. He looks away, scowling at his feet as they continue walking, imagining the ground is Mika's face. Yuu wishes he can stomp on Mika's face.

“Oh, look! I see Guren-san waiting for you!” Mika tugs his arm, pointing at Guren who, surely enough, is leaning against his black sports car.

“Where's your mum? Or Shinya?” Yuu looks around the parking area, trying to spot a guy with white hair, or a woman who looks somewhat like Mika.

“Hmm... I don't know…” Mika scans the parking area with him, bobbing on the heels of his school shoes as the minutes pass.

“Mika-kun!”

Yuu hears a voice call towards Mika. He looks over his shoulder to see a lilac haired man making his way towards them.

“Do you know him?” Yuu shakes Mika's shoulder, but stops when he sees what his expression looks like. He doesn't think he's ever seen Mika look this troubled yet, and he has to admit that it makes him wary.

The man stops before them, smiling down at Mika. Yuu studies him, noting that his hair is surprisingly long. It was hard to notice from the distance earlier because it's tied into a ponytail.

“Your mother said I can pick you up today,” the man says, crouching down to Mika's level. He pats the blond's head, slowly stroking Mika's curly locks with a smile on his face.

Yuu doesn't know if he's imagining it, but he thinks he sees Mika stiffening.

“Oh, okay…” Mika nods. “Thank you, Ferid-san.”

He turns to Yuu, waving his hand and smiling. It doesn't reach his eyes. “I'll see you tomorrow, Yuu-chan... Say hello to Guren-san for me.”

“Uh, yeah. Sure. See you.” Yuu waves back, walking away towards Guren's car instead. That was... strange. He doesn't know why, but he swears that Mika acted weird just now. Was it because of that man?

Yuu shrugs. It's not his business. Why does he care anyway? Mika's annoying...

Guren nods at Yuu when he reaches the car, opening the door for him. The smell of leather and coffee envelops him as he enters, and Yuu smiles because he's gotten used to it over the past month. (It's better than the constant smell of alcohol that his old house was covered in.)

“How was school?” Guren asks when he starts to drive.
Yuu shrugs. “Not bad. I like it more than my old school.”

“Have you made any friends or did you scare everyone away?”

He ignores the latter part of that sentence. Stupid Guren.

“Not yet... but Mika's in my class...”

Guren smirks, but doesn't say anything. Yuu narrows his eyes, but then remembers what Mika told him about Shinya liking Guren. Ha. Ha. Yuu smirks now too, making sure his uncle heard it loud and clear.

“What are you laughing at?” Guren frowns.

“Nothing...”

The man only sighs, muttering something Yuu can't quite hear. He turns the radio on and their conversation ends there.

Yuu lays his head against the window. He can't help but think of Mika's face when he said goodbye to him just now... That smile he gave him... Mika's always smiling, so that's nothing different—but this smile didn't seem like a smile at all. It looked empty. Forced.

Huh... Was there something bothering Mika?

Ugh. Why is Yuu even wondering about this? Mika's not even his friend. He's just annoying.

He shakes his head, telling himself that he's just over-thinking.

“So...” Yuu turns to Guren again. “What's for dinner?”

“Not nuggets.”

“Fuck off.”

Guren looks down at him, his purple eyes glinting with something Yuu can only describe as pure evil.

“I threw all your nuggets in the bin. You're eating healthy meals from now on.”

In that moment, Yuuichirou Amane's life crumbles apart.

After shoving the vegetables down Yuu's throat and possibly enduring what seemed to be the longest dinner Guren's ever had the misfortune to witness, the businessman finally makes his way into his study. He really needs to work on reducing the pile of paperwork tonight. Maybe he should make a start on reading through Sayuri's report. Her work's always easy to understand... Goshi's on the other hand...

Guren shudders, deciding that he'll leave Goshi's until last.

He sinks into his chair, and almost instantly, his phone vibrates.
The sensible part of him advises him to turn his phone off. It's impossible to get any work done with Shinya texting him every two minutes.

But Guren still ends up opening the text anyway.

*How was Yuu-kun's first day of school?*

He half expected Shinya to text one of his useless, weird facts again, but at least that isn't the case this time.

*He says it was fine. He told me Mika's in his class too.*

Shinya, as usual, replies instantly, but Guren waits until he's read at least one page of Sayuri's report before looking at his phone.

*Did you know that a pig's orgasm usually lasts thirty minutes?*

Guren sighs. So much for a normal conversation. He's lost count of how many of these facts Shinya's told him. Half of them are usually sexual too, making the businessman wonder just how messed up in the head Shinya really is.

*Haven't you got some paintings to do? Stop bothering me.*

Guren doubts Shinya will actually heed his text though. There's a reason why they've both been texting non-stop since exchanging numbers; Shinya won't stop sending random shit and Guren's too stubborn to end the conversation.

*So mean~ Actually, I have a question for you.*

A question? Guren frowns at his phone. Knowing Shinya, it's probably another stupid fact. He sighs. He might as well get it out of the way.

*What is it now?*

Strangely, it takes longer for Shinya to reply. Guren has enough time to read three pages of Sayuri's report before his phone finally buzzes.

*What would you do if you were forced into a situation you can't escape from? Would you try to resist or just go along with it?*

What the fuck? The businessman's not too sure on how to reply to that, especially when there's a serious lack of context on the text. He doesn't even know if Shinya's being serious right now.

*It depends on what it's about,* Guren texts back, not really knowing what else to say.

*It's about family.*

As soon as he sees that word, all Guren can think about is the day his father decided to hand the Company to him. He never wanted it, but he focused on his father's eyes, full of expectations and burdens, and knew there was no other choice.

*You can't avoid your family. No matter what, they'll always be there whether you like it or not.* Guren's not sure if his text is actually going to help, but he shrugs and presses send anyway.

Shinya replies.
How troublesome~

Guren can't help it. He types his next message with a smirk on his face.

You're troublesome.

---

Mika doesn't know how long he listens to the silence, but he tells himself again and again that the silence is better than what Ferid did to him. He lies on his bed, burying himself into his blankets and counts the seconds in his head.

One... Two... Three... Four...

He counts until he's no longer shaking. He counts until he reaches three hundred and twenty two and he hears Ferid whistling outside his door. He loses count then, holding his breath and chanting NoNoNoNoNoNo, not again until he hears the sound of fading footsteps. Is he gone? Mika counts once more. Up to fifty. The door remains closed.

He counts because that's the only thing that keeps his mind off things.

When he reaches the hundreds, his mind wanders off. He remembers Yuu-chan's face this afternoon. He remembers Yuu-chan walking away when he said goodbye. He remembers wishing that Yuu-chan would turn around and say Mika, why don't you stay at our house this afternoon instead? He remembers wishing Yuu-chan would take him away from Ferid.

But he didn't. And now... this has happened and...

Mika starts to shake again. He loses the numbers in his head and can no longer pick them up. One. Four. Three. Two. Twenty. One. He can't think straight. He can't count anymore. He just remembers everything and he doesn't know why this has happened or what he's done to deserve it or what he can do or... or...

Mika can't stop shaking. He feels the tears finally escape him until he's sobbing into his hands and wishing Yuu-chan turned around.

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Chapter End Notes

It's nearly 8am and idk why I'm staying up this late to write this chapter but I am so sorry Mika I'm sorry you have to go through shit in this fic too, you've gone through enough pain in canon as it is............... But yeah, I know in canon, it has some dark undertones about Ferid and Mika's relationship, so I thought I could incorporate that into a modern fic as well...
Revelations and Secrets

Chapter Notes

A few people were wondering the extent of how much I would go with the Mika/Ferid thing last chapter, so I thought I should mention that I won't be going into detail with it, especially the /actual/ thing. What you'll mostly get is hints and mainly Mika's thoughts on it. (It already hurt writing that last chapter, I don't think I can survive going into more detail about it)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Time is never on his side these days.

Mika drums his fingers against the desk, listening to the tap_tap as seconds rush by. His eyes dart to the clock. Is it nearly three PM already? He could have sworn that it was only two PM the last time he checked...

He sighs. In ten minutes time, he'll have to go home and...

Mika clenches his fist. Nope. No. Don't think about it. Not in school. School is the only place where he can feel safe. Don't drag it into school.

His eyes travel to the boy sitting next to him—or sleeping, more like. Yuu-chan's got his head in his arms, snoring lightly. He's actually propped a book in front of him so that their teacher won't see him. It's almost enough to make Mika smile. Almost.

He looks at the clock again. Five more minutes. His throat already starts to feel dry and he can feel his pulse quicken at the thought of having to go home. It's been a week since... that started and he's still not used to it. He can never get used to it. He doesn't want to get used to it. Why does time rush by when he's at school? It's not so bad when he's here because he has Yuu-chan and he knows Yuu-chan will never hurt him.

The alarm bellows. Mika jumps, slamming his knee against the desk. Beside him, Yuu nearly falls off his chair and would have done so if he didn't grab onto the nearest thing he can find—which is Mika's shoulder.

Ouch. Mika winces as Yuu unknowingly digs his fingers into a bruise that's not healed yet.

“W-What?” Yuu rubs his eyes when he's finally collected himself. “Is it time to go home now?”

Mika nods, plastering a smile onto his face. It's easier to smile for Yuu-chan.

“Let's go, Yuu-chan,” he says.

They make their way out of school. As usual, Yuu's got his bag slung onto his shoulder, glaring at anything that passes their way. Mika keeps a look out for Ferid, wishing that by some miracle, his mother or Shinya will pick him up today instead. The wishes never work though. He's always greeted by the sight of the lilac haired man waiting for him with that sickly smile.

“Is Guren-san picking you up again?” Mika asks in order to distract himself. It's the same question
everyday and he only asks it because some part of him wishes that Yuu will offer to invite him to his house instead.

This time, Yuu shakes his head.

“Nah. He says he's coming home late today so I gotta take the bus. How about you? That Ferid guy picking you up as usual?”

Mika's about to nod, but hope strikes him. If Guren-san isn't in the house... Then maybe... He bites the inside of his cheek, praying that Yuu-chan will cooperate.

“Erm... Not today, no,” Mika lies. “I-I was actually wondering if I could stay at your house this afternoon. Until my mum gets back from work.”

That stops Yuu. He glances over his shoulder and raises an eyebrow at Mika, who's trying very hard not to fidget under his scrutiny. The blond silently prays that Yuu will let him stay over. If he can avoid Ferid this afternoon, at least until his mother comes home, then it will be enough. Please...

In the end, Yuu just shrugs.

“Yeah, sure. Why not? Guren's not home anyway, so it's not like he'll care.”

Mika suddenly wants to hug Yuu-chan. He smiles instead. It's the biggest smile he's given in days, and this time, it's actually genuine.

Yuu looks away, his cheeks flushing slightly.

“I-It's no big deal, geez...” He scratches his cheek and glares at Mika from the corner of his eyes. “C-Come on. We gotta hurry up for the bus or I'm blaming you if we miss it.”

Mika laughs. It's a genuine laugh too.

“Guren-sama... Guren-sama!”

Guren jolts awake and nearly knocks over the cup of coffee positioned dangerously close to his arm. He grunts, opening his eyes to a blur of figures huddled around him. As the haze disappears, he recognizes the meeting room and manages to stifle the groan that he nearly lets out.

Fuck. Did he fall asleep in a meeting again?

He looks at Sayuri, who was the one who woke him up. She fiddles with her clipboard, her eyes flickering to Mito and Goshi.

Mito just shakes her head and lets out a long suffering sigh. “You need to get more sleep. You look like a mess.”

Guren doesn't say anything but inside, he automatically curses Shinya. The idiot always feels the need to text him at ungodly hours. They're not even texts worthy of a normal conversation; usually it's just Shinya saying random shit and Guren replying with either 'What the fuck' or 'Fuck off'. Last time, Shinya even woke him up at four AM to text him that he had a dream a giant rabbit tried to kill him.
You could just not reply, the sensible part of his brain always tells him.

And Guren always ignores it.

“What were we talking about?” he asks, ignoring Goshi's immediate laugh.

“The Hiiragis,” Shigure answers, always the reliable one. At least she doesn't seem to care that Guren's slept through their hour long meeting.

“One of their sons quit the business and left their family about a year ago, remember?” Sayuri says. “It's only recently that they're beginning to hunt him down.”

“That dude's gotta be special for them to bother.” Goshi lets out another laugh. Guren only notices now that he's smoking his pipe, but he doesn't have the strength to bother telling him to put it out.

Guren shrugs. “What's so important about one guy anyway? I thought that bastard Kureto was going to inherit the company—”

“If his dad ever steps down. He doesn't look like he's going to do that any time soon. At least not until they find the missing son.” Mito shrugs. “Anyway, who's to say this has anything to do with their business? For all we know, it's just family problems. Lord knows the Hiiragis have lots of them.”

Slowly, Guren nods, not really paying attention. Let the Hiiragis fuck up their family as usual. He's had enough of dealing with their kind to last him a lifetime.

“I heard Mahiru returned to them too.”

Everyone turns their eyes to Sayuri, who had dared to mention her of all people. Once it dawns to Sayuri, she gives a little gasp, covering her mouth as if it would erase what she just said. Guren sighs, breaking the heavy silence.

“Good for her,” he mutters.

It's bitterly said, though he secretly wonders if she'll be safe. He doubts it. He also wishes he doesn't care. All he remembers is Mahiru waking up in the middle of the night, crying from nightmares about her fucked up family. She never elaborated on what they did exactly, and Guren's not one to pry, but he guesses that whatever it was, it wasn't just good. Of course it wouldn't be good.

It's not his business anymore.

Well, that's what he tells himself. It doesn't stop him from wishing she was safe.

“Anyway, are we done?” Guren asks, glancing at his watch. “It's getting late. You guys should head home.”

“You should as well,” Shigure suggests. She gathers her things, and the others do so as well.

Mito smirks, waggling her eyebrows in a way that tempts Guren to demote her. “Get more sleep too. Stop texting your new girlfriend—”

“What? I don't have a new girlfriend!”

Goshi bursts out laughing. “I told you he didn't have a new girlfriend. Pay up, girls.”

Guren watches as the three girls glare at the larger man before rooting through their purses and
handing him the money.

“Did you bet on me having a new girlfriend?” Guren hisses. Forget demoting Mito. He wants to sack all of them instead.

“U-Um, we thought... that since you kept texting someone...” Sayuri twiddles her thumbs together, unable to meet his eyes.

Guren pinches the bridge of his nose. Fucking hell.

“I'm texting Shinya! He's just a guy I met at the superma—”

“Wait, it's a guy?” Mito's jaw drops. Guren thinks she's dropped her purse too.

“We didn't include the possibility of him getting a boyfriend...” Shigure turns to Goshi, holding out her hand. “I want my money back.”

Goshi doesn't move. He's looking at Guren as if he sees a new man before him.

“I didn't even know he swung that way,” he whispers, still loud enough for Guren to hear.

Guren feels his blood pressure begin to rise. His 'friends' continue talking like he's not in front of them contemplating their deaths instead of unemployment.

“W-Well, Guren-sama was very distraught after his divorce...” Sayuri sneaks a glance at him, then flinches when she sees his scowl.

Goshi shrugs. “I didn't think he was that upset—”

“Shut up! I'm not dating anyone!” Guren finally snaps. Fuck. And he thought dealing with Yuu is bad enough. “Out! Just get out! You're all giving me a headache!”

All of them shuffle out of the room, muttering under their breaths. Guren can't even be bothered to listen to them, but he swears he can make out Goshi placing another bet on how long it'll take for him to hook up with Shinya. The temptation to sack him right there on that spot is almost overwhelming.

Guren sinks back to his chair with the largest sigh he's ever mustered. God, he's starting to get a headache. Today's been a horrible day and all he wants to do is go home and eat something. Being the idiot that he is, he didn't have enough time to pack lunch for today and fuck, he's actually starving.

He at least hopes that Yuu remembered to get the bus, because he sure as hell isn't going to drive all the way to the brat's school and pick him up at this time.

His phone vibrates.

“Not again...” Guren mutters, glaring at Shinya's name on the screen. With the amount of times the artist texts him, you'd think Shinya doesn't do anything else in his life.

Are you done with work? Wanna meet up?

Guren frowns. That's unexpected.

Yeah, I'm finishing up now. What do you mean meet up? he texts back, keeping his eyes on the screen. For once in his life, he's thankful Shinya replies at the speed of light.
Like... get some food. I'm out in town atm so I'm up for it if you are.

Guren's still frowning. He looks outside and sees that the sun is about to set. Yuu should definitely be back home by now, and Guren did leave a meal for him at home in case the kid got hungry. Going with Shinya wouldn't hurt, right?

Besides, he's hungry anyway and he's got time to kill.

Guren texts back.

Sure. Where do you want to meet up?

Mika's still shocked. He's been in Yuu-chan's house for nearly three hours and he has yet to accept the fact that his house isn't a house. It's a mansion. He vaguely remembers that Guren-san works in Ichinose Company, but Mika never expected him to be this rich!

He sits awkwardly on their white sofa—which, he might add, looks bigger than his entire bedroom. Wow. Everything looks really clean too, as if Guren-san spends hours wiping every spot and corner of his house. Mika wouldn't be surprised if he does; he seems like he might do that to relieve stress.

Yuu yawns, stretching his arms and pausing the game he's playing. He turns to Mika, nudging him lightly in the shoulder.

"You hungry?" he asks. "I think Guren cooked something, so there should be enough for both of us."

Mika nods. "If that's okay."

They make their way to the kitchen and Mika watches as Yuu-chan places the tray of pasta into the microwave. It's eerily quiet in the mansion, though knows that's just because there's no one else here but them. He's glad. Being with Yuu-chan always puts him at ease.

When the pasta's all heated up, they sit around the table. It's been a while since Mika's eaten dinner with anyone because his mother usually doesn't get home from work until the evening, and Ferid... well, the less time spent with Ferid, the better.

He watches as Yuu devours his meal. The sight of it makes him smile and he happily eats the pasta as well. They don't say anything. Mika's content with just watching Yuu-chan in front of him.

"Mika, are you okay?"

Mika blinks.

"Yuu-chan, what do you mean?"

Yuu actually pouts. "I-It's just that you've been quiet these days. I was wondering if there was something wrong—n-not that I care or anything!"

He almost laughs at Yuu-chan's last statement. It's so typical of him. He's glad that no matter what's changed in his life, there's at least something that stays consistent.
“I’m fine,” Mika lies. “Everything is fine.”

Yuu's gaze stay on him. He can't look away, although he wishes he can. It feels like Yuu-chan can see straight through him and Mika's worried that he'll actually find out about his secret this way.

Sighing, Yuu looks back down at his pasta and stabs it with his fork. Mika feels bad. He doesn't like lying, and now he's coming to realise that he definitely doesn't like lying to Yuu-chan at all... but he has to. Yuu-chan can't find out. No one can.

Mika pushes the pasta around in his plate and tries to find a way to change the subject.

“Isn't it lonely in the house?” he asks after while. “Especially when Guren-san is at work and you're here by yourself?”

Yuu shrugs. “I like it.”

That catches Mika's attention. “You like being alone?”

Yuu hums, tapping his chin as if in thought about what he's going to say. Mika feels impatient, eager to find out more about Yuu-chan.

“When I lived with my parents, I always preferred being alone, so I guess I'm used to it now,” Yuu says, shrugging again.

That doesn't sate Mika's curiosity. If anything, it makes it worse, but he's aware that it might be sensitive topic so he makes sure to deliver his next question carefully.

“Um... by the way, why do you live with Guren-san? Is it because of your parents?”

Luckily, Yuu doesn't seem to react badly. He just twirls some pasta on his fork.

“My mum died two months ago and my dad's nowhere to be seen so... Guren was the best option.”

Oh. Mika's at a loss for words.

“I-I'm sorry. I didn’t mean to—”

“Don't. I hated my parents anyway.” Yuu doesn't even say it with emotion. He sounds empty, and Mika thinks that's worse.

“Did... Did they hurt you?” Mika's voice is barely even a whisper. He can feel his pulse quickening. He's nervous to hear Yuu-chan's answer because... because he doesn't want Yuu-chan to be hurt by adults too.

Green eyes avert back to him. Mika wonders if Yuu will say anything... He won't be surprised if he doesn't. He's already shocked that Yuu has told him this much in the first place.

Yuu looks away. At first, he looks composed, calm, casual even—and then Mika notices the way his hands are trembling. He remains silent, now finding it hard to breathe.

“It's just the usual. Parents being alcoholics and hitting their children.” He pushes away his bowl now, standing up. “I'm over it.”

Yuu walks away, quickly. Too quickly. He dumps his bowl into the sink.

Maybe it's his own loneliness, maybe it's the way Yuu-chan looks so small now, or maybe it's just
because Mika's tired and scared, but his body moves by itself. He crosses the room, throws his arms around Yu-chan and hugs him tighter than he's ever hugged anyone before.

“E-Eh? M-Mika! What the fuck! G-Get off me!” Yuu tries to wriggle away, only for Mika to shake his head and bury his face into his shoulder.

So, Yu-chan's been hurt too... The thought of an adult hitting Yu-chan and making him cry... The thought of Yu-chan having the same bruises that Mika has now... The thought of an adult hurting Yu-chan... Mika's arms tighten around him, his jaw clenching in silent anger. Yuu-chan doesn't deserve that. Both of them don't.

“M-Mika...?” Yuu's no longer pushing him off. Instead, he cranes his head, trying to meet his gaze. Mika closes his eyes and shakes his head, breathing in Yuu's scent of... something he can't describe. He just knows it makes him feel safe and he hasn't felt like this in a while.

“Can we stay like this?” Mika asks, his voice muffled and small.

Yuu doesn't reply. Mika braces himself for rejection. He actually loosens his grip in case Yuu wants to step away.

But he doesn't. The blond's heart swells when he feels arms wrap around him, pulling him into a warm embrace. It's only then does Mika find himself trembling; not from fear, not from anxiety, not because of Ferid—but because he knows that whatever happens now, at least he'll have Yuu-chan. Mika smiles, relaxing into Yuu's arms.

Guren almost doesn't recognise Shinya. The artist is wearing a white shirt, a black vest, and black trousers—he even has a bowtie. His hair is parted again, with one side smoothed back like it was the last time they met.

He looks like he's about to attend a wedding, Guren thinks. Why the hell is Shinya wearing this anyway? Part of him wonders if he actually made the effort to look like this just to eat in a restaurant with him...

Guren pushes that thought away. This wasn't anything special.

“Why are you dressed like that?” Guren asks once he reaches Shinya.

Of course, Shinya laughs. He pulls the bow tie off and unfastens the first button of his shirt.

“It's my uniform. I told you I worked as a part time waiter,” he explains, unbuttoning his vest next.

“Oh. I forgot.” At least Guren knows he didn't wear that on purpose now. “So, did you just finish your shift?”

Shinya nods whilst shoving his bowtie and vest into his bag.

“Alright, come on. I know a place where they do a good Chinese buffet.”

He doesn't wait for Guren to respond. The businessman sighs as he follows Shinya through the
streets, wondering just what he got himself into. It only occurs to him now that he'd be eating alone in a restaurant with Shinya. It won't be like that time when Yuu and that Mika kid were there with them.

Why the fuck is he even doing this..?

*I'm hungry. He's hungry. It's just that.*

He remembers the last time he had a meal out with someone else. It was Mahiru. In the end, they argued over who was going to pay and ended up not talking to each other for the rest of the evening. Or the rest of the week, for that matter.

They stop in front of a restaurant called 'The Elemental Dragons', which Guren thinks is a pretty cliché name for a Chinese buffet, but that's just his opinion. Thankfully, it doesn't take them long to be given a table because Guren's not sure how long he can last without eating at this rate. He's starving.

Shinya fills his plate up with noodles. Nothing but noodles. When he catches Guren judging him, the artist only winks and tells him that you can't go to a Chinese buffet without trying out their chicken chow mein. Guren rebukes that he doesn't need to flood his plate with it to 'try it out'.

It's not so bad; this whole meal thing. Guren's surprised that he doesn't feel uncomfortable sitting opposite Shinya and digging into his food. He convinces himself that it's only because he's so hungry that he doesn't care.

"You know," Guren starts. "I've never actually been to this restaurant before."

Shinya waits to swallow his noodles before replying.

"You've lived in this city for, what, most of your life and you've never set foot in the biggest buffet here?"

"I don't really go out much."

"I can see that."

Guren throws him a scowl that has no effect on the artist.

"You need to go out and have fun, Guren," Shinya says. The smile he gives looks suspicious—then again, Shinya always looks like he's got something planned whenever he smiles, so that's nothing different.

"I don't need to have fun," the businessman grumbles. He can't believe he's having a conversation about having fun in the middle of a Chinese buffet, and then he remembers it's Shinya anyway so Guren really should have expected this.

Shinya sighs. "God, you're miserable..."

"You're annoying."

After they finish their meal, Guren and Shinya agree to split the bill. Originally, Guren offered to pay for it, but Shinya said that he hates it when he owes money—not that Guren would have asked him to pay it back, but the artist insisted.

Guren opens his wallet and fishes out his notes. At least Shinya chose a pretty cheap restaurant, and
the food was pretty good so that's an added bonus—

“Wait.”

Shinya grabs his wrist. Guren freezes, wallet still in hand, and raises an eyebrow at the artist, who looks like he has just seen a corpse in front of him.

“W-What's that?” Shinya asks, nodding towards his wallet.

“Um... My wallet?”

“No. The picture.”

Guren looks down at the picture and wishes he didn't. Fuck. He keeps forgetting to get rid of that picture of him and Mahiru during their wedding. It's just something he barely looks at anyway, even though opening his wallet is obviously a daily occurrence. He takes time to study it now though, to remember Mahiru's smile when she was still happy with him, to see the sparkle in her eyes rather than the rage in them whenever they argued.

He sighs, closing his wallet.

“That's my ex-wife,” Guren explains, shaking off Shinya's hand. “We divorced a few months ago.”

Shinya pulls his hand away and sinks back to his chair. He keeps his gaze on the table, the bangs of his hair hiding his eyes so Guren can't quite see his expression. Huh? Was there something wrong? Did Guren say something bad?

“She looked nice. W-What's her name?” Shinya flashes him the same old smile, as if the past few seconds didn't exist.

Guren looks at him suspiciously and brushes it off in the end. The artist has always been odd, so this wouldn't be the first time Guren's confused because of him.

“Mahiru. Mahiru Hiiragi,” he tells Shinya, shoving his wallet back into his trousers. By the time he looks back up, Shinya's got his eyes trained onto the table. He's gripping it. Hard.

What's his problem?

“Have you heard of the Hiiragis?” Guren asks.

“Yeah... Um, who hasn't? They're a pretty well-known family.”

He has a point. The Hiiragis are infamous throughout the country, after all. No one wants to get on the bad side of the Hiiragis.

Guren gives a bitter laugh. “Yeah, I wouldn't suggest getting involved with a Hiiragi. It's not worth it.”

Shinya's eyes widen. He laughs. It sounds more like a choke instead.

“So, you hate them, then?” he says.

Guren doesn't even have to think about it.

“The Hiiragis aren't worth my time anymore. I want nothing to do with them. Then again, it's probably my fault for thinking an Ichinose and a Hiiragi could ever work together—”
“A what?”

“Huh?”

Shinya's blue eyes freeze him on the spot. They're urgent, almost desperate, and Guren doesn't know what the fuck is going on in this conversation but the artist has been acting strange ever since he saw the picture...

“An... Ichinose?” Shinya says the word like it's poison.


If it's possible for Shinya to look even more surprised, then he looks like he's on the verge of passing out right now. Guren's convinced he might have to demand that the waiter get them some water for Shinya.

“Yeah, Ichinose. I'm Guren. Guren Ichinose.” Guren laughs at the shock on his face. The look on Shinya's face is priceless. He never thought he'd ever see Shinya out of that near permanent smile and yet, here he is now, looking as if he can't move his face muscles.

“S-Sorry, I just... never expected you to be... that... important,” Shinya mutters the words, and then laughs under his breath. “No offence.”

Guren just smirks. “None taken. Anyway, we should pay now.”

“Y-Yeah, we should.”

Is it that big of a deal that I'm an Ichinose?

Then again, he remembers that Ichinose is basically one of the largest electronics companies in the country, so he can sort of understand why it might be a big deal to someone like Shinya. He shrugs it off. It's probably not important anyway.

It's pitch black once they leave the restaurant. Guren checks his watch and is surprised to see that he's spent nearly two hours with Shinya. He looks at his phone next, mostly due to instinct now in case Yuu's somehow set the house on fire and sent him a text to tell him the grim news.

The fact that's even a possibility is enough to keep Guren awake at night.

There's one text. Guren fears for the well-being of his house for one second, but sighs in relief once he reads the text.

mikas here btw he wntd 2 go wid me coz ders no1 in his house >_<

It takes a full minute for Guren to decipher the language Yuu's trying to text him in.

“Er, I think Mika's in my house right now,” Guren tells Shinya, showing him the phone.

“Huh? That's weird. I'm pretty sure Ferid's meant to be picking him up today...” Shinya sighs. “If you want, you can drop me off at your house and I'll get Mika off you.”

Guren shakes his head. “Nah, I'll just give Mika a lift home. It's alright. I can give you a lift too, if you want.”

The smile Shinya gives him is small, almost invisible in the darkness. “I can take the bus. Thank you though.”
“If you say so.”

Guren types out a message for Yuu, making sure to actually use the English language rather than whatever code his nephew's using.

_I'll be home soon. Tell Mika I can give him a lift back to his house._

Yuu's reply is instant. The time it takes to understand it isn't.

_K :) mika sez thx nd hes srry he ddnt ask 4 ur prmission 1st. btw we 8 all da pasta so ders no food 4 u left dnt b angry wid me T__T_

“What the fuck is this...” Guren puts his phone back into his pocket. Just looking at the text is giving him a headache.

Since the bus stop is right next to the car park, Shinya and Guren walk in the same direction. It's quiet between them, which is a first, so Guren wonders if something's wrong. He can't help but think that Shinya's acting strange. It's not like he knows Shinya well—it's just that Guren's not used to the artist being silent. He hasn't even said one of his stupid facts so far. Nevertheless, Guren ignores it. They're not even close friends, and Guren's reluctant actually considering him as _just_ a friend. He needs to stop thinking about this—

Suddenly, Shinya grabs him and pushes him into the cramped shadows. It takes Guren a second to realise it's an alleyway, and then he nearly explodes at the idea of Shinya dragging him here. What the fuck is he playing at? Guren has half a mind to demand, but Shinya covers his mouth and tells him to shush.

"Wait," he snaps. “Just be quiet.”

Guren's so close to punching Shinya. Especially when his face is so fucking close in the first place. Their legs are touching and it dawns on the businessman that he can easily wrestle Shinya off, and would have done so if the urgency behind the artist's actions didn't stop him. For once, Shinya's serious. That alone is something to worry about. He has no choice but to watch as Shinya tilts his head out of the shadows, scanning their surroundings.

Was there someone out there? What the hell was even going on? Guren looks as well. It's no use. The darkness makes it near impossible to make out any figures. At first, he wonders if Shinya's only joking about, although the grip the artist has around his wrist says otherwise. If he didn't know any better, Shinya was afraid.

He keeps silent, even to the extent where he's now holding his breath. The only sound he hears is his heartbeat—or Shinya's. They're so close it's hard to tell.

After what seems like an eternity, Shinya sighs and steps back.

“S-Sorry,” he mutters. “I just... I thought...”

“Is there something wrong?” Guren asks. It's too dark to make out Shinya's face. Guren can only hear him breathing; it's fast, erratic, and definitely not calm. Something is clearly wrong.

“I-It's nothing,” Shinya says. He gives that same old, same old laugh again. “Just a mistake. I need to go home. I'm tired, aren't you?”

Guren doesn't answer.
“Guren... Actually, um... would you mind if you gave me a lift home instead?” Shinya pokes him in the shoulder. “I just... I just remembered I don't have any change on me for the bus ticket.”

It's a lie. Whatever Shinya's noticed out there has made the artist change his mind about taking the bus. Whatever is out there is enough to make Shinya afraid of going home by himself.

“Sure. I can do that,” Guren says, keeping his thoughts inside.

That's the last thing they say. As they make their way to the car park, Guren keeps his eyes on Shinya, watching his every move. There's something more to the artist than meets the eye, he notices now. Shinya may be all smiles and jokes on the outside, yet he's clearly got his own secrets hidden under that stupid mask. Guren's not sure why this bothers him. It's not like the artist means a lot to him. To be frank, they barely know each other.

However, the more he tries to tell himself that, the more he remembers Shinya's trembling body beside him a few seconds ago. That wasn't because of the night breeze; that was because of fear. What could the artist be so afraid of that it's enough to break apart that carefree attitude of his?

Guren repeats again and again in his mind that he doesn't care, but he still watches Shinya's back, wondering just who this artist really is.

Chapter End Notes

I never expected this chapter to get so long, but... yeah. Oops.

Anyway, hope you enjoy this chapter! Thank you for all the comments and kudos on this story so far too. It makes me happy to see that people like it ^__^
This chapter's not the happiest of chapters, so just a warning for child abuse and violence.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

For once in his life, Shinya wishes he had some sort of weapon—something to make him feel safe, even for a little while. He eyes his kitchen, wondering if it's better to wield a knife or a frying pan. If he uses a knife, he might accidentally cut himself instead... and knowing his luck, he'd probably trip over and stab his own gut. That's a no to the knife then...

He looks at the frying pan. He remembers watching Tangled with Shinoa a few years ago and the frying pan they used in that movie looked lethal.

Knocking out Kureto with a frying pan... Hmm...

Shinya has to admit the mental image is very satisfying.

But that would mean having to get close to his oh-so-very-pleasant brother. No thanks.

Ugh. Part of him wishes he had a gun on him. That would be useful, and not to mention, he'd look so badass with it. Life sucks when you can't conveniently protect yourself with a gun. Maybe in a different universe, the heavens will smile down upon him and reward him with a gun and an easier life...

The door explodes with the sound of someone trying to break it open.

Shinya grabs the frying pan and stares at the door with wide eyes. What the fuck? It's morning! Can't Kureto stick to clichés and hunt him down during the night?

“Shinya, it's me!” Krul's voice yells from the other side.

The artist pretty much deflates on the spot. He puts the frying pan down, although tempted to smack Krul across the head for giving him such a scare.

I really need to tell her to knock like a normal person, Shinya thinks as he opens his door.

As soon as he sees how pissed off the pink haired woman is, he rethinks on that last thought and lets her in without a word of complaint. He'd rather she break the door than break him, thank you very much.

“What's wrong?” he asks when they've seated themselves on his sofa.

Come to think of it, it's the weekend and usually, Krul would be spending it with her boyfriend instead of visiting him.

And Mika usually visits me on Saturdays... Shinya pauses that thought, realising that the blond kid hasn't actually visited him in a while. He wonders if there's anything wrong.
Krul sighs, twirling a lock of her pink hair around her fingers. Ah. She only does that when something is really bothering her.

“You look like something’s bothering you too,” she observes.

“Well, yeah.”

“I rant, you rant back?”


Krul takes a deep breath and Shinya prepares himself for whatever crisis his friend's currently going through. He guesses it's something along the lines of her sex life, as usual.

“It's Mika.”

Okay, for the love of god, he hopes it's nothing to do with her sex life now.

“Er...” Shinya scratches his cheek. “Carry on.”

“He's been acting strange lately. He won't eat, he barely talks to me—fuck, he barely even leaves his room! And when he does, he just looks so... I don't know, different?” Krul sighs. “At first I thought that maybe it's because he started school, but Mika's always loved school.”

Shinya frowns. That doesn't sound like Mika at all. Even though he's only known Krul and her son for a little over a year, Mika's been nothing but an over-energised bundle of happiness throughout that entire time.

“Have you spoken to him about it?” he asks.

Krul shakes her head. “Maybe it's just a phase... I mean, he'll be a teenager next year so...”

“Talk to him about it. I doubt he's just going to act like that for no reason.”

A nod from Krul is the only response he gets. Honestly, he can understand why she's so stressed about this. She's always told him that even though she had Mika at the young age of sixteen, she's never had any problems raising him up.

“Mika's a good little kid,” she used to brag. “Hardly has any tantrums, hardly makes a fuss. My perfect little boy.”

He supposes that any young mother would panic as soon as their precious little angel starts to rebel. It's every parent's worst nightmare, after all.


The artist groans. Where does he even start?

“I get the feeling that Kureto nearly found me after my meal out with Guren last—”

“Wait, wait. You had a meal with Guren?” Krul's red eyes widen almost as much as her grin. Shinya doesn't even think she listened to half of what he said.

“Yeah, but it's complicated because he's actually an Ichinose—”

“He's a fucking what?!”
Shinya gives her a look.

“Ichinose. Can you stop interrupting me? So yeah, I was having a meal with him and it was fine until I found out his ex was Mahiru—”

“Mahira? Your sister? What the fuck?”

Jesus Christ. This conversation is going nowhere. Taking a large, deep breath, Shinya musters up as much patience as he can. Telling everything to Krul is going to take some time.

Fifteen minutes and twenty-seven interruptions later (Yes, Shinya actually counted the amount of times Krul kindly interrupted him), he's finally managed to share the details of that night with the pink haired mother. He waits as she takes everything in. You gotta admit that for one meal out, a lot happened. When Shinya invited Guren to eat in a restaurant with him, he didn't exactly expect all that. God, he just wanted to have at least one good thing in his life. He should have know the Hiiragis would ruin this somehow.

“Are you sure it was Kureto? You said yourself that it was during the night. It could have been too dark.” Krul shrugs, although her voice sounds somewhat worried.

Shinya shakes his head. “I'm pretty sure it was him. I don't know if he saw me or Guren though.”

“Does Guren know about your family?”

He can't help but snort at that thought. God forbid if Guren ever finds out about his family. Shinya will never let that happen.

“No. I haven't told him anything, and I haven't contacted him ever since.”

“Are you avoiding him?” Krul almost sounds disappointed even though her face betrays nothing. Instead, she nibbles on her manicured nails.

“Well... Yeah.” Shinya sighs. There's no other way to deny it. “He's been trying to text and call me, but I haven't picked up or texted him back.”

He doesn't get a reply, but the look he receives is enough to show that Krul's questioning his mentality.

“I'd rather he doesn't get involved with any of this, Krul. What do you think will happen once my family finds out I'm associating myself with an Ichinose who is also Mahiru's ex?”

Krul doesn't need to say anything. She just winces and Shinya already knows he's proven his point. Silence fills the room. Shinya's not sure if he's waiting for Krul to offer him some miraculous solution or if he's just pleased with the fact that, for once, he gets the last say in their conversation.

“I think...” Krul's voice returns his attention back to her. “I think you need to be selfish, just for once.”

“For once?” Shinya scoffs. “I ran away from my family. Isn't that selfish enough?”

“No, you ran away because that Hiiragi scum you're meant to call your dad killed your mother.”

Her words feel like knives. Shinya holds his breath as unwanted memories barge themselves back into his brain. He remembers the screams, his tears, his voice as he begged for his “father” to stop, his mother's last words to him.
It's all your fault. I hate you. You did this.

He grits his teeth. Clenches his fist. Hard enough to dig his nails into his palms and let the pain dissolve the memories away.

Krul sighs. She doesn't apologise—just sighs.

“I'm just saying that you ran away for a reason. You ran away to escape your family, so there's no point doing that if you're still letting them control you when you're on the other side of the country.” The young mother pats him on the shoulder, a bit too hard, but it's Krul so it's to be expected.

Maybe she has a point. Or maybe he's being too hopeful.

“So...” Shinya raises an eyebrow. “What do you think I should do?”

That typical smile on Krul's face stretches across her face. Her eyes gleam, reminding him of pools of blood—which isn't exactly the first thing you want to associate when you're trying to ask for advice from your friend.

“I suggest calling Guren and inviting him to your flat and frick-fracking each other until you forget all about the stupid Hiiragis.”

Ah.

Easier said than done.

Smirking, Shinya can only shake his head.

“I'll think about it,” he says.

Mika knows that going home with Yuu-chan was a big mistake. He knew it from the moment he suggested it. And he definitely knew it as soon as he stepped back into his house and was faced with Ferid's mocking voice, telling him how much of a naughty kid he's been and that he should be punished. The worst thing was that his mother took it as a joke, laughing whilst Mika could only dread what Ferid had planned for him.

It's been a week since that happened and Mika still can't walk properly. He wonders if Ferid broke something.

He also can't bring himself to care anymore.

So, he stays in his room and sits on his bed. At first, he tried to read some books, hoping to take his mind off things. Instead, all the words leave him until the only thing he's thinking of is what happened last night, or the night before, or the night before that, and so on and so forth. In the end, Mika throws the books onto the floor and gives up.

He tried to eat too, thinking that some food would give him his strength back. It's no use. Anything he tastes makes him feel sick and he has to risk running into Ferid just to go to the bathroom to throw up.

He doesn't know what to do. So he doesn't do anything.
A tiny buzzing in his pocket makes him jump. He takes the phone out, his eyes darting around the room, terrified that Ferid has somehow heard it. Thankfully, there's only silence. He's safe. For now.

He looks at the screen and smiles when he sees Yuu-chan's name.

They exchanged numbers when Mika went to his house. It was actually Yuu-chan's idea, which made Mika really happy. He barely uses his phone; it used to belong to his mum but she gave it to him after upgrading and, to be honest, he only kept it so he could play on Flappy Bird...

how r u 2day :P

Typical Yuu-chan and his texting... The smile remains on Mika's face even as he replies.

i'm ok :) just bored wbu?

