Baby on Board

by nakadoo

Summary

This and that happened, and Jyushimatsu comes home with Karamatsu.

Except Karamatsu's like, five years old.

Notes

Fuck, I couldn't think of a proper summary I'm sorry.

There u go my pals, I'm doing it. I'm making this happen.
Whoopsie Daisy

Professor Dekapan didn't really understand why Jyushimatsu frequented his quaint little laboratory every now and then but he didn't mind. He always loved to talk about his new inventions and ideas to anyone who was willing to listen. And while Jyushimatsu Matsuno didn't look the type to understand convoluted explanations, he made the effort to listen and to try and understand in his own way, which was fine by all means in Professor Dekapan's book. Anyone willing to understand, to learn, was a person to be admired.

Jyushimatsu tended to bring one of his brothers when he wanted, and today it was the blue one that accompanied him. He looked to be just as curious as Jyushimatsu, although he thankfully kept his hands to himself. Professor Dekapan wouldn't want a mishap to happen, especially since it would take quite some time for him to reverse the damage that may occur.

But this is a gag anime fanfiction, and of course something wild and completely predictable is going to happen. For the sake of entertainment, and for the sake of putting our favorite brothers through an ordeal they didn't think they would have to face for at least a couple more handfuls of years.

"To make flowers grow faster!" Jyushimatsu cheered over and over behind him, reminding Professor Dekapan why the two siblings were there in the first place. The blue one wanted to grow flowers of his own, to give to girls in hopes of sweeping them off their feet. "And more colorful! And nice smelling! Right, nii-san?" he asked, turning his head to his older brother for confirmation.

"That is correct my little Jyushimatsu," he agreed, nodding his head firm in resolve. "For each and every girl out there is unique, and I would want nothing more but for them to receive flowers that are as unique as they are," he explained though it fell on deaf ears. But it didn't matter to him, since he was more than used to delivering monologues and soliloquies despite the lack of audience.

Well, his spiel didn't go completely ignored. "Then what of crossbreeds?" Professor Dekapan asked as he rummaged through his shelf, looking for the little bottle that held the growth enhancer that they sought. "Hmm, now where did I put that darned thing?"

"Ooh!" Karamatsu exclaimed, genuinely curious and interested in seeing what kind of beauty crossbred flowers could show him. "That would be lovely, Professor! Surely whatever the outcome will be—"

"Crossbreed?" Jyushimatsu asked, turning around abruptly to look his brother in the eye. "What's that?"

As the blue one began to explain crossbreeds in an unnecessarily complicated way, Professor Dekapan found the bottle he was looking for. At least, it looked to be the right bottle. He squinted at it's label, worn out and faded from being left alone to collect dust for so long. He blew at the glass bottle and a small cloud of dust erupted around him, causing him to cough and sniffle and—

—ACHOO!!!

The little glass bottle slipped from his fingers, twirling around in the air like a cheerleader's baton. The cork, old and crumbling, easily slipped out and flew away in another direction. The content of the bottle could land anywhere now but the centrifugal force of the spin kept it from spilling for now.
Professor Dekapan watched in slow motion as the little bottle spun and spun and spun, watched as it slowly descended. He watched as the rim of the bottle promptly and conveniently landed in Karamatsu's open mouth (he was still talking? Goodness, what a talkative boy!) He watched as the content of the bottle slowly disappeared with each bob of the blue one's Adam's apple.

"Oh dear," Professor Dekapan said sheepishly.

Jyushimatsu went to his brother's back, his arms wrapping around him in preparation to perform the Heimlich Maneuver as the bottle lodged itself in his throat. After a few harsh squeezes from the yellow one, the bottle was finally free from his brother's mouth and shattered against the floor, it's life and purpose now done and over with.

Everyone looked at the broken bottle in confused silence.

"Am I going to die?" Karamatsu asked after a beat, his face red from the rough way his brother had helped him.

Professor Dekapan shook his head confidently. "No, that was meant for living beings—plants in this case—so I don't think it will do you any harm—"

A loud "poof!" was heard, a pink cloud of smoke appearing where the blue one was. The professor and Jyushimatsu coughed as the smoke invaded their senses, scrunching up their faces in distaste as it burned their nostrils.

After the smoke had subsided...

"Nii-san?"

"Oh my goodness..."

Karamatsu popped his head out of his over-sized sweater, looking up at his younger brother who now looked too big to be his younger brother. He blinked, confused, and a little bit hungry, before erupting into tears. He tried to wipe at his eyes only to find that his hands were hidden beneath too much sleeves and proceeded to cry more, harder, and louder.

Jyushimatsu jumped, startled, but cradled his brother in his arms instinctively.

Professor Dekapan crouched down and pulled the label from the shattered glass on the floor, squinting his eyes once more to try and decipher his own atrocious handwriting. And, after a few long seconds of staring, he laughed. "Ah, silly me. That was a de-growth formula!"
Jyushimatsu has never taken care of a child before. The only younger sibling he had was Todomatsu, and even then his youngest brother was the same age as him. It was different; looking out for a younger brother to make sure they didn't get hurt wasn't the same as taking care of a younger brother to make sure they grew up to be big and strong, as well as a good person.

He helped his small older brother out of his now over sized clothing, bundling it up to the side before wiping Karamatsu's face with the end of his sleeves.

Karamatsu was still sniffling, still overly confused as to what was happening around him. One moment he was an adult who (mostly) had his life together, and now he was a small child wondering where he was and why his younger brother was not younger than him anymore. His memories were a bit muddled and it was difficult trying to remember what his life was before all this, because the memories of his grown up life almost seemed like a really vague dream that he doesn't quite remember but is certain that they happened.

In short, his mind was a mess, his memories even messier, and he was hungry and he was tired and now he wasn't even wearing any clothes. He sneezed, and sniffled, feeling tears well up at his eyes again. The only reason he was able to hold them back this time is because Jyushimatsu was still there with him, hands over his shoulders as he listened to Professor Dekapan's explanation. He tried to listen too.

"—ould wear of in maybe a week, or maybe two!" Professor Dekapan explained as he pulled shelves open and looked under various stacks of paper. "Making the antidote itself is pretty easy, the difficult part is that I just can't remember where I put my notes! I'm sure they're here somewhere," the professor said. He remembers making the de-growth formula as well as the re-growth antidote almost as if it were yesterday, and he very clearly remembers that he wrote down the process in one of his notebooks.

"Professor Dekapan," Jyushimatsu called, raising his hand in the air like a child waiting to be called in class. When the professor acknowledged him, he put his hand back down. "Do you have clothes that nii-san can borrow? His old ones are too big now and he might get a cold if he just stands here naked."

Karamatsu nodded in agreement, tugging Jyushimatsu's long sleeves over the front of his body to at least hide most of his private parts.

"Oh! Actually," the professor said, turning around to face them. "I have this invention, you see! It works like an ordinary washing machine but it shrinks clothes! How convenient, right?" He pointed over to the far corner of his lab and his ever trusty assistant and best friend Dayon pulled at the drapes to uncover the washing machine in question.

It looked like a frog's face for some reason, but that didn't bother Jyushimatsu in the least. He jumped up with an excited "WHOOAAA!!!!" and picked up his older brother's discarded clothes before skipping over to the frog washing machine to examine all it's different buttons and functions. He pressed a blue button and the frog's mouth opened, so he dumped the clothes in there. He closed the lid, then pressed the red button and soon enough the machine was whirring into life, vibrating almost violently as it washed and shrunk the clothes inside.
"Wahoo!" Jyushimatsu exclaimed as he climbed on top of the machine, his body vibrating along with it. "It's like a roller coaster!"

For some reason, Dayon climbed on top of the machine with him. Jyushimatsu's exited exclamations were joined with Dayon's enthusiastic cheering.

Feeling vulnerable now that his brother was not at his side, Karamatsu felt like crying again. His lip wobbled as he came closer to crying, his vision blurring as tears began to swim at his eyes again. But he picked up a book from the floor to cover his indecency.

Professor Dekapan was aware of the small child's distress. In order to quell his tears, he crouched down and put on the most responsible scientist voice he could muster. "Karamatsu-kun," he called the boy's attention and smiled kindly as the blue one looked at him with his big, innocent doe eyes. "Are you alright? Do you remember who I am?"

Karamatsu looked down in thought, searching through his memories for the answer. He nodded slowly but uncertainly.

"I'm Professor Dekapan," the professor explained. "I've known you and your brothers since you were small children."

The statement confused Karamatsu, seeing as he was technically a small child and he barely remembered the man in front of him.

"Don't you worry," the professor told him, tentatively patting the blue one on the head and let out a small sigh of relief when the boy let him. "We'll get you back to normal in no time. Just leave it to me!" And then the professor laughed in that odd but familiar way of his, going back to the task of finding his notes.

Karamatsu stood there for a while, not really sure what he should do next. He wanted to sit down, or maybe take a nap, but first he wanted his clothes back. He didn't want to stay naked for any longer, even if no one seemed to mind his nudity at the moment. He turned his attention to his brother, who was still excitedly waving his arms as the machine continued to violently vibrate. "J-jyushimachuu," he called. He was so confused and he wanted to cry again. So he did. "Jyushimachuuu...!!!" he wailed, one hand still firmly holding the book to hide his privates, the other going up to wipe away his tears. "Jyushimachuuu!!!!!"

Jyushimatsu's cowlick went rigid and straight as he heard his brother's cries. Oops, he left him alone! Jyushimatsu jumped off the washing machine, leaving Dayon to ride it alone as if it were a mad bull, and bounded over to his brother in a few couple of seconds. He scooped his brother up into his arms, squishing their cheeks together as he walked back to the washing machine. "Do you wanna ride it?" He asked. "It's really fun!"

Karamatsu wiped his tear stained face against Jyushimatsu's long sleeves then nodded.

"Okaaay!!" Jyushimatsu cheered, climbing back on with Karamatsu still in his arms. "We're going to..... Mars!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Jyushimatsu, Karamatsu, and Dayon excitedly went to mars together as Professor Dekapan tried to look for that confounded notebook. The sound of laughter filled the lab, everyone unanimously deciding to stay optimistic about the whole situation.
"Where's Jyushimatsu?" Ichimatsu asked, holding a baseball bat in one hand and a roll of rope in the other. It was about time that they did *The Thing* and yet his brother was nowhere to be found. It's not like they did *The Thing* everyday, but Jyushimatsu usually gave him a heads up before making other plans.

"He said he was gonna go to Professor Dekapan's place," Choromatsu answered pretty quickly, browsing through his magazine without really reading anything. While he did love his brother, it was nice and peaceful when he wasn't around. "I think he brought Karamatsu with him."

"Ehhh...." Ichimatsu replied with a frown, tossing his things to the side.

"Aww, do you miss your little brother?" Osomatsu teased, grinning at the fourth brother with a playful glint in his eyes. Osomatsu seemed to be the only brother who did not fear Ichimatsu's wrath, or maybe he was just too stupid to realize that teasing his brother could potentially mean death. "It's okay, Ichimatsu. I miss my little brothers too! Two of them aren't here! It sucks, you know? They didn't even invite meeeeee," he whined as he rolled on the couch.

"Do you think they went to play pachinko?" Todomatsu asked without looking up from his phone.

Choromatsu clicked his tongue in annoyance. "I just said they went to Professor Dekapan's lab!"

"They can't have stayed there this whole time," Todomatsu replied with a roll of his eyes. He very maturely stuck his tongue out at Choromatsu.

Ichimatsu wandered to the window of the room where the warm sunlight was pouring in. Well, he didn't mind if they didn't do *The Thing* today. A cat brushed against his leg for a few moments before spreading itself out on the patch of sunlight on the floor. The fourth brother followed suit, curling up with the cat for a short nap.

"Ah, look at that," Osomatsu said mostly to himself. "He can be really cute sometimes."

"I'm hommmmmuscle!" came Jyushimatsu's familiar greeting, accompanied by the front door slamming against the wall. The impact was strong enough that it almost felt like the whole house rattled, but no one really cared since this was a usual thing.

"Uuugh," Choromatsu whined, planting his face into his magazine. The silence was nice while it lasted.

The door to the room opened, revealing their yellow brother.

"Welcome home, Jyushimatsu nii-san," Todomatsu greeted, again not bothering to look up from his phone as he typed away.

"Ous! Ous!" Jyushimatsu cheered, a sleeping and thankfully clothed Karamatsu bundled up in his arms.

A chorus of "welcome back" spread across the room, no one really realizing that Jyushimatsu had a child in his arms.

Jyushimatsu padded towards their most responsible brother then sat next to Choromatsu as he carefully adjusted Karamatsu in his arms. His older brother cried a whole lot since turning into a
child, and Jyushimatsu supposed that the whole transformation must have really tired him out. "Nii-san," Jyushimatsu called in a relatively quieter voice. He poked Choromatsu's arm when his brother didn't respond right away. "Nii-sannnnn."

"Whaat," Choromatsu replied grumpily, his face still very much pressed against the pages of his magazine.

"How do you take care of a kid?" Jyushimatsu asked.

Choromatsu paused, confused with the question. While Jyushimatsu was an enigma within himself, it was still a pretty odd question coming from him. Finally, he pulled his magazine away from his face to look at his younger brother. "Why do you a—WHAT THE HELL IS THAT!?!?!??????" He screeched, jumping up like a spooked cat. Ichimatsu, from behind him, did the same at the sudden high pitched scream.

Everyone looked at Jyushimatsu then, and the sleeping child in his arms.

Jyushimatsu adjusted his brother in his arms again, rocking him slightly. "It's Karamatsu nii-san!"

Chapter End Notes

DONT DISTURB THE SLEEPING CHILD!!!!!!!!!!
Four of six brothers sat around the small round table at the center of their room, each wearing different expressions on their faces. Jyushimatsu, the figurative stork who delivered the child into their household, had his usual wide, open-mouthed grin, eyes looking at nothing in particular but at everything at the same time. Ichimatsu beside him had a confused scowl on his face, his brows drawn together as his eyes darted to each of his brother's faces to gauge their reactions. Choromatsu's scowl was much deeper than Ichimatsu's, just as confused as his younger brother, but his scowl held the worry that everyone else's faces lacked. Todomatsu had a small frown on his face, eyes closed and his chin cupped in his hand as he thought deeply of what they should do.

Behind them the futon was set out for Karamatsu, the small boy still deeply asleep as he nuzzled against the pillow under his head. Osomatsu was beside him on the futon, reclining on his side as he watched the slow rise and fall of Karamatsu's chest as he slept peacefully.

Of all the brothers, it seemed that Jyushimatsu and Osomatsu didn't find a problem with their new predicament.

"We should get him out of here," Todomatsu finally said after a painfully long moment of silence. He grabbed his phone from the table top, already scrolling through his contact list to see who could baby sit their brother for now while they tried to figure out what to do. "I have a friend who can take care of him, he loves kids, and he's really good with them."

"He sounds like a pedophile," Ichimatsu supplied helpfully, grinning at the very upset look that Todomatsu sent his way. "No, I'm serious," he insisted, though he was not really serious at all. At least, not completely.

"You're just gonna dump your own brother onto someone else?" Choromatsu asked with a distasteful shake of his head. While they usually didn't treat Karamatsu very well, it just felt wrong to abandon him and leave him with a stranger instead of taking care of him themselves. He knew next to nothing about taking care of children, but he supposed it wouldn't be too hard to learn. "I knew you were a dry monster but this is just harsh."

"Totty, Totty, Totty," Ichimatsu tutted at his younger brother, mostly to tease him.

"Totty, Totty, Totty," Jyushimatsu echoed, but honestly a little bit disappointed in his younger brother's decision.

"It's not about being a dry monster, which I'm not by the way!" Todomatsu argued, his frown getting deeper as he went on. "Do any of us know how to take care of a kid?! We'd lose him in like, five minutes! I say it'd be better if we left him in more capable hands!"

"It's only going to be for a week," Choromatsu responded, then turned his head towards Jyushimatsu. "Or two weeks, right?"

Jyushimatsu nodded his head vigorously. "Yep! Professor Dekapan said it was gonna be easy! He just can't find his notes right now!"

"Hmm," Choromatsu replied, a somewhat stable plan beginning to form in his mind. "So we can take turns watching over Karamatsu nii-san and helping the professor look for his notes. If he had
more help looking for them, then maybe this doesn't even have to last too long."

"No, no, no, no, no, no!" Todomatsu argued more, slamming his hands on the table top more for a
dramatic effect rather than genuinely being upset. But he was upset at the fact that no one seemed
to understand why it was important to have Karamatsu out of the house while he was a child. "I just
said we're not capable. We're neets! Jobless neets! Do you really think we can take care of him—"

"We can always ask mom," Ichimatsu added, actually helpful this time. "She raised like, six pieces
of trash—"

"—You're the only one who's trash, Ichimatsu nii-san!"

"I'm sure she wouldn't mind taking care of one again" Ichimatsu finished, completely talking over
Todomatsu's outburst.

"That's what you don't understand," Todomatsu whined, running his hands through his hair in
frustration. "You know how mom went all crazy at the mention of..." he lowered his voice to a
whisper and leaned in closer to his brothers. "Grandchildren." He leaned back out and shook his
head. "What do you think she's gonna say when she sees nii-san like this? She'll probably want to
keep him this way for as long as possible! Heck, she might even ask Professor Dekapan for more of
that weird stuff to turn us into kids too!"

"Totty's just angry because he's not the cutest brother anymore," Osomatsu piped up with a grin,
looking over his shoulder momentarily to see his younger brother's very upset face just as he let out
an offended and scandalized gasp.

A hand over his heart and continued offended noises was all Todomatsu could do in response.
Finally, after regaining himself, he stood up and stomped his foot almost childishly. "That's not
true! You know that's not true!"

"Hit the nail on the head," Ichimatsu snickered.

"I can't believe this," Choromatsu said, hand on his forehead as he shook his head in
disappointment.

"DON'T YOU DARE SHAKE YOUR HEAD AT ME!!" Todomatsu shouted, finally losing his
cool as he pounced Choromatsu, shaking his older brother by the shoulders in his frustration. "I'm
the one who's being the most logical here! What do you think is gonna happen next?! Mom and
dad are gonna make us look for jobs to help support Karamatsu nii-san! We're going to have to
abandon this lifestyle we have just because he turned into a kid!" Todomatsu continued to ramble
on without much sense, thoroughly upset because Osomatsu was 100% right. Karamatsu was
ridiculously cute as a child, and being cute was his gimmick!

"Wah!" Jyushimatsu sprung to his feet, his legs set apart just a little bit wider than his shoulders as
he bent his knees, making himself bounce up and down as his head turned to Totty who was livid,
and then to Choromatsu who looked like his soul was slowly escaping him out of his mouth. He
waved his arms a little frantically for a short moment before skillfully tackling Todomatsu off his
older brother and onto the floor. The fifth brother sat on top of Todomatsu's chest to trap him, and
proceeded to gently pat his younger brother's cheeks to quell his anger. "Shush, shush, Totty.
Shush, shush."

Ichimatsu grabbed the tail of Choromatsu's slowly escaping soul and forced it back into his older
brother's body. When Choromatsu's eyes looked a little less vacant and a little more like usual,
Ichimatsu gave himself a pat on the back to congratulate himself for saving his brother's life.
Even though Jyushimatsu was doing his best to calm Todomatsu down, Choromatsu was upset with his youngest brother's selfish need to be the cutest as well as freaking livid that he had to fall victim to his violent reaction. And, as the say, boys will be boys and an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Choromatsu jumped up and on top of innocent Jyushimatsu, crushing both of his brothers underneath his weight as revenge (he had at least a shred of decency to remind himself to apologize and make it up to Jyushimatsu later).

Jyushimatsu didn't mind, however, thinking that it was pretty fun to roughhouse with his brothers. "OOOOOOORRRRYAHHH!!" he screamed, wrestling whoever got in his way as he laughed the whole while.

Ichimatsu stood up then, watching the fight take place and acting as the referee. As usual, Jyushimatsu was winning but the fight between Choromatsu and Todomatsu looked to be evenly matched.

The hustle and bustle and noise and commotion of his brothers was enough to rouse the smallest Matsu up. He was still very confused about what was going on, but at least he was rested now and could think a little bit clearer. But as he opened his eyes slowly, he was greeted by a face that looked very much like his own, although much older.

"Good morning sunshine," Osomatsu greeted with his usual grin. "D'ya know who I am?" Osomatsu questioned calmly and gently despite the chaos happening at the other side of the room.

