"It seemed to Sousuke that he was always making assumptions about Haru that often turned out wrong. When he thinks about how he bullied him in high school, there’s nothing but regret churning in his stomach. Sousuke didn’t want a situation like that to play out again. He was wiser now, more compassionate and patient. He could help, he wanted to help. They could be friends, if the other man let him."

Haru is struggling and gets a push in the right direction from a surprise source.
Third: The rest of the gang will show up in the future as well as a few Haikyuu!! characters. I needed more people in the story and didn't want to make up OCs. I think they fit in well, but you'll have to let me know what you think when we get there.

See the end of the work for more notes.
you're a time bomb, baby

Yamazaki Sousuke just wants to be home. The intense year of training and the continuous studying he had to do to be a police officer didn’t prepare him for the sheer number of morons he’d have to deal with while stuck in a koban. This was the last year of on-the-job experience he needed before he could apply for the sergeant exams and he wasn’t sure he could make it through without becoming a criminal himself. Who wanders through a tourist area at 10 in the morning, drunk off their ass, only to puke right in front of the police box? Sousuke wanted to strangle him.

He had stopped by the convenience store on his way home to pick up a couple meals and beer. The next two days were free for him to enjoy himself and that meant getting mildly drunk and watching movies. Sousuke had always found pleasure in the simple things.

He was on the home stretch, just round the corner and up a set of stairs until this damned uniform could come off and he could satisfy his rumbling stomach. He was daydreaming about a hot bath when something crashed into him with an “oomph!”

Whoever had barreled into him was thrown back to the ground, but Sousuke was built like a rock and only took a couple steps back. He rolled his eyes and walked over to the man who was panting and looking completely disoriented. His police instincts kicked in, “Hey, are you-”

He stopped when the face turned toward him; it was familiar but also wrong. The blue eyes were cloudy and underscored with dark bags. His cheekbones were even sharper than before and not due to maturing - the rest of what Sousuke could see proved that he was all muscle, skin, and bones, but not wholly in the good way an athlete could be. The hairs raised on the back of Sousuke’s neck. This was not right.

“Nanase?”

Haru couldn’t seem to catch his breath or focus his vision. Was that Yamazaki’s voice he heard?

“Hey, Nanase, you’re freaking me out. Calm down.”

A large hand clasped his shoulder to still him. When had he started shaking?

This was weird, to say the least. Nanase was always infuriatingly composed. “Do you want me to call Tachibana?”

That brought Haru crashing back to reality, “NO!” The abrupt movement shoved Sousuke’s hand off of him. “No... he’s not... we’re not... don’t call...” he managed to squeeze out between gasps for air.

This was surprising news. Although Sousuke didn’t talk to the former Iwatobi swim club, Rin kept him updated on their shenanigans. The last he heard, Makoto and Haru were still in their perpetual state of domestic bliss.

He stared at Haru who looked like he was in even greater distress since mentioning the name of his apparent ex. Tentatively, Sousuke reached out and grabbed Nanase’s wrist. He flinched at the contact, but didn’t open his clenched eyes or try to pull his hand away. Sousuke maneuvered Haru’s hand so his palm laid flat against his chest, “Nana- Haruka. You need to breathe. You can feel me breathing, right? Just match me, okay?”

Nothing.
“Okay?” Sousuke asked again, but using the authoritative voice he used mostly on teens who caused trouble at work.

An almost imperceivable nod.

“Good. Just match my breathing. In...out...in...out...”

It took a while for Haru to calm down. He was still trembling, but at least he was getting enough oxygen. Feeling like it was safe to move, Sousuke grabbed the bags he discarded and pulled a shaky Haru to his feet, “Do you have anywhere to be?”

A headshake.

“Come on, you need to eat.”

Haru let himself be steered into Sousuke’s modest apartment. It was surprisingly spacious, a large couch and TV blessed the living room. A small dining table with two chairs was positioned next to the open kitchen. The take out containers, instant foods, and empty drink bottles spread throughout the house made it fairly obvious that Sousuke lived alone and didn’t often have company. Haru didn’t blame him, he preferred to be alone too - well, at least now he did.

Gently guiding Haru into one of the seats by at the table, Sousuke set down one of his bento and instructed him to eat. He opened a beer for himself and grabbed a bottle of water for Haru, assuming he still preferred water to almost everything. Actually, if Tachibana was out of his life, water might have retaken its first place position.

Sousuke pulled his chair to one of the sides adjacent to Haru rather than directly across. From what he remembered, Haru wasn’t a fan of eye contact. He frowned as he sat down, wondering why he was being so accommodating, but he figured his police training was kicking in. He wasted no time in digging into his dinner except to ask Haru one question: “What happened?”

Haru shoved the rice around with his chopsticks. Usually he wouldn’t even think about responding, but something inside told him it was okay to confide in Yamazaki. Maybe it was because he didn’t give a shit about either party involved. Or maybe the police uniform made him appear inherently trustworthy. Either way, he did help Haru through a complete and total meltdown on the street so at the very least he owes him an explanation as thanks.

“He dumped me.”

They sat with it hanging over their heads. Sousuke simply waited for Haru to continue; Rin had told him enough times that because Haru doesn’t say much he puts a lot of thought into choosing his words. With Sousuke’s much improved skills at reading people, it was obvious Haru was just trying to figure out the best way to tell his story.

“We… weren’t doing well. The few months before it happened were bad - we were either fighting or pretending nothing was wrong or ignoring each other completely. But things were troubled before that. Our schedules became too full. The rare times we were together he was stressed out and I was exhausted.”

His voice was straining, the words rushing out and raising in pitch like he had lost his usual control, “This sort of thing happens to couples, I guess. Everyone says it’s rare for high school sweethearts to stay together. I just didn’t think it would happen to us. He spent thirteen years with me already, what’s thirteen or thirty more. I should’ve known better. He was always too good for me. I didn’t deserve-”
Haru shut down, grinding his teeth and squeezing his eyes shut to keep back the tears. “I… I tried. I tried so hard. I g-gave him everything, but it wasn’t enough. He-He’s the best thing I’ve ever had and I wasn’t enough.”

Sousuke was having a hard time processing this information. Sure, he pegged Nanase as being apathetic about a lot of things, but he had seen the magic that happens when he put in effort - he was brilliant. He couldn’t imagine Saint Tachibana refusing Haru at his worst, much less when he was on his A game. But Haru was obviously not ready to divulge details so he took this as an opportunity to steer away from the object of affection.

“So you’ve been over training in effort to cope?”

Without looking over, Haru nodded.

Sousuke sighed and took a long swig of his beer, “I understand that. That’s what I did all senior year. I was pissed off, confused, and desperate. I was punishing myself for my failure and that’s how I ended up completely ruining any chance I had. No surgery and no amount of rehab can get me back into the pool. That only made it worse. I hated myself even more after that.”

Sousuke looked over to Haru. He was giving him a pained look that he translated as do you still hate yourself? Sousuke gave him a small smile, “My mother suggested therapy. I didn’t want to, but I probably would still be wallowing in self-pity if she hadn’t forced me. It didn’t magically fix me, but eventually I was able to move on. I got a new goal and learned how to deal with my anger.”

“You’re okay now?” Haru asked tentatively, his voice barely above a whisper.

Sousuke’s keen eyes assessed him. They had been together so long, Haru most likely really believed that he couldn’t make it without Tachibana at his side. He resisted the urge to reach out, Haru never seemed like the touchy feely type, but he wanted to offer some sort of reassurance, “I’m okay now.”

Just like that, the dam burst. Sobs wracked Haru’s body. Sousuke chided himself for ever thinking Nanase was an emotionless robot. No longer caring if Haru snapped at him, he reached over and took the smaller hand in his. Rather than pulling away, Haru squeezed back, holding on for dear life. They sat like that for a while, Sousuke rubbing soothing circles over Haru’s knuckles while he cried.

Eventually the tears stopped and Haru was left blotchy faced, hiccuping, and spent. Before he could pass out on the table, Sousuke gently pulled him to his feet, “Come on, it’s time for bed.”

Even through the puffy redness of his eyes, Sousuke could tell that Haru was giving him a confused look.

“You can barely stand by yourself and I’m too tired to take you home.”

Haru looked away and nodded, allowing himself to be led to the bedroom.

“You can take a shower first. Let me grab something for you to wear, I think Rin left a pair of shorts here the last time he visited.”

Silent but grateful, Haru accepted the clothes and went across the hall into the bathroom. For once Haru skipped a soak in the tub after his shower. More than anything he just wanted to fall asleep and stop thinking for a while. Yes, he had been crying often recently, but never like that. It left him feeling empty which sounded bad, but he noticed that it meant he didn’t want to double over in pain from the loss of Makoto. That was a first. He went back into the bedroom wearing one of Sousuke’s giant on him, plain black t-shirts and a pair of Rin’s workout shorts that were baggy, but fit him
better than anything else the large man could’ve offered him.

Sousuke smiled awkwardly at him, letting him know that he sleeps on the side closest to the door. He left for his turn to wash while his company settled himself beneath the covers. He took his time, hoping that Haru would find sleep quickly. This was weird. No one except Rin had ever spent the night (which Rin never fails to point out how woefully empty the larger man’s love life is). Now someone he used to think of as an enemy, someone he really doesn’t know a thing about besides what his best friend tells him, is wrapped up in his blankets. Yup, super weird.

He walked back to his room, noticing that the only visible part of Haru was the top of his head. There was no noise coming from him, but it wasn’t that surprising considering the way he was buried in the covers and Haru’s general quietness. Sousuke did his best to slide into bed without disturbing anything.

They laid on their sides, facing away from each other. Sousuke kept a fan on for white noise and Haru - not yet asleep - liked the breeze, it was a little bit like being on the beach back home. Sousuke’s breathing soon turned into deep rumbling snores, but Haru had to admit he didn’t mind it. He made sure the alarm on his phone was set and was carried off to a much needed peaceful sleep.

Haru woke up a few minutes before his alarm. It was just as well, that way he wouldn’t disturb Sousuke who probably didn’t need to wake up at 5:00 am. He silently slipped out of bed, pulling his windbreaker on over the borrowed clothes. They’ll have to be washed before returning them anyway and Haru cringed at the prospect of changing back into his dirty workout gear.

Closing the bedroom door quietly behind him, he went over to the kitchen to down a glass of water while looking for a notepad and a pen. He hastily scrawled a note and left it where he knew Sousuke would find it before departing to the train station.

A few hours later Sousuke dragged himself out of his bed. Oh, how he wanted to stay there, but he knew if he gave in his entire sleep schedule would be more fucked than it already was. He immediately stomped into the kitchen, craving his favorite spicy pork instant ramen. It was always his motto that any food is a breakfast food if you eat it early enough. As he waited for the water to boil he noticed a scrap of paper propped against the coffee maker.

Yamazaki-

I had to take off for morning practice.

Thank you for everything last night. It helped.

Haru

He was alone in his bed when he woke up and thought that Nanase in his apartment had only been a dream (why his dreams would feature Nanase, he didn’t know, but the subconscious mind is weird, right?). The events of last night replayed in his head - Nanase’s hunched shoulders, pained voice, the tears that really didn’t suit him.

It seemed to Sousuke that he was always making assumptions about Nanase Haruka that often turned
out wrong. When he thinks about how he bullied him in high school, there’s nothing but regret churning in his stomach. Sousuke didn’t want a situation like that to play out again. He was wiser now, more compassionate and patient. He could help, he wanted to help. They could be friends, if the other man let him.

Looking at the note again, Sousuke smiled to himself in a satisfaction he rarely felt, even from his job.
hold on, there's a hole in my heart

Chapter Summary

Old friend, new friend, someone in between.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

From: RinRin
Haru pick up your damn phone, I need to talk to you.

From: RinRin
Why didn’t you fucking tell me that you and Makoto broke up?

From: RinRin
Are you okay? Is he okay?

From: RinRin
I can’t do much from here so you need to talk to me. I want to help.

From: RinRin
I know you’ve had your differences in the past, but if you need anything you can go to Sousuke. He really is a good guy. You can rely on him.

From: RinRin
I’m here for you too, Haru. You’re my best friend.

Haru frowned and furrowed his brow at the texts. He wasn’t surprised that Yamazaki had reached out to Rin with the new information, but he kind of hoped he’d have the day off from prying friends. He was still tired from last night’s cry fest and he didn’t really have it in him for one more. But he knew Rin and the messages wouldn’t stop until he responded. With a sigh, Haru dialed his sharkboy, grateful he had the extra international minutes his parent’s insisted on buying.

He answered after one ring, Haru!

“I thought Yamazaki is your best friend.”
I can have more than one best friend!

Haru scoffed, “Doesn’t ‘best’ imply one?”

Then you two are tied for first.

And don’t evade. What’s going on?

“Seems like Yamazaki already told you.”

He didn’t add any details, if you told him any. What happened?

Haru hesitated. A lot of things happened - or in some cases didn’t happen - that led to the end of their relationship. “He... He just didn’t want to be with me anymore.”

What the fuck. That doesn’t sound like Makoto at all. He must’ve given you a reason?

That broke him. How many times did he ask Makoto why? How many hours did he spend obsessing over everything he could have done differently?

“It’s not my fucking fault, Rin!”

I didn’t say-

“But that’s what everyone’s thinking! Makoto is so handsome, so kind, so perfect, it must be his asshole boyfriend who broke his heart! Well it wasn’t! He’s the one who said he couldn’t even look at me anymore! He’s the one who told me that we were a mistake! He’s the one who told me to move out!”

This was anger. All this time he hadn’t felt that. It had been sadness, regret, guilt, and despair, everything directed at himself for screwing things up. But this rage was aimed at Makoto and the diversion of the flames burning his insides was refreshing.

“I wanted to make it work! I was willing to do anything for him, but he didn’t give a shit. Stop asking me what happened because I don’t fucking know. Ask Makoto if you want some answers, maybe he’ll be kinder to you than he was to me.” Haru hung up, tossing the phone onto the pillow as he curled up into a ball.

His jaw was clenching painfully in his effort to control his tears. He promised himself that last night was the last time he’d cry for Makoto, but it was easier said than done. When he screwed his eyes shut, he remembered the steady timber of Yamazaki’s voice instructing him to breathe. In... out... in... out...

It worked. Haru felt some of the tension bleed away, the muscles that were aching relaxing. He didn’t move, though, worried that if he left this spot he’d fall back into his panic. The phone vibrated again and Haru reached for it, assuming Rin was messaging back to apologize or yell at him. Maybe both. But when he looked at the screen, the message wasn’t from who he expected.

From: Whale Shark
Sorry about Rin. I thought he knew.

Ah, so Rin must have called Yamazaki freaking out when Haru hung up on him. They had exchanged numbers when they were put on the same team for that water gun battle - just in case. This was the first occasion for their use, though.
To: Whale Shark
It’s fine. I should’ve told him when it happened.

From: Whale Shark
For what it’s worth, I never really liked Tachibana.

Haru frowned. Rin must have recounted their entire phone conversation. He honestly wasn’t sure how to feel about this message. It would seem like pity if it was coming from anyone besides Yamazaki and Haru definitely did not want that. But Haru could tell that Yamazaki didn’t say things he didn’t mean, not even to spare someone’s feelings. They were alike like that. While a small part of Haru wanted to rush to Makoto’s defense out of habit, he couldn’t deny he felt a little relieved that not everyone was jumping to his ex’s side.

To: Whale Shark
You never really liked me either, you know.

From: Whale Shark
Things change.

Haru stared at the latest message. He wasn’t really sure what it meant, but it did cause the vice grip around his heart to ease a little.

Sugawara Koushi - ‘Suga’ to most - was on his last year of his Master’s degree in psychology. He had a brilliant advisor and a thesis he was passionate about; he’d be moving on to his doctorate in no time. Yup, everything was wonderful except he was five minutes from dying of boredom working the reception desk of the student counseling service center.

Said beloved advisor recommended that Suga work there part time to familiarize himself with running a practice. It was an easy question - he wasn’t going to say no to practical experience that came with the side benefit of being able to afford to buy those new volleyball shoes his fiancee was drooling over.

The downside was that Suga had always been a quick learner and a hard worker. Within his first month he had mastered and streamlined the administrative tasks and reorganized the entire office. Currently there was nothing for him to do but sit at the front desk. It wasn’t that he thought it was beneath him, it was just that his brain had gotten accustomed to constantly figuring out problems and rapidly digesting information. All he had to do now was simply wait until a patient walked in and hopefully not make them feel uncomfortable by being a little too enthusiastic to assist them.

This afternoon there was only one doctor in the office and the last patient signed up had booked a three hour stretch of time. There would be no one to save Suga from his solitude today.

A repetitive blur of blue across the office’s wide front windows snapped Suga’s wandering mind into focus. It was a young man pacing, hands fumbling with the strap of his gym bag, sending concerned glances inside to the waiting room.

Trying not to be obvious, Suga tilted his head down and watched the man through his bangs, figuring he must be nervous enough without an audience. The man reminded him of his precious
underclassman, Tobio, what with the dark hair, blue eyes, and deep frown. The stranger was more handsome, though, almost pretty thanks to his sharp cheekbones, milky skin, and long limbs.

He suddenly turned to face the door, causing Suga to immediately divert his eyes back to his computer screen, pretending he was doing some important scheduling.

The man finally walked inside, his hands balled into fists at his side. He looked around until he spotted the reception desk and purposefully marched over. The steam he had was gone by the time he reached it and he floundered once Suga smiled at him.

“Here to check in?”

He seemed thankful that one of them was calm, “Um. I missed an appointment, but they said I could reschedule today.”

Suga gave him a gentle smile *he’s that nervous huh?* “Of course. We had a cancelation and there’s an opening at 5. It’s the last appointment of the day, but if you’re free-”

“It’s fine.” It came out more forceful than Haru had intended. Hopefully the man behind the counter would chalk it up to nerves. “It’s fine, I have time today.” he repeated more calmly.

“Perfect! I have some forms for you to fill out as a new visitor.” Suga handed him the clipboard, the smile never leaving his face.

Haru spent the next 20 minutes battling the forms, pretty sure he remembered his parents’ medical history correctly and trying to think of someone to pick as an emergency contact. It’d be weird to list his coach, and his mom and dad were always gone. Nagisa, Rei, and Rin were currently abroad. Mak- No. Don’t think about him.

He sighed. He really needed to work on broadening his social circle. He filled in his parents anyway since he was still on their insurance. It at least made sense. Haru handed them back to the man behind the counter, Sugawara his name plate said, and fidgeted awkwardly while he gave them a quick review.

Sensing his discomfort, Suga looked up and let him know he was welcome to hang out here and study until his appointment, “That way you don’t have to worry about losing track of time and missing it.”

Haru’s shoulders slumped slightly in relief. He wasn’t sure if he was brave enough to walk back in if he left. He gave Sugawara a nod and the tiniest of nervous smiles before heading back to his seat and pulling out a marine biology textbook.

*I bet his real smile is even better,* Suga thought as he watched him scribbling notes. When he looked down at the paperwork something stood out. He’d seen the name ‘Nanase Haruka’ many times before, usually paired with the words “winner,” “champion,” “new record,” and “merman.” He was the star of the university’s swim team, one of Japan’s top hopefuls for the National team. Suga kept himself well apprised of local sports and felt a little bit in awe at having someone so prestigious sitting a couple meters away from him. He did his best to keep his curious glances to a minimum.

Right when Haru had finished a worksheet about deep sea organisms, a young woman returned to check out at the front desk. Suga gave her hand a gentle squeeze before booking her next session. As she walked by Haru she gave him a watery smile which he returned with wide eyes and a bob of his head.

Ten minutes after that, a soft, pleasant looking woman in a gray button up called out for Haru. She
introduced herself as Kotobuki-sensei and asked if would be okay chatting with her this afternoon. He nodded slowly and gave Sugawara a quick glance. The look was returned with an encouraging smile and thumbs up.

An hour later Kotobuki-sensei walks Haru up to where Sugawara is waiting for them. Haru feels a little shaky, like he wasn’t sure what just happened or if it was good. But a tender smile from his potential new doctor and her insistence that he should go home and sleep on it before making another appointment, helps Haru push aside more of his unease. He bows deeply to her and offers a small wave to Sugawara who returns it with a bright smile.

During his next shift, Suga notices Nanase-kun scheduled an appointment for the following week. He smiles and send a wish to whatever Gods are listening that they’ll help him.

On Sunday Haru found himself outside of Sousuke’s apartment with a couple bags of groceries. He wanted to thank him for listening and for the advice. He didn’t know much about Sousuke except his swimming history, that he’s a police officer, and - according to Rin - a lonely sad sack who needs to make some friends or get laid. Haru wasn’t good at the whole making friends thing and he was positive that Yamazaki would not appreciate Haru trying to set him up with someone (not that he knew anybody else, anyway). With that in mind he defaulted to what he assumed every single young adult would accept as gratitude: a home cooked meal. Haru squared his shoulders and rang the doorbell. A couple minutes passed and he rang again. Nothing.

Haru sighed and mentally reprimanded himself. Policemen worked odd hours, didn’t they? Plus, there was no way a guy like Yamazaki was as destitute as Rin made him out to be. He was probably out with friends; it’s the weekend afterall. Why he thought he could just drop by and Yamazaki would magically be home he wasn’t sure.

He probably doesn’t want to see me anyway…

“Nanase?”

Shit.

“Why are you blocking my door?” the voice didn’t sound annoyed. Curious, maybe even amused.

“I…” Haru couldn’t make eye contact, “I thought I could cook you dinner. As thanks for the other night.”

Sousuke was glad Haru wasn’t looking at him because he knew he was blushing. Gratitude wasn’t something that appeared often in his life, even in his line of work, and he didn’t know how to deal with it. He decided to cover by deflecting, “Rin would’ve flown home from Australia to kick my ass if he found out I left you on the street while you were having a panic attack.”

“I still appreciate it.”

“You don’t have to-”
Haru huffed in annoyance and finally locked eyes with him, “Just let me in your kitchen, Yamazaki. You’ve probably been living off crappy take out.”

He wasn’t wrong, “Fine, fine. But only because I’m out of instant ramen.”

Sousuke couldn’t help but chuckle at the horrified look on Haru’s face as he let them into his apartment. Hearing his guest grumble “how do you even get that big eating instant ramen…” only made him laugh harder.

Haru immediately went to the kitchen to survey the tools at his disposal. Thankfully Sousuke was equipped with the basics and even a few more novelties that surprised him. Cooking here would be fine, enjoyable even.

Sousuke hovered awkwardly near the dining table, “Do you, uh, need help?”

Without looking at him Haru responded, “If your skills don’t go beyond instant ramen then, no. I said I’d cook.”

“Okay, but try not to ruin my kitchen. It’s pristine.”

“Because you don’t know how to use it.”

He just waved off the comment as he headed toward his room to remove his offending uniform.

Exiting the bath almost an hour later in sweatpants and a tank top, Sousuke was amazed to find his table covered in real food. Neither of his parents were much for cooking so he wasn’t sure this kind of spread was possible outside of a restaurant. He turned his attention to Haru, his mouth gaping, trying to make sense of the beautiful sight before him.

Haru’s eyes were determinedly fixed on the food. The slightest tinge of red on his ears giving away his embarrassment at being gawked at, “I said I’d make dinner.”

“This is way more than just dinner.”

“It’s a few dinners, then.”

“Nanase-”

“If you don’t want it, then don’t eat it,” Haru reached to start taking plates away.

Sousuke’s hand shot out and grabbed one of Haru’s wrists to stop him, “No! I want it, it looks amazing! It’s just…” his voice lowered, “You didn’t have to do all of this. I didn’t help you expecting something in return.”

Haru rolled his eyes, “Sousuke. You brought me into your home and took care of me when I was self destructing. You listened and shared and gave me good advice, which I took by the way, and for the first time in a long time I don’t feel so hopeless and it’s thanks to you.” He fixed Sousuke with an impatient stare, “So I don’t think it’s too much to ask that you let me make sure you eat at least one real meal everyday to show that I appreciate you.”

Again, Sousuke couldn’t find his words. The last time Nanase Haruka was in his apartment, he was a broken man. He still looked vulnerable and fragile, but there was a small fire in his eyes now that said he was going to fight. A fire that Haru just said Sousuke had lit.

Sousuke wasn’t sure what this new feeling in his gut was. He passed it off as hunger.
After a few more moments of intense blue eyes on him, his expression softened as he mock complained, “You’re so stubborn.”

“You’re stubborn. Now sit down and eat.”

He let go of Haru’s wrist and sat down in his usual spot. Picking up his chopsticks he gave a heartfelt “Itadakimasu!” before digging in. Sousuke almost started crying when he took his first bite of tamagoyaki. God, when was the last time he ate something that was fresh or wasn’t made in bulk?

Haru subtly watched Sousuke eat with relish as he picked at his own portions. He didn’t bother trying to mask the slightly victorious look on his face. They ate in a comfortable silence that was punctuated with Sousuke asking what something was or remarking how something was better than the version from a restaurant. Haru softly scoffed at all of these comments as if it was common knowledge, but really he was just trying to deal with the attention.

“Haru,” Sousuke started - he had already used his first name, hadn’t he? “I leave my schedules posted on the fridge.”

Haru raised an eyebrow over his miso.

“You said one real meal everyday, right?” a cheeky grin spread over his face, “This will only get me through the rest of the work week. You’ll have to come back.”

Haru made an indignant grunt and returned to his soup, “Don’t push it.”

They finished eating and cleared the table, Haru wrapping up the leftovers while Sousuke began washing dishes. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed Haru take out his phone to snap a photo of his work schedule.

Haru must have felt his eyes on him because he quickly pocketed his phone and turned away. Sousuke let him hide, his focus back on the dishwater. He couldn’t help the smile that tugged at the corner of his lips.

When Haru couldn’t pretend the counter needed any more straightening, he allowed himself to look over his shoulder at Sousuke. *Maybe Rin was right* - words Haru very reluctantly admitted - *maybe I can rely on him*.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! I hope you enjoyed this chapter, I really had fun writing that last scene. More of Makoto and Haru's history will be revealed throughout the story, so if you feel like you don't get it right now that's ok!

How was Suga? Not too distracting I hope! For reference, the third years from Free! are 21/22 (last year in college) and the third years from Karasuno are 25/26.
Chapter Summary

Haru takes a few steps forward only to be pushed back.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The cafe was unusually busy. Somehow most of the seats had been filled while Haru was waiting for his drink and snack. As his eyes scanned the room he recognized a mop of silver hair: Sugawara. He had one of the few empty seats at his table. Would it be weird? What if he’s only nice at work? Is this breaking some sort of doctor-patient boundary? But Haru needed to finish his drawings and Haru worked best in this cafe, so he fortified himself as he walked over to the table.

“Excuse me, but is it alright if I sit here?”

Suga startled at the request, having been so ingrained in his paper. When he looked up and saw the familiar blue eyes he relaxed, “Oh! Nanase-kun! Of course we can share,” he gave the newcomer a welcoming smile as he rearranged his books to make space.

Haru nodded, offering the ghost of a smile as thanks before settling down in his chair. A worn sketchbook was pulled out of his bag along with a pencil pouch Nagisa gave him that was covered in chubby sea creatures. Suga’s eyes widened at the case and couldn’t help but gush about how cute it was. It was enough for the rest of his nerves to be washed away.

As he worked on his sketches, figure drawings of people stretching, Haru kept peeking at the man across from him who was fully engrossed with whatever he was typing away at. They had casually chatted a few times before his appointments, but Sugawara usually asked Haru questions and didn’t offer too much about himself. He wanted to know something about him; he was so kind and had an air about him that drew you in, made you want to get close. Haru knew it was going to bother him and prevent him from focusing so he might as well just take care of his curiosity now.

“What are you working on?”

Suga turned his eyes from his screen over to Haru, “a research paper for a case study. I’m in the Masters program for Psychology and we have one of these due every month. I don’t usually procrastinate too much, but…”

Haru nodded in understanding. Often he would have his art assignments done within the week they were given out, but his already full schedule of swimming and school was made even more hectic with the addition of weekly sessions and homework from Kotobuki-sensei. It wasn’t that it took a lot of time, but dealing with his mental health was exhausting and he lost hours of productivity in order to recoup.

“You want to be a therapist too?” He tried to keep the conversation going and hoped he wasn’t bothering him too much. But then Sugawara beamed at him and Haru felt his pulse quicken. Haru briefly wondered if it’d be too weird to ask this sort-of-stranger to pose for a drawing sometime.
“I do! Being vice-captain on my volleyball team in high school showed me that I was pretty good at observing and aiding people when they struggled. It gave me purpose and fulfillment I never had before. When I talked to my advisor about it, he suggested this career path. I’m really grateful; from the first class I knew this was exactly what I wanted to be doing.”

Haru’s eyes drifted down to his drawings, “That sounds really nice.”

Suga could hear the frustration in his voice, “What about you Nanase-kun? You’re graduating next spring, right?”

“Yes, but the two things I do - swimming and art - aren’t... If I’m lucky I can compete until I’m 25 and, if I do well, I can do some endorsements when I retire. I’ve been told that careers in art are more based on luck and who you know rather than talent. I’m not exactly keen on the whole networking thing.” Haru snorted, trying to imagine himself rubbing elbows at gallery functions.

Suga wagged a pen sternly at him, “There’s nothing wrong with your path. I think it’s brave to pursue what you love rather than doing something you don’t care about for sake of security or being ‘normal.’ People worry more about money than about happiness and end up leading miserable lives. Personally, I think you’re doing great, Nanase-kun.”

The reassurance Sugawara was gave made his heart ache, “Thanks…” Haru went back to his sketches a little more enthusiastically than before.

They continued working in a comfortable silence until Haru’s mobile alarm went off. He had to leave now in order to make it back to campus for practice. Still reluctant to leave the peaceful atmosphere he slowly packed up his art implements that had somehow sprawled across the table, “Thank you for today, Sugawara-san.”

He gifted him another dazzling smile, “Call me Suga! Or Koushi, that’s my first name.”

“Then call me Haru.”

“Okay, Haru,” Koushi’s smile still shined. It wasn’t like Makoto’s, Haru thought, which was more like the sun’s radiance, this one was like soft and bright rays of moonlight. Haru wanted to bask in it. “I’m here every Sunday around this time if you ever want a work buddy.”