Texting Yuu-chan is the only thing that keeps Mika going these days... He just has to make sure Ferid won't find out.

2day sux >__> gurens in a pissy mood nd hes takin it out on me

The blond raises an eyebrow. He hopes it's nothing too serious. Just as he's about to reply again, he hears his door opening. Mika shoves his phone back into his pocket in the blink of an eye and turns around. His pulse immediately rushes as he comes face to face with Ferid's red eyes.

"Mi-Mi-Mika-kun," Ferid sings his name in a tone that makes Mika want to vomit. "What's that you're hiding there?"

Mika's bottom lip trembles. No. He can't take this away.

Ferid's laughter fills the room. Mika wants to shrink away, but Ferid's already taken hold of his wrist.

"You look so cute when you're scared, Mika-kun..."

No. No. Mika tries to pull his wrist away. The grip Ferid has on it is too tight, too hard against the bruises still on them. It's no use. No matter how many times he tries to fight back, it always ends up with him giving up and crying. Tears are already welling up in his eyes, which only makes Ferid laugh even more.

He hates it. He hates everything. He hates his life.

He hates himself for being so weak.

Mika bites his lip hard enough to draw blood. The only thing he can do is close his eyes and take it as usual—

The muffled sound of the front door opening makes both of them freeze.

"I'm home!" his mother's voice sing-songs into the air and Mika literally exhales. He can feel Ferid's grip loosen and it takes all of his strength not to burst into tears when the man narrows his eyes at him, having heard his sigh of relief.

Ferid's lips tug into a bitter smile, and he leaves his room without another word.

When he's gone, Mika wraps his arms around himself and tries to take deep breaths. Anxiety wells up inside him and it makes it hard to breathe properly. He can't stop shaking. His chest shudders with every breath and it's taking all of his self control to stop himself from crying. He can't cry now. His
mum is back at home. He can't cry in front of her.

“Mika?” His mother's voice calls from behind the door. “Mika, it's me. Can we talk?”


“Y-Yeah,” he mumbles, hoping it's loud enough for his mother to hear.

She peaks her head in, slowly entering the room when Mika nods meekly at her. Mika remains silent, watching his mother as she sits on the edge of his bed. He studies the way her long, pink hair pools down onto his duvet. It's pretty. His mother's very pretty.

He just wishes she never met Ferid.

“Mika, are you okay?” she asks, her voice softer than usual. “Ferid tells me you're not listening to him.”

Mika frowns.

“I know it's weird that he's living with us but... please try to get along?” She reaches out for his hand. It's cold. Uncomfortable. “It would really mean a lot to me if we could all be a family.”

Family. Mika's heart may as well have stopped.

*Family.*

“I don't want that,” he blurts out. “I don't want him to be in this family!”

It's too late to take the words back. Mummy snatches her hand back, staring at him as if he had just hit her.

“M-Mika...” Red eyes pierce onto him and he sees her squaring up her shoulders. Her voice is no longer soft when she speaks again. “Mika, what is your problem? Tell me what's wrong.”

He shrinks away.

“*Mika.*”

That tone. She only uses that tone whenever he's done something wrong, like eat too many sweets or forget to tidy his room—but he hasn't done anything wrong this time, has he? She doesn't know anything. She doesn't know. She'll never know.

“Is this about Ferid? You don't like me being with him?”

Mika shakes his head. He wants to cover his ears too.

“Then, what's the problem? Tell me, Mika—”

“Just go!” Mika doesn't mean for his voice to raise. It's too late to regret it because all it does is make his mother's eyes colder. He's always thought red was a warm colour; now, looking at her eyes, he feels nothing but frigid emptiness.

She stands up. Mika doesn't think he's ever seen his mother look down at him like this and in that moment, he wants to shrivel up and disappear.

“Mika, for god's sake, stop this! I don't know what's wrong with you so suddenly! You're not eating
properly, you're not going to school, you're not even leaving this room! Why are you being like this?"

He can only shake his head. He doesn't want to talk. He doesn't want to listen to her anymore. Mummy's never screamed at him like this and he's only just realised that her red eyes are exactly like Ferid's. They both have the same look on their face when they're angry. Mika wants to be sick. Her voice is too loud. Her eyes are too scary. What if she hits him?

Are all adults like this?
Can he trust anyone?

Yuu-chan's face flashes across his mind.

Yes. Yes, he can. Yuu-chan is the only person he can trust.

His mother sighs. She shakes her head, her expression filled with nothing but disappointment for him. She probably hates him now too. No wonder she prefers Ferid. Maybe everything is all Mika's fault.

Mika says nothing as he watches his mother leave the room, but he wishes so much that he can at least tell her that he's sorry because he never meant to make her sad too.

Huh. Mika's not replying. Yuu narrows his eyes at his phone, feeling a bit silly for bothering to text Mika in the first place if he's just going to ignore him like this...

Ugh. Fine. Whatever. He doesn't care! Why is he texting that loser anyway? It's not like they're friends!

Today sucks, he mentally decides. Not only is this jerk not texting me, but Guren's been in a bad mood for nearly a whole week. What the fuck is his problem anyway?

It's probably something to do with Shinya. Yuu remembers that they ate in a Chinese restaurant together and Guren went home that night looking pissed. Maybe something bad happened? Really, Yuu doesn't care, but he does care enough about the fact that Guren's annoying when he's in a bad mood.

It isn't even fun to piss him off when he's like this. All he does look at him like he's about to throw a table in his face or throw him out of the house—and really, Yuu would rather avoid both outcomes.

Whatever...Yu should just leave him alone for the time being. By the looks of it, Guren's too busy with all that paperwork as well as constantly checking his phone for a text from Shinya anyway.

It's kinda sunny outside today, maybe he can go out in the garden and play there instead? That seems like a good idea. Yuu shoves on his trainers and runs out of his room. He's in such a rush that he doesn't look out for the desk around the corner. It's too late to swerve out of the way once he sees it.

He crashes straight into it and hears a loud crash as glass falls around him. Fuck. He looks down at the shards, his blood growing colder when he realises he's just shattered Guren's wedding photo. Oh shit.
Er... Maybe Guren won't even care? It's not like he's with the chick anymore so this photo shouldn't matter anyway... Yuu tries to stand up, but glass cuts into his knees and his feet catches on the corner of the photo. He falls flat again, wincing when he hears the picture ripping underneath his foot. Well, shit. This is just better now, isn't it? Not only is he bleeding, he's also gone and ripped the photo as well. Good job, Yuu.

“Yuu, what the fuck are you doing?”

Yuu freezes as he hears Guren making his way towards him. Fuck. Fuck. He's going to go insane once he sees this...

“I-I can explain,” Yuu says once Guren's sighted him. “I didn't see where I was going so—”

Guren grabs him by the collar and throws him off the photo. Yuu whimpers as his knees hit against the marble floor, stinging further when he feels the glass cut even deeper into them. He starts to feel dizzy from the pain in his legs. What the fuck is Guren's problem?

“This is my wedding photo.” Guren's voice is cold. Scarily cold.

Yuu suddenly can't breathe. He sees Guren, but all he can remember are his parents.

“I told you not to run around the house, Yuu!” Guren picks up the broken photo frame, waving it in front of his face.

“Y-You don't even care about the photo! It's not like you're together anymore!”

As soon as those words leave Yuu's mouth, he feels a stinging crack against his cheek. He looks up, the seconds ticking slowly by as he registers that Guren has just hit him across the face.

This is familiar.

He should be used to be this.

His parents have hit him harder than this. He should have expected this.

Yuu hates himself for starting to cry. Forcing himself to his feet, he clenches his fists and ignores the tears blurring his eyes. Guren's hazy figure is in front of him, a hulking mass of anger and—fuck, he really should have expected this to happen. Why is he so upset? He should have known.

“I knew it,” he mutters. He looks at Guren straight in the eye and ignores the bubbling fear in his gut. “I knew that sooner or later, you'd be just like my parents.”

Guren's eyes widen. “What?”

Yuu doesn't bother answering. He spins around and runs as fast as he can, out of this house, out of another possible prison that life wants to trap him in. He doesn't know where he's running. He just knows that he's sick of everything and he's sick of being treated like he's nothing but a nuisance. The bitter breeze makes his tears feel colder against his face, but Yuu doesn't stop running. He's scared of Guren coming after him, although one look over his shoulder tells him that there's no one there.

Ha. Guren doesn't even care, right?

For some reason, he ends up in the park. It's sunny. There are children playing around with their happy faces and happy laughter and happy families. Yuu wipes the tears away, but more keep
coming. He cries whilst listening to the children around him laughing. They're probably laughing at him.

He's not thinking straight. All he knows is that he's lonely and the only person he can think of talking to is a call away. His fingers are trembling as he dials Mika's number.

“H-Hello?”

Yuu starts crying harder as soon as he hears his voice.

“Y-Yuu-chan?” Mika's voice is hushed. Is he whispering? “Yuu-chan, what's wrong?”

Why is he even calling Mika in the first place? What the fuck can he say? Guren hit me and now I'm in the middle of the park, crying like a baby? No. No, he can't say that!

Words fail to form in his brain and Yuu can only cry.

“Yuu-chan, where are you right now? Are you okay?”

“T-The park...” is all Yuu can mumble. He hiccups, not caring whether Mika thinks he sounds stupid. “I-I'm at t-the park... w-where we m-met.”

“Okay, Yuu-chan. Wait for me. I'll try to get there.”

Mika hangs up before he can say anything. What the hell is even happening anymore? What's he meant to do? Stay here until Mika comes? And then what?

Yuu trudges his way onto the nearest bench, plopping onto it as painlessly as possible considering his knees are still bleeding. Ouch. Stupid photo. Stupid Guren. Stupid family.

He spends the next half an hour thinking about how much he hates his life and is almost engrossed by it that he doesn't notice Mika sitting on the bench next to him. Yuu jumps, at first wondering if he's imagining him there, and then Mika gives him a small smile, takes his hand and it's all it takes for Yuu to burst into tears.

Mika gathers him into his arms and gently shushes him, asking him what's wrong. Yuu can't even think straight as he begins to tell the blond everything. Everything, from his parents, to his mother committing suicide, to the stupid, fucking photo, to Guren hitting him, and lastly, to his fear that it's always going to be like this. He's always going to be alone, he's always going to be hated for simply existing.

Mika doesn't say anything. He just strokes his back. It's enough.

When they pull away, Mika's blue eyes are hard and serious. He lays his hands on Yuu's shoulders, sealing him with his gaze and stopping their surroundings when he utters his next words.

“Yuu-chan,” he says. “Abandon everything and run away with me.”

It's been six hours. Six hours. Guren doesn't know what the fuck to do. One look outside and he knows that it’s too dark for Yuu to be alone out there. It's already seven PM, damn it! Where did the brat go?
Fuck. He shouldn't have lost his temper. He knows the kid's got issues with abusive parents and hitting him was the last thing he should have fucking done. How could he have fucked up this much?

Guren runs a hand through his hair, tempted to pull it just to punish himself. Shit. He needs to find the kid before he gets himself hurt. He needs to make it up to him.

But where? Where the hell could he be?

This city is near gigantic; finding one twelve year old kid isn't going to be easy, and the more Guren thinks about this, the more he finds himself panicking. Who else can he turn to? Yuu only has him. The kid hasn't got anyone else to look after him.

_I couldn't have fucked things up worse than this_, he thinks. _What the fuck have I done?

Fuck. He's panicking. He has an idea of what to do; it's stupid and he's not even sure it'll help, but he's already grabbed his keys and made his way for his car. Guren starts up the engine, hoping to the heavens above that this'll be worth it.

The drive to Shinya's flat is short and quick; he's gotten it pretty much memorised in his head, which is a relief considering that his nephew's still out there, alone in the city as more time passes.

The only problem is that he doesn't actually know what number is Shinya's apartment. He knows the block. It's that dingy block in the corner, the one that looks the shittiest out of all of them. There's not enough time to ponder about Shinya's lifestyle choices. Guren runs into the block, opening the door and—

Shit. He doesn't have keys.

He hasn't thought this through.

He groans out loud. This can't be happening.

There's nothing else to lose. Fuck it all. Guren takes out his phones and dials Shinya's number. It rings. He's almost certain the artist won't pick up because he's been ignoring him for the past week for some unknown reason, and it's actually enough to drive Guren near his breaking point. It's bad enough that his work is brutal this season, _and_ his anniversary with Mahiru is coming up, but now Shinya chooses to suddenly drop off the face of the world without even explaining anything. Guren's surprised he hasn't snapped yet.

_Well, you did_, he reminds himself. _You took it out on Yuu and now he's ran away. Great fucking job._

Guren winces. He didn't need that reminder.

"_Guren?_"

Shinya's voice in the phone surprises him. He didn't think he'd pick up.

"_Shinya, I need your help. I'm outside your block right now—_"

"_Wait, what?_"

The artist literally screams down the phone, possibly deafening Guren for a good few seconds.

"I'll explain when I'm there. We need to hurry though, so please just let me in._"
“Okay, hang on a minute.”

Guren hears the rustling of keys before the phone cuts off. He doesn't even need to wait a whole minute before the door opens to reveal Shinya's face. Relief floods into him, so strong that he's half tempted to grab the artist and pull him into a hug.

“What's wrong?” Shinya asks as they walk back to his apartment. They stop by his door, and the businessman makes a mental note that Shinya lives in number thirteen, Block C. He'll remember that in the future.

Guren steps in, having already planned out the whole story in his mind—except he loses it as soon as he sees the pink haired woman pacing in Shinya's living room. She whirls around, frowning at him for a second before folding her arms and raising an eyebrow at Shinya.

“What? Do we need a search party now?” she snaps. “Am I that shitty of a mother?”

Shinya sighs. “Krul, calm down. This is Guren.”

For some reason, the woman slowly nods, as if Guren's name is all it takes for her to understand this whole situation. The businessman feels like he's missing something.

“That's nice and all, but Mika is still missing, Shinya. What's this pretty boy got to do with anything?”

That catches Guren's attention. He grabs Shinya's wrist, forcing the artist to look straight at him.

“Mika's missing too?”

Shinya looks at him as if he's mad. “What do you mean 'too'?”

“Yuu's missing as well,” Guren tells him, watching as Shinya's blue eyes instantly widen. His head snaps back to the pink haired woman, who's staring at both of them with the same expression. Understanding descends on the three adults and they all breathe out the exact words in the same tone of horror.

“Oh fuck.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm not really sure what to write here now because writing this chapter has made me really tired.... It's tiring torturing fictional kids just for the sake of Gureshin seeking them out in the next chapter.......... I'm so sorry Mika and Yuu...

Anyway, thank you as usual for all the comments and kudos! I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter too!~
This is a mess.

Guren doesn't know what he expected when he drove all the way to Shinya's flat for some much needed help, but watching the artist try to reign in a pink haired lady in the kitchen is not what he had in mind. The businessman stays rooted on the spot as he takes in the sight of this woman slamming open Shinya's cupboards, demanding for a mixing bowl, some ingredients, and a whisk. After trying to calm her down for three seconds, Shinya eventually gives up and tells her where everything is.

Now, Guren's watching her dump all the ingredients into the bowl so hard that he's surprised it hasn't shattered yet.

“What... What the fuck is she doing?” Guren asks when Shinya returns to his side.

The artist shakes his head and releases a long suffering sigh.

“Krul's always like this when she's stressed out. She needs to start cooking something to calm down and rearrange her thoughts.”

Guren blinks.

“Her son just ran away.”

“Yeah.”

“And she's baking a cake instead of looking for him.”

Shinya winces. “It's cookies, actually.”

“I didn't come here to bake cookies with you,” Guren snaps. Fucking hell. He should have known this wouldn't help.

A hand grips around his wrist, stopping him from walking out of the flat. Shinya stares at him with eyes so blue that they remind Guren of the calm, clear skies. It's enough for him to shake off his impatience. For now.

Shinya doesn't say anything. He just smiles and lets go of his wrist.

“Shinya, where the fuck are the chocolate chips—”

The shrill tone of a phone interrupts Krul's voice. She frowns, checking it almost hesitantly, and then smashing her finger on the button to accept it as soon as she sees the screen.

“Ferid?” she says, her voice urgent. “Is he back?”

The hope in her voice is short lived; her face falls as soon as those words leave her and Guren watches her expression switch from disappointment to confusion in the course of this conversation.

“Who the fuck is Crowley?” she hisses at the phone. “Are you sure he can get Mika back?”
Guren's eyes flicker to Shinya, who only shrugs at him.

"Are you seriously telling me that I'll have to wait an entire night? Mika's out there! Anything could happen to him!"

By this point, she was waving the whisk around in anger. Blobs of the cookie mixture are flying off into the air. Whilst Guren has no clue what the hell is happening, Shinya's only staring at his friend like this is a normal thing. He's not sure whether to be relieved by this or not.

After a few more minutes of Shinya's kitchen being ruined by projectile cookie mixture, Krul hangs up with a defeated look on her face and thankfully sets the whisk down. She twirls a lock of her pink hair around her finger, so fast that it just looks like she's trying to yank it off her scalp instead.

"What's up?" Shinya asks.

Krul leaves the kitchen, ignoring the state she's left it in, and starts to gather her things.

"Ferid told me one of his friends is a policeman who owes him a favour. His name's Crowley or whatever."

"And...?" Shinya motions for her to continue.

"Well, apparently, Crowley's gone to look for the boys with his team. Ferid says we'll have to wait until they find them."

This time, it's Guren who reacts. He's not too keen on the idea of waiting, especially since this is partially his fault in the first place.

"Can't we help look for them?" he asks.

Krul shakes her head, although she doesn't look very happy about it as well.

"Crowley said he has it under control. He's confident he'll find Mika and Yuu by tomorrow."

"That's... That should be good, right?" Shinya tries to give her a smile. Even Guren can tell it doesn't work.

Krul sighs. She walks past them, stopping just in front of the door to look over her shoulder.

"I'm going home. I'll call you if I hear any news."

She leaves just when Shinya's about to reply to her. The artist groans and they both listen to the door slamming, followed by angry high-heeled footsteps that soon fade into silence. None of them move.

Now what the fuck is he meant to do? Guren's still reluctant to just go back home and wait until this Crowley person finds Yuu and Mika. How is he meant to put his trust into this guy if he hasn't even met him yet?

He also wants to apologise to the brat as soon as possible. He doesn't think he can sleep with this guilt.

Shinya taps him lightly on his shoulder. Guren looks up, catching his gaze as it dawns on him that this is the first time he's seen or even contacted Shinya since the artist suddenly decided to ignore all his calls and texts. He pushes aside the temptation to demand answers in order to focus on the more important thing, which is essentially Yuu.
Guren looks away.

“Are you alright?” Shinya asks, his voice surprisingly gentle.

“Not really. I should go back home and wait there—”

“Isn't it better to wait with me? Krul will call me, so it'll be quicker if you were here for that.”

He has a point there.

“Besides, you look like you need a cup of tea or something.”

First off, Guren's not a big fan of tea; and secondly, he doesn't think that a cup of it is going to magically erase his problems away. He knows Shinya's trying in his own way to calm him down, but it's just not what he needs right now.

“If you need a shoulder to cry on, I'm right here.”

Now, Guren frowns at him. Is Shinya mocking him? He glares at the artist, although it's short lived when he sees that his face shows no trace of amusement on it. He's actually serious.

“What?” Guren says, still confused.

Shinya looks at him as if it's obvious.

“I'm right here,” he repeats. “You can talk to me about what happened. You look kinda stressed, so I figured you'd want to let it out.”

His first instinct is to decline. He's not all about letting his feelings out, especially to other people. Guren Ichinose doesn't do that.

And then he sees Shinya smiling at him like that and he can't help but think that his eyes are really far too gentle for his own good. It's the colour. It's probably just the colour. Guren's always thought the colour blue was a lovely shade, and Shinya's eyes are by far the bluest things he has ever seen.

In the end, he just shrugs.

“Basically, I lost my temper and ended up hitting Yuu. The kid's been abused by his parents since he was born, so I'm not surprised he chose to run away after I did that.”

He waits for Shinya to react, to recoil back in disgust, frown at him, tell him what a shit person he is, anything.

Shinya only stares.

“Do you regret it?” he asks. His face is empty. Guren wonders if he's just hiding his emotions or if he literally does not know how to react to this at all.

Guren nods. “I might complain about him a lot, but Yuu didn't deserve that. I shouldn't have taken my temper out on him.”

A smile spreads across Shinya's face. He lightly pats Guren's shoulder, resting it there afterwards so that the businessman can feel how warm his palm is through his shirt.

“That's what matters then. Everyone makes mistakes from time to time, but as long as you acknowledge it, then it's okay.” Shinya pulls his hand away, but not before poking him in the arm.
“Just make sure you apologise to Yuu-kun. And probably spoil him for the next few months or so.”

Guren actually smiles at that. “I'll buy him all the chicken nuggets he wants if he forgives me.”

The artist laughs and the atmosphere in the flat lightens up. His gaze travels from Guren's face to the kitchen behind him. Guren follows it, taking in the sight of the tiny kitchen currently covered in splatters of cookie mix and discarded bowls. He takes this moment to look at Shinya's flat and... well, there's nothing really he can say about it apart from the fact that he's surprised anyone can actually live in this place.

It's dreary. Everything is the colour gray. Shinya's mint green t-shirt and navy blue jeans may as well be the liveliest source of colour in the entire room.

“Typical Krul,” Shinya mutters under his breath, unaware of Guren judging his home. “I'm going to tidy up the kitchen. Feel free to make yourself comfortable.”

Is it actually physically possible for him to make himself comfortable in this place...? Guren keeps that question to himself, lest he wants to offend Shinya.

“I'll help you,” he says instead. “It'll give me something to do.”

For some reason, Shinya's face softens and the smile he gives is almost shy.

“If you insist,” he laughs.

Yuu's starting to worry.

Maybe he was too reckless when he decided that running away is a good idea... Where would they even go? How would they eat? What would they do?

These questions surround his mind whilst he follows Mika. He can't bring himself to say them though, not when Mika's tugging his hand and leading him through this empty street. Is it just him or does Mika seem... happier that they're running away? It only dawns on Yuu now that Mika's also leaving his family behind. Does he have problems too?

Yuu wants to ask, he really does, but he doesn't want to talk because a little part of him is afraid that they'll be found if anyone hears them.

Amazingly, Mika looks over in his direction, as if sensing his uneasiness.

“Are you okay, Yuu-chan?” he asks, squeezing his hand.

Yuu gulps. “W-Where are we going?”

Mika smiles at him. “Don't worry, Yuu-chan. I know the perfect place.”

That's all he says.

They continue walking. Yuu tries not to focus on how scary it is to be outside when it's this dark. How does Mika even see where he's going? Is he not scared too? Just in case, Yuu tries to keep up with Mika's pace, holding on tighter to the blond's hand in case something happens to separate them.
When he looks up at the sky, he's surprised to see a blanket of stars above them. Wow... He doesn't think he's ever seen them like this before. His parents barely let him out of the house, so Yuu's never had the chance to see anything at all.

He smiles. It's pretty.

Just as Yuu's legs are beginning to hurt, Mika stops walking and points to a house in front of them. It's too dark to see it properly, but even Yuu can tell that the house is empty and boarded up. In the darkness, it looks like the typical place where a murderer will take his victims to. He hopes there isn't any murderers in this house. He's not too happy with the idea of running away only to get killed in a scary looking place like this.

Yuu squeezes Mika's hand tighter.

"It's okay, Yuu-chan," Mika reassures. "This is Hyakuya Orphanage. My friend, Akane, used to live here before they moved the children to a bigger house in Shinjuku."

Yuu frowns. "So it's empty now?"

Mika nods, letting go of his hand. Yuu nearly grabs it again. He doesn't like being outside when it's this dark.

"There's a hole in the fence around the back. Akane and I used to sneak into here when we were younger. No one checks the place anymore," Mika explains, beckoning Yuu to follow him.

With his heart hammering in his chest, Yuu scurries after the blond and hopes that this house doesn't look as scary as it does from the outside. They easily find the hole in the fence, and Mika helps him crawl through it because of his injured knees. When they're through, Mika entwines their hands together again and Yuu tries to ignore the fact that it makes him feel more at ease.

Mika points to one of the windows.

"That window is broken, so we can climb through it. I'll help you up, Yuu-chan."

He makes it sound so easy... Rest assured, it wasn't. Mika must have spent at least ten minutes trying to get through that window, and another five more so that he can pull Yuu up through it. By the time they're in the house, both kids are panting on the dust covered floor.

Yuu coughs. Fuck. Everything is so dusty. He's lucky he doesn't have asthma. It's cold in the house—really cold, and Yuu wishes he didn't wear shorts today. Not only would it have made his knees hurt less, but it would also have saved him from shivering this much.

"I can't see anything..." he grumbles, patting the floor to try and find Mika. "Oi, where are you?"

He feels Mika take his hand again.

"Don't be scared, Yuu-chan," he says. "This place is safe."

"I-I'm not scared!"

Mika's laugh echoes throughout the empty house.

He leads them up the stairs, telling Yuu to be careful in case he slips in the darkness. Yuu listens. His knees are already hurting him; he doesn't want to end up breaking them as well if he slips.

Earlier, Mika tried his best to get rid of the glass on his knees. They stopped by the public toilets in
McDonald's to wipe the blood and glass off with a wet tissue, earning a few puzzled looks from people who were probably wondering why Yuu was bleeding in the first place.

Ah, well. At least his knees don't have glass in them anymore.

He hopes, anyway.

Whilst they blindly look around the house, Mika tells him about the times he's sneaked into this place. He used to play Hide and Seek here, apparently.

“Akane and I always played here,” Mika tells him, “but then she got adopted, so she had to leave the city. I haven't seen her ever since.”

He sounds kind of sad. Yuu wonders if he had a crush on this Akane girl.

That thought makes him pout.

Yuu's never had a friend before in his entire life. Everyone stayed away from him in his old school because of his parents and he always thought he didn't need friends anyway.

Is Mika his friend now?

Hmm...

They find a bedroom with an open window that lets the moonlight through. No longer does Yuu feel blinded by the darkness, and he's finally able to take in his surroundings—or just this room, at least. It's nothing special. He sees a metal framed bed in the corner, covered in rust and dust so thick that it might as well be a blanket.

Mika lets go of his hand and tackles the hard job of trying to get rid of all the dust. He has a coughing fit almost instantly and Yuu feels bad that he's not helping, hence he joins in.

They cough for at least five minutes before giving up and declaring the bed passable enough to lie on.

It's not the comfiest thing in the world, and Yuu has to sneeze every ten seconds, but it'll do.

Mika lies beside him, taking his hand again and entwining their fingers together. It's been so long since anyone's held his hand; Yuu has to admit that he likes it. Probably a bit too much. It makes him feel safe.

“We'll be okay, won't we, Yuu-chan?” Mika's voice is just a whisper. It shakes a bit, Yuu thinks, or maybe he's just imagining it. Or... maybe Mika's scared like he is. Maybe he's starting to regret running away. Maybe he's confused too.

Yuu swallows. He doesn't know the answer to that...

Even so, he nods. For Mika, for him, for both of them; he doesn't know.

He sees Mika smile. The moonlight shines against his blond hair, his eyelashes casting shadows down his cheeks as he closes his eyes. Yuu's relieved he nodded now. If Mika believes it, then he can believe it too.

“If you could have anything in the world, what would it be?”

Yuu blinks at that question. He takes a moment to think about it. When it sinks in, he notices that
Mika's opened his eyes, staring at him as he waits for his answer.

Yuu says the first thing he can think of.

“A family.”

The blond tilts his head. “A family?”

This is a bit embarrassing... Yuu closes his eyes. It's easier to talk when he can't see Mika staring at him like everything he says is the most important thing he'll ever listen to.

“Y-Yeah. A family. Like... a place where I can be comfortable or something. I-I don't know.” Yuu blushes. Shit. He sounds stupid. “It's just silly, of course—”

He nearly screams when he feels something touch his forehead. His eyes snap open to the sight of Mika being close. Too close. He's leaning his forehead against his and all Yuu can focus on are his eyelashes and that he's too close.

“Let's be a family,” Mika says.

“Us?”

Mika opens his eyes. Yuu loses himself in nothing but blue.

“Yes, us. If we're going to run away, then we only need each other, right?”

“I-I guess...”

The smile on Mika's face is brighter than the moon.

“If we're going to be a family, then we need a new name!”

“Eh?”

“Yeah! We can't use our old names now! What if people track us down?”

Yuu thinks that Mika's watched too many action movies... Still, he doesn't protest.

“What would we change our names to?” he asks instead.

Mika's answer is instant. “Hyakuya.”

“Hyakuya?”

He nods. “It's the name of this orphanage. You can be Yuuichirou Hyakuya and I can be Mikaela Hyakuya.”

Yuuichirou Hyakuya... Hyakuya... It's not so bad, he has to admit... And it's better than keeping his parents' surname, that's for sure.

“That's... pretty nice.” Yuu smiles now. “Yeah, I like it!”

The two kids grin at each other. Under the moonlight, they talk about their future plans as Hyakuyas; Mika promises that maybe he can find a job or something, anything, and Yuu suggests that they should just resort to stealing instead. (Mika pokes him in the forehead for that because stealing is apparently very, very bad.) Mika also says he has some money to buy them food tomorrow and
Yuu's stomach grumbles at the idea of a McDonald's breakfast meal. Life suddenly doesn't seem so bad.

Yuu doesn't know how long they spend just talking and nor does he care because they eventually fall asleep, still clasping each other's hands, still resting their foreheads together.

It's one of the most peaceful nights he's had in ages.

Guren can't sleep. It's either because he's too worried that Yuu's somehow managed to get himself killed out there in the city or Shinya's useless excuse for a sofa is to blame. The first option is definitely plausible, although the more Guren attempts to make himself comfortable in this blasted sofa, the more he's convinced it's because of the latter option.

He suddenly regrets Shinya's suggestion that he should stay here at least until Krul calls them about the children. Yeah, it's faster if he stays here, but Guren's starting to wonder if the back ache he's getting from this is worth it.

You deserve more than just back pain, he reminds himself. It's your fault you're in this position in the first place.

Ugh. Of course.

Giving up on sleep entirely, he sits up. The door to Shinya's bedroom is right across from the sofa; it's inevitable that he stares at it and wonders if the artist is already asleep.

He probably is, Guren concludes. It's not like any of this is his problem, anyway. He won't lose sleep over this.

Guren wonders if Shinya has some coffee. If he's not going to get any sleep tonight, then he might as well kick down some caffeine to make it easier for himself.

He makes his way towards the kitchen, trying to be as quiet as possible in case he woke Shinya up. Shinya did insist that he make himself at home, so he's sure he won't mind if Guren does just that...

Turning the kitchen lights on, the businessman winces when it almost blinds him. Fuck. That's too bright for someone still awake at three in the morning.

He notices several things whilst searching through Shinya's cupboards:

1. Shinya's canned food aren't arranged in height order and it takes all of Guren's self control to stop himself from rearranging everything to perfection
2. Shinya has a lot of tinned pasta
3. Shinya has a cactus dying a slow and dark death as it's hidden in a cupboard of its own
4. And Shinya has a lot of mugs. Too many mugs. One of them is shaped like a minion from that movie Despicable You. Wait, was that the title? Despicable something. Whatever—

“Admiring my mug collection?”

Guren nearly drops the minion mug when he hears Shinya's voice from behind him. He turns around, and sure enough, the artist is there. He's dressed in his pyjamas, which consist of beige and
white stripes, and a weird picture of a smiling cat on the front pocket.

The artist yawns, scratching his head so that his hair sticks up into more directions. Guren smirks. He's so used to Shinya's hair being so neat that it's amusing to see it how it looks like when he's just woken up.

"Sorry, I was going to make myself a cup of coffee," he says. "You should go back to sleep."

Shinya yawns again. "Nah, it's okay. I'll make myself some hot chocolate too."

They don't talk as they make their drinks. Guren figures that Shinya's either still half-asleep or he's actually sleep walking. He looks like he's about to pass out any time soon.

Luckily, they make their way to the sofa without any incidents of fainting artists or the like. The coffee slides down his throat easily and Guren sighs in content when he can slowly feel the caffeine kicking in.

Shinya, on the other hand, looks like he's about to fall asleep whilst still holding his hot chocolate.

"You should go back to sleep," Guren advises him.

The artist shakes his head, taking a sip of his drink.

"It's okay. I'm always like this when I wake up." Shinya yawns again. "I'm not a morning person."

"Technically, it's still three AM."

Shinya waves an arm, ignoring him.

They sit in silence. The only sounds Guren focuses on are of them sipping their drinks, the ticking-tocking of the clock, and the slow, tired breaths coming from the half-dead artist beside him.

Why is Shinya so insistent on staying awake with him anyway?

"How are you feeling?" Shinya asks him, groggily poking him in the side.

Guren shrugs. "It's hard to tell. I just hope the kid's okay."

"He'll be fine. Mika's with him."

The only response Guren can think of is to nod at him.

Silence again.

For the sake of his sanity, he hopes that Yuu and Mika have at least found a safe place to stay for the night.

God, he shouldn't even have to hope for that in the first place. Guren wishes they found the children before night descended. Who knows how terrified those two would be out there?

"It's going to be alright." Shinya nudges him in the side again, having probably noticed the way he's now gripping the mug. He's too perceptive for his own good, even when half asleep.

Guren just sighs. He tries to think of something else. For once, he's actually hoping for Shinya to tell one of his stupid facts again, just so he'll be distracted from worrying about Yuu.
He looks at the artist from the corner of his eyes.

Come to think about it, he still doesn't know why Shinya ignored all of his calls and texts. And what was up with Shinya's behaviour on their last meal out?

Should he ask?

Fuck it. It's three AM and they're sipping coffee (or hot chocolate). He figures now's a good time as any.

“Shinya, can I ask you a question?”

He doesn't get an answer. Guren stays still. Maybe Shinya's waiting for him to continue.

“What happened the last time we saw each other? In that alleyway?”

Again, there's silence. Did he say something wrong? Or is Shinya just being an ass and downright ignoring him? What little ounce of his patience runs out and Guren sends a glare in Shinya's direction.

Oh.

He's fallen asleep.

Shinya has literally fallen asleep whilst sitting up, with the hot chocolate still in his hands.

Amazing.

Guren laughs under his breath as the artist wobbles on the spot. That laugh, however, is short lived when gravity does its job and Shinya's head falls right onto his shoulder.

Don't. Move.

Well, shit. Slowly, very, very slowly, Guren pries the hot chocolate off Shinya's hands and places it on the coffee table instead. This little moment of victory is interrupted when the movement causes Shinya's head to fall from his shoulder and onto his lap.

Guren swears out loud.

He literally stops breathing as he stares at the slumbering man. Silver hair spills onto Shinya's cheeks, and Guren has this overpowering temptation to brush the locks aside but he convinces himself that it's just creepy if he does that.

Should he wake Shinya up?

The thought of doing that makes him feel bad. Shinya already looks so peaceful.

But fuck, there's no way he's going to spend an entire night sitting down with a passed out artist using his lap as a pillow.

Guren groans, laying his head against the back of the sofa. He closes his eyes, wondering how the fuck he's even managed to land himself in this position. There's literally too much going on in his life, and yet the thing he's stressing about now is whether he wants to keep a certain artist on his lap or not.

He must have thought about it for a long time because he gradually loses himself in his thoughts and
lets sleep take over. It doesn't even dawn on him that the caffeine should have prevented this and that
sleeping whilst sitting up isn't going to improve his back pain, but the last thing Guren thinks about
before falling unconscious is that this is surprisingly comforting, in a weird way.

In fact, he's almost glad he stayed over at Shinya's.

Almost.

Chapter End Notes

I made sure that this chapter was nice and fluff-induced to make up for causing people
to cry in the last chapter.......... 

Thank you as always for all the comments and kudos! :)
As Shinya slowly, but surely, wakes up, he can't help notice how uncomfortable his pillow is. Wow, did he actually manage to sleep on this thing for the entire night? He must have been beyond tired because this thing is—

Definitely not a pillow at all, holy fucking hell—how the *fuck* did this happen?

All traces of sleep leave him as he opens his eyes to the sight of a slumbering Guren right above him. *What the fuck?* Did he manage to fall asleep on his lap?

Shinya sits up so quickly that he nearly gives himself whiplash. Unfortunately, his legs bash against the table in front of them and Guren wakes up with a jump that's uncharacteristically cute. He's not sure whether to laugh or be terrified, so Shinya does the only thing he can in a situation like this. He sits and admires Guren's bed hair because that's an image he wants to take with him to the grave.

The businessman groans, running a hand through his hair and unknowingly causing Shinya to swoon even more.

“Sorry for falling asleep on you there,” Shinya says, not the slightest bit sorry at all. In fact, he's surprised and kind of flattered that Guren didn't shove him off and leave him to sleep on the floor. That would have been something that Guren would definitely do.

“It's okay,” Guren says, his voice still drowsy. “Just don't do it next time.”

Shinya resists the urge to tease him about the possibility of him staying over at his flat for a 'next time'.

“Oh, are you two awake? Would you both like some breakfast seeing as we're all clearly not in a rush to get the children after all?”

His swooning is interrupted by a very sarcastic voice who could only belong to one person. Nevertheless, that doesn't stop Shinya from recoiling at the sight of Krul glaring from his kitchen, angrily wielding a spatula as the smell of eggs and bacon register into his brain.

“It's okay. It's not like I came here in a rush or anything,” Krul laughs, but it sounds more like a snarl instead. “I certainly didn't have to force open your door to find both of you sleeping together like the cuties you are.”

*Oh god.* Now would be a good time for the ground to swallow him up. Or Krul. At least one of them so that this embarrassment will end.

“Am I interrupting something? I figured since that your clothes are still on that nothing dirty
happened, but then again, this is *Shinya* we're talking about—"

"Krul!" Shinya's voice squeaks an octave higher as he can feel his life disintegrating before his eyes.

“What? Like I said, we're in no rush. Look, I even made breakfast. It's not like the kids are waiting in the police station or anything.”

Guren lurches forward at this, literallyshouldering Shinya out of the way to stand up and approach Krul.

“Did they find Yuu?” he asks—or rather, demands.

“And Mika. Crowley said they found them at that abandoned orphanage.”

Krul turns off the cooker, slapping the eggs and bacon into one plate so hard that the yolk actually breaks and spills over like cheap yellow paint.

“Shouldn't we... head over to the police station?” Shinya slowly asks, still staring at the ruined eggs. He doesn't want to end up like that; limp and... bleeding out because of an angry mother.

“I cooked breakfast,” Krul says in a deadpan voice.

“I know... but why? Your son is—”

Krul slams the plate on the table and glares at him with an intensity that puts her red eyes to good use. In an instant, Shinya shrinks back, grabbing onto Guren's arm for a much needed sacrifice in case Krul came flying at him with her signature roundhouse kick.

“I'm stressed,” she hisses. “I spoke to Mika—or fucking tried to—but he won't talk to me! He won't even look at me! What the fuck am I meant to do? My kid ran away and I can't even ask him how I can make things better? I am not good with this sort of thing, Shinya! What. Do. I. *Do.*”

Not for the first time in his life, Shinya wonders when Krul will kick her odd habit of cooking whenever stress takes a hold of her. What's even worse is that she feels the need to drive all the way to his house and cook here rather than her own kitchen. Shinya thinks she just can't be bothered cleaning up afterwards because she knows he'll be too freaked out to protest about it in the end.

Shinya sighs, letting go of Guren's arm, who, by the way, looks beyond confused at the scene unfolding in front of him.

“Listen, just calm down, Krul. Give Mika some time and space. They did only just find him this morning after all,” he says. “If you want, I can talk to him tomorrow?”

Luckily, Krul's shoulders sag down and she looks away, no longer having an expression of murder in her eyes.

“It's alright. I want to sort this out myself.”

With that, she grabs her handbag and leaves the flat, apparently not waiting for them anymore. Shinya's used to all this by now, although he can't imagine what's going through Guren's mind after he just witnessed all that. Turning to him, Shinya's not surprised to find him looking down at the floor, as if in pensive thought.

“Sorry about that. She can be a bit odd sometimes.” Shinya pauses, frowning when Guren still didn't look up. “You okay?”
Guren shrugs, finally looking up.

“Yeah. I'm just wondering what I'll say to Yuu. I don't think a simple apology will do it.”

He's right, that much is true... Shinya knows all too well how damaging something like this can be. Guren’s lucky that this wasn't something he intended, and it was only done once—not over the course of several years where it could have possibly ruined Yuu's life with each passing day. There's still hope for Yuu to forgive him. There's still hope for Yuu to move on from this.

Shinya wonders if that can ever apply to himself.

Ha.

Who is he kidding?

He lays a hand on Guren's shoulder, trying to ignore how warm, how strong it feels under his palm. Now's not the time for that.

“You'll be fine,” Shinya reassures him with a smile. “Just make sure he understands you didn't mean for this to happen. And don't let it happen again. I'm sure things will be fine soon.”

“Shinya, it's been three days and he's still not coming out of his room.”

“Oh, god.”

Guren pinches the bridge of his nose, clutching onto the phone with all the strength he has to stop the temptation to hit something. Fuck, he really needs to calm down when he's stressed. He's not the most serene person in the world, and yeah, he might be known to have a temper but accidentally taking it out on your nephew is not something he wants to repeat. At all.

He hears the artist sigh over the phone.

“He's been eating though, right?”

“Yeah. I've been leaving food by his room and he's been taking it in and eating there. He just won't go outside or talk to me.”

Again, Shinya sighs. Guren can almost imagine the artist running a hand through his hair in frustration.

“Well, you can't really force him. There's nothing else to do but wait until he's ready. He can't stay there forever.”