Karamatsu looked at his brother in front of him, then at the rest of his brothers fooling around. Maybe it was instinct or a weird sextuplet sixth sense, but he knew that it was his one and only biggest brother. "Osomachu nii-chan," he said sleepily as he sat up, rubbing away the sleep from his eyes.

"Yeah! Haha, that's right," Osomatsu agreed, sitting up as well. "You hungry buddy? Wanna go get some snacks? I think we got cookies downstairs."

Karamatsu nodded, his eyes almost sparkling at the promise of food. He extended his arms towards his brother, his fingers curling and opening up repeatedly in the wordless request of "carry."

"Hehe, cute," Osomatsu commented and proceeded to pick his brother up. Karamatsu was really light and easy enough to carry and Osomatsu patted his back in a comforting way. "Did you sleep well?" he asked as he carried his brother out the room and downstairs to the kitchen for the promised snack.

The two eldest brothers were completely unnoticed by the younger ones, their conversation slowly drifting away as they descended the stairs.

A few more long minutes of roughhousing, Ichimatsu chanting "FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT," over and over again as Jyushimatsu somehow managed to overpower both his brothers. Choromatsu was still arguing with Todomatsu, though most of their arguments were baseless and dwindled down to angry name calling.

The door to their room slammed open.

They all yelped in shock.

Their mother, standing at the doorway, looked absolutely livid. "What is going on here?!"

They all paused, looking at each other silently.
Then realized that Karamatsu and Osomatsu were missing.

Choromatsu screeched loud enough for the whole street to hear. "WHERE'S OSOMATSU NII-SAN AND KARAMATSU NII-SAN!??!?!??!"

Meanwhile in the kitchen, Osomatsu and Karamatsu watched as a single cookie slowly sank down to the bottom of a glass of milk, completely oblivious to the noise and commotion happening upstairs.

Chapter End Notes

oh man they're probably a little bit out of character but w/e

and if you guys have been following me for a while now, yall already know that i love oso&kara so its pretty obvious who kara's favorite brother is going to be >:3c

i literally have NO PLAN™ for this story
A Very Reasonable Decision

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Osomatsu felt a chill run down his spine.

Carefully and nervously he looked over at the doorway, and to the best of his ability he tried to keep his face in it's usual carefree expression so as not to worry his younger brother. When nothing happened, he glanced back at Karamatsu and smiled brightly as he watched as Karamatsu tried to take back the sunken cookie from the bottom of the glass. Whatever that weird, worrying feeling was was gone now, replaced with absolute delight as Karamatsu made a mess of himself and the table. "Karamatsuuuu," he cooed. "You're making a mess!"

Karamatsu paused, his hand wrist deep into his glass of milk. He looked almost guilty when he saw the mess around him, crumbs and small puddles of milk all over the table, and retracted his hand. "Oopsie..." he said quietly, looking down at his lap as he wiped his wet hand on his hoodie, waiting for Osomatsu to scold him for making that mess.

"If you tell me you love me, then I'll help you clean the mess before anyone finds out!" Osomatsu said instead, winking just in time for Karamatsu to see.

The young boy gasped, practically jumping to his feet on his seat as he nodded his head vigorously. He spread his arms as far as he could manage and even got on his tip toes as he said "I love Osomachu nii-chan this much!"

"Gyaaahh!!" Osomatsu squealed, a huge grin plastered across his face. "Osomachu nii-chan loves you too!" he replied, raising and extending his arms towards Karamatsu to envelop him in a bone crushing hug. But as his fingers brushed against the material of Karamatsu's hoodie, his brother was suddenly out of his reach as a blur zoomed behind him, sweeping up the little boy away from Osomatsu's awaiting arms. "Huh!?"

"AHHHH!!" Karamatsu screamed as he was suddenly being spun around, and around, and around. He wanted to go to Osomatsu's safe hug right now but as he looked at the face of his captor he realized that it was the face that he found so much comfort in. He raised his arms up high, a smile lighting up his face immediately. "Mommy!" he cheered, reaching forward in an attempt to hug his mom.

Of all his memories, his mother's face was the one that stood out the most and stayed constant throughout it all. Though she looked a little bit older than he remembers, he still knows without a doubt that this is his one and only mother, the one who would protect him from harm and love him forever. He laughed happily as she continued to spin him around at arms length.

Osomatsu looked thoroughly put off by the turn of events, getting up to his feet with a scowl on his face. "Oi! Mom! I was playing with—" Karamatsu was spun in a circle, his feet accidentally hitting Osomatsu in the face. "Ow!" he staggered back but quickly recovered. "Mom, I said— Ow! Oi! Mo—!! Ow!! Ow!! H-hey!!"

And with one more hit to the face, Osomatsu lost his footing and stumbled backwards, backwards, backwards, until his head collided with the refrigerator door. Stars burst across his vision for a
moment and he slowly slumped to the ground with the fridge right at his back.

The rest of the brothers arrived at the kitchen just in time to witness the fall of their eldest brother.

"He's out cold," Ichimatsu commented, crouching beside their fallen brother to poke at his cheek. "Wow."

Choromatsu crouched down beside him, poking his eldest brother's cheek as well. "I think he deserved that."

"He deserves more than that!" Todomatsu huffed out, still upset with what Osomatsu had said earlier. He was still the cutest since Karamatsu's cuteness was only going to be temporary. And, petty as he is, Todomatsu sat right on top of Osomatsu's stomach with his nose held high up in the air and his lips set into a very deep and not at all threatening pout. "Hmph!"

"One, two, three!" Jyushimatsu shouted, each count accompanied by a slam of his hand against the floor. "Osomatsu nii-san's out!" He took Todomatsu's hand in his own sleeved one, raising it up high. "Totty wins!"

Choromatsu turned his attention away from his brothers and instead to his mother and Karamatsu. "Oi, mom. Stop spinning him around so much, you're gonna make him dizzy!"

Thankfully their mom wasn't deaf to his words like how she was with Osomatsu's. She put her now youngest son down on the kitchen table, her expression still warm and happy as metaphorical flowers and hearts danced around her immediate perimeter.

The brothers winced slightly at the bright light that was radiating from their mother's figure.

"Mommy!" Karamatsu called again, extending his arms towards her. His mom came closer and he wrapped his arms around her neck and smiled and he rubbed his face against her shoulder. "I love you mommy!"

Matsuyo's glasses cracked at her son's words. It was much cuter when Karamatsu called her mommy when he was younger rather than when he was older. "Mommy loves you too, Karamatsu! Oh goodness, your face is a mess!" She grabbed a tissue from the counter and began to wipe at his face, absolutely delighted with how round and soft his cheeks were.

"She's lost it," Ichimatsu said, still wincing slightly from the bright atmosphere that was now not only surrounding their mother but Karamatsu as well. He had to physically use his hand to shield his eyes.

Todomatsu was doing the same. "I told you! I told you all and did any of you listen?!"

"Oh shut up, Totty," Choromatsu said with a roll of his eyes, accepting a pair of Karamatsu's sunglasses that Jyushimatsu handed to him.

Jyushimatsu didn't seem to mind the brightness though and made things worse as he joined the warm and happy atmosphere, laughing all the while with Karamatsu and their mother.

They explained the situation to their mother when she asked earlier, but judging by her reaction now she probably only registered the words "Karamatsu is five years old now." She didn't even listen to the rest of the explanation and immediately rushed down to steal Karamatsu away from Osomatsu.

Choromatsu shook his head at the antics of his family, turning his attention to his somewhat more
reasonable brothers. "I guess it's up to us then. Let's— OI ICHIMATSU, WHY ARE YOU SITTING ON OSOMATSU TOO?"

Ichimatsu, who was now sitting on Osomatsu's chest next to Todomatsu, shrugged his shoulders lamely.

"Ugh, anyway," Choromatsu said, deciding to let his brothers do what they want for now "I guess we should split into teams. Jyushimatsu and Osomatsu can watch over Karamatsu since they don't seem to mind at all," he thought out loud as he rubbed his chin. "And then the three of us can go to the lab to help the professor find his notes."

Todomatsu nodded with conviction, standing up and already making his way out of the house. The faster they found the stupid notes, the sooner Karamatsu could turn back into his painful self. He never thought he'd be thinking this but he'd much rather have his painful older brother than a cute younger brother. His position was at stake here!

"Oi, Totty!" Choromatsu chased after the youngest, leaving Ichimatsu alone with the rest of their family to debrief their brothers of the plan. Ichimatsu got off of Osomatsu and began swatting at his face like how a cat would, urging his oldest brother back into consciousness. "Nii-san, get up. Come on. Get up."

Osomatsu stirred for a short moment, then went back to being a limp human puddle on the floor.

"Oiii," Ichimatsu persisted, not really that annoyed with his brother's refusal to wake up. He was too lazy to look around Professor Dekapan's lab, and he didn't want to be in a place that was filled with surprise needles the size of god damned fishing poles.

Karamatsu, utterly happy with the love and affection his mother and Jyushimatsu were showering him with, barely noticed Osomatsu's absence. But as he turned around to look for his eldest brother to remind him that they still had to clean the mess on the table, he found that Osomatsu was on the floor looking quite dead. Worry filled his little heart as he carefully climbed down from the table, making his way over to his big brother.

Matsuyo's glasses glinted and she once more became a blur of a human, returning in less than three seconds with a camera in her hands. She began snapping as many photos as she could, from every possible angle, as her small son went to his older brother.

Jyushimatsu finally realized where he'd gotten his speed from.

Karamatsu twaddled towards Osomatsu, getting on his knees next to Ichimatsu as he looked at their oldest brother. Then he turned his attention to Ichimatsu, who flinched upon receiving such an innocent and pure look, and asked "is nii-chan... dead...?"

Ichimatsu felt a little bit of himself die at how painfully cute his brother was. And, as usual, he disguised his affection with harshness instead. "Yes, he's dead. You killed him" he said in a flat voice, nodding his head solemnly.

The effect was almost immediate.

Karamatsu's big eyes swam with tears, dripping down his cheeks like a waterfall as a truly depressed look overcame his small face. He pressed both his palms against Osomatsu's chest, shaking him as much as he could. "Nii-chan! Nii-chan wake up!!" he wailed, his lip quivering and he continued to shake his brother. "Nii-chaaaaaannn!!"

Ichimatsu died a little bit more on the inside, and then felt a hand hit him on the back of his head.
He looked up just in time to see his mother retract her hand, but other than that she went back to taking pictures of her sons.

"Uooowaahh...." Karamatsu continued to cry, shaking his eldest brother in vain.

Though not completely in vain because after a few seconds of crying, Osomatsu began to stir. He blinked his eyes as he felt the small pressure of small hands against his chest, and heard the small sad voice of his small younger brother. He sat up immediately, his older brother senses kicking in and his need to console Karamatsu making him forget that he was ever hit in the first place. He put his hands underneath Karamatsu's armpits, lifting his brother onto his lap to hold him. "Whatcha crying for?"

"...!!" Karamatsu couldn't even speak with how warbled his crying made his voice, choosing instead to cling onto Osomatsu as if his life depended on it.

Osomatsu cradled his brother as he stood up, wincing slightly as flashes from his mother's camera blinded his eyes. He raised his hand to shield his eyes. "Mom, what the hell?"

Matsuyo smiled at her sons and gave them a thumbs up. Seeing her eldest son holding the younger one gave her the image of Osomatsu with a family of his own, with little kids of his own, and a new-found excitement to be a grandmother washed over her all over again; she thought that her sons would become a hopeless case, NEETS forever, but the fact that Osomatsu seemed to be taking care of his brother almost effortlessly gave her hope of a grandchild-filled future. She put her camera down finally, opening her arms for a hug.

Confused but never one to deny physical affection, Osomatsu made his way to his mother's arms and accepted the hug. "What's going on with you, Ma—ouch! Ouch!" He yelped in pain for the instant his mother hugged him, her hand also went to pinch the shell of his ear. "Ma! Owwww ow ow!"

"Get a girlfriend already," his mother said in a very serious tone then finally let go of his ear to resume hugging him.

Karamatsu ended up squished against their bodies, but didn't mind because two people that he loved so dearly were holding him close and making him feel safe.

When their little hugging session was done, Matsuyo clapped her hands to get everyone's attention. "Okay," she said, looking at her sons as they all lined up like how they used to when they were kids whenever she had something important to say. "This is going to last for a week, right?" she asked, turning her gaze towards Jyushimatsu who seemed to know most of what was going on and what needed to be done.

"Yes, yes!" Jyushimatsu cheered with his hands up in the air. "Or maybe two weeks!"

Matsuyo nodded at the information. "Well, I've already given away all your baby clothes so we don't have anything for Karamatsu to wear in that span of time."

Karamatsu looked down at his clothes with a small frown. What was wrong with the clothes he was wearing right now? He liked his clothes right now, it matched with his brothers. He didn't want to change his clothes.

"And Karamatsu was the only one out of all of you who even bothered to learn how to sew but he can't really make his own clothes in the state he's in," Matsuyo continued to discuss, her glasses gleaming again due to the sunlight that poured into the room through the kitchen window. Her
eyes were hidden against that gleam, making her expression unreadable.

And then, with a serious voice, "Osomatsu."

"Uh... Yes?" her eldest son said uncertainly, adjusting his grip on Karamatsu.

"You know where your father hides his credit card, right?"

Osomatsu took his time trying to put the pieces together, and even though he wasn't entirely sure of what his mother had planned he nodded. "In his sock drawer. He hides it in the socks you got him for his birthday."

Matsuyo's lips twitched slightly as she muttered "no wonder he never uses those" under her breath. She cleared her throat and straightened her posture, looking at her sons again. "Get ready."

The brothers looked at each other questioningly.

"F...for what?" Ichimatsu asked nervously.

A wide smile spread across their mother's face. "We're going shopping."

Meanwhile, at an office a few minutes away, Matsuzō Matsuno felt a chill run down his spine.

Chapter End Notes

MamaMatsuno knows what's best for all her sons. She will fight you if you hurt her sons. Do not hurt any of her sons.
Karamatsu looked up at the building that he remembers to be the mall, but can't remember where he's seen it before. But whatever anxiety that came with going to new places didn't affect him since he was surrounded by people who made him feel safe. No, no anxiety at all. In fact his eyes were glittering in excitement at all the new things to see, all the pretty things to touch, and all the things that a mall could hold.

Osomatsu tugged gently at his hand, following after their mother as she continued down one area to the next as she looked for the children's clothes department. His small brother walked slowly behind him, his head looking up and down and taking everything in. Eventually the eldest son picked his brother up, letting his brother admire the mall without having to tire himself out with walking.

Ichimatsu lagged behind as Jyushimatsu zoomed through one department to another, appearing in front of their mother with a rather large shopping cart in tow. He saluted his mother, and she saluted back, then he dutifully pushed the cart beside her.

"Nii-chan," Karamatsu said excitedly, tugging at his older brother's hoodie to catch his attention. When Osomatsu looked down at him he pointed over to the children's clothes, in particular he was pointing at a rather sparkle-y looking shirt, the word "COOL" written with blue sequins. It had caught his attention, and he felt like it was something that he'd wear, something that he was familiar with. And he wanted it. "That one, that one!"

Osomatsu walked over to Karamatsu's desired shirt, laughing at how completely Karamatsu it was. Yep, this was definitely his little brother in his arms that was for sure. He put Karamatsu down to take the shirt off the clothes wrack and then crouched down as he held it against Karamatsu's body. "I think it'll fit you," he nodded thoughtfully and Karamatsu returned his nod with his own enthusiastic one. "Wanna try it on?"

Karamatsu nodded his head again, but then held the edges of his hoodie as Osomatsu tried to pull it off him.

"Huh? I thought you wanted to try it on?" Osomatsu asked, tilting his head to the side as Karamatsu pouted at him.

"But there's so many people," Karamatsu whispered to him.

"They won't mind," Osomatsu argued, and attempted to help Karamatsu out of his hoodie again.

"No!!" Karamatsu insisted, eventually crouching down to make it more difficult for his brother to take his hoodie off.

"Alright, alright," Osomatsu said in a placating tone, retracting his hands and standing up before taking his brother's hand into his own. "Let's look for a dressing room then, okay?"

Karamatsu nodded in affirmation.

"Excuse me, miss?" Osomatsu called, raising the shirt above his head and waving it to catch the store clerk's attention. When she finally came over to him he smiled, rubbing the underside of his
nose in his usual way. "Where's the changing room? My baby brother doesn't want other people to see him change."

"Nii-chan!" Karamatsu complained, his face going red in embarrassment. He hit Osomatsu's butt in frustration.

The store clerk, who seemed initially unhappy to be attending to Osomatsu, smiled brightly upon seeing the small child behind him. She crouched down with a gentle smile on her face, happy to have such a cute kid brighten up her otherwise boring work day. "Aw, aren't you a cutie pie?"

Karamatsu jumped in shock at the sudden attention, hiding himself behind Osomatsu's legs as he clung to his brother's hoodie.

"Aww," Osomatsu cooed at the same time as the store clerk did. "Sorry, he's a little bit shy," he told her, one hand going to rest atop Karamatsu's head to get him to relax. His brother merely leaned into his touch and tried to hide behind him harder.

The store clerk, her day successfully brightened, stood up and sent her smile towards Osomatsu this time. She gestured to her left and said "the changing rooms are over there. If you need any assistance, please don't hesitate to ask."

"Thank you miss!" Osomatsu said as he made his way towards the changing room with Karamatsu walking alongside him, still trying to hide himself behind his brother. When the store clerk tried to wave good bye at Karamatsu, he tried to make himself smaller and hid behind his brother more.

They went to the changing room and Karamatsu tried his shirt on, admiring his own reflection in the mirror. It felt right to wear it, and looked almost normal on him. He turned towards his older brother and did a pose, puffing out his chest as he smiled brightly.

"Ahhh, so cute!" Osomatsu squeaked out. Even though the shirt was painful, it looked incredibly adorable on Karamatsu. Or maybe Karamatsu was just that cute. "So you really want this one?"

Karamatsu looked down at the shirt and nodded. This was a perfect shirt.

"Okay, okaaaay," Osomatsu said, helping Karamatsu out of the shirt and back into his hoodie. "Let go get mom to buy it okay?"

"Mn!"

As soon as the duo stepped out of the dressing room though, they were roughly shoved back in with a threateningly big stack of children's clothes. Osomatsu stumbled backwards, holding Karamatsu in a protective way and maneuvered his body to protect him from getting crushed by the clothes. There was a beat of silence before their heads popped out from the pile, looking up at their mother and Jyushimatsu behind her with another stack of clothes.

"Wow," Osomatsu said in disbelief.

"Wow!" Karamatsu exclaimed in excitement, his little hands digging through all the clothes that surrounded him. It looked like his mother knew his tastes well, because he hasn't even found a single shirt that he dislikes. "Uwooooah!!" he exclaimed more, finding shirts that he just absolutely adored.

Matsuyo again had flowers and hearts flying around her immediate perimeter and she sighed happily. Though she wanted to spoil her child, she still had to think of a budget. "Pick out eight shirts and shorts okay?" he asked and gestured for Jyushimatsu to put the rest of the clothes on the
pile already on the floor. "We wouldn't want to give your father a heart attack when he sees the receipt," she winked at all of her sons and they grinned back at her in mutual delighted mischief.

Matsuzo Matsuno felt another chill run down his spine and a slowly growing headache.

"Oh, Ichimatsu!" Osomatsu called, pulling himself out of the pile to approach his younger brother. "What'cha got there?"

Ichimatsu kicked the floor underneath his slipper in mild embarrassment before holding up a small blue kigurumi to show his eldest brother. It was a wolf kigurumi and looked to be just about Karamatsu's size. He shrugged his shoulders before shoving it into Osomatsu's gut. "I just found it or whatever," he grumbled before sluggishly making his way over to Jyushimatsu.

"Waahh," Osomatsu said in awe, lifting up the cute outfit to see it in all it's glory. Ichimatsu really knew how to pick out cute things when he saw them. "Karamatsu look!" he called as he skipped to the changing rooms. "Look at what Ichimatsu found for you!"

"I didn't say it was for him," grumbled Ichimatsu but no one really paid him any notice. "Tch."

"Ooh!" Karamatsu pulled himself out of the clothes pile, reaching up for the outfit that Osomatsu was holding. When Osomatsu handed it to him he smiled at his eldest brother and then directed another smile towards his technically younger brother. "Thank you Ichimachu!"

"N-nii-san?!" Jyushimatsu screamed, catching Ichimatsu before he hit the floor. His brother was foaming at the mouth, his eyes rolled to the back of his head. Karamatsu's innocent and sincere smile was just too much for him to handle. Matsuyo was at Jyushimatsu's side, demanding of Ichimatsu where he had gotten the kigurumi so that she could choose one that suited Karamatsu better.