It was Haru’s turn to smile - a small shy one, “I’d like that. See you later, Koushi.”

He departed with a wave. While he walked he noted that he didn’t feel nervous or put out like he usually did when speaking with newer people. In fact, he felt refreshed, the energy he spent today given back to him. He was actually looking forward to practice because it would be fun, not because it would be a distraction.

This was good. Yes, this is definitely a step in the right direction like Kotobuki-sensei had talked about. Haru made a mental note to join Koushi at the cafe every Sunday he could.

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To: Whale Shark

Grocery shopping tonight?
From: Whale Shark
You want me to come with?

To: Whale Shark
You eat more food than I can carry.

From: Whale Shark
Fair, Higuma Grocery work?

To: Whale Shark
Yeah, I’ll meet you at your apartment.

From: Whale Shark
Why? We can just meet there.

To: Whale Shark
You’ll get lost.

From: Whale Shark
Shut up. My sense of direction has gotten a lot better.

To: Whale Shark
Prove it.

From: Whale Shark
I’ll meet you there at 5. Make sure you’re not late.

After taking three wrong turns and stopping to help a small girl find her lost kitten, Sousuke finally arrived at 5:37 to see an extremely smug looking Haru waiting outside the store. It took an embarrassed and indignant Sousuke buying three whole mackerels to get the teasing to stop.

- 

The next day Sousuke woke up to a text. He groaned once he read it and promised to get back at the sender somehow. How fucking dare he use an emoticon to mock him?!

From: Haru
Make sure you’re not late today. :)

At first Haru was glad the obnoxious chime of his alarm had woken him up, anything to get him out of his troubled dreams, but when he looked at his phone he regretted it. He swiped away the notifications of missed calls and text messages before shutting his phone off completely. He didn’t need the reminders of what today was and how empty it would feel.

He considered how much it would inconvenience him to stay in the apartment today, but it seemed like his day was full. An hour and a half of conditioning in the morning, an exam in marine bio, sketches to turn in for his figure drawing class, storyboards due for the animation practicum, and regular swim practice this evening.
Unfortunately, Nanase Haruka needed to exist in the outside world today, even though it was the last thing he felt like doing. Today was going to be absolute shit and he would just have to deal with it.

Today was Haru’s birthday. The first one in so many years that he knew there wouldn’t be a poorly wrapped (but extremely thoughtful) present left by the bathtub. The first time he wasn’t going to be eating chocolate cake just to make someone else happy. The first time he didn’t have to be on the lookout for any surprises littered throughout his day. His first birthday in so long without Makoto.

He regretfully pulled himself out of bed. If he had to suffer through today, pretending he wasn’t falling apart inside, then he wanted to get it over with as fast as possible.

It turned out that Haru was wrong about one thing about today. He did, in fact, get a surprise. It was in the form of a tall, muscular policeman waiting outside his apartment with a cute yellow carrier box in hand that Haru recognized from a popular bakery on Omotesando.

Sousuke turned his head at the sound of Haru dropping his keys, “Good timing.”

“How do you even know where I live?”

“I asked Rin for your address,” Sousuke waited for Haru to move, but he seemed to be frozen, “Are we just going to stay out here all night?”

Haru picked up his keys and closed the gap between him and his front door, “I’m surprised you made it here before midnight.”

“GPS, asshole.”

He let Sousuke and himself into the apartment. There was no need to apologize for the books and art supplies laying around, Haru’s worst mess still miles away from how the policeman’s apartment looked when it was ‘tidy.’

“How was your day?” Sousuke asked as he unlaced his shoes.

“Long.”

It was unbearably long. Not bad, everything ended up being normal with the exception of this morning’s conditioning turning into a birthday breakfast celebration. Haru didn’t like the fuss, but his teammates insisted, saying it was the birthday he’d have on the team. He did well on his exam and his art instructors praised his work. With the exception of an uninspired afternoon practice where Haru didn’t match any of this week’s times, today should be classified as a good day.

But it wasn’t because every spare moment his mind would wander to Makoto and he would usually spend his birthday. Blushing at a sappy card. The bittersweet taste of ganache. Legs tangled together and hands clenching the sheets...

Shaking his head to clear his mind again, Haru gestured to the low table in his living room, “Take a seat. I’ll get some tea.”

“Bring some forks too,” Sousuke instructed as he undid the buttons on his uniform shirt, untucking the black tee he wore underneath.

Grabbing what he needed, Haru came back and sat kiddy corner to his guest. Slices of various cakes were unboxed and laid on the table: strawberry shortcake, tiramisu, matcha mousse cake, and a giant
cream puff sprinkled with powdered sugar. No chocolate in sight except the dusting of cocoa powder on the tiramisu.

“You should try them all, see which one you like best.”

Haru nodded and stole a small bite from three of the cakes. The matcha mousse ended up being Haru’s favorite, his eyes lighting up after taking a taste.

“You’re not even going to try the tiramisu?” Sousuke wondered.

Haru wrinkled his nose in displeasure, “it’s coffee flavored.”

He laughed, “More for me then. I couldn’t survive without coffee.”

Haru set the piece of matcha mousse on his plate, but Sousuke stopped him before he could continue eating. He inserted a dolphin shaped candle and lit it quickly before giving Haru a startlingly warm smile.

“Happy birthday, Haru.”

His chest tightened as he looked between that smile and his treat. He wasn’t sure what was going on inside of him, his heart feeling like it was trying to break through his ribs at the same time it felt like it was imploding into nothing. This wasn’t a birthday he’s ever had before.

It wasn’t spring green eyes focused on him (these were a bright teal). It wasn’t the nickname he pretended to be annoyed by (he was still getting used to the particular way his name sounded on a new tongue). It wasn’t an airy melody (this was a deep rumble of bass). It wasn’t what he was used to. It wasn’t what he expected.

But still - somehow - right now, it felt like enough.

Haru leaned forward to blow out the small flame before any of the wax dolphin’s features could be distorted by the heat. He gently wiped the mousse off before setting it down on the table, thinking of where it could go in his room. It was the first new addition to his collection since Christmas and the first gift from a new friend.

Friend.

That’s what they are now, isn’t it? With his parents and three closest companions out of the country, Sousuke became the one person he could physically go to. But he didn’t need him. He didn’t need to be around someone else, it’s just that he quickly realized he liked being around Sousuke.

He liked that it was comfortable to be with each other without speaking. He liked that Sousuke always appreciated his cooking. He liked that they could bicker and sass each other without either one actually getting upset. He liked that they both preferred to be inside than out, that they were efficient when they ran errands together, that they had - more or less - the same taste in movies and books. There were many things Haru had come to like about Sousuke.

Yes, he decided, they were friends.

And it was his voice that pulled him out of his thoughts, “It suits you.”

“Hmm?”

“Your cake choice. It suits you,” Sousuke chose not to elaborate further.
Haru studied the dessert as he continued taking small bites. He didn’t see what was particularly similar between him and it. Maybe because he enjoyed traditional Japanese food? Matcha was a very Japanese thing, even though most Japanese people didn’t care much for the intense flavor on its own. Maybe that’s what Sousuke meant, that Haru is intense? That most people don’t enjoy him? Even though both are true, that didn’t seem like a particularly nice thing to imply to someone on their birthday.

His gaze traveled over to Sousuke who was already scraping the last bit of cream off his plate, “Yours does too. You’re bitter and alcoholic.”

“Oi! Don’t exaggerate, you’ve seen me drink like three beers max!” he flicked Haru’s forehead in retaliation.

Haru flinched and pouted, “you should show more respect to your elders.”

“Pardon me, Nanase-san.”

The next two hours went like that. The two men lazily finishing off the cakes while they lightly jabbed at each other and swapped stories about their days. It was mostly Sousuke talking, but Haru didn’t think he minded, content to unload his annoyance with Tokyo’s particular characters on anyone who would tolerate his bitching. As much as he complained, Haru could tell that Sousuke did enjoy his job, those moments where he really helped people made up for the inane tourists and rowdy teens.

When Haru yawned three times within two minutes, Sousuke determined that it was time for him to go.

“Will you be able to find your way home?”

Sousuke reached over and pinched his arm in response. He gave Haru one last fond look and birthday wish before heading out into the night.

Haru couldn’t get into bed fast enough, he even forewent his bath in favor of getting his much needed rest. He did take his time to pick out the right spot for the dolphin candle, deciding it looked best nestled between a snowglobe Nagisa bought him and a beautiful figurine of an amazon river dolphin Rei picked up on holiday with his parents.

He regretfully removed a black brick from his pocket. His phone needed to be turned on before he went to sleep or he wouldn’t have an alarm for the morning. While more sleep was always welcome, he knew that his coach would expect him to make up for this evening’s lackluster performance at tomorrow’s practice. He plugged it in and waited for it to restart. He decided to listen to the voicemails tomorrow, but he couldn’t help thumb through the texts.

His heart stopped when he reached the most recent message.

From: Makoto

Happy birthday, Haru-chan

His phone slipped from his hold. The peace he had a minute ago completely forgotten, Haru buried his face in his hands and wept.
Yes, Suga is going to be a reoccurring character. No, Haru is not going to crush on him. They are going to have a ~beautiful friendship~ because friends are super duper important.

For a time frame, the first two chapters take place in April and now it's obviously the end of June. If you want to know what it was like during the time skip, take the part about grocery shopping and imagine things like that for the two months in between. Cute.
I'm still learning, but I think I'm getting better

Chapter Summary

Storms, sweatshirts, and sharks.

Chapter Notes

I have zero chill and updated 2 days early, oops! I may even put out chapter 5 at the end of the week as well.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was almost too early on a Sunday morning for Haru to be staring at his laptop. His latest “homework” from his therapist was to reach out to his friends and loved ones. It didn’t have to be some grand gesture, just a soft touch of contact. For Haru, who only started checking his emails for classwork, his little assignment was a big deal.

It was made even worse with the surge of anxiety that hadn’t gone away since receiving that birthday text from Makoto. He didn’t reply, he couldn’t, and after speaking with Kotobuki-sensei about it he decided to delete it. The memory of it was haunting enough, he didn’t need to actually see it again. He considered deleting Makoto’s number altogether, but that was too much. Despite everything that happened, Makoto was still too important to him to pretend like he never existed.

He downed the rest of his tea and promised to reward himself with a slice of lemon bread from his favorite cafe afterward. He pounded out three messages.

TO: Matsuoka Rin
How’s training? I have a gala in two weeks so practice has been nonstop. I’m doing 100, 200, 400, and relay. Sousuke told me you and your coach were considering relocating to Japan. Take care of yourself.

Haru

TO: Hazuki Nagisa
Hi Nagisa. I’m sorry I haven’t replied to your messages the past few months. I had to move, maybe Rin already told you what happened with me and Makoto. It’s complicated and I’m not really ready to talk about it, but I’m doing alright. I’ve been hanging out with Sousuke a
little, so no, I haven’t become a shut in. Swimming has been going well. Are you coming back home for any breaks? It’d be nice to see you.

Haru

TO: Ryuugazaki Rei

Dear Rei, Thank you for your emails, even though most of them get taken over by Nagisa. I’m really glad you two were able to study abroad together. How have your classes been? I’m sure you’re doing very well. Send me some more photos.

Haru

A victorious hum buzzed in his throat as he clicked send on the last email. He had already talked to his parents that morning. They were surprised to hear from their son, asking what was wrong as soon as they answered the call.

Relieved that Haru was only calling to check in - actually they sounded a little overjoyed about the surprise - his parents told him they were enjoying their trip to Venice despite the daunting project that had brought them there. He was on the phone with them for almost an hour (a new record) and found that listening to their stories soothed his tumultuous heart. Haru promised to call again in a few days and swore he heard the telltale tearful wobble in their voices when they told him they loved him.

They knew what happened between him and Makoto, of course, since Haru needed their help to afford his own apartment. They were in Hong Kong at the time and even offered to fly home to help him get situated. Haru had refused, but he was genuinely touched by their concern. He knew that other adults in Iwatobi didn’t think well of them for always being on the move, but Haru knew they cared in their own way, just like he cared in his. Sure, it was really difficult after his grandmother died and his parents didn’t come back to stay, but he got through it. He understood their actions better now that he was older and had dreams of his own to chase.

It was his parents that helped him the most during this transition because they never doubted that he’d be fine on his own. His friends still seemed to think that Makoto was the only reason he had survived this long. Sure, most of their first semester he was being pulled out of the bath by his childhood friend, but a lot had changed over three years, especially after they became a couple and moved in together.

Haru was the one who made sure Makoto’s alarms were set after he fell asleep on his books from studying too long. It was Haru who slipped muffins and lunches into Makoto’s backpack and had dinner ready when he got home. If Makoto was panicking trying to find his notes or a textbook or his scarf, Haru would be able to tell him exactly where it was. The laundry, the cleaning, the bill paying was all done by Haru. He did whatever he could to make his boyfriend’s life easier. In the end, Haru didn’t need Makoto to look after him, he just needed Makoto to love him.

It never occurred to him that maybe he was asking too much.
He sighed and looked out the window. Rain was pelting the sidewalks and Haru could see the trees shaking in the wind. The lights flickered and Haru wondered if the cafe would even be open today.

- 

Sousuke woke up to a fierce rainstorm. He felt even more thankful that for once he had a Sunday off, a stack of dvds, and a fully stocked fridge (thanks to Haru visiting by a couple days ago). He pulled on some lounge clothes and made his way to the kitchen, eating directly from a plate of cold leftovers.

A knock on his door got his attention. He hesitantly put his food away as he went to answer it. Who would go out in a storm like this? And to his apartment of all places? What he saw when he opened the door surprised him, even though it was the only answer to his questions.

“Haru?”

“My power went out,” he walked past Sousuke into the apartment sopping wet and left a bag from the conbini on the table before going down the hall, “I’m taking a bath.”

Sousuke scoffed as he heard the bathroom door shut, but grabbed some clothes for Haru to borrow anyway and a towel to soak up his trail of rain water. It had been a few months since Haru had unceremoniously arrived back in his life and it wasn’t the first time he had shown up without notice. Most of the time it was with food, but there had been a couple times it was just him, his legs restless and hands continuously clenching into fists. In those instances Haru ended up cleaning and rearranging the apartment. It wasn’t exactly relaxing, but Sousuke figured it was safer than Haru hitting the gym unsupervised for four hours straight.

Initially, Sousuke was concerned that he was taking advantage of the situation, but Haru shot him down at every protest. He didn’t elaborate on his reasoning, but one time they were out running errands when Haru’s parents called. He informed them he was out with a friend and promised to call them back later. Haru had turned red after he realized his admission and couldn’t look at Sousuke directly for the rest of their shopping trip. A tiny part of Sousuke wanted to tease Haru for being embarrassed about something so simple, but he was too happy about his official friend status and let it slide.

Sousuke also kept it to himself that Haru always looked lighter when he left. It was enough to ease his conscience.

About thirty minutes later, Haru emerged when Sousuke finally decided on what to watch. He must have missed the clothes he set out because the swimmer entered the living room in Sousuke’s Police Department sweatshirt rather than one of his plain tees. The top was way too big for Haru’s smaller frame, covering his hands and reaching down to his mid thigh. Only the stretch of black and purple covering his powerful quads - Haru’s signature jammers - proved that he had anything at all on underneath. It was too much. It was-

So fucking cute.

Sousuke shook his head, hoping to quell the blush he was worried about from rising up his cheeks and dispel dangerous, completely unnecessary thoughts.

“What are we watching?” Haru asked as he swept into the kitchen
“I was going to marathon the ‘Jaws’ movies,” he popped the first disc into the dvd player and sat on the couch with his arm resting over the back.

“Number four is the best sequel.”

“Of course you’ve seen them all.”

Haru gave him a look of COURSE I’ve seen them all and set down a tray on the coffee table full of snacks and drinks - the contents of his bag from the convenience store. He plopped down next to Sousuke, drawing his legs up so they were part way tucked underneath him. The position made him lean into the other a little, but neither of them moved apart.

They shared a few quiet exchanges as they watched. Both had seen the first installment so it didn’t inhibit their understanding. As they neared the climax Sousuke asked Haru about his last therapy session.

“It...wasn’t the worst,” he conceded.

“But it was still pretty rough?”

Haru nodded.

“Anything I can do to help?”

Haru thought for a moment, trying to decide if this was a good idea, “Could you…”

He knew he was blushing as Sousuke looked at him with interest. He grumbled, “Could you rub my head?”

Sousuke had to hold back his look of confusion. The arm on the back of the couch shifted so he could reach. Winding his fingers through inky black hair, Sousuke began to massage his scalp in soft circles. “Like this?”

Haru’s eyelids were half shut as he minutely leaned into the touch, “Y-yeah. It’s relaxing.” And also mortifying to tell you this.

Sousuke nodded in understanding, trying to will his heartbeat to slow down because there was no reason it should have sped up in the first place, “I had a dog growing up who loved to be pet like this.”

Haru shot him a glare, but didn’t move away.

Laughing lightly, Sousuke tousled his hair, “Although your moodiness is much more like a cat’s.”

Crossing his arms over his chest, Haru pouted. He caught the smug look on Sousuke’s face before he pressed his head more forcefully into Sousuke’s palm while uttering a deadpan “meow.”

Sousuke’s eyes widened in shock before he burst out in uncontrollable laughter. Haru looked embarrassed and annoyed, but it wasn’t long before he broke out into his own chuckles. It was the first time Sousuke really heard Haru laugh - it was like a wind chime being rustled by a summer breeze. He liked it.

When they had gotten control of themselves, the credits were rolling. Sousuke got up to put in the next one.

“We should skip Jaws 2 .”
“What, why? I’ve never seen it”

“It’s so boring.”

“Then you can nap. My house, my marathon, my rules.”

Haru rolled his eyes as he went to refresh his tea. When he came back he flopped over the rest of the couch, slightly curled and facing the TV. His head grazed Sousuke’s thigh. As the movie progressed, Sousuke’s large hand found its way back into Haru’s tresses. He didn’t think about what he was doing, sometimes he’d draw shapes with his fingertip or twirl pieces into curls.

Halfway through the movie, Haru got up again to use the restroom. When he came back he resumed his former position except this time his head rested on top of Sousuke’s thigh. To his credit, Sousuke managed not to say anything about this new closeness and his hand immediately went back to its task. Haru gave a soft sigh of contentment that Sousuke tried very hard to ignore.

They paused every so often to stretch and eat. Each time they came back to the couch they’d be touching in some way. Haru pressed against him because he was holding the popcorn; Sousuke’s calves across Haru’s lap as he stretched out on the couch.

The storm outside hadn’t abated, but it hardly mattered to them as they laughed, bickered, and relaxed. They had finished the series (Sousuke agreed with Haru’s feelings on *Jaws 4*), and Haru insisted on watching his favorite shark movies that were available online: *Deep Blue Sea* and *Sharktopus*. Sousuke thought the first one was pretty good, but seriously reevaluated Haru’s taste after the second.

Haru threw together a late dinner of mackerel and vegetables (Sousuke had to admit, his fish was amazing) before they settled back on the couch for one last movie, *Lake Placid*. It wasn’t about sharks, but it fit well into their giant predator theme and it was much better than Haru’s previous choice. By the end they were both yawning and had to work hard to keep their eyes open. Sousuke got up first, holding his hand out to the man still seated. Haru eyed him in question.

“Time for bed.”

“I can sleep here,” Haru patted the couch.

Shaking his head Sousuke argued, “No you can’t. Your back and neck will be destroyed when you wake up and I don’t want that on my conscience. We can share.” He didn’t add that it wasn’t like they hadn’t been in the same bed before, but he supposed that was a different, desperate circumstance.

“Sousuke, it’s fine-”

“Ha-ru-ka. My house, my rules, remember?”

The glare Haru sent him had no bite, especially when the tips of his ears had turned red - most likely from the use of his full name. It only took a few seconds of waiting before he allowed Sousuke to pull him off the couch and to the bathroom where he was given an extra toothbrush.

“Do you want different clothes to sleep in?”

Haru looked down at the borrowed sweatshirt, “No, this is good.”

“How do you even sleep in your swim suit?”
“They’re comfortable. Like a second skin.”

“Creepy.”

Haru rolled his eyes and nudged him lightly on his way out of the bathroom.

Sousuke took his time washing his face to allow Haru to get situated in bed first. He didn’t mind sharing, Rin slept in his bed whenever he visited, but it was still new for Haru. When he came back into the room, Haru was on his back, blankets pulled high on his chest. He was holding his phone close to his face, illuminating him in a soft blue glow. A hint of a smile played on his lips.

“Good news?” Sousuke asked as he climbed under the covers on his side. Haru simply handed his device over to him. It was an email:

**FROM: Hazuki Nagisa**
OMG HARU-CHAAAAAAAN!!!! I’m putting today in my calendar so we can celebrate the anniversary of the first email you sent me!!! You should come visit, Haru-chan! You’d love it our campus, it’s right by the lake AND close enough to the ocean AND has beautiful fountains (I wouldn’t stop you from jumping in, FYI, even though the water here is always cold). I’ll make sure Rei-chan sends a lot of pictures of them. Is your new apartment nice?? Rei-chan and I were planning on heading home for a bit in September, we’ll have to drop by our university to check in with advisors!!! CAN WE STAY WITH YOU, HARU-CHAN?! Pleeeeeeese! Uh oh, Rei-chan is giving me the “your-laptop-is-for-notes-not-for-goofing-off” look, so I guess I have to go (he withholds snuggles as punishment HOW COULD HE BE SO MEAN!?) LOVE YOU HARU-CHAN. Message back soon!

XOXOXO

Chuckling as he returned the phone, Sousuke commented that he couldn’t help but read that in Nagisa’s voice.

Haru let out a breathy huff of a laugh and quickly typed out a response:

**TO: Hazuki Nagisa**
You and Rei are welcome to stay with me. I live in a two bedroom so there’s plenty of space. It’s a longer commute to campus, but I have a full size bath. I’ll figure out which cafe around here has the best strawberry shortcake and latte art.

Haru

P.S. Sousuke says hi.

Across the pacific, a certain blond boy burst into happy tears as he filed out of the lecture hall.

“Nagisa-kun! What’s the matter with you?”
He couldn’t explain, he merely handed his phone over to Rei. As he read the message he smiled lovingly at him. “Haru-senpai is amazing.”

Nagisa nodded in agreement. They walked on to their next class in thoughtful silence until he spoke up, “Ne, Rei-chan, isn’t it night time in Tokyo? Do you think Haru-chan is with Sou-chan right now?”

“Perhaps, Nagisa-kun,” Rei had already pulled out his notebook for their next class and wasn’t too focused on gossiping.

“Twenty bucks says Haru-chan and Sou-chan are gonna bang.”

“NA-NAGISA-KUN! That’s inappropriate!”

Nagisa merely cackled and skipped off ahead.

Chapter End Notes

THANK YOU SO MUCH for all of the lovely comments, kudos, bookmarks, and subscriptions! It makes me beyond happy and really motivates me to write!
Makoto really wasn’t sure what he was doing at the university’s aquatic facility. It was a place he’d been a hundred times since entering college, but this was the first visit in a long while. During the last year of their relationship, Makoto had attended less and less of Haru’s competitions. By the time they had broken up, he hadn’t seen Haru swim for a few months.

Haru never brought it up. He started silently tucking away his medals and awards rather than sharing them with his boyfriend to drink in the praise he would receive from the person whose opinion mattered the most. Makoto knew every time he would hide another win, but he never asked about them. Haru would probably smile and tell him it was alright, that it wasn’t important.

And that’s why, after thirteen years of friendship and almost three years of dating, he broke Haru’s heart. He realized he didn’t know the Haru in front of him and he didn’t recognize the Makoto that stared back in the mirror. No one, least of all himself, would have ever thought Makoto would stop prioritizing Haru, but it happened. And Haru rarely complained, burying his jealousy and disappointment deep inside.

Uneasy feelings had started to creep up Makoto’s spine as they moved further in their relationship and their studies. He couldn’t shake the notion that things were off - that his life and relationship were shifting without him knowing. It was uncertainty and he didn’t like it, not after the struggle they went through in high school.

The first time Haru had already bathed and prepared coffee and breakfast by the time Makoto’s alarm went off planted a tiny seed of insecurity in Makoto’s gut. Most of Makoto smiled and was happy that Haru was taking initiative to become a more mature person, but that kernel was still there, growing.

One would think that all of Haru’s efforts would make life easier for Makoto. In some ways it did, he had the time to study and work and was always in excellent health while his classmates with similar loads were fighting to keep their lives together. But it also made him feel useless. He was always the one people could depend on, the one who could help and solve problems. While many of his new
friends still saw him as such, Haru asked him for less and less.

There was no good reason for his discontent. Everyone who knew Haru, including Makoto, nagged him for years to spend less time in the tub, get to places on time, be kinder, and a myriad of other changes to make Haru more ‘normal.’ What right did Makoto have to be upset about Haru finally taking all that advice?

None, he knew, but it didn’t stop the bitterness. Reason didn’t stop him from intentionally arranging his schedule to conflict with Haru’s. Logic didn’t prevent him from spitting hurtful passive aggressive comments at Haru’s efforts. Common sense didn’t help every time he walked out after petty arguments that didn’t matter, leaving Haru alone to feel insignificant like Makoto did.

It took him a few months of reckless college life: parties, dates, too many all-nighters, and more instant meals than he’d care to admit, to realize how devoted Haru was to him and how all of his changes were in effort to support him. But by then it was far too late to go back and apologize, whatever was left of his pride wouldn’t allow it.

And now there he was, months after he ended things in a spectacular fire, sitting in the familiar humidity, feeling empty. With Haru gone, the poisonous plant eventually withered and died. He could now see how petty he was, how selfish and cruel he had become. How stupid he was for resenting Haru growing up.

Despite acknowledging and trying to rectify his poor attitude, Makoto couldn’t help continuing to be a little selfish. He knew that he shouldn’t have texted Haru on his birthday, but it felt so wrong not to. He couldn’t focus on anything else that day, only thinking about how lonely he felt and how much more miserable Haru must have been.

Cheers from the crowd broke Makoto out of his brooding. The groups of four were filing out to their starting blocks. It was easy to pick out Haru’s team, adorned in swimsuits the color of the sky. Makoto never paid much attention to the three men who swam this event with Haru. Although he always showed up for his boyfriend’s individual events, he couldn’t bring himself to stay for the relay. It sent a pang of jealousy and regret seeing someone else out there. It left Makoto feeling small, being unable to handle college level athletics, seeing someone usurp his place.

The tallest of the team gave them one last thumbs up before jumping in the water to get into starting position. The audience was eerily silent until the second whistle blew and the race began. From the start, Haru’s team gained the lead, becoming more pronounced with every turn. By the time Haru made a perfectly timed dive into the pool, they were a full body length ahead of the next school. It didn’t change how Haru swam, though, he was still putting in maximum effort. With one last burst of speed he hit the wall, producing another personal best for the foursome.

When the man who swam butterfly stepped forward to help Haru out of the pool, Makoto’s heart plummeted. Haru was immediately pulled into a hug, his two remaining teammates joining in, slapping each other on the back in congratulations. Rather than the bashful scowl Makoto was used to seeing, Haru was smiling with them, his mouth moving in what was mostly likely words of praise judging by the moved looks on the three other faces.

This hurt even more than watching the relay itself, bubbles of old resentment rising in his throat. Haru was fine, better than fine, even. He was swimming magnificently and smiling and laughing with his teammates, something he only did once with his high school team, with him. Makoto left quickly, envy and anger pooling in his gut, trying for the thousandth time to figure out where things went so wrong.

But what Makoto couldn’t see from his seat was how Haru’s jammers were a little too loose on his
hips - he still wasn’t eating as much as he needed to. Makoto couldn’t see the bags under Haru’s eyes because he still couldn’t sleep through the night, plagued with bad dreams of broad backs turning away and dissolving into darkness. Makoto couldn’t see Haru’s heart, pieces missing, still trying to repair itself.

If Makoto was able to see all that he might have stayed in the stands long enough to see deep blue eyes instinctively flash over to his abandoned seat.

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From: Whale Shark
Are you home?

To: Whale Shark
Practice ran late.

From: Whale Shark
You better be eating dinner.

To: Whale Shark
I literally just walked into my apartment.

From: Whale Shark
And I bet you were thinking about going out for a run.

Haru eyed the message a little guiltily. He didn’t want to give Sousuke the satisfaction that he was, indeed, considering changing into shorts and going out for a jog. He knew he shouldn’t, but even after the grueling practice his mind was restless. He couldn’t unload his anxieties when he was swimming for school - too focused on the dozens of pointers his coaches wanted his body to memorize. Running was mindless and easy. His phone lit up again.

From: Whale Shark
Silence implies guilt. Eat dinner. Take a bath. Work on your paintings.

Haru rolled his eyes, knowing that Sousuke was using his ‘listen to me, I’m a policeman’ voice on him. The tone of authority absolutely works on others, but after witnessing Sousuke use a sickeningly sweet pitch with every cute dog (which to Sousuke means EVERY dog, he doesn’t discriminate) they pass on the street, he was much less intimidating. He threw his phone on the couch before heading to his bedroom to undress. It takes forty five minutes for the ache in his muscles to be erased by the hot water. When he walks back into his living room there’s another message waiting for him.

From: Whale Shark
Haruka.

At this text, Haru grumbles and snaps a quick picture. He’s scowling at the camera and giving it the finger. He makes sure that the towel around his shoulders to catch his dripping hair and the apron he wears to grill his mackerel are obvious.
The phone still in his hand finally signals a message from Haru. Sousuke barks out a laugh when he sees the picture and saves the photo without thinking.

- 

Haru gets two hours of quiet before his phone chimes again.

*From: Whale Shark
Go to bed.*

*To: Whale Shark
You’re annoying.*

*From: Whale Shark
You won’t see my messages if you go to sleep.*

*To: Whale Shark
I won’t see them if I turn off my phone.*

*From: Whale Shark
Goodnight, asshole.*

*To: Whale Shark
Idiot.*

*To: Whale Shark
Night.*

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Haru arrived at the cafe fifteen minutes early, his nerves forcing him out the door because he couldn’t sit still. Today he was going to meet Koushi’s fiancee. He had heard plenty about the physical therapist and part time volleyball player, but Haru had no idea what his friend said about him. Koushi swore that they would get along fabulously, but Haru was still unseasoned at making friends and didn’t want to make a bad first impression, especially with Koushi becoming a regular in his life.