That's true... Guren hopes. It's not ideal for your nephew to lock himself in his room forever, no matter how nice his room might be. (Guren made sure Yuu got one of the bigger rooms. The kid's lucky he has his own HD TV in it; too bad his PS4 is connected to the TV downstairs though. If Yuu wants to play his precious Grand Theft Auto game, he's going to have to leave his damn room and talk to Guren.)

“You're right,” Guren says, defeated. “Thanks again for—”
Huh? His phone begins to vibrate. Confused, he looks down and realises that someone else is trying to call him.

“Shinya, wait a sec. Someone's trying to call me. I'll call you back.”

“Oh, okay. I'll talk to you later.”

“Yeah.” Guren ends the call, smiling.

Ever since he stayed over at Shinya's flat, they've been texting again. It's almost as if nothing happened—which reminds Guren; why was Shinya ignoring him in the first place? He never got round to asking and he's not sure he can bring it up now. It feels like a lifetime ago.

Shrugging, he convinces himself that it didn't matter now. It's best he forgot about it.

Now, who was trying to call him anyway? There's no one else who bothers contacting him these days.

When Guren looks, he almost drops his phone.

There, in clear letters, is a name he never thought he'd ever see again on his phone.

*Mahiru Hiiragi.*

It's still ringing. Guren doesn't know whether to pick up or if he can even move his arm in the first place. He stares at the phone with wide eyes, a million questions flashing in a short space of time.

What did she want? What's going on? Why now? Is she okay?

It keeps on ringing. He doesn't think it'll ever stop.

He accepts the call. As soon as it stops ringing, Guren's convinced he stopped breathing too.

“Guren?”

Fuck. His eyes widen at the sound of her voice.

Just that one sound and a barrage of memories come flooding back. The day they first met back in high school. She was late for class; he was ditching it. They bumped; a cliché meeting from any old novel but Guren remembers thinking it was perfect and deciding from that moment on, this girl would be the one he'd marry.

And eventually divorce, but that's another story entirely.

He gulps.

“What is it?” he asks, surprised he can even speak without stuttering.

From across the line, he hears her sniff. Her breath shakes, wavers, and then silence. Guren waits.

All he hears is sniffing.

Is she crying?

“Mahiru? What's wrong? Mahiru?”

“I-I... I just wanted to hear your voice.”
Any time ago, he might have wanted to hear those words. But not now. Not after half a year of her divorcing him and this is the first thing she does? Guren grips the phone. Hard.

“I don't know what you want from me,” he says, wishing that he can say it with the anger he wants to feel. It ends up sounding empty, half-hearted.

“I hate it here. I hate being at home.”

Even when she sounds desperate, her voice is laced with that fiery anger he's grown so used to. It's Mahiru and Mahiru is fire; unpredictable, angry, and easily catching him in her flames with each word she spits out.

Guren wants to hate her, but he can't.

Guren wants to let go, but he ca—

He hears screaming from Yuu's room.

Just as easily as that, the flames are doused and all Guren can focus on is the sound of his nephew panicking.

“Mahiru, I have to go,” he says, his eyes flickering up the stairs. What on earth is wrong with Yuu?

“What? N-No, wait—”

“I'm sorry, I need to go. My nephew needs me.”

Mahiru chokes with what sounds like a sob.

“No, please, you have to help me—”

Too late. Guren's hung up on her before he can even listen to what she says. He rushes up the stairs, the sound of Yuu screaming growing louder as he nears the kid's room. By some miracle, this time, the door isn't locked and he can easily go in.

Yuu thrashes on his bed, sobbing in the darkness, his short arms flailing against his sheets as if to fight off an imaginary being.

A nightmare, Guren thinks. He's having a nightmare.

Gently, he pads by the kid's side and tries to shake him awake. No use. Yuu almost punches him with how much he's struggling against his sheets.

“Yuu, wake up,” Guren hisses, shaking him harder. “Wake up!”

The little kid jolts, lurching up in his bed and squeaking out loud when his eyes open. He literally shudders and as soon as he sees Guren in front of him, Yuu covers his face and bursts into tears.

Shit.

What the fuck is he meant to do?

He's barely dealt with children before—let alone calm them when they're having a breakdown like this! Nothing useful flies into his brain and he's left just staring at Yuu's shaking figure in front of him. He knows Yuu's only twelve, but it never occurred to him just how young he is until this moment. He's always thought of him as... well, to be perfectly honest, Guren doesn't think about
their situation much. Sure, he's basically stuck with the kid until Yuu's old enough to move out, yet he doesn't pay attention to it. In a way, he's gotten used to thinking of the kid as just being there. There, as in someone to cook food for, someone to piss off when he's stressed, someone to laugh at. He never regarded Yuu as a little kid who needed guidance and maybe, just maybe, some comfort as well.

Guren sighs, sitting down on the edge of Yuu's bed. He lays a hand on his head and softly ruffles his hair. Yuu pauses a bit, uncovering his face to look up at him with large, puffy eyes.

He sniffs.

“It's okay,” Guren says. “I'll stay here until you fall back asleep.”

Yuu hiccups. “I-I don't want to sleep anymore.”

“How come?”

The kid rubs his eyes, trying to wipe the tears away. It's badly timed because as soon as he moves, his lips tremble and he's suddenly weeping again.

“I-I keep h-having nightmares a-about—” Yuu breaks off as another hiccup interrupts him. He doesn't bother talking again—it's not like he needs to elaborate anyway. Guren guesses that it's a nightmare about his parents.

“I'll stay here,” he says. It's the only thing he can do.

Yuu doesn't say anything. He just cries. And Guren lets him.

Seconds, minutes, lifetimes pass until Yuu's sobs subside and all that can be heard are the soft hiccups and sniffs coming from him. Guren sits back, wondering if this is a bad time to start apologising to him. It probably is. He'll wait for now.

Damn, he's not good with kids. Where's Shinya when you need him?

“What was my mum like?”

Guren's surprised to hear Yuu talking. The kid's hugging his knees, resting his head on them so that his hair hides his face from view.

“I barely remember,” Guren admits. “I was never close with my family.”

“Oh. S-Same...” Yuu sniffs again. “Mika said he'd be my family.”

Huh. Mika?

“What do you mean?” Guren asks, frowning in the near darkness.

“We changed our names and everything. I-I'm Yuuichirou Hyakuya now and he's Mikaela Hyakuya. W-We were meant to be a happy family together...”

Nothing he thinks of sounds remotely good as a response for that, so Guren remains silent.

“I just wanted a family. I still do. I've never known what it's like to be in a family...”

A family... Guren has to admit he doesn't think he can relate to that. He's never care much for family; blood means nothing if you don't care about the person. If someone wanted to be in your life, then
they will stay—not leave, not force you to have to cast them aside because what's the point of holding onto memories when the person who that memory's attached to isn't there anymore.

He's tried to hold onto that ideology, but it's hard when Mahiru's called him today and he's still shaken up about it.

Guren clenches his fist. Forget about it. Forget about her.

Try to forget about her.


Where the fuck was he going with this speech, he wonders, but continues just for the sake of calming the kid down.

“Despite all that, you stick around and the day may come when someone out there will need you.”

It must be some miracle. Yuu's stopped sniffing and he's looking up at him with wide, hopeful eyes. It's the best Guren can do. For some reason, he thinks of Shinya and wonders if he's said the right things. Maybe the artist will approve of this. He better damn well do so. Guren's never said anything as cheesy as that before in his entire life.

“Do you think that day will ever come?” Yuu asks, his voice small and barely audible at all.

Guren cracks a smile. “Who knows?”

He pats Yuu on the head, ruffling his hair again until the kid yelps out loud.

“I, for one, don't need a little bed wetter like you, though.”

That seems to do the job. The kid grins at him, trying to swat his hand away. He even laughs. Guren feels like he's actually done a good job for once.

“Get some sleep,” Guren urges him, pulling his hand away. “I'll be here.”

“Kay...” Yuu mumbles, sliding back under his blanket with a tiny yawn. “Oh, Guren?”

“Yeah?”

“S-Sorry for running away...”

The businessman is surprised the kid's actually apologising for that. Out of all the things to be sorry for...

“Don't be sorry. It was my fault in the first place. I shouldn't have lashed out,” Guren says, taking a deep breath. “I'm sorry about that. I really am.”

“It's okay,” Yuu mutters.

That's all that's said. Guren watches as Yuu closes his eyes again and it's not long until his chest falls into a soft rhythm, until the room is once again filled with silence. It's only then does Guren allow himself to sigh in relief.

That went better than he expected it to. He's almost tempted to think he's dreaming because he expected to fuck up worse than that. Wow.
Smiling, he takes out his phone and texts the first person he can think of.

_Yuu's talking to me again_, he texts to Shinya in less than a heartbeat. Seeing as Shinya was the one who urged him to talk to the kid in the first place, it's only fair that Guren keeps him updated.

_Hahaha, I told you so~ I'm glad things are sorted out. Who was the person who called you btw? Are things okay?_

Guren freezes. He almost forgot about the call.

Mahiru.

What's he going to do about Mahiru?

Wait. Does he really need to do anything? Wasn't she out of his life? Didn't she leave him? Why does he need to do anything?

Guren shakes his head to himself, wishing that he never picked up her call in the first place. Just thinking about her sends his thoughts everywhere.

In the end, he grumbles and sends a text to Shinya, hoping to push away Mahiru's call to the back of his mind. He'll worry about it when he has to. He's got other things to think about right now.

_It was nothing important. Don't worry about it._

Mika grabs his phone with shaking hands and tries to keep his sobs at bay as he thinks of a text to send to Yuu-chan. He needs to talk. Just talk. Distract. Distract himself from this. This place. From Ferid. Anything. He needs to talk to Yuu-chan.

His hands are shaking too hard to properly type in the password for his lockscreen. Stupid. Stupid! Tears well up in his eyes, making Mika hate himself more. All he does is cry these days. He can't do anything right—he can't even run away properly without being caught. Useless. _Stupid._

He tries to wipe the tears away.


What is he even crying about? Mika can't decide anymore. He can't tell apart the bads from the other bads. All he remembers is coming home and Ferid's here again and everything is worse. Worse. Horrible. Unbearable. He thought he was used to it by now but just one day of running away and it's like everything's back to day one and Mika's even more terrified than before. He remembers mummy too. He remembers her saying she's sorry and crying when he ignored her.

He's never seen mummy cry before.

That's his fault too.

Everything is his fault.

Finally, he manages to unlock the phone. He's amazed he can find Yuu-chan's contact with all the tears blurring his eyes.
What can he text?

What does he want to say?

Mika wants to tell him. He wants to tell at least someone. He can't bear being alone anymore. He's only twelve. He knows twelve year olds shouldn't be feeling like this. He knows that Ferid shouldn't be doing this to twelve years olds. He knows he shouldn't be going through this. It's not fair. What has he ever done to deserve all this?

He's typing without thinking about it. The words escape his hands and he cries as he writes down everything he wants to tell to Yuu-chan.

*please help me yuu-chan i'm scared of being at home i'm scared of ferid i don't want to be here anymore i'm scared of the things he does to me please help me*

His hands are shaking again. It's hard to type. It's hard to see what he's typing when he's shaking with too many sobs.

He doesn't stop.

*im scarewd i dofn't knwo what to do anymore i don't want to live like this anymore*

“Mika-kun, are you texting your Yuu-chan again?”

Mika's heart lurches. He drops the phone, spinning around in time to see Ferid grabbing his shoulder. He opens his mouth to scream, but the adult's already covered it with a hand and a smirk to match.

His mummy's here. She's just in the next room!

Mika closes his eyes and cries even more. It's the only thing he can do.

Slowly, Ferid's hands pulls away. It's still not enough; Mika can feel him just in front of him, his presence as choking and terrifying as ever. He can't breathe.

“Do you think Yuu-chan will care, Mika-kun?”

At those words, Mika's eyes fly open.

Ferid's smile mocks him.

“Once he finds out, don't you think he'll be disgusted?”

No.

No.

“He'll be disgusted, Mika-kun. Think about it. Who wouldn't be?”

Stop.

Mika wants to cover his ears. He's lying. Yuu-chan isn't like that!

“He won't want to be your friend anymore. Why would he?”

Why is he saying this? Why is Ferid doing these things to him?
Mika covers his mouth in order to stifle his sobs. His mummy can't hear him crying. It'll only make her hate him more.

Ferid's right.

If mummy already hates him... and she doesn't even know what's going on... Yuu-chan can't find out... Yuu-chan can't hate him too... He can't lose Yuu-chan. Mika doesn't know how he can survive if he hasn't got Yuu-chan anymore.

“There, there.” Ferid strokes his hair and pulls him into his arms, gives him an embrace that makes all of the nerves in Mika's body stand up and prickle his skin like a thousand needles. Mika resists the urge to be sick right there on that spot.

“This is our secret, Mika-kun,” Ferid says, laughing lightly before eventually letting go of him. He doesn't even say anything as he leaves his room and shuts the door close.

Left alone again, Mika stares blankly at the wall in front of him. He can't find the strength to cry anymore. So he just sits there. And stares.

He doesn't even think of anything. It's all pointless anyway.

In the end, Mika does the only thing he can think of. He reaches for his phone, opens the texts he typed earlier to Yuu-chan and deletes every single one of them.

Yuu-chan will never know. No one will ever know. Mummy might hate him, and the world might even come to hate him too, but if Yuu-chan ever hated him... If Yuu-chan left him...

*Yuu-chan's the only one I'm living for, Mika thinks. If Yuu-chan leaves, then there's no point anymore.*

He lies back down on his bed, repeating that thought over and over again.

Chapter End Notes

Lol, it was cute that everyone was happy about the fluff last chapter and here I am again, posting another angsty one... (Sorry...)

Thank you as usual for all the comments and kudos!! I promise that all the pain will be worth it and the characters will find happiness.................. Probably. Maybe. Who knows...
Shinya's day doesn't get off to a good start. He's rudely awakened by the loud shrill of his phone at ten past six in the morning, ripping him away from a very pleasant dream he was having about eating chocolate cheesecake. He didn't even get to have a bite of it...

Honestly though, who even calls at this time? Who could possibly need him at six in the morning?

Groaning, Shinya peaks out from his duvet and grabs his phone. The name Guren~ is flashing on his screen.

That wakes him up. He answers the call faster than he can even blink.

“Guren,” he yawns. “What's up?”

“H-Hello, Shinya...”

Oh. That's not Guren. Unless Guren's voice suddenly heightened back into its teenage phase, then that's definitely not Guren at all. Frowning, Shinya rubs his eyes and sits up, wondering why on earth Yuu-kun would be calling him at this time. And why did he have Guren's phone anyway?

Oh no. What if something was wrong with Guren?

“Is something the matter?” Shinya asks, his mind already coming up with a million possibilities.

Did Yuu-kun flood their house again? He probably did, didn't he?

“No, no! Everything's okay!”

That's still not enough for Shinya to sigh in relief though. He narrows his eyes, waiting for the kid to explain what's going on.

“So... it's Guren's birthday today. I-I wanted to cook breakfast for him but I don't know how to... so I-I thought maybe you could come by? Maybe... Maybe he'll enjoy it if he spends his birthday with his friends? B-But you're the only one I know who he's friends with—I don't even know if he has other friends...”

Aaw. How sweet. Shinya takes a moment to smile as Yuu-kun continues to mumble down the phone, making up excuses as to why he's doing this for Guren.

It's only been a couple of weeks since he ran away, Shinya thinks. It's good to see he and Guren are all better now.

Of course, Shinya should also take credit for that... To this day, he's still surprised that Guren asked for his advice not once but several times. He wouldn't have expected it, especially from Guren of all people. Guren who was too stubborn and endearingly prideful, Guren who he never expected would actually bother with someone like him.

It's not like they were doing anything. Guren only saw him as a friend—and even that seems too much for Shinya to hope for. He is, after all, a Hiiragi. All this would end once Guren finds out about that.
Not that he will. Hopefully. Shinya's determined to keep the Hiiragis away from his life for as long as he can allow them to.

“Shinya? You there?”

“Sorry.” Shinya blinks back into reality. Oops. He's only been awake for five minutes and he's already spacing out. “Um, yeah, sure. I'm free this morning, but I have to leave at one PM for my shift. Do you have anything planned for your uncle's birthday?”

He hears an excited laugh from the other side. Aaw... Yuu-kun is such a cute kid. The artist is glad that, considering he tried to run away two weeks ago, Yuu seems to be in a much better mood now. It's nice to see that the kid is happier after all that.

“Guren wakes up pretty late on Sundays so we can cook for him? I'm really hungry—I mean, Guren would be hungry! Probably...”

Shinya smirks. Ah, now he knows why Yuu-kun is so eager for this...

“And u-um... I was also going to ask... C-Could you bring Mika along too? Um, I asked him if he wanted to sleep over at my house and he said yes...”

“Sure. I'll drop by his house and take him with me. What's your address, by the way?”

Yuu cheers and Shinya hears a rush of air hit the phone. Is he waving the phone around? Wow, he must be really excited, huh?

“Okay, our address is...”

“Wow.”

That's it. That's all Shinya can say as he stands outside Guren's house. No. Scratch that. Guren's mansion. It didn't occur to him that being an Ichinose also meant that Guren would be this loaded, though he shouldn't be surprised. After all, the Hiiragis also lived in a house like this; perhaps not quite as visitor-friendly, albeit still a mansion nonetheless.

He glances down at Mika beside him who, for once, is quiet. The blond kid shuffles his feet on the spot, fiddling with the straps of his backpack as he stares at the door of the mansion. Odd. Shinya would have thought that Mika would be excited at the idea of spending more time with Yuu-kun.

“Is there something wrong, Mika?” Shinya asks, leaning down to the kid's eye level. Wide-eyed, Mika turns to him. It's the first time Shinya's managed to get a proper look at his face and he can't help but notice the dark circles under Mika's eyes. Now that he thinks about it, Mika looks like he's lost a bit of weight too. At first, Shinya thought that maybe it's puberty doing its job at getting rid of Mika's baby fat, but along with the eyebags, the pale tone of his skin, and his recent attempt of running away...

There's definitely something wrong.

“U-Um... N-No,” Mika mumbles, looking away. He hugs his bag closer to his body.
“Are you sure? You know you can always talk to me, right?”

Shinya makes sure to keep his voice as gentle as he can. Mika's always been a happy kid; full of energy and life. He was like one of those overly-hyper kids you would only find on Teletubbies, that type of kid that every mother imagines as soon as she finds out she's pregnant. Blond, blue eyes, angelic aura, happy all the time.

To say that he's worried about Mika's sudden change in personality is an understatement.

“I'm... I'm good. I just—”

The front door bursts open. Yuu-kun jumps into view, still dressed in his matching pyjamas.

“Mika!” he calls out, the grin on his face brighter than the sunrise. Just as easily as that, Mika's eyes brighten up and his shoulders rise, matching Yuu's smile.

“Yuu-chan!” Mika runs over to his side, almost tripping over with how eager he is.

Shinya sighs. That's that then. Mika's definitely hiding something. Now's just not the time to try and coax it out of him; Shinya doesn't want to ruin what little happiness he gets just from seeing Yuu.

“Thanks, Shinya!” Yuu says. “Guren's still asleep so we gotta hurry and make him breakfast before he wakes up.”

Nodding, Shinya follows the kids into the mansion, whistling as soon as he takes in the interior of the place. Nice. It's nothing like the mansion the Hiiragis had. This one didn't actually look like it belonged in the medieval period, complete with rooms that may as well be dungeons or torture chambers. This mansion actually looked like a home.

All the walls are white. Shinya feels like his hair is going to camouflage in this place. Everything is so clean as well. Considering that only Yuu and Guren lived here, did that mean that Guren was stuck cleaning this house by himself? If so, then wow, he's earned more respect points in that stance. This place is beautiful.

“Guren shouldn't wake up until eleven AM, so we're not in any rush,” Yuu tells them when they walk into the kitchen.

Shinya looks at his watch. It's only seven thirty AM. Thankfully, picking Mika up from his house and taking the bus to Guren's address didn't take as long as he thought it would be. Life is good when there's no traffic in the streets anymore.

“What do you think we should cook for him?” Shinya asks, looking around the kitchen. Guren's kitchen is bigger than his entire living room and kitchen put together.

The kids pause to think; Yuu pouting as he taps his feet against the tiles and Mika fiddling with the straps of his backpack.

“Pancakes,” Mika suggests after a while.

Yuu nods. “And nuggets!”

“Nug... Nuggets?” the artist stares at the kid, inwardly questioning if it's a joke, and then remembers Guren complaining endlessly about Yuu's nugget obsession.

It seems he wasn't lying.
“Yeah! We always have nuggets for breakfast!”

At first, Shinya contemplates saying no, but Yuu-kun's face looks too excited for him to dare. He exchanges looks with Mika, who only shrugs in defeat. It's too late to protest now anyway; Yuu's already started opening the freezer, yanking out packets of his precious nuggets and slamming them onto the counter.

Shinya sighs.

Nuggets and pancakes it is then.

“What will you have on the pancakes though?”

“Nuggets!”

Shinya does a double take. He almost drops the frying pan, saving it at the last minute and sighing in relief when he sees that the pancakes are unharmed.

Why did he even bother asking that question?

“Nuggets on pancakes...?” he blanches, much to Yuu's dismay.

“It's good!” Yuu glares at him, tiny hands clenching into fists. He grabs Mika by his collar and forces the blond to look at Shinya too. “Mika, tell him it's good!”

“A-Ah, Yuu-chan, I've never had nuggets on pan—”

“You're having it now!”

Poor Mika. His blue eyes widen, remaining silent as he resigns himself to the doom of being stuck with nuggets on pancakes. Shinya laughs, returning to the task at hand. He'd rather have strawberries and whipped cream on his pancakes, thank you very much.

This is pretty fun though. The kids are making the batter for him whilst Shinya's in charge of flipping the pancakes. Originally, Yuu-kun wanted to do it at first. After one attempt that ended up in him whacking a pancake straight onto Mika's hair, they decided that maybe Shinya would be the best person for the job. (Mika still has bits of pancake mix on his hair and Yuu keeps smirking when he isn't looking. Shinya thinks it's cute, so he hasn't bothered telling Mika. Yet.)

From behind him, Yuu lets out a monster of a sneeze.

“Ah, FUCK!” he screams, and it's followed by Mika's soft giggle which soon morphs into genuine laughter.

“Yesu-chan, it's made your hair white!”

Confused, Shinya spins around to the sight of Yuu covered head to toe in flour. Mika's clutching onto his stomach beside him, laughing as Yuu yells a string of curses that a boy his age shouldn't really be aware of.

“Shut up!” Yuu screams and lobbs a handful of flour at Mika's face.
Well, that does a fine job of shutting Mika up—especially when Yuu's aim is impressive in that he's managed to get most of the flour into Mika's mouth. Spluttering, Mika looks at Yuu as if he's just destroyed his life. Anyone with a heart would apologise after seeing such a heartfelt pout. But not Yuu-kun. He grabs more flour.

Mika does as well. The two kids watch each other with vengeful eyes.

Oh, god.

Shaking his head to himself, Shinya decides to let them fight it out instead of try and stop them. Knowing his luck, they'd drag him into their mess and—

A blob of flour smacks straight into the side of his face.

Shinya coughs, seeing nothing but white. Everything's white. Too white. Is this what it feels like to die?

“That was Mika!”

“I-I missed! Yuu-chan dodged! I didn't mean it!”

The artist lets out a long-suffering sigh. He woke up at six in the morning. For this. Sparing one look at the two kids, he's not surprised to find both of them covered in flour—as well as the floor. And the counters. Shinya doesn't even want to think about Guren's reaction once he sees the state of his kitchen because, surely, there's only one outcome for this and it doesn't include the survival of his own life.

As tempting as it is to pour flour down Mika's head as payback, Shinya decides to play the responsible adult. He sighs, possibly for the umpteenth time this morning.

“You two... Go clean yourselves up—”

“What the fuck is going on here?”

All three of them freeze. And look up towards the stairs.

Shinya's glad he's no longer holding the frying pan. If he was, he would have most definitely dropped it straight onto his foot and ruined both the pancakes and his ability to walk.

There, walking ever so slowly and looking very, very pissed, was Guren. Shirtless.

Oh boy.

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Guren's convinced he's still dreaming. Imagine waking up to the sound of screaming children and thinking when the fuck did he allow that brat Yuu to invite anyone over at this ungodly hour. Also, imagine walking down the stairs, ready to yell at said piece of shit nephew, only to find a perfect sight of your kitchen covered in nothing but flour. Imagine taking in the sight of your ruined kitchen and seeing not one, but two uninvited visitors in your home; all of them covered in flour.

Everything is covered in fucking flour.
Guren just stands there. Stares at Yuu. Then Mika. Then Shinya.

He's not sure what to say. He's not sure if he wants to say anything, or if he's just tempted to throw his slipper at all of them.

“Um,” Yuu nervously laughs. “H-Happy birthday!”

Oh. Is it his birthday today? He's honestly forgotten.

“Thanks,” Guren says, deadpan as ever. “What the fuck are you doing?”

It's Shinya who speaks up this time. He steps forward and Guren takes in the sight of his light blue sweatshirt and jeans, both complimenting his eyes. It's a shame about the flour all over his face though.

“Yuu-kun suggested that we should make you breakfast for your birthday... and well...” the artist trails off. He doesn't need to explain further. The kitchen answers everything.

His first reaction is to lob a slipper in Yuu's direction, which he refrains from doing so as soon as he sees the nervous look in his nephew's eyes, coupled with a small smile that makes Guren feel like a villain for considering it in the first place.

“What are you trying to make?” he asks instead, walking over to them.

“Pancakes,” Yuu says with a grin.

“With nuggets...” Mika mumbles afterwards, not looking very happy about it at all. Guren doesn't need to guess twice which idiot suggested that.

Still, Guren admits that it's nice of Yuu to do this for him. He's relieved that after all that's happened recently, his nephew's forgiven him enough to try and plan a birthday surprise for him... even if it did end up with his kitchen in a state.

“As you can, er, see... we haven't finished cooking yet.” Shinya laughs, trying to wipe the flour away from his face.

He does a pretty good job of it—mostly anyway. Right on his cheek is a speck of flour he missed out... The more Guren looks at it, the more it annoys him. He waits for Shinya to wipe it off, but the artist is completely unaware. Typical.

Without thinking, Guren reaches out for Shinya's cheek and wipes the flour off. Huh... His cheeks are pretty soft. Who'd have thought? That realisation slows Guren's thought process down and it doesn't occur to him that he's still stroking Shinya's cheek until Yuu starts to gag.

“Urgh.” Yuu pretends to be sick like the little asshole he is. “It's too early for this. Ugh. Mika, let's go leave them alone.”

Guren jumps away from Shinya. Yuu grabs Mika by his shoulders and leads him out of the kitchen before Guren can tell him to shut the fuck up, already talking about how they should play one of his new games whilst they wait for breakfast to cook.

Only Yuu would plan a surprise and give up on it to let the birthday recipient cook it for him in the end. Only Yuu.

“S-Sorry about the mess.” Shinya lets out another laugh, only it sounds nervous this time. For some
reason, a light pink flush coats his cheeks, standing out against his pale skin and light hair.

“It's alright,” Guren reassures, smiling. “You didn't have to come all the way here, you know.”

The artist shrugs, gives him a larger smile that makes his eyes sparkle.

“I wanted to.”

Well. Guren's not sure how to reply to that. He's caught off guard by how those simple three words could flatter him so much. He's even more surprised that his heart has started pounding. What the fuck? It doesn't help that the smile Shinya has on his face looks genuine and... caring. Huh.

Guren coughs. Awkwardly.

“Heh. Thanks,” he says, although wishing, just for a bit, that he can show his gratitude more.

“Anyway, do you still want pancakes? I can make them for you,” Shinya asks, pointing at the frying pan. “I've already started on a few.”

“I'll help you. I don't mind.”

For some reason, Shinya's eyes widen.

“You might want to put on a shirt first. Unless you usually cook shirtless?”

Oh shit. He's completely forgotten about that.

“It's not my fault I had no idea I'd be having two guests over, is it?” Guren says, raising an eyebrow. Shinya, ever so smug, just shrugs and waves him off. It would have looked more genuine, if it weren't for the red tint on his cheeks.

“I'm not complaining. I just didn't think it would be practical to flip pancakes whilst being shirtless, but like I said. I'm not complaining.”

And then he winks. The asshole actually winks at him.

What the fuck.

Guren's not sure why he suddenly feels like the entire room is on fire. All he sees is how red Shinya's turned and how he now refuses to meet his eyes. Just standing there in all his shirtless glory is making things more awkward, but he doesn't really understand why it would bother Shinya of all people.

In the end, Guren returns upstairs without another word. He gets changed, quicker than he usually does.

He tries to ignore the fact that he's actually looking forward to spending some time with a certain artist downstairs.

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Once breakfast is done (no thanks to Yuu and Mika, that's for sure), the four of them sit around the table; Yuu with his pancakes and nuggets, alongside Mika who looks much more reluctant to try it
out, Shinya with strawberries and cream on his, and Guren—ever the exciting man—just settling for butter and syrup.

“Oh, wow!” Yuu cheers, stabbing his pancake with eagerness.

With all of them eating around a table, Guren can't help but remember the first time they did this. That was when he met Shinya for the second time and they all went in that café together. Wow. Was that five or four months ago? It feels like years.

He stares at the artist in front of him, tempted to roll his eyes when Shinya typically picks the strawberries off his pancakes first.

“You know, if we eat around a table, it's like we're a family!” Yuu says. He nudges Mika on the side. “Right, Mika?”

Mika's eyes dart around the table. “Y-Yeah... Family...”

Guren lets out a non-committal grunt. The kid's been going on and on about families recently that it's just something he's grown used to.

He spares another look at the artist, curious as to what his reaction is. To his surprise, Shinya's cheeks are red again and he's got his eyes trained onto his plate, refuses to look up.

Is he ill? Maybe he has a fever? Maybe that's why he's so red today? Guren feels bad that Shinya went to all this trouble to be here for his birthday. He's touched—he really is, but he doesn't want to be happy at the expense of the artist's health.

“Are you alright?” Guren asks, lightly kicking Shinya's leg to grab his attention.

“A-Ah! Yes!” Shinya nods, a bit too quickly, and gives him a shaky smile. His cheeks are still pink. “Sorry, I was just spacing out.”

“Didn't you say you weren't a morning person?” Guren smirks, remembering the time when Shinya fell asleep on him.

“I wouldn't pass up on pancakes though.”

He has a point there. Even the kids are enjoying their pancakes—or at least Yuu is and Mika's still staring at his as if he's not sure whether or not he likes it. Guren almost feels sorry for the kid. Pancakes with nuggets and ketchup on top of them is not something anyone should be having first thing in the morning, not unless they were insane like Yuu.

Silence descends on the table. It's comfortable. Nice, even. As Guren slowly devours his breakfast, he remembers something that's been bothering him for a while now. He looks at Shinya, debating whether the artist will have a reasonable explanation for this and if he should bother asking in the first place.

But... If he doesn't ask, then he'll never know. It'll keep nagging at him from the back of his mind.

No. That won't do.

Guren lowers his fork and clears his throat.

“Shinya, why do you have a dead cactus hidden in your flat?”

Amazingly, the first one to react is Mika. He drops his fork and stares at Shinya with wide eyes like
the artist has just unleashed the worst betrayal of all.

“Oh fuck,” Shinya says, scratching his head. “I forgot all about Prick.”

Guren frowns. “Prick...?”

“Yeah. It's a cactus that Mika and I bought a while ago. I was cleaning up my kitchen, so I had to put the cactus somewhere where it wouldn't be in the way.”

“It was under the sink when I found it.”

“Yeah...” Shinya gives one of his nervous laughs. “Sorry, Mika. I killed Prick.”

“We should google how to bring him back to life!” Yuu takes out his phone. The amount of enthusiasm the kid has as he opens up Google should be amusing, but all Guren can do is wonder what in the world is happening.

“Yuu, I don't think Google can bring a dead cactus back to life—”

“No, stupid Guren! LOOK!” Yuu thrusts his phone forward, showing them Yahoo!Answers and a page titled 'My Cactus is dying, how can I save it?'

The four of them huddle around the phone, staring at the massive block of text explaining in full detail what you must do to resurrect a cactus back to the land of the living.

“Eh, that's too much work...” Shinya complains. “That paragraph is too big for me to bother reading.”

“Do it for Prick!” Yuu demands, slamming his hands on the table. “Mika and I will save Prick!”

“Yuu-chan, it's okay—”

“No! You looked sad about it earlier so I'm going to save Prick for you!”

Guren pinches the bridge of his nose and takes several deep breaths. Out of all the things to happen on his twenty-fifth birthday, Yuu declaring his need to rescue a dead plant for Mika was not on his list.

Neither was spending the rest of his morning being forced to browse Google for more remedies.

“You brought it up,” Shinya reminds him, laughing.

“Fuck you,” Guren says, but feels the corner of his lips tugging into a small smile.

It's one PM by the time they finally give up on saving the cactus. Shinya vows that he will buy a new one and name it Prick II, as well as take better care of it. Mika doesn't look convinced or excited; he only gives a laugh that Shinya detects to be fake. Guren and Yuu may be easily fooled, but the artist can tell a fake laugh from a mile away.

Shinya curses the fact that he has to leave for his job now. God knows when he'll get the chance to talk to Mika again considering that he now rarely visits him during weekends.
“Do you want me to give you a lift back?” Guren asks, already standing up.

Shinya stops before he says no. Hmm. More time with Guren? Why would he refuse that?

“Sure, if you don't mind,” he says, trying very hard to ignore the giddy feeling in his chest. *Calm down, Shinya. Don't get too ahead of yourself.*

Guren smiles. “Yeah, it's fine. Is Mika coming with you?”

“U-Um...” Yuu raises his hand. When Guren looks down at him, he shuffles his feet on the floor and mutters under his breath. “I, er... forget to ask... but can Mika stay over for the night?”

Shinya nearly laughs as the smile on Guren's face disappears in an instant.

“I'm guessing that backpack by the corner is all the stuff he needs for tonight?” Guren asks, nodding towards the distance.

“Um, yeah.”

“Well, it's not like I can say no, can I?”

“S-Sorry, Guren-san...” Mika's voice is small, almost scared. “I-I can leave, if you want...”

For a moment, Shinya wonders if the reason Mika's in Yuu's house is because Krul's got work today. Then again, it's not like there's no one to take care of him; Ferid's there after all so he's still got someone watching over in case Guren decides to be an asshole and refuse the sleepover.

“Nah, it's okay. You can stay over. But next time, be sure to tell me, *Yuu.*”

Guren glares at Yuu, who ignores it and pumps a fist into the air instead.

Mika, on the other hand, literally sighs with relief.

*Huh...* Shinya narrows his eyes. Is Mika trembling? He is... Just a bit; it's barely noticeable—until you notice his shaking hands.

Was it because Guren was about to deny him permission to—

“Oi, are you ready?” Guren shakes his shoulder, ripping his attention from Mika.

Shinya looks away, focusing back on the businessman.

“Yeah, sure.”

By the time he returns his gaze to Mika, the two kids have already made their way to the living room, plopping down onto the sofa and deciding what games they should play. Mika's hugging his knees, smiling gently as Yuu-kun jumps around the living room, excitedly telling him about all the games he has and how good he is at them. From a distance, everything looks fine, normal; just two kids playing around.

But Shinya knows Mika. The usual Mika would be jumping *with* Yuu-kun rather than just sitting there, looking small and delicate.

_Maybe I should talk to Krul about it. She might want to know about this._

Deciding that would be best, Shinya pushes it to the back of his mind. For now. He follows Guren
out to his car, realising just how many times Guren's given him a lift ever since they met each other. Haha... He's lucky Guren's generous enough to bother since all these bus tickets cost a fortune once you add them all up. If money wasn't such an issue, Shinya would have bought a car for himself by now...

“Do I drive to your flat or the restaurant?” Guren asks, starting the engine.

“My flat, please.”

And they drive. Or Guren drives and Shinya watches him from the corner of his eyes. Same thing.

The day's barely even started and Shinya already feels like he's too happy for it to be real. This morning has just been really, really... lovely. He can't remember the last time he's been able to relax like that.

Yuu-kun's comment about being a family though... That caught him off guard. What surprised him wasn't the actual comment, but the fact that it felt so genuine. True enough, Shinya doesn't exactly have a perfect idea of what a family is since the Hiiragis aren't the best example by far. It's just that sitting around a table with people he's able to laugh freely and be comfortable with, forget his troubles, forget the fact that his older brother is still probably out there searching for him, forget the dreams he's haunted by, forget his mother... That seems too good to be true. Like family.

There's nothing more unattainable to Shinya Hiiragi than finding a real family for himself after all.

However, as he stares at Guren from the corner of his eyes, admires the way the sunlight makes his purple eyes shine like amethysts (cliché, yes, but true nonetheless), he can't help but feel like that doesn't matter. He's happy as long as he can spend time with Guren.

For now. He has to remind himself that this isn't permanent.

Sooner or later, this will end somehow—either with Kureto finding him or Guren finding out he's a Hiiragi.

Sooner or later.

But, for now, Shinya leans against the window and sighs, wondering how much time there is left until all this has to come to an end.

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Chapter End Notes

I think I'm so used to writing angst for this story that it catches me off guard when I don't have it in a chapter....... BUUT considering that I didn't get to update last week, I figured I'd make this chapter cute and let people take a break from the angst... For now.......

You know, that cactus page on Yahoo!Answers is actually legit. And yes, I did google how to save a dying cactus just for this story. My dedication knows no limits.
Yuu doesn't feel like eating his nuggets.

There's nothing wrong with them, of course. There's never anything wrong with nuggets. You can't go wrong with a good lunch of nuggets behind the Art Block in this bright, summer's day. It would have been perfect.

Would have been.

They've never eaten lunch out here before. After hearing a group of those stuck up upper years go on about how great the Art Block is, Yuu decided that first thing he's going to do is drag Mika out here to try and cheer him up.

Except he doesn't think it's working very well.

Yuu closes his lunch box, forgetting his nuggets. He stares at the silent blond in front of him, wondering what the hell Mika's so sad about these days. Fuck, it's not even these days. It's been going on for weeks. Months, maybe. It's like as the days go by, Mika's getting more and more quiet, hardly even saying a word, let alone look at him. What could be wrong?

He watches as Mika pushes his food around with his fork. Not once has he eaten a single bite yet, and Yuu doubts he's going to eat one any time soon. This happens every lunch time; Mika plays with his food until the bell rings and then finds the nearest opportunity to throw it all away without another word. At first, Yuu thought it was because he didn't like his lunch so he offered some of his nuggets. (Mika should be grateful because Yuu never shares his nuggets. Ever.) However, all Mika did was shake his head and tell him that he's not hungry.

Sighing, Yuu gathers the courage to ask what's been bothering him lately.

“Mika... Am I your friend?”

In an instant, Mika looks at him with large blue eyes.

(Of course you are, Yuu-chan,” he says. “Why?”

“Well... You're my friend too, y'know... and...” Yuu sighs again. He grabs Mika by his shoulders and tries with all his might to look serious and mature. “Y-You can tell me anything! Um, you can trust me. I-I want to help you...”

He didn't expect anything to happen. To be honest, he was just being desperate, wanting to coax a reaction from Mika, any reaction just as long as he didn't look so sad and empty anymore.

So, when Mika's bottom lip starts to tremble, Yuu jumps back in surprise. He shakes him, asking what's wrong and it's all it takes for the blond to burst into tears.
“M-Mika?!” Yuu panics. Does he hug Mika? Does he keep asking what's wrong? Maybe he should get a teacher to help him?

_Do something! Anything! Don't just stand there!_

“What's going on here?”

Yuu whirls around. There, in front of them, stood a tall, pink haired boy surrounded by his friends. The first thing Yuu thinks is why the fuck does this boy have pink hair anyway? Then, it dawns on him that these are people from the grade above and they really don't look happy about the fact that their lunch-time spot has been stolen from them.

Pushing Mika back, Yuu tries his best to cover him. He knows that Mika probably doesn't want to be seen crying, especially by _them_.

“Oi, kid, I asked you a question,” Pinky says.

Yuu grits his teeth. “Fuck off, you telephone pole!”

Behind him, he hears Mika's voice utter out a soft “_eh?_” and Yuu momentarily questions himself as to why, out of all the insults he could have chosen from, _telephone pole_ popped up into his head.

“Telephone... Telephone _what?_” the older boy splutters, shaking his fist. “Are you trying to pick a fight?”

“What if I am?” Yuu shakes his fist too, hoping to at least smash those glasses that the asshole is wearing.

He feels a light tug on his sleeve, spots Mika shaking his head from the corner of his eyes.

“Yuu-chan, stop it!” Mika hisses, grabbing his hand. “Let's just go.”

“Yeah, that's right. Listen to your crybaby boyfriend before he starts crying again.” The pink idiot laughs like he's said the funniest thing in the entire world. His friends join in, their smirks all merging together into a big headache for Yuu.

He can feel Mika's hand trembling.

Something inside Yuu snaps.

He rips his hand away from Mika and drives it into the pink boy's face instead.

“No, Yuu-chan!” is the last thing he hears before all his senses focus on the taller boy in front of him.

Several things register in his brain; the punches this pink guy gives are weaker than the ones his parents have driven into him over the years, his friends are shouting at them, trying to drive them apart, trying to hit Yuu as well—but he's used to this. This is okay.

These guys laughing at Mika isn't though.