"Go try it on," Osomatsu urged, gently nudging Karamatsu back into the changing room and basically ignoring the rest of his family members. But when Karamatsu didn't close the door and looked at him expectantly, he raised an eyebrow. "Is something wrong?"

Karamatsu looked bashful for a moment. "Where are you going?"

Osomatsu raised his other eyebrow. "No where?"

Karamatsu fidgeted, a small upset noise escaping him as he tried to figure out how to properly express himself. He settled with "come here," and waited for Osomatsu to approach him. When his brother was close enough, he latched onto his sleeve tightly and tugged with all his might. "Come with me!" He didn't want to be alone, an idea that he for some reason dreaded with the entirety of his being. He didn't like the idea of opening the door to find his brothers and even his mother gone. He wanted them to be in his immediate line of sight, to make sure that he wouldn't be alone.

For some reason he wasn't really sure of, he knew exactly what it felt like to be alone. He hated it, and it scared him.

Osomatsu wasn't aware of Karamatsu's inner plight, mistaking his fears for the childish desire to have someone doting upon him. Not that he didn't mind of course, it was always such a wonderful feeling to know that he was needed by his younger brothers. He smiled at Karamatsu and went into the changing room with him, rubbing his nose again and winked at his brother. "Need help changing?"

If it meant his brother was going to stay with him, then yes. Karamatsu nodded his head and raised his hands above him, waiting for Osomatsu to help him out of his hoodie.
Chapter End Notes

TBH this chapter is just because people wanted kara in the cute kigurumi thingo so not much content for this chapter SORRY HAHA

PS: i read all of ur comments and they all make me happy i just dont know how i should reply to them
"Karamatsu..."

Karamatsu struggled to use his chopsticks, his fingers not fully adjusted to being small again. He was getting rice all over his face, all over the table, making a huge mess despite his small size.

"Karamatsu...."

He put his chopsticks down on the table top, reaching over for his glass of water and ended up knocking the bottle of soy sauce all over the table. He didn't even seem to notice the mess though, too preoccupied with trying to carefully bring his glass of water back to himself to take a sip.

"Oi..."

He lifted the glass to his lips, but he ended up just spilling the water all over his hoodie. He didn't let that deter him though and he only put his glass down once his thirst was quenched. He let out a satisfied sigh, smiling brightly at his small accomplishment.

Choromatsu couldn't take it anymore and put his bowl of rice down a little bit too forcefully, causing Karamatsu to squeak in shock beside him. Before Karamatsu could apologize for the mess he now realized he created, Choromatsu already had a firm but gentle grip on his chin. His brother's face was a mess and while it was adorable to look at the urge to clean his face up was too much for Choromatsu to resist. He wiped his brother's face with a napkin, getting each and every grain of rice off.

Karamatsu scrunched his face up as his brother cleaned it, his little hand going up to rest against Choromatsu's wrist.

"There," Choromatsu said with a self satisfied sigh, admiring how neat Karamatsu looked now. And then he remembered the mess on the table and let out a sigh, cleaning it up because none of his brothers even batted an eyelash once the soy sauce started spreading across the table.

"Thank you, Chokomachu," Karamatsu told his brother as he watched him clean the table. "And uh... sorry..."

"Chokomachu?" Choromatsu asked, whatever irritation he felt towards his brothers now gone with the new and un-lewd nickname that was bestowed upon him. "It's Choromatsu. Choro."

"Choko," Karamatsu replied.

"Choro."

"Choko!"

"Choco!!" Jyushimatsu cheered.

"No, no. It's Choromatsu. CHO-RO. Not Choko!" But even Choromatsu didn't mind, he even had a smile on his face.

"Ahh even Chokomatsu can be cute sometimes too," Osomatsu sighed dreamily. His brothers were
cute, all of them were, but it was always such a treat to see Choromatsu smiling happily for once. He turned his attention to Todomatsu then, grinning mischievously at the youngest. "Hey Totty, do you wanna hear my cutest brother ranking?"

"Go die, Shittymatsu nii-san!" Todomatsu huffed angrily, defiantly adding more soy sauce into Osomatsu's food. His plans were foiled however, since Osomatsu seemed to like his food salty anyway. "Ugh, I can't believe this."

"Guess you didn't find the notes, huh?" Osomatsu commented, letting Choromatsu dote on Karamatsu this time in favor of interrogating his poor youngest brother. Todomatsu has been put off since the beginning of this whole ordeal and Osomatsu thought he should at least be a good brother to his brother that was troubled. "What if we never find those notes? What are you gonna do Totty?" In his usual teasing way that is.

"Are you asking me this to annoy me, or because you actually care about Karamatsu nii-san's well being?" Todomatsu asked in reply, his brows drawn downward as a frown that was beginning to be a constant formed on his lips.

Osomatsu shrugged his shoulders and wiggled his hand indiscriminately. "A little bit of both I guess."

The youngest sighed and his shoulders slumped. "Professor Dekapan said that he could try and recreate it while we look for the notes. But his lab is just so huge, it's going to take days to find it."

He turned his attention to Ichimatsu then, a pout replacing his frown. "And Ichimatsu nii-san was supposed to help us but he never came."

Ichimatsu made an indifferent noise and shrugged too, going back to eating his food. He was in no hurry to get Karamatsu back to the way he was. His brother was easier to talk to when he was a kid, he was less painful too, and much cuter.

"Well alright then, what's the plan tomorrow?" Osomatsu prodded, goading Todomatsu to talk more so he could at least share his troubles.

Todomatsu sighed again. "I guess I'm gonna go back tomorrow and look more," he looked at the rest of his brothers with a raised eyebrow. "Who's coming with me?"

Choromatsu raised his hand, though much of his attention was still on Karamatsu. "Yeah, I'll go. I'm not really that great at taking care of kids anyway."

"You're doing well, brother!" Karamatsu cheered, patting Choromatsu's lap approvingly. He was very proud of his brothers. They were doing their best to help him get back to normal. "You too, Totty!"

Todomatsu grunted, his demeanor towards Karamatsu mirroring Ichimatsu's usual demeanor towards the older Karamatsu. "Yeah, whatever nii-san. As long as we get you back to normal."


"Grumpy Totty! Grumpy Totty!" Jyushimatsu agreed, sliding across the floor to lay his head on Todomatsu's lap. It's okay, Totty! You're still cute!" He raised his hands to pat at his younger brother's cheeks, squishing and kneading his skin until Todomatsu relented and leaned into his brother's touch.

Ichimatsu placed a hand over his heart. If his brothers continued to be cute, he'd probably die an early death.
"Oi, Karamatsuuu," Osomatsu called, spreading his arms open for a hug. And without even skipping a beat Karamatsu walked over to him and granted him a hug. Osomatsu nuzzled him a bit and the pulled back enough so that he could point a finger at Todomatsu. "You think you could give Totty a hug? He probably needs it, look at his face!"

Todomatsu frowned more at Osomatsu’s words, though it didn’t really have much heat to it. And with Jyushimatsu still playing with his face the way he was, he just looked really ridiculous at the moment.

Karamatsu nodded, a new mission given to him by big brother Osomatsu. He ran to Todomatsu, throwing himself to his youngest brothers to give them a hug. He landed on Jyushimatsu's face though, and accidentally headbutted Todomatsu in the process. Realizing his mistake he tried to stand back up and ended up stepping all over Jyushimatsu's body. "J-jyushimachu! Sorry!"

Jyushimatsu grabbed Karamatsu by his waist, lifting him up and above his head so that he was no longer being stepped on. "It's okay, Karamatsu nii-san!"

Being lifted up by Jyushimatsu put Karamatsu right in front of his youngest brother's face. And wanting to cheer his brother up, Karamatsu placed both his small hands on Todomatsu's cheeks and kissed him on the nose.

Todomatsu blinked. "...Eh?"

"Wahahaha, he's been blessed with a kiss!" Osomatsu laughed, clapping his hands in delight. "It's working! Do it again!"

Karamatsu nodded with conviction, pressing another kiss to Todomatsu's nose again though he held it longer this time. "No more grumpy faces, Totty!" he told his brother and tried to kiss him on the forehead and succeeded. "Totty is the cutest when he smiles!"

Ichimatsu collapsed then and spilled rice all over the floor.

"O-oi, Ichimatsu!?!” Choromatsu screamed in shock, going over to his younger brother to check his vitals and to make sure he was still alive. "Oi! Don't die on me, I don't want to clean up your mess!"

Karamatsu continued to shower his youngest brother in kisses. He planned to kiss the unhappiness away and so far it seemed to be working, but not enough. He looked down at Jyushimatsu and said "you too, Jyushimachu!"

"Yes, yes!" Jyushimatsu cheered in his loud voice, sitting up properly so that he was face to face with Todomatsu with Karamatsu in between them. He leaned forward, chin over Karamatsu's shoulder, and pressed a raspberry kiss against Todomatsu's cheek.

"E-ew! Jyushimatsu nii-san! That's gross!"

But Jyushimatsu continued to give his brother raspberry kisses, and Karamatsu continued to kiss his face as well.

Osomatsu grinned widely, jumping up to his feet and charging towards his brothers. He tackled them, sending all three of them to the ground with Todomatsu underneath the dog pile. "I know another way we can get Totty to smile!"

Karamatsu gasped. "How?!"
"Jyushimatsu, hold him down."

"Wh-whoa, no wait...!" Todomatsu tried to escape but Jyushimatsu was just too fast for him. Soon he found his hands pinned above his head and his oldest brother leaning over him with the biggest shit eating grin he's ever seen.

"You wanna know how to make Totty smile?" Osomatsu asked a curious Karamatsu.

Karamatsu nodded beside him.

"Ever heard of the tickle monster?

"No! No, Osomatsu nii-san! Don't!" Totty tried to beg, squirming and trying to get himself free from Jyushimatsu's grasp.

Suddenly there were hands grabbing his ankles, keeping him from moving too much. When Todomatsu looked down, he found Choromatsu grinning at him in the same way Osomatsu was, hands keeping his legs in place. Even Ichimatsu, who now recovered from the cute overdose, was at his side with a cat toy in his hand.

"NO! NII-SAN, PLEASSSSAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHAHAHAHAHAHAHHA!!!!!!!"

Karamatsu watched in awe as his brothers tickled their youngest brother and though Todomatsu was begging for it to stop, he was smiling. He was smiling wide and he was laughing. Karamatsu couldn't help but smile and laugh as well, wiggling his fingers at his brother's exposed skin to aid in the tickling.

After a while Todomatsu stopped laughing, though he still had a smile on his face. His body was twitching slightly from the aftershocks of all the laughing, absolutely tired and feeling like he laughed himself a six pack.

"Is he okay?" Karamatsu asked.

"He'll be fine," Osomatsu assured.

Trusting his brother, he nodded. He pressed a kiss to Todomatsu's cheek again just in case.

There was a bit of an argument with the sleeping arrangements that night and it ended up with Karamatsu sleeping in between Osomatsu and Jyushimatsu on one half of the futon, with Todomatsu sleeping in between Ichimatsu and Choromatsu on the other half.

Todomatsu, though still physically tired from the tickle attack, felt better. He slept well due to his fatigue, but also due to the fact that Karamatsu, an extremely cute kid at the moment, called him cute. If someone cute calls you cute, that only affirms your cuteness.

The night was peaceful.

Chapter End Notes
ichimatsu's going to be fainting like 45% of the time
Osomatsu rather liked sleeping in. He didn't have anything to do anyway, so why should he bother with waking up early? All his favorite stores didn't open until later in the afternoon so waking up early would just end up with him being bored out of his mind or helping out around the house with the chores which quite frankly he did not want to do. So he curled up more, pulling his pillow closer to his body even as the rest of his brothers started getting ready for the day.

"Hustle hustle!"

"Dibs on the bathroom!"

"Oi, Totty! You always get the bathroom first!"

"I called it Choromatsu nii-san, you're just too slow!"

"Ichimatsu nii-san! Wanna do The Thing today!?"

"Five minutes, Jyushimatsu..."

The usual morning noise of the Matsuno household was something that they were all used to. Any one of the brothers could fall asleep even if an argument was happening, something that happened often ever since they were kids. So even as Choromatsu and Todomatsu wrestled on the floor with each other over the bathroom rights, Osomatsu didn't even bother trying to shush them.

He intended to sleep the day away. That is until he felt small hands on his arm shaking him. "Noooo," Osomatsu whined, pulling the blanket up over his head to somehow block whoever it was trying to wake him up. "It's too early."

"It's ten o'clock, nii-san!" Jyushimatsu exclaimed loudly as he rolled the fourth brother off of the futon. "It's just the right time for baseball! Do you wanna play with us today?"

"Noooo," Osomatsu whined again and since the futon was now void of bodies aside from his own, he pulled the blanket towards his body to cocoon himself. "Maybe next time," he grumbled softly, trying to get back to sleep. If he just closed his eyes and ignored his brothers for a bit longer then he could probably get back to his dream.

"Nii-chan," Karamatsu said in a tiny voice and attempted to shake his brother awake again.

"Oh," Osomatsu said in realization. He made an entrance to his blanket cocoon that was big enough for his brother to squeeze into. "C'mere."

Karamatsu nodded and wiggled into the cocoon with his brother, pressing his cheek against Osomatsu's chest as his older brother pulled him close for a hug. While he appreciated how much Osomatsu showed his love for him, it was getting increasingly hot since the sun was already up and shining, and a ray of sunshine was already creeping towards them as the sun rose higher and higher into the air. He squirmed, trying to get comfortable, but couldn't quite find a position that felt right. "Nii-chan..!"

"Mmmmm?" Osomatsu hummed lazily, latching onto Karamatsu like a leech.
"I wanna take a bath," Karamatsu told him, pursing his lips in mild frustration as Osomatsu cuddled into him more instead of catering to his needs. While he wasn't usually one to demand things from his brothers, he was still wary of doing things by himself as a small child. Anything could happen at any moment since they still didn't know the full effects of whatever it was that Karamatsu drank that turned him into a child in the first place, and he didn't want anything to happen to himself unless someone was there to help him out. And that person he'd designated to helping him was Osomatsu. "Nii-chan...!

"I can take a bath with you, Karamatsu nii-san," Choromatsu offered, having lost to Todomatsu over the bathroom rights. He lifted the blankets high enough to reveal both his brother's heads, Karamatsu looking up at him with an appreciative look while Osomatsu burrowed deeper into his cocoon away from the bright light of the sun. "I don't mind. Osomatsu nii-san'll probably forget to wash behind your ears. He doesn't even wash behind his own ears now that I think about it," Choromatsu told his small brother, reaching out for him so that they could get ready for a bath.

"Ahh!" Karamatsu gasped, retreating back into the blanket cocoon and hiding himself by lifting Osomatsu's arm and using it as a shield. Osomatsu, thankfully, tightened his grip around him like he was hugging a teddy bear. When Choromatsu gave him a confused look, he looked back at him meekly and almost shyly. "I want Osomachu nii-chan," he told him.

"Whaaaat..." Choromatsu replied in what sounded suspiciously like a disappointed whine. He retraced his hands and rested them on his lap, then sat on his haunches by Osomatsu's head. "Are you sure?"

Karamatsu nodded and grabbed onto Osomatsu's shirt just to make sure he wouldn't be taken away. "Yes."

"We'll take a bath with you Choromatsu nii-san!" Jyushimatsu told his brother, pulling up Ichimatsu into a standing position beside him. He kept his arm around Ichimatsu's shoulders to make sure that his half asleep brother didn't fall. "I'll wash your back really well!"

An irritated look befell Choromatsu's face. Usually it was either Ichimatsu or Karamatsu who helped him wash his back and they tended to be gentle. He wasn't so sure about letting Jyushimatsu anywhere near his very valuable spinal column. "Uhh..."

Ichimatsu gave him a halfhearted hand wiggle, reassuring his older brother without speaking that he'd wash his back instead of Jyushimatsu.

"Alright then," Choromatsu said with a sigh. He turned his attention back to Karamatsu and tried one last time. "Are you absolutely sure? If you take a bath with us you wont have to wait too long for your turn."

Karamatsu gave him a thumbs up.

"If you say so," he finally relented, standing up to follow his younger brothers out into the hallway to harass Todomatsu while he was still in the bathroom by banging on the door and urging him loudly to hurry up.

With the room now silent, Karamatsu thought that maybe it wouldn't be too bad too to catch a few more minutes of sleep. The warmth that both the blanket and Osomatsu were providing was helping him reach a sleepy lull and he felt his eyelids go heavy. He moved as close as he possibly could to Osomatsu, his back to his brother's chest, and pulled Osomatsu's arm in an embrace.

Osomatsu, though he was still awake but very, very close to being unconscious again, instinctively
curled up around his brother and rested his chin on top of Karamatsu's head.

Karamatsu felt another kind of warmth bubbling in his heart. It was nice to be hugged like this, it made him feel comfortable, safe, and loved. He smiled as he settled in, and finally closed his eyes.

He opened his eyes.

He needed to pee.

He debated with himself, wondering if he should wait for Osomatsu to wake up or if he should wake him up himself. Could he hold it for a bit longer or would that risk accidentally wetting himself? Was his bladder still as strong as it was when he was an adult? Probably not, he couldn't even control his tears as well as he used to. So he squirmed again, trying to release himself from Osomatsu's hug, but his brother was pretty much knocked out at this point. "Nii-chan!" he said a little urgently. "Nii-chan!"

He shook Osomatsu again and again, trying to get him to wake up while simultaneously trying to free himself from his brother's grasp. But it was no use, Osomatsu had an iron grip on him and it didn't seem like he was going to wake up any time soon. Should... Should he bite his brother to wake him?

Before he could even argue with himself (how could he hurt his own brother like that!?) the sliding door opened to reveal an upset looking Todomatsu with a pout on his face. His youngest brother was upset because the other three brothers wouldn't shut up outside the bathroom door so he had to speed up his usual morning routine. Karamatsu popped his head out of the blanket and raised his arms, waving them to catch Todomatsu's attention. "Totty! Totty!"

Todomatsu's upset face was replaced by a surprised one and he turned his attention to the waving blanket lump on the futon. "Karamatsu nii-san? Are you stuck?" he laughed. He wasn't angry anymore with Karamatsu being cuter than him, and now that he did get a better look at his brother he really was cute. "Need help?"
"Un," Karamatsu nodded, trying again to pry himself out of Osomatsu's grasp to no avail.

Todomatsu quickly put on some clothes and let his towel hang around his shoulders. He sat by his brother's sleeping form and reached out to pull Karamatsu out of Osomatsu's grip. But Osomatsu, even in his sleep, was as stubborn as a mule and each time Todomatsu managed to get Karamatsu a few inches out of the blanket cocoon their eldest brother would just pull him in deeper like some sort of blanket monster undertow. "Uurghhh... Osomatsu nii-san! Let go!"

"Don't wanna," Osomatsu sleepily replied, turning his body away from Todomatsu and taking Karamatsu with him.

"Wah!" Karamatsu yelped. "Totty!"

Todomatsu circled his brother as he pulled his sleeves up in preparation for the difficult task of wrestling a small child away from his brother. He grabbed onto Karamatsu's arms and tried to gently but firmly pull his older brother from the eldest brother. "One... two... three!" he pulled, and pulled, but Osomatsu kept his hold tight. "I'm sorry Karamatsu nii-san, he's just not letting go," Todomatsu told him and frowned. "And if I pull any harder I might hurt you."

"But Totty..." Karamatsu whined softly, a sad frown forming on his lips. "I gotta pee."

"What?"

Karamatsu squirmed more. "I gotta pee!!!" he said louder because as more time passed, the stronger his need to use the bathroom became. "I gotta pee right now!"

Todomatsu panicked, suddenly realizing the gravity of the situation. With new-found vigor he shook his oldest brother as strongly as he could without shaking Karamatsu too much at the same time. "Shittymatsu nii-san!" he practically screamed. "Hey! Nii-san, wake up! Wake up right now!"

"Don't wannaaaa," Osomatsu whined.

"Totty...!" Karamatsu wailed.

"OSOMATSU NII-SAN...!"

Both the squirming in his arms and Todomatsu screaming in his ear and shaking him relentlessly woke Osomatsu up. With a huge frown and a grumpy voice, Osomatsu swatted his youngest brother's hands away. "What the hell do you want, Tott—"

"BATHROOM!" Todomatsu and Karamatsu screamed at the same time.