After a deep, calming breath, Haru stepped into Caf Nip, not surprised that Koushi picked out a cat cafe for their late lunch. The server placed him at a table by the windows with enough seats for the two other guests. As soon as he sat down, a large ball of black fluff jumped into his lap. When Haru scratched it between the ears, it immediately started purring and settled into his lap. Haru smiled, feeling his nerves disappear. He takes a quick picture to show Sousuke later.

“Haru!”

The man in question looked up to see familiar smile, which he returned. His eyes shifted to the tan,
dark-haired man next to Koushi who looked even more impressive in person than he did in the photos he was shown. He was nowhere near as tall or built as Sousuke, but his presence more than made up for it. There was an air of confidence and unyielding strength that Haru rarely encountered. He gently squeezed the cat in his lap who licked his knuckles in encouragement, “Hi Koushi.”

“I hope you weren’t waiting long! I see you already made a friend,” Suga reached out to rub the black cat under its chin, “This is my fiancee, Sawamura Daichi!”

They reached out to shake hands, “Nice to finally meet you, Nanase-kun.”

“Same here. Please call me Haru.”

“Then it’s Daichi for me,” the couple took their seats across from Haru, their arrival signalling to other eager cats that there were more available laps. They each gained their own kitty companion before they could order beverages.

Their drinks and meals were excellent, Haru was impressed by the seafood selection, but it made sense: cat cafe. The trio fell into easy conversation, Suga effortlessly leading them from topic to topic. Despite chatting for a couple hours, Haru didn’t feel like his energy was drained like he usually did.

Koushi and Daichi made quite the pair, seamlessly telling stories between them. They shot each other adoring looks when discussing the most ridiculous topics and all of their teasing was laced with affection. It made Haru ache a little, it was the first time he’d hung out with a couple since Nagisa and Rei left to America, but the warmth he felt in their presence overshadowed the envy.

“Now that you’ve been here a while, do you think you’ll stay in Tokyo after you graduate?” Suga asked as he polished off the last of his parfait.

Haru frowned, he hadn’t really thought about it. His future was largely dependant on if he made the national swim team.

Daichi smiled kindly, “It’s definitely a shock to come from a small town to the biggest city, but after being here, what, eight years now, I can’t imagine moving back to Miyagi.”

Suga nodded in agreement, “It’s nice, being someplace so vast. We had a chance to start over here and live how we wanted to. You don’t have to just be who you were back home. You don’t have to be the third year who was replaced by a first year or the ‘mom’ friend or the-”

“-the weird kid who doesn’t talk to others and only cares about water,” Haru added quietly. Or the Haru who is a match set with Makoto.

“Exactly,” Daichi grinned, “There aren’t as many expectations and busybodies trying to tell you how to live your life. You don’t have to be anything that doesn’t bring you happiness.”

Haru didn’t miss the significant look they gave as they squeezed each other’s hands. Tentatively Haru asked, nodding at their laced fingers, “Was... was it a problem in your town?”

“Not with our teammates. They were so confused when we told them because they had all assumed we were already dating,” Suga chuckled at the memory of their libero’s reaction, “Daichi was scolded for staring at my butt so often. ‘It’s inappropriate unless you’re a couple! It’s about time you took responsibility, Captain!’”

“But our parents weren’t thrilled with it, to say the least, and told us we had to keep hidden from everyone else. Nine years later they’ve accepted us, but it’s obvious they still don’t approve of the
‘lifestyle,’” Daichi snorted. As if his love for Suga could ever be some rebellious phase he’d grow out of.

“What about you, Haru?”

“Our parents and friends were really happy for us. They said they always knew we would end up together,” Haru shrugged, “I knew I loved him for a while, but I was scared I was going to ruin our friendship. When we got here and soon started living together I kept noticing the couples all over campus. I couldn’t hide what I wanted anymore so I confessed. He was really surprised, but happy, and wanted to try dating.

“We kept it private besides our closest friends and family. He was worried it would hurt my swimming career if people knew, so we always acted like we were just friends in public. I wouldn’t have cared if it did, but I wanted to keep him safe from harassment. He might look big and strong, but I know things like that would eat away at him and make him feel insecure.” Haru idly stirred his drink. He was getting caught up in ghosts again. Was there any part of his past that didn’t involve Makoto?

“It’s not that I wanted to tell everyone, but I didn’t like hiding either. Makoto is so popular, a lot of women and men would flirt with him or ask him out and I couldn’t say anything. He would always turn them down, but it never discouraged anyone. It was irritating and it made me feel uncertain, like I constantly had to prove that I deserved to be with him…”

“Haru,” came a strong, but gentle voice. Watery blue eyes looked up to see Daichi focused on him. “I obviously don’t know what happened between you and your ex, but I can promise you this: you are worthy of love and respect. That relationship didn’t end because you didn’t deserve happiness; it ended because it requires the effort of all parties to maintain. No matter how hard you worked, no matter how much you gave, if your partner wasn’t investing as well then there was nothing you could do. It was not your fault.”

Haru covered his eyes with one hand, head bent down to hide his face with his overgrown bangs. He had known this man for two hours and somehow Daichi knew exactly what Haru needed to hear. Soft fingers latched onto Haru’s other hand that was resting on the table. He squeezed them gently before a larger, calloused one rested on top, encompassing of both of theirs. It felt warm and safe.

Haru didn’t understand how these two could show him so much support and affection after only knowing him for a short time, but he was so grateful.

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*From: Whale Shark*

*Hey, you busy?*

*To: Whale Shark*

*No, just got home. Met Koushi’s fiancee.*

*From: Whale Shark*

*Nice guy?*

*To: Whale Shark*
Yeah, he’s great. They’re perfect together.

From: Whale Shark
Want to come over? I accidentally hit the re-order button for pizza and got one of your pineapple and mackerel monstrosities on the way.

To: Whale Shark
Be there in 30.

Haru pocketed his phone and allowed himself a small smile. The emotional end of lunch was unexpected. Although it was a positive experience, Haru needed some distraction. Spending the night at Sousuke’s with greasy pizza and a low budget monster movie was the perfect thing.

He grabbed his swim bag and quickly stuffed a change of clothes inside. Remembering to bring along the tupperware of chocolate chip banana muffins he had stress baked that morning, Haru locked the door behind him and headed to the station.

The short train ride went quick as usual and soon enough he was at Sousuke’s front door. He stood for a moment, catching his breath. He must have moved from the station much faster than he realized.

His knuckles only rapped on the wood once before the door was pulled open. A now familiar lopsided grin greeted him. Haru was overwhelmed with the urge to throw himself into his empty arms. Sousuke was strong, he could hold Haru together.

The feeling momentarily unnerved him.

Maybe seeing Koushi and Daichi so happy together got to him. Maybe he missed being able to do that with someone. Hold hands. Share secrets through smiles and gazes. Having someone’s arms wrapped around him and his filled in turn. Now that he had had it, now that he had tasted how sweet it was, maybe he needed it more than he thought.

He wasn’t sure if that made him weak or just human.

Sousuke must have seen something in Haru’s eyes. He reached his hands over and ran them through Haru’s hair, smoothing out what tangles the wind caused. It wasn’t the hug Haru envisioned, but once again, he should have recognized a pattern forming, it was enough.

“Come on,” Sousuke prompted, “I’m not sure if your disgusting pizza would be better or worse cold.”

He took Haru’s wrist and led him inside, away from his sadness and the humid summer night.

Chapter End Notes

There are no nuts in the banana muffins because that’s an abomination (also because I’m Haru and I’m very allergic to walnuts).

I hope Makoto wasn’t too jarring. Keep in mind this is 3 years from the end of Eternal Summer and many things can change in that time. I thought about what kind of person he’d be if his flaws were allowed to dominate his personality rather than his virtues. It happens - college is a high stress make-or-break point and sometimes people break.
I STILL HOPE YOU ALL ENJOYED IT THOUGH!!! I tried to end on some nice Haru ~friendship~ moments.

PS: still looking for a beta reader if anyone is interested!
live like I did before all this hit

Chapter Summary

The difference friendship makes.

Chapter Notes

I'm floored at the wonderful response I received from the last chapter! Thank you so much for all of the comments and support, I seriously cannot describe how happy it makes me to see it!

All of these sports babies are so precious. I love them and I love all of you. <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Haru exited the locker room with a few other members of his team. He was only partially listening, going through his mental routine to prepare himself for his individual events. He just had the 400m and the relay today after winning yesterday’s 100m and 200m events.

“Haru.”

Four swimmers turned to look at the brawny man who had called out to one of them. He had a pissed off expression on his face and looked strong enough to take them all on at once. They shot glances of concern to each other before settling to watch how Haru reacted. They resisted the urge to step out to shield him from this potential threat, Haru was their precious dolphin after all.

The young man in question tilted his head in surprise, “Sousuke?”

The teammates panicked. ‘Sousuke’ definitely sounded like a Yakuza name. Was Haru in trouble? He definitely seems like the type to unknowingly piss off the wrong people.

Before they could stop him, Haru bee-lined for the man, reaching out to fleetingly squeeze his wrist as if checking to see if he was really there.

The familiar gesture was not lost on the observers. They had really only ever seen Haru unnecessarily touch four people: a short energetic blond, a nerdy guy in glasses, a red haired dude with shark teeth, and Haru’s best friend/roommate/probably (ex) boyfriend whom they hadn’t seen for a suspiciously long time. They were even more shocked when the stranger’s scowl melted into a handsome smile. Who is this guy?

“Thought I’d come watch. I haven’t missed the butterfly events, have I?”

Haru shook his head and then pointed over at his olive haired teammate, “Yamato is our best in butterfly.”

Yamato couldn’t help but puff out his chest in pride. Haru, the star of the Todai swim team, did not give praise freely. When Sousuke met his gaze, something clicked inside Yamato’s head, “Ah! Are
you *Yamazaki* Sousuke from Tokitsu?! I competed against you in high school! You were so good! I couldn’t even get close!"

Sousuke smiled and nodded, reaching out to shake his hand, “I’m sure you’re much better than me now. I retired after senior year.”

The other two boys relaxed and joked, “Are all your friends former swimmers, Nanase?”

A pout formed on Haru’s lips, “...Two play volleyball.”

His teammates laughed, one ruffled his hair “Nothing wrong with that! Athletes gotta stick together!”

“Come sit with us, Yamazaki-san!”

“Yeah, we’ll fill you in on the top competition.”

Sousuke glanced at Haru who nodded and brushed his hand once more in reassurance, “I have to go warm up.”

“Don’t worry, Haru-kun! We’ll take good care of your friend!”

Haru rolled his eyes, but gave them a slight smile and a wave as they parted ways. His friends went to the stands and Haru dived into the lap pool.

Sousuke felt comfortable enough with the three other swimmers. Finally introducing themselves, he learned that Yamato was indeed their top swimmer in butterfly, Touya specialized in backstroke, and Ichirou dominated with his breaststroke. With the addition of Haru, they made a fearsome relay team.

This was the first time in a couple years Sousuke had been at a pool. The scent of chlorine and the sounds of splashing transporting him back to his most treasured and painful memories. He tried swimming with Rin once while he was visiting from Australia, but it was too overwhelming, physically and mentally.

His therapist had urged him to try it out again when he felt like he was ready. While the condition of his shoulder had steadily improved, he hadn’t had the guts to head back to the pool. Being here now, though, wasn’t so bad; he figured this would be enough for the first attempt. His therapist had told him that he was meant to be in the water, that he’d be back there someday. It seemed ridiculous the first few times he heard it, but now…

Well, he wondered what Haru would have to say about it. No one knew the water like him.

While they waited for Haru’s heat, they filled Sousuke in on the other schools’ top competitors as well as the participants on their own team. Eventually Haru filed out and took his position on the starting block. The last time Sousuke watched Haru swim was during nationals in their third year of high school. Begrudgingly, he had admitted to Rin that he made the right choice in a rival.

Seeing Haru now was not like nationals. Even races with Rin were not this intense. He always had the feeling that Haru was holding something back before, but now in front of him it was clear that every part of Haru was devoted to this race. There was no doubt, no concern, nothing but the stroke the his arms, the kick of his legs, and his gasps of breath.

As Haru touched the wall to finish, Sousuke let out a whoop of amazement. He didn’t look up at his time (even though it was a new personal best), but diverted his vision up to where he knew his friends would be clapping and cheering. He met Sousuke’s teal eyes and wide grin with a humble but victorious one of his own.
Their connection didn’t go unnoticed by Haru’s teammates. They silently conferred with each other before Ichirou leaned in and whispered, “He definitely seems more like Haru’s type.” The other two nodded in agreement and turned fondly to Haru’s new companion.

Touya clapped Sousuke hard on the back, causing him to raise an eyebrow in confusion. “You’re a good guy, Sousuke! You should come out with us after the meet.”

He smirked, “First round’s on me if you win the relay.”

“Deal!” Yamato said as he got to his feet, stretching, “But first I have to show these kids how butterfly is really done.”

Ichirou boo’d his friend, “You sound like an arrogant old man.”

“You can brag after you win!” added Touya.

He marched off indignantly only to pass Haru on his way up to the stands. Haru offered Yamato a gentle pat on the shoulder and a small, but encouraging smile. The way he perked up was not missed by Sousuke’s trained gaze. Yamato reminded the policeman of a cross between Tachibana and Rin. Physically he was very similar to Haru’s ex: lean, broad, and tall with wide grins and brown hair. But he also had a cocky, competitive spark that no doubt helped fuel his team.

His observations were pushed to the back of his mind as Haru took a seat next to him, hair still dripping from a quick rinse in the showers. Sousuke gave Haru a sly smile and whispered to him, “Rin should be worried.”

Haru turned away to hide his pleased expression.

- 

The izakaya they went to was lively, but not overly crowded. The four had won the relay with little difficulty, all of them swimming with impressive drive and precision.

Haru insisted on sake as their celebratory round from Sousuke, which didn’t surprise him in the least. He’d never seen Haru drink before and was interested in seeing how it would affect his behavior. His usual drinking buddy and partner on the force, Tanaka, would become even more boisterous and Rin became an even greater weeping ball of emotion. He was suddenly nervous that alcohol would send Haru back into his silent brooding.

There was no need for him to worry, though. By the time they started the third round, Haru was still Haru. The only evidence of his drinking was his blush and unusually uncoordinated movements (that much to Sousuke’s annoyance, remained graceful somehow).

“So how did you and Haru meet?”

Haru choked a little on his sake. Why did Ichirou sound like an annoying uncle grilling his nephew’s date?

Sousuke took a sip of his beer before answering, seemingly unphased by the question, “Actually we’ve known each other since middle school. My best friend is Haru’s swimming rival.”
“I’m his rival. I never cared.”

“Never?” Sousuke teasingly raised an eyebrow at him.

Haru shot him a glare in response, “Fine. I cared once. I was determined to beat you at regionals.”

Sousuke’s eye twitched. Apparently tipsy Nanase was even more snarky than sober Nanase. Touya and Ichirou tried to suppress their giggling with coughs. Sousuke changed the subject, “How long did it take you to convince Haru to swim the relay?”

Touya laughed, “Almost two years! He’d sometimes be willing to practice with us, but he never wanted to do an official race. It wasn’t until we were in a pinch - our usual anchor was injured - and Haru was forced to step in that he agreed to regularly participate.”

Haru kept his focus on his sake glass, his cheeks flushing an even deeper rose, “...it was a fun race.”

“And we’ve been unstoppable since then!” Touya and Ichirou bumped fists. The action made Sousuke cringe in nostalgia. It didn’t go unnoticed by Haru, who gave his knee a brief squeeze under the table.

The moment was interrupted by Haru’s phone ringing. He took a look at the screen, it was his parents, and excused himself. After Haru left the table, his teammates immediately rounded on Sousuke who looked a little taken aback at the sudden charged atmosphere.

Yamato looked directly into Sousuke’s eyes. He hadn’t said much this evening, content to observe and pour Haru’s sake, “You’re the first person who has come to the meets since Makoto-kun stopped showing up.”

The undercurrent of hostility Sousuke’s face and posture presented at the name confirmed their theory that the two no longer had a relationship.

“I’m sure you know that Haru isn’t easy to get close to. Even after we officially became a relay team, we were all kept at an arm’s distance. I know you don’t have to be friends in order to swim together, but it makes it better, doesn’t it?”

Ichirou added, “Haru is weird, ya know? Like, there were times where I could tell that he wanted to get close to us, but he held himself back, like he was scared of opening up.”

“And he’s just plain stubborn.”

Sousuke snorted. That was a fact.

Yamato continued, “But we knew something was really wrong at the end of last year. Haru always took swimming seriously, but it was a whole new level of intensity. He was always training, always working, always busy. He was pulling himself away even more than before.

“We were worried. We made sure to always include him, to try to make him feel as comfortable as possible. Let him know we were there for him if he needed us. But still… there was nothing we could do.

“The last few months have been different though. He’s healthier, but it’s obvious that that’s not the only thing that’s changed,” Yamato hoped the implication was clear. Whatever was going on between Haru and Sousuke had turned Haru’s life around. “We don’t want to see him hurting like that again. He’s our teammate, but more importantly, he’s our friend. Please take care of him, Sousuke-kun.”
Something swelled inside Sousuke’s chest, “I was planning on it.”

Kotobuki-sensei, Haru’s therapist, was very pleased in his progress of strengthening his personal relationships. When she told him that, an usual feeling blossomed in his chest. Swimming victories made him happy, but actually feeling proud of himself? That was new.

It wasn’t like with swimming. Training could be difficult, but it was still something that came naturally to him. With this he had taken on a challenge, something he was abysmal at, and was succeeding, feeling more reassured in himself than ever before.

His relationship with his parents was stronger than he could ever remember. It was the first time in years that either side could confidently say that they knew what the other was up to.

Haru had been doing well with his emails as well. Nagisa and Rei sent him updates everyday and he would always respond, even if he could only manage one or two lines. Rin’s correspondence was less frequent, but still regular. Haru had the sneaking suspicion that Sousuke kept him updated between messages. Even though they were all so far apart, Haru believed that they were even closer than when they saw each other everyday in high school.

As for making new friends, Koushi and Daichi had easily fit themselves in Haru’s life. Being an only child, he didn’t really know what having siblings was like, but Haru sometimes thought of the couple as older brothers. They were dependable, gentle, and generous, just like Makoto was with Ren and Ran.

Haru frowned. There he went again, going back to Makoto. He knew that this would be the toughest part - most of what he could remember included him in some way - but he tried to keep it to a minimum. Often when Makoto crossed his mind, he couldn’t help but fall into a spiral of memories and regrets. He didn’t want to, he wanted to go at least one day without feeling like he screwed up.

Focus on something else.

What was he thinking about again? Right, that he was doing a good job at communicating. He even greeted the underclassman at practice yesterday (Haru would be lying if he said the shocked looks on their faces didn’t bring him satisfaction).

He didn’t feel so weird anymore, like he was alienating everyone around him. Some days it took a lot out of him, opening himself to others would probably never be easy. Some days he still wanted to retreat into himself, unable to keep nightmares and worries at bay. But he persevered. When he was at his worst he knew that he still had someplace to go, someone to rely on.

He was surprised at how fast he became close to Sousuke considering their troubled history together. But the hulk of a man had calmed down and Haru had started to give people - and himself - a chance. That had been enough for the two to put aside their past and enjoy each other’s company now. It seemed like all of their spare moments were spent together.

They had come to understand each other’s moods very well. Sousuke always pulled up an ocean documentary and handed Haru his softest blanket when he came over looking particularly fragile and on edge. Haru always had a drink and fried food ready at the end of Sousuke’s rotation when he was fed up with idiots at work and was this close to quitting. Their friendship was easy and comfortable, one that had benefited both men equally. It was as if they hadn’t wasted the years since
high school.

Haru picked up his phone and shot a quick text, fairly certain Sousuke would be recovered from his 8:00pm to 4:00am shift.

To: Whale shark
Hey. Need to go to shopping. Want to come with?

Before he could set the phone down Haru received a reply.

From: Whale shark
Sure. Can we stop by the sporting good store?

To: Whale shark
Meet you in an hour by Hachiko.

From: Whale shark
See you soon.

When Haru arrived in Shibuya, he was surprised to see Sousuke already there waiting for him. Since the grocery store blunder, he hadn’t gotten himself terribly lost when meeting Haru, but he was always a few minutes late. He always excused it as getting ‘turned around,’ but by now Haru knew that it was probably because Sousuke couldn’t resist helping someone who scraped their knee or need a few more yen to catch the train home. Maybe why Sousuke had all those muscles was to keep his extremely soft insides safe.

Sousuke spotted Haru and waved him over, holding the last piece of his takoyaki out on a skewer. Without hesitating, Haru leaned in popped the entire snack into his mouth. He let out an appreciative hum and started walking to their first destination.

Leading the way, Haru didn’t notice how Sousuke’s ears burned.

“I love your dolphin collection, Haru!” Suga was seated next to Haru on his bed, clutching one of Haru’s plushes to his chest.

“It’s almost as big as your shrimp shrine, Suga,” Daichi teased. He was sitting next to them in the desk chair, flipping through a swimming magazine.

Haru picked up another stuffed animal, a small, chubby grey dolphin and squished its face, “I’ve always liked dolphins. When I was little and joined swim club, the other kids said I reminded them of one. It just stuck. In high school everyone ended up with their own animals.”

Leaning over to reach under his bed, Haru pulled out a memory box. Daichi came over and crowded the bed on the other side of Haru, wanting to get a good look at whatever he was going to share. After a several seconds of rifling, Haru pulled out a group photo of the Iwatobi and Samezuka teams.

“Why are all of your uniforms wet?” Daichi asked.

Haru chuckled, “We were playing a survival game at the Samezuka cultural festival. It was a water
“Did you win?”

“I was the last person standing on our team, but it was so warm and I was tired of playing, so I let Rin shoot me despite being able to take him down. Sousuke was *not* pleased, he had taken a hit for me so I could win.” That sent Suga into a fit of giggles.

Haru turned their attention back to the photo and pointed at each boy, explaining their background.

“Rin, my so called rival, is a tiger shark. He swims butterfly and free, but was against me during the relay. Momo, backstroke, is an otter and Ai, breaststroke, is a goose. Sousuke, who was one of the best butterfly swimmers in Japan during high school, is a whale shark.”

Suga snorted, “From what you say about Sousuke-kun, he does seem to fit the gentle giant description.”

Haru agreed and ran his finger against his image with a warm smile. Suga and Daichi passed a curious look between them.

Haru continued, introducing his team, “These two are our breast and butterfly swimmers who are actually studying overseas in America together. Nagisa is a penguin, Rei is a butterfly-”

Daichi frowned, “Butterflies can’t swim.”

“Neither could Rei when he started in his first year of high school. He was a track star until Nagisa shamelessly harassed him until he joined. We really needed fourth member,” Haru explained, as if that made it okay, “But in his third year he became captain. He worked really hard.”

Haru cleared his throat to rid himself of the nostalgia bubbling up in his chest, “I’m a dolphin and Makoto… Makoto’s an orca.”

Koushi hums appreciatively, “That’s so cool, Haru! We were all just crows.”

“But that makes sense. Crows can fly, they’re strategic, and they can build strong families to thrive.”

That was all true of Karasuno, Daichi and Suga knew, but it warmed their hearts to see how easily Haru picked up on how it wasn’t *just* a team for them.

Suga ponders the change in demeanor when Haru touched upon the tall brunet from his swim team. There was obviously a much longer history there, more than just an ex boyfriend, if he was reading Haru correctly. He remembers how it felt when Asahi had left them, the pain and guilt of their family fracturing, but there was more to it than that. Whatever had happened between them must have hurt Haru deeply.

Suga rested his head on Haru’s shoulder as he continued to rifle through his mementos. Daichi asked questions about anything that caught his eye, keeping the conversation light and jovial. Suga knew he must have picked up on the strain in Haru so he’s doing his best to distract him, prevent him from dwelling on it.

Suga smiled to himself, very happy with the latest addition to their family.

Chapter End Notes
Yes, Sousuke's partner is THAT Tanaka because he's amazing and needs to be appreciated more.
Normally the universal dread of Mondays didn’t have a strong effect on Haru. His routine was more or less the same no matter what day of the week it was: workout, make art, swim. What made this beginning of this week different was that Haru had spent the last three days stuck at home with a nasty stomach bug. Haru absolutely refused to get sick, but he couldn’t deny that he was knocked out of commission this time.

Now that he was mostly recovered, he had to get back into his routine and that obligation weighed on him. To add insult to the injury of his body betraying him, it meant he missed the swim team’s weekend away meet in Okinawa.

It wasn’t that he was particularly upset about missing the competition itself, his times were comfortably better than the roster of swimmers his coach had showed him. His irritation came from missing a free trip south where the famed Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium resided.

It was an aquarium that his dreams were made of. Seventy-seven tanks of glorious ocean residents, from manatees to mysterious deep sea creatures. His plan was to spend every free hour of the trip there, observing and sketching as much as he could.

But no, his immune system had to go and be the biggest jerk on the planet and make him miss it. Haru let out a long-suffering sigh. He’ll get there someday. For now he’ll have to be content to visit the aquariums within a reasonable distance.

He wondered if he would be able to bribe Sousuke into coming with him. To help him carry his art supplies, of course.

When he arrived at practice that evening, he was relieved that his coach said he could take it easy and just do laps for as long as he wanted. He was recovering, but his strength hadn’t returned just yet after not being able to stomach much food for three days.

After almost an hour of slow laps (which were still quicker than some of his teammates’ times, much to their dismay), Haru heaved himself out of the pool. He spent the rest of the time stretching, lost in his own world, making a mental grocery list to replenish his empty fridge. It was just him to feed for a few more days, Sousuke having gone out to the country for training exercises. Sousuke sent him
texts whenever he could to check on him. Haru wasn’t planning on even discussing his illness, ready to make up some bullshit excuse about why he wasn’t in Okinawa, but Sousuke had heard Haru throwing up mid phone call the day after he arrived on site. They were mostly nagging messages about taking proper care of himself, but Haru felt more endeared than annoyed by the ordeal. It was nice to know Sousuke still cared, even when he wasn’t in front of him.

It wasn’t until one of the assistant coaches called out to him that he realized how long he was spacing out. Almost everyone had changed and gone already. The coach urged Haru to get some more rest before he entered in the locker room to shower and change.

As he finished getting dressed, Haru’s relay team approached him with suspiciously pleased looks on their faces and their arms hidden behind their backs. Haru pulled on his jacket and quirked an eyebrow in question.

Touya spoke first, “We knew how much you were looking forward to going to Okinawa.”

“We felt really bad about it, so we wanted to do something to make up for it!” Ichirou added.

Yamato revealed a couple homemade DVDs and held them out to Haru, “We went to the aquarium ourselves and filmed as much as we could of the exhibits and some of the special programs they offered.”

Stunned, Haru took the discs and stared at each man in turn. A look of confusion filled his eyes, as if to ask you did this all for me?

“One of the biologists is a big fan of yours and said that if you come visit he’ll give you a personal behind the scenes tour!”

“We also got you this!” Touya and Ichirou stepped aside to unveil the object they had hidden behind them: a stuffed whale shark as long as Haru’s torso.

Haru’s jaw dropped, matching the gaping mouth of the plush. He tucked the DVDs safely in his bag and slowly reached forward for it.

Yamato explained in a soft, kind voice, “You doodle them a lot in your notebooks. Churaumi is kinda famous for them, so I thought that they must be one of the reasons you really wanted to go.”

“Plus, you’re super into weird looking things and this monster definitely qualifies,” Touya stretched out his mouth in imitation of the fish.

Seemingly forgetting that he’s in the locker room with an audience, Haru rubbed his face against the shark and gave it a squeeze.

“Thank you so much, guys. I’m really happy.”

The rosy hue that swept over Haru’s cheeks as he lovingly smiled at them made the three swimmer’s hearts pound. They couldn’t resist and surged forward, enveloping Haru in a joyful group hug usually reserved for races.

As Haru left himself laugh and reciprocate their feelings, the three friends silently agreed on one thing: Yamazaki Sousuke had better appreciate what he had or there would be hell to pay.
Haru was laying on his stomach in his living room, half resting on top of the new whale shark plush that he’d hardly let go of since getting it a couple days ago. He even slept with it, his bad dreams becoming less frequent now that he had something to hold on to in the night.

To show how grateful and touched he was by his teammates’ thoughtfulness, Haru had invited them all over for dinner the previous night. He tried to cook everyone’s favorites, or at least what they frequently ordered when they went out to eat, and sent them home with freshly baked cookies. They were incredibly moved just by being allowed into Haru’s apartment and declared their unwavering loyalty to him. Haru was confused, but accepted their weird pledge with fondness.

Pulling his laptop over, he quickly refreshed his inbox, finding what he was looking for.

FROM: Hazuki Nagisa

Haru-chan, guess what! I aced my midterm in Sociology of the Family! Taking classes during summer quarter still sucks, but at least I’m getting good grades. Rei-chan said that as a reward, we’ll take a ferry to Canada! I reallllly want to see a moose! And have maple flavored everything! Do you think maple rice balls would be good? Is Sou-chan back from his training yet? I hope it’s not too long from now, I don’t want you to get lonely, Haru-chan!
Rei-chan says my study break is over I’ll talk to you tomorrow! LOVE YOU LOTS, HARU-CHAN!

PS Also Rei-chan says hi and he loves you too! σ(≧ε≦ o )

Emails from Nagisa always made Haru smile. He replied quickly, letting the blond know that no, maple rice balls did NOT sound appetizing and he hopes that Rei will not let him insult rice that way. Adding some praise for Nagisa’s hard work and a quick note to Rei, he sent off his reply and shut his laptop.

The phone beside him lit up. Haru quickly went to his messages, having a good idea who it was from.

From: Whale Shark
I’m starving and my fridge is a barren wasteland.

To: Whale Shark
Be there soon.

To: Whale Shark
Glad you’re back.

From: Whale Shark
Me too.

From: Whale Shark
Now hurry up.
Haru rolled his eyes, but if anyone was watching him now, his smile gave him away.