At some point, the pink boy knocks him to the ground. Stars burst around him as the back of his head slams against cement. The screams grow louder. His punches are getting heavier. Slower. Everything blurs but he hears Mika screaming his name, a voice so distant that Yuu starts to wonder if he's fallen asleep and this is all just some weird dream.

_Yuu-chan!_
Yuu groans. Everything feels lighter already.

He cradles his aching head and cracks open one eye.

The world is still spinning.

For a second, he sees the blurred image of Mika on top of the pink boy, sending punches to his face and then—

Adults? Teachers? He doesn't know. He just knows that there's too many people now and he's slowly swaying to the right, to the left, right, left—

And everything turns black.

Shinya thinks he must have stooped to the lowest of the low. Or at least as close to it because wow, this is so cliché and almost pathetic.

He shrugs to himself. It's not like he hasn't done this before. He's drawn plenty of strangers in the past; faces he glanced at in the bus, faces he remembers, faces he even made up.

This is fine. This isn't anything to be ashamed of.

He runs a finger across the sketchpad, smudges the thick lines so that it softens the jaw. Black charcoal coats his fingers, worn and tired from drawing on the same spot for hours, but he doesn't budge. This is the first time in a while that he's actually pleased with something he's drawn.

And it's all thanks to Guren's face.

Part of Shinya wants to rip the page off and chuck the drawing out of the window—except that's a waste of paper and this sketchbook cost him a fortune so no thank you. He's about to pick the charcoal up again when he feels his phone vibrating in his pocket. Even before he takes it out, he knows who it's going to be. Guren's still at work, so there's no way he'd call him at this time.

Sure enough, he sees Krul's name flashing on his screen.

“Hey, what's up—"

“I think I'm having a mid-life crisis, Shinya."

Well. That was straight to the point.

Shinya places his sketchbook down. Knowing Krul, he's going to need his full attention for this phone call.

“What's wrong?” he asks.

“Ferid says he's been offered a better job in Shinjuku."

“Um... Congratulations to him, I guess?”

“No, no! That's not the point! Shinjuku is hours away, and he says this could be our chance to start a
better life as a family but I'm not so sure."

Oh. It clicks into place.

Krul was thinking of leaving the city.

The thought *What about me?* crosses his mind. He wishes it didn't. Unlike him, Krul is actually moving on with her life. Krul found someone who loved her. Krul now had a family.

She has every right to leave and start a better life. God knows Shinya's been trying to do that for nearly a year.

And so, Shinya swallows down the lump in his throat and forces a smile onto his face.

“What's stopping you?” he says. “You've always told me you wanted to get out of this city.”

“I know, I know. I just feel like this is all too soon.”

“Have you told Mika?”

Shinya can't imagine Mika being pleased with the news. Mika's always loved living in this city; perhaps even more so now that he's found a best friend in Yuu-kun.

Although... That reminds Shinya that he still hasn't spoken to Krul about Mika yet.

“Not yet. I'm wondering if moving out of the city might be good for him.”

Shinya frowns. “You think?”

“I don't know. At this point, I'm willing to try anything.”

“Do you have any idea as to what's depressing him? This has been going on for a while.”

He hears Krul take a deep, long breath. She sounds tired, definitely stressed. A pang of guilt taps inside Shinya; he's used to helping his friend, not being as clueless as her.

“I have no idea. Every time I ask him, he says there's nothing wrong.”

“Hmm...” Shinya taps his feet against the floor in thought. “I've noticed that he cheers up around Yuu-kun though.”

“I've noticed that too. It makes me feel kind of pathetic knowing that a little kid is doing a better job of cheering Mika up than I am.”

“Krul, you know that's not—”

“Whatever. Anyway, how's the whole Kureto thing?”

The edge in Krul's voice stops Shinya from pursuing the Mika subject any further. He shakes his head to himself. There's no getting through to Krul when she was in this mood.

“I don't know,” Shinya admits. “I haven't heard anything from the Hiiragis in weeks.”

“You think they've given up?”

The artist smirks at this. “I doubt it. The Hiiragis don't just give up.”
Especially not Kureto. If there was anything that was impossible for his older brother, it would be giving up. And donating to charity.

"Why don't you just report it to the police or something?"

Shinya almost laughs. Just the thought of even attempting that makes him cringe. He's learnt the hard way that trying to fight his family will only end in consequences. Better to run away and hide for the rest of his sad life instead of risk the lives of people he cared about. Again.

It was bad enough when he only had his mother to protect. But now...


Guren.

Their faces flash in his head, all smiling, unaware of what risk they're in just because he's gotten himself attached to them.

He can't let them suffer too.

“Nah,” Shinya says, forcing a laugh. “I can deal with this. Don't worry.”

“You're being hunted down by your creepy family. Of course I'm going to—wait. What?”

Shinya frowns. “Huh?”

“Ferid? What do you mean? What?! Mika, what happened?”

Wasn't she talking to him anymore? What the hell was going on?

“Krul, what's wrong? Did something happen?”

“It's Mika. He got into a fight at school—”

“What?!” Shinya can't help but raise his voice. Mika? Mika, the little blond kid who couldn't even harm a fly even if it bit him on the arm? Mika?

“Yeah,” Krul says, sounding defeated. “I have to go. I'm going to try and talk to him.”

The tone in her voice suggests that she's already given up. Before Shinya can even reply or wish her good luck, she hangs up. Silence falls back into the room.

Shinya doesn't know how long it takes for him to sigh and pocket his phone once again. Even after that, he's no longer in the mood to draw. Once he stops to think about it, he can't help but notice that everything is changing. He's depended so much on his daily routine (wake up, draw something, talk to Mika, talk to Krul, sleep, repeat) that he didn't realise adding Talk to Guren in that list has actually changed it. Maybe this is what happens when he tries to pursue his own happiness; his family starts hunting him down again and his best friend's life crumbles apart.

Okay, perhaps he shouldn't blame himself for everything, but Shinya can't help but think it's petty of him for still trying to find some happiness in his life when, in reality, life is shit. To put it lightly.

His phone buzzes.

Wow, Krul's already finished talking to Mika?
Guren's name flashes on the screen.

Oh.

Shinya opens the text message and finds himself laughing in less than a second. Just like that, he can forget about his problems all thanks to this man completely oblivious of his feelings for him.

*If a kid gets into a fight at school, is it a good idea to ground him?*

Does that mean that Yuu-kun was involved in this fight too? Wait. Was he fighting Mika? Surely not. Shinya can't imagine those two ever punching each other... Sure, Yuu-kun had a temper on him (a bit like Guren, actually), but he doubts that the kid would ever lay a hand on Mika in that way. Those two were close. It was cute.

*Did you ground Yuu-kun?* Shinya asks.

He can already picture it happening: Guren screaming at Yuu, Yuu screaming back, possibly threatening to punch the boiler again. Maybe it even happened. Maybe Guren's currently standing in the remnants of his ruined mansion because his nephew flooded the house after being grounded. It's possible.

*Yeah. He threw a shoe at me and told me I sucked balls.*

The latter part of that sentence gave Shinya a mental image he enjoyed a little bit too much.

Guren sends another text.

*Now I have to go to some meeting with his teacher later this week. Yuu's grades are apparently so shitty that the teacher has to complain to me about them. Ugh. I don't have time for this.*

Oh dear. He can just about feel Guren's anger emanating just from the text alone.

*You should take a break and relax for a bit.*

Shinya knows there's a zero percent chance of Guren actually heeding that advice, but he means it though. The businessman was almost always in a state of stress or anger. Or both. Usually both.

*I don't think it's possible for me to relax.*

Shinya rolls his eyes. Typical.

How do you get an uptight man like Guren to relax anyway?

For some reason, his mind takes him back to the days when he and Krul used to go clubbing together. Nights filled with hazy memories of drinking a bit too much tequila and Krul almost getting arrested because of him. Also known as A Mess.

But it was fun.

He wonders what a drunk Guren would be like and his fingers send a text before he properly thinks about his decision.

*You should go out with me sometime. I can help you relax.*

Oh shit. That text sounded way too suggestive. Shinya wants to throw his phone out the window. Or
himself out the window.

*What*

Okay. It doesn't help that Guren's reply literally only consists of one word. Wow.

*A good way to relax is to go out and get drunk. So I'm offering to do that with you. You need to have some fun instead of stress over things 24/7*

He doesn't know what he's doing. Wasn't he just hating himself for pursuing his own happiness less than five minutes ago?

Shinya wants to laugh.

Part of him feels pathetic for even trying anymore. It's not like Guren will ever feel anything for him. Even so, he can't stop deluding himself from thinking that maybe, just maybe, if he spends more time with Guren, then everything will be all okay.

He forgets about his problems when he's with Guren.

He forgets everything and all he focuses on is how nice it is to care about silly things like feelings and love instead of remember the past.

He'd do anything to forget the past.

*Are you serious?*

Guren's text is, as usual, short. It's enough for Shinya to push aside his depressing thoughts and focus on this moment though.

So, he ignores his problems and texts back.

*Very serious. Go out with me xoxoxox DO IT*

He has a feeling Guren won't listen to him because, after all, since when did Guren listen to anyone else aside from himself? Maybe if Shinya sends more texts... A dozen more texts...

*YOU KNOW YOU WANT TO :)))*

*GET DRUNK*

*LIVE LIFE TO THE FULL GUREN*

*CARPE DIEM*

*MEMENTO MORI*

*wait no that's about death nvm*

!!!!!!!

xD

*You know I'm going to spam you until you say yes*
Five minutes of spamming Guren's inbox, he finally receives a text message sent all in caps lock.

*CAN YOU FUCKING STOP. OKAY. I'LL GO WITH YOU BUT JUST SHUT THE FUCK UP.*

Shinya allows himself to cheer out loud. What the fuck. That actually worked? Was Guren serious?

*YAY xoxoxoxoxo I'll meet you tonight ;)*

Guren's reply is short and sweet. Straight to the point.

*Go fuck yourself.*

He'll take that as a yes.

Shinya places his phone down and smiles to himself. It's stupid how something so trivial can make him happy, but he reminds himself that this isn't permanent anyway. He'd never let himself get so deluded into thinking that this happiness will last forever.

He might as well try to cherish it for as long as it lasts.

That's the only thing he can do anyway.

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Amazing how the bruises don't hurt when he's anxious. Mika finds it easier to ignore his aching limbs from the fight now that he's faced with having to explain to his mother what exactly happened. With Ferid in the room.

Which just means he won't be able to explain anything at all. Not with *him* here.

Mika keeps his eyes on the floor instead. He can't look at mummy, not when her face is filled with disappointment. As usual. And he definitely can't look at Ferid.

He hears his mother sigh. That's all she seems to be doing these days.

“What happened, Mika?” she asks. Her voice doesn't even sound like it has any emotion in it—and Mika thinks that's worse. It's like she's already given up on him.

He doesn't really blame her.

“You've never gotten into trouble with school before... I just don't know what's happening with you anymore.”

*Good,* Mika thinks. The less she knows, the better.

He says it's good, but his heart may as well be tearing apart inside him.
Mika swallows. His throat still feels dry.

“Mika says those kids were bullying him.”

His head snaps up at Ferid's voice. He's looking at him with those red eyes, masked with fake concern that makes Mika want to scream out loud. Slowly, his mother frowns, falling for the bait. She turns to him, worried, like any mother should be.

Mika hates it.

“What? Is that why? You tried to fight back?” She takes a step forward, her hand reaching out for him. Concern swims in her red eyes—but that's the thing. Red. Mika's too used to Ferid's eyes; red with anger, red with lust, red with the reminder that he's never going to get out of this, he's never going to get his life back.

Red with concern isn't real.

Mika flinches. His mother's hand pauses in mid-air.

It drops back down to her side. Limp.

Mika hates himself for sighing in relief.

“That's why he's been acting so odd, Krul. The kids at school have been picking on poor Mika all this time.” Ferid lays a hand on his mother's shoulder, his words soft, believable. Poison.

The urge to scream is at the edge of Mika's mouth. *That's not true! He's lying! It's because of him! Everything is his fault!*

But he can't stop looking at Ferid's eyes. They're aimed straight at him, holding him place like he always did, always will.

Mika doesn't say anything.

“Is... Is that true, Mika?” Mummy's eyes are glistening. She looks like she's about to cry. “Have you been hiding it all this time?”

*No no no no NO NO NO*

Ferid is still looking at him.

Red eyes. His lips tug into that smile, that smile that makes Mika's spine shudder, his heart race with fear, his blood cold, his eyes sting with tears he doesn't want to show. Not in front of his mother.

Ferid won't stop looking at him.

Mika gulps.

“Y-Yeah...” he blurts out, hating himself. “It's... It's true.”

The smile on Ferid's face widens.

“Oh, Mika...” His mother takes him into her arms before he has time to react. Mika stiffens, drowns in the scent of rose scented perfume; a perfume he used to embrace every day but now has forgotten when was the last time his mother even hugged him.
He doesn't move. Her arms tighten, digging into the bruises underneath his clothes.

“It's okay, baby,” she reassures, patting his blond hair like she used to. He remembers vague memories of giggling whenever she played with his hair, leaning closer because the feel of mummy's fingers through his curls always used to lull him to sleep.

Now, he holds his breath and waits until she lets go of him.

“I'm here. I'm right here,” she says. “No one can hurt you.”

He wants to laugh.

And cry.

In the corner of his eyes, he can see Ferid watching them. Smiling.

His mother leans back, still holding him at arm's length and gives him the gentlest, sweetest smile he's ever seen on her.

“It's okay, Mika. You don't have to put up with those bullies anymore. We're moving soon.”

Everything stops.

Her words swim in the air, circling his head until nothing makes sense.

_We're moving soon._

“What?” Mika croaks out.

It can't be...

No.

His eyes flicker to Ferid. Sharp, white teeth glint at him as Ferid's smile morphs into a sickly grin.

No.

“Yeah, moving.” Mummy nods, still smiling. “I was going to tell you later, but you don't need to worry anymore. Ferid has a new job and he already has a house for us over there. We'll be moving to Shinjuku by next month.”

Shinjuku.

That's three hours away.

It's as if everything shatters around him. The wall he's built up cracks and he feels tears slide down his cheeks like sharp razors. Before long, he's sobbing and his mother embraces him again, tells him that it's okay and he can cry it out and that she knows he's scared and he's not alone anymore.

She doesn't know anything.

He's going to be alone now.

Mika cries harder, limp in his mother's arms as Ferid watches on with a mocking smile.
Yuu doesn't know why tonight, out of all nights, he can't get to sleep. He's tempted to go downstairs and play on his PS4 because it's not like Guren can stop him anyway. Stupid Guren went out with Shinya tonight... He won't know if Yuu stayed up to play games even though he's currently grounded...

*Grounded.* Ugh. This sucks. He wasn't the one who started the fight! Sure, he dealt the first punch but that was because that pink asshole forced him to! It wasn't even a fair fight. He had a bunch of his friends helping him! Yuu could have totally knocked him out by himself if he didn't get his stupid gang to join in.

Ugh. His head hurt. Hitting it on the ground wasn't nice—at all. Definitely not doing that again.

He doesn't remember what happened after that. All he knows is that Guren picked him up from school and grounded him and Yuu threw a tantrum. And now Guren's out with Shinya (*URGH*) whilst Yuu's stuck in bed with NO DINNER. That's right. Guren didn't even cook dinner for him. The asshole! Yuu's half tempted to shove his fist into the boiler again just so—

He hears a tapping on his window.

Yuu's eyes widen.

Fuck. What the fuck is that?

The tapping gets louder.

Yuu squeaks. Fuck! He's all alone in the house! If there's someone out there who wants to kill him then Guren's going to come back home to his corpse and Yuu will never be able to get the platinum trophy for *Grand Theft Auto V.* *Fuck!*

The tapping turns into loud knocks. Panicking, Yuu looks around his room for a suitable weapon. He knows he has a baseball bat here somewhere...

“Yuu-chan. Yuu-chan, it's me.”

Wait. That muffled voice. Only one person calls him Yuu-chan.

Yuu scrambles off his bed and nearly tears his curtains off. There, sitting awkwardly on a tree branch, was Mika.

What the fuck.

He opens his window wide open, holding out his hands for the blond to take. Steadily, Mika grabs them, wobbles a bit, and falls into his room—and onto him.

Both of them sit up. Yuu groaning in pain at being flattened and Mika muttering an almost silent apology. The window's still open, letting in a bitter gush of wind that sends goosebumps up Yuu's arms. He makes no move to close it. Not when Mika's right in front of him at eleven PM. After having climbed through his window.

*At eleven PM.*

“What the hell, Mika?” Yuu demands, poking him hard on the shoulder. “Why are you here? Do your parents even know you're here?”
Mika's shoulders begin to shake. Is he laughing? What the fuck? Who breaks into someone's house and laughs? Yeah, Mika's weird but even Yuu doesn't expect him to go this far! Geez!

Sighing, Yuu grabs Mika's shoulders and—

Oh.

Now, he sees Mika's face. Tears are running down his cheeks, heavy, unstoppable, and Yuu realises that he wasn't shaking with laughter. He was crying. Mika was crying.

“Mika, shit, what's wrong?”

Yuu loosens his grip on his shoulders and leans closer. Damn. He's really bad at comforting people but...

It's Mika.

Thus, Yuu awkwardly wraps his arms around the sobbing boy and gives him a hug. He mentally sighs in relief when he feels Mika relaxing against him, burying his face deeper into his shirt so that Yuu soon feels it dampening from his tears. Still, he doesn't move. He's never comforted someone like this, but the fact that Mika needs him... For once, someone actually needed him.

Yuu tightens his arms around Mika.

“Y-Yuu-chan...” Mika's voice is muffled in their embrace. His hands grip Yuu's shirt, refusing to let go. “Yuu-chan, I-I can't do this anymore.”

Although quiet, the words pierce through Yuu's brain.

He loosens his hold, looking straight at Mika's face.

Mika won't look back.

“What... What do you mean?” Yuu asks. His pulse pounds in his ears. He waits for Mika to look up, say anything, react, do something.

All Mika does is stare at his hands as tears continued to leak from his eyes.

“I-I... can't... I can't do this anymore,” is all he kept saying. “I can't. I-I don't want to be here anymore, I can't. I can't do this anymore, Y-Yuu-chan, I just want it all to end. I-I want everything to end.”

Yuu wants to shake him. Nothing is making sense here. Mika continues to mutter the same words, I can't I can't I can't, and soon enough, he's covering his face, wailing into his hands. The sobs fills Yuu's room, coupled with the sharp breeze that blows in from the open window. All Yuu does is sit there. Staring at Mika breaking down in front of him.

“What's wrong?” Yuu asks again, wishing that Mika won't lie to him this time. “Mika, please tell me. I want to help you.”

Finally, Mika looks up. His eyes are red, puffy, and filled with fear.

“It's Ferid,” he says, voice trembling more than the wind. “It's because of Ferid.”
Chapter End Notes

Thank god I can finally move the Mika plot along... I've been waiting to do this for like five chapters oh my god

By the way, Emma came up with the idea that Yuu and Mika get involved in a fight at school so she kinda fuelled the angst for this chapter. (I'm saying this just so that I feel a bit better for writing more sad!Mika)

But hey, after the Mika plot moves along, we can focus more on sad!Shinya! YAY!
Yuu has no idea what the hell he's meant to do.

He fidgets with the edges of his sleeves, watching Mika from the corner of his eyes. The blond doesn't seem to notice, too busy trying to steal a car on Grand Theft Auto (and also doing a really shitty job at it, if Yuu has to admit). It's been like this for a good hour or so; just both of them sitting down on the sofa and Mika playing on his PS4 in silence. Yuu's not even sure if Mika's paying attention to the game at all.

It's kind of awkward. Yuu doesn't know what in the world he can do in this situation. Or if he can even do anything to begin with.

He sighs.

“Mika... What does Ferid... do?” Yuu asks the question so quietly that if it weren't for Mika stiffening next to him, he would have thought he hadn't been heard.

Mika pauses the game, setting the PS4 controller down on his lap.

Yuu notices his hands are shaking.

“You... You said that you're scared of Ferid... but you haven't told me why...” Yuu swallows, looking at his friend now. “Does he hurt you? Hit you?”

Mika flinches as if he had been the one to hit him. Yuu suddenly regrets opening his big mouth. Idiot! Stop bringing up sad things! He should have just let Mika play the damn game without saying anything!

“I-I... I don't want... It's... It's not something I want to go into... detail with, Yuu-chan...” Mika's looking down, long eyelashes covering his eyes from Yuu's view, although he swears he can see tiny droplets of tears threatening to escape him.

The temptation to ask is still there. There's one thing that stands out the most in Yuu's mind and that's memories of his own parents abusing him... Does Ferid do that to Mika too? Or... something else? He tries to think of other things, but it's hard to do that when Mika won't say anything at all.

That makes it worse.

Yuu wonders what could be so bad that Mika's too scared to tell him.

He sighs again, dropping the subject for now. If Mika doesn't want to go into detail then he's going to have to suck it up and respect that. For now.

“Should we tell your mum, then? Or Shinya?”
Mika's head whirls to look at him. His eyes are wide, filled with so much horror and shock that you'd think Yuu suggested murdering Ferid instead.

"You're not telling anyone.” Mika's voice is steady, much to Yuu's surprise. But it's not just that. It's urgent, raised, almost... angry.

Yuu fidgets with his sleeve again.

"Y-Yeah, but... we have to do something—"

"**Yuu-chan. You're not going to do anything.**"

Yuu doesn't miss the way Mika says *you* instead of *we*. He looks away, biting the inside of his cheek in an attempt to reign his thoughts in.

Truth is, all Yuu wants to do is stomp all the way to Mika's house and kick Ferid right in the nuts.

"**Yuu-chan, please...**” Mika begs, his voice wavering, no longer raised and angry. It's enough to make Yuu look at him again. “I... I don't want you to get involved.”

Typical. Figures that Mika would be more worried about other people instead of trying to help himself. Yuu swallows the temptation to tell Mika he's already involved by knowing about Ferid. He could argue about this all night but knowing Mika, he'd just be a stubborn ass about it.

But that doesn't mean that he's going to sit around and do nothing! What the fuck can Ferid do to him anyway? Yuu isn't scared of some pretty looking adult. Ferid doesn't even look that strong. That pink haired fucker back at school probably packs a bigger punch than Ferid any day.

If he guessed correctly, then this has probably been going on for a few months now... And come to think of it, Mika was the one who suggested they both run away together. At the time, Yuu didn't think much about why Mika suggested that, but now...

Now, it all makes sense.

Add that with the fact that Mika's always sneaking out and trying to find any excuse to stay over at Yuu's house instead...

Yuu can feel the anger bubbling in his chest. Fuck Ferid. Fuck whatever Ferid's done to Mika.

"**Y-Yuu-chan.. Please... say something...**”

Yuu looks up. Mika meets his gaze with watery eyes, his bottom lip trembling as he tries his best not to start crying again. If Yuu needed any more persuading, then this would have been the last straw.

He can't ignore this.

Gently, he wraps his arms around Mika's shoulders. As easily as that, sobs spill out of his friend's lips for the second time tonight and Yuu silently lets him cry it out onto his pyjama top. It's not long until he can feel the cloth dampening but Yuu tightens his embrace anyway, rubbing circles on Mika's back as softly as he can.

"**P-Promise me you won't do anything.”** Mika sobs, clawing at the back of his shirt. “I... I don't want anything happening to you, Yuu-chan.”

Yuu narrows his eyes. He pictures Ferid in his mind; tall man, lilac or silver hair—whatever the fuck his hair colour is (it doesn't matter; Yuu still wants to pull that long ponytail anyway), red eyes,
creepy smile.

He grits his teeth.

Guren told him that there would come a day when someone out there would need him. And he was right. Mika needed him now. Mika needed someone to be there for him, protecting him from Ferid.

Yuu wants to save Mika. Yuu wants to save his family.

“I won't do anything,” he lies. “I promise.”

Mika sighs in his arms, relaxing as he falls for Yuu's false words.

Guren is already regretting this.

Granted, they haven't even done anything yet. He's waiting outside Shinya's flat, shuffling his feet on the floor and wondering why his damn shoes are so shiny anyway. Is it a good idea to wear his best shoes to go out clubbing? What the fuck did people wear to go out clubbing anyway? He figured a suit would be too much so he opted for a black shirt and jeans...

Yuu told him that that he should probably wear casual shoes instead of his best shoes, but what the fuck did the brat know anyway? Nothing.

Or maybe he should have listened to Yuu in the first place... Guren's starting to worry that a drunk person will end up projectile vomiting all over his shoes. Fuck, these cost him a fortune—

He hears the sound of Shinya's front door opening. Guren looks up, about to flash the artist a half-hearted smile when... well.

The smile turns into him staring at Shinya instead.

He's wearing a light blue shirt; the first two buttons unfastened so that Guren can see his milky collarbones peeking out. Black jeans tightly hug his lean legs, and usually Guren would roll his eyes at people wearing skinny jeans but oddly enough, they suit Shinya. A lot.

Then again, Shinya could wear a binbag and he'd still look pretty.

Guren coughs, looking away. Okay. Where the fuck did that train of thought come from...

“So, are you ready to have some fun?” Shinya asks, flashing him an excited smile that Guren can't bring himself to scowl at.

“I want to go home,” he grumbles. One look at Shinya's shoes is all it takes for Guren to deem this night doomed.

Great. Shinya's fucking wearing casual shoes.

“Oh, come on!” Shinya grabs onto his arm and tugs gently, fluttering his eyelashes. Guren's half tempted to ask if he's got something stuck in his eye and would have done so if it weren't for the fact that Shinya actually looks adorable even when he's doing that.
Guren sighs, allowing the artist to drag him off.

Having had little to no experience of the sort of 'fun' Shinya's proposing, it's safe to say that Guren has no idea what to expect. Apart from drunk people. He expects a lot of drunk people. He's not sure what to think about this.

A little part of him admits that he's *anticipating* what Shinya has in store. Guren's childhood mainly consisted of his parents enforcing him to be a capable leader for their business, not really leaving any room for 'fun' or going out drunk to be quite honest. Add that with his early (and reckless) marriage with Mahiru...

Yeah, Guren's definitely lacking in Shinya's department of 'fun'.

They take the bus to town, which, Guren will add, might be his first time actually taking a bus in god knows how many years. He suggested driving there, but Shinya only laughed in his face and told him that he'd be in no state to drive back home afterwards.

Cue Guren's mental alarms at this point.

“I'm not going to get *that* drunk,” he says with strong resolve. Guren Ichinose does not and *will not* stoop to the level of a typical drunk. He can't. He has a reputation to keep up, damn it.

Shinya raises an eyebrow, a smile tugging on his lips.

“That's what they all say.”

More mental alarms.

Before he can even think of backing away, Shinya's already pushed him into some bright looking club with the sign **FUXION** in flashing, bold letters. How the fuck do you even pronounce that? Fuck-tion? Fook-tion?

As soon as Guren steps in, he's instantly thrown into something that can only be described as hell. Everything's dark with flashing red lights; mobs and mobs of people pressed against each other, screaming in whatever drunk language Guren can't understand. It's a wonder he can still hear over the deafening music booming over the club. If possible, the music is actually worse than all the screamo songs Yuu's somehow spammed into his phone. Guren's unsure if he can even call this music at all; it just feels like a mash of electronic bashing suited to give him the quickest migraine known to man.

He groans, turning to Shinya. Red lights play with his hair, washing light tones of pink over his locks.

Shinya grins at him. “You need a drink.”

No, Guren needs earplugs.

Nevertheless, he lets Shinya push him into the bar. He makes eye contact with a few people waiting for their drinks, but looks away before they can even blink. Ugh. He hates drunk people. What's even worse is that he can already see a handful of girls checking out Shinya—hell, there's even a couple of guys ogling him here. Whether Shinya's ignoring them or is just plain oblivious, Guren will never know. Still, it rubs him the wrong way.

He shuffles closer to the artist, close enough so that their shoulders brush against each other. Confused, Shinya turns to him, frowning. He doesn't get the opportunity to ask what's up as the
barman turns to him, asking what drinks he wants to buy.

Shinya considers for a second.

“A round of shots, please,” he says, giving the barman the sweetest smile you could ever imagine.

Guren blinks. A round of shots?

When the barman gives them twelve shot glasses, Guren looks at Shinya as if he's insane.

“Have you ever played that drinking game called 'Never Have I Ever’?” Shinya asks him, grouping all the shot glasses together so that they're huddled in a neat circle.

“Never have I what?”

The artist laughs softly.

“Okay, so I'll say something like 'Never have I ever danced naked before' and if you've done it, then that means you have to drink one shot. Get it?”

“But I've never danced naked before.”

“Then... that means you don't drink.”

Guren narrows his eyes. “Have you danced naked before?”

“That's not the point—”

“You have?”

Shinya laughs at him, waving a hand as if to brush the question away. No matter how casually done it is, Guren can't miss the slight blush on his cheeks.

“Well, I've got to do something whilst I shower...”

The thought of Shinya dancing whilst showering brings a smile to Guren's face. Somehow, he's not even surprised.

“Alright, whatever. Let's start then,” Guren says, pushing away the sensible part of his brain telling him that this is not going to end well.

He might as well play. Shinya already bought the drinks after all.

“I'll start,” Shinya says. “Never have I ever gotten married.”

Guren stays still. He looks at the shot glasses. And then at Shinya's shit-eating grin.

“But I've gotten married,” he says in a blank tone.

Shinya nods. “So drink.”

“You did this on purpose.”

Shinya's grin widens.

“I fucking hate you.”
He drinks the shot all in one go, wincing as he feels the burn down his throat. It tastes like soap. Or at least what soap would taste like if Guren was ever stupid enough to drink it in the first place.

Placing the shot glass down, Guren wipes his lips and comes up with the perfect response to get back at Shinya.

“Never have I ever needed Guren to give him a lift.”

The artist gives him an unamused glare. “Are we really going to do this?”

Guren grins, mirroring the exact expression Shinya had a few moments ago.

“Drink up, Shinya.”

“If that's how you want to play...”

Shinya drinks the shot with barely even a wince, smiling innocently when he sets his glass down. Okay, maybe it wasn't a good idea to challenge the guy who looks like he's used to alcohol when you're not a drinker yourself... Guren meets the artist's gaze head on, refusing to back down. That shot he had barely affected him at all. He reckons he can take a few more without any problems. No big deal.

Fifteen minutes later and five more shots down Guren's system, he's starting to regret ever going here at all. He winces, thumping lightly on his chest. He doesn't really feel any different, apart from the fact that all the alcohol makes it a bit hard to breathe. Kinda makes him want to burp. Or something. It's hard to focus with all the loud music and flashing lights around them.

Guren coughs. He looks up at Shinya, scowling at the fact that the artist has only drank four shots so far. Figures that he'd be completely fine.

“You alright?” Shinya laughs, poking him lightly on his shoulder. That usual Shinya smile plays on his face again, bringing attention to his lips.

Huh. Guren's never noticed that Shinya's lips actually look really smooth and soft.

He shakes off Shinya's hand and says the first thing that pops into his head.

“Never have I ever kissed a guy before.”

Shinya's eyes widen. He looks away, a shy smile twitching on his lips before he takes a shot glass and downs it.

Guren's still looking at his lips by the time he's done.

Oh shit. Now Shinya's looking back at him. Okay. Look at his eyes.

That doesn't help... Shinya's blue eyes are practically glowing against the lights in this nightclub...

“Last shot,” Shinya declares, his cheeks tinted slightly pink—whether it's from the alcohol or not, Guren has no idea. “Never have I ever...”

His voice gets drowned out by the music. Is it just him or is everything getting louder? Guren frowns, glaring at his surroundings. Around him is a bunch of people dancing, grinding against each other and shouting along to whatever song is currently playing. It doesn't really look appealing, but he's starting to get sick of sitting around here and losing at Shinya's little game.
“Oi, Guren.”

Shinya shakes him lightly.

Guren returns his focus back on the artist. He doesn't know what the fuck Shinya just said, but nevertheless still takes the last shot and throws it into his mouth.

Shinya laughs, although it sounds forced and a bit worried.

“Uh. I didn't say anything yet...”

Oh. Oh well. He shrugs. One more shot won't hurt.

“Now what do we do?” Guren asks. He stares down at all the empty shot glasses and his stomach does a little flip when he considers how much he's actually had.

“Well... we could dance...”

“Dance?”

Shinya nods, pointing at the dance floor.

“I don't dance,” Guren says.

“But I'll be with you. You can dance with meehee.” Shinya's tugging on his hand again, easily pulling him off his chair.

Not that Guren's resisting. Because he isn't. Not at all.

He keeps his eyes on Shinya's profile as the artist leads him deeper into the dance floor. Despite being surrounded by a bunch of people, Guren can only focus on Shinya; the smile fixed on his face—that same smile he's been seeing for months now and he should be used to it... Should be, but still isn't. There's something about Shinya's smile that you can never get tired of.

They stop. Music blares into Guren's ears and the lights flash a multitude of colours that make Shinya stand out even more in front of him. He stares at the artist's lips and doesn't fail to notice how close they are, how Shinya's now holding onto his shoulders and... wait, shit, he's saying something.

“Guren, are you listening?” Shinya flicks him on the forehead.


Shinya laughs. It sounds like bells or something... really pretty. He does that cute thing where you close your eyes when you laugh. Guren didn't think people actually did that.

“So. Dance.” Shinya starts again, this time gripping his shoulders more and leaning closer. The blush on his cheeks is redder now and his eyes look glazed, like blue glass and Guren swears he can see himself reflecting on them.

He brings his arms around Shinya's waist, smirking when he feels the artist jolting against him. It seemed like the right thing to do and it doesn't help that Shinya's waist is surprisingly slender...

“Come on, Shinya...” Guren murmurs, leaning closer to the artist's ear. “Teach me how to dance.”

He hears Shinya's breath tremble, released into a soft laugh. And then he nods, his hair brushing the side of Guren's jaw.
The music beats louder. Shinya moves against him. Guren can't focus; he feels the swaying of the air, the way his heart pumps faster as Shinya's body presses against his, revels in the heat the artist brings with him and responds by clumsily following his lead. Around them are couples doing the same, grinding against each other in a half-minded state, grinning, close eyed and lust-ardoured.

“I-I think you've got the hang of it now,” Shinya mutters. His gaze is averted down, white eyelashes hiding his eyes from view. He looks up and flashes a smile that doesn't quite reach his eyes. “You should try out your new moves on one of those girls.”

Guren looks over his shoulder to find a group of girls standing idly by a wall. They're chatting to each other but their eyes scan the dance floor, as if waiting for someone to approach them.

Nah... Guren returns his gaze back to Shinya. Music drowns out everything, drowns out those girls, everyone. Shinya's the only person worth looking at.

“I think I'll stay here,” Guren says, grinning when Shinya's eyes widen so much that it's actually cute.

He smiles. This time, it's real.

“You drunk mess,” he laughs, nevertheless staying in Guren's arms all the same.

Drunk? He's not drunk? He's just... swaying... and dancing. Dancing. It's nice being with Shinya and having him so close, not that he'd ever admit this when he's sober—wait, he is sober. He thinks. Probably. Everything just feels like it's rushed, like he doesn't have control of his body and his thoughts are a second too late. He's beating in tune to the music, flushed against the artist, his knee between his legs and Shinya's breathing the only thing he can hear above this song. Heat, nothing but heat. Shinya's body. Shinya's slender waist in his hands, their hips pressed against each other and breaths mingling as the music gets louder and louder. The smell of sweat and alcohol is nothing compared to Shinya's scent of vanilla. It fills his senses, his mind, until all Guren can think of is Shinya, Shinya, Shinya.

He smiles, losing himself in this moment because nothing else matters but the artist in his arms.

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Shinya doesn't know whether to feel happy or guilty. Or both. It was all fun and games until Guren suggested getting more drinks and downing four glasses of beer and two shots. It's amazing he hasn't been sick yet, but Shinya can't help but think of the hangover he'll surely get in the morning... and the angry texts he's sure to receive because of that.

Thankfully, they're finally going home without any problems after four hours of... he honestly can't remember. He's not as wasted as Guren is and he can definitely hold his alcohol better, although it's still hard to pinpoint what exactly was reality and what was just his deepest desired dreams seeping into his life. Who'd have thought Guren would be so... nice when he's drunk?

Speaking of which...

He grabs Guren, steadying the businessman before he trips and falls flat on his face.

“Have you got your keys?” Shinya asks. “We're outside your house now.”
Guren shoves his hand into his pocket and fumbles for his keys. God, he's adorable when he's drunk. His eyebrows furrow together in the cutest, pissed-off glare and he stabs the keys into the keyhole with so much urgency that Shinya's surprised he didn't punch a hole through the door instead.

The door opens and Guren stumbles into his house, grabbing Shinya's hand and pulling him inside. Shinya laughs, surprised to find Guren joining in with him as the two of them practically run into his living room. Alcohol, infatuation, whatever it is that's running through Shinya's veins right now thrums deep in him, sending flutters down his stomach as he falls on the couch besides Guren. They sigh, shoulder to shoulder, panting, still laughing amidst the silence.

“Tonight was fun,” Shinya says. It's been ages since he's felt this happy; he doesn't want to go home. If possible, he'd sleep right here on Guren's couch and never leave.

He spares a look at Guren, who seems to be out of it... Ah. Maybe he should get him a glass of water to sober up. The lucky thing is that at least Guren's not stripping and getting himself arrested like Krul did. At least he's not that drunk.

Shinya stands up, about to head for the kitchen to get themselves both a glass of water. Especially Guren. The least he could do was—

Guren grabs onto his wrist and tugs. Hard.

He loses his balance and falls right onto Guren's lap. Shinya's first instinct is to scream in his head and stand up, but that's all lost when Guren leans in and kisses him.

Guren's kissing him.

Shinya doesn't know how long he stays like that, wide eyed and frozen as Guren's lips slide against his.

He's imagining things. This can't be happening. This... This isn't...

Guren's hand reaches into his hair, sighing against his mouth. His lips are soft, surprisingly gentle, and Shinya finally lets himself return the kiss.

It's as if something switches in Guren's mind. As soon as Shinya relaxes, he pushes the artist onto the sofa and deepens their kiss. Shinya's pulse pounds in his ears, losing himself in this moment. Guren pries his legs apart with one knee and slips his tongue past his lips. He tastes of alcohol and somewhere deep inside Shinya's mind, he knows he should stop this—but he can't. He can't do anything but cling onto Guren's neck and tremble as their tongues meet each other. They moan in unison, filling the living room with sounds of their breaths and pants, both drowning in the heat of this pleasure—

“AAAARRRRRRRGHH!”

Shinya jumps, pushing Guren off him. The first thing he sees is Yuu-kun standing in front of them, wielding a baseball bat whilst Mika stares in shock behind him.

“MY TWELVE YEAR OLD EYES!” Yuu yells, dropping the baseball bat and dramatically turning around to cover his face.

“I'm scarred. I didn't want to see that,” he continues to mutter, shaking his head to himself and all but declaring his life over now that he's seen his uncle making out with his friend.

Shinya blinks. He sits there, still panting, lips swollen from the kiss and head reeling from what just
happened.

Guren groans, clutching his head.

“Yuu... what the fuck?” he mumbles. His voice is slurred, barely even understandable. “What...? What's going on?”

“You're drunk!” Yuu yells at him. His cheeks puff out; the very picture of youthful anger. “Go to bed!”

“No... Fuck... Fuck you.” Guren tries to stand up, but somehow manages to bash his knee against the coffee table and collapse straight back down onto the sofa.

Yuu points at Guren, now staring at Shinya as if he's got the perfect explanation for this.

“He's a mess! Can't we just knock him out so he goes to sleep?”

Shinya shakes his head. “Uh, I don't think—”

Too late. Yuu stomps over to Guren's side and slaps him across the face.

“Snap! Out! Of! It!” the little kid yells, slapping his poor uncle with every word that he screams out. Amazingly, the only thing Guren does is whine and try to swat him away, his eyelids already drooping close as he sways on his seat.

“Y-Yuu-chan, no, don't slap your uncle!”

Mika pulls him back, just in time as Guren's eyelids close and his head lolls on his shoulder. Pushing aside his own state of shock, Shinya shuffles to Guren's side, steadying the drunken man. Is he actually falling asleep now? Well, Shinya shouldn't be surprised considering how much he's drank...

“Okay, uh, Guren...” Shinya pokes him on his cheek. “Guren, you can sleep in your room, okay? It's upstairs. Come on, you're almost there.”

The businessman literally groans.

“No...Fuck off...” he mumbles, trying to push Shinya away. “Wanna sleep.”

“Oh god,” Yuu blanches. “Can I slap him again?”

“No! No more slapping!”

Shinya eventually sighs. There's no way he's going to get Guren upstairs, especially if he seems to be determined in falling asleep right here on the couch.

“I'll take care of him,” he tells the kids. “So you two go to bed—and Mika, why are you even here? Does your mum know you're staying with Yuu-kun?”

As expected, guilt flashes into Mika's eyes and he averts his gaze down onto his shoes.

Shinya sighs again. “I'll stay overnight here so I'll bring you back to your mother tomorrow. But you're explaining to her why you sneaked out, okay?”

“Okay...”

Although he's agreeing, the tone in Mika's voice says otherwise. Nevertheless, the two kids hurry
back upstairs, Yuu-kun sparing a glance at his uncle one last time.

Once they're gone, Shinya finally has the chance to recollect his thoughts and actually pinpoint what in the world he's meant to do now.

Well. Guren was drunk. No, wasted. And they kissed.

Well.

*He probably won't remember tomorrow. It doesn't mean anything.*

Shinya repeats that into his head, desperate not to get his hopes up. He spares a glance at the businessman in front of him, not surprised that he's managed to fall asleep on the couch.