Osomatsu took a few long seconds to register the meaning of the word. And then, putting two and two together, his eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets as he leaped to his feet. "Why didn't you say so earlier!?!" he shouted as he ran out of the room and across the hallway to the bathroom. Thankfully Jyushimatsu never locked the door behind him and Osomatsu kicked the door open without much trouble.

Ichimatsu and Choromatsu let out high pitched startled screams and sunk their bodies into the bathtub water, their arms over their chests the same way Todomatsu usually did when they went to the public baths. Jyushimatsu did the same just to be part of the fun and instead of screaming he was laughing. "Wow! I didn't know you guys could move so fast!"

Osomatsu let Karamatsu down and Karamatsu made his way to the toilet as fast as he could to relieve himself.
"WHAT THE HELL? DID YOU BREAK THE DOOR?" Choromatsu screamed as he peeked over from the bathtub. Indeed, the door was barely hanging on by the hinges. "We didn't even lock it, damn it!"

"Oopsie," Osomatsu said with a shrug.

Choromatsu was about to scold his older brother when he finally realized that Karamatsu was there too. Whatever he was going to tell his eldest brother died on his lips and his tone suddenly shifted from infuriated to kindness. "Oh, did you change your mind about taking a bath with us?"

"Nah, he had to pee," Osomatsu answered for Karamatsu and Karamatsu nodded. "Hey is there still room for two more?"

Choromatsu rolled his eyes at the stupid question. Of course there was enough room, the bathtub was specifically made to hold six people. "Yeah, yeah. Get in while it's hot."

"Yes!" Osomatsu said, immediately stripping his clothes, Karamatsu not too far behind him.

As they played around in the bathroom, a sudden flash from the doorway caught their attention. Again, everyone except Jyushimatsu and Karamatsu covered their chests with their arms and hid in the water.

Todomatsu smiled widely from behind his smart phone and it went off several more times. The smile went from cute to menacing and he wiggled his eyebrows at his brothers before running down the hallway. And they heard his voice growing more distant the farther he ran as he screamed "MOM, I HAVE PICTURES YOU'LL WANT TO PRINT!"

"TOTTY!"

"TOTTY !!!"

Three of the brothers scrambled for towels to wrap around their waists, chasing after the youngest despite their half nakedness. Ichimatsu tripped however, and fell flat on his face on the bathroom floor. He stayed down.

Jyushimatsu smiled at Karamatsu and carried him, making sure to bundle up his brother in a big towel to get him drier faster. "What do you wanna wear today, Karamatsu nii-san?" he asked as they exited the bathroom, stepping over Ichimatsu's prone form, and went back to their room.

"Uwahh! Karamatsu fashion! Karamatsu fashion!" Karamatsu squealed delightedly.
Jyushimatsu and Karamatsu sorted through the clothes that their mother bought yesterday.

Outside the window, Todomatsu and their mother were running as fast as they could manage with two half naked brothers chasing after them.

Chapter End Notes

U guys, this this was playing on loop the whole time i was writing this so like please imagine that this was what Choro, Ichi, and Jyushi were doing before Oso and Kara came. And then Oso and Kara joined in afterwards.
To The Rescue!

Chapter Summary

Gotta save Totty!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Karamatsu is five years old. What he was interested in now is what many other five year olds would be interested in too; shiny pretty things, cool amazing toys, exceedingly violent but funny T.V. shows, and what have you. Most of the things his older self was interested in no longer applied for the time being, and Karamatsu was contented with staying at home and playing with his brothers.

Watching T.V. with Osomatsu, reading comics with Choromatsu, taking naps with Ichimatsu (though Karamatsu had to sneak next to his already sleeping brother to nap with him, otherwise Ichimatsu would shoo him away with a high pitched voice and a very red face), playing baseball with Jyushimatsu in the backyard, and finally going shopping with Todomatsu.

Todomatsu as of late has been spending too much time in professor Dekapan's lab in search for the notebook that would help Karamatsu get back to his regular self and it's only because Choromatsu forced him to stay home with Karamatsu that he stopped. But Todomatsu, out of all of the brothers sans Jyushimatsu, was a very active person. While he liked lazing around with all his brothers, there were times when staying cooped up in the house frustrated him to no end.

Which was why they were here, inside Sutaaba, passing the time. Todomatsu bought himself an ice cold caramel macchiato to cool himself off, and a cake for Karamatsu to eat. Todomatsu thought to invite a friend or two but changed his mind.

Somehow having Karamatsu as a small kid made Todomatsu feel... Powerful. No, that's not the word. Having Karamatsu around made him feel more responsible than he usually was. Since he was the youngest he always expected his brothers to look out after him and not the other way around. So this is what it must feel like being an older brother, it's kind of nice.

Karamatsu had the plate of his cake settled on his lap, eating it happily while Todomatsu clicked away on his smart phone. He didn't mind that Todomatsu wasn't talking to him, he didn't even have much to talk about, and his mouth was still preoccupied with chewing the cake. But being in the presence of his brother was enough and he was happy as he could be. He cut a piece of the cake and stabbed it with his fork, offering it to his younger brother with a bright smile on his face. "Totty! Ahhh!"

Todomatsu didn't even bother to look up from his phone, but leaned towards Karamatsu to accept the bite of sweetness. "Mmm, thanks nii-san," he mumbled, licking his lips before going back to his phone. He was trying to explain to his friends why he'd been brushing them off lately and he just couldn't think of a proper excuse. The truth was a little bit too ludicrous to say (my older brother turned into a kid and I'm taking care of him), so he'd been dodging questions to the best of his ability while promising to make it up to them when he could.
A man in a business suit, out of work early for today, looked into Suutaba at the sight of a familiar face. Deciding to take a short detour before going home, he went into the coffee shop, ordered a coffee of his own and smiled amiably as he made his way towards the Matsuno siblings. Neither of the two siblings noticed him as he approached, so he greeted them to catch their attention. "Hello, Todomatsu-kun. Fancy meeting you here."

"Atsushi-kun!" Todomatsu squeaked in shock and jumped slightly in his seat, nearly dropping his smart phone in the process. "Don't surprise me like that," he chastised, scooting his chair a little closer to Karamatsu's to make room for his friend. "Why are you here? Lunch break?"

"No, no. I got off work early today," he replied, settling down beside Todomatsu. He put his briefcase down onto the floor, looking up at Todomatsu before remembering that the two of them weren't alone. A little face was staring at him rather angrily for some reason, though it came off as cute rather threatening. "Is this your brother?" Atsushi asked curiously. He knew Todomatsu had five other brothers but he was also aware of the fact that they were supposed to be the same age.

"Ah— uh—," Todomatsu debated with himself whether or not to tell Atsushi the truth, then decided that a little white lie would be easier to explain. "He's my cousin," he replied, grabbing a tissue off the table to wipe Karamatsu's face. "Karamatsu nii—I mean, Karamatsu, this is the guy I was talking about. The one who likes kids."

Karamatsu shrunk back a little bit, grabbing hold of Todomatsu's wrist in a firm grasp. "You mean..." he glared at Atsushi, who smiled back at him, "the pedophile?"

Atsushi choked on air at the accusation, but tried to maintain his smile. He hid his shocked expression by taking a sip of his coffee. Just what exactly is Todomatsu-kun telling people?!

"Kara— NO! What?!" Todomatsu nearly screamed, accidentally wiping Karamatsu's face a little too aggressively in embarrassment. "Who told you tha— It was Ichimatsu nii-san, wasn't it?" Really, did he have to ask? Who else could it have been?

Karamatsu nodded grimly, pulling Todomatsu's arm closer to himself as if he could somehow protect his younger brother from the evil clutches of the scary man in front them, even though he was probably too small to put up much of a battle. Still, that didn't mean he wouldn't try.

"I'm sorry," Todomatsu told his friend sheepishly, even bowing his head down slightly in embarrassment. "My shitty older brother likes to scare him with lies. He doesn't know what he's talking about," and then to Karamatsu. "This is Atsushi-kun. He's my friend, okay? He's not gonna hurt you." When Karamatsu's grip on him only tightened, he added "he's not going to hurt me either."

Atsushi drew a cross over his heart and raised his right hand. "I promise I won't hurt you guys," he said seriously, nodding his head to assure the little one. He loved kids, he really did, and he was confident that the small child who looked a lot like Todomatsu would eventually warm up to him. When it came to children, patience is the key. Patience and a lot of playing pretend.

He crossed his heart, a sacred promise to most five year olds, so Karamatsu nodded his head at the gesture. If anything bad happened, he could always just call Osomatsu to help. "Okay," he told Atsushi, finally letting go of Todomatsu's arm to get back to eating his cake. Just because Atsushi promised he wasn't going to hurt them didn't mean Karamatsu had to make friends. He was perfectly happy having five best friends, his brothers, who took care of him and understood him without even trying.

"He's a little shy," Todomatsu told Atsushi, honestly surprised by Karamatsu's cold behavior
towards his friend. Over the passed few days, Todomatsu had noticed that. Karamatsu was shy and bashful around girls he didn't know, but when it came to guys he didn't know he was rather cold. Was Karamatsu always like that? No, he was always looking for both Karamatsu girls and boys, so he wasn't really sure why his brother was like this. "He's not usually like this."

"It's okay," Atsushi replied with a dismissive hand. It took time to earn the trust of children; all he had to do was show that he really was a good guy and become a familiar face. "He's still cute even if he hates me. Actually, he kind of reminds me of you."

"What are you talking about," Todomatsu laughed, shaking his head in disbelief. Eventually he fell into warm and casual conversation with Atsushi, talking about whatever topic came to mind. He told his friend that Karamatsu was his cousin who was staying over for the time being because his parents were on a vacation together. It was an easy enough lie to believe in, as well as an easy enough lie to keep up.

Karamatsu's mood went down considerably, a small frown on his face as Atsushi ate up all of Todomatsu's time. Time that was supposed to be spent with him. He didn't even want to finish his cake anymore so he put it back on the table, pushing it towards the center so it wouldn't fall off. He crossed his arms over his chest, pouting and moping and hoping that the stranger would get the picture and leave.

But eventually a few more of Todomatsu's friends showed up, noticing Todomatsu and Atsushi hanging out. Having actually missed Todomatsu's company, the small group of people joined them at the table and started chatting and having fun that five year old Karamatsu didn't think was much fun at all. It wasn't as if he wasn't used to being ignored, and he understood that adults needed time to spend with their friends, but he was getting impatient and bored. Really bored. He couldn't even borrow Todomatsu's phone to play the games on it because now there were a few people in between him and his brother.

He turned his head to the side to look out of Suutaba's window to look for something interesting to look at. And find something he did. What he found was a face that looked much like his retreating into an alleyway and there was really only one brother who did that. "Ichii...!" he whispered to himself happily, a smile spreading out on his face. He climbed off his chair and walked out of Suutaba unnoticed, looking both ways first before crossing the street, and then into the alleyway where his younger brother went into.

"Ichimachu!" he called excitedly, running to catch up to his brother. But as he came closer and closer to the end of the alleyway, he found that his brother was no where to be found. Where did he go? The only way out was where Karamatsu came from... Unless...? Karamatsu looked up the high buildings and wondered if his brother somehow climbed them but the shook his head. Ichimatsu wasn't exactly the most physically fit person, so it was hard to imagine his brother scaling walls somehow.

Unbeknownst to Karamatsu, who was looking under the dumpster and under various pieces of trash, Ichimatsu was on top of the building to his left, having turned into his cat form to chase after one of his cats.

"Ichiiiiimachuuuuu!!" Karamatsu called, lifting up a piece of cardboard to check under it. Instead of finding his brother, however, he found a cat. A small but rather fat cat looking at him with wide, big eyes. He gasped softly, tossing the cardboard aside and crouched down in front of it, extending his hand towards the cat in hopes of making a new friend. "Hello," he greeted.

The cat eyed his hand and swished its tail. Otherwise, it did nothing.
"I'm Karamachu," he introduced, edging a little closer and stopping when the cat hissed at him. "I'm nice. My brother likes cats too. Maybe you can be our friend," he kept talking, kept moving his hand closer little by little. He's seen how Ichimatsu does it. You have to be careful, and you have to be gentle. "I wont hurt you, I promise," and just like Atsushi did earlier, he drew a cross over his heart before reaching out to the cat again.

Atsushi sneezed, startling his group of friends with how loud and sudden it was. He didn't have a cold, and he was pretty sure it wasn't an allergic reaction either, so it was a little bit odd and out of no where. He sniffled, belatedly realizing he had a little bit of snot running down his nose. Ah, how embarrassing.

"Looks like someone was thinking about you," one of the girls commented with a laugh behind her hand. "Wonder who that could be."

"It's probably Kyoko," another girl replied with a devious smile. "You know who she's interested in," she waggled her eyebrows suggestively and laughed. "Too bad she couldn't join us today! We get Atsushi-kun all to ourselves!"

"Geeze," Todomatsu chuckled, taking a napkin from the table to wipe at Atsushi's nose. "You're just like a kid!"

Atsushi cleared his throat slightly, taking the napkin from Todomatsu's hand to wipe his nose himself. "Thank you," he stated, hoping it wasn't obvious that he was feeling a tad bit flustered. He turned his attention to Todomatsu's cousin, hoping to divert the attention away from himself. But he paused, blinking in confusion when he realized the chair that was occupied was now empty.

"Um, Todomatsu-kun..."

"Yeah?"

"Did your cousin go to the bathroom or something?"

Todomatsu shook his head, confused by the question. "No, he's right ther—" except he wasn't right there. He was gone, and no where to be seen. Panic surged in Todomatsu's being, making his stomach churn in worry as he stood up. "Karamatsu?" he called, trying his best to stay calm. Maybe he did go to the bathroom and just forgot to say so. "Karamatsu, where did you go?" he asked, not even excusing himself as he made his way towards the bathroom to check. But even after checking each stall and even the girls bathroom, he couldn't find his brother.

"Oh no no no no no no no no no no," Todomatsu whimpered, crouching down in front of the bathroom door as he tried to calm himself down. But his stomach was still churning uncomfortably, and he felt like he was going to be sick at any given moment. He lost his brother. He actually lost his brother. How could he be so careless? What was he going to do!? Karamatsu didn't even have a phone on him.

"Hey, are you alright?" Atsushi asked, crouching down beside his friend to rub at his back soothingly. The moment he realized that Karamatsu was missing, he politely told the rest of their friends to go home because they had something important to do. He was pretty sure Todomatsu
wouldn't want them to see him when he didn't have his emotions under control. "Calm down, you're starting to hyperventilate—"

"He's not there!" Todomatsu screeched, raising his hands up in the air and shaking them. "He's not there and I don't know where he is! He's lost! I'm not even sure if he knows the way back home!"

"Calm down. He can't have gotten that far so let's look for him right now, okay?"

Todomatsu nodded, wiping his eyes on his sleeves before taking a deep breath. "R-right," he agreed, standing up and walking out of Suutaba with Atsushi at his heels.

Karamatsu held the cat in his arms proudly. It took some time and a lot of coaxing but he finally got the cat to like him. He was going to bring this cat home so that Ichimatsu could have a new friend, and so the cat could belong to a family too. He came out of the alleyway, a little bit dirty around his arms and face, but otherwise unharmed. He looked both ways again before crossing the street, about to enter Suutaba again to show Todomatsu his new friend but he was stopped by one of the staff members who was clearing up the tables outside.

"Sorry kiddo," the man said, blocking Karamatsu's way successfully. "No pets allowed in there," and to prove his point he pointed at the sign that very clearly read no pets allowed.

"Oh," Karamatsu replied sadly.

The man patted his head comfortingly, leading Karamatsu to one of the cleared up tables. "You can stay here though," he said. "Are you waiting to be picked up?"

Karamatsu nodded, and the shook his head, and then shrugged. "I'm waiting for my brother."

"Alright," the staff member told him. "You can wait for him here. I'll get you some water okay?"

"...Okay," Karamatsu agreed.

It's been three hours since their separation and Todomatsu couldn't stop himself from crying. He'd already called the rest of his brothers to help and though he'd been briefly scolded by both Choromatsu and Osomatsu, that wasn't why he was crying. He was actually worried, sincerely worried, about his brother. Was this how stressful it was to lose a child? He could finally sympathize with all those worried and angry parents that he used to think of as annoying whenever they caused a scene when they lost their children.

He was in Atsushi's passenger seat, rubbing at his eyes while looking out the window in hopes of
spotting his brother.

Atsushi looked over his friend worriedly, scolding himself in his mind for letting Todomatsu's cousin slip from his sight just because he was distracted by friends. He should have been paying more attention, he didn't like seeing Todomatsu so sad. "We'll find him," he reassured.

Todomatsu nodded, but it was getting harder and harder to stay positive.

When an hour passed and Karamatsu didn't see his brother come out, he decided to peek in instead to look for him and call for his attention. But when he looked over at the table that they were previously occupying, he found it to be empty. Fear enveloped his litter heart, his eyes beginning to water at the thought of his brother abandoning him. He sniffled, wiping his nose on his arm, and tried not to cry. The cat on his lap purred softly and it helped him calm down.

Todomatsu wouldn't abandon him. Of course not. It must have been that Atsushi guy! That was the only possible reason.

The fear was replaced by anger, and then the anger was replaced with worry. That guy was going to hurt Todomatsu! He had to do something!

The cat moved off his lap when it realized that it's new owner was going to get off the chair. The cat meowed curiously, rubbing against Karamatsu's legs as the boy stood up. If the cat could talk, it would have asked the young boy where he was going, or if he had some fish.

"We have to find them!" Karamatsu replied to the meow with conviction. "We have to save Totty!"

"Meoooow!"

Before he could sprint away, the staff member who'd been checking up on him stopped him. "Whoa there little man, where's the fire?"

"I need to save my brother!" Karamatsu told him urgently, shifting his weight from one foot to another anxiously. "He was kidnapped!"

"Ohh," the staff member replied, trying to keep a serious face. Little kids playing pretend never failed to amuse him, and seeing this little one look so determined made him happy. "You can do it, I believe in you!"

"Right!" Karamatsu nodded, thankful for the support.

"If you get tired and need help," the staff member said with a wink. "Just come back and call for me."

"Un! Thank you!" Karamatsu told him, waving goodbye at the man who'd been so kind to him, before running off. The cat followed behind him, meowing loudly and complaining because it just wanted to go back to napping on his lap.

Karamatsu looked high and low, checked in every window and every alleyway to find his brother
to no avail. Where could he be? Where could that Atsushi guy have taken him? To a high tower in the middle of the woods? To a castle dungeon? A corporate office where cellphones weren't allowed? No! Todomatsu loved using his phone! Karamatsu hoped that it wasn't that.

Though he started his quest valiantly, his determination started to wear down with his stamina, and each step he took just made him tired. And scared. And so, so lost. He's not sure which part of the city he was in now, and though there were a lot of familiar buildings he couldn't remember which way was home. It frustrated him since he remembers getting home was easy as an adult, but as a child it was complicated.

He eventually found a playground, spending the last bits of his energy to get to the swings so he could sit down. The chains creaked as it supported his weight and he choked out a sob, his lip warbling as he willed himself not to cry. But he was tired, he was lost, and it was starting to get dark, and Todomatsu was still no where to be found. What if he never found his brother again? And that thought finally triggered his tears, and he cried loudly by himself in despair.

His cat meowed softly but went unnoticed because it's new master was too consumed with crying. The cat rubbed against his legs once, twice, before sprinting off.

Ichimatsu didn't even know where to begin looking for his brother. He didn't even know where Karamatsu liked to hang out. Usually the park to pick up girls, or around Chibita's oden stand since he was on pretty good terms with Chibita, or maybe even the fishing hole. He checked everywhere he thought his brother would be with no positive results.

A cat meowed at his feet and it momentarily took his mind off his little brother. "Hello," he told the cat, reaching down to pet it's head.

But the cat dodged his hand by a mere few centimeters and meowed at him, taking a few steps ahead of the human who looked a lot like his new master. The cat meowed again, almost as if urging Ichimatsu to follow. "Meooow."

"I can't play right now," Ichimatsu replied, again reaching forward to pat the cat on the head. This time the cat let him, and he smiled lightly. "I have to look for my broth—YOWCH!!" The cat bit his hand, harder than a playful nibble but not hard enough to break through his skin. Before Ichimatsu could retract his hand all the way, the cat bit on his sleeve and tugged. Ichimatsu grumbled to himself. He could never really say no to a cat. "Fine, I'll play with you for a few minutes but— Hey! Get back here!"

When he finally stopped crying, Karamatsu sneezed. He had to get home, it was getting dark and
cold. If he went home, he could ask his brothers for help in finding Todomatsu. Even though he wasn't sure which way was the right way, he stood up, walking in a direction that felt right and hoped he was going to get home soon.