It was a few days later when Sousuke rounded the corner to his apartment, surprised to see a form curled up against his door. Haru’s knees were pulled tight against his chest and his head buried in his arms. The erratic breathing was obvious as Sousuke squatted down next to him. He knew what this was. He couldn’t count the number of times he came home from an appointment emotionally wrecked and immediately skyped Rin for comfort. It was either that or hit the nearest bar to go home with someone he never intended to see again. He was glad that Haru wasn’t the type to cope using the latter method.

“Rough session today?”

He barely caught the slightest of nods from Haru’s still hidden face. Therapy was like this sometimes. It wasn’t all fluffy feelings of reassurance and miraculous breakthroughs. Inner turmoil can be like a jagged wound that never healed properly. Sometimes you had to cut it open again to stitch it up right.

“Come on, I’ll make dinner.” He pulled Haru up to his feet. He let himself be tugged into his friend’s apartment. He slipped off his shoes and waited for Sousuke to guide him wherever he wanted.

Sousuke only paused for a second before leading Haru into the bathroom and reached over to start filling the tub.

“You have thirty minutes,” he turned around to leave and finally looked at Haru’s face. He’d been crying, there’s no way to mask his swollen, bloodshot eyes, but they were full of what Sousuke assumed was gratitude.

The urge to pull Haru into his arms and hold him, tell him that this was part of getting better - that there would less and less days like this - coursed powerfully through his body. Sousuke took a step toward him, but didn’t reach out, still not sure of Haru’s boundaries, not willing to risk pushing the limits of their new friendship. He settled for gently tucking Haru’s overgrown bangs behind his ears, fingers lingering on the sharp curve of the start of his jaw. Haru tilted his head, eyelids fluttering shut, pressing his cheek into Sousuke’s warm palm. Sousuke was dumbstruck by the intimacy of the moment.

They stood like that for several heartbeats, Sousuke hardly daring to breathe, not wanting to ruin this (whatever this was).

When he recognized the familiar sound of the tub reaching its capacity, Sousuke let his thumb run across Haru’s cheekbone before he slowly pulled his hand away to turn off the faucet. He tried to make his voice sound as gentle as possible, not wanting to Haru feel awkward about their contact, “Get in before it starts cooling down.”

As Sousuke walked past him he heard the whispered “thank you, Sou” before closing the door behind him. He clenched the hand that had so tenderly held Haru’s face, the heat he felt there transferring to his own.

He stomped to the kitchen and splashed cold water on his face. When his heart had stopped racing he towed off and reached into the fridge to get dinner started.
Haru emerged almost exactly thirty minutes later, having stolen another shirt from his friend. This one was pink with pandas covering it. He was surprised to find it in Sousuke’s drawers, but he immediately fell in love and was already planning on ‘accidentally’ mixing it in with his own laundry. When he walked into the kitchen to check on dinner, Sousuke paled, staring in horror at the tee. He opened his mouth to say something, but decided against it as if talking about it would give the shirt too much power. He turned back to the omurice he was finishing.

Haru was pleased with the reaction. This was definitely his shirt from now on.

When the omelets were plated, Haru nudged Sousuke out of the way and grabbed the ketchup bottle.

“Haru.”

“The ketchup is the most important part and you have zero artistic ability.”

“Does it really matter?” Sousuke sighed.

“Yes.”

Sousuke rolled his eyes, but stepped back in defeat. When Haru was done each dinner was graced with the tomato likeness of Iwatobi-chan. Sousuke was about to say something in mock jest, but paused when he noticed a faint smile on Haru’s face. He clicked his tongue.

“Next time I want the Samezuka mascot on mine.”

Haru nodded and looked satisfied with the challenge. They took their plates to the couch and settled in. Sousuke grabbed the remote and scrolled through Haru’s queue on Netflix until he found one of his favorites. They ate in a comfortable silence, once again learning about the migration patterns of whales.

An alarm went off on Haru’s phone. With a scowl he turned it off and rooted through his bag for a small, orange bottle and took two of what was inside.

“What are those?” Sousuke asked. He hadn’t seen Haru take anything before and wondered when he had this prescription filled.

Haru handed him the medication. Sousuke read the unpronounceable name and wracked his brain for familiarity, “Antidepressants?”

Haru nodded.

“Are they helping?”

“It’s only been about a week, but Kotobuki-sensei said it may take a couple months for things to normal out if they do,” he shrugged and drank the rest of his water, “Right now they just make me feel tired and sick. Like everything is just getting worse.” Haru didn’t bother to mask the frustration in his voice.

Sousuke set the medication down on the coffee table and covered Haru’s hand in his, but Haru jerked away. Sousuke was not having it.

“Haruka, listen to me,” large but gentle hands cupped Haru’s face. He hoped that this was okay considering their exchange in the bathroom, “This does not make you weak. This does not mean you’re broken. You have nothing to be ashamed of.”
For a second the anger in Haru flared up, tired of hearing hollow words of sympathy. Of all people, Sousuke should know how degrading it feels to be told useless placations.

But because they came from Sousuke, Haru realized they couldn’t be empty. He had suffered too and probably thought the same things of himself. Who had been there for Sousuke to convince him he was worth something?

Haru’s shaking hands latched onto Sousuke’s wrists, eyes closed and letting tears spill out. Broken mumbles of apologies and explanations flew out of his mouth.

“Shh, Haruka, I get it. You don’t have to say anything, I understand,” taking a chance, he pulled the crying man to him, one arm wrapping around his waist and the other intertwined in soft black hair. Haru was now clinging to his shirt. Sousuke could feel the tears soaking through the fabric, but it didn’t matter; he would continue to be Haru’s rock.

When the sobs had turned into quiet sniffles, Sousuke grabbed the remote to resume the ocean documentary they had picked out. Haru shifted a bit so he could see the TV, but didn’t pull away from the hold.

They didn’t move apart until their film was almost over and they were graced by a skype call from Rin. He looked mildly surprised to see Haru there so late, sitting very close to Sousuke, a little red in the eyes. His friends had both told him that they were spending time together, but in Haru and Sousuke terms he assumed it meant getting dinner every so often and occasionally running errands together. Not...

Well, Rin also didn’t comment on the fact that he was ninety-nine percent sure the ridiculous shirt hanging off Haru’s shoulders belonged the owner of the apartment.

They chatted for a while, Haru and Rin comparing times and complaining about gruelling training regimens while Sousuke filled them in on idiots who bothered him at work. They had moved onto the subject of the latest superhero movie (Rin cried three times) when Sousuke felt Haru’s weight press against his side. He had fallen asleep, his head lolled onto Sousuke’s good shoulder. Rin merely quirked an eyebrow as his friend excused himself and maneuvered a half awake Haru away to bed. Before he was even seated properly back in front of his laptop, Rin pounced.

“You got a spare futon?”

“I didn’t.” Too many beats of silence followed. Sousuke knew exactly what Rin was getting at and was not going to give him the satisfaction of jumping at the bait.

“Why didn’t you tell me you and Haru are dating?!” Rin had a pissed off, but pleased expression that only he could pull off.

“Because we’re not.”

“Bullshit. He was wearing your clothes.”

“He took a bath.”

“You were playing with his hair,” Rin hissed, like it was a secret.

“It calms him down. He had a bad day.”

Rin was absolutely not convinced, “I know he’s made a lot of progress moving past his anti-social tendencies, but I still know Haru. He wouldn’t let you touch him like that unless he cares about you.
Unless he feels _safe_ with you. The only other person I’ve seen handle him like that was-”

“Don’t,” it came out as a growl.

Rin was taken aback by the fierce protectiveness in Sousuke. There was definitely more to this than his friends were letting on. He knew he had to proceed cautiously, “Fine, no mentions of the ex. But all I’m saying is if you two aren’t dating-”

“We’re not.”

“-both of you need to be careful and open about whatever it is you’re doing.”

Sousuke rolled his eyes, “Thanks, dad.”

“I’m serious! Haru isn’t in the best place right now and-”

“I _know_, Rin. I know better than anyone what he’s going through right now.”

Under Sousuke’s gaze, Rin shifts uncomfortably knowing that he contributed to that pain.

Sousuke’s features softened. He didn’t like the guilty look on Rin’s face, all of that stuff was in the past - just like his feud with Haru. “I care about him, Rin, and I’m going to help him get through this. Can we just leave it at that?”

Defeated, Rin sighs, “okay, okay, I get it. I’m glad he has you to depend on.” Sousuke returned Rin’s heartfelt smile. “But I better be the first person you tell when you finally touch his butt.”

This time Sousuke rolled his eyes so hard that he thought they might pop out of his head, “Goodnight, Rin.”

He closed his laptop, double checked the locks on the front door, and turned off the lights on the way to bedroom. Climbing under the blankets, he noticed Haru was a little closer to him than he normally was. Making sure his alarm was set, he settled in and closed his eyes.

“What’s this about touching my butt?”

Sousuke groaned, ignoring Haru’s muffled sniggering, “Why are we even friends with that idiot?”

_I’m going to kill Rin._

By the time Haru woke up late in the afternoon, Sousuke had already left for his shift. Wandering out into the kitchen to ease the anger in his stomach he noticed a note on the table.

**Haruka-**

_I texted Yamato to let him know you wouldn’t make it to practice (you owe him dinner). I’ll be back around 10 if you decide to stick around, if not, text me when you get home. Remember to eat._

_Sousuke_

_PS. You can keep this one._
Haru picked up a small shiny trinket that was left on top of the note. A wave of complicated emotions rushed through him as he stared at it.

It was a key.

His own key to Sousuke’s apartment.

Chapter End Notes

I hope this gave you feelings; it gave me a lot of feelings.

Rin knows what's up (Sousuke is so fucked).

*whispers* I sketched a couple scenes:
http://tspofnutmeg.tumblr.com/post/148840527283/a-couple-sketches-of-scenes-from-chapter-seven-of
Haru was in his customary middle seat on the couch, nestled between Koushi and Daichi. Last week he had mentioned that he’d never seen a volleyball game and that he wanted to know more about them. It wasn’t the sport itself that piqued his interested, he just knew that it was supremely important to his new friends and wanted to try to understand. They had been enthusiastic when he discussed his swimming with them, and Koushi had even managed to make it to a couple practice meets. It was only fair that he returned the favor.

The couple was so moved by Haru’s request that they decided their next movie night would feature the taped games from Karasuno’s run to Nationals. Haru agreed, glad that he’d be able to see them both play.

After a few minutes of watching the intense back and forth, Haru realized he really had no idea what was going on. He understood that the ball touching the floor meant a point, but that was about it. Thankfully, as soon as he shot a confused look to Koushi, they jumped in to explain the game. They paused to go over what just happened, did replays of spectacular receives and spikes, and slowed down complex plays so Haru could grasp what he was looking at.

Haru was marveled by how complicated the game was, especially with how much and how quickly you had to work together as a team. He could never imagine putting himself in that kind of situation. In the relay, you believed in and supported each other, but you only really had to focus on yourself when you were in the water.

They finished with the match against Shiratorizawa that had everyone on the edge of their seats. It was cute that despite being there and knowing the outcome, Koushi and Daichi still had such strong reactions to the game. Haru understood, his chest would tighten when he thought about the relays with Rin and Rei and not just because it would inevitably rehash memories of Makoto.

The couch shifted, Daichi getting up to throw together a quick late dinner while Suga had to respond to an email from his advisor about his thesis. Haru was content to play with his phone, spacing out while checking to see if Joe DiMeowgio had shown up in his Neko Atsume home yet.

Haru felt a jab at his cheek and turned to look at Koushi. He and Daichi were staring at him, holding out a plate of tofu stir fry.
“Spill.”

Frowning a little in confusion as he took his meal, Haru raised an eyebrow to show he had no idea what his friend was talking about.

“Something is obviously on your mind and I get the feeling you want to talk about it,” Suga explained, gently patting Haru’s hand in reassurance.

Haru looked away, a little embarrassed. Was he really that obvious? He wanted to think it wasn’t such a big deal, but he also couldn’t stop thinking about it. His chopsticks fiddled with a piece of broccoli as he replied, “Sousuke left me a key.”

Daichi put his plate down and crossed over his chest, frowning deeply at the statement. “He gave you a key. To his apartment?”

Haru nodded, wondering why Daichi looked so concerned and if it was something he needed to feel too.

Suga could see Daichi’s jaw tense, probably clenching his teeth as he thought about the best way to address the situation. Knowing how cautiously Daichi approached these types of things, he most likely wanted to have Haru take him to Sousuke now so they could have a one-to-one chat about his intentions.

*Daichi is so straightforward it’s embarrassing*, Suga thought fondly. He jumped in before Daichi could make his request.

“That seems pretty practical, doesn’t it? You go over to his apartment frequently enough that having your own key means he doesn’t have to worry about you stuck waiting if something comes up,” Suga reasoned.

Haru nodded again, mulling over what Koushi said. It certainly made sense considering what happened the night before getting the key. Haru sitting broken on his welcome mat must have been a sore sight for Sousuke to come home to.

Suga studied Haru thoughtfully. He seemed to know that this wasn’t insignificant, but he probably didn’t know *why* exactly. Well, didn’t know or couldn’t yet handle where his feelings were leading him. Of course, Suga wasn’t one hundred percent sure what those feelings were, but he had a pretty good idea based off his own experiences.

There were three key things Suga looked for when it came to friends who are unknowingly more than friends. He and Daichi had done all of them so often that he felt absolutely ridiculous that it took them as long as it had to confess to one another. Gotta love that hindsight.

Number one: making up excuses to spend time together. How many times did Daichi ask Suga to go over volleyball plays and rosters with him even though they had discussed them during practice? How many times did Suga drag Daichi to the library or a cafe for extra study sessions even though they were both doing well in their classes? Even on weekends there would be something that popped up that allowed the boys to steal a couple hours together.

Suga still feels a little regretful that they could’ve been doing all those things and kissing that entire time. When he told Daichi about it, he laughed and promised he’d pay Suga back with interest. As far as Suga was concerned, Daichi would never be out of debt.

Haru didn’t keep it a secret that he spent most of his free time with Sousuke. Whenever Suga prompted Haru to tell him about his week, it would always be *something* with Sousuke - going
shopping, making dinner, or binge watching the latest Netflix original series.

But Suga always heard it for what it truly was, (hidden underneath the necessity of being productive or relaxing and eating) it was volleyball strategies and studying. Also known as: ‘anything is fine as long as I’m with you.’

Of course, with as reluctant as Haru is to talk about those types of feelings, he’d probably rather eat one of his swim suits before saying a phrase like that. One of the nice things about Haru, though, is that he doesn’t need to say it - his actions speak loud enough and his behavior alludes to how much Sousuke means to him.

Number two: playful teasing. That was the basis of Daichi and Suga’s high school interactions. Although it had been fun and brought them closer together, he’s honestly embarrassed when he thinks about how many times he sassed or punched Daichi when what he really wanted was to tell him he loves him. They still don’t hesitate to poke fun at each other, but now their gently wounded pride can be mended with smooches or more intimate activities.

Haru had mentioned that they were definitely not friends growing up, so naturally Koushi was worried that any antagonistic interactions would bring up old feelings. But Haru was adamant that it was nothing to worry about. That, in fact, them being able to say a few jerkish comments to one another showed that they were comfortable together.

Suga wasn’t convinced at first, but slowly stopped his worrying. He wouldn’t admit it because he had to maintain his flawless image, but sometimes Suga just happened to sneak a glance at text messages between the two while sitting next to Haru. The small smile that would bloom on Haru’s face proved that ‘idiot’ and ‘asshole’ were more pet names than anything else. If he had learned anything in high school it was that ‘dumbass’ did indeed count as a term of endearment if coming from the right person.

Number three: ample unnecessary touching. Don’t even get Suga started.

He was the type for the casual interactions, ones that could easily be brushed off as accidents or just being overly friendly. He wasn’t always punching Daichi - he also constantly bumped their shoulders together, brushed his hand against his while walking, squeeze Daichi’s biceps or forearms while speaking with him, and sit a little too close so their knees or thighs would press against each other.

Daichi, on the other hand, was ripped right out of a romance comic. He would come up from behind and have his arms around Suga to correct his form during practice. Daichi would press his forehead against his because he looked like he might have a fever and wanted to check. More often than not when Suga would be spacing out and lose his footing (usually because someone’s majestic thighs were far too distracting), it would be Daichi’s equally majestic arms that would catch him right in the nick of time.

It’s no wonder the team thought they were already dating. If it was Suga observing others dancing around like that, he’d be convinced as well.

This was the big question mark Suga had about the relationship between Haru and Sousuke and became the motivator to get them to attend a group outing.

Suga knew that Haru spent the night often at the other man’s apartment, but he didn’t know what sleeping arrangements were like and wasn’t about to ask something so personal. He had also kept that tidbit of information from Daichi who would go into protective overdrive if the answer was anything less than them sleeping in separate rooms with locks on the door. What a hypocrite.
From what Suga had heard about Sousuke, he seemed like a well meaning guy, content with supporting Haru and letting him do things in his own way and speed. It was the right way to handle sensitive Haru, Suga thought, it showed that Sousuke respected and trusted him.

Yes, he decided, Sousuke giving Haru an open invitation into his space was probably a good development, but he and Daichi needed to be sure. They were the responsible ones, afterall.

Good thing that Suga knew the perfect opportunity. “Haru, I have a great idea! You should invite Sousuke-kun to Daichi’s game at the end of the month!”

Haru raised an eyebrow at Suga’s wide grin.

Daichi caught on to Suga’s train of thought immediately, “Excellent idea, Koushi! It’s about time we all met and got to know each other.”

Haru regarded them not without suspicion. They were a little too excited about inviting Sousuke to this game for it to be entirely altruistic. But if Haru was honest, he wanted them all to meet. Part of it was selfish: Haru sometimes wondered if he’d feel a little less lonely seeing how happy Daichi and Koushi were if he could bring a friend to some of their gatherings. But he also noticed that both parties seemed genuinely interested in each other from the tidbits Haru shared.

Haru smiled at them and agreed, “I’ll make sure Sousuke’s schedule is free.”

The scent of tonkatsu was heavy in the air, causing Sousuke’s mouth to water as soon as he walked into his apartment. He dropped his bag by his shoes before collapsing on the couch, stretching his legs out. He called to Haru in the kitchen, “How did you know?”

“Know what?” Haru asked over the sound of crackling oil.

“That today was absolute shit and I needed pork.”

He heard Haru’s amused snort, “You only texted me about it half a dozen times. Sit up, it’s almost ready.”

Haru delivered a heaping plate of tonkatsu to Sousuke’s waiting hands. It was barely out of Haru’s grip before Sousuke had started eating. Haru rolled his eyes and mumbled “you’re an animal” while he set down a chilled beer on the coffee table. Sousuke merely shrugged, shoving another piece of meat in his mouth. Haru flicked his forehead for his bad manners before he headed back to grab his own plate.

Haru sat down next to Sousuke who pressed their shoulders together in a sign of silent thanks. Nudging him back, Haru picked up the remote and put on the most recent Mission Impossible movie that he knew Sousuke wanted to see. Sousuke let out a pleased growl. Haru had to bite his lip not to laugh, he really was an animal - a big, goofy dog.

When they finished eating, Haru took the plates to the kitchen and retrieved another beer for Sousuke. He knew he was spoiling him, but Sousuke did no less when it was Haru who was having a bad day.

Returning to the living room, Haru clicked his tongue in annoyance. In the two minutes he was gone,
Sousuke had taken over the couch again, his long body draped over all available space.

“Move,” Haru slapped his knee.

With a grunt and focus never leaving the movie, Sousuke turned on his side and scooted back against the cushions. Haru narrowed his eyes and studied the area presented to him. With a huff he sat, but quickly stretched out, mimicking Sousuke’s position. Haru’s more compact body was the perfect size to take up the rest of the couch. He heard a breath catch in Sousuke’s throat, no doubt surprised at their close proximity.

Still feeling a teensy bit vengeful, Haru shifted, his back pressed flush against Sousuke’s chest. It was really more direct contact than they have had before, but if Sousuke was feeling uncomfortable he could just fucking deal, or move and give Haru adequate space.

Honestly, Haru wasn’t sure which outcome he preferred.

Haru had to admit that although this was different, it wasn’t awkward. They were often touching in some way, so being so close to Sousuke wasn’t disagreeable. Plus, Sousuke was apparently a volcano and constantly cold Haru found the heat radiating off of him to be pleasant rather than suffocating. Was it normal to enjoy spooning with your friend? Probably not, but since when had Haru been normal?

What Haru didn’t know was that Sousuke had become conscious, very conscious, about particular interactions with him since Rin had joked about them dating. Every time he touched Haru felt a little different now. He felt like he managed to catch sight of more of Haru’s soft smiles and more often felt whenever the other’s eyes were on him. He’d become so much more aware of Haru.

And this - they were spooning for fuck’s sake - definitely had his attention.

Despite how hard he tried to concentrate on the movie, Sousuke couldn’t help but notice how well their bodies fit together in this position. Haru was just short enough that Sousuke could still see the TV over the top of his head. Haru’s shoulders were more narrow so that if Sousuke had wanted to wrap an arm around him, they’d both be comfortable. Just what he needed, more confusing feelings to process.

Thankfully another distraction popped up in the form of his cell phone going off. It was some obnoxious American pop-rap song that Sousuke definitely did not set for the caller, but he did know who had. Naturally, Sousuke let the call ring through to voicemail.

“Dodging calls now?”

“I learned from the best,” Sousuke got an elbow in the stomach for his sass.

“It’s just Tanaka. He’s bugging me about going on a double date with him tomorrow.”

“Oh.” For some reason this information surprised Haru and made him uncomfortable. “Do you do that sort of thing often?”

“What sort of thing?”

Haru could hear the teasing lilt in Sousuke’s voice. Haru knew he was already trapped in this situation so might as well soldier on, “Go out on blind dates.”

“I used to when we first started working together. Tanaka is hellbent on finding ‘the one.’” Something about how all of his old teammates from high school found their true loves and he was always single.
But honestly, Tanaka’s taste is awful. He has not once successfully picked out a guy who is my type.”

Haru tensed. He had no idea about Sousuke’s preferences because they avoided the subject of romantic entanglements as much as possible. “You’re gay?” he asked softly.

“Bi, but I prefer dating men,” he offered casually.

Silence settled over them for a bit as a thrilling motorcycle chase scene stole Sousuke’s attention.

When it was over, Haru spoke up with the annoying question he couldn’t get out of his mind, “...So what is your type?”

“Going to play matchmaker, Nanase?” Sousuke pretended to be chill, but on the inside he was screaming. His gut response to the question just so happened to be things that described the man currently pressed against him. No, he could not say them, absolutely could not.

Haru scoffed to cover his uncertainty, “I just want to know what kind of impossible person you’re demanding your partner to find for you.”

“It’s hardly impossible. Just someone, you know, who’s energetic, super talkative, smiles constantly...” he made sure that his voice was light and held enough sarcasm that Haru wouldn’t think he was being serious.

Haru dug his heel into Sousuke’s shin, “Don’t know anyone like that.”

“Then I guess your company will do for now.”

Haru knew he was joking, but he couldn’t help the worry creeping into his body. Did Sousuke not enjoy hanging out with Haru as much as he did? Did he spend too much time with Sousuke, keeping him from finding lovers or other friends? Was he being a burden? An obligation to uphold so Rin doesn’t have to worry?

He was suddenly feeling like he had made a mistake by getting into this conversation.

Sousuke must have picked up on Haru’s internal panic and smiled to himself. He prodded Haru’s cheek with his pointer finger, pulling on the skin to force Haru’s mouth into a half smile. Haru growled and shot a look of disdain over his shoulder, but his expression softened into a pout when he saw the goofy smirk on Sousuke’s face.

Haru relaxed a little and let their attention return to the movie. They were just in time to see the pieces of the mystery come together and find out how Tom Cruise would execute his final battle.

It was Sousuke who interrupted the silence this time. “What about you, Haru?”

“What about me, Sousuke?”

He sighed, “You’re gay, right?”

Haru considered it for a several seconds before responding, “I guess I’m gay.”

“You guess?” Sousuke questioned.

Sousuke felt him shrug. “I’ve only been in the one relationship. But I’ve never considered women, so I guess that means I’m gay.”
“That’s fair,” Sousuke took a deep breath before his next question, “So what’s your type?”

Again, he took his time to think about his answer.

“Not that it would do you much good, but…” Haru turned his head to regard Sousuke with cool, half lidded eyes. When he spoke, his voice came out rich and deep, “I happen to like nice men.”

Haru turned his attention back to the tv, smirking to himself at Sousuke’s stunned face.

Recovering from seeing a new side of Haru, Sousuke cleared his throat but stayed silent, now running his fingers through Haru’s hair. He originally picked up the behavior because it made Haru comfortable, but it had become a relaxing habit for Sousuke too. When he wasn’t sure of what to say or when he was worried, his hands would instinctively find their way to the soft locks.

Sousuke wondered how much conditioner Haru went through in a month.

He also wondered if maybe he pushed Haru’s buttons a little too often - that Haru was reminded a little too much of how Sousuke intimidated him in the past. Or maybe Haru didn’t appreciate how frequently Sousuke nagged him about taking care of himself - maybe it was too reminiscent of how Tachibana fretted over him. Was he pushing his luck? Was he not being a good friend?

He caught Haru’s reflection in the TV as the screen went black before returning to the main menu. He had that mischievous little smile on his face and Sousuke couldn’t believe that he took Haru’s taunt seriously for even a second.

Sousuke poked Haru in the cheek again and grumbled, “I am ‘nice men.’”

Haru hummed a questioning noise, earning him a pinch on the side and a muttered “rude.”

Chuckling, Haru reached back to pat Sousuke comfortably on his hip.

“You’re nice enough.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry not sorry for the second appearance of Star Wars flirting.

Again, I'd like to express my undying appreciation for everyone who is reading, commenting, kudos-ing, subscribing, bookmarking, and recommending this fic! This story means so much to me and I'm really happy to share it with all of you!
when I'm with you there's no point in breathing

Chapter Summary

Things get set in motion.

Chapter Notes

Me: I feel like it's been too long since I made Haru sad.
Friend: Meg.
Friend: You're right but it feels wrong.
Me: You gotta be hurt in order to be comforted.

(plz rest assured I would never make Haru upset for long. He is so important to me)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sousuke had gone through his entire closet during the last thirty minutes trying to decide on an outfit.
This is so stupid, it's not like he’s my boyfriend. It's not like they're his parents.

But the truth of it is that Haru had become a very important person to him and his affection for Sugawara and Sawamura was obvious. He needs to make a good impression because Sousuke plans on having Haru in his life for the foreseeable future.

When Haru had extended the invitation to the volleyball match, Sousuke started sweating. Sure, it sounded like a casual, fun get together, but he saw through it.

This was his Judgement.

They were going to see if Sousuke was worthy of being in Haru’s personal bubble. He could’ve laughed it off, saying that they barely knew Haru and had no right, but he knew that wasn’t true. Haru had instantly taken to them both and they doted upon him like it was they were getting paid for it. He usually gave zero shits about the opinions of other people. This was the first time Sousuke felt the pressure of needing someone to like him.

It was not a good feeling.

Noticing that he’d be late if he spent any more time fussing, he went with the first thing he tried on: relaxed grey jeans and a black and white plaid button up with rolled up sleeves. Haru had advised him of Sawamura’s team colors (black and red) so he left the shirt open to show off the crimson t-shirt he wore underneath. The splash of red would be enough to show support for the proper players.

He speed walked to the station, glad that they agreed to meet there rather than at the stadium so he didn’t have a 40 minute trip to fret (as well as remove the very real possibility he’d get lost on his way there). When he arrived, he spotted Haru with a shorter, silver haired man.

The man had to be Sugawara - Haru didn’t have conversations with strangers in the train station -
plus he was wearing a red jersey with the number three and kanji for “Sawamura” on the back. He had a feeling it would match with the man he’d meet later.

As he approached, Sousuke was surprised about how naturally beautiful Sugawara was. A little too soft and sweet looking to his personal tastes, but he could still appreciate the aesthetic. Especially in contrast to Haru’s darker coloring, the two effortlessly stylish men made quite the pair. He could see several people pass by admiring them.

To be honest, it was kind of annoying.

He jogged the rest of the way to where they were waiting, trying out what he thought was his friendliest grin. “I hope you weren’t here too long.”

Haru performed his usual greeting of giving Sousuke’s wrist a brief squeeze and gave a small smile in acknowledgement, “Sugawara Koushi, this is Yamazaki Sousuke.”

“Oh, you’re huge!” Suga’s eyes thoroughly raked over Sousuke from his shoes to his hair.

Sousuke was honestly not sure how to respond to that. He heard similar statements from people all the time, but they weren’t usually spoken with such awe.

“Don’t let Daichi hear you say that, he’ll get jealous,” Haru teased.

Suga blushed, realizing the suggestive nature of what he said. He quickly recovered, “I’m sure Dai will also be impressed with Sousuke-kun! We’re athletes, well former athlete in my case, we appreciate a good physique when we see one.”

Haru rolled his eyes when Suga winked at Sousuke who chuckled, feeling his nerves ebb away. “It’s nice to meet you Sugawara-san. Haru speaks very highly of you.”

Koushi waved off his politeness and responded, “Please, call me Suga. You know, without your guidance I wouldn’t have even met Haru. I owe you one!”

Suga gave a friendly punch to Sousuke’s arm. Even though Sousuke routinely practiced his hand to hand combat, he had to hold back a grimace of pain. Suga was much stronger than he looked.

Blushing, Haru glared at both of them before walking toward their train. They shared a laugh and followed closely behind, Suga instructing them on which platform they needed to be on.

The train ride was spent with Suga and Sousuke exchanging information and stories. Haru added a comment every so often, but was content to listen to the others. Sousuke could definitely understand how Haru had taken to Suga so quickly. He had a soothing presence that was somehow also filled with energy. It was easy to share with him; he made the right choice of going into psychology.

The conversation was easy and the questions Suga threw at Sousuke were harmless. Sousuke felt like he was making a good impression, but didn’t let his guard down yet. If he was the nice one, that meant Sawamura would play bad cop. That would be the one whose approval he really needed.