A smile flutters onto Shinya's face. He stands up and slowly pushes Guren down, making sure that he's actually in a position that's suitable to sleep in. Luckily, Guren doesn't struggle, probably too drunk to notice anyway, and continues to sleep. Even when he's finally settled, Shinya doesn't leave. He sits by Guren's side, watching the steady rise and fall of his chest.

Try as he might, he can't forget about the kiss. Shinya shakes his head to himself, raising a hand to trace his lips and remembering what it felt like to have Guren's against them.

As soon as Guren wakes up, he instantly wants to die.

His head may as well be splitting apart. He struggles to sit up, groaning when his surroundings blur around him.

The good thing is that it looks like he made it home. At least he didn't pass out in the middle of the street, asleep on a puddle of piss or something. Passing out on your couch is always a good sign. Or as good as signs can get in this circumstance anyway.

“Oh, you're awake.”

Guren rubs his eyes, his sight finally focusing clearly on a plate of nuggets being handed to him.

Nuggets. Fucking nuggets.

Now he knows he's definitely awake.

Yuu grins down at him.

“Here. I'm a nice nephew so I made nuggets for you.”

Guren doesn't even have the strength to thank him. He takes the plate and sets it down onto his lap, staring at the golden nuggets waiting for him. Yuu's precious food better get rid of this hangover or he swears he's going to end up banning them from the house again at this rate.

“Shinya and Mika went home an hour ago, by the way,” Yuu says, plopping down on the couch besides him. He leans in to steal a nugget from the plate.

Mika? What the fuck was that kid doing here in the first place? Ugh. It didn't matter. Guren's head
hurts too much to care.

He pops a nugget into his mouth and chews. At least it gets rid of the taste of alcohol.

“What even happened last night?” he asks.

The last thing he remembers is that drinking game with Shinya... Drinking seven shots in a row probably wasn't the best thing to do on your first night out, now that he thinks about it. And it definitely wasn't a good idea to drink even more after that. It's practically a miracle he hasn't been sick yet.

Although, at this rate, these nuggets might just fulfil that.

Yuu smirks, almost choking.

“You don't remember anything at all?”

Guren narrows his eyes. He doesn't like that smirk.

Yuu laughs again. “Oh boy.”

“You, fucking tell me or I swear to god, you are never eating your fucking nuggets ever again.”

That shuts him up. The brat huffs, folding his arms and scowling at him before opening his mouth.

“You kissed Shinya.”

Guren stays there. Staring at Yuu. Wondering if he heard that right.

“I what?”

His nephew rolls his eyes.

“You kissed Shinya. I walked in on both of you making out on the sofa, and let me tell you that was not something I wanted to—”

“I what?”

Guren stands up so fast that the plate falls onto the floor. Yuu yelps for his nuggets, but it's only background noise as memories of last night start to flash back into Guren's mind. He remembers hazy images of Shinya's smile as they danced together, how tempting his lips were, how Guren spent almost all night staring at them until...

The kiss. On this fucking couch. Vague memories of the artist moaning under him, his arms around Guren's neck and Guren tasting nothing but alcohol and Shinya.

Fuck.

He kissed Shinya.

He actually fucking kissed Shinya.

Shit.
This chapter is just one big flashback to my first year in uni.....

Anyway, sorry about the late update! I hope this chapter makes up for it~ Hopefully, the next updates will come sooner than this one did because I'm looking forward to writing them. They'll be focusing on what's going to happen between gureshin now that they've smooched... as well as what Yuu has planned to get Mika away from Ferid... 8)
Omen

Chapter Notes

Just a warning that this chapter gets violent and intense towards the end so...... mind what you read and uh... *hides from everyone* pls don't kill me

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If there was ever a moment when Guren thought he fucked up, then this was probably it. Granted, he's fucked up a lot in the past and he's very much aware that his breakup with Mahiru is included into that list... And Yuu running away as a result of him hitting the brat... And maybe a bunch of other things he can't be bothered to brood about, but kissing Shinya whilst he's wasted as fuck definitely adds into this list.

Shit.

It's been a three days since the whole drunk incident and Guren doesn't know what he's precisely panicking about; the fact that Shinya hasn't texted him or the fact that he can't bring himself to text Shinya and confront him about all this. This all seems so childish to him; he knows that he should sort it out and stop prancing around the topic like a blushing teenager but—fuck, he's completely stumped on what to do.

This is Shinya. Shinya.

He doesn't even know what that means anymore. Somewhere along the line, Shinya stopped being That Random Guy He Met At The Supermarket and turned into...

Well, what exactly?

Guren doesn't fucking know.

“Oi, stupid Guren.”

Yuu's voice pulls him away from his thoughts, throwing him back to the harsh reality that is Monday morning. Seven AM and he's sitting at the table with his nephew, listening to the radio but not paying attention to whatever song is blasting off it. All he can think about is whether he should drive to Shinya's flat or not. He hasn't got work today and there's no way Guren can focus on his paperwork with all this to think about.

But what will he even say to Shinya?

Yeah, sorry for kissing you when I was wasted last time. No hard feelings, right?

Ugh.

“Oi. Guren.”

Guren turns to Yuu, who's currently narrowing his eyes at him. What the fuck does the brat want now? Can't he see he's too busy mentally complaining about his shitty life choices?
“What the fuck is it, Yuu?” Guren snaps. He grabs his coffee and chugs it in one gulp, ignoring the scalding pain down his throat. Fuck. He's gonna need all the coffee he can get to survive today.

“I'm gonna be home late, okay? I wanna head down to Mika's house this afternoon,” Yuu tells him, unperturbed by Guren's venomous mood. He's twiddling his thumbs, which is usually something he does when he wants Guren to let him do something that he probably shouldn't be doing.

Whatever. All Guren does is nod. If he's just going to hang out with Mika, then who was he to stop him? Guren would rather Yuu pester Mika's parents than pester him, that's for sure.

Surprise flashes across Yuu's face before he replaces it with a grin.

“Great! Thanks, Guren!” he beams, returning to his plate of nuggets and pancakes with an eagerness that Guren's never seen on the brat. Ever.

What the hell is the kid so excited about? He's just going to Mika's house, right?

Shaking his head, Guren concludes that it's none of his business. Let the brat hang out with his friends. It's a wonder he has any in the first place anyway.

He buries his face into the newspaper with a heaving sigh—not that he's reading it, mind you. It's a bit hard to focus on the local news when all he can think about it that same scene flashing in his head. You'd think that replaying a kiss for three days non-stop would help Guren calm down about it.

But no. Quite the contrary, in fact. He's no where near calm. At all.

“What's the deal with you these days?”

Guren looks up, frowning at Yuu.

“What do you mean?” he asks. His nephew rolls his eyes like the answer is obvious, and yeah, maybe it is but Guren feels like dragging this conversation out. Yuu's the last person he wants to talk to about this.

“I mean that you're still worrying about the Shinya thing, right?”

Guren lowers his newspaper down, narrowing his eyes at the brat. Out of everyone in this entire planet, Yuu is hardly the best person to discuss his troubles with. He stares at him and waits for an answer, plate now devoid of nuggets and pancakes. How he eats those every morning, Guren will never understand.

The businessman sighs.

“Why can't you just text him? Or go to his flat?” Yuu insists, shrugging like every thing is fine and dandy in his own little world.

“It's not that easy,” Guren groans. “You wouldn't understand.”

As expected, the kid doesn't drop the subject. He leans in, green eyes filled with stubborn curiosity. Guren flickers his gaze to the clock, mentally groaning that it's still too early to send the kid off to school. Damn. He's stuck with Yuu pestering him about this for now. Times like this, he curses that Yuu's started to get comfortable around his house; life was so much easier when the kid wasn't so fucking nosy.
"Do you like Shinya?"

Thank god Guren wasn't drinking his coffee when Yuu asked this. Even so, that doesn't stop him from choking on air, almost coughing out his entire breakfast whilst Yuu watches on, completely unaware of what his stupid question has done to Guren's brain.

"Why are you even asking that?" Guren snaps. He can't believe his own twelve year old nephew is enquiring about his love life. Yuu. Yuu, of all people.

Yuu raises an eyebrow.

"It's obvious he likes you. Mika told me."

That catches Guren's attention. He pushes his chair closer to the dining table and scrutinises the kid. To his surprise, Yuu looks back at him with a steady expression, no sign of any jokes or amusement.

"What do you mean he likes me?" Guren asks, trying to ignore the way his heart pounds faster. Shinya? Liking him? Since when?

"That's what Mika said a few months ago... and anyway, wasn't Shinya kissing you? Doesn't that usually mean that someone likes you if they kiss you?"

God... He can't believe he's even having this conversation. This is all Shinya's fault for looking so pretty that Guren actually kissed him. His fault that he's stuck brooding about the consequences to his pubescent nephew. When Guren was forced to basically adopt Yuu, they never warned him about the possibility of this brat trying to counsel him about his love life in the future.

Frankly, it's embarrassing. If he wanted someone to counsel him, he'd have called up Sayuri and the other girls for embarrassment from the right age group.

And wait, what? Did he seriously just call Shinya pretty? Fuck, he needs more coffee.

"We were drunk. It doesn't count," Guren says, the words coming out automatically rather than earnestly. He's repeated those sentences into his head so many times that he's not sure if he's trying to convince Yuu or himself.

"Oh, so you don't like him?"

For fuck sake. What the hell is this? Twenty questions at seven AM? Why is Yuu so curious about this anyway? Usually, they'd be having breakfast in peace and quiet, just the way Guren likes it, not enquiring about the details of his personal life.

"Yuu, shut the fuck up."

Yuu's nose scrunches. "I'm only asking."

"Well, stop asking."

"Did I hit a nerve?"

The little shit... Guren glares at him, making sure to pack every warning and threat into a single stare in the hopes of silently shutting the brat up. Sadly, it doesn't even work; Yuu only scratches his cheek, yawning for a good five seconds before looking at Guren again.

Ugh.
“Shouldn't you be heading off to school?” Guren nods towards the clock, grateful that Yuu takes this distraction to turn around and look at it.

“Not yet. Still got some time to kill.”

Great. Awesome. Fantastic. Guren grabs his phone, needing something to keep his thoughts preoccupied whilst Yuu pesters him until his damn school bus finally arrives. A minute doesn't even pass until he questions himself as to why this was a good idea in the first place; there's literally nothing on his phone apart from the collection of Yuu's screamo songs that he still hasn't bothered to delete.

And it also reminds him that he hasn't texted Shinya in a while. Just staring at his empty inbox is beginning to irk on Guren's nerves. Who'd have thought he'd miss Shinya spamming him so much?

“Did he text you?” Yuu asks, kneeling up on his chair in an attempt to sneak a peak at Guren's phone.

It takes all of Guren's strength not to push the brat off the chair. He puts his phone down, hiding it away from this nosy idiot.

“No. What makes you think he will?”

“Why don't you text him?”

Guren grinds his teeth together. Don't. Snap. At. Yuu.

“What the fuck am I supposed to tell him?”

“I don't know! It just seems kind of stupid that you're letting something like this ruin what you have with him.”

*What you have with him...*

What's that supposed to mean? What exactly did he have with Shinya before all this mess started anyway? As far as he can tell, Shinya was only a friend. He wasn't meant to be anything *more* and Guren definitely wasn't supposed to kiss him and actually *enjoy* it.

Drunk as he might have been, Guren remembers every single detail.

And he also remembers that he liked it. A bit too much for his sanity, if he has to admit.

Yuu's right though. This *is* stupid. He can't try to avoid this and pretend that none of it happened. Not only is that childish but Shinya hardly deserves to be treated like someone to be cast aside—

*Fuck. Since when did he start caring about Shinya so much?*

“Well, my bus is going to arrive soon...” Yuu raises his voice enough to pierce through Guren's deep state of brooding.

Guren nods, sighing as he runs a hand through his hair.

“See you,” he says. “Try not to fuck up too much in school.”

Yuu sends him a scowl. “Not as much as you've fucked things up with Shinya!”

He leaves before Guren can chuck something at him.
Stupid brat.

Still. Amazingly, Yuu isn't wrong. He has fucked things up with Shinya and he should talk about this with him. The problem is knowing what he's going to say to Shinya...

Guren groans. To hell with this.

He rises from his seat and grabs his coat and keys, ignoring the part in his brain telling him to stop and think about this for a second. Now's not the time to fret over every single little detail; he needs to sort things out once and for all.

Time to stop avoiding everything just for the sake of his own comfort.

Guren leaves the house, making his way to his car as quickly as he can before common sense forces him to stop.

The drive to Shinya's flat feels like the dawning of Judgement Day. It doesn't help that the weather is gloomier than a funeral, regardless of whether they're in the middle of summer or not. Maybe it's a damn sign. Today's going to be a bad day, he just knows it. One way or another, something is going to fuck up; his boiler exploding, Yuu getting kicked out of school, Mika running away again, who fucking knows. Anything could happen today.

Guren glares at the car in front of him, tapping his fingers against the steering wheel as the roads choose today of all days to be clogged up with traffic. He probably shouldn't have chosen this time to drive to Shinya's, not when half the city's population is on their way to either school or work.

Fucking typical. Guren's tempted to slam his head on the steering wheel, but refrains from doing so. He's going to need a clear mind in order to sort his thoughts and figure out what to say to Shinya—a headache is not going to help.

At least this traffic gives him time to ponder over what he's going to say.

Kind of.

The only problem is that he's not sure what to actually say... Does he apologise for kissing him?

Fuck. Guren groans, letting his head rest on the steering wheel.

He has no clue. He only hopes that Shinya has enough patience to hear him out because this is going to be one hell of a long conversation.

It takes Guren a full ten minutes to get himself to text Shinya that he's right outside his flat. The worst thing is that Shinya doesn't send a reply straight away; not even one asking why the hell Guren's here in the first place or even a simple 'okay' to reassure him that he's not waiting for nothing. Instead, Guren awkwardly shuffles by the flat's entrance for another five minutes or so, wondering how long he's going to have to wait or if Shinya's even home in the first place.

He hasn't really thought this through, has he? Shinya's probably at his part time job today and he's just waiting by his flat like some fucking idiot—

The door clicks open. Guren jolts, spinning around and coming face to face with bright, blue eyes.
They stand there, staring at each other in silence as the seconds run by and Guren's pulse runs even faster. Maybe it's his nerves or the contrast of the gloomy weather, but he swears that Shinya's eyes are brighter, more colourful, impossible to look away from.

So, he doesn't look away. Guren stands there, nine AM in the morning, no clue as to where this conversation is going to go, and he stands there and gazes at Shinya like he's seeing him for the first time.

He gulps.

“Shinya, I—”

“Come inside. It's pretty cold today, isn't it?”

Shinya beats him before he even has the chance to say anything else. The artist turns around, too quickly, and disappears into his flat.

Silently, Guren follows, watching his back and wishing he had enough courage to walk alongside him. No words are exchanged, not even when they finally enter Shinya's room and the artist makes his way for the kitchen, probably brewing some tea or coffee in order to kill time. Guren takes this opportunity to look around his flat, taking note of the unfinished paintings and sculptures randomly placed about. He hasn't had a good chance to look Shinya's artwork until now but he can see why he's working a living for these.

Creativity has never been Guren's area of strength—unless you count being able to read through a pile of reports and paperwork a creative aspect then it's safe to say he hasn't got a single artistic bone in his body. He spares a moment now to admire Shinya's sculptures, impressed at how he's managed to make something look so delicate and yet is made out of marble.

It's odd; being an artist seems to both suit and contradict Shinya. Guren's always regarded the artist as a calm person, hiding behind that smile that covers up all emotions. It gives him a serene vibe, that vibe that says 'My life could be ending but I'm still smiling like an idiot'.

And then there's the contradiction. Everything about Shinya is just so unpredictable. You never know what he's going to do next, what's going to happen—a bit like a painting, really...

Shit. Is he comparing Shinya to a piece of art? This is so fucking cliché.

“So... How's life?”

Shinya appears by his side, handing him a mug of coffee that looks as black and meek as this situation is.

Guren takes it; warm in his hands and he looks down to count the ripples that shake as he trembles.

“I'm sorry about the kiss,” he blurts out.

Shinya's eyes widen before a short breath of laughter escapes him.

“I just asked you how your life was...” he mutters, still chuckling, but sits down on his sofa and takes a long sip of his drink.

Oh. Did he? Guren didn't think he was listening.

“Uh, It's good—I mean, well, nothing much is happening. I just thought I should sort things out and
apologise."

It feels like forever until Shinya nods, taking another sip of his drink. He places it down on the coffee table, too slow for Guren's patience, and frowns into the distance.

"It's okay," he says, shrugging. "You were drunk, I should have stopped you."

And Guren *should* have ended it at that. The conclusion was there; they could have laughed it off and pushed it into the past, but he focuses his attention on something else instead. He focuses it on the way Shinya says *I should have stopped you*, the way his smile wavers, his eyes narrow, voice too low for what Guren's used to.

"Why didn't you?" Guren asks. He lowers his mug of coffee and turns towards the artist, watching his shoulders tense.

When Shinya's eyes flicker to him, Guren can't help but hold his breath.

"Why did *you* kiss me then?"

That same smile is on his face.

Guren feels like Shinya intended that to be a joke.

It sure as hell doesn't seem like one though.

Why did he kiss Shinya anyway?

Yuu's voice echoes in his head.

*It just seems kind of stupid that you're letting something like this ruin what you have with him.*

What he had with Shinya... Whatever that was, it was enough to let his alcohol-induced brain into grabbing the artist and making out with him.

He stares at the artist from the corner of his eyes. Shinya's no longer looking at him, having averted his gaze down to his hands. They sit beside each other in silence, listening to the ticking of the clock, the only indication that time is passing by and they're both unable to find a way to fill it.

What he had with Shinya...

For starters, he had a phone that never stopped vibrating because of his texts. Not a day went pass without Shinya's endless stream of messages and although initially finding them annoying, Guren has to admit that he feels empty without that.

He never realised how attached he had gotten to the artist's constant presence.

Guren smirks, but it's empty, flat.

"I don't even know," he admits. "I couldn't tell you the reason why."

"Oh," Shinya shuffles in his seat. "It's okay. Like I said, you were drunk. We all make mistakes when we're drunk."

"No."

Guren says it without realising. He's not sure who's more surprised; him or Shinya. A moment too
long passes and it sinks into him what he's just admitted, what he just blurted out for Shinya to hear. *It wasn't a mistake.* Drunk or not, he doesn't think it's a mistake. He doesn't *want* to take it back—hell, why is he even apologising for it?

And with those thoughts come another realisation.

The realisation that this man in front of him might just mean more to him that he ever expected him to.

It's like he's just had a fucking epiphany. Guren sits there, wide eyes fixed on the coffee he's barely touched, and completely aware that the person right beside him is waiting for an answer.

He's *hyper-aware* of Shinya. He hears him breathing, sees the way he fidgets nervously, perhaps too wary to ask what the hell is going on with Guren's mind and why the fuck he's travelled all the way to this flat just to sit here, pondering the extent of his feelings.

Guren looks up.

Shinya's still staring at him, confusion now evident in his eyes.

“Um... Guren?” He tilts his head, a shaky smile tugging on his lips. “Are you alright? You're acting strange.”

Guren can't answer. He's awful with words. He should have known that he wouldn’t have been able to say anything to Shinya's face, let alone explain the full extent of what he's feeling right now. Hell, even he doesn't know himself.

All he knows is that Shinya thinks that kiss was a mistake.

He's *wrong*.

Guren *doesn't* answer. He grabs Shinya by the shoulder and pulls him in for a kiss instead.

If he was watching this rather than experiencing it, Guren would have probably laughed. It's like everything that you'd expect in a kiss; Shinya jolts, his first instinct to lay a hand against Guren's chest, tries to push him away before pausing—and thank *god* he pauses. Guren senses his hesitance, how Shinya's lips slowly start to return the kiss, relenting and relaxing into the embrace that's when Guren stops paying attention to what's cliché and what isn't and instead focuses on how damn nice Shinya's lips feel. He pushes closer, buries his hand into Shinya's hair and hears his heart pounding when the artist parts his lips open.

It doesn't feel real. He's sober and he's kissing Shinya. He's sober and he's kissing Shinya because he initiated this and he's *not* stopping.

Shinya's the first to pull away. Faint red flushes on his cheeks, stands out against the white of his hair and it's times like this that Guren can admit that, yes, the artist is too damn pretty for his own good.

“I, uh, I wasn't expecting that,” Shinya says. He blinks rapidly, like this is a dream—or a nightmare, depending on how much Guren's fucked up.

“Do you want me to apologise for it?” Guren can't help it. He's actually smirking.

Shinya laughs. This time, it's real, it reaches his eyes and Guren sighs in relief because he knows that maybe he's done something remotely right for once.
Once his laughter subsides, Shinya's eyes soften.

“I'm not apologising for it.”

Guren smiles. It's the first real smile he's had in days.

“Neither am I.”

No other words are exchanged; they simply grab their mugs and drink in blissful silence. There, in the clutter that is Shinya's flat, Guren stares out of the window and actually smiles at the shitty weather outside. Maybe he was wrong. Maybe the weather's no omen for how horrible this day could have turned—because it's *not* horrible at all.

It's pretty good.

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As soon as the bell rings, Yuu springs up from his chair and swings his bag onto his shoulder. *God,* today passed by too slow! It feels like he's been staring at the clock for ages, counting down the hours until he can finally set his plan into motion. Even Mika's noticed how fidgety he is, asking if he's ill or not and if they should tell the teacher in case he can go home instead.

Yuu almost laughs at this. Typical Mika to worry about him instead of *himself.*

Well, that ends today! That's right! Today, Yuu is going to find out just what the hell Ferid is doing to Mika and he's going to make sure that he *never* does it again.

Today, he's going to *save* Mika.

“Ferid picking you up?” Yuu asks Mika, already knowing the answer. Of course Ferid's picking Mika up—Ferid *always* picks Mika up.

Nodding, Mika makes slow work of putting his books into his bag, as if trying to drag out the eventual dawn of his demise. He sighs once everything's in his bag, looking up at Yuu with tired, blue eyes.

“Yup... I guess I'll see you tomorrow then?” he says, forcing out a smile that even Yuu can tell is fake.

“Yeah, I'll see you tomorrow. I gotta take the bus home today so I can't walk down to the yard with you.”

It's a lie. He's not taking the bus at all. Far from it, in fact, but Mika can't know that. Yuu sends a mental apology as the smile Mika's faking falls, replaced with an expression that looks lost and lonely.

“S-Sorry,” Yuu rushes to say. “I just have to be back home before—”

“No, no, it's okay. It's only to the yard anyway. It's not like I can't walk there by myself, Yuu-chan.”

Lightly, Mika pokes him on his cheek, chuckling when Yuu jumps at the sudden contact.

The chuckle kinda sounds like a sob.
“Okay... If you say so...” Yuu says, and gives Mika a hug.

He tries to ignore how quickly his best friend clings to him, clutching onto his shirt tightly and too long for it to be a normal embrace. The guilt of lying digs into his chest and Yuu unconsciously buries his face into Mika's shoulder, breathes in the faint smell of apple scented shampoo and rain. He's always hated hugs, thought they were lame and unneeded, and yet this one isn't so bad. Mika's comfy and warm. He can definitely stand to hug Mika more.

When he pulls away, Mika doesn't meet his gaze. He smiles at the floor, turning around and leaving before Yuu can even return it.

Ugh... He hates lying to Mika. It feels like he's been doing it more these days, but this is all for his sake, right? He *wants* to help Mika.

He's *going* to help Mika.

With that resolve echoing in his mind, Yuu rushes to follow his best friend, making sure to stay as quiet as possible. He lied about the bus thing; he's not taking that—he's not even going home at this rate. Nope, he's going to follow Mika and Ferid to their house and see what the hell happens there. He has no clue where the hell Mika lives, although he's pretty certain that it's in walking distance. Ferid's always picking him up without a car, so it's a safe bet to say that Yuu will be able to follow them home by foot.

Besides, he's a pretty fast runner. Time to put that to good use.

It doesn't take long to spot Ferid. The tall man is unmissable amongst the other parents waiting for their children to appear; his long hair and weird clothes make sure of that.

Yuu narrows his eyes when he sees Ferid placing an arm around Mika's shoulders. From this distance, there's no way he can hear what that walking trashcan is saying, yet it's enough to make Yuu's blood boil. Even a clueless idiot can tell that Mika's uncomfortable with this guy! He's tense, hugging his shoulders to himself and trying as much as possible to put some distance between him and the adult.

This carries on as they walk to their house. Yuu ducks between cars and keeps back a few yards; enough distance to see them, but also enough away just in case he needs to make a subtle escape. He's got this covered; he watched a bunch of James Bond movies to make sure this plan goes perfectly.

Thankfully, they get to Mika's house just as soon as Yuu's legs begin to ache. He hides behind a tree, peeking to make sure that they've both entered the house. Yup, they have! Now he just has to find a way to get inside without Ferid knowing...

What would James Bond do? Hmm, he'd probably sneak in with a gun... Yuu doesn't have a gun... He doesn't even think guns are legal in this country so that's out of the plan... The sneaking part will just have to do; maybe he can climb in through a window or something?

He runs towards the back of the house, pleased to find that the window is easy enough to climb through. *Alright.* Time to do this shit.

Using the fence as leverage, Yuu manages to clamber his way up the window. He has to admit, he feels pretty damn badass whilst he's doing it and a little part of him thinks *Wow, I should break into houses some more.*

Maybe next time. And maybe not Mika's house either.
Yuu stumbles into the window, landing ungracefully on the floor. He lets out a little *oomph* before realising that he's meant to be quiet about all this.

Luckily, the room is empty. *Phew.* How much of a fail would it have been if he landed right into a room where Ferid was? *That* would have turned out badly in an instant.

He takes a look around, squinting his eyes at the vivid red walls and internally cringing. Who paints a bedroom wall *this* bright? There's no way this is Mika's bedroom. Mika actually has taste. Probably.

Yuu tip-toes his way across the room, holding his breath just in case Ferid somehow has vampire-senses or whatever. Ha! What if that's the reason Mika's so scared of him? Maybe Ferid's secretly a vampire and this is a really bad idea because there's no way Yuu can fight off a vampire with nothing for a weapon.

Okay. He's being silly.

Time to get serious.

As quietly as possible, Yuu opens the bedroom door. Still no sign of Ferid or Mika. That's good—Wait. What's that?

Is that *crying*?

He feels his stomach lurching. Just as easily as that, every sense in his body is replaced with dread and fear—*fear for Mika.* This is serious. He has to sort this out and save his best friend from whatever is happening to him!

Yuu follows the sound of the sobs, every footstep he takes is like a squeeze to his gut. His eyes roam the corridor, fixing onto the door on the far right. It's slightly open, revealing nothing but the darkness of a room he can't quite make out. The staircase is just in front of it—which is pretty lucky because at least there's a quick getaway if Yuu needs that...

To his relief and surprise, he hears Ferid downstairs. Humming. Faint sounds of... pots and pans? Is he cooking? That's a relief. Cooking takes a while to do and Yuu has enough time to... well, do *something.* Alright, he'll admit he hasn't perfectly planned this through. He just thought he should break into their house and figure out what the fuck Ferid's doing to Mika and then... hopefully put an end to it. Somehow. He'll think of something. *Wing it.*

Now that he knows Ferid's not upstairs, Yuu rushes over to the room. The first thing he sees is Mika huddled up on the bed, crying into his palms and surrounded by the near darkness. His eyes snap up, jaw dropping before he jolts up on the bed and points behind him.

"Yuu-chan—*look out!*"

Yuu doesn't turn around in time.

Pain explodes into his head as he's slammed against a wall. He hears Mika screaming—and then a ringing in his ears when he forces himself to look up into a pair of red eyes.

*Oh, shit.*

Yuu struggles—oh, *fuck,* is that a hand around his neck? He coughs, gasping for breath, fear lodging
itself into his chest because *what the fuck*—what the *fuck* is going on?

The grip around his throat tightens and Ferid's lips stretch into a sick grin that makes every nerve in Yuu's body stand.

He tries to kick himself free. *No use.* Yuu chokes for breath, clawing at the fingers crushing his neck and slowly starts to feel his limbs grow heavier. All he sees are Ferid's red eyes, that colour of blood sending panic into his brain—he should have thought about this more—he's just a *kid* and—

"*No!*"

*Mika's voice.*

Yuu looks down just in time to see Mika running towards them. He's holding something—a lamp?

*Wait, what—*

Relief floods into him when he's released. Yuu collapses to the ground, wheezing for air, and looks up to see Ferid grabbing Mika by his collar and flinging him across the room.

He doesn't know what's louder; Mika's scream or the tell-tale *crack* when his leg connects with the wall. Yuu stares in shock as Mika slumps to the ground, clutching his leg and biting his lip in an attempt to muffle his cries.

*Oh god.*

This is like a nightmare.

Fuck, what's going on? How is this happening?

Shaking, Yuu pushes himself up, amazed he can even do so with how weak his entire body feels. Above him, Ferid's smiling like he's stalking his prey, advancing closer and closer, those same red eyes suffocating Yuu into a deeper core of fear. He whimpers, stumbling back and wishing that *fuck fuck fuck,* he had something to defend himself or make him feel safer.

This is a nightmare.

"*Yuu-chan, how nice of you to visit us,*" Ferid mocks. His voice cuts through, makes it even harder for Yuu to focus because all he's thinking is *Fuck, this guy is insane.*

He has this grin that makes Yuu want to cry.

He won't cry.

Yuu scrambles to his feet. *Help.* That's what he needs. He needs to call someone—the police, Guren, Shinya—fucking *anyone.*

"Where do you think you're going?"

Ferid's voice trails after him like a ghost. Yuu doesn't look back. He makes a run for the door, knowing that if Ferid's after him then at least that means Mika can be safe for now. The thought of leaving Mika whilst he's hurt doesn't bode well with Yuu, but what other choice does he have? He needs to find a fucking phone and call the police—*shit,* why didn't he bring his phone with him to school today? How the fuck is he going to find a place to call someone without Ferid lunging at him with the intent to kill?
Yuu shakes his head. No time to panic. He rushes down the stairs—

Something grabs his hair. He loses his footing, tries to grab the railing for balance, but Ferid tugs even harder and laughs down his ear.

That's the last sound Yuu hears before he's thrown down the stairs.

It doesn't even register to him. All he feels is pain—burning, breaking—the back of his head slamming against the floor. The ringing gnaws louder. His limbs are heavy, numb, and Yuu's eyelids droop, lulling him into a place much more peaceful than this—

Mika.

No. Mika needs him.

Yuu forces himself to move. Everything spins. Burns. He feels something trickling down his forehead, but ignores it for the sake of his own sanity. He needs to save Mika.

Save Mika...

That thought spurring him on, Yuu pushes himself onto his elbows.

It's as if something seizes his throat immediately. He chokes, clutching at his chest, and coughs into his hand.

Blood.

Blood.

Everything's spinning. His mind is screaming. He wants to cry, run away, take back this stupid plan.

More importantly, he wants to save Mika. How the fuck can he do that if he can't even save himself?

He has enough strength to watch Ferid walking down the stairs, grinning at him with a smugness that lurches Yuu's guts.

Fuck.

Yuu clenches his fists.

Ferid reaches the last step.

Fuck.

“Ferid, I'm home—”

A gasp cuts across them. Yuu cranes his neck to see pink hair; a small woman, covering her mouth and staring at them with wide, red eyes. She stays by the doorway, unblinking, like something that doesn't really belong in this scene, and Yuu wonders Is this real or am I imagining everything? It's hard to think straight. All he feels is the horrid weight in his bones and the blood dripping down his forehead, his lips.

Shit.

The woman walks forward, meets Ferid's gaze with hard eyes, a grim line of her mouth.
“What the _fuck_ is going on here?”

Chapter End Notes

You know, I was writing the scene at the end and thinking _I can't believe I'm writing about Ferid beating up children_, and then I realised. He kills an entire family of children in the first chapter. Oh. How could I forget.

Idk what else to write here apart from I'm sorry for doing that to baby mikayuu and pretty please don't kill me, I swear I'll update really soon.......

*hides*
Yuu can't focus. Everything's like a dream, blurring in and out with faint voices swimming around his head. All he knows is that he's lying down on the ground and his entire body is too heavy to move—which is odd, considering how light he feels. He's there, he knows he's bleeding and everything hurts like a bitch but at the same time, nothing registers to him.

Or registers enough for him to grasp hold of reality.

"Is... Is that Yuu? Shit, what happened?"

The floor shakes as footsteps hurry to his side. Pink hair blocks out his vision, tickles his nose as this woman leans over. He swears he's seen her before. There's not many people around this city who has pink hair of all things.

Her eyes are red. Yuu stiffens. Red eyes. Red eyes that gleamed at him when Ferid had his hands around his neck. It comes back, crashing down with the pain from his bones, that burning throb in the back of his head telling him to wake up, wake up and save Mika for god's sake.

"The poor boy took a nasty fall down the stairs. I was just about to call you."

Ferid's voice. Yuu would recognise it anywhere; it has that tone that makes him want to empty the contents of his stomach. Preferably in Ferid's direction. He clenches his fist, trying desperately to find his own voice and deny that blatant lie. There's no way Mika's mother can believe that bullshit!

He's able to focus on her now, taking note of the way her hands tremble as she rises back up to her feet. Ferid's smile doesn't waver; it remains there like the silence that hangs over the air, interrupted only by the pounding of Yuu's pulse.

"Where's Mika? Why haven't you called an ambulance? What's going on?"

Krul's voice sharpens with each word.

"I told you. I was going to call you," Ferid says, reaching out. His hand extends to Mika's mother and all Yuu wants to scream is no, no, no, don't take it. She can't possibly believe that half-assed lie. She can't.

No one moves.

"Where's Mika?" Krul asks again.

Mika's upstairs. Mika's upstairs and he's hurt and Yuu needs to do something to help him. He can't stay here, waiting for Ferid to come up with a bullshit lie to win over Krul again. Mika's hurt and...
there's no way Yuu's going to sit here and do nothing. Mika needs him.

Yuu struggles to sit up. Everything falters, the world shakes and his bones feel like jelly. He's convinced his left arm is broken, but ignores the initial panic that seizes him and turns his attention to Ferid instead.

His eyes are cold, piercing through Yuu with a warning to remain silent.

*Go to hell,* Yuu thinks and licks away the blood that's crusted on his lips, summoning the courage to speak out.

He's only just parted his lips when he hears it. A faint cry of pain. From upstairs.

All three of them look up.

Yuu's mind turns blank as soon as he sees Mika's small figure emerge from the distance. He's dragging himself on the floor, clearly in agony from his broken leg but keeps his head down so that his face is not in sight. Krul's gasp cuts through Yuu's shocked state and he returns to the present, to the thoughts of *Save Mika, gotta save Mika.*

Mika stops by the stairs, holding onto the railings so hard that Yuu sees his knuckles turn white. When he looks up, their eyes meet; horror descending on Mika's face as he sees Yuu's injuries and Yuu wanting to stand the fuck up and get his best friend away from this place, *damn it.*

Too soon, Mika flinches. He looks at his mother now, who looks like she's either hyperventilating out of shock or anger—Yuu can't tell.

“F-Ferid...” Mika's voice is tiny, scarcely audible, and yet it's like a pin-drop against still waters. It disrupts everything. Centres the world around him. “Ferid... Ferid did all this. D-Don't listen to him!”

Krul doesn't seem to react straight away. She stares at Mika, unblinking and not moving a single muscle, perhaps not even *breathing.* Then, ever so slowly, she gulps, shoulders quivering, and turns to Ferid.

“Krul, you can't honestly believe something like that? It was just—”

He doesn't get to finish his sentence. Krul takes one step forward and punches him straight in the face.

Yuu's jaw drops. Woah, *shit.* He doesn't know whether to be impressed or scared so he makes do with staying on the spot, watching Ferid stagger back, that damn smile finally wiped off his face. He'd have laughed if the situation wasn't so serious and if he didn't hear Mika's gasp from upstairs. *This is serious.* No time for celebrating Ferid's pain.

When Ferid looks up, Yuu stops breathing. He's grinning, patting his shirt as if to casually brush off dirt.

“You're so beautiful when you're angry, Krul,” he says, chuckling under his breath. There's no guilt or fear in his expression.

He actually looks like he's enjoying this.

“What have you done?” Krul spits out. “They're *children!* What the fuck—you know what, I'm not even going to ask.”
She shoves her hand into her bag, rooting for something—maybe a phone, is she going to call the police? The ambulance? Yuu hopes that—

Ferid moves. Yuu's eyes widen. His voice catches on a warning, too late to be heard as Krul's grabbed by her neck.

He doesn't have time to panic. As soon as Yuu blinks, Krul kicks Ferid—

*Shit.* Yuu winces, almost forgetting about his own injuries when he sees Ferid knocked back into the wall behind him. *Wow.* For someone so small, Mika's mother is *terrifying* when she's pissed off. She doesn't even give Ferid a chance to recover; she's already standing above him, her foot under his chin with a glare that rivals all the anger combined in the world.

Ferid's still chuckling.

He grips Krul's ankle, grins, and tugs. The next thing Yuu knows, Krul cries out and there's a sickening *crash* as she falls and collides the side of her head with a nearby table. It all goes downhill from there. Yuu knows he should move, do something to help because Ferid's pinning the woman down with his legs and choking her. He's got that manic grin on his face, widening the more Krul struggles underneath him.

"*No!*" Mika's scream echoes in the room.

Yuu sees him trying to pull himself up with the railings, sobs shaking his entire body more than the panic that hovers over them. Everything moves slowly. It's like Yuu's watching an action film and those slow-motion effects are on the screen, giving him time to think—but he *can't* think. All he feels is his heart pounding and his eyes flitting everywhere, looking for something—*anything* to do.

Maybe it's instinct, maybe it's a miracle, but his eyes rest on a vase. Big and red, probably expensive as fuck and even heavier than its price.

He moves without thinking. Ignore the pain, ignore how sick the fear is making him, ignore all that.

Yuu picks up the vase—*ignore the pain, ignore his broken arm*—and smashes it against the back of Ferid's head. Just like that, time picks up again, rushes out of slow motion and Ferid slumps down onto the cold floor.

No one reacts at first. Yuu's staring at the floor, splattered with blood and shards of glass. His hands are shaking, throat closing up. He's only just realised he's started to hyperventilate and Mika's mother has sat up to wrap an arm around his shoulders. She smells of roses too strong for Yuu to breathe in. There's no comfort, just the nausea and urge to cry; he pushes it aside, bites the inside of his cheek and points at Mika waiting by the stairs.

Krul nods. She strokes his hair back before rushing to her son, heels clacking hard against the wooden floorboards. Yuu can't take his eyes away from Ferid, merely listening to the sounds of Krul carrying Mika down the stairs as he watches the uneven rise and fall of the unconscious man.

He's still alive. Yuu doesn't know what to think about this.

He feels sick.

There's a soft tug on his arm and Yuu lets himself get pulled into Krul's arms. She gathers both children into a shuddering embrace, her sobs merging with Mika's, teardrops falling cold onto Yuu's shoulder.
Yuu only feels numb. He stares off into the distance and listens to the hollow ringing in his head. He's tired. Everything's heavy, weighing him down as his eyelids start to droop. He wants to sleep and forget about this nightmare, let his dreams take him to a place elsewhere, a place where Mika was never in any danger and everything is fine, everything is okay.

Finally, he gives into the dull ache. The last thing he remembers is Krul shaking his shoulders, Mika's panicked cries of his name echoing in his head, gradually fading away.

Shinya taps his feet against the floor; black shoes against white. He looks up and meets colourless walls, corridors that span for miles, dotted with more people waiting in anxiety. Amongst them, Krul paces the room, her pink hair swaying with each frantic step she takes. Just watching her is enough to make him dizzy, but he keeps his silence. He can't expect her to calm down after the events of today. Even he's finding it difficult to relax and wrap his mind around everything.

It's been two hours since he received the call from Krul. Over the year that he's known her, he's never seen or heard her cry.

That was the least of his shock though. He can barely remember how he and Guren made it to the hospital, spent too much of it trying to sort his jumbled thoughts on why such a thing would happen.

Sighing, he looks to where Guren's disappeared off to. They're still not sure on Yuu's condition; the nurses said that nothing is life threatening—thank god for that—but there's also the possibility of internal damage done to his head because of that fall.

Guren's talking with the doctor now.

Krul's still waiting for them to assess what exactly happened to Mika.

Shinya observes her. Still pacing. Hasn't stopped since he arrived—with good reason. There are no kitchens for her to cook her stress away and this is much serious anyway, much, much more serious. That feeling of needing to know what's been happening, realising that it's something they probably don't want to hear because it's been months of Mika giving these hints that everyone's somehow tuned out. Months of Mika dealing with this all by himself.

He's only twelve. Shinya knows all too well what it's like to be afraid of your own home.

The door swings open.

Krul's by the doctor's side before Shinya can even stand up.

“Well?” she demands. In less than a second, her entire body's started to shake. Shinya fears she's on the verge of having a breakdown. “What is it? Is my son going to be okay?”

“Aside from a few bruises, your son's injuries only include a broken leg, which ought to take six to eight weeks to recover from,” the doctor says. He pauses for a second, as if making sure Krul is listening, and takes a deep breath.

“Physically, your son should be alright. However, we also discovered something which may shock you.”

The doctor sighs. His tired, wrinkled eyes are staring at Krul with the burden of news that Shinya knows isn't good. Krul's bottom lip has already started to tremble. Maybe a part of her is imagining what it is.