Not even a minute after he stood up his cat friend was back, meowing at him happily and rubbing against his legs again. He smiled and picked the cat up, hugging it to his chest to comfort himself. The cat purred at the attention. "Sorry," he told it. "I forgot about you."

"Meow."

He sniffled, then put the cat back down to pat it's head. "I'll call you Michi," he said and started walking again. "Let's go home, Michi—"

"Karamatsu?!

Karamatsu looked up at the call of his name, comfort flooding him as he saw Ichimatsu running towards him. He thought he'd cried all the tears he had to shed, but the sight of Ichimatsu caused him to cry more in relief. He raised his arms towards his brother and ran to him even though his legs were tired beyond belief.

Ichimatsu scooped him up into his arms as easily as he did with his cats, holding his brother close to his chest. He rubbed his back and rocked him, trying to get him to calm down. "Shhh, shhh," he cooed in the same way he did to get Jyushimatsu to calm down. "It's okay, it's okay. Shhhh..."

"T-totty..." Karamatsu whined, wiping his eyes on Ichimatsu's shoulder. "I can't find Totty...!"

"Totty's okay," Ichimatsu reassured. "Shh, it's alright, shhh."

Karamatsu eventually fell asleep in Ichimatsu's grasp, his small arms wrapped tightly around his brother's neck.

His new cat friend followed them dutifully, almost as if it wanted to make sure that Karamatsu made it back home safe.

Though it was a struggle to carry a child and use a pay phone at the same time, Ichimatsu eventually managed to call Todomatsu's phone. "Yeah. Yeah, at the playground near— Yeah, that one. Oi, stop crying already, he's safe. Yeah. We'll wait here. Yeah. Alright, bye." Ichimatsu exited the phone booth and looked down at the cat. "Thanks," he told it, before walking over to a bench to wait to be picked up.

"Ichimatsu nii-san!" Todomatsu stumbled out of the car, racing towards his brothers with his arms outstretched. He took Karamatsu from Ichimatsu, and even though his brother was asleep he still complained to him anyway. "I was so worried! I thought you were gone! I thought I was never going to see you again!" he said much like a mother finally reunited with her child.

Ichimatsu rolled his eyes at Todomatsu's dramatic display, but staved off of making a rude comment. He'd tease him about it later, for now he let them be. He looked passed Todomatsu's
crying figure to see that friend of his with the car, waiting patiently to bring the Matsuno brothers home. The fourth brother picked up the cat that had helped them, and then put a hand on his youngest brother's shoulder to push him towards the car. "C'mon, let's go home."

Eventually Todomatsu fell asleep as well in the backseat, curled up around Karamatsu protectively.

Though it was awkward for Ichimatsu to stay in the passenger's seat of a stranger, his own fatigue was making it easier to tolerate. "Hey," he said softly, calling for Atsushi's attention.

Atsushi raised an eyebrow but dutifully kept his eyes on the road. "Yes?"

"Thanks."

"For what?" Atsushi was honestly surprised.

"Taking care of my brother," he replied, vaguely gesturing towards Todomatsu.

Atsushi had thought it was gratitude for helping them find their cousin.

"Totty cries a lot, especially when he's worried. Thanks for taking care of him," he elaborated when he noticed Atsushi's confused face. But that was all he was going to say, he'd reached his maximum quota of interacting with people who weren't his family.

"Ah," Atsushi smiled to himself. "No problem."

When Atsushi finally arrived in front of the Matsuno household, the three Matsunos under his care were now asleep.

Chapter End Notes

BAM. The longest chapter. I don't usually like writing chapters that are longer than 2500 words tbh. It seems too long. But idk take it

i also really ship atsutodo so in this fic im lowkey implying that atsushi's got a huge old crush on todomatsu

:^}
Karamatsu sat atop of Professor Dekapan's work table, sorting out through papers and files that he didn't really understand. While he still had the reading proficiency of his adult self, the information that the papers presented to him didn't make much sense. But they wouldn't have made much sense to his older self either, Karamatsu was much more skilled in the arts rather the sciences. Still, wanting to be helpful, he organized the papers according to the dates and whether or not the experiment recorded was successful. He didn't really seem to mind that the stack dedicated to failed experiments was much taller than that of the successful ones.

Choromatsu looked over at his small older brother just to check on him before letting out a sigh. The pile of papers he'd sorted through were useless, just some inane idea for a time travel machine or something. He brought the pile over to Karamatsu, setting it beside him. "There's still a lot to go through," he commented, patting Karamatsu on top of his head. "Are you sure you want to stay here? Ichimatsu's at home you know, you can play with him."

"I want to help," Karamatsu replied, actually looking delighted at the new stack of papers. He was actually having a bit of fun organizing the papers, it looked a whole lot neater now. And being helpful was the least he could do since his brothers were trying so hard to get him back to normal while still keeping him company. He feels happy, probably happier than he's ever been in a long time though he's not too sure why.

"Well, if you want to go home just ask Totty," Choromatsu replied, jerking his thumb back towards Todomatsu. "He can call home and ask Ichimatsu to pick you up."

"I can bring him home!" Jyushimatsu offered, raising his arm up and waving his sleeved hand in the air. "It'll be a fast home run!" he told them, running in place with his usual smile on his face. "First base, second base, third—" and then he jumped, pumping his fists up in the air triumphantly. "Touchdown!"

"Eh? Don't you mean home run?" Choromatsu asked, leaving Karamatsu to sort through the papers to go through yet another stack.

"That's what I said!" Jyushimatsu replied, bouncing over to Choromatsu to give him a hand.

"No, you said touchdown. That's football, isn't it?" Choromatsu and Jyushimatsu continued to bicker lightheartedly about the obvious differences of baseball and football, Choromatsu's ire only growing each time Jyshimatsu said something right and then contradicted himself a few seconds after.

"Dayooon," Dayon told Karamatsu, peeking over his shoulder as the little one started organizing the papers. "Dayon?"

Karamatsu nodded, somehow understanding exactly what Dayon was saying. "That one's finished," he said, pointing at the already organized stack of papers.

"Dayon!" Dayon replied happily, taking the stack of papers to set them aside where they'd be out of the way.

Professor Dekapan laughed sheepishly, walking over to Karamatsu to pat him on the back. "You
and your brothers have been very helpful! I found old notes I thought I lost!" he told the young boy happily. "I guess this accident was a happy one, right?"

Karamatsu nodded and smiled brightly at Professor Dekapan.

But as the professor left him to assist his other brothers, Karamatsu let the statement float around in his head for a while. For some reason, it bothered him more than he'd like to admit. A happy accident? Well, the professor was definitely gaining something from all of this; his lab was cleaner and neater now and it actually looked like a lab for once. But Professor Dekapan wasn't the only one who was happier because of the accident. Now that he thought about it, he's never seen his mother so happy before, and he's never seen his brothers work in tandem without so much as an argument passing by.

In fact, his brothers... seemed a whole lot happier now than they used to be.

Karamatsu stilled, everyone else in the room unaware of his thoughts or the change in his behavior.

Were they happier if he was like this?

He... He felt happier like this.

In the back of his head, a small voice was telling him that he was better off like this. That they were all better off now than they were before.

His brothers, though they were still NEETs, have grown to become reliable and responsible. Osomatsu's been drinking less and gambling less, choosing to spend his time with Karamatsu when he could. Choromatsu's gotten better at planning things, and has grown to be more patient with all of them. Ichimatsu was starting to open up more, smiling more. Jyushimatsu stayed his happy self, though much more in control of his impulsiveness. Todomatsu's even become a little more sincere in his words and actions too.

Karamatsu bit his lip.

"Uuuwaah," Todomatsu whined, collapsing on top of a literal heap of papers with a pout on his face. "I've been here almost everyday and I haven't found a single thing!" He rolled on the paper pile, kicking a few folders and documents up into the air as he threw a small temper tantrum like he was five years old again. "Is it even here? Argh, I'm so tired! I've gotten so many paper cuts! My fingers feel so dry because of all the papers!"

"YOOOOSH!!!!" Jyushimatsu yelled, jumping off of a bookshelf and right on top of Todomatsu.

"JYUSHIMATSU, NO!" But Choromatsu was too late and his younger brother dropped the entirety of his weight onto the youngest.

"UGWAH!" Todomatsu yelped as Jyushimatsu squished him.

The paper pile beneath him exploded at the sudden weight dropped on it, scattering all over the room like confetti. Pages and pages of experiments fluttered down to the floor like leaves on a windy autumn day. Jyushimatsu jumped around and tried to catch as many as he could out of the air. Todomatsu, tired and frustrated from sorting out through so many papers without results, decided to take a break and join in his brother's shenanigans. He spread himself out on the floor and started waving his arms and legs to make a paper snow angel.

Choromatsu sighed deeply, shaking his head in disappointment while he rolled his eyes. "You guys are lucky Dayon put the other papers aside," he scolded lightly, kicking Todomatsu's shin and
slapping the back of Jyushimatsu's head. "But now we have to clean this mess."

Todomatsu grinned and grabbed Choromatsu by the ankle and tugged hard. His brother slipped onto the floor with him, the ugliest startled noise escaping him. "We're just taking a break," Todomatsu told his brother. "We've been at this for hours!"

"Breaks are good!" Jyushimatsu agreed, nodding his head seriously as he dropped all the papers in his arms. "If you over work, you get tired! If you're tired, you can't play anymore!" And then, without warning, "dog pile on Choromatsu nii-san!"

"Wait, no! Jyushi—OOF!"

Jyushimatsu body slammed into Choromatsu, laughing all the while. Todomatsu jumped on top of the brother pile, his laughter joining with Jyushimatsu's.

"OIII! GET OFF!" Choromatsu screeched, grabbing a handful of paper to shove into Jyushimatsu's face. "My ribcage! Ow! Get off!"

"Paper fight!" Jyushimatsu screamed, rolling off Choromatsu and sending Todomatsu skidding against the floor. He took a handful of paper as well, tossing it at Choromatsu's face, and then at Todomatsu's face, and then in every direction. "Paper fight!"

"Dayooooon!" Dayon dove away from the paper heading his way and behind a table. He joined in the paper fight, throwing papers at the brothers and eventually pulling Professor Dekapan along with him.

Paper flew everywhere, and Karmatsu momentarily forgot his train of thought. He ducked, laughing as he ran across the room. He tossed papers at his brothers, hiding when he could to avoid the onslaught of documents heading his way.

"We have to take him down!" Todomatsu told Choromatsu, using a book as a shield from Jyushimatsu's attacks.

Choromatsu nodded in agreement, pointing at Jyushimatsu's feet. "I'll grab him, and you throw him down!"

"Right!"

Chaos ensued, brother against brothers, and the paper war continued. But Karamatsu used small build to his advantage, hiding under tables and behind bookshelves strategically so he could ambush Jyushimatsu as well. As he crawled underneath one of the tables in the lab, he noticed a small notebook wedged underneath one of it's legs. Though he really wanted to continue to play with his brothers, something was telling him that he had to check that notebook right now.

And so he did.

He pulled it out and dusted off the cover, seeing the professor's messy handwriting on the cover. He gulped, flipping it open to examine the notes. Again, he didn't really understand what the notes meant but luckily this one had pictures to go along with the notes. There was a poorly drawn plant with the label "Sample 1" written underneath it. Beside it was a poorly drawn test tube with "GROW" as it's label. And it didn't really take a genius to figure out that the notebook he found was the one they were looking for all this time. He flipped to the last few pages, finding the word "antidote" and notes on how to make it.

He felt a weight drop down to his stomach, anxiety filling him and sending a chill down his spine.
He didn't know why he was so nervous, and he didn't know why he felt like crying. But he didn't want to cry because then his brothers would notice and realize that he had what they were looking for. He didn't want to show them, and he didn't want them to know. So he sucked in a breath and puffed out his chest before stuffing the notebook into his pocket.

He peeked out of the table just in time to see Todomatsu tackle Jyushimatsu to the ground. Dayon and Professor Dekapan took that moment to ambush all three of the brothers, burying them in a huge stack of papers. They laughed in triumph as the three Matsuno brothers tried to free themselves from their paper-y prison.

Karamatsu caught sight of Todomatsu's phone, sitting innocently on one of the tables, and made a beeline towards it. He took it, found a place that was quiet enough, and punched in the numbers for home. The line rang once, twice, thrice, before someone finally answered it. "Matsuno residence, eldest brother Osomatsu speaking!"

He was relieved to hear Osomatsu's voice but it didn't quell the nervous feeling in his heart. He clutched the phone tighter. "Nii-chan," he said softly, trying to figure out what words to say. He didn't know what he was doing but going home was comfort, and comfort meant he felt safe. He just wanted to go home.

Osomatsu heard the somber tone in his brother's voice, frowning a little bit as he cradled the phone closer to his ear. "Hey buddy, what's up? You getting bored?" he tried to feign ignorance, thinking that maybe Karamatsu would feel better if he didn't sound as worried as he felt. "I told you Chokomatchu's boring to be around! You should have stayed at home with nii-chan! I was feeling so lonely without you! Ichimatsu's been playing with the cats all day and ignoring me!"

"Unn," Karamatsu replied uncertainly, fidgeting in his spot. "I wanna go home."

Osomatsu's tone softened, a sad little smile on his face as he nodded. He didn't like how sad Karamatsu sounded. "Alright, sit tight. I'm coming to get you, okay?" He slipped into his shoes, ready to leave home as soon as Karamatsu hung up.

"Okay..." Karamatsu nodded too, sniffling a little bit but trying his best to hold his tears back.

"I'll see you in a few minutes," Osomatsu replied. "Bye, Karamatsu."

"Bye bye, nii-chan."

Karamatsu hung the phone just as the commotion in the room started to die down. His brothers, as well as Professor Dekapan and Dayon, lay on the floor panting to catch their breath. He wiped his eyes on his sleeve and walked over to Choromatsu, shaking his brother's arm to gain his attention.

Choromatsu looked at him, his eyebrows rising in question. "What is it?"

"I'm gonna go home," he informed him.

"Oh," Choromatsu said softly, sitting up to look at his brother. A small frown grew on his face, but he tried his best to change it into a reassuring smile. "I'll call home—"

"Nii-chan's gonna pick me up," Karamatsu told him before he could finish. "I'm tired..." he lied. Not completely convinced, Choromatsu nodded. "We'll fix up here and follow."

Karamatsu nodded, stepping over the papers and doing his best not to crumple any of them on his way out.
"He's really cute," Todomatsu commented offhandedly, already picking up papers to get back to work. "I think I could get used to having a little brother."

"You didn't like him being cuter than you," Choromatsu replied, giving his youngest brother a disbelieving look. "You wanted him back to normal as soon as possible."

"You lost him too!" Jyushimatsu added helpfully.

"I didn't mean to lose him!" Todomatsu defended. He hugged the stacks of papers to his chest, looking over at Karamatsu to see him carefully kick aside a few papers to make a path for himself. "Maybe it's not so bad that he's like that."

"Mmm," Choromatsu hummed in agreement. "I guess it's fun playing with him when he's like that."

"Uuhh!" Jyushimats agreed too, waving his sleeved hands in the air. "He can even fly!" he said, throwing paper into the air.

"You shouldn't throw him so high, Jyushimatsu nii-san," Todomatsu scolded. "He might get hurt."

"Ehh? But he has fun! I have fun too!"

Karamatsu frowned as he finally exited the building, his brothers talking happily behind him about how they liked him the way he was. He sniffled, sitting down on the first step of the stair case in front of the lab to wait for his eldest brother. Why was he sad? His brothers were happy, so he should be happy too right? He looked down at his feet, deep in thought, as his hand felt for the notebook sitting innocently in his hoodie pocket. Did they really need the stupid notebook? If they were all happy like this, then there was no point anymore, right?

If he threw the notebook away, maybe the professor wouldn't be able to make the antidote. Maybe his brothers would give up, and they'd all just keep being happy.

He was so consumed by his thoughts that he didn't notice Osomatsu in front of him until his brother tapped his shoulder.

"Ready to go?" Osomatsu asked, crouching down in front of him so that they were looking eye to eye.

Karamatsu nodded, standing up and walking over to his still crouching brother to wrap his arms around his neck.

Osomatsu carried him, patting him on the back as he did so. He seemed... sad, but he couldn't figure out why. He cradled him for a while, rocking him a bit, before making his way back home.

Karamatsu stayed quiet the whole way.

Chapter End Notes

:^)
His small brother slept with a small frown on his face, brows scrunched and drawn downwards as if his dreams were plagued by monsters or nightmares. Osomatsu frowned and brushed Karamatsu's hair back in an attempt to soothe him somehow, and though his brother leaned into his touch it did nothing to alleviate the growing anxiety and stress that was haunting him even in his sleep. Osomatsu looked up at the rest on his brothers preparing for the night, a small frown on his usually grinning face. "Did something happen at the lab?"

Jyushimatsu, who was tucked in right next to Karamatsu, nodded his head enthusiastically. Though his eyes were closed and ready for slumber, he had his usual wide smile. "We had a paper war. We had a lot of fun!"

"It took us so long to clean it up though," Choromatsu grumbled, bleary eyed and tired as he wiggled underneath their shared blanket. He curled up onto his side, trying to find a comfortable enough position. He was so tired, unused to going through so much paperwork and carrying stacks of paper from one side of the lab to the other. In retrospect though he considered it to be practice for when he actually got a job and while he was annoyed now, it would probably help him out in the long run. "But we've made a lot of progress, I think we're gonna find it soon," he yawned, the rest of his sentence trailing off as he came closer to sleep.

"No, not that," Osomatsu argued, shaking Choromatsu by the shoulder to stop him from falling asleep completely. "Before I came to pick up Karamatsu. Did something happen?"

Choromatsu swatted his older brother's hand away, irritated. "Jyushimatsu already told you—"

"Paper war!" he whispered loudly, wanting to show his enthusiasm but also trying to keep it down so he wouldn't wake up Karamatsu. "It was fun! You should have joined us!"

"I think you bruised me," Todomatsu huffed, settling down next to Jyushimatsu as he checked his arms. Rough housing with his brothers was always fun, though he always regretted it hours later when bruises would bloom on his skin. But he sighed and shrugged, wiggling into his temporary spot next to Jyushimatsu. "But yeah, it was kinda fun I guess."

Osomatsu huffed as well, the only brother still sitting up. "Are you sure? Nothing weird happened? Like, nothing at all?"

"The paper war—"

"Nothing worth mentioning," Todomatsu spoke over Jyushimatsu, patting him on the cheek to get him to hush up. "Why do you ask—"

"The lights," Ichimatsu hissed on Todomatsu's other side, pulling the blanket over his head to shield himself from the light that was annoying his already sleepy mood. "Shut up, it's time to sleep."

"Yeah," Choromatsu agreed, just as irritated as Ichimatsu. Even though he couldn't see their fourth brother he mirrored his actions, pulling the blanket over his head and whined. "We have to wake up early to cover more ground in finding Professor Dekapan's notes."

"But you're the closest to the light switch..." Osomatsu replied. He wanted to get to the bottom of
things, but his brothers were just so irritable when they were tired. Not that he blamed them, he wasn't on Notes Search duty that day so he's not as tired as the rest of them. Though he'd been concerned ever since he got back home with Karamatsu; all his younger brother did was curl up next to Ichimatsu, quiet and pensive and not really willing to talk even though he usually had some animated story to share. "Choromatsu, are you sure nothing happened?"

Choromatsu was halfway across the room to get the light switch, groaning and muttering complaints under his breath the whole time. He only realized he was being spoken to when Osomatsu called his name again. "What? Didn't I just tell you? Stop being so persistent," he replied. "No is no," he added as an afterthought, flicking the lights off before crawling back into bed. "Just go to sleep, Osomatsu nii-san."

He really didn't want to but he sighed since it was futile to argue with a stubborn Matsuno and wiggled underneath the sheets with the rest of his brothers, turning his head to the side to watch Karamatsu's face. It was dark now, but moon shined bright enough outside that he could still see the troubled look on his brother's face. He reached up and pressed the tip of his middle finger in between Karamatsu's eyebrows, rubbing small and gentle circles in an attempt to erase the worried crease under his finger tip. It didn't work because each time he pulled his finger back Karamatsu's worried furrow would return. He sighed deeply.

"Karamachuu..." he whined softly, only loud enough for himself to hear. "Nii-chan's worried about you."

His brother slept unaware, fidgeting slightly in his sleep before going lax once more.

Osomatsu sighed deeply again.