There was a sizable crowd milling about when they arrived at the gymnasium. A majority of the people were wearing red and black in support. Everyone else seemed to be wearing blue and yellow, no doubt rooting for the away team. Suga mentions offhand how much it killed Daichi at first to wear the uniform because it was the same colors as their Tokyo rivals from high school.

Suga led them inside, greeting every staff member they passed, along with what Sousuke assumed to be families of the other players. They were on the side of the court now, heading to where the
players were gathered in a loose group. Suga motioned for the two guests to stay there.

“DAI-CHAN!” Suga shouted as he ran over, waving his arms in the air like he was stranded on an island, trying to get a plane’s attention.

A muscular man with short dark hair turned around just in time to catch Suga, who had thrown himself into the other’s arms. After receiving a quick kiss on the forehead, Suga straightened up and motioned to where he left them waiting.

Sousuke noticed how Sawamura’s eyes immediately hardened as they swept over him. They stopped a few feet in front of Sousuke, Sawamura obviously sizing him up. Sousuke stood a little straighter and maintained eye contact. He didn’t want to get on his bad side, but Sousuke also didn’t back down when he was being challenged. He had nothing to worry about, he tried to remind himself, he treated Haru well.

“You’re huge,” Daichi nodded once in approval. Haru and Suga tried to cover up a snorts of laughter with coughs.

Sousuke tried not to feel embarrassed by reaching out to shake his hand. “Yamazaki Sousuke. Nice to meet you.”

Daichi took it and held his gaze. His chocolate eyes seemed to bore into him, trying to find an answer to a question Sousuke didn’t know. Apparently he got it right because Daichi soon broke out into a wide grin, “Sawamura Daichi, but just Daichi is fine. Thanks for coming today, it should be a good game. Do you know much about volleyball?”

Sousuke let his shoulders relax. “I’ve seen a little on TV during the Olympics, but that’s all.” “No problem, Koushi can fill you in on anything you need to know,” Suga threw a peace sign up in agreement.

Someone shouted for Daichi and he turned around to give them a wave, “I have to finish warming up, but I’m glad I got to meet you first, Sousuke-kun!”

Koushi gave Daichi a kiss for luck and a slap on the rear for good measure which caused Daichi to blush and Suga to laugh. Sousuke couldn’t help but smile at their affectionate exchange. He felt something at his wrist, looking down to see Haru wrapping his fingers around it. Tugging at him, Haru led the way to their seats with Koushi following, continuing to shout sappy phrases of love and encouragement at his partner. The team must be used to it because they took it in stride, chuckling at Daichi’s red face and elbowing him in a not unkind way.

Suga stopped teasing eventually and turned to his companions to explain the different positions and the rules. He gave background information on the teams, not so subtly bragging about Daichi’s talent for defense. “He’s the absolute best at receiving,” he said with a sly wink that made them blush. Sousuke was learning that Suga hid many surprises under his gentle looks.

During the game they were kept updated them on certain moves and strategies. Sousuke enjoyed learning more about volleyball and the match as a whole, but most of his focus was on Suga and Daichi. The way that Suga’s eyes were filled with fire whenever Daichi received the ball. The way that Daichi would smile and wink at Suga after he scored a point as if to say that one’s for you. He was impressed by Suga’s endless enthusiasm and Daichi’s serious perseverance. They made a great pair and Sousuke was certain he’d never seen a couple more in love. Haru wasn’t kidding when he told him that they were perfect for each other.

Whenever he glanced over at Haru, he would always be intently following the ball with a little but
excited grin on his face. He didn’t cheer much, but Sousuke heard a few Nice kill! s slip as Daichi’s
team scored. When Suga was too caught up in the game, Haru would lean over and elaborate using
his knowledge from viewing the Karasuno matches. Sousuke thought it was adorable. They were
sitting close, elbows and knees pressed together. But Sousuke played off his erratic pulse as a result
from the fast paced sport rather than their proximiy.

Daichi’s team had won their first set. During the short break he had bounded over to them to say hi.
He pushed Suga down into his seat with a deep kiss and ran back to his team muttering something
about ‘recharging his batteries.’ It was Koushi’s turn to be left red and speechless. Haru and Sousuke
tried and failed to stifle their laughter.

The match went to all five sets, but Daichi’s determination and encouragement to his team never
faltered and they managed to eek out a win. They stayed in their seats as the crowd thinned out,
giving the teams the time they needed to pack up and hit the showers.

Suga could not stop gushing about how thrilling it all was. Haru and Sousuke tried to keep up, but
the longer Suga talked, the more excited he became and nonsense words like ‘GWAAAH’ slipped
into his explanations.

Daichi came out to collect them and lead them to the izakaya where they usually celebrated their
victories (or mourned a loss). The entire upstairs was reserved for the team and their guests so they
wouldn’t disturb the other patrons with their rambunctious reenactments of the game.

At first Sousuke and Haru felt out of place, but everyone was energetic and friendly. Some even
recognized Haru from articles or a few art pieces that were in cafes scattered around town. They also
found out that Daichi and Suga had a rotation of guests, bringing along whichever members of their
extended family were available that day. That information didn’t surprise either of them.

Daichi and Suga weren’t able to spend much time with their guests as they were too popular with
everyone else in attendance. Sousuke didn’t mind, willing to put off an intensive interrogation for
another day. Haru too, seemed content enough to mostly observe until someone came up to speak
with them.

After a couple hours the party was dying down. Haru was engrossed in conversation with the team
libero who is an experienced scuba diver, traveling around the world to visit famed diving spots. The
way that Haru’s eyes sparkled meant that Sousuke was probably going to catch him researching
online exactly what the requirements are to get certified.

It takes another half an hour before Haru tugs on his sleeve, tilting his head and asking with his eyes
if Sousuke wanted to go. He offered a tired smile and a slight inclination of his head in response.
Haru immediately got up, pulling Sousuke with him. They wobbled over to where Daichi and Suga
were sitting to let them know they were heading out. Suga looked guilty, realizing that they had left
their guests to fend for themselves for a long while, but Haru waved it off. They had fun. With a few
parting ‘thanks’ and promises to text each other tomorrow, Sousuke and Haru left, deciding to walk
off some of their buzz through the park.

“Hold on.” Sousuke led them over to a dessert stand nestled by a beautiful fountain. Haru eyed it
wistfully. He had overcome his habit to strip and jump into any available body of water, but the urge
still hit him sometimes. Like right now when he’s mildly intoxicated and relaxed. He wondered if
Sousuke had his jammers on beneath his pants.

When was the last time Sousuke had been swimming?

“We should do this more,” Sousuke commented as he turned back and handed Haru a waffle cone
filled with strawberry and matcha ice cream. He had coffee and caramel for himself.

Haru took an experimental lick and was delighted by the flavor combination. “What, watch volleyball?”

“Hang out,” Sousuke answered as they started walking again.

“We hang out all the time,” His expression was neutral, but his eyes were twinkling in amusement.

Sousuke sighed loudly, knowing that Haru was intentionally being an oblivious asshole, “I mean leave the apartment. Go out.” Wait, does that sound like I’m asking him out on a date? “F-For more than just errands.”

_Fucking smooth, Yamazaki._

Haru looked at his ice cream thoughtfully and slowly smiled, “I agree.”

Letting out an internal sigh of relief, Sousuke couldn’t help the (no doubt) ridiculous looking grin that went to his lips. He was lost in his own cloud of happiness and moving on autopilot back to the station. Neither of them said anything, but it was assumed that Haru would be accompanying him back to his apartment. The train out of the city was unusually crowded for a Saturday evening, forcing them to be shoved and jostled continuously. Haru reached out and looped his arm loosely through Sousuke’s.

Breath caught in his throat, Sousuke glanced down at Haru who merely looked away and mumbled, “For balance.”

Squeezing his arm to his side had the intended effect of pulling Haru closer. When he looked up blushing, Sousuke just smirked, “Wouldn’t want you to fall.”

But Sousuke didn’t know that Haru was already falling.

He found it terrifying.

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Makoto was being haunted. Since he had rushed away in a fit of jealousy after the relay, he had been seeing Haru all over. Sitting and sketching by the pond Makoto passed on his way to anatomy lecture. Picking out drinks and snacks at the convenience store near his part time job at the gym. A few of his water colors were put on display in the part of the library his weekly study group met. Had he always been this close and did he just not notice? Never wanted to see Haru?

But now Haru was always on his mind. He was so stupid to think he could do this without him.

It wasn’t as though he was doing poorly. Makoto was still maintaining top grades and was assured by his professors and connections that he’d easily find work after he graduated. He more than enough money to make ends me and could afford luxuries like treating friends or taking small weekend trips. Even his family, whose reaction to the breakup was what Makoto was most afraid of, had supported him and continued on in their endlessly kind and loving manner.

Everything was going great. He just wasn’t… well, he wasn’t happy. And now that he had been seeing Haru up close, Makoto realized he wasn’t doing as well as he assumed. He may have been
shining at his swim meet, but it was an exception, not the rule.

Makoto could still read him well; he knew the differences between how high his shoulders were pulled, how curved his frown was, and the varying degrees of dullness in his eyes. Haru was just going through the motions, pushing off the pain by keeping himself busy. It looked like what Makoto felt: empty.

When had his life become so hollow?

A memory pops into his mind. Soaking wet and exhausted on a beach, taking cover from the torrential rain. One of the few times Haru looked frightened, his concern directed at green eyes and tan, shaky limbs. An indirect confession spilling from his mouth.

“‘It’s meaningless without you,’” he repeated in a whisper to the wind.

There was Makoto’s answer.

Sousuke’s brow knit together in worry as soon as he spotted him on the couch with an ice pack on his shoulder. “What happened?”

“Collided with a first year who was practicing his relay exchanges,” Haru responded.

Sousuke clicked his tongue, “That’s because you’ve been spacing out the last few days. Want to tell me what’s been going through your head?”

“No.”

So much for getting to the bottom of Haru’s sudden moodiness. It started soon after they went out for the volleyball game. They still spent the same amount of time together, but it was like Haru had thrown some of his walls back up. This was supposed to be a safe space for Haru to be in and it pained Sousuke to see that he wasn’t entirely comfortable here, around him, anymore.

So of course Sousuke was worried. His friendship with Haru was the best thing he had in his life right now. He didn’t want to lose it because he unknowingly overstepped his bounds. But Haru didn’t want to talk and it would do him no good to press the issue, so he focused on an easier problem.

“Did you get it checked out?”

Sousuke took Haru’s lack of response as a no. He came over, pushing the ice out of the way to take a look at the nasty purple bruise that had already formed. He gently felt around the muscles. From his own experience, he could easily distinguish normal inflammation and minor strains from more serious issues. Thankfully, Sousuke could only find the former, and let out an internal sigh of relief.

“You have to take a few days off.”

“I know,” Haru quietly agreed.

Sousuke shifted the ice back onto Haru’s shoulder, “You’re coming with me to Shizuoka.”

“What?”
“My dad wants me to visit this weekend and I need to keep an eye on you.”

“I don’t need a babysitter,” he huffed.

“Haruka.”

Haru turned away from him with a sour look on his face. He wasn't about to admit it, but he was more miffed at the fact that it was already Thursday and just when was Sousuke going to tell him he was going out of town? Not that he was obligated to check in with Haru, but they had always let each other know when they were going to be unavailable. It just saved them a lot of scheduling trouble, that's all.

“Think of it as a vacation, Sousuke suggested, “When was the last time you left the city that wasn’t for a swim meet?”

Again Haru didn’t respond, feigning interest in a stain on the couch. It was probably cola. Sousuke smiled. These silences were the easiest to read - he was just being stubborn.

“We can go to the beach.” Sousuke offered in a teasing, almost sing-song voice, noting the involuntary perk in Haru’s shoulders at the mention of the ocean.

Haru still didn't look at him, but he leaned more into the hand that rested near his injured shoulder. “...the beach might be nice.”

A victorious grin spread across Sousuke’s face. “It’ll be just what you need.”

Chapter End Notes

Is Sousuke from Shizuoka? I read it somewhere and just assumed it to be true. I know he went to Sano middle school, but I wasn't sure if it was the name of the town or not like how Iwatobi HS is.

I'm sorry Makoto came back. I promise it'll all be okay in the end!

Thank you, you precious dumplings, for all of your support and kudos and love and beautiful comments! You're the reason why I'm able to pump out 2 chapters a week!
After Haru agreed to go, he found out that they’d be taking off the next day on an afternoon train. He had planned on staying at Sousuke’s that night, but headed home instead because he still had to attend his morning class and wouldn’t have the time to prepare a bag unless he woke up before dawn.

Haru had told Koushi and Daichi about his last minute weekend getaway over the phone while he packed. They had mixed reactions. Suga remarked that it was an excellent idea and while Daichi thought Haru did indeed deserve a break, he lamented being too caught up in their win to properly grill Sousuke when he had the chance.

“He’s not going to ditch me at the train station or murder me, it’ll be fine,” Haru did his best to reassure him.

“That’s NOT what I’m worried about!” Daichi had retorted before Suga took the phone away.

“Don’t mind Daichi, Haru! He’s just being an overbearing father,” he stuck his tongue out at Daichi’s indignant glare, “I’m sure you’ll be in very good hands with Sousuke-kun.”

Haru did not pick up on the particular way Suga said this. He shrugged, but then remembered he was on the phone. “Yeah. From what he told me about them yesterday his family seems nice.”

He didn’t mention that he’d been feeling unnerved since the volleyball game. Going out to an event together, Sousuke buying him dessert on the way home, Sousuke’s assured smile as Haru was pressed against him on the train… It felt like a date.

And the way his heart had sped up was definitely not the cause of crowded subway anxiety.

He shook his head, willing the thoughts to the back of his mind. It was not the time to dwell on them.
He brought his focus back to his phone conversation.

“And if nothing else, I’ll get to swim in the ocean.”

Laughing brightly at Haru’s optimism, Suga and Daichi chatted a bit longer about random topics before bidding him goodnight with a request to let them know when he’s safe in Shizuoka.

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The train ride Friday was pleasant enough. Both of them had brought work to complete, Sousuke catching up on a mountain of paperwork and Haru hammering out critiques for classmates. They took a long break to eat the bento lunches Haru had prepared when his churning mind wouldn’t let him fall asleep the previous night.

Sousuke was still concerned about Haru’s sudden withdrawal, but let him be. Hopefully he’ll be able to relax once they arrived at his family home.

When they got off the train, Sousuke led the way through the station. Haru eyed him in doubt, but Sousuke snapped back that he wasn’t going to get lost on the way back to his own house, thank you very much. They made it there with no complications and Haru’s mouth dropped open in surprise when they stopped in front of the tall wooden gates.

Sousuke had off-handedly mentioned that his family was well-off due to his mother working for the Japanese consulate in France and his father the CEO of a major technology firm. But Haru was not imagining that they practically covered an entire block with their estate. He turned to Sousuke with a look of apprehension.

Sousuke blushed, pressing in a code to unlock the gates before pushing them aside so they could enter. “It won’t be bad, I promise. My old man leaves his attitude at work and mom’s on assignment—”

“Onii-san!” came a shout from their left. A teenage girl with long black hair and brown eyes ran forward.

“Michiru!” Sousuke dropped his bag and picked his sister up in a bear hug, lifting her off the ground and twirling her a little bit.

She was giggling as he set her down and took a good look at her. He hadn’t seen her much since they were children. She spent most of her life in France with their mother, only returning to Japan to start high school two years ago. Their parents had felt like this was what was best for them, women facing much more prejudice in Japan than in France, and they couldn’t argue being so young and knowing that the motives behind the separation were in good intention.

As he studied her, Michiru’s eyes went straight to Haru. She turned to him, cupping his face in her hands and stared. Haru met her gaze evenly although he knew he was blushing.

“Onii-san, you brought home a real beauty!” she exclaimed after several seconds. “How did you trick him into dating you?”

Haru’s blush only deepened, while Sousuke looked like he was ready to turn around and walk back to the train. “We—we’re not—”
“Michiru, stop picking on your brother.” Behind them a man came through the gate. He was a little taller than Sousuke, less muscular, but his presence no less imposing.

Haru’s instinct was to be intimidated, but it all went away when the man smiled reassuringly at him and bowed. “Yamazaki Yasuhiro. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Nanase-kun.” Haru immediately folded in response, making sure to dip low, “It’s nice to meet you, Yamazaki-san. Thank you so much for letting me be a guest in your home.”

When he rose, Yamazaki-san was assessing him with the same gentle brown eyes that Michiru has. Once again, Haru couldn’t fight the heat spreading over his cheeks. This man was really attractive in his impeccably tailored suit, peppered grey hair that was stylishly slicked back, and thick framed glasses.

_Shit. Would Sousuke look like this in twenty years?_

Snapping back to reality, Haru scolded himself. How hot an older Sousuke would be is really not what he should be focusing on right now. Or ever. God, why couldn’t his brain just chill the fuck out?

“Hey, Oyaji.”

Yasuhiro smiled brightly at his son before hugging him. “You look great, Sousuke! Did you finally stop eating all that instant food garbage?”

Haru coughed to cover up a laugh as Sousuke blanched. Being a shrewd girl, Michiru caught the reactions and whispered to Haru, “you cook for him, don’t you?”

He nodded, giving her a shy smile. She rolled her eyes and mumbled something about lazy bachelors before speaking to the group, “You and Otou-san should catch up. I’m going to borrow Nanase-kun for a bit!”

“Oi, don’t be-” Sousuke tried to protest.

“Just ‘Haru’ is okay. Would you mind giving me a tour of your home? It’s stunning.”

Michiru’s eyes lit up, “Of course, Haru-kun! She wrapped her arm around Haru’s and led them away, already discussing the features of their property. He glanced over his shoulder to throw a smirk at Sousuke, who suddenly felt like he was going to be in trouble.

His father clapped a hand on his shoulder, chuckling. “Come on, it’s about time you got me up to speed with your life.” He shot Sousuke a meaningful look that implied that he didn’t just mean work and and physical therapy.

Haru and Michiru make a pit stop before heading to the back of the house. Rifling through one of the spare rooms, she pulls out a gorgeous yukata, navy blue with white and gold sparrows embroidered on it.

“Otou-san has a terrible habit of buying things he finds beautiful, even if he has no use for them. He picked this up on a business trip to Hokkaido even though it would never fit him or Onii-san. I think it’s the perfect size for you, though, Haru-kun.”

He ran his fingers over one of the birds. “It looks very high end…”

She laughed, but a glimmer of loneliness ran through her eyes before she set them back to determined, “No matter how expensive they are yukata are meant to be worn, Haru-kun. Think of it...
as you fulfilling its purpose.”

“Alright… But you have to help me put it on. I haven’t worn one since I was a kid,” he agreed. Haru understood the flash of honesty he saw because he had felt it too, hidden it away whenever anyone was looking. Someone as lovely and bright as Michiru shouldn’t harbor those feelings. It was like seeing Nagisa sad, it shouldn’t be allowed. He wasn’t sure how good of company he’d be, but he would offer it as long as she wanted.

Michiru was right, the yukata fit perfectly, accented by a silver obi. After they had redressed Haru, she led him to the gardens. The yard was breathtaking, filled with flowers and trees, accented with a large koi pond and a tea house. The whole thing was idyllic, like it was ripped straight from a magazine or a tv show.

Michiru led them to the tea house, explaining that she had learned tea ceremony and flower arranging early on in order to impress the foreign coworkers of her mother. She continued with her skills even after moving back to Japan because they relaxed her, the familiar patterns required her focus and cleared her mind. Haru told her he felt the same way about swimming.

Michiru put on a demonstration for him, which Haru found delightful. The traditional bitter tea was delicious and the ceremony fascinating in its delicate intricacies.

They cleaned up after themselves and laid down a blanket by the koi pond. After making themselves comfortable, Haru reached over to his messenger bag and pulled out a worn sketch book. He wanted to share something with her, to thank her for her kindness and acceptance.

He cleared his throat and didn’t look at her when he spoke, “Even though I got in on a swimming scholarship, I’m actually an art student,” he traced a doodle of a dolphin that was on the cover, “would you like to see-?”

“Yes!” she practically shouted, looking thrilled.

Haru gave her a warm smile and opened the book so it spread out between them.

- 

Having suffered enough of his father’s questions for now, Sousuke insisted that they grab the others to get dinner. Yasuhiro relented, only because it would be rude to allow their guest to go hungry. Sousuke had carefully avoided spilling anything besides the usual basic information about Haru except that he considered him a close friend.

Bullshit.

One didn’t become the head of a major corporation without being able to root out secrets and omissions; he knew Sousuke wasn’t telling him the full truth. But Sousuke was putting up his best poker face and not budging.

Yasuhiro led the way to the gardens, describing a potential acquisition that he was currently negotiating. It was a risky move, but if it worked then his company would be even more valuable. They took the stone path to the pond and Sousuke hesitated when Haru and Michiru came into view.

At first Sousuke was just taken aback by Haru in a yukata. It looked so natural on him, he swore that
he had jumped straight out of a historical drama. But then he really observed the scene, Haru was
giving her one of his kindest smiles, explaining the difference between several of the dolphins he had
drawn in his sketch pad. Michiru’s head rested lightly on his shoulder, paying rapt attention.

Sousuke’s heart swelled with indescribable fondness at it all.

Turning to his son, Yasuhiro’s eyes marginally widened as he took in the look on Sousuke’s face. In
that instant he understood what Haru-kun was to him.

-  

Haru had been tossing and turning for what felt like hours. It wasn’t that he was uncomfortable, he
was merely overloaded with all of the events of today. Being with the Yamazakis felt as easy as
being with the Tachibanas. Different, but no less warm and welcoming.

No longer being able to stand it, he threw off his blanket and tip toed out of his room. He paused
briefly in front of Sousuke’s door, but moved on.

Padding quietly through the halls, Haru spotted an open screen to a porch and a flickering light. He
peeked his head out to see Yasuhiro watching the rain. After speaking with him quite a bit at dinner
and seeing his interactions with his children, Haru felt surprisingly at ease with him. He stepped
closer and quietly called out, “Yamazaki-san?”

He looked over his shoulder and smiled, “Can’t sleep either?”

When Haru shook his head, he patted the space next to him, “Come keep an old man company,
Haru-kun.”

Haru rolled his eyes - Yamazaki-san was hardly an old man - and plopped down next to him. They
sat in silence for a little while, surrounded by the steady thrum of rain hitting the ground and foliage.
Haru felt his body relaxing, his worries and fears being washed away.

“You and Sousuke have a good relationship.”

Haru jumped a little at the comment. “Y-yes,” he allowed himself a little smile, “Sousuke’s a good
man, a good friend. I-”

“It’s more than that, isn’t it?” he gave Haru a coy smile.

In a voice that was almost a whisper Haru asked, “...is it wrong?”

“What, liking men?”

Yasuhiro chuckled, “I understand what you’re trying to say, Haru-kun. And I don’t believe that
Sousuke would think of it like that, he’s too straightforward.”
“I’m just… not ready yet. Is it okay for me to stay with him like this even though I can’t tell him?”

“Do you plan on telling him eventually?” Yasuhiro asked.

Haru paused and took a deep breath, exhaling slowly, “Yes.”

Yasuhiro smiled at the conviction in his answer, “Then it won’t be a problem, Haru-kun. He might be a little hot headed, but Sousuke has learned the importance of being patient.”

Haru nodded, reminded that he wasn’t the only one who had struggled.

Ruffing Haru’s hair, Yasuhiro stood. “I think it’s time for both of us to get some sleep. It will do you no good to be too tired to enjoy the ocean tomorrow.”

Haru followed, bidding him goodnight. He returned to his bed feeling lighter, but he still couldn’t sleep. He had finally admitted that he was falling for Sousuke and it diminished the unease that had been growing in his chest. He didn’t have to tell him yet, they were happy with whatever they were doing now.

They would be okay. They would have to be.

When the door creaked open and shut softly, he didn’t bother looking over to see who it was. Still on his side, he scooted over so he wasn’t in the exact middle of the queen sized bed. Sousuke clumsily climbed under the blanket, probably still partially asleep. His arm wrapped around Haru’s waist and tugged him back against his chest. Haru took a few seconds to settle and when he did both of them let out small, satisfied sighs. They were asleep in an instant.

When Sousuke awoke the next morning, it was to the smell of mint mixed with a little bit of chlorine, his face buried in Haru’s hair. Sousuke wondered how long it took for his own body to stop smelling like the pool after he had quit swimming.

Still facing away, Haru had an iPad out, playing some brightly colored game where it looked like he was harvesting crops and were those sea turtles? Probably.

“What’s that?” he asked with a rough voice.

Haru turned on his back so Sousuke could see the screen better. “Paradise Bay. You operate a trading post on a tropical island. Sailors come in with orders and you get money and jewels and other rare items in return.”

“What are those turtles doing?”

“They fish for you. The otters gather stuff like shells and seaweed.” He tapped on them to demonstrate.

The arm around Haru’s waist gave him a squeeze. “It’s cute.” You’re cute.

Wait, what?

Rather than dwell on that thought, Sousuke focused on what had led to this trip. Haru must have sorted out whatever was bothering him before because the barrier that had worried Sousuke so much
was gone. Or at least he assumed it was considering how relaxed Haru was and the fact that he hadn’t been kicked out of his bed yet.

He continued to watch Haru work diligently on his island, amused by how serious he was about it. It felt natural to slowly wake up together like this. At home one of them usually had to leave before the other’s alarm went off. Even when their schedules did align, they kept with whatever morning routines they followed when they were apart. This was new and Sousuke couldn’t help but think it might be nice if it became part of their normal routine.

*WAIT, ‘their normal routine?’*

Before Sousuke’s mind could spiral out of control, Haru offered, “Sorry I was being a jerk this past week.”

“Don’t worry about it. I can be an ass sometimes too.”

“You’re an ass all the time,” he smirked.

Sousuke scoffed, “Sounds like you don’t need a place to stay tonight.”

Haru elbowed him a little under the blanket, “Your dad and sister would never allow it and you know it.”

“Ugh. I think they like you more than me already.”

“That doesn’t sound too hard,” came Haru’s deadpanned response.

“Oi!” Sousuke moved to pinch Haru’s side, but instead accidentally brushed his hand just below his ribs. Haru let out a sound that was a cross between a yelp and a laugh. As soon as he did, he clamped his mouth shut, staring wide eyed at the ceiling, not daring to move.

Sousuke really could not help the shit eating grin that spread across his face. “Haru, are you-”

“Don’t. you. fucking. dare. Yamazaki.”

He did. Of course he did. Sousuke mercilessly attacked his ribs with calloused fingertips, this time on both sides. Haru couldn’t stifle any of the giggles that bubbled uncontrollably from his mouth, trying in vain to pull the hands off of him. He was wiggling, doing his best to get away and breathe, but Sousuke was relentless.

“Sou-!” a particularly loud squeak escaped his lips, “P-please!”

It was only when Sousuke was winded from laughing at Haru’s distress that he pulled back. “Oh my God, Haru, you’re super ticklish-”

“Shut up! Get out of my bed!” he managed to pull himself up, shoving Sousuke away.

Sousuke let himself be pushed to the edge of the bed, still chuckling. Haru had retreated to the other side, face as bright as a tomato, the blanket pulled around his shoulders as if it would protect him. Who would’ve thought that the stoic Nanase Haruka could be reduced to a giggling mess with a few well placed touches. Sousuke didn’t dare entertain what other weak spots Haru might possess.

“You’re such an asshole.”

Wiping the tears of mirth from his eyes, Sousuke got up and walked over to Haru’s side to pat him on the head. “I’m sorry, I couldn’t resist.”
Haru only glared and pouted in response.

Sousuke tapped his nose. “You can’t stay mad. I’m taking you to the beach today.”

“You were already going to do that,” Haru knew he was laying it on thick, but he didn’t care. Serves him right for exploiting his weakness. Only one other person knew about that.

Sousuke had the feeling that Haru often got his way in arguments. “Okay, how about I convince dad to order sushi for dinner tonight. There’s an amazing, kinda fancy place nearby that delivers.”

His pout almost twitched into a smile, but he managed to control it, “If it’s good then I’ll forgive you.”

Michiru had run off when she spotted a group of her friends. It was just as well, for as much as he loved her, Sousuke could only put up with her boundless energy for so long. Haru had an armful of towels and other supplies, but was hopping from foot to foot, staring at the sparkling water.

Sousuke let out a loud sigh in mock exasperation, “Just go. I’ll take care of it.”

Not wasting a second, Haru emptied his arms on the sand and tore off his tshirt and sandals. With a flash of a rare wide grin and a quick ‘thanks, Sou!’ he was off, diving into the ocean.

Shaking his head and laughing, Sousuke proceeded to set up their area. When Haru flopped down on the towels next to Sousuke after only an hour, he looked over in concern at his bruised shoulder.

“I’m fine,” Haru explained, “I’ve been mostly floating or using my legs. I just forgot to put on sunscreen.”

Sousuke clicked his tongue and tossed him a bottle. When Haru was done, he returned to his stretched out position.

“Not going back in?”

Haru wasn’t looking at him when he quietly answered, “you should come in the water with me.”

Something squeezed Sousuke’s heart. It wasn’t the anxiety or remorse he usually felt when swimming was brought up. He hadn’t felt this about swimming in such a long, long time. It was excitement, the pure love of being in the water. How was Haru pulling this out from him?

Sousuke was about to respond when a harmony of voices called Haru’s name.

“Haru-nii!”

A middle school aged boy and girl with dark chestnut hair were running over to them, waving their arms in the air. Haru jumped to his feet in surprise only to be tackled back down to the sand, the kids hugging him fiercely.

“Haru-nii, I can’t believe you’re here!”

“I knew coming on dad’s business trip was a good idea!”
“Whoa, you look super ripped!”

“Are you going to the Olympics yet?”

Haru’s arms instinctively wrapped around them, but his mouth was still gaping, trying to find the right words. To tell them he’s wanted to see them. To tell them he’s sorry. To tell them he still loves them.

Another familiar voice called out, “Ran, Ren, where did you- Oh!”

An onslaught of panic froze Haru’s entire body. Facing the Tachibana family, even without Makoto, was not something he planned on doing nor prepared for. He could feel Sousuke’s eyes on him, ready to sweep him out of there at a moment’s notice even if he didn’t understand the situation.