They wait. There's a distant ticking of a clock which can be heard in that corridor, breaking the silence.

Still, they wait.

When the doctor talks, the sound of the clock is lost and time wavers, pauses with each word that's said out loud.

“It seems that your son has been sexually abused. More than once, I believe. We found some traces of semen—”

Krul's choked gasp interrupts the doctor. She covers her face with her hands and sobs into them, drowns out everything in the corridor until all you can hear is this mother breaking apart at the revelation of her son being sexually abused by her own boyfriend. The doctor stops talking, laying a hand on her shoulder in silent comfort and softly telling her she's free to visit Mika.

He walks away, leaving her sobbing in that spot by herself. Despite her reputation and quick anger, despite that almost everyone she knows fears her, despite everything, Krul's only a single mother who was too young to be left alone with Mika. She has her own insecurities, hides them under her black dresses and self-defence classes, but it's there. It's always been there.

Sometimes, Shinya forgets that.

Slowly, he walks to her, stops just a few steps in front and searches for something to say. What can you say in a situation like this? There's nothing that words can do to soothe the blow of that news. Nothing compares to that.

Giving up on saying anything, Shinya waits for Krul. He waits for her to be ready to talk.

“He always hated staying at home...” Krul refuses to look up. She clutches her head, muttering to herself. “He was always sneaking out. I-I just thought it was a fucking phase.”

Shinya doesn't say anything. He listens.

“I-I thought... I thought that he was going through that rebellious teenage phase and... I never listened. Shinya, he went through all that by himself and—I never listened to him! T-The amount of times I left him alone with Ferid—oh god, it's been months. This has been going on for months!”

Her voice cracks and she finally looks up, swollen eyed and tear-streamed cheeks, an expression that Shinya's never seen on her. Truth be told, part of him always thought Krul was untouchable. She was a strong woman, often too prideful to even bother showing weakness.

He sighs.

“I was too fucking busy getting attracted to a psychopath to even realise that my own son was getting raped—”

She chokes on that word, bursts into tears again and it's all it takes for Shinya to gather her into his arms and let her cry into his chest. No words of comfort are said, the artist merely rubs her back and
remains silent even after she dampens his clothes with her tears. He can feel her gripping onto the back of his shirt, fists shaking with an emotion he can't begin to understand. Even with his chest to muffle the sounds, her cries are loud in the corridor, travelling down as if they're the only people left in this hospital.

It's like one of those moments where you stop and think Why did this happen? You look back at the memories and question why because everything seemed so normal, so innocent from a distance. Mika was just a kid on the verge of becoming a teenager, Krul was a young mother who wanted to sort her life out and have a family. It's any other story, nothing special or extraordinary about it.

Times like this, Shinya wonders if there's such a thing as an easy, normal life. For one thing, he's never known what it's like to have that. He simply thought it was something that other people experienced—other people who aren't part of the Hiiragi family, other people who actually deserved happiness.

Now, he's not so sure. Maybe an easy life just doesn't exist. Full stop.

Shinya doesn't try to calm Krul. He stays, still rubbing her back because it's only thing he can do. She's allowed to break apart, cry it all out and ruin his shirt. He's not going to stop her.

After a while, her sobs die down, fingers loosening the grip she has on Shinya's back.

He hears a faint hiccup followed by several, shaky breaths.

"I... I should have known, Shinya. I-I should have listened to him—I should have known."

Shinya shakes his head. He pulls back, trying to look at her eyes.

"No, Krul, no. You couldn't have known. None of us saw it coming—"

"I'm his mother! I should have known! It's my job to protect him but I've done nothing!"

Gripping her shoulders, Shinya ignores how Krul glares at him; a silent warning that if he so says the wrong word then he's pretty much risking a kick in the face. He doesn't care. Shina keeps his gaze.

"Yes, Krul. You're his mother. You're human. We're human. That's all we are. Human. You can hate yourself all you want, but fact is that you made an honest mistake and regretting it won't change anything."

Krul's dropped her scowl. Now, she regards him with an expression that's lost, refusing to listen and accept his words.

She averts her gaze away, shrugging off his embrace and pulling at her sleeves as if fidgeting is the only thing she can do in this moment.

"I don't know what to do," she admits. "Actually, scratch that. I want to kill Ferid."

Venom laces her tone. Shinya knows she means every word of it.

"Mika doesn't need that though," he reminds her. "What he needs is his mother. He needs you to be there for him, to be by his side. He doesn't need you blinded by hatred and anger. He just needs your support and love. That's all."

It's obvious this is the last thing Krul wants to hear. Her fists clench, perhaps imagining they're around Ferid's throat.
Nevertheless, Shinya doesn't relent. He's right, he knows he is. There's nothing worse than being a child and not having anyone to turn to, that safety of a mother's embrace non-existent in your time of need.

He would know.

“Just be there for Mika,” he repeats. Gently, so as to not force her, he turns her towards her son's room. The door's closed. It's quiet, almost peaceful. “He needs you right now. He needs a mother. Ferid's with the police, he'll get what's coming to him but for now, you need to focus on Mika. You need to be there for him and make up for the times when you weren't.”

Krul doesn't move or say anything for a while. Shinya sees the way her shoulders tense, closing in around herself and making the woman seem smaller than she already is. He's tempted to take his words back just for the sake of comforting her—but why should he? It's the truth. She can't afford to lose herself to her rage and forget about what really matters.

Finally, after what seems like an eternity, Krul looks up. Her red eyes are empty, tired, although no longer filled with that raw anger.

“I hate it when you're right,” she mutters. There's an attempt of a smile, one that she gives up midway. “Thank you though. I... I needed to hear that.”

Shinya smiles for her. He lightly nudges her back, nodding at Mika's room.

Krul doesn't say anything else. She merely nods back and enters the room without another glance.

Mika doesn't like it here. It's too bright, too quiet. Too much white and blue. It gives him this uneasy feeling that perhaps he died and now he's in some place that's suppose to calm or soothe him but it just makes him feel alone. He takes a shuddering breath. *Calm down.* He's in a hospital. Hospitals are safe. They make people better.

Ferid isn't here. Ferid's gone.

That should make him feel better.

That *should.*

Mika doesn't really know what to feel anymore. All he can focus on is the heavy weight in his chest, that constant trembling of his hands and the feeling that it's still not over. It's never going to end. This is going to stay with him for his entire life and he's never going to escape. It's not even a fear of Ferid anymore. Somewhere along the way, that fear's engulfed other things in his life. A fear of what's going to happen next, a fear of wondering if there are other people out there like Ferid, a fear that this is going to stay with him forever.

Part of him is wondering *What's the point then?* What's the point if he's going to feel like this for the rest of his life? How do you even end something like this?

He wraps his arms around himself.

*Don't think about that. Don't.*
Think about something else instead. Something like... like how his leg is stiff and numb. Mika frowns, lifting the blanket to find that his leg is now in a splint, probably trying to ensure that he won't move it too much. He wonders how long it'll take for him to be able to walk properly again.

Not that he cares anyway.

He spreads the blanket onto himself again. The empty, white ceiling meets his gaze and Mika decides that he’d rather not look at something so boring and empty as that. It's not exactly the most distracting of sights and god knows he needs something to get his mind off things.

Gritting his teeth, he forces himself to sit up. As expected, pain spikes through his leg, causing him to hiss out loud and regret ever moving in the first place. Too late. He's already moved. Mika ignores the dizzying ache and doesn't stop until he's sat up on the bed, having succeeded in only giving himself a headache.

Great, he thinks as he looks around the room and finds that it's not even worth all that pain. It's a hospital room; he shouldn't have expected it to look anything but empty and dreary.

Where's everyone? The last thing he remembers is his mother calling the police... or the ambulance. Or both. He wasn't paying attention. And then there was a lot of rushing. A lot of people taking Ferid away and even more people checking up on Yuu-chan. And then they took Yuu-chan away too.

Is Yuu-chan okay?

His heart races at this thought. Yuu-chan saved him. He doesn't want anything bad to happen to Yuu-chan because he risked everything to save him from Ferid. Mika doesn't think he can live with himself if anything bad happened to his best friend.

If only he could walk... He wants to see Yuu-chan.

The door opens, interrupting his thoughts.

Mika stiffens as his mother walks in, her eyes instantly widening once they rest on him. They stare at each other. The only sound that fills the room is the pulse that thunders in Mika's ears, beating in tune to the panic slowly rising within him.

Mummy looks like she's staring at a dead person.

She takes a step forward.

Everything may as well be closing in around him. Mika grips the blanket, too scared of what his mother's going to say.

Licking her lips, mummy takes a deep breath and lets it out with shudder.

“They... They told me.”

Her voice is barely a whisper, but Mika hears.

“They told me... about... about what... what... Ferid...”

She stops. Her hand rises to cover her mouth, muffling a sob that escapes too early.

She stops but she could have continued and Mika wouldn't have known. Her voice echoes in his head, repeats again and again, louder, louder until it's the only thing that exists in this moment.
They told me.

She knows. His mother knows.

He's staring at her and he sees nothing. He's listening to her cry and all he hears is the rushing of cars outside, engines roaring on the roads, distant conversations of strangers shrieking down his ear. Louder. All is loud and Mika feels small, everything crushes him, the anxiety, the fear, memories of Ferid grinning at him and Yuu-chan's scream as he falls down the stairs. Everything is still here. Nothing is going to end.

“Mika! Mika!”

Mika jumps, returns back to the present and sees his mother right in front of him. She's holding his shoulders, fingers digging into bruises and red eyes filled with concern.

The bruises hurt and her eyes remind him of things he'd rather not remember.

He flinches and pushes her hands away.

Her reaction hurts even more.

She bites her lip, looks down at the blanket as tears well up in the corner of her eyes. Mummy's always been so strong but all Mika does is upset her. Another thing that he's ruined. Didn't they use to love each other? They were a happy family, weren't they? Why did bad things have to ruin that?

Why is he so terrified of his own mother when she's done nothing wrong?

“I-I'm sorry. I... I don't know what to say.”

Her shoulders are shaking. They're shaking so much and Mika wants to lean forward and try to calm her down, but he stays where he is, backed against the bed. May as well be miles away from his own mother.

“I should have been there for you. I should have listened. I am—I am so sorry.”

Mummy cries. He sits there and watches, tears dripping down her chin and voice barely audible through the tremors that shake her entire body. This is all his fault, so why is she apologising? Why is she saying she's sorry?

He's caused her enough pain. Is she sad because Ferid's gone? Does she blame him for that?

She does. She does. She's sorry because you've ruined everything. She's sorry because everything's fallen apart and nothing will ever be okay. Ferid's gone, but you're still alone. Mummy will never look at you the same again. Everything's fallen apart. It's your fault. It's all your fault.

Every sob that his mother lets out feels like a knife sliding through his skin.

This is all his fault.

Yuu-chan being in hospital. His mother crying. Everything is his fault.

He can't breathe. He wishes his mother would leave. He wishes she would just leave and forget about him because she deserves to be happy. She doesn't need someone like him. She should just leave.

Once his mother's sobs subside, Mika's suddenly aware that she's staring back at him.
This is his mother, he thinks. But she feels like a stranger.

She sits on the edge of his bed, hand inching towards his. It stops before they meet, surrounded by ripples of cloth and a world away from Mika.

Does she not want to touch him?

Is she disgusted?

He wouldn't blame her if she was.

She takes another deep breath, one that Mika counts how many seconds it lasts.

“You're not alone anymore. I'm right here,” she says.

Each word drops in. It stains over his doubts, rushing in and out of his thoughts like the speeding cars beyond the hospital window. He can't bring himself to believe—but he clings onto them, waits for his mother to talk again.

Her hand reaches for him. This time, it doesn't stop. This time, she entwines their fingers together and Mika's surprised at how warm it makes him feel.

“I wasn't there for you but I'm here now. I'm not going to leave.”

She squeezes his hand.

Mika feels his eyes stinging with tears he doesn't realise he's letting out. He can't think, doesn't know what to think.

All attempts are abandoned once his mother tugs on his hand and wraps him in a tight embrace. Mika jolts, his first instinct to push her away, but she buries his face into his shoulder and he's drowned in her scent of roses.

“I-I love you, you know,” she says, and her voice quivers more than the arms around him. “I'm so sorry, Mika. I'm sorry I wasn't there for you. I'm sorry you had to go through all that by yourself.”

She pulls back to look at him straight in the face. Her eyes are puffy and swollen, streaming with tears and black mascara.

And for once, Mika ignores how the colour of them reminds him of Ferid's eyes. He stays still, unflinching even when his mother wipes away his own tears and sweeps his hair back. He wants to say something, he wants to tell her that it's okay, that she should stop apologising because he doesn't blame her—none of this is her fault.

The lump in his throat refuses to go away.

All Mika can do is nod. He nods and ducks his head under mummy's chin, shoving aside his anxiety and instead breathing in the scent of roses. Forget about being afraid. Remember when mummy used to hug him like this and he'd always, always breathe in her perfume. It's still the same, it's still here.

And maybe he should believe that mummy's still the same and she's still here too. She's not leaving. Maybe he should believe in that.

He closes his eyes and lets his mother stroke his hair, pressing a soft kiss on his forehead with a sigh he almost doesn't hear.
When she tightens her arms around him, he notices she's shaking too. He swallows the lump in his throat, allowing himself to wrap his own arms around her waist—push aside the fear, push it aside and remember that this is his mother and she has never hurt him, *she'll never hurt him*.

He breathes in. Breathes out.

This is his mother. She doesn't hate him. He doesn't hate her.

“Everything's going to be okay,” she says, still running her fingers through his hair. “I'm here. I'm not leaving you.”

Mika nods. He wants to believe it, he really does, but he's scared and shaking and part of him wonders if she'll take these words back.

It's as if she senses his doubts. Mummy loosens her embrace, tilting her head down to search his face. Her hands hold his cheeks, warm palms against his cold tears.

“I love you,” she tells him. “We'll be okay.”

Her eyes are nothing like Ferid's. Red, yes, but Mika notices now that hers are warm and soft, like the roses she wears as a perfume, that summer's day when they first moved into Japan and she promised they would have a nice life here.

“This place might seem scary at first, Mika, but it'll be okay. You'll love it here in Japan, trust me. Much, much more than Britain,” she says, tugging at his hand and pointing excitedly at Sakura trees in the distance. “See? They're pretty, aren't they?”

Mika nods, eyes wide with wonder and heart thumping at the thought of living in such a place. He squeezes mummy's hand and grins at her, laughing because her hair is as pink as the trees.

“I'm not scared!” he says, bouncing on his feet.

Mummy's lips stretch into a gentle smile that makes her look really pretty. Against the sunset that paints the sky with soft orange and pink, she's the prettiest girl Mika's ever seen.

He's lucky to have her as his mother.

“That's good,” she beams. “There's no reason to be scared. I promise we'll have a better life here, I'll make sure of it. We'll be okay.”

He nods again, this time dragging his mother down the path so they can see the trees up close. She skips along his side, giggling when he almost trips over a rock.

Mika wipes his tears away. That was when they first moved into this country... That was two years ago, straight after his mother said they needed a new beginning. They didn't need Mika's father, not when he abandoned them and broke his mother's heart. They didn't need anyone.

Two years seem like a lifetime ago.

*We'll be okay.*

Mika nods. The sky outside is grey and there are no Sakura trees in the distance; just speeding cars and traffic, yet he looks into his mother's red eyes and nods, telling himself to believe in her.

“I love you too,” he says, hardly louder than a whisper, but he means it.
Mummy's smile is as pretty as he remembers it.

As soon as Guren returns, Shinya notes the heaviness in his steps. He's got his gaze fixed on the floor, dark hair hanging over his eyes and his hands shoved into his pockets.

*That can't be good.*

Shinya only hopes that nothing bad has happened to Yuu. The poor boy's just twelve years old.

Guren sits down beside him with a groan, stretching out his legs and giving no regards to the people having to walk past them in this corridor. *So typical,* Shinya thinks, although remains silent as Guren has enough on his mind without someone nagging him about his manners of all things.

Two minutes pass before Shinya concludes that Guren's not going to start a conversation.

Coughing, he turns to the silent man.

“How is Yuu-kun?” he asks.

The way Guren's eyes narrow at his question tells Shinya that the answer won't be pleasant.

Guren sighs and massages the temple of his forehead with one hand. Shinya's seen him stressed before; it comes with his job as a businessman, of course, but he's never been *this* stressed. Usually, Guren would merely snap and glare at anyone if ever he was in such a mood.

Now, he just looks worn out.

“He's not waking up or responding to anything. The doctors are worried there's a chance he won't wake up for a while—or if ever.”

Oh. Oh *shit.*

He heard that Yuu was pushed down the stairs, but he never imagined it was *that* bad.

“What, like a coma?”

Guren clenches his jaw.

“Hmm.”

Shinya doesn't press for an answer. He knows how much Guren complains about the kid; in fact, he's lost count of the amount of texts Guren's dedicated to violently cursing Yuu's existence. Regardless, Shinya's not blind. It's obvious Guren cares for the kid—he always has. He cared when Yuu ran away, enough to ask others for help even though it probably took a battering of his self-pride.

Guren hides behind a wall of stoic emotions, usually anger tinged with violence, but he's not heartless. Far from it, actually.

He just tries not to show it.
“He’ll be alright,” Shinya reassures. He lays a hand on Guren's shoulder, feels it tense under his palm. “I'm sure he'll wake up soon and you'll be complaining about him by next week.”

At least that makes Guren smirk. He shakes his head, the smile on his face short lived, although his eyes soften once he finally looks up at Shinya.

At least there's that.

“I hope you're right,” he says. “The house is going to be empty without him there.”

“You can stay with me in my flat.”

Shinya pauses.

“I mean I'm here for you. If you don't want to be alone,” he adds for safe measure.

Now’s not the time to be flirting with Guren. Sure, he wouldn't mind having him stay over in his flat but this is the worst moment to be advancing their relationship. Not when Krul and Mika's life have fallen apart and Yuu's in a coma.

Luckily, Guren smiles. It's small and barely a smile, but he's trying.

“I'd like that. Thank you, Shinya.”

Shinya smiles back. “No problem.”

They don't say anything for a while. People walk past them, either in a rush or simply ambling through with a casualness that Shinya now envies. He can't say he's been in a hospital enough to get used to the variety of people here. It's times like this that you realise how little you are, how there's so many other problems out there in the world and you're just not aware of it. You could think that the world is ending for you and your own troubles, but there's someone else out there who's battling something far worse.

He's not sure whether that's a comforting thought or not.

More importantly, he's not sure where he fits in all of this.

“So...” Guren mumbles, “are Mika and Krul going to be okay?”

Shinya taps on the empty seat beside him.

“I don't know,” he admits. “But I know Krul won't give up. She's not the type to give up. She'll make it work.”

Guren hums in response, nodding twice and finally pulling his legs back before someone trips over him.

“What are they going to live now? Didn't that house belong to Ferid?”

He has a good point there. Shinya strongly doubts Krul will want to stay in that house after everything that's happened there. Too many bad memories.

“I don't know either. I think Krul's trying to avoid thinking about that for the time being.”

“Oh.”
This is just small talk, he realises. Guren's talking because he needs something to distract him, fill the silence that now hangs over and reminds them that just a few rooms down, Yuu's in a coma and Mika's recovering from abuse.

“They used to live in Lindsay Flats before Krul met Ferid, you know,” Shinya says, raising his voice and trying not to make it too obvious that he's only forcing conversation. Whether Guren's caught on or not doesn't matter. He nods, looking interested enough. “Maybe they'll move in again.”

Guren gives another empty smile. “Good old Lindsay.”

The chuckle that Shinya lets out feels wrong in this place.

“Haha, I know you hate Lindsay.”

He leans back on his seat, clasping his hands together.

“I've only known Krul for a little over than a year. I think she was new to Japan when I moved here too. I remember her telling me she lived in Britain for a while—Mika's half British, did you know?”

Guren raises an eyebrow. “Ah, is he? I guess he kinda looks European.”

_Blond hair, blue eyes. Of course he does._

“Yeah, his real dad's British. That also explains why he calls Krul his 'mummy' or all that British... stuff.”

He's not sure why he's saying all this. This hardly constitutes an exciting conversation, let alone one enough to distract them from the grim events of today.

“What about you?” Guren asks. “I've never heard anything about your family.”

As soon as he mentions that, Shinya stiffens.

His family, huh?

He wonders what that is.

His first answer would be the Hiiragis, followed by a scoff and painful memories proving exactly the opposite of that. He remembers them now. Kureto and Seishiro, both looking down at him with crimson eyes. Mahiru with her mocking grins and big dreams. Shinoa, sneaking into his room and patting down his injuries. His father—no, _Tenri_—hating his entire existence. His mother, hating him even more.

Shinya laughs.

“Oh, they're hardly interesting,” he waves it off. “Anyway, I'm hungry. I'm going to head down and find something to eat. Do you want anything?”

He doesn't miss the way Guren frowns at him.

“Hmm...” Guren sighs, shaking his head to himself. “I guess I can use some coffee.”

Shinya tries to ignore the disappointment in Guren's tone.

“I'll be right back.”
He leaves, feeling guilty for lying and even guiltier because here is Guren, baring all his problems and insecurities to him for once.

And here is Shinya, hiding behind empty lies and excuses ever since they met each other.

His footsteps are heavy as he rushes downstairs.

One week later and Yuu-chan still hasn't moved a muscle. Mika waits by his side, resting his head on his arms and listens to the slow beeping of Yuu-chan's life machine. It's comforting in a way. It stops him from being completely left alone in silence and it reminds him that his best friend is still here. He's going to wake up.

He has to.

Mika raises his head. Just looking at Yuu-chan like this makes his chest ache. He doesn't like seeing him strapped up to all these machines, all pale and... unmoving.

He nearly uses the word 'dead'.

No. He can't use that word. Yuu-chan will wake up. Yuu-chan will wake up and Mika will thank him for saving him from Ferid and everything is going to be okay.

It has to be.

Mika reaches for Yuu-chan's hand, grasping it tightly and never wanting to let go.

It's cold.

"Wake up for me, Yuu-chan," he murmurs, squeezing his palm. "Please."

He doesn't respond. He never responds. The only thing that answers Mika is the beep, beep, beep of the life-machine, never faltering, never changing.

Mika keeps his hold on Yuu's hand.

A week. It's been a week. He still can't walk properly, but the doctors have placed his leg in a cast and given him a wheelchair in order to move around. It could be worse.

He just wants Yuu-chan to wake up.

Mika gazes out of the window, takes in the clear, blue skies and lack of clouds. A nice day for once. Finally, the bad weather seems to be going away; he's almost tempted to hope it's a sign of better things to come. Maybe he's that desperate.

Still, there are some things that never change. There's still traffic, filled with angry drivers rushing to get to work or school or whatever.

It all looks so normal, so mundane. He wonders if he'll ever fall back into that routine of waking up, going to school, seeing his friends. That's it. Completely normal. Nothing bad. Nothing exciting.

He misses normality.
Mummy says they'll be moving back to Lindsay Flats until she can afford a better house for them. Honestly, Mika will take those flats over Ferid's house any day.

He shuffles in his wheelchair. Perhaps he should leave and give Yuu-chan some peace. He's getting hungry anyway.

Mika lets go of Yuu's hand, muttering a soft goodbye before grasping the wheels of his—

He frowns. Huh?

There's a man standing out there in the street, amidst the speeding cars and rushing crowds. He's not moving. Just... staring. Up. At him.

And he's not looking away.

A shiver runs up Mika's spine. He's never seen this man before... He's tall, very tall—even taller than Shinya or Guren-san. From this distance, Mika can make out short black hair and... no, he can't see his eyes. Maybe brown? Or... red? Amber?

He's still staring.

There's no one else in the room. He has to be looking at Mika.

The door clicks open.

Mika jumps so fast that he almost topples out of his wheelchair. He spins around, shuddering in relief when all he sees is Shinya peeking his head into the room.

“There you are, Mika,” he says, walking in. “Your mother's been looking for you.”

Shakily, Mika nods.

“O-Okay, I'll go to her now. T-Thanks.”

Shinya tilts his head. “Is there something wrong? You look tense.”

He can't help it. Mika returns his gaze at the window.

The man's gone.

He's gone.

He was just there a minute ago! Right on that spot by the lamppost! Mika tries to find him amongst the crowds, wondering if he finally walked away or maybe he entered the hospital or crossed the road...

But he's gone.

Mika looks back at Shinya.

“It's nothing,” he forces out. “Don't worry, it's nothing.”
For extra pain, listen to 'Speeding Cars' by Imogen Heap after reading this chapter...

This chapter was just emotionally draining to write. 7k words of angst and more angst. I don't really know what else to say apart from that and that I need to write some fluff for Saving You to recover from all this.

Buuut anyway, Mika's arc is finished so next we'll be focusing on gureshin and Shinya's past. More Angst. GDI. Mika and Yuu will still be in the story btw. You'll get to see the aftermath of this arc and how each character copes with all that.

Thank you for all the support and comments so far! All of you give me such nice messages and here I am repaying you all with heavy angst. I'm sorry...
Easy Lies

Chapter Notes

I'm dedicating this chapter to Caitlin for making the YuuNugget meme come true. I'm not sure whether to thank or fear you.....

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Mika's not sure how many days have passed. Days, weeks, months—they're all the same to him now. Everything feels like forever when Yuu-chan still hasn't moved an inch from that hospital bed.

It's been long enough that the doctors have allowed Mika to go home, promising him that—give or take a couple of weeks—he'll be able to walk normally again in no time.

In no time.

They say it like it's no big deal. In no time. He'll be able to recover in no time. He can go back to school in no time. Mummy and him will settle back into their flat in no time. Ferid will get what's coming to him in no time.

He's not sure if they're just referring to his leg because if so, then... yes, maybe he can believe that. Just that though—not that he cares too much about whether it's true or not. His leg's the least of his worries; he could be unable to walk for the rest of his life and Mika probably won't even bat an eyelid.

But as for the other things...

Mika sighs. He pushes back memories of Ferid and forces himself to focus on... something. Anything.

His eyes trail around the hospital room, desperately seeking for something exciting enough to distract him. Granted, 'exciting' and 'hospital room' aren't really things that merge and Mika's left staring at all the blank space in turmoil. He sighs for the umpteenth time and twiddles his thumbs together. You'd think they'd have colourful walls and toys around for kids, but nope...

Then again, if Yuu-chan woke up to a rainbow coloured room littered with toys, he'd probably throw a tantrum about being treated like a baby. Only Yuu-chan will prove his status of maturity by throwing a tantrum, after all.

Not that Mika minds. If anything, he's urging Yuu-chan to wake up and start a fight with the nearest person he sees. Mika's missed that. Mika's missed him.

He looks at his best friend, narrowing his eyes at the slumbering figure. His hand is still cold and limp as ever—but that's no matter because Mika always makes sure that his own hand is warm enough for the both of them. He likes to think that Yuu-chan has nice dreams whilst he's like this.

He likes to think that Yuu-chan isn't suffering anymore.

How long does it take for people to wake up from comas anyway? Mika searched it up on Wikipedia yesterday but all it did as make him worry because of the chance that it might take years for Yuu-
Mika's not sure how he'll react to that. So he tries not to think about it. He tries really hard.

There's only so little he can do in this room. He looks at his watch and frowns at how much time has passed. Visiting hours are nearly over and he'll have to leave Yuu-chan again...

Mika hates leaving him. He knows he shouldn't get his hopes up with every visit he has because it only upsets him in the end, but he can't help wish that his best friend would wake up already. Every day, Mika visits Yuu as soon as visiting hours start. Every day, Mika holds his hand and waits for something, *anything* to happen.

And every day, Mika leaves with tears blurring his vision as he makes his way back home. He takes a deep breath. He should do that. Leave.

Reluctantly, Mika lets go of Yuu's hand and ignores his brain telling him to stay, that maybe if he stayed a couple more minutes then a miracle will happen. He can't do that. He needs to go back home to mummy. He needs to eat dinner with her and pretend to smile because they're both hurting and it's not fair that he's dragging her down with him. It's not fair that he's relying his entire happiness on the possibility of Yuu waking up or not. It's not fair. None of this is *fair*. They're kids, barely grasping onto the last year before they turn into teenagers—and then what? They move on?

*Why* does everyone say that like it's easy? They're only kids and Mika's sick and tired of feeling like he's been thrown into an adult's world.

Being an adult, Mika thinks, seems terrifying.

He grits his teeth and grasps the wheels of his wheelchair before he ends up having a breakdown here of all places.

One last time, he looks at Yuu, takes in his peaceful slumber, and turns back around. He really needs to leave.

But wait.

He freezes on the spot. He loosens his grip on his wheelchair. He stops breathing. He listens.

No. He’s imagining things. He’s getting his hopes up again and he *hates* himself for doing this every time he has to leave—he *needs* to go—

There's a rustling of sheets.

No.

Mika tells himself that it's just Yuu-chan breathing. He's sleeping. He's not going to wake up today.

That doesn't stop him from turning around. The hope's there, that stupid smile creeping up on his face and he knows it'll crumble all too soon because there's no way Yuu-chan will wake up now of all times, there's no chance that life is granting him happiness for once, *there's no chance*.

(Last week, they went to church for the first time in years. The priest smiled, welcomed them like
they were regulars, said they were welcome in the house of God and all that.

Mummy prayed. Mika didn't even know she was religious.

Maybe it was boredom, maybe it was the large statue of Jesus staring down, judging him for standing there like a complete idiot, maybe it was desperation, maybe it was the thought of Yuu-chan all alone in that hospital with no one to hold his hand.

Mika didn't know, but he spared a moment and prayed for Yuu.

Maybe it worked.)

It's like the clock's ticking away ten seconds at a time. He gasps, seeing a frown so minuscule, so missable, on Yuu's face.

His hands are shaking.

He's *moving*.

Mika grabs him, squeezing his hand and leaning closer. He can't be imagining this.

“Y-Yuu-chan?” Mika calls out, half-tempted to scream for one of the doctors but also too scared to take his eyes off Yuu for a moment.

Yuu doesn't move.

Panic settles into him. What if he just imagined it? What if Yuu still won't wake up? What if he has to visit tomorrow and watch him sleep for another day, another week, another *month*? Days and days of Yuu not listening to his pathetic attempts of conversation, his silent responses making Mika cry more than anything else in the world.

*(I went to therapy today, Yuu-chan. That's what mummy calls it anyway—I don't know. It's weird. The guy wants me to talk but I don't want to talk—I just want to talk to you.)*

His bottom lip trembles and he lets go of Yuu's hand to softly shake his shoulder. Perhaps not the best thing to do to someone in a coma but Mika's desperate and he refuses to leave this room until Yuu-chan wakes up, *damn it*.

He shakes Yuu again.

And again.

And again—

Yuu groans, eyelids fluttering to reveal those green eyes that Mika didn't think he'd ever see again and—

“Ugh... Go... away...” Yuu mumbles, weakly swatting Mika's hand and closing his eyes again.

Mika blinks. He stares at Yuu settling himself back to sleep as if he's only been for a nap and not passed out for three weeks.

It's ridiculous. It's so silly and so *typical* of Yuu-chan that Mika bursts out laughing. He laughs and shakes Yuu again, pretty sure that this isn't really something you should be doing to a recently comatose patient but he's too relieved and just so *happy* to be hearing Yuu's voice. There's tears already blurring his vision but he wipes them away with his sleeve and tries as hard as he can to pull
himself up from his wheelchair.

“Yuu-chan! Yuu-chan, wake up!” Mika says—begs, more like.

Yuu groans for the second time, his eyes finally blinking open. Green—too green—Mika's forgotten how bright they are and it's this precise moment that he thinks he must have held his breath and let his brain blank over at how... how happy he is.

He sniffs, shoulders shaking and giggles practically merging with his tears.

“Welcome back, Yuu-chan,” Mika says, clutches Yuu's hand and cries even harder.

One thing that Shinya's noticed whilst Guren's been staying in his flat is that the businessman likes his coffee.

Alright, that's an understatement. Considering that he's standing in front of the sink and there's a whole line of unwashed, coffee-stained mugs left by none other than Guren then it's safe to say that someone has an unhealthy addiction to the stuff.

Shinya rolls his eyes, gathering all the mugs and shoving them into the sink. He thought Guren was the type of person to be clean and neat, but with all the chaos of Yuu finally waking up and having to deal with his own business, it seems that cleaning the dishes was the last thing on his mind.

Washing up, Shinya understands, isn't the most exciting thing to do in the world—but fucking hell, he's running out of mugs to use in this house.

Guren even used his minion mug. That's Shinya's favourite mug for crying out loud.

The artist pauses, looking at the thirty or so mugs in the sink. They all looked so... sad just waiting to be cleaned—and yes, mugs lack the importance of proper emotion but Shinya feels that at this specific moment in time, he can empathise with them.

And then he realises he's getting emotional over some washing up. Damn, it's too early in the morning for this.

“Guren?” Shinya calls, raising his voice and waiting for an answer. He waits about ten seconds until groaning to himself and stomping back to his room. Guren, in all his fine grace and beauty, is sprawling all over the bed, snoring like an engine and hugging a pillow close to his chest.

If he was the sweet and caring man that he obviously was (on most days), Shinya would have smiled and left him to rest. But no. Not today. Not when his minion mug is covered in dried coffee and left in the sink to rot until god knows when.

Shinya grabs onto the blanket Guren's currently twisted his legs around and yanks it as hard as he can. He expected the man to go flying like in those cartoons where the sleeping person hurtles across the room—man, that would have been hilarious. What he didn't expect was that Guren has the strength of a fucking vice as he held onto the blanket even in his sleep.

Refusing to give up his pride in his physical strength, Shinya tugs on the blanket several more times. Ten minutes later, Guren still hasn't moved an inch and Shinya is panting like he'd just ran a
marathon.

“Oh my god,” he mutters to himself, finally dropping the blanket and glaring at Guren in defeat. “This is ridiculous.”

Of course, like any sensible adult, Shinya concludes that the only way to wake up Guren is to slap him across the face.

“What the—**FUCKING HELL, SHINYA!**” Guren lurches up from the bed, his eyes switching from groggy to murderous in an impressive record of two seconds. Usually, it takes Guren five before he starts screaming. Ten seconds if he tries to resort to violence.

It's a very endearing relationship, Shinya thinks.

He dodges the punch that Guren sends flying towards his face. He can't help but laugh, now able to yank on the blanket and successfully take it away from the very pissed off businessman.

“As the wonderful and handsome man that I am, I thought I should wake you up in the most romantic way possible,” Shinya teases, taking pleasure at the sight of Guren rolling his eyes. He can faintly hear Guren muttering something about his ego and how much of an idiot he is, but Shinya decides that those small details don't matter. He merely plops himself down on the bed and smiles ever so sweetly. Angelic, lovely, radiating; Shinya resonates a glow that Guren dissolves with a growl.

“Get the fuck out,” Guren grumbles. He rubs his eyes and gives out a massive yawn, resembling a bit like a lion especially with his hair all over the place. “Seeing your face first thing in the morning is hurting my eyes.”

*How lovely,* Shinya thinks, *how flattering.* Coming from Guren, he supposes he should be thankful that he was courteous enough to look at him instead of spit on his face. You see, with Guren, you have to look at the bright side of things.

“But this is my room,” Shinya reminds him. “This is my flat.”

“And your presence is pissing me off, so fuck off.”

Okay, he'll give that to him. That was pretty good. Shinya chuckles under his breath and stands up, still laughing when he leaves the room. Guren's not really known for his words of adoration, so it's fair to say that Shinya's gotten used to his constant insults and death threats. It's his way of showing his appreciation for people. That's all.

He looks down at his watch. Oh shit, is that the time already?

“Guren, visiting hours start in fifteen minutes. Hurry up so we can see Yuu-kun!”

Guren gives him a distant grunt from the bedroom, followed by sounds of him tripping over something.

Shinya shakes his head to himself as he returns to the kitchen. For now, he'll leave the washing up to do when he gets back. Or he can make Guren do it. Honestly, it's not fair that Guren's such a clean freak in his mansion but as soon as he steps into Shinya's flat, he wrecks the place.

“It's already a mess anyway,” Guren said one night. “Doesn't make a difference.”

Shinya kicked him in the shin for that comment and Guren shut up afterwards.
Just to make sure that Guren isn't completely in a murderous mood today, Shinya gets his flask and makes some coffee to pour into it. Guren will thank him later—especially when they're stuck in traffic in the middle of this weather.

Not that the weather is bad, mind you. Shinya looks out the window and smiles at bright, blue skies, the lovely sun about to blind him if he keeps gazing at it, and the bustle of people walking around the streets. It's a nice day, perfectly warm—but not too warm because Shinya kinda hates it when it's summer and it's boiling. Sweating isn't fun.

Anyway, he's getting sidetracked. Fact is, no matter what the weather, Guren is usually in a bad mood during the morning. Or the evening. Sometimes, he's in a decent mood halfway through the day but that's usually only possible with a cup of coffee or if Shinya trips over and lands right on his butt. (He did that yesterday. Tripped over a phone charger and went flying. Guren laughed for five minutes straight. The asshole.)

Speaking of the devil, Guren finally stumbles out of the room, dressed in jeans, white t-shirt and a burgundy blazer. Shinya tries his utmost best not to oggle him but he fails somewhere along the line because... well, it's Guren and Guren always looks good.

"Here you go." Shinya hands him the flask, offering the sweetest smile known to man. "Coffee to wake you up. You're welcome."

Guren stares at it for a while, as if his brain is still processing what certain items are. It takes him ten whole seconds until he finally grabs the flask and drinks from it, apparently not caring whether it burns his tongue or not.

"Thanks," he says, standing up straighter. "Alright, let's go."

And with that, Guren Ichinose is awake and Shinya laughs, following the businessman as they head for his car.

"Are we going to get Yuu-kun anything?" Shinya asks when Guren starts the engine. "Last time, he asked for nuggets—"

Guren interrupts him with a groan, hands clenching around the steering wheel and looking like he's tempted to run over the car in front of him.

"We are not getting him any fucking nuggets," he hisses. "This nugget thing is out of control. It needs to end."

He makes it sound like it's the dawn of the apocalypse. Shinya hides his smirk with a cough, but it sounds like he's choking instead. Nevertheless, he decides to steer the topic away from nuggets. Perhaps that's too much of a sensitive subject.

"But isn't it nice that he's making a swift recovery? The doctor says he might be able to come back home next week if things carry on the way they are."

"Yeah, you're right. Even I'm surprised."

Shinya's glad that Yuu-kun is recovering; they were all worried about him when he wouldn't wake up even after three weeks... Still, he can't deny the slight disappointment in his gut knowing that Guren won't be staying over in his flat anymore. It's been pretty nice having him over.

Is that selfish of him to say that? Here was Guren worried sick over his nephew and Shinya was too busy swooning.
Well, not *too* busy. He has to give himself some credit, at least. He's been worried about Yuu-kun too—everyone has.

It's hard to explain. Feelings are weird. It's been a while since he's actually cared about a person like this—or at least in a romantic sense. He cares about people, it's in his nature to *care*, yet he can't deny the fact that everyone he's ever cared about has suffered one way or another.

He looks at Guren from the corner of his eyes and prays that, for once in his sad life, he'll be able to stay with him.

*Aaaand* his thoughts have taken a depressing turn. Shinya should have thought about the nuggets instead.

In need of some form of distraction, Shinya turns on the radio. Guren's phone is connected to it; he usually has good music taste so that should do—

The car is filled with One Direction's chorus of *Drag Me Down* and Guren almost crashes the car to their deaths as he swerves the corner at the sudden music.

They continue driving. Shinya's listening to Harry Styles singing about feeling like the shell of a man he used to be and to be honest, this is some pretty deep stuff coming from this band.

“One Direction, huh?” he comments, voice completely serious. “Didn't know you were into them.”

“S-Shut up,” Guren grunts. Shinya doesn't miss the stutter in his voice. *Cute.*

“Yuu kept replaying it one day, okay? It's one of those songs you can't get out of your head—”

“*Oooh,* you have their new album in this—”

“*I SAID SHUT UP!*”

It's impossible to stop himself when Guren snaps like that. Shinya throws his head back and lets out a laugh that probably half the entire road can hear. He clutches his stomach, not sure why it's so hilarious, but it's *Guren* anyway so that's enough of a reason.

“Shinya, I will fucking throw you out of the car, I swear to god,” Guren warns, glaring at him from the corner of his eyes.

Shinya doesn't say anything else. Knowing Guren, he would actually go along with his threat and do just that. As much as he likes poking fun at the businessman, Shinya's not ready to be chucked out of a moving vehicle at this time, funnily enough.

Regardless, he turns up the volume of the radio and sings along to the lyrics of *Drag Me Down*, ignoring Guren as he groans about how his life sucks for being stuck in traffic with this.

“I'm bored,” Yuu says for the seventh time in under one minute.

Bored is an understatement. He's been awake for, what, a week? Under a week? Even so, in that short space of time, Yuu has been nothing but *bored*. There wasn't anything fun to do in hospitals and it didn't help that Mika couldn't stay with him all the time.
What was the point of visiting hours anyway? It's not like he has anything better to do. He'd rather have someone stay with him whilst he was stuck in bed like this.

Not literally stuck though. The nurses got rid of those weird things they injected into him and he's not connected to that freaky looking machine anymore—thank god. He felt a bit like a robot—and no, it wasn't even a cool type of robot. It was just scary.

"Shinya said he was on his way with your uncle," Mika reassures him. "They should be here any moment now—"

"But I want to do something fun. I'm bored of staying here in this room!"

"The doctor said you can leave next week..."

Yuu pouts, folding his arms like the mature child that he is. "Yeah, but that's next week. That's ages away!"