"Stop that," Choromatsu whispered, bumping his knee against Osomatsu's to shut him up. "Just sleep." Osomatsu sighed deeply again in reply, though Choromatsu couldn't tell if it was because he was deeply troubled or if he was doing it to spite him. He bumped his knee against Osomatsu's again, only harder this time.

"Alright, alright! Geeze..." Osomatsu sighed one last time, turning his attention to Karamatsu once more.

Satisfied with his answer, Choromatsu curled up facing away from his brother and sighed himself. Sleep was slowly returning him to the world of dreams but a voice at the back of his mind was nagging at him, telling him that he was forgetting something potentially important. Each time he felt like he was asleep something would pull him back to consciousness and it was only adding to his slowly growing ire. Was this insomnia or something? Or was he just not used to being at the edge of the futon? He tossed and turned, pulling his side of the blanket off then pulling it back on when he realized it was too cold to sleep without it.

After an hour or so of tossing and turning, he had an epiphany. "Wait," he said suddenly, sitting up a little too fast. He felt dizzy now with the lack of sleep but he remembered something, and finally understood why Osomatsu was being so insistent. "I think something did happen," he said again as he looked over at Osomatsu's figure, ready to shake him awake. But he didn't have to, because it seemed like his brother was nowhere near sleep at all.

Osomatsu sat up carefully so as not to wake the rest of their brothers. "Well, spit it out!"

"Well I don't know exactly what happened but," he rubbed his chin in thought, recalling the moment Karamatsu approached him at the lab. "He seemed a little bit sad when he spoke to me, but he just said he was tired. Did he get any sleep at all when he came home? Maybe he just
needed a nap."

"No. He was laying around with Ichi but he didn't sleep. He just looked... Troubled," Osomatsu replied.

Choromatsu looked over to Karamatsu, only now realising how unsettled he looked and only now just understanding why Osomatsu seemed so worried. He scratched the back of his head sheepishly, clutching the blanket in his free hand. "Maybe... He'll feel better tomorrow. Don't worry about it," he tried to reassure, feeling just a little bit weird. It was usually Osomatsu telling him to relax and not the other way around. He wasn't too sure if he sounded convincing though, but it was the only thing he could think of to help his brother feel a little more at ease.

"I guess..." Osomatsu sighed one last time before settling in again. "Thanks, Choromatsu."

Choromatsu settled back in as well, a nervous smile on his face. "Don't mention it."

The sound of sniffling was what woke him up. He was usually a heavy sleeper but with how worried he was about Karamatsu he couldn't fall into his usual deep sleep. His head ached slightly but he forced his eyes open, blinking in the darkness to let his eyesight adjust. "Karamatsu...?"

"Nii-chan..." Karamatsu whined, grabbing onto Osomatsu's arm for some sort of support. A bad dream woke him up and though he couldn't remember it. But the feeling was real, the anxious palpitation of his heart and the painful feeling of being alone felt so real. He sniffled and hiccuped, trying his best to suppress his loud tears because he didn't want to wake up the rest of his brothers, didn't want to burden them anymore than he already has.

"Hey, hey," Osomatsu cooed gently, pulling his brother into an embrace even though he was still slightly confused and very tired. "What's wrong buddy? Bad tummy? Bad dream?"

Karamatsu nodded, wiping his eyes on his sleeves before cuddling up closer to Osomatsu. He didn't want to have to explain, because he didn't even know how he would explain it. It wasn't a monster in his dream, or the boogie man, or anything like that. No, it was just a feeling that shook him to the core, a feeling he wasn't used to but something he thinks he should be familiar with by now. He couldn't stop the flow of his tears because he just couldn't get the weird feeling to stop; it felt like his heart was frozen, or like a dark claw was clutching onto it with no intention of letting go.

Osomatsu felt his heart ache at seeing Karamatsu like this. Even as kids he's never seen his brother like this. Karamatsu has always been one of the more emotionally stronger brothers, so he's never really had to worry about him too much. He sat up, pulling Karamatsu with him and rocked him gently. "It's alright, it's okay," he cooed, pressing kisses to the top of his brother's head. "Onii-
chan's right here to beat up any monsters, okay?"

Though he was completely confident in Osomatsu's promise to battle the monsters, he still couldn't calm himself down. He hiccuped and clung onto Osomatsu's night shirt, trying to focus on stopping.

He pulled his brother up, cradling him as he wiggled out of the futon. As he stood up, Karamatsu gave him a confused look through his tears so Osomatsu just smiled back at him. "Let's go get a midnight snack, just you and me," he told him and tiptoed out of the room as quiet as he possibly manage with Karamatsu in his arms and then he slid the door shut behind him. Once he was in the hallway he smiled, talking a little bit louder now that they were out of immediate hearing range. "Hot chocolate for a cold night, right?"

At the promise of sweets Karamatsu nodded, momentarily forgetting his sadness. His tears were easier to stop now, and the thought of something warm in his belly made him feel comfortable already. He rested his head on Osomatsu's shoulder, and wrapped one arm around his neck. "M'kay..."

Osomatsu padded down the stairs with Karamatsu still in his arms, only putting his brother down once they were in the kitchen. He turned the lights on, making a beeline towards the fridge while Karamatsu took a seat in the dining room.

He poured chocolate milk into a mug from the carton that had a label "Totty" on it, figuring that his youngest brother would forgive him for stealing a bit of his personal stash of chocolate milk. It was for a good cause, after all. He put it into the microwave and hit several buttons before waiting for the milk to warm up. He rubbed the underside of his nose then rubbed at his arms to warm himself up. It was pretty cold, and he belatedly realized that if he was feeling cold Karamatsu must be feeling cold as well.

When the microwave went off he took the mug and walked out to join Karamatsu at the dining area, sitting down on the floor before gesturing for Karamatsu to sit on his lap. When his brother did he handed him the chocolate milk and smiled as Karamatsu accepted it gratefully. "Nii-chan will keep you warm," he promised, wrapping his arms around Karamatsu before nuzzling the top of his head.

They didn't talk much, Karamatsu too busy with finishing his drink and Osomatsu still a little bit too sleepy to engage in conversation. But it was fine, it was comfortable, and it was a silence that they both could enjoy. But at some point, Osomatsu must have dozed off because he woke up a few minutes later to find the mug empty and his brother leaning back against him. He looked a little more at ease now, and that was enough for Osomatsu.

He adjusted Karamatsu in his grasp, carrying his brother again and patting his back gently. "Osomatsu?"

Though he was surprised at the voice he didn't jump at the call of his name. Instead he looked over the top of Karamatsu's head, finding his father scratching the slight stubble on his chin. His father yawned and approached him, raising an eyebrow at the scene before him. "What's going on here?"

"Karamatsu had a bad dream," he explained, hugging his brother just a little closer. "So I took him here to calm him down."

"Mmm," his father replied thoughtfully. Out of all of his sons, Osomatsu wasn't on the top of the list when it came to being a good caregiver. If anyone it would have been Choromatsu, or if
Karamatsu wasn't the one in need himself, it would have been him. Osomatsu tended to avoid responsibility at all costs, so it came as a surprise to see him here in the middle of the night just to tend to his baby brother without so much as a complaint.

He patted Osomatsu on the head, then Karamatsu's too. "Good job, son," he said with a small grin. "Now get back to bed already."

"Will do, old man," Osomatsu replied cheekily, giving his father a two fingered salute before climbing back up the stairs to join the rest of his brother's in slumber land.

Matsuzo Matsuno watched his eldest son retreat to his shared bedroom, a fond little smile on his lips. Seeing Osomatsu just now reminded him of the time all his sons were small babies, how sometimes it was either him or his wife waking up in the middle of the night to cease their crying.

He felt a little prideful; even if his son was a useless NEET, at least he could be a decent father if he ever decided to have a family of his own.

Chapter End Notes

I was going to have Osomatsu sing Karamatsu a lullaby but I already did that in another fic so this is fine.

alternatively: in which the matsuno parents slowly start to realize that osomatsu can be house father material and hope he marries a nice lady who can give them lots of grandkids
A few days passed by and the guilt continued to grow inside of Karamatsu. Everyday one or more of his brothers left in the morning to look for the antidote to get him back to normal and came back late at night exhausted and a little bit frustrated but still determined to look for what they needed. It was the most his brothers have ever done for him, and here he was lying to them, being incredibly selfish, by hiding the little notebook that would hurl him back into being his older self, the one that felt alone and out of place.

Weren't they happier with him as a child? Didn't they have more fun with him if he was like this? So why were they trying so hard? He didn't know, and didn't think he had the courage to ask them for answers.

Today he's alone with Jyushimatsu, the brother who was helping him from the very start. He refused to leave his brother's grasp, feeling guilty for wanting affection from someone who he'd been lying to but not brave enough to admit his selfishness. He really was a guilty guy, even as a child. He clung onto Jyushimatsu, nuzzling his face against his brother's chest to comfort himself but found that it was barely working.

Jyushimatsu just hugged him back, a confused and worried expression on his face. He knew that there was something bothering Karamatsu, making him feel down, but he couldn't figure out what it was. He didn't know how to ask either, and even the few times that he did try Karamatsu would just tell him that he was feeling tired, or hungry, or some excuse to avoid giving him real answers. This was something the older Karamatsu would do when he was troubled but didn't want to drag anyone into helping him carry his burdens.

"Karamatsu nii-saan," he sang, swaying his body side to side, rocking Karamatsu as he did so. "I wanna sing! Let's sing a song!"

Karamatsu looked up, resting his chin against Jyushimatsu's chest tiredly but he tried to smile. "But my hands are too small for my guitar..." Now that he mentions it, he misses playing his guitar, misses making songs about anything that came to mind, and misses the little duets that he and Jyushimatsu used to sing.

"That's okay!" Jyushimatsu replied reassuringly. "We can sing without it!"

Karamatsu frowned and pressed his face against Jyushimatsu's chest again. He didn't want to sing though, he wanted to feel happy. He wanted his brothers to be happy, but he didn't know how he could do that.

Jyushimatsu frowned as soon as Karamatsu's eyes were off him. Something must be really bothering Karamatsu and he never did like it when any of his brothers were sad. "Sweater monster!" he screamed suddenly, lifting the hem of his own hoodie and pulled it over and down Karamatsu, trapping his small brother inside his hoodie with him. He lifted Karamatsu, spinning
Karamatsu yelped, clinging onto Jyushimatsu as they spun. A funny, tingling feeling tickled at his stomach and he couldn't help the laughter that bubbled out of him. "Faster!" he yelled, clinging onto his brother tightly as his brother complied with his wishes. "Hahahaha!"

They spun for a few more seconds until Jyushimatsu finally landed himself on the couch, releasing Karamatsu from his sweater-y prison. When his brother's head popped out, hair messy and sticking out in various directions, he pressed a kiss to his forehead. "Cheer up, Karamatsu nii-san!" he told his brother, hugging him tightly in his grasp. "I don't know why you're sad but I don't like it when you're sad!"

The fleeting happiness of Jyushimatsu's antics wore off and Karamatsu felt the dread fill him yet again. All Jyushimatsu has ever been to him was kind and supportive and caring, and Karamatsu couldn't stand it any longer. He had to tell someone, anyone! So he took a deep breath and settled comfortably against Jyushimatsu, preparing himself for whatever reaction his brother might give him. "Can you... keep a secret?"

Jyushimatsu froze slightly at his brother's words, but tried to make it look like he wasn't worried at all. Finally, he was going to understand why his brother seemed so sad lately! Maybe he'd find the solution to putting a genuine smile on his face again. So he nodded his head vigorously and pulled an imaginary zipper over his lips before giving his older brother a thumbs up for confirmation.

Karamatsu sighed and hopped off the couch, his skin tingling and anxiety filling him as he made his way towards the closet where he kept most of his private things hidden. He dug underneath the various items his older self hid before pulling out the notebook that his brothers have been looking for. He stared at it for a moment, debating with himself on whether or not he should show it. But he trusted Jyushimatsu and owed him the truth so he took a deep breath as if it could give him more courage and turned around and walked to his brother, holding out the notebook for him. "I... I found it."

Taking the book from Karamatsu's small hands, Jyushimatsu inspected it. It wasn't a notebook he was familiar with so he opened it to try and figure out just what was so important about it. Though he didn't really understand much of the notes, he understood that this was what they needed to get Karamatsu back to normal! He jumped up, honestly happy with the discovery. "Good job, nii-san!" he cheered and picked Karamatsu up with one arm around his waist, holding his brother at his side. "We'll give it to Professor Dekapan and—"

"No!" Karamatsu yelped, grabbing the notebook away from Jyushimatsu and hugged it to his chest protectively. "No!"

Jyushimatsu paused and placed his brother down, trying to quell the excitement he felt to hear his brother out. "Why not?"

He looked down at his feet, his lip quivering as he tried to hold back his tears. "I'm scared..." he admitted. Scared of going back to being a grown up, scared of being left behind, scared of feeling all alone, and scared of feeling like he wasn't loved or cared for. He was happy like this, but not completely because the guilt was still making him feel horrible.

"It didn't hurt before, right?" Jyushimatsu tried to reason, crouching down in front of him with a smile on his face. He pressed his sleeved palms against Karamatsu's cheeks, playing with them to calm his brother down. "It won't hurt again! You just have to drink it! Professor Dekapan won't use a syringe or anything! I'll tell him that he absolutely can't use one!" he tried to reassure him before resting his forehead against Karamatsu's. "And I'll be there! And Osomatsu nii-san, and
Choromatsu nii-san, and Ichimatsu nii-san, and Totty! We'll all be there so you don't have to be scared!

Karamatsu shook his head. That's not what he was afraid of! What he was afraid of is what would come after. But he didn't know how to say that or explain it.

"But..." Jyushimatsu frowned softly as he tried to think of what to do. He rubbed his forehead against Karamatsu's as he thought but came up with no answers. "Why are you scared?"

"I don't know," Karamatsu replied. He's not sure, not completely. It was hard to understand how he felt at the moment, and could only really generalize it to fear.

"It's not because it'll hurt," Jyushimatsu enumerated. "Is it because it's gonna feel weird?"

Karamatsu shook his head again.

"Is it because you don't like taking medicine?" he continued to try.

Karamatsu shook his head still.

"Hmmm," Jyushimatsu hummed in though, scooping his brother into his arms. "But we should really tell the others..."

"No!" Karamatsu squeaked, shaking his head harder than before. "You promised! You promised that this was our secret!"

"Ah!" Jyushimatsu placed a hand over his mouth, realizing that he really did promise to keep it a secret. He nodded and sat down with Karamatsu on his lap. "I promise," he affirmed. "But... You should tell them! Maybe we can think of an answer together!"

Karamatsu frowned. He knew Jyushimatsu was just trying to help, but he already knew that his brothers would want him back to normal. They were trying so hard, they were probably tired of having to take care of him all the time, and probably annoyed that they couldn't do all the adult things they wanted to do because of him. He was probably troubling all of them, and they were just being kind to him until he went back to his normal self. He! Didn't! Want! That! Not at all! But he can't deny that telling them the truth would make him feel so much better.

"But what if they get angry?" he asked, the guilt rearing it's ugly head once more. "What if they hate me? I lied to them, I lied to you too," he whimpered. "I'm sorry, Jyushimachu. I didn't mean to! I didn't want to lie but I— I don't know! I'm sorry!" A long whine slipped past his lips until he was finally crying, loud and ugly and incredibly miserable.

"Ah, no... Nii-san, I'm not mad! I swear!" Jyushimatsu told him, wiping his brother's tears with his sleeves but each time he wiped there was more. He felt bad, he didn't mean to make Karamatsu cry. "The others wont be mad too, I promise!" except he wasn't perfectly sure. "I'll make sure they wont get mad! I'm on your side! All the time, okay?"

Karamatsu nodded because he couldn't really bring himself to speak, letting Jyushimatsu wipe his tears away. "I'm sorry I lied..."

"You don't have to be!" Jyushimatsu replied, smiling brightly. Karamatsu never opened up to him before as an adult even when it was obvious to Jyushimatsu that something was bothering his brother. It was nice to know that maybe, just maybe, Karamatsu might reach out more to him if he was troubled. He hoped that was the case, because as much as possible he wanted to make sure that all his brothers were happy! "You were scared! So it's okay! Everyone makes mistakes!"
He hugged Karamatsu tightly, peppering his forehead and cheeks with kisses until his brother calmed down, his crying was down to sniffling and hiccuping. He wiped his small brother’s face with his sleeves, not caring if they got covered in tears or snot. "I promise I won’t tell the others," he told Karamatsu with a smile and then added "but you should tell them. I can tell them for you if you’re too scared! Or I can hold your hand when you do it!"

Karamatsu sniffled one more time and nodded his head. "O... Okay..."

When the rest of the brothers came back, Karamatsu was asleep on the couch with a fluffy blanket wrapped around him and the notebook clutched tightly in his arms. He tired himself out because of all the crying, but he felt lighter. He was sure now that at least one of his brothers still liked him even if he lied.

"Aww," Osomatsu cooed when he saw him, ruffling his hair gently. "He looks so cute," he commented but did note that his eyes looked a little puffy and his nose was a little bit red. He looked up at Jyushimatsu, who was sitting close and keeping a careful eye on where Osomatsu’s hand was. "Did something happen?"

Jyushimatsu stiffened slightly. He didn't like keeping secrets from his brothers but he made a promise and he didn't want to break it. So he lied too, something he wasn’t used to doing at all. "We were playing baseball!" he cheered, waving his sleeves up in the air. "He accidentally tripped on one of my baseballs and got hurt! But he didn't get any booboos! But it still hurt so he cried a bit!" He hoped that was believable.

"You should really watch over him better, Jyushimatsu nii-san!" Todomatsu scolded but then flopped down on the floor, absolutely tired.

"You're one to talk," Ichimatsu commented before sitting by Karamatsu's feet on the couch. "You lost him—"

"I DIDN'T MEAN TO!" Todomatsu argued.

"You were crying so hard—" Ichimatsu teased.

"SHUT UP!!" Todomatsu screeched, repeatedly hitting his fist against Ichimatsu's ankle. "Shut up, stupid nii-san!"

"Waahahaha, you should have taken a picture!" Osomatsu chipped in, grinning as Todomatsu's face went red with embarrassment.

Yet another argument erupted between Osomatsu, Ichimatsu, and Todomatsu. Choromatsu shook his head at their stupid argument before making his way to Jyushimatsu, patting his younger brother atop his head, proud of him for taking care of their brother. "Anything to report?" He asked.

Jyushimatsu hesitated. He wanted to confide in Choromatsu, since Choromatsu usually knew what to do. But a promise is a promise so he shook his head. "Nothing to report nii-san!"
Choromatsu gave him a long look, almost as if he could see through his lie, but sighed and nodded his head. "Good job, Jyushimatsu," he complimented. "We couldn't find anything today too, but I really feel like we're getting closer."

"That's good!" Jyushimatsu replied, taking Choromatsu's hand in both of his before shaking it. "Great job nii-san!" He felt a twinge of guilt, and wondered just how much of it Karamatsu felt over the past few days.

"Jyushimachu..."

Jyushimatsu twisted and turned in the futon, face scrunching up momentarily before relaxing. "Jyushimachu....." the voice came with a gentle shake.

Jyushimatsu peeked one eye open, peering into the darkness and up at Karamatsu's small face. His brother held a determined look, and that was enough to get Jyushimatsu fully awake. But he stayed quiet as he sat up, rubbing his eyes as he looked over at him. "Did something happen, nii-san? Bad dream?"

Karamatsu shook his head. "I... I have to do something."

He crawled out of the futon and sat next to Karamatsu. "Bathroom?"

"No!" he squeaked in reply and then abruptly placed both hands over his mouth as he realized how loud he was. He lowered his voice to a whisper. "I think I know what I have to do," he answered, taking the notebook from beside him to show his younger brother. "Can you help me?"

Jyushimatsu nodded. Anything to help his brother! "What do I have to do?"

In a few quiet minutes, both brothers were bundled up in warm clothes and heading out of the house and to Professor Dekapan's lab. They held hands all the way there while Jyushimatsu attempted to make shapes with his breath in the cold night air. He couldn't really manage anything other than a cloud but it amused Karamatsu anyway and kept him occupied for the time being from any negative thoughts.

The lab was unlocked and they sneaked in quietly. The lab looked more organized than before but they eventually found a pile of papers and files that were still untouched by anyone. Karamatsu took a deep breath and placed the notebook on top of the pile, his hands shaking as he did so. He didn't have the courage to admit to his brothers that he hid the notebook but the least he could do was let them find it... And decide what to do when they do find it.