At the sound of their father’s voice, the twins helped Haru back to his feet. They stopped clinging to him, but remained close, waiting to see what their parents would do.

“Haru-chan…”

The look on Mrs. Tachibana’s face was unrecognizable to Haru. He didn’t know what to say. That he was sorry for hurting their son? That he didn’t mean to ignore their calls, but he was just so scared they’d be mad? That he still thought of them as family?

He was surprised at what actually tumbled out of his mouth, “I-I missed you.”

Haru managed to hold onto his tears until Mrs. Tachibana came forward and wrapped her arms around him. He clung to her, letting himself cry because he didn’t just lose a lover so many months ago.

Mr. Tachibana put an arm around Haru’s shoulders and smiled at him, even though Haru couldn’t see it. “Haru-kun, you are part of this family. We’ve always thought of you as a son-”

“And a brother!” Ran interjected, Ren nodding fiercely in agreement.

“-yes, and a brother. Nothing will ever change that.”

Haru nodded against Mrs. Tachibana’s shoulder and whispered a thank you. They shared in another group hug and when they stepped back, Haru wiped the last of his tears away and smiled.

While Mr. and Mrs. Tachibana were speaking softly with Haru, the twins turned their attention to the man hovering closeby, eyes locked on their adopted brother.

It was Ren who took the first chance. “Are you Haru-nii’s new boyfriend?”

Sousuke almost jumped out of his skin. He hadn’t even noticed them come up. “Ah, no, we’re not-”

“Oh, so you haven’t told him yet,” Ran concluded.

“What?”

“You like him, don’t you?”

He eyed them warily, “Why would you think that?”

The twins exchanged sad looks, “...you look at him like how Onii-chan used to… except more?”
“More?”

“Yeah, like…” Ren tilted his head, thinking hard, “Onii-chan looked at Haru-nii like he was a treasure. You do too, but you look you’re afraid you might lose him. Onii-chan never looked at Haru-nii like that.”

Sousuke frowned. Did he really look at Haru like that? And how fucking arrogant was Tachibana that he just assumed Haru would always be there for him. He grunted and pushed the thoughts away - it was no use getting angry about it now.

It was then that Haru came over, resting a hand on each of the twins’ shoulders. “I heard you two were still taking swimming lessons.”

Ran and Ren eagerly dragged Haru to the water to show off. Mr. and Mrs. Tachibana trailed after them, but Sousuke stayed on the beach, content to watch them play. Haru needed this time with his family.

Hours later as they were packing up, Ran motioned for Sousuke to bend over so she could whisper something into his ear. “Haru-nii looks at you the same way,” she giggled.

Sousuke straightened, letting his gaze wander over to Haru who was helping Mr. Tachibana pack up their umbrella. His skin looked a little angry, he doesn’t remember Haru reapplying any sunscreen, but overall he seemed cheerful and untroubled.

As if he sensed Sousuke’s eyes on him, Haru looked over, giving him a small, sincere smile before turning away to fold the towels.

Sousuke looked back down at the Tachibana twins, not quite sure what he was supposed to say.

“Don’t hurt him, please. Haru-nii deserves to be happy,” Ren whispered.

How many warnings has he received since letting Haru into his life? Not that it really mattered, he wasn’t planning on letting anything happen to Haru on his watch.

-  

Yasuhiro was waiting for them when they entered the main house. Dinner had just been dropped off and it was ready as soon as they were. Haru started to move toward the dining area, but Sousuke grabbed the back of his shirt. He let out a small whine of protest that was so unlike him that it almost made Sousuke let go.

“We’re covered in sand. Showers first.”

Haru relented, not wanting to be a bad guest when the Yamazakis had been so gracious. He rinsed off quickly and even waited for Sousuke and Michiru to be done before he purposely headed toward the dinner table.

One of the most beautiful sights he had ever seen was spread out before them. Sushi and sashimi in artfully arranged in brilliant combinations, the whole thing forming an image of a dolphin.

Haru let out an awed breath as he plopped into one of the four seats, “Thank you so much,
Yamazaki-san.”

Sousuke snorted as he sat down across from Haru, “You’re spoiling him, Oyaji.”

“Someone has to, Sousuke,” Yasuhiro teased, “And please, Haru-kun, call me ‘Tou-san!’”

Sousuke rolled his eyes, but Haru gave the tiniest of nods in acknowledgement.

This dinner was just as lively as the one the previous night. Michiru regaled them with stories of her outrageous friends while Sousuke and his father kept up their innocent bickering.

Haru remained mostly silent, enjoying learning more about this family and stuffing his face with outstanding seafood. He thoughtfully looked over the dishes that were available and noticed something he missed during his first sweep. He pointed to a plate of beautifully marbled tuna sashimi and asked, “May I have the o-toro, Tou-san?”

Sousuke and his father froze mid argument and whipped their heads to stare at Haru, identical blushes spreading across their faces. He wasn’t even looking at them, eyes focused on the fatty tuna he requested.

“Of—of course, Haru-kun!” Looking like he was about to cry from joy, Yasuhiro set the dish down next to Haru.

What Sousuke witnessed next was just about the cutest fucking thing he’d ever seen in his twenty-two years of life. As soon as the fish hit his tongue, Haru’s expression turned into one of bliss. His eyes slid shut (Sousuke swore he could see tears prickling at the corners of his lashes), his mouth contorted into one of the happiest expressions Sousuke had ever seen him wear, and his free hand was clenching his chest as if Cupid had just shot him through the heart.

All of that because of goddamn tuna.

—

That night it was Haru who crossed the hall into Sousuke’s bedroom. He had the feeling it would happen, but honestly he wasn’t sure if it was a good idea considering how his feelings were jumbled today. Between their cozy morning in bed, unexpected company at the beach, and having an honest to God family dinner with Haru, Sousuke was feeling absolutely frazzled.

But he let Haru in underneath his thin blanket even though he ended up squirming for a few minutes.

“Do you need me to move?” he asked as Haru accidentally kneed him in the thigh.

“You’re fine.” Haru continued to rearrange himself. This bed was significantly smaller than the California King in Sousuke’s apartment and he used it as an excuse to do what he wanted. This whole weekend had been one emotional feat after the other and right now all he wanted was to shut his brain off and be comfortable. Sousuke was comfortable.

This time it was Sousuke on his back, his arm outstretched to support Haru’s neck as he laid on his side facing him. Haru tentatively rested his arm on Sousuke’s chest, his fingers barely gripping the fabric of his tank top.
“Is this okay?” he whispered, sounding unsure.

Sousuke merely hummed a response, not trusting his voice to remain steady if the erratic pounding in his chest was anything to go by.

Thankfully Haru fell asleep quickly, no doubt spent from hours of playing in the ocean. Sousuke calmed down as well, letting the tension seep out of his body. The arm underneath Haru naturally bent around Haru’s shoulders, hugging him close to Sousuke’s body. Only seconds away from falling asleep himself did Sousuke tilt his face down and over, pressing a light kiss against Haru’s forehead.

Sousuke froze as he pulled back, all traces of sleepiness gone. His breath caught in his throat as he realized what he had just done. Realized how he truly felt. Realized that Rin and the mini Tachibanas were right.

Shit.

Chapter End Notes

Alternate chapter summaries: "in which both men start developing a daddy kink," "getting jealous of tuna," or "Sousuke is always the last to know."

As always, thank you A MILLION TIMES for all of the wonderful comments and everything else you lovely readers do for me!! They make such a huge difference and help me move the story in a direction that I think will make everyone happy!

Please, please, please let me know what you think of this chapter! I was really nervous about this one because it's OCs and almost TWICE AS LONG as a normal chapter for me, but I didn't want to break up the visit into separate parts. I hope you enjoyed it! <3
Chapter Summary

Moving forward, being pulled back.

Chapter Notes

I really can't thank all you lovelies enough for all the support you've given me! Every reblog, like, comment, kudo, subscription, and view means the world to me and I'm really happy that I took the plunge into this fandom. <3 <3

Doodles from sushi dinner in Chapter 10

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Haru wasn’t sure about the latest homework from Kotobuki-sensei. When he had gone in for a session after getting back from Shizuoka, he confided that he wanted to do more in order to move on from Makoto. It was something they touched on now and then, but hadn’t been the focus, Kotobuki-sensei trying more to work on Haru’s trust issues and treat his depression and anxiety in general. But Haru knew that was going to be a long process and he needed to tackle the shadows of his previous relationship before he could be honest with Sousuke.

Kotobuki-sensei had emphasized that he shouldn’t forget about Makoto. Repressing his feelings and memories of him was unhealthy and would lead to more complications in the future. What Haru needed to do was to find peace with what happened between them, accept it for what it was not what he thought it should have been.

They agreed that the lack of communication is what had really driven a wedge between him and Makoto. They had gotten so used to having a mutual understanding of each other that they took it for granted as they started to grow in different directions. Even the times when Haru knew what he wanted to say, he still held back, afraid he’d upset the precarious balance they had achieved.

Kotobuki-sensei suggested that he to write a letter to Makoto, telling him everything he’s ever wished to say but hadn’t because he was scared or didn’t think Makoto would understand. It wasn’t meant to be sent to him, it was just a way for Haru to purge some of the thoughts that kept swirling in his mind that prevented him from moving forward.

It had taken him four continuous evenings holed up in his apartment to finish it. He had gone through half a notebook of false starts and bits of phrases before linking it all together into something coherent.

During this time he could tell that Sousuke was worried - even when Haru had deadlines he would escape for breaks over to his place. All he had told him was that he was working on a unique assignment and it was best if his time was unbroken. He didn’t offer any more details and was grateful Sousuke didn’t ask for them. Even if Sousuke was mad about it, it’d be okay, Haru already had a plan to make it up to him.
Attempting to alleviate the kinks in his back from hunching over his low table, Haru stretched his arms high over his head before flopping onto his back. The completed letter was held up in front of his face, ready for one last proof to make sure he didn’t miss anything. He couldn’t contain his tears even though he had read it a hundred times.

When he finished, he traded the letter for his phone.

- 

Sousuke had been simultaneously annoyed and grateful that he hadn’t seen Haru most of the week. He was glad because since realizing his feelings, he had no idea what to do about them. He knew he couldn’t tell Haru yet, hell, Sousuke wasn’t even sure if he was comfortable with it. He definitely did not start this friendship looking for something more.

But he couldn’t deny that he missed Haru. The apartment was colder and too quiet without his regular presence. It was unsettling how much space he took up in his life.

At least this time the physical distance between them wasn’t like what had bothered him before. None of the mental blocks had been thrown back up and Haru was just as responsive, maybe even more so. Messages of complaints, pictures of things that reminded one of the other, and even the gentle nagging of responsibilities flowed freely between them. It would have to do for now.

Sousuke stretched out on the couch, setting down his book and picking up his phone. Before he could open a new text to Haru, it started to ring. He was so surprised he almost missed the call, but answered at the last second.

Hey, Sousuke.

He frowned at the cracked voice that came over the receiver. “You’ve been crying.”

It’s fine.

“Haruka,” he sat up, ready to throw his shoes on and head across town, “You’ve been isolating yourself in your apartment for almost a week, you actually called me on the phone after you’ve been crying, and you’re trying to tell me that nothing’s wrong?”

Haru took a deep, shaky breath. I had to work out some things I talked about with Kotobuki-sensei. I’m okay now, Sou, I promise.

The nickname always softened Sousuke’s attitude. “Fine. So why’d you call?”

I just wanted to hear your voice. No, definitely could not say that. Are you free tomorrow?

“Of course.”

I’ll be there early. Haru hung up before he lost his nerve.

-
True to his word, Haru walked into Sousuke’s apartment the next morning to find him still in his sweats, sipping coffee at the dining table. “Why aren’t you dressed?”

“I didn’t know what to wear. I only ever wake up before eight fucking a.m. for work. What do people even do at this hour?”

Haru rolled his eyes and grabbed a water bottle out of the fridge. “We’re going on a hike.”

That woke Sousuke up better than his coffee. “A hike? Since when do you do hikes?”

“When there’s something good at the end.”

He groaned, “Haru-”

“You said we should go out more, right? This is us. Going out.”

Well, Sousuke couldn’t argue with that. He took ten minutes to get dressed and wash up and they headed out the door.

They stayed quiet, Haru leading them to the station. It was about an almost two hour ride out to where they were headed which is why Haru insisted on the early start.

Their train stop was fairly close to the base of the small mountain Haru had picked out. Sousuke was glad when Haru pulled out a map with a clearly defined trail on it. The hike was quiet, the call of birds and their slightly labored breathing filled the air. They liked it that way, enjoying the exercise and the scenery you did not get in Tokyo proper.

After a what seemed to Sousuke like a long time, a rumbling noise could be heard in the distance. Haru must have heard it too because he looked back to Sousuke with excitement in his eyes. Grabbing his wrist, Haru rushed them toward the source.

They pushed through the foliage to reveal a gentle waterfall, flowing into a sparkling, clear pool.

Sousuke’s mouth parted in surprise. He hadn’t even considered something like this out here, but now understood why today would be worth Haru’s time and effort. “It’s beautiful.”

“It’s number three on my list.”

“List? Of what - waterfalls to visit?” he asked incredulously.

Haru shot him a look as he placed his bag down and undressed.

“Haru, I didn’t spend an hour trudging through the woods just so I could watch you check off your bucket list.”

“Who said you were just going to watch?” He threw a ball of fabric he retrieved from his backpack at Sousuke. When he unfurled it, he saw it was a new pair of grey jammers in his size.

“Haru…”

“Change.”

“I don’t know-” he continued to protest, feeling put on the spot.
“Change.” There was a finality in his voice that left Sousuke with no room to argue. Haru turned away, giving the other man some privacy. When he heard the familiar sound of a waistband snapping, he chanced a peek to check.

Shit. Sousuke looked good in the jammers. Those thighs could probably kill a man.

But he also looked nervous and uncertain. Honestly, it was an endearing sight because vulnerability was something Haru rarely saw from Sousuke. He had always been strong and composed for him and now it was Haru’s turn to do the same. He waded into the water first, quickly dunking his whole body and letting out a blissful sigh. Sousuke was standing by the edge of the pool now, a shadow of determination etched on his face.

Haru extended his arm and held out his hand. It was the mirror of the gesture that could always get him out of the water, but this time he hoped it would bring someone back in. Haru prompted him with a rare, beautiful, unguarded smile.

“Sou.”

Sousuke thought that if Haru was really a merman luring him to his doom, he would happily drown at the bottom of the sea.

He reached and took the outstretched hand, stepping down into the pool. The water already came up just above knees and it was cold, but not uncomfortably so. Just right the right reward for making the journey up the mountain.

Haru tugged on his hand, moving him slowly forward into deeper water. He wanted to make sure Sousuke was comfortable and adjusted. Once they were submerged up to their shoulders, he gave Sousuke one last squeeze before releasing his grip. His hand traveled up his arm and he gently brushed his fingertips over Sousuke’s old injury. He nodded in encouragement, his eyes blazing.

Sousuke gave Haru a look of absolute gratitude before he dived underneath. He stayed beneath the water as long as he could before surfacing, moving naturally into a slow front crawl. For the first time in more years than he’d like to admit, he felt happy swimming. There was no pain, no anger, no bitterness. He didn’t have to worry about times or placements. He could stop when he was tired. He could just be.

Sousuke felt like he finally understood the ridiculous shit Haru was always spouting about feeling and accepting the water.

They spent the day like this. Slow, graceful strokes across the water, floating lazily with their hands brushing, fingertips entwining every so often.

After a few hours they pulled themselves back up on the rocks to dry out. Haru offered the onigiri and tea he had packed. Only a few soft murmurs passed between them, everything else said with tilts of the head, raising of eyebrows, and various smiles.

They changed quickly, both delightfully tired from the excursion and glad that their trail back to the train was downhill. When they reached the station, Sousuke felt compelled to say something - anything - to thank Haru for what he had done for him. Words didn’t feel like enough; Haru had given so much back to him by getting him to swim again. He owed him. He owed him so much.

“Haruka…”

Haru turned around, the sunset lighting him in the tender glow of golds, pinks, and purples. He doesn’t need to be told, he felt it all in the water. He offers him another one of his once-in-a-lifetime
grins, shutting Sousuke up.

Sousuke has gotten two of those just today and burns the images of them in his memory.

Seeing Haru like this, he is sure about one thing.

Haru thought he had done something good by taking Sousuke to that waterfall, so he was currently wondering what egregious thing he had done to piss off karma so much.

It had been a bad day.

He had woken up over an hour late, missing a decent chunk of the morning workout and earning him an epic scolding in front of his teammates. They had a huge competition coming up and scouts from the national team would be there and how dare their strongest swimmer cut practice.

His appointment with Kotobuki-sensei was no better and left him raw and throbbing. They spent the entire hour going over what was in his fake letter to Makoto and it was frustrating and painful as she picked apart each confession. Every question she asked had wormed its way in like a splinter until he felt like he was bleeding everywhere.

And now he was running, about to be late for practice for the second time that day because some moron wasn’t watching where he was going and spilled his entire meal onto Haru’s front. To be honest, that was probably the least disastrous thing that happened so far.

As if he needed one more thing to betray him today, the strap of his once trustworthy messenger bag caught on a passerby’s folded umbrella. The abrupt cry of fabric ripping made Haru pause, turning back to stare in horror as the contents came pouring out onto the slightly damp sidewalk.

He stood there unmoving, feeling like he was going to snap if the world pressed against him again. Of course the stranger had continued walking, as if none of it was their fault. Haru was going to scream.

“Excuse me?”

Haru snapped his head toward the voice, recognizing the store clerk. His bag had broken in front of the convenience store he regularly stopped at on his way to evening practice. The young man was holding out a bottle of barley tea, the exact same brand Haru always bought when he stopped by.

“You look like you could use this.”

The frustration in his chest deflated a little, enough to offer the clerk a thanks and a soft smile in gratitude. He opened the tea and took a long gulp.

Then he remembered why he was so angry in the first place.

“Shit!” Haru dropped to his knees and gathered up everything in his reach, stuffing it in the remains of his bag and holding it to his chest before sprinting away.

The clerk stared after him, not sure what to make of the whole situation. Looking down, he noticed a few things that were left behind. Trying not to be too nosy (but unable to shut off his curiosity completely), he gathered them up and took them inside. The customer would surely be back in a
couple days like usual.

It was a few hours later when another regular popped into the store, but this one was loads friendlier. He grabbed his usual canned coffee and piece of baumkuchen before heading to the counter.

The clerk eyed the customer’s name tag, this was the first time he’d really noticed it. “Tachibana Makoto?”

“Yes?” Makoto tilted his head to the side and gave him a friendly smile.

“This may be kinda weird, but do you happen to know that dark haired swimmer who comes in pretty regularly? He’s got these big blue eyes and looks like he’s grumpy all the time, but actually has a cute smile.”

Makoto blinked in confusion because that sounded an awful lot like Haru. “Buys barley tea and fish onigiri?”

“So you do know him!”

“Y-yeah, his name is Haru,” that was the first time in so long he had spoken the name out loud. It made him ache.

“His bag ripped earlier and his stuff went everywhere. He was in a hurry, so some of it got left behind, but I noticed this letter in there with your name on it so I thought I’d ask,” he pulled out a small pile of papers from under the counter as he talked, “Would you mind returning this stuff to him? I’d keep it here, but it might get thrown away by my co-workers.”

Makoto hesitated. As much as he had been thinking about talking to Haru, he was not ready to face him. But this seemed like the perfect opportunity, a good excuse to start a low pressure conversation. Plus, that letter was irresistibly intriguing. Had Haru been thinking about him as well? Wanted to reach out but didn’t know how? A note certainly seemed more his speed.

“Sure, I can do that.” He grabbed the bundle of papers and shoved them in his backpack before paying for his drink and snack.

Rather than suffering the twenty minute train ride back to his apartment, Makoto headed to a nearby park that was usually empty by this time of night. He could not wait to open that letter. Taking a seat on a bench facing the swing set, he unfolded the pages.

Makoto,

There are two questions that people repeatedly ask me when they look at my swimming career:

What happened to make you stop swimming mid race?

Why Tokyo?

I’ve always given half assed excuses or ignored them. I’ve never told anyone the real answers, but you deserve to know because they are partially about you.

I stopped because I was afraid. You know better than anyone how much I was alone. You were there when my parents left, when my grandma died, when Rin moved and came back
only to end our friendship. I never told you how much it hurt. I think you knew that I wasn’t happy, but I did my best to hide it. I felt abandoned every time and I kept locking away pieces of myself each time it happened. Because it was my fault that they left, it was my fault they were hurting.

I wasn’t sure what to expect when we started the swim club, but by the beginning of our third year I was happy we did. We worked out things with Rin and I could swim free again. But then the expectations started. The suffocating pressure that I would bring pride to our school and to Japan in the future. The push to decide right then on the rest of my life.

I knew I was going to fail them because what I wanted and what they wanted were different. I couldn’t stand the thought of letting everyone down, of being unable to do the one thing I was actually good for. I could see how disappointed everyone was in me already, so what was the point in continuing? That’s why I stopped, better to end it there myself than live through the pain of everyone slowly leaving me. Again.

I honestly didn’t want a future if it meant that kind of loneliness. There were so many times that I wanted to disappear and almost made it happen. I felt so hopeless. But I thought about you and your family and our friends I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t leave you.

Then you told me you were going to Tokyo.

I ran, it was probably the wrong thing to do, but I couldn’t see you looking like that, knowing that I had been such a terrible friend that you couldn’t even confide in me until I blew up and insulted you. I had hurt you and pushed you away and I felt like I lost everything anyway.

I decided on Tokyo because I couldn’t live with that. Yes, Rin did help a little, but I was still unsure until I came home and saw you. I wanted to go where ever you were going. You were my future, you were my dream.

I realize that was a mistake. You can’t make someone your future.

While we were together I thought I was doing what was best for you, but I never asked if that was true. I just assumed that I knew what you were thinking and forgot that, more than ever, we needed to actually talk.

I knew things between us weren’t going well, but I still didn’t speak up. There were so many things I wanted to tell you...

I really do like it when you call me ‘Haru-chan.’

You didn’t need to be passive-aggressive with me, I’m strong enough to handle whatever you had to say. I wasn’t going to run from you again, not ever.

I’m proud of you. For working so hard and accomplishing your dreams.

I hated that you stopped caring about my swimming.

There were so many things I wanted to ask...

Were you ashamed that you’re with a man? That you’re with me?
Where did you go when you stormed out after our fights?

Did you really return my feelings or did you just not want to hurt me when I confessed?

Was there someone else?

Maybe if I didn’t keep these from you things would have been different.

I see now that we wouldn’t have stayed together as a couple no matter what we did, and I think I’m okay with that. I just never wanted to lose you as a friend, that’s why it took me so long to tell you how I felt in the first place.

I know you’ll never read this, but I want to tell you one last time that I love you. I really loved you with everything I had.

I want you to be happy, Makoto, even if it’s without me.

Haruka

I'm really sorry it ended pretty sad!! I'm building up to something big so the next few chapters are going to be like that, but I promise they'll still have those sweet SouHaru and other friendship moments to balance it out.

Note: baumkuchen is a delicious German layered pastry/cake thing that's pretty popular in Japan. The best version I've ever had of it came from Family Mart (a convenience store chain in Japan) for like 150 yen a piece.

Thank you so much for reading! Please let me know what you think!
Rin answered the skype call quickly. It was a lot easier to stay informed with his best friend now that he and his coach transferred to Kyoto. He had to make the move if he wanted to swim for Japan rather than Australia. They were still far away, but they lived in the same time zone for the first time in three years. Plus, now he could be there in an emergency, it was only a two and a half hour shinkansen ride to Tokyo. Rin still carried the burden of not being there for Haru when his relationship fell apart.

Red eyes studied the image on his screen, “Hmm, no fishboy tonight?”

Sousuke took a bite of the supremely cheesy, greasy burger he brought home for dinner. He relished it, Haru did not approve of him bringing home fast food in his presence. “It’s movie night with Suga and Daichi.”

“Should’ve known. Your only competition for Haru’s time are the Volleyball Dads.” Rin had insisted on the nickname for Haru’s older friends after Sousuke told him about the match they went to and some of the stories Haru passed on. He had to admit that it fit their image perfectly. Suga is the spontaneous and doting dad, your biggest cheerleader who stick by your side while you tried any crazy scheme you could concoct. Daichi filled the role of dependable and encouraging father, helping you achieve your ambitions and there to learn with you through your failures. It was no wonder they referred to their closest friend group as a family.

“We don’t compete, Rin. Haru and I spend plenty of time together.”

With that they let the subject drop, moving on to talk about Rin’s training and him adjusting to life in Japan that isn’t Iwatobi. Kyoto sounded interesting, scores more exciting than their beachside town, but not as hectic as Tokyo. Rin seemed to enjoy the amount of tourists there, making good use of his
Sousuke unenthusiastically tells him some stories from work: a few fights he had to break up, some really impressive graffiti of Saitama from One Punch Man, how he had to go help Tanaka when a hook-up had a sudden emergency and left without unlocking the handcuffs that held him to the bed. Normal events in the life of Yamazaki Sousuke.

Rin finished the ice cream he was eating and threw the stick over his shoulder. Eying his bestie suspiciously, he asked “Okay, now that we’ve gotten all of that out of the way, why don’t you tell me why you look like you’ve been punched in the gut?”

“What do you mean?” Sousuke didn’t think he was acting out of the ordinary.

“I mean you’ve been sulking all evening. Either your shoulder has been acting up again—”

“My shoulder is fine.”

“-or there’s a problem you’re not dealing with,” Rin finished.

Sousuke took a long drink from his beer to fortify himself. He knew that once Rin latched onto something like this he would not relent. He offered up a mumbled a response.

“Speak clearly, your laptop is shit.”

Sousuke sighed in defeat, “It’s Haru.”

Rin leaned into the camera, concern creeping over his skin, “Wait, what’s the matter with Haru? Is he okay? He’s not hurt is he? Did you two get into a fight, is that why he’s with his dads tonight? What did you do—”

“No, Rin, Haru is fine. We are fine .”

Rin sat back in relief, “God dammit, don’t scare me like that.”

“Sorry, sorry. I could have phrased that better.”

“Just tell me what the problem is!” he snapped.

Sousuke looked away and said in a quiet, but clear voice, “I… I have feelings for Haru. More than just friendship.”

“I KNEW IT!” Rin was punching the air in victory, “I KNEW YOU WANTED TO TOUCH HIS BUTT!”

“RIN!” A furious blush spread over all of Sousuke’s skin.

“You didn’t deny it!” Rin was close to cackling like an evil queen.

The damage was done, he had no dignity left so he might as well be honest, “Yes, I would like to touch Haru’s butt, but only if he also wants to touch mine.”

“Sousuke, you’re such a romantic!” he snorted, “When did you figure it out?”

“A couple weekends ago I brought Haru home with me to visit my family.”
“Whoa! How did that go?”

Sousuke rolled his eyes at the memory. “Dad practically offered to adopt him and Michi couldn’t stop fawning.”

“Sounds about right.”

“We ran into Tachibana’s family on the beach - without him, thank God - and it was pretty emotional for Haru,” Sousuke explained.

Rin’s hesitated. The Tachibana’s were always sweet, but who knows how they reacted to the breakup. “In a good way?”

“Yeah, they told him he was still family and all that. I didn’t even consider that could be something he was worried about.”

Rin frowned, remembering back in high school when Haru finally got him up to speed with everything that happened since he left to Australia the first time. “The Tachibanas were more like Haru’s family than his real one, especially after his grandmother died. With Makoto being their son, Haru probably felt like he wouldn’t be wanted anymore.”

Great. As if Sousuke needed one more reason to feel protective of Haru. “Anyway,” he continued, “the twins called me out, saying I look at him like I want him to be my boyfriend.”

“You do, it’s gross.”

“And that’s all that happened,” Sousuke said with a blank expression.

“No! Sou, I’m sorry! Please tell me. Nothing interesting happens here at all.”

Sousuke rolled his eyes, “I’m so glad I can be a source of entertainment for you.”

Rin merely gestured for him to get on with the story.

“That night he came in to sleep with me - NO, not like that, get your mind out of the gutter, jackass - I guess he was uncomfortable being in a new place, and after he had fallen asleep I kissed him on the forehead.”

He shrugged, running a hand through his hair in embarrassment. “I didn’t even realize what I was doing, it just felt like the right thing. That’s when it kinda hit me, but I still wasn’t sure, especially after we got back and I didn’t see him for a week while he was working on some project. But then he took me to a waterfall and-”

“NO FUCKING WAY! YOU WENT SWIMMING?!” Rin screamed.

Sousuke smiled at him softly, “Yeah. It was… Well, it was perfect. I remembered why I loved swimming in the first place.”

Rin blinked back tears. Finally, finally, Sousuke had closure on what had been eating away at his soul for a decade. “We’re going swimming the next time I visit.”

“I can’t race you, Rin.”

“I don’t give a shit about racing, I just want to swim with you.”

It was Sousuke’s turn to be moved, although there were no tears because he had much better control
than Rin. Racing was life for Rin, it was how he swam. For him to say that it didn’t matter that he couldn’t race him, that it was enough that Sousuke was back in the water at all, it showed how much their friendship meant to him.

They shared that quiet, meaningful moment between them before Rin rested his chin in his hand and waggled his eyebrows. “So when are you going to make a move?”

Sousuke pinched the bridge of his nose, “This is my problem. Now that I figured out my feelings I don’t know what to do. I don’t want to force this on him. I don’t think he’s ready to start dating anyone yet and what if he’s never even thought of me in that way? I mean, he couldn’t even look at me after he told his parents we were friends. I don’t want to be weird around him, but now that I know, everything is a little different and I’m worried about crossing a line and-”

“Sousuke. Stop. You’re ranting and it’s not like you. Just answer my questions, okay?”

Sousuke nodded, looking very serious.

“How often do you see Haru?”

“Usually four or five times a week, but we text every day.”

Rin raised an eyebrow at the frequency and the idea of Haru holding an honest to god text conversation. *I guess he wasn’t exaggerating earlier when he said they spend plenty of time together.* “How often does he spend the night?”

“Uh, whenever he’s here and it’s bedtime? Most nights, I guess.” He shrugged like it was no big deal.