As usual, Mika looks like he's going to argue, perhaps try to convince him to stay here but there's nothing he can say that will convince Yuu otherwise. Not today, not when he's been bored out of his mind to the point where he actually started doing some of the homework Guren brought him back from school.

With that resolve, Yuu swings his legs over the bed and stands up.

"Yuu-chan!" Mika jerks in his wheelchair so fast that Yuu's convinced he almost toppled over. "Get back in bed! The doctor said you can't—"

Yuu disregards him with a wave of his hand. Fuck what the doctor is saying; he feels completely fine! He doesn't need to stay in that stiff ass bed anymore, he wants to walk around and explore the hospital!

"Come on, Mika!" Yuu says, skipping around to grab hold of Mika's wheelchair. "Let's go have some fun with this bad boy."

"Bad boy?" Mika's voice squawks a bit higher than usual. "Y-Yuu-chan, no—my wheelchair isn't something to play with—"

Too late. Yuu's started running, barging out of the room like he's on some sort of escape mission to kidnap a princess (or in this case, it's Mika—but hey, close enough). He hears a few nurses shrieking at them, their reactions far too slow as Yuu runs like he's never ran before.

"Yuu-chan, ARE YOU INSANE?" Mika screams at the top of his lungs, trying to crane his neck to glare at him but it's not long until he turns back around, covering his eyes and giving out a tiny squeak of fear.

Of course, Yuu doesn't listen to him. He rounds a corner, whooping as loud as he can when he jumps onto the back of Mika's wheelchair and swerves along with it. This is the most fun he's had ever since he woke up and he's tempted to kindly ask Mika if he could borrow his wheelchair for a bit. Damn. Yuu wants a go on it...

They passed by countless people looking nothing less than confused. Yuu doesn't stop nor slow down. Thankfully, Mika's stopped screaming his little lungs off and has opted to hold onto the wheelchair like his life depends on it.

Yuu laughs, yelling out in victory as they finally escape out into the open. Or the car park—but small
victories are victories nonetheless. There's no way he's going to risk running out of the hospital grounds. Guren would probably flip and run him over with his car if he found out Yuu tried to escape from the hospital. Or throw away all his nuggets again. He's not sure which is worse.

"This is insane!" Mika yells again, kicking his legs like it's gonna help stop Yuu at all. That was a pretty bad decision anyway because soon afterwards, Mika whines out in pain because he accidentally moved his bad leg. The idiot.

Yuu pauses to make sure he's okay—which he is because Mika's glaring at him like normal. No problem there.

"We're going to get in trouble for this! You're not even meant to be out of bed—"

Deciding that Mika's talked enough for now, Yuu dashes off with his wheelchair and ignores his friend's scream of horror. He looks ahead of them and sees the reason why Mika's freaking out.

Oh. There's slope that goes down.

Yuu just grins and runs faster.

He hops onto the back of Mika's wheelchair, holding on tight as they speed down the slope. It's not even a massive slope but Mika's screaming like they're going to catapult off the face of the world. The warm air whips around them and Yuu's grin is so wide it hurts because, hey, this isn't so bad, this is pretty fun. He makes sure to jump off the wheelchair as soon as they reach the end, stopping them in time before they crash into some car.

That would hurt. A lot.

He half expects Mika to start screaming at him for doing that. The other half being that Mika will miraculously rise from his wheelchair to whack him across the head himself.

Amazingly, neither of that happens. Instead, Mika bursts out into laughter, clutching his stomach and throwing his head back. He's so loud that it actually echoes across the car park and it's safe to say that Yuu's very confused. One minute, Mika's being a goody two shoes and the next, he's laughing like a maniac.

Okay.

Frowning, Yuu heads over in front of him, kneeling down to look at his friend straight in the face.

"Yo, are you okay—"

Before he knows it, Mika's pulling him into a tight hug and—wait what? Is he crying into his shoulder? What the fuck? Was it that bad? Maybe Yuu should have stayed in bed if it's going to upset Mika so much then...

He awkwardly pats Mika on the back, not knowing what else to do apart from wait for him to explain what the hell is going on.

“I'm so glad Yuu-chan is awake,” Mika says, sniffing. Part of Yuu is tempted to go ewww because Mika might be getting snot on him, but then he remembers he's wearing this flimsy hospital gown and he doesn't give a shit if it gets dirty.

“You already cried over this when I woke up, didn't you?” Yuu nervously laughs, patting down Mika's fluffy hair.
Mika sniffs again, nodding slightly before tightening his embrace around Yuu.

“I-I'm just really thankful... I'm so happy...”

Yuu's about to make another joke to lighten the mood; he's not very good at moments like this where someone is crying—especially if it's Mika because Mika's done a lot of crying in the past and all Yuu wants is for him to be happy.

And then it sinks into him what Mika just said.

_I'm so happy..._

Yuu's eyes soften. He's glad Mika can finally say that. He's glad that after everything Mika went through, he can say that with a smile on his face and actually _mean_ it.

So, Yuu shuts up and doesn't make any more jokes. He hugs Mika back, burying his face into his shoulder and lets out a few tears of his own.

It's a cute moment, one that Yuu thinks could probably be included into a really sappy movie where the main characters get their happy ending after hours of torture and angst. It's the ending that everyone deserves, the ending that pans off into a black screen with the words **THE END** or **FIN** (Yuu hates that 'fin' because it reminds him of fish, not happy endings). He'd be happy to hug Mika here all day and just bask in how peaceful and _normal_ everything is—but no. Of course, something ruins that.

Or rather, someone.

Someone like his good for nothing uncle.

“Yuu? The fuck are you doing outside?” Guren demands, launching himself out of his car and slamming the door close. He stomps over to their direction and Yuu tries to quell in the urge to make a run for it.

“I'm hugging Mika, leave us alone,” Yuu grumbles, rolling his eyes before pulling away from his best friend's warmth.

“You're not even meant to be out of your bed yet,” Guren says, mirroring Yuu's tone like typical father and son and grabbing him not so gently by the arm.

Yuu yells out every expletive he can think of from his tiny twelve year old brain, albeit it does little to actually prevent Guren from dragging him back to the hospital. He does, however, manage to land a really good kick on Guren's right shin and the look of pain on his face is enough to satisfy Yuu. For now.

Once he's subjected back to the prison that is his room, Yuu flops onto his bed with the longest and loudest groan he can muster. He's lost this battle but fuck that because he's not going down without a fight. He'll complain about this until Guren gets pissed off and leaves if he has to.

“Can you quit that?” Guren snaps, settling himself on one of the chairs besides Yuu's bed. “The doctor said you can come back next week so just _be patient_.”

“Easy for you to say. You haven't been bored out of your mind in this room!”

“No, I've been bored out of my mind in Shinya's flat—”
“Hey!” Shinya pretends to be offended, but it's easy to tell the amusement on his face.

Yuu's tempted to gag. He's convinced there's something going on between Shinya and his uncle, although he's not exactly curious enough to go ahead and ask them. That's grown up matters anyway... Besides, Yuu still has flashbacks to him and Guren kissing on the sofa. It's enough to scar him for life, thank you very much.

“Anyway, Mika's been visiting you everyday. Isn't that enough for you?” Guren asks. He sends a smirk towards Mika's direction, who's suddenly sat up straighter on his wheelchair and started blushing.

For some reason, Yuu blushes too—or not because there's no reason to blush at all. Maybe it's just hot in this room. These hospitals are so stuffy, as well as boring that he's sweating out of his mind. It's only natural he would get red in the face too. He's not blushing. It's just hot.

“Y-Yeah, but... that doesn't mean I don't want to leave this place...” Yuu mumbles, looking away to fiddle with his thumbs. He can feel everyone's eyes on him and it only makes his face heat up even more.

Just as he's planning on sulking even more, Guren leans over and ruffles his hair so hard that Yuu thinks he can hear his brain shaking. He yelps, trying to swat him away as well as punch him in the face. In the background, he can hear Mika laughing and Shinya cooing at how adorable they were.

Yuu feels like punching them too.

Once Guren's stopped pissing him off, Yuu buries himself back down into his blankets with an angry pout and folds his arms in typical, mature style.

“Heh. If you ask me, you're well enough to go home now seeing as you're being a brat again,” Guren says—but Yuu ignores him. Because he's an asshole.

“Just hang in there, kid,” he goes on and on. “You'll be back ruining my mansion next week.”

Yuu throws him a glare. “Can't wait.”

Everyone laughs. Everyone but Yuu, that is. He refuses to admit that he gets the urge to join in and he would have if he didn’t need to keep up his tough angry kid act.

Regardless, he's glaring at each and every one of them, grumbling under his breath and rolling his eyes like your every day teenager (except he's not a teenager—yet). To anyone, it looks like he's pissed to the moon and back, and even Yuu tries to convince himself that he is.

But he isn't. He supposes that having them all here to smile and laugh is a nice thing... maybe. Just a bit.

Alright, it is.

Yuu pouts even more, making eye contact with Mika who's been watching him all this time.

Damn. Even Mika's smiling.

Just for that, Yuu sighs and allows himself to relax into a small smile of his own. If Mika is happy, then Yuu reckons everything will fall into place soon. That's all he can hope for.
It's amazing how one single trip to the hospital can make him so tired. Shinya practically collapses onto the sofa as soon as they get back to his flat, shaking his jacket off and grabbing his favourite cushion as his way of marking this space as his territory. He sighs, happy to finally lie down on something soft and comfy again. Those hospital chairs aren't very kind on one's ass.

His moment of peace, however, is short-lived.

Guren sits down beside the artist, resting his feet on the coffee table and rips his cushion away from his grasp. The first instinct that Shinya gets is to protect what belongs to him—and so, it's only understandable that the artist sprawls himself all over Guren in an attempt to steal his beloved cushion back.

"Get off me," Guren hisses, although there's something in those purple eyes that tells Shinya he means the exact opposite. He thinks, anyway. Or maybe he's just getting too ahead of himself.

Shinya reckons he can push a few buttons before he'll scoot back to safety. He has trouble reigning in his smile as he leans closer, watching Guren's eyelids slowly droop. The look he gives him almost sends the artist reeling back, clutching his heart and taking a few seconds to calm down. Almost.

Shinya refrains from doing so because as much as Guren makes him feel like that most of the time, he doesn't think the businessman will be pleased with him suddenly swooning like a teenager all over again.

Or maybe he will. Anyone swooning over you will be good for your ego, after all.

He's getting distracted. He's getting distracted and Guren's lips are awfully close and very, very tempting. Gulping, Shinya looks away and makes a grab for the cushion. Okay. Maybe now’s the time to scoot back to safety before things get too far. He's still not one hundred percent sure what their relationship is or how far Guren wants things to go, but he doesn't want to ruin anything by being too eager.

However, he doesn't exactly want to move either.

And neither does Guren by the looks of it.

A century could have passed and both of them wouldn't have noticed. It's like they're waiting for the other to make a move, and in the end Shinya throws all cares out of the window and does a mini YOLO in his head. (Maybe he should thank the internet memes for this little burst of confidence. YOLO does wonders to the human brain.)

He grabs Guren by his shirt and pulls him in.

That's all it takes. Guren moves so fast that Shinya almost yelps out loud. He has to grab onto the sofa to stop himself from falling as Guren all but holds him by his waist and crushes their lips together.

The first thought he gets is that Guren tastes of coffee. And Shinya hates coffee. It's too bitter, too strong for someone who likes sweet things like himself.

On the other hand, it's Guren and Guren somehow makes him reconsider that. He moans, easily parting his lips and letting the businessman explore his mouth. The taste of coffee and something else, something he can only describe as Guren lingers in his tongue and it's enough for the artist to wrap his arms around his neck, eagerly returning the kiss.
There's no rush. They haven't done anything other than kissing—haven't really had the opportunity nor the mood to do so, what with Yuu-kun still in hospital and all that.

Today's a bit different. Today, Guren pushes him down on the sofa, snatches that damn cushion from his grasp and chucks it to the other side of the room. Today, Guren's hands are tugging on his t-shirt, this way and that, but never enough to actually take it off. Today, Shinya gets impatient and clings tighter to him, his hands roaming up and down Guren's chest in the hopes that he'll get the message.

Today, Guren does.

There's a sound that resembles a bit like a growl coming out from Guren's mouth and—oh boy, Shinya's entire body pretty much vibrates just at that alone. He gasps when Guren ducks down, nipping at his throat before he sucks at the skin. All Shinya can think of doing is cling onto his back, feel the ripples of muscle through that t-shirt and wait in anticipation.

Or in his case, worry about where they are. They're on a sofa right now... Not exactly the best place to have sex, but Shinya thinks he might ruin the mood if he makes them shuffle all the way to the bedroom. Maybe he can make Guren chase him there; he's seen that happen in some romantic movies...

Knowing Guren, he'd just get pissed off and knock him out by chucking something at him. Or Shinya will accomplish that himself by tripping over.

Okay. Stay on the sofa it is then. Best preserve his dignity rather than the atmospheric quality of this little session. This sofa is comfy enough anyway—and besides, sex is sex—

Shit. He's not paying attention. Shinya blinks back into reality and focuses on the lips travelling down his collarbone. Guren's a good kisser. A really good kisser. He can definitely get used to this...

Just when he is, in fact, getting used to it, his phone explodes into life and the living room is filled with his ringtone of minions singing about bananas.

The two adults freeze. Nothing kills sexual tension more than a bunch of minions belting out a high note.

Slowly, ever so scarily slow, Guren leans back and scowls at his phone. All Shinya can do is awkwardly reach for it—until Guren grabs him by his wrist and pushes him back down on the sofa.

Shinya blinks, half-dazed and confused.

“Uh, Guren—”

“Ignore it.”

“But the minions—”

“Fuck the minions!”

It's not like he can argue with that. They go back to what they were doing before, fucking the minions and all that—wait, no. Not like that. Shinya doesn't even want to imagine that. Minions are too cute to be tainted with such dirty thoughts; he feels like he needs to repent by watching all of the minion movies in a row to remember their purity now...

He's getting distracted again. Shit. This isn't going well. To be fair, it's hard to focus on Guren kissing your neck when the minions are singing in the background. It's not exactly sexy music to
make out to and Shinya hopes that whoever is calling will hang up because at this rate, he's never going to get hard.

They don't hang up. The minions sing for ages until Guren eventually groans and pulls away. He looks like he's about to smash Shinya's phone against the wall.

Before his phone is obliterated, Shinya shuffles closer to the coffee table and scoops his phone up.

“It's Krul,” he says, frowning to himself.

“Tell her to piss off,” Guren kindly adds. He sits back on the sofa, running a hand through his hair in a way that shouldn't be so hot but it is and damn, Shinya wishes Krul wasn't calling right now.

“I'll be right back,” he says. “We can, uh... continue after this.”

The look Guren gives him is enough to make him laugh, although he decides not to push his luck. He scurries off to his bedroom, accepting the call and already preparing a rant to guilt trip Krul about her unnecessary timing.

“I hope you have a good reason for calling me, Krul, because I swear to god—”

“**Shinya, I saw him.**”

Her voice was serious. Blunt. And it takes Shinya longer than usual to process her words because of how urgent she sounds. He frowns, looking around him to make sure the door is closed and Guren can't hear.

“Him? You saw who?” he whispers, hoping to the heavens that his guess is wrong. He prays, counts down the seconds until Krul replies, listens to his heartbeat pumping faster and faster.

“**Kureto.**”

And just like that, Shinya feels like the room is closing in on him. His eyes dart about the place; to the window, to the door, to that picture he kept of his mother before she turned bitter and died.

“Oh,” he says. That's all he can say.

“**Or at least I think it's him. You've shown me pictures of him, right? Tall, short black hair, red eyes? I saw him walking around the street near the hospital. It was Mika who pointed him out.**”

Shit. *The hospital.* Has Kureto been aware of his visits there?

“Mika? Why would Mika know about him?”

“**He said he saw the same man walking around a couple of weeks ago, just after Yuu fell into his coma.**”

Fuck. Shit. That settles it then. Kureto's been hanging around the hospital for weeks in the hopes of finding him. He was close. Too close.

Shinya paces his room, his brain already coming up with ways to escape. There's too much to think about, too many consequences and too much to lose. He's sure Krul's still talking on the phone but he's long stopped listening to her. He's trying to find ways to reason with his older brother... If it's Kureto then maybe he can find a way. Maybe.

That thought does little to reassure him. He sighs, clutching the phone tightly in his hand and resists
the urge to sink into the floor and disappear.

“Be careful, Shinya,” Krul tells him, her voice full of concern. “We don't know what your brother wants but anything to do with the Hiiragis is bad.”

Shinya's tempted to snap at her. Don't you think I already know that? I've spent most my life living in fear of them.

But he doesn't. He swallows down his fear and bitterness and replaces them with a nervous chuckle that sounds more like a sob.

“Thanks for the warning, Krul,” he says. “I'll be sure to take care of myself.”

He hangs up before she can reply.

He can stay here and panic in the near darkness of his room. He can cry and feel sorry for himself. He can climb out the window and flee to the other side of the country if he's that desperate.

And he is.

He really is.

Instead, Shinya stays. He stays and puts his phone back into his pocket, leaving his room and plastering a smile on his face for Guren to see.

“What did she want?” Guren asks, his tone so ignorant that Shinya envies him.

Shinya settles himself besides him, resting his head on Guren's shoulder and wishing he can close his eyes and focus on this moment alone.

“Nothing important,” he says.

He also wishes it wasn't so easy to lie to Guren.

Chapter End Notes

I don't even remember the last time I updated this but I am so so SO SORRY for my long break... I'm so thankful that people still comment and read this fic, honestly EVERY COMMENT MAKES ME SO HAPPY. THANK YOU GUYS FOR NOT ABANDONING THIS FIC. THANK YOUUUU. I COULD SAY THANK YOU 39330330 TIMES AND IT STILL WOULDN'T BE ENOUGH SO I'LL JUST CONTINUE WRITING CHAPTERS WITH YUU AND HIS NUGGETS AND SHINYA WITH HIS BEANIE HAT

I'm hoping to get back into regular updates now, but with uni going on, I'm not sure how hard that'll be... Maybe I can settle for updates every fortnight?

Anyway, I'll also be trying to update Saving You by next week if anyone also reads that! As always, thank you for reading and please tell me what you thought of this chapter~
(btw you can find me [here](#) on twitter and [here](#) on tumblr)
“Shinya, when I invited you for dinner to calm down, I did expect you to try to at least calm down.”

Shinya looks up, an apologetic smile already automatically making its way onto his face before he sees Krul's expression. Thankfully, she doesn't seem to take offence in the fact that he's barely touched his food.

It's not that he's in no mood to eat Krul's special spaghetti bolognese (she says it's special because it's the only recipe she's got memorised into her head), but it's hard to eat when you're too busy wondering when Kureto will find you and possibly drag you back to the Hiiragis to live a sad, sad life.

Maybe he's worrying too much. Maybe it won't be so bad after all. Maybe the Hiiragi household changed since he left. Maybe.

Alright, even that sounds stupid in his head. The Hiiragi household could have turned into utopia for all he cared and he'd still want to live as far away from it as possible. It's not the life that he wants. He's forced himself to live in that house for the past twenty or so years and it's not even something that he'd consider a life.

Shinya bites the inside of his cheek. Just thinking about it feels so childish. Here he is; a twenty four year old man running away from his family. It sounds so pathetic he's almost tempted to let Kureto find him. Almost.

“Did we tell you that we're planning on getting a cat?”

Krul's voice pulls him away from his thoughts again. He gets the gist of what she says; something about a cat or whatever. It's obvious she's only talking to distract him but he's grateful that she's trying to say the least. It's better than her getting annoyed and throwing him out of her flat. God knows she probably should because he's not good company when he's like this.

Nevertheless, Shinya looks at Mika and raises his eyebrows. The kid nods eagerly at him, giving him a smile that looks just like the good old Mika. He's been meaning to talk to Mika and see if he's feeling alright, actually. In fact, Shinya should have done it ages ago. He's just been too preoccupied with his own problems...

And great. Now that sounds even more selfish.

“Cat,” Krul repeats, her voice raising. “Kitten. We're getting one.”

Shinya once again shakes himself out of self-hating thoughts. Shit. He's so out of it today.

“That's nice. When?”

He tries his best to make his voice sound interested; it's the least he can do.

Besides, cats are nice. Kittens are even better. He likes cats. He remembers watching this documentary about tigers a couple of months ago and thinking Wow, I want a pet tiger, but of course, tigers are a bit more dangerous than your average cat so that idea went straight out the
window. Talking about cats is better than constantly worrying about your older brother. He should listen to Krul instead of thinking about Kureto and him possibly getting closer to dragging his ass back home—

*Cats. Think. About. Cats.*

“Hmm...” Mika taps his chin. “Mummy and I are going to see them today. Do you remember Lacus?”

Lacus... Lacus... That sounds familiar... Shinya spends a few minutes racking his brain for an answer. Laaaacus... Lacus... After a while, it dawns on him that Mika used to rant about this kid in his class; apparently Lacus was annoying and clingy. No matter how many times Mika said that, *no,* he wasn't interested in snail racing, Lacus would not give up.

“Huh. That snail kid?”

Mika nods whilst his mother is looking at both of them in confusion. It occurs to Shinya that *snail kid* sounds very odd out of context.

“Yeah, him. Anyway, his cat recently gave birth to a bunch of kittens and his parents came to school asking if anyone wants to buy them since they can't keep them all.”

Shinya nods again, trying to pay attention and sound interested. He doesn't want to upset Mika—especially not Mika of all people. It looks like the kid's finally starting to cheer up these days. He doesn't even need to use his wheelchair anymore, although he does complain that he misses being able to sit around all day. Typical.

“That's cute. Do you know what type of cats they are—” Shinya's suddenly interrupted by his phone vibrating in his pocket. “Oh, what's this?”

Huh. It's a text from Guren. Shinya's sure he has work right now, so why is Guren texting him...

**Hey I'm out of work an hour early today. Want to meet me for dinner? I'll pay**

Shinya can't stop the smile that spreads on his face. This is certainly a surprise... They haven't gone out for a meal ever since... well, now that he thinks about it, they've only gone for a meal *once.* That was when Shinya took Guren to that Chinese restaurant and he ended up finding out that Guren was an Ichinose...

“You're smiling at your phone... You only do that if you're either playing that Neko Atsume game or you're texting Guren.” Krul says, trying to lean over the table to look at his phone and only succeeding in letting her hair fall into her bowl of spaghetti.

The sight of her swearing and pulling her hair away from the sauce is enough to make Shinya laugh. He glances back down at Guren's text and shrugs to himself. A meal with him would be nice. It might even be enough to distract him from all this mess with Kureto.

**Sure. Where do you want to meet up? :)**

“What's he saying?” Krul asks. She's put her hair up in a bun now, completely safe from evils of bolognese sauce.

“He asked me if I wanted to eat dinner with him and I said yes.”

“Ooh... How cute. You have a *date.*”
Ignoring that little tone she has, Shinya looks back down at his phone to see that Guren has already replied.

**I'll meet you outside the Ichinose building at 6**

It's only two PM right now so he still has a lot of time until he has to meet Guren. Seeing as Mika and Krul are about to head out to get their kitten, Shinya thinks he should go home and work on one of his sculptures to kill time. That seems like a good plan.

“How are things with Guren anyway?” Krul presses on, apparently not caring if Shinya ignored her earlier or not.

Even Mika's stopped eating his meal just to listen to them. He's got sauce on his lips but Shinya doesn't have the heart to tell him. He's too busy thinking of an answer.

They haven't really spoken about what their relationship is—if there even *is* a relationship to begin with. They're stuck between that awkward place where they're not friends but they're not exactly together either.

It's better than being nothing. Also better than Guren finding out he's a Hiiragi and hating him. Anything’s better than that.

“I don't really know, Krul. We haven't spoken about it...” Shinya shrugs. He isn't desperate to establish a relationship anyway. At any rate, a relationship will just make things more complicated.

“But you two like each other,” Mika says, a smile creeping onto his face. “Guren-san always stares at you when you're not looking.”

That makes Shinya pause. He forces out a chuckle which is weak compared to how much his face is burning up. Oh, shit. He's started blushing. Damn, he feels like a school kid with a crush again.

“Looks like you're finally melting Guren's cold shell...”

“Krul, please stop talking.”

Both Krul and Mika laugh at Shinya trying to glare at them, and it's not long until the artist gives up and joins in. The spaghetti has gotten cold thanks to their conversation, but Shinya feels too warm at the thought of Guren sneaking glances at him. He never expected to be this *giddy* at the simple thought of Guren reciprocating feelings.

He can't help but think back at Krul's question... What exactly is happening between him and Guren?

Maybe he can get answers during dinner later. *Yeah.* That seems like a good idea. Shinya will definitely make sure to do that.

He feels like laughing at himself. Not just moments ago, he was thinking that he didn't care to establish a relationship with Guren and here he is, getting giddy at the mere thought of it.

Whatever. Shinya decides to just go with it. He's tired of weighing everything in his life and worrying over every consequence.
Mika was so excited that he almost feels sick from the spaghetti he ate. He's always wanted a pet—especially a cat. Mummy's told him that they'll get one in the past but then she started dating Ferid and... well, he was apparently allergic to them.

His excitement dies down a bit at the thought of Ferid. No, he thinks. No, I won't think about him. I'll forget about him.

He pushes Ferid out of his mind and looks around him instead. They're on their way to Lacus' house, and believe it or not, Lacus lives in one of those big, fancy houses with a pretty garden. Of course, it's not as big as Guren-san's mansion but it's still pretty impressive considering Mika's first impression of Lacus isn't.

Oh well. He's getting a kitten from him so Mika's willing to revise that impression.

Just as they're about to round the corner for the next street, Mika hears rabid barking. Or growling. Either way, it sounds like a monster is on the loose and he clutches onto mummy's sleeve, inching closer to her.

"The fuck is that?" Krul curls her lip at the sight of the large dog standing in their way.

It's huge, practically almost Mika's entire size, and it's slobbering all over the pavement. Mika's never seen an animal like it; it looks a bit like a giant bulldog but black and with lots of... big, droopy wrinkles... He's not sure what breed it is... Maybe he'll have to google 'Big Dog With Droopy Wrinkles Breed' when he gets home.

However, it's not just the dog that catches his attention. It's the owner. If there's anyone more suitable in owning a dog like this then it's definitely a tall man with a black mohawk and red eyes—which is exactly what this guy has.

Mika narrows his eyes. He looks a bit like that guy he saw by the hospital... It's not the same guy, but they look similar. Maybe they're related?

"That is the ugliest fucking dog I've ever seen in my entire life," Krul says, her face filled with nothing but disgust as the animal carries on drooling all over the ground.

"What did you just say about Chewbacca?" the owner of the dog hisses, clenching his fists at them.

As usual, mummy doesn't bat an eyelid towards anyone that threatens her. Whilst Mika is slowly shuffling behind her for some much needed protection, Krul continues grimacing at the dog as if looking at it is physically offending her.

"Chewbacca? You named your dog Chewbacca?" Krul scoffs. "At least it's fitting."

"Rude bitch."

It's at that moment that Mika grimaces for this stranger; no one calls his mother a bitch and gets away with it unharmed.

Luckily for him, all Krul does is let out an empty laugh. She does, however, push Mika behind her and stand up straighter. Usually this means she's about to either yell at someone or punch them across the face. Or both. Sometimes both happens. Mika hopes for all their sakes that his mother won't get into a fight in the middle of the street all because she called a dog ugly. That's not a very good reason to fight anyone at all, no matter how ugly the dog is.

(Mika doesn't think it looks that bad. It's certainly not cute, but at least the dog looks somewhat
Then the dog starts barking at him, lunging with its teeth bared and Mika squeaks out loud. Okay. He takes that back. That dog is a rabid beast.

Its owner chuckles to himself, pulling on the dog's leash and keeping it in place. Barely in place.

“I'll be blunt,” the man says. “I'm looking for Shinya Hiiragi. I know you guys are familiar with him.”

With that single sentence, Mika's pulse quickens. This isn't the same man he saw lurking around the hospital, isn't it? This one seems younger, not to mention that there's no way he could have gone from a short hairstyle to a mohawk in just one month.

“Are you one of the Hiiragi idiots looking for him?” Krul asks, not at all threatened by this man or his giant dog. “I don't think he wants to go with any of you so why don't you just back off and leave him alone?”

“Haha, I don't think so. *No one* defies the Hiiragis. Shinya knows that.”

Mika doesn't understand what's going on. He looks up at mummy, noticing that her expression has gone grim, her knuckles clenched into fists as it's taking all of her self control not to punch this stranger in the face. That must mean it's serious. Whatever it is, this guy is trying to take Shinya away.

They *can't* do that. Shinya is a friend. Shinya, no matter how much he smiles and jokes around, always has that look in his eye that's hiding something. Mika's young and naive but he knows a fake smile when he sees it.

And Shinya's full of fake smiles.

Krul rolls her eyes. “You Hiiragis sound so fucking dramatic, I swear. It's the twenty-first century. Man hunts are so old fashioned. What do you even want with Shinya?”

“No one defies father and lives. We're just looking out for Shinya because he knows that the longer he runs away, the more danger he's placing on himself and the people around him.”

The man is smirking now. His words don't sound generous at all; in fact, it sounds more like a threat. Mika clings tighter onto his mother's coat and resists the urge to hide from this man. Are these the type of people Shinya had to live with? Is this his *family*?

This isn't a family, Mika thinks as he focuses in on the stranger's smug grin. This isn't a family at all.

“So make sure to tell Shinya that Seishiro and Kureto are in town. We can't wait to see him again.”

The man tugs on his dog's leash, chuckling again before turning around and leaving. Even when he's a distance away, Mika doesn't move. He keeps his eyes trained on that man's back, broad shoulders and all, black jacket swaying in the breeze.

“Well... I'm glad we decided to get a cat instead of a dog now,” Krul says, turning to Mika and deliberately blocking his view of that stranger. She smiles at him, too casual, too out of place after what just happened.

“Yeah.” Mika forces out a smile too. He nods. It feels stiff and all he can think about is Shinya.
He thought that after everything that had happened, life would be more peaceful, but maybe he was being too hopeful. Even if the bad things aren't happening to him anymore, there's always going to be someone else out there that's suffering. That's just the way the world works. There's nothing fair about it and there never will be.

And Mika can't ignore it. He can try and pretend to be strong like his mother, he can force out smiles as usual, he can convince himself that it's none of his business and that it's Shinya life, it's Shinya's problems, but he can't ignore it.

“Come on.” Krul tugs at his hand. “Let's go get your cat.”

Mika nods, letting out another smile that makes him feel worse.

Shinya planned on sculpting when he got back to his flat. Somehow, instead of chipping away at the marble block, he's ended up lying down on his sofa and playing on Neko Atsume for the past two hours.

He's been slacking off on his art this month. No matter how much he tries, he can't focus or motivate himself to carry on. Maybe it's anxiety, maybe it's him losing interest. Who knows.

Regardless, he hopes it's not the latter. He's always relied on art to make him feel better. When he used to live with the Hiiragis, Shinya would stay in his room and look out the window, watch how the sky bleeds pink over orange as the sun sets, the birds creating black shadows, the trees like distant observers. He'd hear his mother crying from some other room and hate himself for feeling so useless. Instead of trying to comfort her, he'd take out his sketchbook and draw and draw until his pencil was blunt and the paper was torn and his mother's cries were no more.

Shinya sighs. He reaches for his sketchbook on the table, flipping the pages open and frowning at the half-assed doodles he's done. It frustrates him when he thinks about the lack of motivation he has for his art recently. What else is he meant to do if he can't even motivate himself for the one thing he's good at?

Times like this, Shinya wonders where his life is going. His only job is a part-time waiter at a small restaurant. His art is... well, it's going nowhere at the moment. And his family is currently hunting him down like he's some sort of criminal.

Why is he even depressing himself about this again..? There's no point dwelling on problems that have always been there. Shinya mentally berates himself for getting so worked up over the same shit and opens up Neko Atsume again.

Or he would have if his phone didn't start ringing. He almost drops it on his face, catching it in time before it smacked him straight on the nose.

“Krul?” Shinya answers. Why is she calling him anyway? Didn't he just see her a couple of hours ago?

It's probably the cat, isn't it? Only Krul would call him as soon as she bought a cat.

“I don't know how else to tell you this but I think one of your brothers just spoke to me.”
Shinya sits up so quickly that his head spins.

“What? Wait, was it Kureto? You're not hurt, are you?”

His heart is beating so quick. He can't remember when it even quickened in the first place. He's racking his mind for some logic and common sense. Kureto can be fair. He's ruthless to a high degree, maybe even tyrannical if you're going to be dramatic, but he's not mindless.

“No, I don't think it was Kureto. This guy said another name. Seishiro?”

Shinya's eyes widen. Fuck. Seishiro.

He's not sure whether that's worse or not. At front, Seishiro's more reckless and aggressive than Kureto—but he's also an idiot. A pretty big idiot. Shinya still remembers the time when Seishiro made a microwave explode because he put a can of baked beans inside, claiming that he thought it could go in there. It's safe to say Kureto will never do something like that. No, Kureto would probably only need to look at the can of baked beans and it'll cook under his intense glare.

“He didn't hurt you or Mika, did he?” Shinya repeats. Jokes aside, Seishiro's known to be a violent asshole. He refuses to let anyone hurt Krul or Mika—especially Mika after everything he went through.

“We're fine, don't worry. All he did was show off his ugly dog and threaten me. He also said that both him and Kureto are in town. They're looking for you, Shinya. Be careful.”

He already knows that. He knew Kureto was searching for him but now it looks like even Seishiro joined in. At this rate, maybe even Mahiru will drop by and try to drag him back home.

“You said he threatened you... What exactly did he say?”

It takes a while for Krul to reply. By the time she does, Shinya's already guessed the answer.

“They said that the longer you run away, the more danger you place on yourself and others around you.”

That sounds like the typical Hiiragi threat.

And truth. Shinya knows all too well the lengths his family goes to just to ensure that people will not defy them.

“Thanks, Krul.”

“Wait, what are you gonna do though—”

Shinya hangs up before she finishes her sentence. He stares at his phone, counting in his head and trying to calm calm, trying to formulate some sort of plan that won't end up with him giving up and going back to the Hiiragis.


And then Kureto's face flashes in his mind, smiles and taunts him. His thoughts return to zero and Shinya feels like chucking his phone across the room in frustration.

He can't keep running away. It's a wonder he's managed to hold up for this long without any consequences. There are actually people he cares about and he refuses to put them in danger because he's too stubborn and selfish to return to his family.
Shinya rests back on the sofa, stares down at his hands, envelops himself in silence because the sound of the ticking clock is enough to work his anxiety. It's like with every second, he knows that all of this is going to end. He's going to go back to the Hiiragis. Guren will find out he's one of them. Every thing is going back to the way they used to be, the way they should be.

It's almost six. Shinya eyes the clock and thinks of Guren waiting for him.

He reaches for his phone and dials the number he wishes he can forget but never can. As soon as it starts ringing, the ticking of the clock seems to get louder and louder. It mixes with the ringing of the phone, the beating of his pulse. It makes him want to be sick.

His mind is screaming *why* why why why the more the phone rings. He can hang up now and forget this. They don't know his new phone number. They won't know it's him. He can hang up, meet Guren and forget about all this. He can do it.

The phone stops ringing. Shinya stops breathing. The ticking of the clock is drowned out by the one voice he hasn't heard in too long.

“*Shinya.*”

He knows. Of course he knows. Shinya should have known that Kureto would predict his every move. Kureto knows exactly how his mind works; he can tell apart all of Shinya's weaknesses and lay a path that the artist will walk straight into.

Shinya's struggling to speak. Through the phone, he can hear the deep husk of Kureto's chuckle, empty yet arrogant.

“*Time to go home, Shinya.*”

The words sink in and Shinya feels like he's already suffocating. He swallows the lump in his throat and coughs.

“Why if I don't want to go back?”

He tries to make his voice as light as possible. Maybe even force out a laugh here and there if he has enough strength. Not that it's going to fool Kureto.

“And waste your life away? You'll gain nothing from that place.”

“What makes you think I'll gain anything if I come back?”

*Because I'll give you a role. If I give it to you, you'll be able to find your goal.*

Kureto's voice is confident, so sure, and Shinya doesn't need to doubt whether he's being serious or not.

“You make it sound like you're giving me a choice, nii-san.”

“A choice? There is no choice. Man is nothing. Empty.”

It takes all of Shinya's strength to not roll his eyes. He's forgotten his nii-san's random bursts of philosophy in the middle of conversation. He would have found it funny if the situation wasn't so dire and useless.

“The environment shapes us, our surroundings give us our roles. You'll find nothing in that town. You'll waste away without us.”
It's funny because Shinya can already feel himself wasting away just listening to him.

“I can give you a role,” Kureto repeats again. “You search so blindly for happiness when all you have to do is follow me.”

He's wrong. Deluded. Shinya doesn't need anyone to show him how to live his life; it's his life and he'll make his own roles without his own brother trying to do it for him.

And yet, here he is, falling for every trap Kureto is leaving.

“I don't care about roles,” Shinya says. “I just don't want anyone to get hurt.”

“They're nothing, Shinya. You can gain everything as soon as you go home.”

It's not home, it's a prison. Shinya grips the phone tightly and looks at the clock. It's ten minutes past six. Guren would be waiting for him by now, probably getting more and more impatient.

“Guren Ichinose will find out you're a Hiiragi sooner or later.”

Shinya freezes. His hand loosens its grip around the phone and he listens to the faint sound of Kureto breathing.

“Is that a threat?”

He can practically feel Kureto smiling from the other side.

“It's a fact.”

Shinya can't say anything to that. All of the questions and half-hearted jokes die on his lips, replaced by a bitter taste at the back of his throat.

“I'll be by the hospital,” Kureto says. “Come find me.”

Shinya doesn't reply. He can't come up with anything to say to that. Kureto hangs up, the silence once again filling his small flat and leaving him all alone.

He must have spent a full five minutes just staring at the wall opposite him. His thoughts are running away with all the paths laid before him—and all of them lead to Kureto. There's no escaping it anymore. There never was. He was just deluding himself thinking that he could escape if he somehow managed to run away, yet he could flee to the other side of the world and his family will still drag him back.

Shinya checks the time. Six thirty. Half an hour late for meeting Guren.

He only notices now that he's got six texts from him. Oh, shit. Guren must still be waiting, right? Shinya feels bad for not turning up.

Where are you? I'm here already

Should have known you'd be late

Okay this isn't funny. You're fifteen minutes late

Where the fuck are you

I'm not waiting here forever
Are you at your flat or something? I'm coming over

Wait what? Shit! Shinya almost lets go of his phone as soon as he reads the last text. Fuck, Guren sent that ten minutes ago! He'd be near here by now! What the fuck does he do? He can't act as if nothing happened, not when all Shinya wants to do is lock himself in his room and pretend that no one remembers he exists. Talking to Guren is the last thing that he wants.

He fumbles to select Guren's contact, hoping to call him and tell him not to bother coming before he gets here—

The knock on the door literally makes him jump.

“Oi, Shinya, it's me!”

What the fuck? How the hell did Guren get into the flat? Who the fuck let him in and why of all times? This is everything Shinya doesn't need right now. He hasn't even calmed down from his conversation with Kureto yet; he can't keep himself composed in front of Guren of all people at a time like this!

“I know you're in there. The person from across the hall let me in and told me you were here.”

It's times like this that he's regretting ever letting Guren stay in his flat whilst Yuu was at hospital. This would have never happened if the people down the hall didn't recognise Guren. Shinya rubs his temples and even has the desperation to look out the window. Nope... Jumping out is not an option. He wants to escape, not die.

In the end, he gives up and sighs. There's no way Guren's going to leave. He drove all the way here; he must have been pissed off that Shinya never turned up for their date—or whatever it was. Date or no date, it doesn't matter now. Shinya's already fucked it up.

Think of an excuse... Think of an excuse... What could he tell Guren to convince him that it was no big deal he pretty much stood him up on their date or whatever it was. Date or no date, it doesn't matter now. Shinya's already fucked it up.

He reluctantly opens the door, wincing as soon as he's faced with Guren's purple-eyed glare. Okay. He's definitely mad. The businessman doesn't wait until Shinya's opened the door; he pushes past it and lets himself in without so much as a word.

“Sorry, I, uh... got caught up helping Krul buy a cat—”

“I called Krul and you weren't with her.”

Well, fuck. Shinya doesn't bother hiding the grimace on his face.

“Now that we've established that you're lying, why don't you just go ahead and tell me what the problem is?” Guren says. His voice is cold and nothing like Shinya's ever heard before. He's witnessed Guren pissed off on all levels—it's part of his everyday character—but not like this. Not genuinely angry and disappointed at the same time.

“There's no problem...” Shinya mumbles. Even he doesn't believe himself. No matter how much he tries to come up with an excuse, nothing is remotely close enough to let him off the hook. It doesn't help that Guren now knows he's lying to begin with. He might as well give up on lying altogether.

Guren turns to face him. He takes a step forward, and another, and another, until they're eye to eye and Shinya has to hold his breath to keep calm. He's sure that Guren can hear his heart pounding against his ribs, his thoughts screaming for Guren to leave.

Some thoughts are screaming for Guren to somehow help him.

Shinya wants to laugh. Guren? Help him? What the hell can he help him against? He can't exactly ask Guren to protect him from his crazy family.

Particularly when Guren hates his crazy family. He can't let Guren know anything.

“Why can't you just tell me? What are you hiding that's so bad you've been lying about it for months?”