"I'm proud of you, Karamatsu nii-san," Jyushimatsu told him gently. "It must be scary, and you're really brave for doing this."

"Thank you for helping me," Karamatsu replied, hugging Jyushimatsu's arm tightly.

The walk home was quiet but that single task must have been so emotionally exhausting for
Karamatsu because he eventually got tired and Jyushimatsu had to carry him home. What Jyushimatsu didn't expect was to find Choromatsu huddled at the front door, waiting for both of them to come home. He felt a nervous sweat trail down his neck despite the cold and smiled as guiltless as he could possibly manage as he approached his older brother. "Choromatsu nii-san."

Choromatsu didn't look completely mad, but he raised an accusing eyebrow. "Nothing to report, huh?"

Jyushimatsu deflated. "I promised..."

"Just get him inside, it's too cold out there," he instructed, standing up and pulling the door open for his brothers. When they were all back inside, he helped get Karamatsu undress and back into his pajamas and tucked him back in next to Osomatsu. And then, back outside in the hallway he folded his arms and gave Jyushimatsu a stern look. "Explain."

Jyushimatsu fidgeted under his brother's gaze. "I can't say," he confessed, putting both his hands over his mouth. "I made a promise not to say anything!"

Choromatsu sighed. "But Jyushi—"

"It's gonna be okay, Choromatsu nii-san. I know it's gonna be," he reassured him. "Just... Trust me."

Choromatsu took a deep breath. "...I believe you."

Chapter End Notes

lays down

i also like choro and jyushi bonding moments and trusting each other and i die goodbye i just generally like all the bros bonding one on one with each other goooodbyeeeee
Karamatsu struggled to fold the shirt in front of him. While he had managed to fold it the first time, it wasn't perfect enough and no where close to how neat his mother was doing it. He glanced over at his mother then, watching her fold the laundry perfectly and quickly, a pile of clothes growing behind her. Karamatsu looked over to his very feeble pile, three shorts and one blanket, and pursed his lips in determination as he attempted to fold the shirt he had one more time.

His brothers were... Out. Out on their way to find the notebook that he'd hidden in plain sight. He stayed home due to anxiety and complained that he had a bad stomach (which was actually true! His nerves were so bad it was making his insides twist) and their mother offered to nurse him back to health. But after his brothers left and it was just him and his mother left he felt a little bit better, well enough to help his mother with the chores. It kept his mind off of his problems for a while, and the smile on his mother's face was a reward within itself.

Matsuyo sighed nostalgically and smiled warmly at Karamatsu. He was really more trouble than he was help, but having his company was more than enough. When her sons started growing up, they started to leave the house more and showed a little less affection with each passing year. She understood that it was part of growing up, but that didn't mean she didn't miss when her sons used to shower her with so much love and affection. Maybe that's why she didn't mind too much if they were NEETs; she'd grown used to having such a noisy house and having them all gone would make her feel so lonely.

"Do you want to take a break, Karamatsu?" she asked, setting aside the last pieces of clothing before standing up and brushing herself off.

"Ah..." Karamatsu looked at all the work his mother accomplished and compared it to what he's finished. He sighed despondently but put his pile aside as well. He stood up and took the hand that his mother offered him, walking to the kitchen with her to see what sort of snack she was going to prepare for him. "Sorry mommy," he said suddenly as he sat down.

Matsuyo raised an eyebrow, setting a glass of milk and a bowl of animal crackers in front of him. "What for?" she asked with a slight frown. Aside from Choromatsu, Karamatsu has always been one of the more helpful of the brothers evident in the way he offered to help her with the laundry even though he could be doing other things five year olds could be doing.

"I didn't do it right," he replied. "The clothes... They're all messy."

"It's okay," she smiled and patted the top of his head, kissing him on the cheek. "You tried your best! And you're always going to be mommy's little helper, right? So you just have to keep practicing!"

Karamatsu nodded. In a few hours, he probably wasn't going to be so little anymore. "I love you," he told her, his chest giving a painful squeeze as he said those words. He spread his arms as wide as he could and added "thiiiiis much!" he tried to smile, although it was getting a little bit harder to do so.

She scooped him up in her arms, hugging him tightly to her chest. "Oh Karamatsu, I love you so, so, so, so much! Always and forever! Don't you ever forget that!"
His lip quivered. He hoped that he could hear those words from her again soon, even when he's back to normal. But even if she didn't, at least he knew that she loved him forever. "Me too, mommy! I love you forever too!"

From another room in the house, the phone started ringing and they both paused. Matsuyo put her son down, walking over to the phone while Karamatsu followed right after her while the anxiety was starting to grow again.

"Oh, Jyushimatsu. Yes, you want to speak to Karamatsu?" Matsuyo smiled at Karamatsu again, bending down to hand the phone over to him.

"Jyushimachu?"

"Karamatsu nii-san! They found it! The book! They found it right where you left— oops! I mean, they found it under lots of papers!" the fifth brother told him through the phone with enthusiasm but then lowered his voice so that only Karamatsu could hear. "Are you ready?"

Osomatsu cheered loudly from the distance, claiming that he was the one who found it first. Of course, Choromatsu denied that, stating that he was the one who actually found it. They ended up bickering as usual, but that was good because they wouldn't hear the secret conversation between Karamatsu and Jyushimatsu.

But Karamatsu was quiet for a moment, clutching the phone in his hands tightly as he fidgeted. No, he wasn't ready. He was far from ready. But he knew he couldn't stay like this forever, and he knew that the longer he stayed a small child the harder it would be for him to turn back to his old lifestyle. He took a deep breath and clutched his eyes tightly, nodding against the receiver before muttering back a small "I'm ready..."

"Jyushimatsu nii-san, give me the phon— thanks!" Karamatsu heard the phone being transferred to another pair of hands, and then his youngest brother's voice greeting him. "Hi nii-san! We found the antidote! Professor Dekapan said it might take a few minutes or maybe an hour to recreate so Ichimatsu nii-san and Choromatsu nii-san are coming to pick you up!"

"O-okay..." he muttered softly.

"Can you give the phone back to mom? I'll tell her the good news!"

Karamatsu bit his lip and nodded, handing over the phone to his mother.

He was going to cherish all the moments he's had with his family. It was good while it lasted, and he couldn't have asked for more. Not everyone got a chance like this after all, and it would be too greedy of him if he were to ask for more than what he'd already gotten. Karamatsu puffed out his chest in an attempt to conceal his anxiety with confidence. It can't be that bad, right? Being a grown up can't be that bad. He was just over thinking things probably. Hopefully.

Michi the cat meowed at him, seemingly appearing out of nowhere. She always came at the right time to cheer him up. He picked her up in his arms and squished his cheek against the top of her head. "You love me," he said certainly. "And I love you. So it's gonna be okay."

"Meow" she meowed back at him and then purred against his chest. "Meeeeow..."

He laughed, feeling a little bit better at her reassurance. "Thanks, Michi."
As soon as Choromatsu opened the door, he found Karamatsu patiently waiting for them with a cat on his lap and a small back pack beside him. "Oh," he said, walking over to him. "You're ready."

Karamatsu nodded and gave him a thumbs up. "Yes!"

"Are you gonna bring Michi?" Ichimatsu asked, crouching down in front of his brother to pet the cat in his lap. Usually cats liked him the best, but Michi had grown very attached to Karamatsu over the last few days even if Ichimatsu tried to bribe her with dried sardines.

Karamatsu nodded again. "Yes! She's my best friend!"

Ichimatsu clutched at his heart, trying his best not to faint this time. "Okay," he replied instead of foaming at the mouth before standing up. "We ready to go then?"

Choromatsu checked the contents of Karamatsu's bag and found a change of clothes for when Karamatsu was back to his normal age. He nodded at both his brothers, hefting the bag onto his shoulders. "Yeah, we're ready."

The two taller brothers walked out the door, Karamatsu following behind them with Michi in his arms. Before they could get too far from the house though, he was already tugging at the back of Ichimatsu's shirt. "Ichi! Ichimachu!"

Ichimatsu clicked his tongue in annoyance, though it wasn't really annoyance and just his default way of responding to most things. "What?"

"Carry..." Karamatsu said shyly, one arm still cradling Michi while the other was extended towards his brother.

"Tch... Why should I—"

"He wasn't feeling well earlier," Choromatsu interrupted while he rubbed his chin. He took Michi from Karamatsu's arms, holding her carefully, before nudging Karamatsu closer to Ichimatsu. "C'mon, the lab isn't that far. Just carry him."

"But—"

"Please?" Karamatsu said softly, hoping to strike his brother's heart.

Ichimatsu's weakness was abused, and with a scowl on his face and a muttered curse he picked up Karamatsu in his arms anyway, holding him close before continuing on their way.

Karamatsu was glad that Choromatsu remembered that he wasn't feeling so well. This way he didn't have to pretend to be happy as he clung onto Ichimatsu like his life depended on it. After this, he might never get this kind of attention again from Ichimatsu so he wanted to make the most of it. So he hugged tightly, pressed his face against his shoulder, and tried to do everything he could to let Ichimatsu know that he loved him without having to say it.

"What the hell, Kus— Karamatsu," Ichimatsu complained though he didn't really mind. It was cute how clingy Karamatsu was being, and it was nice to get physical affection from beings that weren't
cats. He sighed, pulling his brother closer, and followed Choromatsu closely. "Wait, I can't see—"

He tripped but luckily Choromatsu caught him before he could. And before he could give his brother a thank you, he felt Choromatsu take his hand to lead him. "Oi, Choromatsu, what the hell?
Too much affection at once from two people but he appreciated it because he could at least trust Choromatsu enough to know that he wouldn't make fun of him. "This is stupid."

"This way you won't slow down, and you won't trip," Choromatsu provided helpfully, leading his brothers back to professor Dekapan's lab. "But if you get tired we can switch."

Michi climbed up Choromatsu's chest, resting her paws on his shoulders to look at the other two behind them. "Meow!
she affirmed. While she had grown deeply attached to Karamatsu, she was quite fond of Ichimatsu and Choromatsu as well. "Meoow," she meowed, rubbing her face against Choromatsu's cheek.

"Yeah, yeah, I get it," Choromatsu laughed.

Choromatsu and Ichimatsu chatted idly, softly, while Karamatsu soaked up the atmosphere and tried to remember every single detail so that he would have something to remember when he was grown up again.

"They're here!" Jyushimatsu cheered, jumping up and down in between Osomatsu and Todomatsu. "They're here and it's ready!!! It's time to muscle muscle! Hustle hustle!"

Ichimatsu placed Karamatsu down at the same time Choromatsu put Michi down. The cat strolled over to her master, rubbing herself against his leg and meowed happily when Karamatsu finally petted her head.

"Here it is," professor Dekapan announced, pulling a small vial from the inside of his trousers. He approached Karamatsu, placing the little bottle into his hands. "When you turn back to normal," he said, for once using a very serious scientist voice, "tell me everything that you can remember. It's important to write these things down! For science!" He laughed, then nudged the small Matsu towards the rest of his brothers.

Osomatsu was quick to pick Karamatsu into his arms, pressing his cheek against Karamatsu's. "You ready buddy? It's your big day! Nii-chan did his best and found the antidote for you!"

"I found the antidote," Choromatsu grumbled, but it went unnoticed by everyone except Jyushimatsu who patted his cheek in appreciation.

Karamatsu nodded hesitantly, clutching the little bottle in his hands. He really wasn't ready, he doesn't know what to expect when he turns back to normal. Will everything go back to normal too or will things change? The uncertainty is what keeps him anxious, and whatever determination he managed to scrounge up before arriving is suddenly gone completely. He shook his head suddenly and squirmed in Osomatsu's grasp until he was finally put down. He didn't see the confused look on everyone's faces and ran directly towards Jyushimatsu and hugged him, hiding his face against his brother. "I don't wanna!" he yelled.
Jyushimatsu felt a nervous sweat trail down the back of his neck, but he still picked Karamatsu up so that he could hold his brother protectively. He patted his back, did his best to calm him down, but Karamatsu was frantic and holding on to him so tightly. "Nii-san..." He managed to take the bottle from Karamatsu's hands, holding it out to any one of his brothers so they could take it from him.

"Jyushi..." Choro said carefully, taking the bottle from his brother to hold it carefully close to his chest. Professor Dekapan said earlier that he didn't have enough to synthesize a lot of the antidote so if they were to break this one it would be a longer while until Karamatsu would turn back. But he pushed those thoughts aside, realizing that whatever happened the night prior between Jyushimatsu and Karamatsu had something to do with this, or at least something that would cause Karamatsu to place so much trust into their fifth brother. Though he didn't ask Jyushimatsu a question, his brother understood that he had so many questions but Jyushimatsu just averted his gaze.

Choromatsu huffed. These two brothers specifically were no good at keeping secrets and telling lies, so it was obvious that they were both hiding something pretty important from everyone.

"Jyushi," Choromatsu demanded more firmly, folding his arms over his chest like a stern mother.

"I can't," Jyushimatsu replied. "I promised."

"Promised what, Jyushimatsu nii-san?" Todomatsu asked, looking very suspicious now as a small frown made it's way onto his face and he mirrored Choromatsu's posture. "You can't keep secrets from you brothers!"

Ichimatsu clicked his tongue at Todomatsu's statement and placed a hand on his youngest brother's shoulder and pulled him back, dismantling the authoritative posture he was holding. "Cut it out before I make you cut it out," he told him and though it didn't hold much emotion it was obvious it was a very real warning. Whatever Jyushimatsu and Karamatsu were keeping a secret, it was up to them if they wanted to share it or not. This was different from the time Todomatsu was keeping secrets from them, he knew that much, and he understood to some extent that it was hard to share how you truly feel even with people you love and trust.

"But Ichimatsu nii-san—" Todomatsu argued, but shut up when Osomatsu stepped forward.

"Hey, give him here, Jyushi," he asked gently, extending his arms towards his brother to take Karamatsu. But Jyushimatsu pulled Karamatsu away in time, cradling him close and protectively. "I'm not gonna do anything bad, I swear. Just let me hold him."

Jyushimatsu hesitated and pulled Karamatsu away just far enough so that he could look him in the eye. "Is that okay, nii-san?"

Karamatsu's grip on Jyushimatsu tightened for a moment before he nodded. "Nii-san said it's okay," he announced, approaching Osomatsu carefully before transferring his smaller brother to his eldest brother. But he hovered around them, making sure that he was within Karamatsu's line of vision just in case he needed support from someone who shared his secret.

Osomatsu rocked Karamatsu for a bit, trying to get him to calm down. "Hey, hey," he cooed softly as he rubbed Karamatsu's back gently. "Why don't you wanna take it? Is it because the medicine's gonna taste yucky?"

"Professor Dekapan made it cola flavored," Choromatsu provided helpfully.
"See? Cola flavored," Osomatsu repeated with a small smile. "It's not gonna taste yucky!"

"And when you finish it, we can get ice cream!" This time Todomatsu said in an attempt to coax him into drinking the antidote.

Osomatsu hummed in agreement. "Yeah, we can all get ice cream after this."

Karamatsu stubbornly shook his head and hid his face against Osomatsu's shoulder.

The brothers shared looks before their eyes fell on Jyushimatsu, but Jyushimatsu just averted his gaze again and placed his hands over his mouth.

"Well... Why don'tcha wanna drink it?" Osomatsu asked softly, still rocking Karamatsu in his arms. "It's good for you, it's gonna make you big and strong!" Which was pretty much literally true.

Karamatsu still shook his head. He didn't want to speak because he knew that if he did he'd end up telling the truth and he was too scared of them hating him to let that happen. So he clung onto Osomatsu and whined, shaking his head more. All he could manage was a soft "no."

Osomatsu looked helplessly towards Choromatsu. He didn't know what else to say to get Karamatsu to drink the antidote, and he didn't want to have to force him to do it. He mouthed "what do we do?"

Choromatsu shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. If there was anyone who could convince Karamatsu to do anything it was Osomatsu, and Osomatsu was doing his best with no results. He sighed, turning to look over at Jyushimatsu who looked absolutely distraught by the situation at hand.

"Can I have him back?" Jyushimatsu asked. "Nii-san—" he tried to take Karamatsu from Osomatsu, but Osomatsu pulled their small brother away from him. "Nii-san...."

"Tell us what's wrong, Jyushimatsu," Osomatsu demanded from him. "Tell us so we can fix it."

Jyushimatsu's hands flew to cover his mouth again. He shook his head just as stubbornly as Karamatsu did.

"Jyushimatsu..." Choromatsu nodded his head in agreement with Osomatsu's statement. "If... If there's a problem you can't fix, tell us so that we can fix it together. Six heads are better than one right?"

Ichimatsu clicked his tongue. He didn't like that they were prying Jyushimatsu for answers when it was so obvious he didn't want to say anything. He stood in front of his younger brother then, glaring at his two older ones as a warning. "Stop pushing," he hissed softly. "Don't force him."

"But we can't wait forever!" Todomatsu said back, standing by Choromatsu's side with a frown on his face. "Ichimatsu nii-san, we finally found it! It's right here! Things can go back to normal now so—"

"I said don't force them," Ichimatsu stressed, his frown growing deeper with each argument sent his way. "Don't force them. They don't wanna say shit so they don't fucking have to."

"But Ichimatsu," Choromatsu intervened this time, placing himself in front of Todomatsu when Ichimatsu started to look more aggressive. "Jyushi knows something, and Karamatsu nii-san wont talk. This is the only way—"
"What don't you understand?!" Ichimatsu retaliated, his posture rigid but his stance firm. "If they don't want to talk then they don't have to! They'll talk when they're ready so stop pressuring them to talk!"

"Ichimatsu nii-san, it's okay—" Jyushimatsu said softly, tugging at the back of his brother's hoodie. "You don't have to—"

Ichimatsu shook his head. "You don't have to tell them a thing, Jyushimatsu. You made a promise, so you keep it."

"..." Jyushimatsu backed down and looked to the ground.

Ichimatsu looked just about ready to fight anyone who got closer to them.

"Can you stop being so stubborn for once?!" Todomatsu shouted at him, throwing his arms out in frustration. "This isn't for you to decide, nii-san—"

"IT'S NOT FOR YOU TO DECIDE EITHER!" Ichimatsu spat back.

A punch was thrown, though it came from neither of them.

Ichimatsu cradled his sore cheek, looking up at Choromatsu with a look of betrayal. He felt Jyushimatsu crouched down behind him, supporting his back to prevent him from falling all the way, but something ignited his already short fuse and before he knew it he threw himself at Choromatsu's legs, tackling his brother to the ground before sitting on top of his chest to hit him back.

"Nii-san!" Todomatsu yelped, diving into the fray and tried to pull Ichimatsu's arms away from dealing any more damage to Choromatsu's face. "Stop! Stop! Stop it!"

"Jyushi!" Choromatsu slid the little bottle with the antidote towards Jyushimatsu and luckily his younger brother caught it easily. With his hands free now he lifted his arms to shield his face and when he felt Ichimatsu's blows lessen he took the opportunity to turn the tables around. He pushed his younger brother by the shoulders, wrestling with him to gain the upper hand. "God damn it, Ichimatsu! Just listen to me— For five seconds—!!"

"Choro!" Osomatsu yelled, wanting to help but he still hand Karamatsu in his arms. "Oi! BOTH OF YOU JUST STOP IT ALREADY!"

The yell from Osomatsu is what finally got Karamatsu to lift his face off of his brother's shoulder and when he looked up to see what all the commotion was about he gasped. Choromatsu had Ichimatsu pinned down and thankfully he wasn't hitting his brother but it looked like they still managed to land a few punches on each other. "Choro!" he hiccuped. "Stop! Let him go! Choro!"

At the sound of Karamatsu's small but loud voice, everyone stopped. They looked up at him, all feeling different shades of guilty for being so immature when Karamatsu was still obviously emotionally distressed about the whole thing. Slowly, Choromatsu pulled himself off of Ichimatsu and sighed, rubbing his cheek where Ichimatsu managed to hit him hard. Ichimatsu was doing the same, and yet again clicked his tongue in annoyance.

"I... I'm sorry," Karamatsu told them. "Don't fight anymore. It's okay now, I can do it..."

"You don't have to—" Ichimatsu mumbled. "If you don't want to."

"Are you sure, buddy?" Osomatsu asked. Even though he was on the side that wanted Karamatsu to
take the antidote, he didn't want Karamatsu to do it out of some weird moral obligation. "We can wait a few more days, that's fine—"

"I'll do it," Karamatsu said with vindication.

Osomatsu put him down on the table, and Jyushimatsu approached him with the antidote in hand.

"Thank you," Karamatsu told Jyushimatsu.