“And you still share your bed?”

“You threatened to burn my couch to ashes after the one time you slept on it,” Sousuke accused.

“Fair. Do you two..uh…” Rin hesitated, unsure of how to finish the question.

“Rin, you’re blushing and it’s making me blush. Just say it.”

“How- how much physical contact do you have?”

Why did he think talking to Rin about this was a good idea? “More than ordinary friends do, probably? Like he’ll grab my wrist if we’re out and it’s crowded and we, uh,” *don’t say cuddle don’t say cuddle don’t say cuddle* “do things like fall asleep together on the couch? I don’t know. It feels like a lot because neither one of us is usually into that.”

Rin stared at him hard. They practically lived together and Haru willingly touches Sousuke often and lets him hold him for extended periods of time. How the fuck is he actually worried that Haru doesn’t feel the same?

There was only one conclusion Rin could come to: “You’re an idiot.”

“Not helpful,” Sousuke almost pouted, a habit he must’ve picked up from Haru. Yes, they were definitely spending *more than enough* time together.

“Just… keep doing what you’re doing. Haru obviously likes,” Rin motioned vaguely to Sousuke as a whole, “whatever the hell this is. It seems like you’re getting closer just by being yourself. Maybe you can be a little more touchy feely in whatever weird way Haru likes, but don’t sweat it.”
Sousuke furrowed his eyebrows, “He had almost his entire life to fall in love with Tachibana. We’ve been friends for, what, five months? How do I stand a chance against that?”

“Sou, I know this is the first time you’ve wanted to be in a real relationship with someone. It’s new and it’s scary, I get it. But you need to have some faith in yourself.”

Sousuke gave a frustrated sigh and rubbed his face, “Be honest, Rin, do you think I have a chance?”

Rin looked over at the new message that just chimed on his phone:

From: Fishboy
Call Sousuke, I’m worried something is bothering him.

It wasn’t exactly a declaration of love, but it was pretty damn close coming from Haru. He tried hard to stay out of people’s business unless he was asked to intervene and he steadfastly refused to ask for help for anything. Seeing Haru break both of these rules for Sousuke is no small thing.

“Rin?” The guarded hopefulness in Sousuke’s voice made Rin want to punch him. Why were his two best friends so dense?

“I think you’re both idiots.”

Makoto was walking through the courtyard on the half of the university he doesn’t normally visit. His second class was canceled so he figured he had the time to go to his favorite cafeteria by the music building. They have the best desserts on campus and Makoto desperately needed the sugar. For other people, sugar makes them hyper, but chocolate always had a calming effect on him. He needed it after finding that letter from Haruka a few days ago.

He couldn’t get it out of his head. Haru’s abandonment issues, his depression, how scared he was - it made Makoto’s heart clench in a way it never had before. Makoto thought Haru’s emotional state was fine for the most part, he never knew how much he really doubted and didn’t value himself. Even worse that Haru wasn’t sure that Makoto loved him.

Not that he should be surprised after what he did.

But Makoto did love him, still loves him, it’s just that he had forgotten why for a while. It’s clear to him now, of course. Every smile Haru had given him, every soft kiss he pressed against him (and the not-so-gentle ones too), every way he told Makoto he loved him without words. His determination, his strength, his bravery. His stubbornness, how quick he was to make snap judgements about people, how impulsive he was when it came to certain things. All of it.

So why was Haru convinced they couldn’t make it as a couple anymore? Makoto could make it up to him, he could earn back his trust if given the chance. They loved each other, shouldn’t that be enough?

As Makoto went along in his unfocused daze, he noticed a familiar man sitting on a bench. He
stepped closer, curious because even when they had been in regular contact, Rin had never mentioned what Yamazaki was up to.

*What was he doing here? Did he study here? He doesn’t have a bag, what kind of student wouldn’t have a bag with them if they’re going to classes? Maybe he works here?*

An odd sense of hope ran over Makoto. He hadn’t been able to confide in anyone, not wanting to explain the less than flattering details to his parents and being too worried that Nagisa, Rei, and Rin had already spoken to Haru. He didn’t feel close enough to any of his newer friends to burden them with his problems. But Yamazaki would be a neutral party, especially considering it involved Haru.

Making up his mind, he started to walk over. Before he could get there he saw someone approach that had him diving for cover behind the nearest tree.

Haru had come up behind Sousuke and plopped his head on his shoulder. Sousuke immediately reached up and started threading his fingers through his hair. Haru visibly relaxed at his administrations and Makoto watched the swimmer’s fingers twitch, as if he wanted to touch the other man as well.

Green eyes widened at the unbelievable sight. Nanase Haruka was allowing *Yamazaki Sousuke* to touch him. Not only that, they each had such fond expressions on their faces. Like this was *normal* for them.

Haru stood, walking around and taking a seat next to Sousuke. Makoto was close enough to make out their conversation.

“What did your instructor want?”

Haru blushed slightly while answering, “A local gallery is doing a show featuring young up-and-coming artists and asked her a while ago for some recommendations. She gave them some examples from her students and apparently they really liked my work.”

Sousuke beamed at him, pride shining in his eyes. “Haru, that’s fantastic! When’s the event?”

“Not until November, but they want me to do three new pieces for it. They said they already have a buyer for the two my instructor submitted. I’m not sure what I’ll even do, three is a lot.” Haru sighed.

“I’m sure you’ll figure it out.” Sousuke stood and motioned for him to do the same. “Come on, celebration sushi on me.”

Haru hopped to his feet with little prompting, earning him a chuckle from Sousuke. Anything for his beloved fish.

Makoto watched their backs as Haru followed him down the path. He didn’t miss it when the their hands brushed and Sousuke looked down with an uncharacteristically nervous smile.

Makoto’s insides twisted in a way that could only be described as *ugly.*

Haru had inched himself closer to where Sousuke usually lay. Despite looking like he wanted to say something, Haru was quieter than usual all evening. Sousuke had noticed, of course, how his eyes
weren’t as bright as usual, how he couldn’t keep his hands still, how not even Finding Nemo could bleed the tension from his shoulders.

Thankfully it wasn’t the same quiet as before when Haru would sulk and avoid his problems. He was merely psyching himself up to share whatever was on his mind. No doubt trying to find the right words to express himself properly. Whenever he was ready, Sousuke would be there to listen.

After he settled himself on his back he felt Haru scooch even closer until he was pressed against his arm. This was new. Despite the now routine couch spooning and the weekend in Shizuoka, any close contact in bed was a product of sleep, not a conscious effort. Letting his instincts take over, Sousuke shifted onto his side, lifting his arm up in invitation for Haru to get as close as he wanted. Taking full advantage, Haru closed the the space between them. Deep breathes were fluttered across the front of his shirt as Haru pressed his forehead to Sousuke’s chest. He didn’t hesitate to wrap his arms around Haru’s body, but he did hope that he wouldn’t notice how forcefully his heart was thudding against his ribs.

They stayed like that for a while. It could’ve been two or twenty minutes, maybe even two hours. It didn’t matter to Sousuke, this is what he wanted to do every time a real frown formed on Haru’s face. If he was being really honest, this is what he wanted to do with Haru always.

Finally, Haru spoke, “Can I tell you something?”

“Of course.”

“Even if it’s something that I haven’t told anyone else?”

“You can trust me.”

“Even if it’s-”

“I’m not going to judge you, Haruka,” Sousuke declared firmly.

He felt Haru taking another deep breath, “Makoto cheated.”

That was not a phrase Sousuke ever thought he’d hear. He had slowly learned from Haru that Tachibana wasn’t as perfect as he seemed in high school, but no one ever was. The background information that he was filled in on didn’t paint Tachibana as an intentionally bad guy; Haru always owned up to his share of the blame (probably more than what was fair, but Haru was hard on himself). But this? Cheating was inexcusable.

His arm tightened around Haru’s waist. He didn’t speak, knowing that he wouldn’t be able to keep the malice out of his voice.

“We had a fight about something dumb. Makoto was stressed out and I was being a brat and we yelled at each other. He stormed out and didn’t return until the end of the weekend. I was worried, but I was more stubborn, so I didn’t even bother calling him. I figured he’d be home by Sunday night, as mad as he was he wouldn’t miss class and all of his books were there.” Sousuke’s heart ached at the thought that Haru believed his ex-boyfriend cared more about school than he did about him.

“It was night by the time he came home. I wasn’t sure if I should go to him or wait for him to come in - give him the chance to avoid me if he wanted. I’m glad I stayed where I was, I couldn’t move when I saw the hickies on his neck and collar bones. I don’t remember saying anything. Makoto just fell onto his knees in front of me, hugging my waist and crying. He didn’t actually tell me what happened. He didn’t apologize, he didn’t ask for forgiveness, but I gave it to him anyway.”
Haru sniffled, wanting to purge all of this from his brain, but that’s not how life worked. Maybe sharing this last secret, what had ultimately shattered him, would at least ease the weight of his burden.

“We stayed together, but I was so scared all of the time. Was he with other people when he wasn’t at home? Did he think about someone else when he was fucking me? What could I do to make him happier? Why wasn’t I good enough? Why—” Haru’s voice choked with a sob as he gripped the thin fabric of Sousuke’s sleeping shirt as if he could save himself from drowning in painful memories.

Sousuke did his best to control himself. He wanted to pull Haru closer, hold him tighter, spend all night whispering about how amazing and strong he is and how happy he feels when they’re together. Kiss away every tear on his face, make ten thousand promises he fully intended to keep. But he couldn’t. He didn’t want to do anything that might overwhelm and shut Haru down. He settled for reaching up to give Haru’s hair the familiar comforting attention as he still held him securely around his middle.

They stayed like that for a while, Sousuke silently listening to Haru crying, no doubt reliving the excruciating feelings of that night. Haru hadn’t had a breakdown like this since the first night he spent in this apartment. Sousuke couldn’t help it, he had to ask the question that wouldn’t get out of his mind, “Do you know who it was?”

He felt Haru’s grip tighten, “I think I-I know. Makoto never said, b-but…”

“But?”

“But that night he… he smelled like c-cotton candy.” Fresh sets of tears seeped through Sousuke’s shirt.

Eventually Haru’s whimpers subsided, replaced by the rhythmic breathing of sleep. Sousuke promised himself two things that night, as he chanced another gentle kiss to Haru’s forehead.

Chapter End Notes

I LOVE YOU ALL, READERS, AND I SWEAR ALL OF THESE BABIES ARE GOING TO BE HEALED AND GET CLOSURE AND GOOD ENDINGS. IT JUST HAD TO BE THIS WAY, I PROMISE.

*runs and hides*
let's make a list of who we need

Chapter Summary

Reunions.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Rin couldn’t keep his infamous dangerous looking grin off his face. He had taken time off to visit his mom and Gou in Iwatobi when his sister had the idea to spend the last few days of his break in Tokyo with their friends. He had reached out to Haru first to make sure he wasn’t going to be out of town for any competitions. That’s how he found out that Rei and Nagisa were going to be back for a bit as well and staying as Haru’s guests. With everyone conveniently in town and Sousuke’s birthday only a week away, Rin wasted no time in booking bullet train tickets.

Gou’s best friend from high school, Chigusa, was also studying in the city so she had met them when they arrived to take Gou back to her place for the night. They had plans for the next day while Chigusa was in class so she would still be able to visit with her favorite boys.

Rin was now on his way up the stairs leading to Sousuke’s apartment, duffel bag slung over shoulder. The first time he had visited, only a few months after he had moved, Sousuke had left him a key hidden in the flowerpot outside his door because he couldn’t change his shift to meet him. He held on to it since it came in handy every time he arrived in Tokyo, Sousuke’s ever shifting schedule never seemed to allow an easy meeting. If Sousuke wasn’t currently home, Rin would be happy to eat whatever was in the fridge while he waited.

As quietly as he could, Rin pushed open the front door. If he had thought to look, he would’ve noticed a smaller pair of shoes in the entryway, but he was more focused on the opportunity to potentially scare the crap out of his friend.

But it was Rin who ended up being surprised. At first he was excited to see Sousuke lounging on his couch with his legs stretched out, feet on the table. He was a little confused about why the TV’s volume was almost all the way down with subtitles turned on. What he could not prepare himself for, though, was seeing Haru asleep, curled up and pressed against Sousuke who had an arm firmly wrapped around his shoulders, rubbing small circles into his skin with his thumb.

On the train ride, Rin had attempted to steel himself for several sights he had never seen before - largely anything and everything that had to do with Sousuke and Haru. A Sousuke who was in tune with and open about his feelings. A Haru who no longer hoarded his smiles and words like he only had a finite amount. A Haru that had nothing to do with Makoto.

A Sousuke and Haru who didn’t claw at each other’s throats, but were honest to god friends. These were all supposed to be good things.

Even so, it was one thing to be told about it and accept it, but to see it in real life? Completely different.

Hearing the door, Sousuke looked over, eyes widening in surprise. A wide grin quickly spread over
his face, but he noticed that Rin hadn’t moved, hadn’t even breathed. Eyebrows furrowing in concern, he mouthed *what’s wrong?*

Rin sent his own concerned face back, dropping his bag before walking in front of the TV and emphatically gesturing at Haru. *What the fuck is THIS?*

Sousuke glanced down at Haru. Rin did not miss the way his eyes softened and the gentle uptick of his mouth. Dear lord, his best friend was in *deep*. He pulled out his phone and shot off a message.

Eyes rolling when he feels his phone vibrate and sees that the text is from Rin, Sousuke frowns when he reads it. “*Have you told him yet?!*” Sousuke shakes his head.

Rin wants to fall to his knees in distress. Or grab these two idiot’s heads and smack some sense into them. Maybe both, both is good.

“You need to tell him!” Rin hissed.

Sousuke was about to whisper a retort when he felt Haru stir. A quiet voice asked, “Am I having a nightmare? I swear I heard Rin…”

Sousuke chuckled and pushed Haru’s fringe out of his face with his free hand. “Surprise, Rin’s here.”

“Don’t joke about that,” Haru mumbled sleepily, eyes still not fully open.

“Nice to know how you *really* feel about me, fishboy,” came an annoyed voice.

Haru bolted upright, leaning away from his human pillow, his cheeks on fire. He was wide awake now. Oh god, it really was Rin. He wasn’t sure how much Sousuke had told him about their friendship, but Haru had certainly left out a few choice details like how he cooked and packed meals every week or how when Sousuke came home and Haru was in the bath (in his jammers, of course), he would come and sit on a stool to chat with him until he was done soaking.

...Or how Haru’s feelings had turned into something much more than fondness.

He continued to stare at Rin in disbelief, silently pleading with him not to ask weird questions.

*At least he has the decency to be embarrassed*, Rin thought.

To Haru’s relief, Rin only frowned at him. Haru stood, walking over to him and shyly wrapped his arms around his torso. The hug was a surprise, but all of Rin’s irritation melted away as the display of affection. Maybe touchy Haru wasn’t so bad.

“I thought you weren’t going to be here until tomorrow.”

Rin roughly ruffled Haru’s hair and was rewarded with an annoyed nose scrunch and a half-hearted pout. “Hana-chan freed up her schedule so we came up a day early.”

“We?” Sousuke asked, still on the couch.

Rin flashed a grin, “Gou’s here too! She’ll join us for tomorrow’s celebration.”

Sousuke raised an eyebrow at them.

Haru and Rin traded sly looks before looking at him and smiling, “Happy birthday, Sousuke.”
Realization dawned on him as he sheepishly looked over at the calendar. His birthday was indeed the next week.

Sousuke got up and performed his traditional handshake with Rin before giving him a hug. Laughing, he said “This is way better than your gift last year.”

“Hey! What do you expect when you act like you don’t like anything?”

Haru enjoyed watching them bicker, but it definitely sent a pang of emptiness through his chest. His phone buzzed to distract him. He looks at the time and notes that he slept a little longer than he meant to, but Sousuke is just so damn comfortable.

Grabbing the nearest jacket, he heads to the door. “I have to go meet Nagisa and Rei and take them home. You two are on your own for dinner.”

Rin scoffed, “Don’t get into trouble.”

“You two are the ones who are trouble. See you tomorrow.”

Sousuke walked Haru to the door. Rin half expected him to lean down and give him a goodbye kiss, but it was just soft smiles and Haru’s customary wrist squeeze.

When Sousuke came back into the living room, Rin threw a pillow in his face. “What the fuck was that?”

“It’s nice to see you too, Rin.”

No way was Rin letting him off that easy.

- 

“HARU-CHAN!” a voice rang out through the station.

Haru moved toward the direction he thought he heard the call from. Spotting a ice cream crepe stand, he figured that it was as good of a place as any to find his friends. When a head of blond hair came into view, he sped up, a smile forming on his lips.

Nagisa shoved his half eaten crepe into Rei’s hands and launched himself at Haru. He caught him in a hug and even spun him around, causing bright giggles to erupt from Nagisa. He let go so he could step forward and hug Rei, careful of the desserts, but with no less warmth.

“Who did you steal that jacket from, Haru-chan?” he asked as he waggled his eyebrows.

Haru blinked and looked down. The coat he had on was indeed much too big for him. He recognized it as the light one Sousuke had on when he ran out for beer and snacks before starting the latest *Avengers* movie.

“It’s Sou’s.”

Rei and Nagisa exchanged glances as Haru was busy rolling up his sleeves. They didn’t say anything, but Nagisa flashed a victorious smirk before turning his attention back to Haru.
Since they had quite a bit of luggage, they decided it was best to head straight for Haru’s apartment. As Haru led them through the station to board the proper train, Nagisa reached over and slipped his hand into his. Haru gave it a gentle squeeze and looked over at Rei. He reached over and clasped his shoulder briefly, hoping it would convey how glad he was they were there with him.

Rei gave him a sincere smile before asking, “Will Yamazaki-kun be joining us tonight?”

Haru shook his head, “Rin showed up today and I’m sure he has plans for them to get drunk and gossip.”

“Good! Sou-chan is great and all, but I wanted to have Haru-chan to ourselves for at least one night.” Nagisa laughed.


The ride took forty minutes, but at least it wasn’t crowded. They passed the time by making a list of everything Nagisa wanted to eat and do now that he was back in Tokyo for the week. They were staying in Japan for another week after that, but were going home to see their families in Iwatobi.

Rei was impressed by how fancy Haru’s building looked. He explained that it was a place his parents owned, but usually rented out. It was lucky that they hadn’t had a new tenant lined up when he needed to move. Rei and Nagisa knew better than to ask anything more about the issue that forced him into his own place.

He let them in the front door and immediately after taking off his shoes, Nagisa was bounding through the apartment, gushing over everything from Haru’s immaculate and well stocked kitchen, the dining area that he converted into painting space, to his balcony with various herbs and succulents growing. He showed them to the spare bedroom, which usually served as his workspace, so they could drop off their bags and get changed or bathe if they wanted while Haru fixed dinner.

Thinking that they would be in the mood for home cooked Japanese food, Haru prepared his favorite staples: miso soup, tamagoyaki, and grilled mackerel. He also pulled out an assortment of pickled and stewed vegetables he had prepared a couple days ago.

He had finished setting everything on the table in the living room when his guests came out, looking fresh and relaxed from the bath. Haru raised an eyebrow when he saw that Nagisa was holding his oversized whale shark plush.

He giggled shyly, “Sorry, Haru-chan! I peeked into your room while waiting for Rei-chan and I saw this guy and couldn’t resist. He’s the perfect size for hugging!”

Haru nodded, patting the shark on the head “That’s Tomarou’s official job. He was a gift from my relay teammates when I couldn’t make it to Okinawa.”

Nagisa had always found it cute how much personality Haru assigned to inanimate objects.

They didn’t talk much through dinner, even though Nagisa tried. Rei scolded him for his bad manners and Haru promised they could chat after they ate. They picked the plates clean, Haru scoffing in disappointment when they mention this was the first time they’ve had mackerel since their going away party.

As promised long ago, Haru pulled multiple cake boxes out of the fridge. Each had a piece of strawberry shortcake along with one or two other specialties of the house. Tears were shining in Nagisa’s eyes as he complained that the few Asian bakeries they were able to find in Seattle didn’t hold a candle to the real thing.
Rei controlled most of the conversation while Nagisa tried every cake. He pulled out his phone and showed Haru many of the snapshots he’d taken that he hadn’t already sent over email. Nagisa managed to stop eating long enough to expand on the locations in the photos with anecdotes of their adventures.

After that it was Haru’s turn to share and he pulled out his portfolio so they could see what he’d been working on over the past year. He told them about how he’d be in the gallery showing and both were disappointed they wouldn’t be there (Rei made a note to ask Yamazaki-kun to take video). When they asked if Haru had any videos of his races, he instead invited them to his practice in the morning so they could watch in person.

Nagisa really did want to find out more about Haru’s feelings for Sousuke, but he knew it was not a discussion to be forced. Even though he was looking and doing much better than he or Rei expected, it was too soon to bring up romance and potentially scare Haru away from something that would be good for him in the future. No, he can wait it out. He knows Haru will open up to him when he’s ready.

Just before midnight, Haru forced Rei and Nagisa to their rooms in an attempt for them to get some sleep. They bid each other goodnight with more hugs. Under his covers, Haru falls asleep quickly - the happiest and warmest he’s ever felt in his apartment.

-  

Yawning for the third time in only a few minutes, Sousuke led Rin and Gou through campus to his and Haru’s usual meeting spot. They had agreed to meet there and then head out for lunch because Haru still had to attend morning classes after practice.

Rin had kept Sousuke up way too late grilling him about his relationship with Haru and trying to think up confession scenarios. Sousuke vetoed them all. Each one was more ridiculous than the last - no doubt pulled from shoujo manga that Rin wouldn’t admit to borrowing from his sister.

Then Gou had arrived at Sousuke’s doorstep early that morning, but she at least brought along an offering of coffee and curry bread which made up for the interruption of his sleep. Rin had already filled her in on Sousuke’s romantic dilemma during their train ride. Thankfully, the only words she had to offer about it was that she was happy for him and she’s sure that he and Haru will get it figured out when the time is right.

He knew there was a reason why Gou was the only one of them to have had successful relationships.

Sousuke had definitely felt guilty that he hadn’t kept up with her life much after he moved to Tokyo for police academy. She waved it off with only a few admonishments and was happy to fill him in while they waited for Rin to wake up.

Gou had stayed close to home and attended a local university where she reconnected with one of Haru, Makoto, and Rin’s former classmates, Yazaki Aki. They immediately hit it off and became inseparable friends. Around a year ago they had recognized their relationship as being more than platonic and moved in together. Everyone was ecstatic for them, Gou deserved drama-free happiness after everything she’d gone through with her family and watching over her troublesome brother and Iwatobi boys.
As they approached the designated courtyard, Sousuke was surprised to see their friends standing around a huge quilt that had several large bento boxes spread out over it. Nagisa spotted them first and started waving as he ran over and crashed into Gou with a hug. He moved on to Rin who scooped him into a bear hug as Rei and Haru came over to greet Gou. Nagisa paused in front of Sousuke, tilting his head and smiling to ask for permission. He smirked back and opened his arms a little to show it was alright.

Nagisa stepped forward and gave him firm squeeze. He spoke softly so only Sousuke could hear, “Thanks for looking after Haru-chan, Sou-chan. He’s doing really well.”

Pride blossomed in Sousuke’s chest and he simply nodded in response.

After greetings were exchanged, they headed over to the quilt to thoroughly embarrass Sousuke with an enthusiastic, but horrible rendition of ‘Happy Birthday.’ Haru had prepared the food early that morning with Rei’s help (mostly keeping Nagisa from snacking on it).

They chatted easily, taking turns regaling the others with stories from their studies and travel. Both Haru and Sousuke tried not to blush when Rin brought up their visit to Shizuoka and Gou scolded them for not telling her because she and Aki would have definitely come up for a beach day.

“Oh! We got to watch Haru-chan’s practice this morning! Rin-chan, you better have been working hard and not goofing off if you still want to compete. His relay team is amazing too, I’m jealous!”

Rin furiously blushed, “Of course I’ve been working hard! I can still beat this fishboy any day of the week!”

“What do you mean ‘still?’” Haru teased, “If I remember correctly, the last three races we had I—”

Rin jumped to his feet. “That’s it! You and me. We’re going to the pool now!”

Sousuke rolled his eyes, grabbing Rin’s shirt and tugging him back to his seat on the ground.

“Rin-san, you shouldn’t swim so soon after eating,” Rei scolded.

“You’ve known me for years, you don’t have to be so polite, Rei-chan.”

He blustered at the nickname, “Only Nagisa-kun calls me that!”

Gou made to grab a bottle of tea, but only found an empty bag. “Ah, we need more drinks!”

Haru stood. This was his campus, after all, and he knew where the closest vending machine was. Sousuke held out his coin purse, but Haru simply frowned at him as he took a handful of change from Rin.

He turned to leave, but something - make that two someones - caught his eye.

It wasn’t that Haru grew up hating Kisumi - he didn’t, even though it might have seemed that way. Kisumi just had qualities that Haru couldn’t understand and envied on some level. He easily made friends, he wasn’t uncomfortable giving and receiving affection, he could unabashedly state what he wanted and went after it. It was so different from all of his second guessing and self doubt, it made it hard for Haru to be around him without feeling awful, especially when Kisumi started vying for
Makoto’s attention.

It had bothered him a little bit to learn that they still kept in regular contact in Tokyo, meeting up a couple times a month since Kisumi went to a nearby university. He had thought he had gotten over it, especially after he managed to confess to Makoto and build what he thought was a good relationship. He was with Makoto in a way that no one else was and it quelled most of his jealousy.

But Haru’s insecurities rushed back at him tenfold that night when Makoto came home looking ashamed and guilty. When he had collapsed in his lap, Haru almost choked on a sickeningly sweet smell. He knew it from high school, it would stick to Makoto long after he sent the kids home from swimming lessons at the Iwatobi Swim Club Returns. The couple times Haru visited Makoto after class, the scent transferred to him too because Kisumi didn’t understand he still didn’t like people hanging off of him. It was even on Sousuke once, during the watergun battle where he admitted to using Kisumi as a shield to get away from Rin.

He recognized it from when Makoto came home after pickup basketball games and Haru would be on him instantly, pulling his clothes off as he kissed him breathless. Dragging him to their bedroom so Haru could replace the sweetness with the smell of chlorine and sweat and them.

So Makoto didn’t need to say it - where he had been and who he was with and just what the fuck he had done. The perfume, the love bites, Makoto’s breakdown said it all. The answers had burned through Haru, leaving his insides mangled.

Of course it was someone so unlike Haru. Of course it was someone Haru always feared losing Makoto to.

Of course it was, of course it was.

Haru dropped back to his knees, coins clinking together as they fell from Haru’s fist. He instinctively reached out to Sousuke and squeezed his forearm in panic.

Sousuke stopped mid sentence, brow furrowed in concern. He traced Haru’s line of sight in effort to figure out what had caused the pain in his expression. It was obvious once he turned his head: a familiar man with pink hair was bounding toward them, dragging a terrified looking Tachibana behind him, either too scared or too shocked to run away.

Sousuke was on his feet in seconds, blood boiling, ignoring Haru’s shout of protest.

Chapter End Notes

I promise this is the only real chapter cliffhanger in the story.

Haru named his whale shark plush 'Tomarou' because it's a combination of Touya, Yamato, and Ichirou's names. It also sounds like the English word 'tomorrow' and reminds Haru that he's moving forward.

Thank you so much, my loves, for your excited/supportive/screaming comments and messages! <3 <3 The next chapter will be out on the 6th (in the US), so enjoy your weekends and calm down before Sousuke gets you riled back up!
Three good punches landed, sending Makoto back on his ass, before Sousuke was pulled away. It took Rin, Rei, and Nagisa to hold his arms while Haru pushed him back, his hands firmly placed against his chest. “Sousuke, STOP! You don’t have to do this!”

He saw the tears in Haru’s eyes, but he wasn’t sure who he was crying for. As calmly as he could, he explained himself, “Haruka. When you told me what he did with him.-” Sousuke’s eyes left Haru’s only for a second to spot Kisumi handing Makoto a handkerchief to start mopping up the blood pouring from his nose, “- I promised myself two things. The first being that I’d beat the shit out of Tachibana if he ever crossed my path-”

“Wait, what did Makoto do with Kisumi?” Rin’s grip on Sousuke had started to loosen as if he was reconsidering Makoto deserving the punishment his best friend had in store for him.

“He…” Haru was not ready to talk about this so openly. It was hard enough telling Sousuke, someone he built a rapport with when it came to talking about his feelings. He let the silence hang in the air.

Realization dawned on Kisumi as he looked between Haru’s anguished, Sousuke’s livid, and Makoto’s rueful faces. He felt his own expression shift into one of shock. “Oh my god… you two weren’t just roommates. Makoto, why didn’t you tell me you and Haru were together?”

Haru cringed and bit his tongue to keep back a wail of frustration. He knew Makoto wasn’t forthcoming about their relationship to acquaintances or casual school friends - he accepted whatever reasons Makoto had listed - but he thought for sure he would’ve shared that detail with Kisumi. He was on their New Year's Greeting list, for fuck’s sake.

When Makoto didn’t answer, he turned his attention to Haru. “Haru, I swear, I didn’t know! I know we haven’t always gotten along, but I wouldn’t-”

“Enough!” Sousuke snapped. Haru’s hands were gripping his shirt so hard he thought it was going to tear.

“When was this?” Rin hissed through clenched teeth, letting go of Sousuke completely.
Nobody answered. Kisumi was trying to sort out how he got wrapped up in this mess and Haru was concentrating on not throwing up on Sousuke’s shoes.

“WHEN?”

“Halloween...” That was the first thing Makoto had said this entire time. The guilt and shame in his voice made Haru’s nausea worse.

“You son of a bitch!”

Before anyone could register what was happening, Rin had dived forward, ready to add bruises to what was already there. Gou reacted first, knowing exactly what her brother would do. She has her arms hooked under his shoulders and hauled him back before he did too much damage.

Makoto had barely defended, only protecting himself from the worst of the blows as if he knew he deserved it. As far as Sousuke was concerned, his behavior warranted more than a few emotional punches.

Unable to get his anger out with his fists, Rin had started yelling, “How could you, Makoto?! You’ve loved each other since you were kids and this is how you fucking treat him!”