“It's nothing you need to get involved with,” Shinya sighs. “Why do you even care anyway?”

For some reason, Guren's eyes widen. He leans back, staring at Shinya like he just said something that he shouldn't have. For the life of him, Shinya can't understand what though. All he knows is that Guren's still far too close and he can't breathe with him here. He needs space. He needs to go.

“Why do I care? Do I even need to answer that?”

Guren's stare is hard and cold. It's not long until Shinya has to avert his eyes away. He can't keep up his gaze if Guren's looking at him with that much disappointment. It's bad enough that he's let a lot of people down in the past; he can't do this to Guren too.

Shinya glances back up. The intensity in Guren's eyes is almost too much. He cares. He really does care. Somewhere along the way, Shinya's managed to do the impossible and made Guren Ichinose care for him.

He should be happy. He should be elated, jumping for joy at this miracle of events.

But no. It feels like he's going to be sick because he knows it'll be ruined one way or another. Every path leads back to the Hiiragis. Every path leads back to Guren hating him and then he'll realise that he never cared for Shinya at all. He cared for the fake lies that Shinya's planted around him, not Shinya Hiiragi. No one cares for Shinya Hiiragi.

“Maybe you shouldn't care,” Shinya says.

He forces his voice to sound as steady as possible. He acts because he's always been good at acting. His entire life is an act of lies and jokes, fake smiles, little delusions he tries to blind himself with. It's time to act some more.

Guren blinks. Caught off guard. “What?”

“You don't need to care. No one asked you to give a shit about me.”

As soon as those words leave him, he knows there's no going back. Guren clenches his jaw, anger evident in his expression. Shinya waits to test the waters; he's thinking of what to say, how to say it—he doesn't want to drown. He feels like he's on the brink of sinking too fast and it's all it takes for him to keep his composure and not fucking cry.

“What the fuck are you even saying?” Guren's voice has already started shaking.

Shinya gulps. He can do this. He just needs to act.
“I'm saying that I don't need you prying into my business. Why are you even here? Why don't you go back home?”

“Are you seriously saying all of this right now?” Guren is getting louder with each word he lets out. “You're the one asking me why I care about you after all this time?”

He doesn't mean to raise his voice as well, but it's hard not to when Shinya's pulse is so loud he can barely hear all the bullshit he's making up on the spot.

“What time? You make it sound like we've done something together when all we've had are a few kisses here and there!”

Guren reels back as if Shinya hit him. Even the artist winces at what he said. He's not even thinking straight. He hates himself for being able to pick the right words, just those precise words to hurt someone in a way that benefits him.

It's times like this Shinya understands that no matter how much he runs away, he's still a Hiiragi at heart. He can try to be as calm and friendly all he wants, but he'll always hurt people in the end. It's inevitable.

“So that means nothing to you?” Guren asks. He takes a step back. Probably disgusted at Shinya's mere presence.

Shinya shrugs. “And it means something to you?”

A low chuckle comes out of Guren. He looks down and shakes his head to himself, and yet his fists are trembling so much that Shinya's surprised he hasn't hit him yet.

“You know what?” Guren glances back up at Shinya. Now, his eyes are completely blank. He sneers. “I don't even know why I fucking bothered with you. Here's me thinking that maybe we could have spent some time together today but that was just a mistake. You were a mistake.”

You were a mistake.

That hurts more than he expected it to. It's exactly what his mother used to say, every day of his life, right until she died.

Shinya feels the stinging in his eyes. The words are echoing in his head, louder and louder until Guren's voice morphs into his mother's and he's thrown back to the reality that his life will always be like this. You were a mistake. You are a mistake. There really was no point in ever trying to be happy. He should have known this was all a big fucking mistake.

He blinks. Swallows the dry lump in his throat. Licks his lips.

“Just go,” he says, forces it out. “There's no point to all of this. Just go.”

If Guren noticed the tears already pooling in his eyes, then he didn't care. He shouldn't care. Not anymore.

“You're right. There is no point to all of this. Goodbye, Shinya.”

He turns around. Shinya watches his back as he leaves, slamming the door as hard as he can.

The artist stands there, listening and listening until Guren's footsteps are no more and he's out of Shinya's life for good. He stands there. The clock is still ticking, it's always ticking, even when his
time has ran out. And he's still standing there because he's scared that as soon as he moves, everything will crumble away and he won't have anything else to hold onto.

He won't cry. He shouldn't cry. Why should he even be allowed to cry when he did this to himself?

Shinya doesn't have the right to mourn about ruining his own life when all he does is enable it. He's constantly breaking down the walls he's tried building into a home.

*There is no home,* he reminds himself. *Only the Hiiragis.*

That clock is forever ticking. It's seven o'clock now. One hour ago, he was meant to meet Guren for dinner. If he went, he could have been happy, he could have been sitting opposite Guren, blushing and stuttering like the naïve fool he's tried to be all this time. He could have carried on living his life of lies and delusion, he could have *tried* to be happy. He could have.

All it took was one hour for Shinya to destroy all that.

His eyes flicker to the clock. It's *still* ticking. Never stopping. It's engraving itself into his head until all he hears is the tick tock, tick tock of the seconds that mock him.

And before he knows it, he's prying it away from where it's hanging. Shinya sees his reflection on the glass, the hands of the clock etched onto his empty eyes, *tick tock, tick tock, tick tock.*

He throws it against the wall. Glass explodes into shards, the sound of the *crash* enough to make the ticking stop, times stops—everything stops. Shinya's thrown into silence with his breathing as his only company.

His hands are shaking when he reaches for his phone. He dials the number as if he's always meant to do this.

Kureto picks up after the second ring.

“I'm coming,” Shinya says, eyes still fixed on the broken clock. “I'll meet you at the hospital.”

Chapter End Notes

It is 7:25am and I have a lesson in four hours but here I am updating this fic because I clearly hate myself

I'm sorry Shinya. I would type a more coherent author's note if I wasn't slowly dying and in need of sleep. I hope you all enjoyed the chapter and ,, ,, pls don't kill me

Feedback is always appreciated~ Thank you for all the support so far!

(Btw, Seishiro actually does have a dog named Chewbacca in canon. Idk I found this funny so I thought I'd add it here. He has a Neopolitan Mastiff here in IRH even though I was tempted to give him a tiny puppy just for the laughs.

The conversation between Kureto and Shinya is also based from the light novel. Kureto basically tells Shinya to follow him there, saying that he can make Shinya happy/give him a purpose. And Shinya's like lol wut bruh)
Feel free to follow/contact me on twitter or tumblr! Bye bye!
Roses

Chapter Notes

Thank god this chapter is finally done... Anyway, I wanted to say dedicate this space to some wonderful people who have drawn fanart for this fanfic!! I'm so honoured that people have taken the time to draw for IRH :__; Thank you to Michi and Sharon for their wonderful art!!! Please check them out, their art is SO GOOOOOD.

Michi's art - I'm still not over how pRETTY KRUL IS HERE. And I love all the drawings of little mikayuu, they look so cute! I feel so honoured that you did so many drawings of IRH, THANK YOU MICHI and I can't believe you actually drew Shinya with the mug. I will never forget this. Ever.

Sharon's art - I LOVE THAT SHARON DREW THE KISS SCENE WHERE MIKAYUU INTERRUPT GURESIN. I love seeing gureshin in your style, especially that drunk scene because Guren blushing over Shinya is TOO CUTE... Thank you for drawing the scenes out, it's so nice seeing them in fanart form *___*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's odd how he only appreciates this city when he has to leave. The sight of skyscrapers rushing past makes him dizzy. He's trying his best to take in every single one, memorising the shape, the height, the patterns of brick work. He thinks, maybe, if he remembers this city in his mind, he can paint a picture that will remind him there was a time when he genuinely thought he could be happy. It wasn't a fleeting dream or a moment that lasted far too short. It was real. It happened.

That thought keeps him sane as Kureto drives on. None of this was a waste... Shinya can't afford to think of it as something he shouldn't have done. He managed to have his freedom for a while. He made friends with Krul and Mika. He made friends. That alone is a miracle in itself.

He also met Guren.

Shinya winces. Maybe it's best if he doesn't think about Guren for a while. At least until he's finally alone. He doesn't want to start crying in front of Kureto of all people. Especially not Kureto.

He returns his attention back to the city. They're almost out of it now; Kureto's driving far too fast for comfort, but he knows it's probably because he wants to leave before Shinya decides to change his mind. Not that it's going to stop him from dragging him back home.

There's music in the car, probably from Kureto's playlist. It's nothing Shinya recognises. He doubts Kureto's into mainstream music. For now, instrumental songs fills the vehicle, something sombre and sad to further depress Shinya and make him wonder if Kureto is doing this on purpose. The artist purses his lips, glaring at the radio from the corner of his eyes.

He gathers the courage to switch to the next track. Kureto won't mind, he's too busy driving and passively staring at the road like he's contemplating the many philosophies of life. As Shinya sits up and reaches for Kureto's phone, the playlist automatically switches to the next track and the car explodes with the sounds of opera singing and doom.
Shinya sits back.

He frowns.

“Phantom of the Opera?” he asks, staring at his brother with wide eyes.

Kureto doesn't bat an eyelid. He nods slowly, too calm for someone who's sitting in a car with a woman belting out a soprano in the background.

“Hmm.” Kureto's red eyes narrow slightly. “I thought I sorted all of the songs by their albums. That's not meant to be there.”

_Okay_, Shinya thinks. _He's not even going to bother questioning that._

Henceforth, he makes himself comfortable in his seat and loses himself in opera. It's much better than the depressing music that was playing earlier, _that's for sure_, but he can't help think that the dramatic songs of Phantom of the Opera foretell his return to the Hiiragis.

_Huh._ Shinya imagines Kureto in the Phantom's outfit. He snorts out loud, hiding it with a cough so that his brother won't grow suspicious of his thoughts. If he's going to be forced back home, then the least he can do is amuse himself by re-imagining his oh-so-intimidating brother as a crazed maniac in a mask.

It's not a bad way to pass the time. Shinya's too busy picturing Kureto flip a cape around when his phone vibrates and pulls him away from his thoughts. He takes it out, all amusement draining out of him as soon as he sees Krul's name flashing on the screen.

She's calling him. _There's no way he can hold a conversation with her right now._

Sighing, Shinya rejects the call. He can instantly picture Krul glaring at him from the other side of the city, most likely yelling out a string of swear words for Shinya having the audacity to not pick up.

He hurries to turn his phone off before she can call him again. He doesn't think he'll be able to reject any more of her calls if this is how guilty it makes him feel.

Kureto looks down at him, eyes fixed on the phone in Shinya's hands.

“I'll arrange for you to get a new number,” he says.

Shinya nods. _It doesn't sound like it's something he can argue against. He wouldn't be surprised if they destroyed his phone for the sake of it._

He looks back out the window. _Ah, they've gone past the city's borders now... The Hiiragi household is a few hours away from here so it'll be a while until Shinya's entire life officially falls apart._

He closes his eyes. At first, he wanted to take in the sights before they exited the city; a sentimental way of clinging onto what he had left. Now Shinya doesn't have the strength to do that. He wants sleep, he wants a moment where he can forget about this and everything that happened with Guren.

His eyes remain close. He sees nothing but Guren's face, contorted with anger and confusion, purple eyes glaring straight through him.

It takes a while, but Shinya eventually falls asleep.
The next day, Yuu drags his feet on the way to class, still groggy and pissed off that Guren was such an asshole this early in the morning. He was meant to drive him to school but the bastard probably got out on the wrong side of the bed today. Either that or he had a fight with Shinya. Yuu was certain he heard Guren grumbling about Shinya this morning, but of course, he said nothing about it.

Whatever. It isn't any of Yuu's business. He's just pissed off he had to take the bus instead of get a ride to school. He *hates* taking the bus, especially during the morning. He's not sure how long this little fight between Guren and Shinya will last but Yuu hopes that Guren will at least stop being such an angry bastard around him.

Geez. Adults are such a mess.

Yuu spots Mika first as soon as he enters the classroom. Typical Mika to arrive to class on time. He sinks into his own chair with a groan, already dreading the next six hours of school.

“What's wrong, Yuu-chan?” Mika asks, poking him on the shoulder.

Yuu lightly shakes him off.

“Eh, it's nothing. Just Guren being an asshole again.”

Mika looks like he's about to say something to that, but the teacher comes into the room and everyone shuts up. This is where Yuu spaces out for the rest of the day, only returning to the land of the living if someone happens to pick on him for an answer to some question he didn't even listen to. He slumps in his chair, his mind drifting off into a better place, when the teacher says something that catches his attention.

“I would like all of you to welcome a new member of our class. He's new to town so I'd appreciate it if some of you show him around.”

Yuu raises an eyebrow at the small guy at the front. The new kid stands up, shaking like a leaf caught in a hurricane. In fact, he's shaking so much that he trips over his own table.

“S-Sorry!” the new kid mumbles, and then blushes as if realising that he literally apologised to a table. Around him, people are already smirking.

Oh man, Yuu feels a bit sorry for him. Yeah, he'll admit the table thing was a bit funny but it sucks being the new kid at school. He watches as the guy turns around, smiling at the class. Or at least trying to. It looks more like he's about to burst into tears.

“I-I'm Yoichi... Yoichi Saotome... P-Pleased to m-meet all of you.”

There's silence in the class. Yuu winces. Man, he would *not* want to be that guy right now. No one's saying anything or even making any effort in at least looking like they're interested. Feeling sorry for this kid, Yuu smiles at Yoichi when his eyes catches his.

Either Yoichi needs glasses or he's ignoring Yuu because he didn't react at all. All he does is look back at the teacher, probably mentally begging them to save him from the torture of standing in front of the class, and then scurries back to his seat without another word.

“Do you think we should talk to him?” Mika whispers, nodding at Yoichi.
Yuu shrugs. Why not? Yuu was hoping to drag Mika to McDonalds after school. He's not in the mood to rush back home to an empty house since Guren's still at work. Yoichi could tag along and have nuggets with them or something... if he likes nuggets. Who in their right mind wouldn't like nuggets though?

For the majority of the day, Yuu's stuck between spacing out and trying to sneakily look over Mika's shoulder to see his answers for today's test. After failing to decipher Mika's handwriting, Yuu gives up and decides to embrace his inevitable failure instead. It's not like Guren cares whether he gets low grades in the end. Guren's too busy sulking over his recent argument with Shinya to bother even looking at Yuu's report card.

The good thing about having Guren as your current father figure is that no matter what, he doesn't tend to hold grudges. Yeah, he might explode and threaten to throw Yuu out the window but he'll usually be chill about everything the next day. It's awesome. Yuu feels like he can get away with anything and the worst thing Guren will do is ban nuggets for an entire month.

If that happens then Yuu's backup plan is to sneak to McDonalds and get nuggets there. See? Everything's cool. Nothing bad can possibly happen no matter how shitty Yuu does at school.

When it's finally home time, Yuu and Mika make it their goal to try and invite Yoichi to go with them. If they can find him at least. It's hard looking for someone with brown hair when that certain someone is smaller than everyone else.

"Maybe he went home or something," Yuu groans after a while. He's too hungry for this. He doesn't have time to look for the new kid when he could be eating McDonalds instead.

"Wait, I see him!" Mika tugs at Yuu's sleeve, pointing frantically.

Yoichi isn't the first thing that Yuu sees. No, it's pink hair. There's literally only two people with pink hair in this city that Yuu's aware of; Mika's mum and... that asshole who beat him up a few months ago.

It's him. Yuu will never forget that bastard's face. That asshole packed one of the lousiest punches ever but it still managed to knock him out. How annoying is that?

Completely forgetting about Yoichi, Yuu stomps his way to Pinkie—or whatever his name is. Assholes like him didn't deserve to be acknowledged by their name.

"Wait, Yuu-chan!" Mika hisses, grabbing Yuu's collar and yanking him back.

"It's that asshole who beat me up! Don't you remember? He was making fun of you too!"

"Yes, I remember! But look! Yoichi-san is there!"

Huh? The fuck? Mika's right! Yoichi's right there with the pink haired guy!

Oh shit, Yuu thinks. Is that asshole bullying Yoichi now? He should have shown that these idiots would start targeting the new student.

Yuu rolls his sleeves up, completely ready to punch the living daylights out of this bully—and then Yoichi starts laughing. Like actually laughing. With that guy.

"What the hell?" Yuu frowns. All of the eager energy that built up within him deflated in less than a second at the sight of Yoichi acting like he's suddenly best buddies with the telephone pole.
“Huh? Does he know Kimizuki-san?” Mika asks, looking equally as confused as Yuu.

There's something surreal about seeing someone as small as Yoichi laughing next to that pink haired bastard. What the fuck is going on? Are those two actually friends or is Yuu hallucinating?

“Oh, shit. They're going!” Yuu jumps up as he sees Yoichi and Kimizuki turning around, making their way to the school's exit.

He grabs Mika's wrist and pulls him, very much intent on following these two and seeing why Yoichi was friends with that guy of all people. He doesn't even know why he cares—he doesn't—but he needs to make sure that Kimizuki isn't going to suddenly punch Yoichi to the other side of the planet if given the chance. That's it... It's not like he's curious... If they're friends then fair game to Yoichi because Yuu has no idea how someone can stand being friends with Kimizuki.

“Yuu-chan... Please don't tell me we're going to follow them...” Mika sighs from behind him, but still follows Yuu when he proceeds to sneak after the pair.

He ignores Mika. Yuu needs full concentration in order to be successful in this art of following people without them noticing. If he managed to break into Mika's house before then this is going to be easy-peasy.

They have no trouble shadowing Yoichi and Kimizuki but it's how long they do it that surprises Yuu. Or how far they actually go. Yuu figured they would stop by town, but nope, they're now all the way near the hospital and Yuu swears his feet are about to fall off.

It's Mika he's worried about. He only recently got out of his wheelchair and here was Yuu dragging him for a forty minute walk just to stalk the new kid in school.

“They're going into the hospital...” Yuu mutters, hidden from behind a tree. “What the hell are they doing in there?”

“Maybe they're visiting someone... It's probably personal. We should leave, Yuu-chan—”

Of course, like any responsible twelve year old kid, Yuu doesn't leave. Oh no, he sprints to the hospital and ignores Mika yelling for him.

Yuu realises that this isn't a very well thought out plan. If Yoichi and Kimizuki really are visiting someone then there's no way Yuu can follow them. Besides, Yuu's not interested in that. He only wants to know how Yoichi and Kimizuki know each other. Is Yoichi part of Kimizuki's gang or something?

There's no way someone that small and... timid looking could be part of that gang of bullies.

Then again, Yoichi's the new kid. For all Yuu knows, he could be a killing machine underneath those large green eyes and shy exterior.

“Why are we doing this, Yuu-chan...?” Mika grumbles. His voice sounds a bit annoyed but he's still following Yuu so he can't be that annoyed.


They manage to catch sight of Kimizuki's pink hair when they're inside the building. It feels a bit wrong to be spying on them in a place like this, but hey, they've made it this far so they might as well go all the way.
“Kinda weird to be back in this place,” Yuu mumbles. He definitely hasn't missed the hospital at all. Especially the smell. Everything smells too clean here.

“We can always leave,” Mika says. “McDonalds sounds like a better place to hang around in.”

Yuu laughs. “Ha. Nice try, but no. I wanna see what Yoichi's doing hanging around with that jerk.”

“Doesn't it occur to you that we can ask him tomorrow instead...?”

Oh. Oh yeah. That's a good point. Why didn't he think of that?

“You should have suggested that earlier, idiot. It's too late to turn back now!”

Mika rolls his eyes. He points at the exit, which isn't really that far away from them yet.

“No, it's not! We can leave now!”

“Leaving is for cowards! We made it this far, we can't stop!”

“This is weird! We're stalking people, Yuu-chan!”

Yuu snorts at this. Mika's making it sound like they're committing a crime when in reality, they're only following two guys from their school. Nothing bad about that... A lot of people probably do this in their spare time.

“Calm down,” Yuu sighs. “Let's hurry up before we lose them!”

Behind him, he can hear Mika complaining about how silly this is and that he's going to be late for dinner with his mother. For the safety of his well-being, Yuu hopes that Krul won't mind too much that Mika's late.

“Tell your mother that you're busy then!” Yuu says.

“Ugh, okay. I'll tell her we're in the hospital following the new guy in our class.”

At first, Yuu thought Mika was joking, but as soon as Mika takes his phone out and starts texting, Yuu yelps and snatches it away from him.

“Idiot! Don't tell her that! Do you want her to kick me in the face?”

So much for Mika being his best friend. Clearly the idiot was either messing with him or he really didn't care if his own mother sent Yuu flying across the room. Rolling his eyes, Yuu finds Krul's number and starts texting her on his own.

gone 2 yuus h0us3 2 study wid him 4 our scince test >_< be bak l8tr luv ya ttyl xx

“I don't text like that,” Mika says, looking over Yuu's shoulder with the epitome of horror in his eyes. “And you spelt science wrong.”

“Too late, I sent it. You're texting like this from now on.”

He gives Mika's phone back, ignoring the tiny sigh that his friend gives as he shoves it back into his pocket. Now that that little matter is dealt with, they can return to the stalking—wait, not stalking. Spying is a better word.

By some miracle, he can still spot Kimizuki's pink hair a few yards away. Yuu runs after them before
they round the corner, earning a few disapproving looks from the people around. There's a sign on the wall saying Intensive Care and it doesn't take Yuu more than a second to recognise this place.

He was in this ward too. This was where they kept him, at least until he woke up and then they moved him to another ward.

“Why's he in here...?” Yuu mumbles. It feels weird being here again. It's like all the bad memories are creeping back up.

He turns to Mika, making sure if he's okay, but isn't surprised when he sees him uncomfortable shuffling his feet. As tempting as it is to stay, Yuu doesn't want to risk Mika feeling bad because of bad memories.

Ugh. He's such an idiot. He should have thought about this before entering the hospital.

“What the fuck are you doing here?”

Oh shit. Yuu's stomach flips as he hears that familiar voice, sounding nothing less than incredibly pissed off. Is it too late to make a run for it? Because he's seriously thinking of grabbing Mika's arm and bolting the fuck out of this place.

“Oi, asshole, I asked you a question.”

Groaning, Yuu turns around.

“We weren't following you!” he says, paying no mind to the sight of Mika facepalming in the background. “I happen to live around here!”

Kimizuki blinks. “In the hospital? You live here?”

“No! Like... around here... Mika and I just... got lost...”

Fuck, this isn't going very well. Next time, he should leave the lies to Mika because he's shit at this. Shit doesn't even begin to cover it. This is a whole new level of shit.

“Don't you live with that rich Ichinose guy?” Kimizuki says, raising an eyebrow and folding his arms in a typical 'I'm not amused and I'm about to beat you up' stance. “The entire school knows you're living in that mansion. Stop fucking around.”

Giving up, Yuu turns to Yoichi instead. He's awkwardly staring, likely debating whether to calm them down or stay at a safe distance.

Yuu points at Kimizuki. Fuck, why is this guy so much taller than him. Isn't he in the grade above? He's only thirteen, right? And Yuu was twelve... There shouldn't be this much difference in their height!

“I was making sure that you weren't going to do anything bad to Yoichi! He doesn't need bullies like you picking on him!”

He thought that was a pretty good comeback but it's like he turned on a switch. Kimizuki's eyes narrow and he clenches his fist, stomping towards Yuu's direction.

“Kimizuki-kun!” Yoichi finally moves. He rushes to the taller man, grabbing onto his arm and trying to pull him back.

“I would never hurt Yoichi,” Kimizuki growls. “You don't know shit about me so why don't you just
Yuu isn't scared—Yuu isn't scared of anyone, and yet there's something about the way Kimizuki says it that shuts him up. As much as he hates it, he can't think of what to say to that. He feels like whatever comes out of his mouth is only going to make him look like a complete asshole—as if following both of them here isn't enough to do that. Yuu's left to stare up at Kimizuki's brown eyes, narrow and beady, yet filled with so much anger that you'd think he's spent his entire life loathing Yuu.

And that's when Yuu notices it. Roses. Kimizuki's holding a small bouquet of roses. They're yellow, painfully bright that Yuu wonders why he didn't notice them before.

They look odd in Kimizuki's hands.

“Yuu-chan...” Mika's voice is soft, but stern. “Let's go.”

“Fine,” Yuu grumbles. He averts his eyes away and resists the urge to sigh in relief. “This was a waste of time anyway.”

They don't waste any more time in leaving. Even when they've left the building, Yuu can't ignore the sour taste in his mouth. The words Intensive Care are circling in his head and he wishes he can stop wondering why Kimizuki is there. He shouldn't care—he doesn't. It's none of his business. Kimizuki is just that bastard who beat him up. He's nothing. He doesn't matter. He's an asshole.

So why does Yuu feel like he's the asshole this time?

He shakes his head to himself. There's no point dwelling on it. It's really none of his business.

“So... McDonalds?” Mika asks, trying to lighten the mood. His voice sounds awkward when he forces it to sound that casual, but Yuu appreciates it nonetheless.

“Nah,” Yuu sighs. “I'm not hungry anymore. Let's go home.”

Today is slow. Guren can barely focus during his meetings. Even if he tries his best to listen to what the person is telling him, his eyes will drift off to his phone. There's no flashing, no notifications to tell him if someone's texting him or not.

It's weird. He's gotten used to Shinya's constant texts. It never occurred to him how empty life would be without his phone going off every two minutes and pissing him off.

He hates how it makes him feel lonely.

And he hates that he's admitting it.

Guren clenches his jaw. No, he should stop thinking about Shinya. The artist made it obvious that he didn't want anything to do with him anymore. Guren's got enough on his plate to be fawning over anyone at the moment. He should have never gotten too attached to Shinya in the first place.

He doesn't even know how he got so attached. Wasn't he still getting over his divorce with Mahiru? Add that on top of his job and looking after Yuu and you'd think that he'd be busy enough to not pay attention to cute artists who won't leave you alone.
Ugh. Did he seriously just say Shinya was cute...?

Guren reaches for his cup of coffee. God, he really needs to stop thinking about Shinya.

“Guren?”

He looks up. Mito's eyes are on him, clipboard in hand, tapping a pen against it.

“There's a woman demanding to see you,” she says. “We tried to tell her to wait but she started getting violent and said that it was urgent? Something about... Shinya?”

At the mention of that name, Guren's eyes widen. No doubt that's Krul but why? And what's so urgent about Shinya that she has to go all the way here?

“Shinya, eh?” Goshi leans over the table, his large fist slamming it like this is something to be happy about. “Isn't this the guy you've been seeing? What's going on?”

It's amazing how the professionalism of the meeting is immediately chucked out of the window as soon as Shinya is mentioned. Guren's lucky that the only people present in this room are Goshi, Sayuri, Mito and Shigure, but that still doesn't mean he's going to suddenly indulge them in his personal life.

“Shut up, Goshi.” Guren throws a glare at the blond man. As usual, Goshi isn't deterred at all and only smirks in reply.

“Tell her I'm busy,” Guren tells Mito. “It can wait until I'm done with work.”

“Uh... Not sure how she'll take that. She was threatening to punch one of our guards a few minutes ago. I was going to ask if you wanted to call the police—”

“No, don't call the police, goddammit.” Guren groans. For the love of fuck, he's never going to get a day where he can relax and not have to deal with some form of shit to sort out. “Fucking hell, fine. I'll tell her to piss off myself.”

Guren gets up, mentally planning a speech in his head that will hopefully make Krul leave without any further violence. He doubts it though. Krul doesn't seem like the type of woman that takes no for an answer.

It doesn't take him long to find Krul. All he had to do was follow the source of angry yelling and he's instantly met with the sight of a woman waving a fist at one of his employees. Good god, he seriously needs to plan out a speech that will ensure no damage to his body. At this rate, he's got little to no confidence that Krul will let him go unscathed.

“What do you want?” Guren demands, wasting no time in getting straight to the business as soon as Krul calms down and glances at him.

She's not the tallest woman out there. In fact, she's pretty small. That doesn't stop Guren from being wary of her.

“Do you know where Shinya is? He hasn't answered any of my calls ever since last night.”

Last night. That was when he and Shinya had that fight. Guren averts his eyes away, scowling at the wall as memories of that argument return to him.

“No, I don't know where the fuck he is. You can go now.”
There goes all civility out the window. Guren sends one last look at Krul before spinning around, all intent on getting back to work and doing everything he can to forget Shinya's goddamn existence. However, he should have known that Krul wouldn't let it drop so easily. She grabs onto his arm, digging her nails so hard that Guren even feels them through his suit.

Jesus Christ. He snatches his arm back and gives out a heavy sigh.

“The last time he contacted me, he told me he was going on a date with you. What the fuck happened?” Krul's red eyes are boring into him and it's hard to look away. She's acting like he's gone and killed Shinya, for fuck sake.

“We didn't even go, alright? He told me to leave him alone and that's all that happened.”

That catches her attention. Krul frowns, shoulders sagging.

“He did what?”

“He told me to leave him alone and pretty much ended whatever we had between us. Can you go now? You're interrupting a meeting—”

“He's not in his flat. He left the keys in there.”

Why is she even telling him all of this? What does she want him to do? Just because he's made out with Shinya a couple of times doesn't mean that he's suddenly given the miraculous ability to track him down! What the fuck does Krul expect him to do?

“So what? He's probably gone somewhere for today and doesn't want to talk to anyone. Give the guy some space.”

Krul shakes her head. “No. No, you don't understand. This isn't good! You don't know Shinya!”

Before he realises, Guren is snapping at her.

“That's because he won't fucking tell me anything! I've known him for, what, nearly a year and he's barely told me anything about himself!”

He runs a hand through his hair, not giving a damn whether he messed up the slicked back hairstyle he wore for work. Talking to Krul is stressing him out in so many levels.

“This isn't my problem,” he says. “You're asking the wrong guy. You should just leave.”

He never expected her to leave. He hoped, but as luck would have it, Krul only glares even more at him and remains in her spot.

“Doesn't it occur to you that maybe he was scared of telling you?”

Guren frowns. “Scared of what? The only thing I know about that guy is that he draws and he's literally the only person I know who likes the minions!”

“What did he tell you? Did he tell you if he was going anywhere or doing anything?”

Oh great. Now she's changing the subject.

It's too late for this. All Guren wants is to finish his paperwork and go back home so he can spend the rest of the day in his room hating life.
“I told you; he didn't tell me anything!” His voice rises with irritation. “He just said that there wasn't any point in us anymore and I got pissed off and left. That's it.”

If she noticed his impatience, then she didn't show it. Krul taps her chin, staring off into the distance. “This isn't good... What else did you say? Is that it?”

Her questions are only pissing him off even more because it meant remembering what happened last night. Guren's patience is little to non-existent by this point. He has to push aside the memory of Shinya's hurt face when Guren said he was a mistake. He never meant to say something as hurtful as that but his temper got the better of him.

Yet, there's no point in regretting it. It's in the past. He's made a lot of mistakes in his life and this is one of those things he'll have to forget and move on from. That's the way life is. You make choices, you make mistakes, you move on.

“I don't remember. Like I said, there's no point in us anymore. I don't care what happens to him. You can deal with this on your own—”

He doesn't see it coming. One minute, Krul's staring blankly at a wall and the next, she's grabbing him by his collar. Up this close, he can see just how red her eyes are and it doesn't help that she's glaring at him like he's done the most heinous of crimes.

“You don't even know how much Shinya risked to fucking stay here,” she hisses. Her fists are white with how much she's gripping his collar. “You don't know anything.”

It's true. Guren listens to the distant sounds of cars driving past in the street as he admits that it's all true. He doesn't know anything. He wanted to, god, he really did. He never admitted it to himself but he wanted to know Shinya. He knew that the artist was hiding something from him; anyone with a brain could notice it. It's not hard to tell when someone's lying to you, especially if that certain someone is Shinya.

Guren sighs.

He doesn't make any effort to push Krul away.

Not before long, she narrows her eyes and lets go of him. Her lips are curled with disgust, anger, disappointment—it's hard to tell. Maybe it's a mixture of all three.

“Shinya,” she says, still looking at him straight in the eyes. “Shinya Hiiragi. There. That's his name.”

Everything is blanketed in silence afterwards. His mind empties at those words. Everything is gone. Blank. Empty.

“Hiiragi...?” is all Guren can utter out. Even the word feels odd in his mouth.

It feels like poison.

Krul nods. She's watching his reaction, he can tell, but he can't do anything to fully shake himself back to reality. All he can think of is Shinya and the Hiiragis.

“He's a Hiiragi. Right now, he's probably on his way back to them and god knows what they'll do to him.”

Guren can't grasp on what she means but it's there, it's right there in front of him. It's always been there.
He remembers Shinya's reaction when he found out Guren was an Ichinose. He remembers all those times Shinya avoided talking about families. He remembers Shinya's smiles, always tinged with something that doesn't quite touch on happiness, something not entirely real, something fake.

“What? Shinya... Shinya's part of the Hiiragis?”

He feels like a broken record but it's all he can say out loud. He can't even think properly. Everything is a mess.

“Yeah. But it's not like you care, right?” Krul gives out a laugh, if you can even call it that. “I don't even know why I deluded myself into thinking you'd be any help. Shinya's better off without you.”

That's when she leaves. Her last words surprise Guren by how much they sting, as much as he hates to admit it. He knows he's not the world's most perfect guy but... but he doesn't know. All this is too much. He doesn't know how the fuck to react to all of this.

Shinya is a Hiiragi.

Shinya is related to Mahiru.

Shinya is a Hiiragi.

“Fuck,” Guren says to himself. “Fuck this.”

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Even when he's at home, Yuu's still thinking about the Kimizuki incident. That's what he'll call it; The Kimizuki Incident. It sounds better than 'That time I stalked Kimizuki and the new guy' or 'That time I should have gone for nuggets instead'.

Ugh. Yuu really doesn't know why he feels so guilty all of a sudden. He knows next to nothing about that bully, but there's something about Kimizuki's reaction that tells him he was over the line today. Yeah, they beat each other up before but Yuu's not a complete ass. He'll hate on people who deserve it and yet when it comes to things like this, he's too nice.

He can't stop thinking about why Kimizuki was in the intensive care unit. Yuu knows that if you're in that unit then it's not good. Hell, that's an understatement. He fell down the stairs and almost cracked his head open and was in a coma for a few weeks. Of course it isn't good.

Was Kimizuki visiting someone in there? A friend? A family member?

Yuu doesn't know why he's so wrapped up in this. It isn't any of his business at all but it's all he's been thinking about ever since he got home.

Maybe it's because it made him realise that aside from Mika and Guren, he doesn't really have anyone else in this world. He's not even sure if Mika and Guren count. Guren's his uncle, yeah, but they're not like those family members that act all happy and close. Yuu's never had that. He doesn't even know how that feels like.

Even people like Kimizuki have someone they care about, but who does Yuu have?

He lies down on the couch, staring at the ceiling. There's intricate patterns on the ceiling, little swirls and loops of white, round and round until Yuu blanks out and follows them with his eyes. He does
this for ten minutes; lying there and spacing out because it's better than thinking about how lonely he is.

Man, that's lame.

How do you even feel lonely when you've never known what a family is?

Well, Mika said he was his family... but Mika has his own. It's not the same. Ever since Mika and him got out of hospital, Mika's been spending more time with his mother—which is understandable. Yuu's not complaining about that and he certainly doesn't want Mika to stop. No, he's glad that Mika's happy with his own family.

It just makes Yuu wonder what it's like to have that sort of relationship with your mother or your father. The only memories he has of his mother are those times when she would get too drunk. She'd be angry and cry over anything, she'd hit things, she'd hit him, she'd scream and demand for more drinks and Yuu would stare at her and think I fucking hate you.

And his dad? Who knows where his real dad is. He disappeared. No one knows if he's even still alive, but Yuu doesn't give a fuck about him too. He can be dead for all he cares.

He sighs. Great. Now he's in a bad mood. He should go and play something on his PS4 to distract himself.

Just as he's about to start up Assassin's Creed, there's a knock on the door.

That's odd. Guren didn't say anything about expecting visitors today. It's only five PM as well so his uncle shouldn't be back from work until a few hours later.

He gets up from the couch, running to the door and almost tripping over his own slippers. When he opens the door, Yuu's staring up at a man with black hair and bright green eyes. His brain tells him it's a stranger; he's never seen this man before but he continues to scrutinise the face and frown. He's tall, maybe a little shorter than Guren but still tall enough. His face is marred with light wrinkles, eyes shadowed by bags underneath and lips set in a thin line as the man stares back at Yuu.

Yuu grips onto the doorknob. “Yeah? What do you want?”

The stranger coughs. He looks away for a second, and then glances again at him.

“Yuu, it's me,” he says, voice husky and oddly familiar. “Your dad.”

Guren's still thinking about Shinya even when everyone else has left to go home. He gathers all of his papers, shoving them into his suitcase whilst his thoughts are trying to fill each memory like it's a puzzle.

None of it makes sense. He goes from wondering if Shinya only spoke to him because he was an Ichinose, and then telling himself that that's absurd because Shinya wouldn't do that. Shinya isn't like that.

He thinks. He doesn't even know. He barely knows anything about this guy.

But I know the Hiiragis, Guren reminds himself. The memories of Mahiru he'd long suppressed are
returning to him. He remembers her mood swings. She'd go from being the sweetest girl that ever lived, peppering his cheeks with kisses, and then she'd start crying, maybe screaming, maybe pulling at her hair and clawing at Guren's arms. She'd have nightmares almost every night and would tell Guren about her family, but then wake up with a blank expression and no recollection of what happened.

Guren knows the Hiiragis. They're not safe. He knew that when he was still married to Mahiru. He knew that when Mahiru divorced him and returned to them but he still did nothing because he was too heartbroken to care.

And now it was Shinya's turn to go back to them. He's losing another person he cared about to the Hiiragis.

Guren's eyes flicker to the clock. It's late. Yuu will wonder where he is if he doesn't get home soon.

But all he can think about is what he said to Shinya.

You were a mistake.

That's not true. He never intended to care about Shinya. He never wanted to care about someone ever again if it meant losing them like Mahiru, but Shinya happened and even after everything, Guren doesn't think it was ever a mistake. It wasn't meant to happen, and yet he's glad it did.

He needs to apologise. He can't believe he's only realising this now. He doesn't even know how to get Shinya away from the Hiiragis, but he wants to apologise. It feels silly suddenly being so hopeful and optimistic that he'll somehow be able to get a hold of Shinya, let alone get the Hiiragis off his back, but Guren's throwing all sense out the window.

He stuffs everything into his suitcase and hurries out of the building. He'll call Krul and say he'll help her get Shinya away from his family.

That's if he wants to get away from them, that is. In the end, Mahiru chose to return to the Hiiragis. What if Shinya is the same?

He doesn't know. He doesn't know anything when it comes to Shinya, but he can't let that stop him.

Guren fumbles for his keys. He's too busy thinking about whether he'll go home first or head straight to Krul's. What will he even say to her? What is he even going to do? He has no fucking idea—

“Boo!”

Guren swears, dropping the keys. He picks them up, spinning around to tell whoever it was behind him to fuck off.

He stops. He almost drops his keys again.

She's smiling. It's the same smile he saw from across the aisle a lifetime ago, purple hair billowing in the breeze and brown eyes larger than life itself.

She envelops him in an embrace, drowning Guren in the scent of roses. It's overpowering, too nostalgic and too real. There's a plethora of memories that go with this embrace, memories that Guren used to treasure and now they suffocate him instead. He stiffens and resists the urge to push her away. This can't be real. He's hallucinating. He's finally gone mad.

A laugh escapes her lips.
“You look like you've seen a ghost,” she says.

Guren finally finds his voice. He gulps, keys still in his hand, but they're shaking like the rest of his body.

“Mahiru...?”

Chapter End Notes

Idk why but I struggled writing this chapter a lot... I'm glad it's done now though because it's 5am and my back is dying and I need to sleep...

As usual, thank you so much for all the support and comments!! I'm so so grateful you guys stick with me even though my updates are slow and I repay you all with angst. All of your comments and kudos make me so happy, I feel lucky to have such lovely readers. I love reading all of your reactions, they always make me smile <3

If you want to contact me, feel free to do so on my tumblr or twitter! ~
Hello y'all. This is probably expected since I haven't updated any of my fics for well over a year but, yes, I'm going to discontinue this as well as my other ongoing fics for this fandom. I just wanted to say THANK YOU to everyone who supported/commented/liked my writing; you guys have been so kind and I just?? I'm still wow at the amount of attention my stuff got. I never wrote fics before this; I usually just wrote my own thing but never got involved with a lot of fandoms, so it was really nice to have so many people say nice things about my writing.

Thank you for taking the time to support me and I am very very sorry I couldn't finish my things. If I'm going to be truthful, it's simply because I'm not as invested in mikayuu/gureshin or the owasera fandom in general as much as I used to be. I struggle to write about things I'm not passionate about and I know that if I were to force myself to write another chapter for my fics, it won't be as good and I'll just hate it.

Again, thank you to everyone who still wrote comments during this past year. Just know that I read every single one of them even though I don't reply. All of you are so sweet and I really do wish I can bring myself to write again for this fandom because I feel like I should at least repay all of you guys dfjkfgggf

Anyway, goodbye for now. It was fun writing for this fandom and I've met a lot of good friends because of it. Thank you guys <3

Btw, I do have a chapter outline for the rest of this story. If anyone wanted to know how it ended/what happens in the future chapter then here was my very very rough chapter outline. Bear in mind, it's very rough. It's mainly just vague bullet points summarising key events for each chapter. I don't know how helpful it's going to be, but it's there if anyone is curious.

If anyone wants to talk, I'm always active on twitter! Let's be friends ^^

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