"Of course, nii-san!" Jyushimatsu cheered happily. "You can do this!"

"Sorry," he told Ichimatsu and Choromatsu.

"It's okay, nii-san," Choromatsu replied. Ichimatsu gave a noncommittal shrug of his shoulders.

"Then we'll get ice cream, okay?" Totozmat promised.

Karamatsu nodded and pulled the cork out of the bottle.

"We'll be right here," Osomatsu reassured with a smile. "Don't keep us waiting."

And with a deep breath, Karamatsu threw his head back as he drank all of the antidote. And after a few long seconds, a puff of blue smoke erupted around him and hid him from everyone's view.

And when the smoke settled and dispersed....

Chapter End Notes

I love the cat bros being nice and cute with each other, but i also like the cat bros fIGHTING :^)

if there are mistakes oopsie! Sorry! I'll fix them when I get back home!
Karamatsu felt his knees quiver under his weight, his bones aching in a painful way that was unfamiliar to him. He felt sore everywhere, like his whole body was one giant bruise, and he grit his teeth to prevent himself from making a pained noise in order not to worry his brothers. He's already caused them enough trouble, this is the least that he could do for them.

Osomatsu was at his side, grabbing hold of him before he fell face first onto the tiled floor of the lab. Choromatsu was quick to react as well, flanking his other side to help their eldest brother carry his weight.

"Hey buddy, hey," Osomatsu cooed softly, his hand patting Karamatsu's cheek gently to catch his attention. "Are you still with us?" he asked, leading Karamatsu to one of the softer looking seats in the room. His brother was moving really slowly, wincing with each step that he took, and Osomatsu felt his heart ache at the sight of it. He never really liked seeing any of his brothers hurt, and he hoped that the this wouldn't affect Karamatsu's body in the long run.

"Barely," Karamatsu replied honestly, lacking any energy at all to put up his cool facade. He wanted to be selfish at that moment, to take advantage of the pity that he could see so clearly on his brothers faces. They wouldn't leave him alone right? Not when he was hurting like this. He doesn't think he could bare to be alone right now; the pain was only just bearable but just keeping his emotions in control was taking up all the energy that he had left. "I..." he whimpered and clamped his eyes shut, feeling completely vulnerable at the moment. "Everything hurts."

Choromatsu and Osomatsu carefully helped him into his clothes, thankfully loose and warm and comfortable instead of his usual fashion. Not that Karamatsu minded much. He sighed when they were done and leaned back against his chair and kept his eyes closed, feeling close to passing out at any moment.

He felt a gentle weight rest on his thigh and when he peeked one eye to see who it was he found Todomatsu crouching by his side, fingers gently curled around his thighs and his chin resting on his knuckles. The look on his face was somewhere in between relief and tears, though Karamatsu didn't really understand why he had such an expression on his face. "Welcome back, nii-san," Todomatsu whispered softly.

Jyushimatsu bounded over with a huge smile on his face, though he remained quiet because he knew he wasn't the best at controlling the volume of his voice. So he nodded instead, grabbing hold of Karamatsu's hand to press it against his cheek. His missed his big older brother a lot and ended up rubbing his face all over Karamatsu's palm like an overly affectionate cat would do.

Speaking of cats, Ichimatsu approached as well with Michi cradled in his arms. He looked hesitant to join his younger brothers in welcoming Karamatsu back but before he could decide to back away and stand next to Choromatsu, Michi jumped out of his arms and onto Karamatsu's lap, circling for a moment before settling down contentedly.

"How do you feel?" Choromatsu asked, watching with an amused smile as Ichimatsu finally gave in and sat next to Todomatsu to rest his chin on Karamatsu's thigh as well.

"Tired," Karamatsu confessed. "Confused, but mostly tired." His mind was still sorting itself out;
the memories from the past two weeks were getting mixed up with his memories from when he was actually younger and the only reason he knew that he didn't have five older brothers was the concrete fact that he was a sextuplet instead of the youngest brother of six.

"What did it feel like?" Osomatsu asked as he leaned against the seat Karamatsu was sitting on, wanting nothing more than to smother the second born with affection as well but let his younger brothers have their moment first. "It happened so fast, like, poof! And then you were big again."

"That's literally what happened though," Choromatsu commented with a flat look.

Karamatsu shook his head then shrugged his shoulders but answered anyway even though he couldn't fully and accurately describe how he felt. "It's almost as if I ran a marathon or two," he replied. "And it feels like I have a terrible hangover."

"I guess we'll have to skip out on the ice cream today huh?" Osomatsu commented offhandedly.

"Ah, brother, we can still get ice cream," Karamatsu said, looking over at the general direction of his brother's face. "Don't stop on my account."

"We can get ice cream another time," Todomatsu interjected while patting Karamatsu's thigh to catch his attention. "You look like shit, so you should rest first."

"Should we call Iyami so he can drive us home?" Choromatsu asked Osomatsu, already sticking his hand out to borrow Todomatsu's phone. "Or should we take a cab?"

"I can carry nii-san home!" Jyushimatsu offered.

"You don't have to..." Karamatsu told him, smiling at his brother appreciatively. "You've already done so much for me my little Jyushimatsu."

"But I want to," Jyushimatsu insisted.

"Are you sure, Jyushimatsu?" Choromatsu asked. "Iyami probably won't mind. I guess." He shrugged. Iyami, despite constantly stating his distaste for them, has always been reliable when they really needed him.

Jyushimatsu nodded his head firmly. "Yes, yes! Leave it to me!" he told Choromatsu, crouching down in front of Karamatsu so that his brother could climb onto his back. "C'mon nii-san! Hup hup!"

"Ah, but let me speak to Professor Dekapan first," Karamatsu plucked Michi off his lap and got onto his feet on wobbly legs but managed to stand up by himself. Michi meowed and climbed up his chest and onto his shoulder before nudging her head into the hood of his hoodie, crawling inside of it as if it were a hammock and rested there. "I promised I'd tell him what I felt—"

"You can save that for another day," Osomatsu interrupted, then turned his attention to Choromatsu. "You stay and tell the prof what Kara told us for now."

Choromatsu shrugged but nodded, heading towards the professor's office. Funnily enough Ichimatsu followed after him without being prompted to.

"Hey Totty, let's head home first so we can set up the futon for Kara," he added, grabbing his youngest brother by the shoulder to pull him up to his feet. "Maybe we can get ice cream along the way too and eat it tomorrow or whatever."
Todomatsu's eyes twinkled hopefully. "Are you paying? Are you actually going to be a good big brother?"

"I'm broke," Osomatsu said honestly, with a mischievous smile on his face. "That's why I'm bringing you along."

Todomatsu's face scrunched up in irritation. "Shouldn't have expected anything less from our shitty eldest."

"Anyway," Osomatsu said, completely ignoring Todomatsu's insult. "Split up and we'll meet at home," and he tugged at Todomatsu's wrist again, leading his brother out of the lab. "See you guys at home."

Karamatsu and Jyushimatsu were left alone together, just like how this whole fiasco started in the first place.

"Let's go nii-san!" Jyushimatsu reminded Karamatsu as he waited for his brother to climb onto his back.

After a moment of hesitation Karamatsu complied and climbed onto his brother's back, his arms gently wrapping around his shoulders to keep himself from falling. Jyushimatsu hefted him up, wiggled around a bit until Karamatsu sat a little more comfortably against his back, then walked out of the lab. In the distance they could see Todomatsu and Osomatsu walking and talking together and Jyushimatsu followed after them at a relatively slower pace.

"I'm sorry you had to lie for me," Karamatsu muttered. The feeling of guilt was there, but it was overridden by the feeling of absolute gratefulness and trust towards his younger brother. "I'll make it up to you—"

"It's okay, nii-san! I'm happy because you're big again! We can sing songs with your guitar so it's gonna be great!" and if Jyushimatsu wasn't carrying his older brother, he would have done a little happy dance just to express how excited he was. But whatever happened to his older brother, if he turned young again or grew two more pairs of arms or something similarly grotesque, he'd still love him and he'd still love to hand out with him.

"Oooh my little Jyushimatsuuu," Karamatsu cooed softly, his consciousness finally drifting away.

"You did that on purpose, didn't you?"

Osomatsu paused and gave his youngest brother a confused look. Behind Todomatsu he could see Jyushimatsu with Karamatsu on his back, following behind them slowly. "Whaddaya mean?"

"You knew Ichimatsu nii-san was gonna get angry. You knew he was gonna start a fight," Todomatsu accused.
Osomatsu gasped. "Lil old me?" he asked, scandalized. "I'm not the scheming dry monster. That's you, Totty!"

When Todomats's expression didn't change, he scoffed and rolled his eyes. "Fine yeah. It's real easy to rile Ichi up," he admitted as he continued to walk forward, stuffing his hands into his pockets as he spoke without guilt at all. "But I didn't think Choromatsu would throw the first punch. I thought he was gonna hit you first, so I did kind of panic a little bit." Just as he had a particularly soft spot for Choromatsu, Karamatsu had a soft spot for Todomatsu. It was manipulative, sure, but if the ends justify the means then he didn't think it was too bad.

"You were gonna sacrifice my cute face?" Todomatsu huffed exasperatedly. "You really are the worst Osomatsu nii-san. And here I thought you were being a cool big brother for once," he said in a disappointed tone. It had been impressive watching his older brother try to persuade Karamatsu into drinking the antidote; he was being patient and careful with Karamatsu, a side of his brother he has never seen before. "Why do you always have to resort to violence?!"

Osomatsu shrugged his shoulders and grinned. "If it works, it works."

Ichimatsu waited patiently as Choromatsu spoke to Professor Dekapan. He wished that Michi had stayed with him to ease the growing anxiety in him be he supposed that Karamatsu needed her more than he did at the moment. He sighed and tried to brush the cat fur off of his hoodie to occupy himself to no avail; the cat fur was still there, and his mind still worked into overdrive as intrusive thoughts began to fill his head.

Choromatsu probably hates him or something. He was being irrational in hindsight. His brothers were just trying to help Karamatsu, and he probably wasn't thinking things through. The one time he tries to be considerate of both Karamatsu and Jyushimatsu's feelings is the one time he was wrong apparently. Why couldn't he just keep his mouth shut like he always did? He ruined everything, all the time, and if Choromatsu was angry at him he probably deserved it.

He should have gone with Jyshimatsu instead. He's not even sure why he decided to tag along with his older brother when all he wanted to do now was run away.

"Oi, Ichimatsu. Stop spacing out."

He snapped his head up, having not realized that Choromatsu was standing in front of him now with a curious eyebrow raised. When he got a better look at his brother's face, he could see that his cheek was still red from when he punched him and it was probably going to turn into a bruise later on.

At Ichimatsu's silence he sighed and grabbed his brother's wrist, pulling him towards the door. "Thank you for everything, professor," he called over his shoulder.

"If anything should happen to Karamatsu-kun, such as side effects and the likes, just call me and I will see if there is anything that I can do to help," the professor replied. He waved the brothers off.
with a smile, watching them as they walked out the front doors of his lab.

"Hey, I'm sorry," Choromatsu was the first to apologize, always quick to take responsibility over his own reckless actions. "My fist kind of moved on it's own," he added. It was a shitty excuse, he was aware, but he really wasn't thinking when it happened and he didn't have any other explanation but the truth.

Ichimatsu nodded and shoved his hands into his pockets. He knew the feeling of fists moving on their own without him really thinking about it. "M'sorry too," he replied. "I was just... Really..."

"Angry," Choromatsu finished for him. "I was too."

"Sorry," Ichimatsu apologized again.

"It's whatever, you know" Chromatsu dismissed with a wave of his hand. It really wasn't that big of a deal in his opinion. Choromatsu tended to act on his violent impulses more so than the rest of his brothers, and Ichimatsu used violence as a defense mechanism. He wasn't surprised that the two of them ended up rolling on the ground like they were kids again but he looked at Ichimatsu then, wondering if the fight had affected him more than he let on. "Hey, are you alright? Did I hit you too hard?"

Being doted upon wasn't something Ichimatsu was used to and he felt heat rise to his cheeks. "Tch, your punches are weak," he lied. Choromatsu, surprisingly, packed a very mean punch. Even though he could feel heat radiating around the bruise that was sure to bloom on his cheek it didn't hurt too badly anyway, and it would probably get better in no time.

"Haha, I guess so," Choromatsu dismissed as he curled his hand into a fist, looking at his knuckles before rubbing at them carefully. They continued to walk home in amiable silence, but Choromatsu broke it by thinking out loud. "Do you think things will be different now?"

"Ah?" Ichimatsu asked crudely, his eyes looking as disinterested as usual though his brows rose to show he was curious as to what Choromatsu meant. "That's vague."

"I mean between us," he gestured to both of them, and vaguely waved his arm in the general direction of their home. "All of us."

"Different how?" Ichimatsu pushed.

Choromatsu rubbed his chin as he thought deeply of how to express his feelings, but no words could completely convey how he felt. "I dunno," he replied with a shrug of his shoulders. "Kinda like we leveled up or something."

"We're still neets though."

Choromatsu felt his eye twitch. "You don't have to remind me!"
When Karamatsu woke up it was dark and quiet which he was thankful for. Though his body felt a little better, he still felt his head ache slightly but not enough to be that much trouble for him. He waited for his eyes to adjust in the dark and stared up at the ceiling, taking deep slow breaths to relax himself. He felt the heat of his brothers around him and, when his eyes had adjusted enough to see their faces, realized that their sleeping arrangement was all wrong. For some reason he was in between Osomatsu and Jyushimatsu (though really, Jyushimatsu was practically laying on top of him) instead of in between Ichimatsu and Todomatsu but the change in arrangement didn't really bother him as much as he thought it would.

His mouth felt dry and his stomach rumbled, and he belatedly realized that the last thing he'd eaten was a snack that his mother gave him earlier that day. With a quiet but determined sigh, he gently and slowly pried Jyushimatsu off of him and when he was finally free of his brother's grasp he wiggled out from underneath the blanket and shivered. It was cold but tolerable so he stood up and quietly made his way to the bathroom.

He flinched when he switched the lights on and blinked several times to let his eyes adjust to the lighting again. When he could finally see without it stinging his eyes, he moved to the sink and gazed at his own reflection in the mirror. He brushed his fringe away from his face then let it fall back into place, bared his teeth at himself before opening his mouth then shutting it with a click of his teeth, leaned into the mirror to get a better look at his own eyes. Everything seemed to be normal, and thankfully he didn't grow an extra limb or something. Though it would be cool if he got some weird super power as a side effect of the antidote. He laughed at the thought.

He washed his face and dealt with other bathroom necessities before walking out of the bathroom, leaving the light on for now so that he could see in the dark hallway. He made his way down the stairs and into the kitchen, opening the fridge to check for leftovers that he could eat.

Surprisingly, he found a small plate with a few pieces of meat and vegetables as well as a bowl of rice. Usually there were no leftovers in the Matsuno household, but what surprised him the most was the note that came with it. It was written in his mother's handwriting, a warning for the rest of his brothers. It read "This is for Kara, you neets! You already had your share." He smiled fondly, tucking the note into the pocket of his dress shirt with the intention of keeping it forever.

He ate his very late dinner alone, but for some reason he didn't really feel lonely at all. If anything he felt contented, more so than he has in years. It was refreshing and he hoped that he could feel this sort of contentment all the time when he was alone, and not the crippling loneliness that urged him to seek attention from anyone who would give it to him.

As he washed his dishes, he thought of what had happened in the last few days. He'd made a lot of happy memories with his family in the span of two weeks. They took care of him, made sure he was alright, and tried to keep him happy whenever they could. It left a warm feeling in his heart, though there was still the lingering fear that maybe, after a few days, things would go back to normal. But at least now he knows that his brothers care for him one way or another even though they might not show their loving sides to him on a frequent basis to him anymore.

He smiled to himself. He'd be fine. Hopefully. Probably.

He walked back upstairs quietly, planning to get back into the futon even though he wasn't really tired anymore. But as he approached their shared room, he could hear their voices speaking in quiet whispers. He wondered if he should wait for them to finish their conversation so that he wouldn't interrupt them with his entrance, or if he should just go in anyway since they probably wouldn't pay him much mind. But before he could make a decision the door in front of him was already sliding open, and he felt a body bump into him. If this was any other day, he would have been fine,
but his limbs still felt pretty weak so he fell to the ground and whoever bumped into him fell right on top of him.

"Oof!"

"Oh, there you are," Osomatsu greeted, pushing himself up and off of Karamatsu, offering a hand to his brother to help him back up to his feet. "Where'd ya go? You were gone pretty long so we kinda got worried."

Karamatsu flipped his hair and sparkled. "I was partaking in a meal that was so graciously set aside for me by our dearest mother," he replied with a flourish, accepting the helping hand that was offered to him. He was pulled back up to his feet and he wobbled slightly, grabbing onto Osomatsu's forearm to steady himself. "Thank you, brother."

"Yeah don't mention it."

Karamatsu peeked behind Osomatsu, flinching again as Choromatsu pulled the light switch on. Todomatsu and Jyushimatsu were awake, talking to each other animatedly about some T.V. show they were both watching. Ichimatsu hissed as the lights went on, pulling the blanket over himself to shield his eyes from the brightness. "I'm sorry," Karamatsu said sheepishly. "Did I wake you guys up?"

"Karamatsu nii-san!" Todomatsu's smile looked brighter than the light as he jumped up and practically skipped towards his older brother. He pushed Osomatsu out of the way, enveloping Karamatsu in a tight hug. "Don't you ever do that again. I'm supposed to be the cute one, not you!"

"No one's cuter than you, Totty," Karamatsu assured with a fond smile on his lips as he reciprocated Todomatsu's hug. Somehow it felt like he hasn't seen them all in such a long time even though he knows that he saw them all just yesterday.

"Nii-saaaaaan!!!!!!!!!!!" Jyushimatsu cheered loud enough to wake the entire house as he jumped up too, tackling both Todomatsu and Karamatsu to the ground before hugging both of them tightly. "Good morning! Did you sleep good?!

Osomatsu grinned and shared a look with Choromatsu before jumping on top of Jyushimatsu, crushing his little brother's under his weight. "Dog pile!"

Ichimatsu was suddenly wide awake and he threw the blankets off his body and with no hesitation at all jumped on top of Osomatsu. Choromatsu shook his head and rolled his eyes, but eventually smirked as he jumped on top of the brother pile.

"Get your fat ass off!" Todomatsu complained, his hand pushing at Osomatsu's face.

"Ahahaha! We're a sandwich!" Jyushimatsu cheered. "I'm the banana!"

"Eh? I don't think sandwiches have bananas," Ichimatsu replied.

"Bananas with peanut butter is pretty good though," Choromatsu commented.

"Ugh! Ahh! Nii-chan's getting crushed! Ow! Ow, ow, ow!"

Though he was getting crushed the most, Karamatsu felt happy. He felt himself laughing until he was breathless, trying to tilt his body to the side to spill his brothers out into the hallway. With all the strength he could muster he pushed himself up and they all toppled to the side in a tangle of limbs, and he felt himself breathe a little easier though he couldn't stop himself from laughing.
Suddenly Jyushimatsu wrapped his arms around Karamatsu, hugging his brother tight, and Karamatsu relaxed into his hold. The rest of his brothers eventually joined in the cuddle puddle and spent a few long and quiet seconds like that.

Overwhelmed, Karamatsu couldn't help but break into tears. Just how many times was he going to cry? Well, he didn't really care. These were tears of joy, and none of his brothers made fun of him for it.

After they separated and calmed down, Osomatsu raised his head and smiled at them. "So, who's up for ice cream?"

Matsuyo and Matsuzō Matsuno came down from their bedroom to find all six of their sons asleep in their living room the next day, huddled up together under their futon blanket.

"Honestly, these boys," Matsuzō sighed with a shake of his head. He turned his head to look at his wife but found that she was no longer beside him. In the short span of time he had his eyes off her, she had somehow managed to grab their camera to take several pictures of her cute and precious sons. "Huh?"

"The last picture I've had of them like this was when they were still babies," she explained to him, smiling from behind her camera lens.

And though he was asleep, Karamatsu had a wide smile on his face.

Chapter End Notes

ahh yes, this fic ends on a prime number. im happy hehehe.
tap dances happily here. i hope yall enjoyed this fic. I sure as hell had fun writing it B)
my next fic is gonna be horror, hopefully, because i kinda wanna branch out in terms of genre =))

ANYWAY!!! Thank you so much for all the nice and funny comments! I treasure all of them, they're here in my heart forever and I will always read them again and again if i need a smile!

Have a good day everyone!

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