“Onii-chan-!”

“I don’t give a shit if you were unhappy! You don’t do that to someone! He’s supposed to be your best friend-!”

Hoping that Sousuke would stay still, Haru moved to intervene, placing a firm hand on his shoulder. “Rin, that’s enough! Calm down.”

Rin turned on Haru and slapped him before pulling him in for a bone crushing hug. “YOU IDIOT! I knew something was wrong back then! Why didn’t you tell me what happened?! Why did you stay with him?!”

Haru rested his chin on his friend’s shoulder. He felt his eyes start to water again, not just from the stinging of his cheek, but was managing to hold them back. He said softly, “I loved him. I didn’t want him to leave. I thought I could make it work.”

Rin was still sobbing, but managed to choke a few sentences out, “Haru! You stayed with him for two fucking months after he cheated! You didn’t deserve this! You should’ve left!”

Haru rubbed Rin’s back in soothing circles, amusement tugging at his lips at the irony of how he’s the one doing the comforting in this situation, but Rin always went overboard. He felt everything with his whole body and soul. “I know, Rin. I know better now. Things are better now.”

Sousuke did his best to hide his obvious pleasure when Haru flicked his gaze to his.

Being a former master at reading Haru, Makoto didn’t miss the subtle action. As much as his face hurt, his guts boiled in the worst way. He knew he shouldn’t feel like this; he had no right to be jealous. He cheated. He ended the relationship. He forced Haru out. He had no one to blame but himself, but it didn’t make it any better. He flopped back on the grass in frustration.

The group finally noticed students hovering around them, watching as the drama unfolded. Haru sent Rin off to go help Nagisa and the others start cleaning up their abandoned picnic. He looked over at Makoto who was visibly shaking from his place on the ground and hesitantly made his way over.

After seeing that his eyes were closed, he knelt down next to him, assessing the damage. Nothing
looked broken, but he knew that Makoto would be dealing with some nasty bruises for the next month.

There was movement in the corner of his eye. Haru sent a warning glare to Sousuke who looked like a bull ready to charge, clearly upset by his proximity to his ex. The glare softened into a small smile just for Sousuke. Don’t worry, I’m still leaving with you.

“Hurry up,” Sousuke grumbled as he turned away, but stayed close enough to get to Haru within seconds if he needed to.

Turning his attention back to the body in front of him, Haru poked the ribs knowing it was a sensitive spot, “Hey Makoto, are you dead?”

Makoto groaned, “I kind of want to be.”

Poking him again, Haru frowned, “Don’t joke about that.”

Good job, Makoto, way to get on his good side.

“Sorry, Haru.”

Pulling out a tissue, Haru held it against a particularly nasty gash near his eyebrow, “Sorry for what?”

He kept his eyes closed, knowing he couldn’t take the sight of Haru’s concerned eyes on him, “For everything.”

Haru’s breath hitched before he hummed out an acknowledgement. He continued to tend to the worst of Makoto’s bleeding seeing as Kisumi had already taken his opportunity to bolt from the scene. He couldn’t blame him, he had wanted to run and hide as well.

Haru tried to keep his tone even and apathetic, but it still came out a little broken and harsh, “You’re… are you with him?”

Makoto heard the real question Haru asked: ‘did you leave me for Kisumi?’ The green eye that wasn’t swollen regarded Haru with sincerity, “No, I’m not. We weren’t… I never slept with him, Haru.”

Haru’s scowl deepened as he responded in a quiet yet hard voice, “Just because you didn’t have your dick in his ass doesn’t mean you didn’t cheat, Makoto. Those hickies came from someone.”

Makoto clenched his jaw, forcing the bile that rose in his throat back down. He didn’t think it was possible to feel worse, but he was wrong. Haru had never brought it up after it happened, never uttered a word about his lapse in judgement. Hearing his reaction now, almost a year after the fact, didn’t dull any of the pain. He knew he deserved every bit of agony he was feeling.

His voice came out shaking, “Yo-you’re as blunt as ever, Haru.”

He only shrugged.

Makoto sighed, “This is the first time I’ve talked to him since… I was on my way to the library and he popped up, saying he was meeting a friend and needed help finding the right building. I figured there’s no harm in showing him the way, but then he saw Yamazaki-san and Rin and took off.”

Haru nodded. He certainly wasn’t happy to see Kisumi again, but he was slightly relieved that his earlier assumption that Makoto had continued sleeping with Kisumi was unfounded. The most surprising bit was Kisumi’s ignorance in the entire ordeal. But when it came to Kisumi, Haru
guessed he could see it. Outside of some teasing in middle school, he had never done (or heard about him doing) anything intentionally hurtful or malicious. It was just easy for Haru to assume that a casual acquaintance would betray him if someone like Makoto had.

He looked over to where his friends were milling about. Nobody was looking toward them, they all probably wanted to forget this ever happened. He kind of did too, if he was being honest, but he knew something like this would happen eventually. Hopefully this would be the worst of it.

“I read your letter.”

“What?”

“What?”

“Th-the letter you wrote about the two questions you’re always asked. It had fallen out of your bag and it was picked up and delivered to me.”

Haru should’ve known better than to jinx himself. This was, in fact, worse. “You… You weren’t supposed to read it.”

Makoto’s brown scrunched in confusion. Haru used to kiss it to make the wrinkles go away. “Then why did you write it?”

He did not want to talk about the contents of that letter. That’s why he wrote it, so he’d never have to think about it again. “My therapist thought it would help me let go of my regrets.”

*Regret? Is that all I am now?* There were a hundred other questions Makoto wanted to ask, but he settled on one, “...Is therapy helping?”

A nod.

Makoto was silent for a moment before he quietly responded, “I’m glad, Haru-chan.”

The nickname made Haru pause, nostalgia tugging on his heartstrings. Instinctively, he ran his fingers gently over Makoto’s less damaged cheek. It was a simple, but meaningful gesture he had done thousands of times before. Makoto couldn’t help the tears that sprang to his eyes over the familiarity of it, the easy times when he and Haru had been devoted to one another. He shut his eyes to keep them from falling.

Nothing would ever be that simple between them again.

Haru looked from the face he had memorized over to the broad shoulders and strong back he was still getting to know. He felt a pull on his heart, not one of sorrow or doubt, but one that simply urged him to move.

*Forward.*

“You should stay away from Sousuke.”

With that whispered warning Haru stood, leaving something he had been holding on to behind.

They still weren’t done picking up their picnic site by the time Haru rejoined him. They assured him that they were almost ready to go so Haru just stood there, lost in his thoughts.
Sousuke was close to him through all of it. His hand resting protectively at the small of his back once Haru managed to free himself from another of Rin’s clingy hugs. He still had a thing or two to say to Tachibana, preferably with his fists - maybe a knee, but Haru had silently asked him to leave it be.

Sousuke looked down at Haru whose line of sight was pointed at his ex. A few blushing girls were fussing over Makoto as he got to his feet, wobbling, the tissue from Haru still pressed against his eyebrow.

“We’re ready to go, Haruka.”

He didn’t appear to hear him, blue eyes out of focus but still toward Makoto. Sousuke glowered at Tachibana one last time before he bent over and lifted Haru into his arms princess style.

Haru let out a yelp of surprise, “Ya-Yamazaki, what are you doing?!”

More than anything, Haru was shocked at how effortlessly he had been swept off his feet. He wasn’t exactly a small man, but apparently his bulk was nothing to Sousuke.

“You’re spacing out, Nanase. We’re ready to go.”

Haru had turned tomato red. “Put me down. This is embarrassing.”

“I don’t trust you to not get in trouble.”

“You’re the one who started throwing punches!”

“And you’re the one who can’t tear your eyes off Tachibana!” he hissed, low enough so only Haru could hear.

Oh.

He stopped trying to push away, instead reaching to squeeze Sousuke’s shoulders in comfort. “Sou…”

Sighing, he placed Haru back on the ground. At least he had his attention now.

Haru didn’t move away from him even though they were standing close enough he could see the faint scar on Sousuke’s collarbone. Some high school punk had tried to take him on with a knife. It didn’t end well for the kid.

“It’s nothing.”

Sousuke narrowed his eyes, it was obviously not nothing.

Haru let out a huff of air and stared at his hands as he spoke, “This was a lot and there are so many feelings in me right now and it’s really overwhelming. It’s taking all of my willpower to continue to stay here when I wanted to run home and lock myself in the bathroom as soon as I spotted Kisumi.”

He could feel Sousuke assessing him with his all too keen eyes. What he did see what he was looking at him now? Was it someone weak? Someone who didn’t deserve his time and effort?

He certainly hoped not, but he was still afraid as Sousuke stayed silent.

Done with cleaning, his friends picked up on his frantic energy and without any discussion they all headed back to Haru’s apartment as fast as they could.
No one really knew how to behave when they got there. Rin was flipping back and forth between seething and sorrow, and Sousuke had clammed up and withdrawn behind his old shield of apathy. It was only thanks to the relentlessly cheerful attitudes of Gou and Nagisa that they didn't sit in uncomfortable silence in the following hours.

They decided on card games, figuring that movies left too great of an opportunity for wandering minds to dwell on unsavory things. This was complicated enough to keep their focus and it was always a good move to spark Rin and Rei's competitive natures. They would go overboard and the rest of the group to have a good laugh at their antics. After delivery pizza dinner and hot baths, most of the tension had left the apartment.

They decided on a sleeping arrangement. Sousuke, being much taller and broader than the others, would get the second futon in the guest bedroom. Haru offered Gou and Rin his bed and they insisted all three of them could fit. They said goodnight, Sousuke still brusque (much to Haru's dismay), and retired to their separate rooms.

Haru might have liked the warmth of his two friends in his bed, but right now their proximity was suffocating. It had taken an hour of soft chatter for Gou to drift off and another awkward thirty minutes of Rin obviously wanting to say something, but not being sure if he should. Eventually Haru turned and gave him some pats on the head, gently brushing back the long locks.

Rin was taken aback at first, but he remembered all of the times he caught Sousuke doing the same thing to Haru, how he said it relaxes him. Not exactly sure what was running through Rin's mind, he must have settled on doing something that he knew helped himself feel better.

Rin's last thought before he joined his sister in slumber was that he could definitely get used to touchy Haru.

Haru waited another half an hour before he disentangled himself from the Matsuoka siblings, grateful that they were both heavy sleepers. He entered the living room to find Sousuke, relaxing on a nest of pillows and blankets, watching some sci-fi movie on low volume.

His eyes briefly checked to see who it was before speaking, "You should get a couch."

Haru shrugged and sat down next to him, "Yours is enough."

It was awkward and Haru wasn’t used to feeling that way with Sousuke, not since high school. But he couldn’t bring himself to do the usual things - press their shoulders together, rest his head on his thigh. There were so many ways for Sousuke to feel about the entire situation, but none of the ones that flickered through Haru’s mind were good. He settled on the one that seemed the most obvious.

"Please don’t be mad."

The voice was small and timid. Sousuke immediately hated it.

He turned to Haru to defend himself, "I’m not."

Haru’s mouth pressed into a thin line, disbelief set in his features.

He grunted, "Fine, I am mad. But not at you, okay?"

Haru looked away, drawing in on himself even more. He was clearly not convinced.

"Hey…” Sousuke shifted toward Haru so he could cradle his face in his hands, forcing eye contact. "I’m mad that you were hurt like that in the first place. I’m angry that you not only had to see
Tachibana before you were ready, but you had to see Shinigo as well. I’m fucking pissed at myself that I couldn’t control my temper and turned it into a goddamn brawl when we could have easily made some excuse for you to get out of there.”

Hands reached up to grip Sousuke’s wrists, clinging to him for grounding, for comfort.

“I’m mad, but it’s not your fault, Haruka.”

Haru nodded the best that he could considering his head was being held in place. He inhaled a shuddering breath through his nose, pressing harder against Sousuke’s hands.

Sousuke leaned in closer, whispering, “None of this is your fault.”

There wasn’t much space left between them. If Sousuke wanted to, he only had to tilt his chin forward to slide his lips against Haru’s, to find out what flavor of chapstick he had last used. He vaguely hoped that it would be the peach one.

Sousuke did want to, of course he wanted to, but this was absolutely not the right time. Instead he briefly pressed his forehead against Haru’s before pulling his hands away. Haru looked at him in confusion. “You should get some rest.”

Haru nodded (was that a flash of disappointment in his eyes?) and started to untangle himself from the mess of blankets that crept up around him. Sousuke gently grabbed his wrist to keep him there. He joked, “You really think you’ll be able to sleep peacefully in the same bed as Rin?”

Haru thought back to their Australia trip. Despite Rin falling asleep and waking up in the same position every day, he kicked and tossed and turned nonstop during the night. The frown on Haru’s face was enough of an answer.

Sousuke hunkered down in the nest and held open his arm, an invitation for Haru to come close. Haru looked toward the bedrooms with concern, but in the end decided that this was his apartment and he’ll sleep wherever he wants. Besides, Rin’s reaction was his greatest worry and he had already caught them napping together on the couch.

He grabbed the remote to turn the tv off and huddled up against Sousuke’s side. When he felt a strong arm wrap around him, he let out a long and heavy sigh, trying to expel the fears from today. He hoped that as jumbled as he felt now, he was still on the right path.

Nagisa was the first one up the next morning, his body adapting easily to the time change. He felt unnerved when he noticed the empty second futon, looking like it hadn’t even been used. He had a right to be concerned. Sousuke was so angry and then had hardly said more than two words at a time to Haru after they returned to his apartment. He really hoped the unfortunate outcome of yesterday wouldn’t cause major setbacks to the blossoming romance he just knew was going on between him and Haru.

When he walked into the living room, he noticed a bundle of blankets that he was fairly certain weren’t there last night. Tiptoeing over to investigate, his heart was put at ease as he saw Sousuke on his back with Haru halfway laying on top of him, their arms around each other as they slept.

Being Nagisa, he couldn’t help but slip his phone out of his sweatshirt pocket and take a couple photos for posterity. Trained to pick up on changes in his surroundings, even when dozing off, Sousuke’s eyes blinked open to catch him in the act. Nagisa lowered his phone and sent a sheepish smirk to him.
Sousuke returned it with a wink and Nagisa knew he had nothing to worry about. He grinned broadly, grabbing a couple snacks from the kitchen and went back to the guest room.

Checking the time - yup, still too early to be alive - Sousuke rolled to his side and gathered Haru fully into his arms, holding him close to his chest. With a contented huff, he drifted back to sleep.

After a couple hours Nagisa could sit still in the room anymore. Surprisingly, Rei was still asleep and he didn't have the heart to wake him as he had been struggling the most with the time switch. He crept out into the hallway, silently checking into Haru’s room to see the Matsuokas sprawled out in deep slumber. His last hope for entertainment was the duo in the living room.

Thankfully they were awake, still wrapped up in blankets, but propped up against the pillows and watching a nature documentary. Most of their bodies were covered, but from their positioning, Nagisa had a hunch that Sousuke still had an arm around Haru.

They looked over and spotted Nagisa, but the doorbell rang before anyone could speak. Haru instantly stiffened, his eyes going wide with the possibilities of who it could be at his door. Half the people he considered friends were already there and the others know better than to just show up since he’s not home that often. His brain ended up in a loop of No no no no. How did Makoto get my address? No no no no.

Picking up on his discomfort, Sousuke gave him nod, trying to tell him not to worry, he’ll take care of it, before climbing out of the blankets and to his feet. On the way to the door he ruffled Nagisa’s hair. To his credit, Nagisa shifted so whoever was at the door wouldn’t necessarily see Haru right away.

Sousuke took a deep breath, readying himself for a conflict, hoping he’d handle it better than he did yesterday. He quickly pulled back on the door and barked out a laugh when he saw who was on the other side.

Suga and Daichi looked surprised at the outburst, but still had their sweet smiles on their faces.

“We brought things for pancakes!” Daichi nudged him, which caused Suga to roll his eyes, “And things for omelets for you beefcakes with your protein needs.”

Haru had popped to his feet and came to the door as soon as he heard Koushi’s voice. “What are you doing here? N-not that I mind!”

Sousuke took the bag of groceries from Suga’s arms and led Daichi to the kitchen, introducing him to Nagisa on the way.

“A not-so-little birdie told me that if I wanted to meet your other best friends I should come by in the morning and bring breakfast. In my excitement, I forgot to text back, so sorry for the surprise!” Suga beamed at Haru.

Was his smile brighter than usual? Or was it just that there had been so much darkness yesterday? Either way, he was grateful and wanted to bask in Koushi’s soothing presence. He’d have to do something special for Sousuke later to thank him for this.

A crash came from the direction of Haru’s bedroom and he knew the apartment would soon be bursting with energy. He gave Suga a small smile. “You’re in for a treat. Rin has no filters for about an hour after he wakes up. Any question you ask will get a one-hundred percent honest answer. It’s horrifying.”
Suga giggled, that mischievous glimmer sparked in his eyes as he pulled Haru into the kitchen to help with breakfast. "Sounds like we arrived just in time!"

Chapter End Notes

I hope that was worth the anticipation from the cliffhanger!! After the the build up of the last few chapters, the end of this one seems unexciting, but Haru needs a break right now.

Thank you so much for your support!! I love you all and really appreciate everyone reading this story.
Nagisa ran off to fetch the sleepyheads after introducing himself to Suga. They shared a conspiratorial look that made Haru wary, he had the feeling they’d be connecting in the future. In the kitchen Daichi and Sousuke were beginning to prep pancake and omelette toppings. Before Sousuke could start chopping the peppers, Haru hip checked him away.

“Oi! I’m holding a knife, Haruka!”

Suga giggled, “Haru, you’re in trouble, he used your full name!”

Sousuke blushed and Daichi frowned, retorting, “It was dangerous.”

Haru and Suga rolled their eyes in unison. He patted Sousuke on the arm and told him he can flip the pancakes instead.

After a few minutes of quiet conversation and cooking, raised voices drifted in from the hallway and Haru prepared himself for Morning Rin. As expected, a pair of arms latched onto him across his shoulders. He continued cracking the eggs into a bowl as if nothing was different.

“Haruuu, where’d you go last night?” Rin whined.

“You kick too much. I don’t know how Gou put up with it.”

“I kick back,” Gou explained with a smirk.

Rin snorted, “you’re just used to sleeping next to Sou. He’s like a damn corpse.”

Shit.

From his vantage point at the stove, Sousuke checked on Haru first. He had frozen mid whisking and from the small changes in his expression and demeanor, Sousuke could tell he was waiting for the Earth to open up and swallow him whole. Rei had a curious look on his face, he probably missed the significance of what was just said (or didn't think it was his place to have an opinion). Gou wasn’t surprised at all, and Nagisa was wearing a shit eating grin (of course). Suga had kept his usual pleasant expression, but he could tell the gears were turning in his head, they always were. Finally,
he cast a glance to Daichi who was boring holes into him with his eyes, a ‘we’re going to talk about this later, mister’ look on his face.

Not even his own powerhouse of a father had ever felt so intimidating.

Haru cleared his throat, recovering from the surprise, and changed the subject, ‘Rin, have you asked out that cute barista at the cafe by your pool yet, or are you still choking down their horrible coffee?’

‘UGH! It’s not that the place has horrible coffee, it’s just that they as an individual are terrible at making coffee! How do they even have a job there?’

‘Because idiots like you buy from them anyway.’

Rin pulls his phone out, navigating to his gallery. “Once you see them, you’ll understand!” He crowds Haru, keeping his arm around him so he can’t get away and flips through the photos. They’re all candid shots of a very pretty barista with multi-colored pastel dyed hair done up in impressive braids. He could see why Rin was interested and thought how he fawned over them was fairly sweet, but he wasn’t done teasing. What Rin had let slip earlier was definitely going to earn him a thirty minute lecture from Daichi, so it was only fair.

“Won’t they think you’re a creep if they find out you’ve taken all these secret pictures?”

Rin scoffed, as if it never crossed his mind what he was doing wasn’t pure of heart. “It’s not like I’m stalking them. And you people can’t judge! I seem to remember Nagisa following around Rei for weeks!”

Nagisa jumped in to defend himself, “We needed him to join the swim club! Besides, I only started taking sneaky pictures of him after we were friends. Does your crush even know your name, Rin-chan?”

“Of course they do!”

Sousuke couldn’t resist getting at least one prod at his friend, “Only because they have to write it on the cups.”

Rin’s face turned the same color as his hair, “O-oi! You’re my best friend, you’re supposed to support me!”

“It’s not so unusual, Rin-kun! I found loads of secretly taken photos of me on Daichi’s phone from before we started dating.”

“Suga!” The embarrassment was the only thing that distracted Daichi from continuing to glare at Sousuke.

“Doesn’t make it less creepy just because Daichi did it,” Haru added.

“I was sixteen! And we were friends, so it wasn’t that weird!” Daichi was trying to defend himself, but Suga still shook his head at him, a disappointed look on his face.

As the group dissolved into playful jabbing and story swapping, Sousuke leaned over to Haru after he finished plating the last pancake. “Mind if I use your shower?”

Haru shook his head. “Do you need anything?”

“Save me an omelet and find a shirt that fits me.”
“Got it.” He waved him away.

When Sousuke rejoined the group a short while later, it was obvious why Haru had been smirking ever since he had gone to his room to fetch a top for him. Rin had seen it before, on that skype call when he first teased Sousuke about potential butt touching, but at the time it had been Haru who was wearing it. He wolf whistled and Sousuke looked ready to slam his face into the table.

“You seriously didn’t steal anything of mine that’s less awful than this?” He gestured to the smiling pandas on the hot pink shirt. Sousuke could feel his eyebrow twitching as he tried to ignore the snickering.

Haru pouted, “I like that shirt.”

“It’s super cute, Sou-chan!”

“Pink is definitely your color, Sousuke-kun.”

He rubbed a hand over his face, hoping he could hide how mortified he was under a mask of irritation, and missed seeing Nagisa taking a photo. Haru caught it though, and pointed at his own device, indicating that he needed to be sent a copy. Nagisa happily obliged.

Haru now had a new phone background.

When he had made the plans, Haru was genuinely worried that the constant presence of Nagisa, Rei, and Rin would be too much for him to deal with for five straight days. Not that he didn't love them, of course, but outside of Sousuke he hadn't shared that much of his energy and attention with anyone else. Thankfully after the excitement of that first day, his friends paid extra attention to Haru’s moods and adjusted their behavior accordingly.

The rest of the visit went as predicted. Sousuke and Haru still had responsibilities to fulfill, but spent their free time eating, shopping, and catching up with their guests. They ended up at a public pool a few times (Rin insisted he did not cry when Sousuke happily dived in), Haru managing to always win one more race than Rin did.

It was wonderful week, solidifying the friendships Haru had rebuilt and practicing speaking up and reaching out (sometimes literally). He went out for jogs with Rei in the morning and encouraged him to try some of the things he was interested in that we're outside of his comfort zone. He taught Nagisa a few of his favorite cookie recipes and painted each other’s nails (Nagisa picked out a matte grey for Haru and he ended up with gold glitter over a pale aqua). He didn't spend too much alone time with Rin since he stayed with Sousuke, but they managed to steal a few minutes here and there for them to seriously discuss the stress of training and swap coping methods. Gou joined them whenever Chigusa had to go to class or work, and Haru made a note to add her to the list of people he messaged. Her unique blend of straightforward confidence and compassion was comforting. He felt like he could go to her with a question and she wouldn’t sugarcoat her answer.

The obviously avoided subject of Makoto established a sliver of tension throughout the entire visit. Haru pretended he didn't see the glances of concern whenever something happened or was mentioned that had an obvious link to Makoto. He figured that one of them would check in on him sooner or later. Honestly,
Haru hoped that they would, he didn't want Makoto to be suffering alone (if he was suffering at all).

Now Haru woke up by himself in an empty apartment for the first time in a week. For someone who used to actively push people out the door of his house in Iwatobi, the loneliness he felt now was alien and unsettling. Nothing on the outside had changed from before the visit, but now his apartment was too quiet, too cold.

It wasn't like they'd be gone forever. It wasn't like they left because of something he had done. It wasn't like he wouldn't get messages from them before the day was over. But they were still gone and Haru couldn't fight the resurgence of panic and self doubt that emerged with it. Kotobuki-sensei said there would be one or two things that would never be easy, that would always cause distress to speed through his body.

This was it. He could not handle people leaving.

Haru had worked hard to be independent and self sufficient. He didn't think he needed anyone else, but as the dreaded feeling of abandonment flooded his chest, he realized he had been lying to himself. He couldn't be alone anymore. He had to have someone who wanted him around and could prove it.

He had that, he knew, but it did little to console him right now. Maybe after a few years passed to give him a better perspective things would be different. He hoped so.

He managed to make it to the bath and focused on evening out his breathing. The water had become room temperature by the time Haru felt like he had left the worst of his attack behind and could get ready for morning practice.

He still had to make it through his unfortunately long day, but the fact he wasn't returning to his apartment that night gave him something to look forward to.

It was close to two in the morning by the time Sousuke returned home. The shift was officially over at midnight, but problems kept arising and apparently, everyone else in the station that night was a moron and needed Sousuke to fix all of their mistakes. Every time he was forced to clean up after the department, he became increasingly bitter that he would still have to sit for the sergeant exam.

As happy as he had been to spend the week with Rin, he was glad his place was empty and quiet. He had the next day off, a handful of new movies, and a case of beer to relax with. What could be more relaxing?

The answer was when he realized his home was not as empty as he thought.

When he walked into his bedroom he was glad he didn't flip on the overhead light because there was a familiar lump in his bed, stealing more than a fair share of blankets. Sousuke's heart swelled at the sight. Due to their visiting friends, they had slept at their respective apartments except the night after the picnic. They had seen each other often during the week. of course, but it was different. They didn't get to have their usual peaceful moments, and Sousuke had reigned in most of his instincts to casually touch Haru. Their friends were a little too watchful, and Rin needed no additional ammunition to tease him with.

However, it was just them again, and Sousuke knew he could get in bed and wrap an arm around Haru’s waist or run his fingers through his hair with impunity. Despite his urge to do just that as soon as possible, Sousuke forced himself to go take a shower and eat something, lest he wake up full
of regrets. When he finally slid under the covers, Haru was facing Sousuke’s side and not as tightly wrapped. Sousuke wasted no time in pulling him close, inhaling the comforting scent of mint and chlorine. In his sleep, Haru shifted, fitting their bodies perfectly together. Sousuke allowed himself the selfish thought that this was how it was supposed to be.

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Despite arriving home at such a late hour, Sousuke was - for once - awake before Haru and didn’t have to rush off to work. Sousuke was mildly concerned because Haru never slept in, but he wasn’t about to wake him up and ask if anything was wrong. Instead, he just laid there and enjoyed how absolutely unrefined Haru looked while he was asleep: his cheek smashed up against the pillow, hair sticking out in all directions, mouth open and drooling. Sure, it wasn’t the prettiest sight by any means, even with the sunlight filtering in through the curtains bathing them in a rosy hue, but it was something that only Sousuke got to see. That was special enough.

His phone buzzed with an incoming call and he rolled away, sitting on the edge of the bed so he wouldn’t be talking right in Haru’s ear.

“What’s up, Oyaji?”

“Happy birthday to my favorite son!”

“I’m your only son.”

“That doesn’t make you less of a favorite!”

Sousuke chuckled, even though they rehashed the same conversation every year. They easily slid into their normal exchanges about the business, how Michiru was doing, and Sousuke’s work. They were about to part ways when Sousuke felt the bed shift and a warm hand graze his back.

“Sou...?”

Sousuke stopped mid sentence. He’d forgotten Haru was there.

“...Is that Haru-kun I hear?”

Sousuke did not appreciate how smug and suggestive his father’s voice sounded. “Y-yeah, he-”

“Give him the phone, please.”

“Oyaji...”

“Now, Sousuke.”

Ugh, he used his dad-tone on him. He gave up and held out the phone to Haru who was now sitting up against the pillows, rubbing sleep from his eyes with the sleeve of the borrowed long sleeved henley he had on.

God dammit. Haruka looked so cute in Sousuke’s clothes, even when he was a little worse for wear. Sousuke made a mental note to spoil him a little today.

“Hello?”

“Haru-kun, I’ve missed you!”
Haru smiled, feeling soothed by the genuine, caring voice. “It’s good to hear from you, Tou-san. Did that acquisition go well?”

Sousuke could imagine how his father would be gushing about Haru’s attentiveness on the other side of the call. Not feeling like he particularly wanted to listen to a one-sided conversation, he motioned to Haru that he was going to make coffee. Haru nodded, but didn’t miss a beat in his conversation, which had moved on to the new plants added to their garden for autumn.

Haru received a lengthy update on Michiru (who constantly lamented Sousuke on keeping Haru to himself) even though they regularly messaged each other. He didn't interrupt because it was clear by the pride in his voice how much Yasuhiro enjoyed talking about his children. After Haru debriefed him on his swimming progress, Yasuhiro inquired about a more time sensitive topic.

“Did you give Sousuke his present yet?”

Of course he knew. “Did Michiru tell you?”

He hummed an affirmative.

“No, I wanted to wait until his actual birthday.”

Yasuhiro heard the faint trace of uncertainty. “I’m sure he’ll be thrilled, Haru-kun.”

“It’s not really that special…”

“Nonsense! It’s from you, that’s special enough.”

Haru covered his face with his free hand. “Tou-san, please don’t say such embarrassing things.”

A joyous laugh came over the phone. “Sorry, Haru-kun, but you know I’m right.”

Haru was glad this conversation was not taking place in person. It was almost too embarrassing to have your crush’s father encouraging you to woo his son.

“I’ll go give it to him now.”

“Good boy! Tell Sousuke you love him.”

Haru snorted, “You mean ‘you love him,’ Tou-san.”

“You caught me!” That laugh again, not as rich as Sousuke's but in the same beautiful flow. “Keep me updated, Haru-kun. I'll call again soon, hopefully you’ll be there.”

Rolling his eyes, Haru bid him goodbye and left the bedroom after grabbing something from his overnight bag.

Sousuke was sitting at the dining table, picking through an assortment of take out leftovers. “You talked to him longer than I usually do.”

“Maybe you’re just a bad conversation partner,” Haru retorted.

“I do not want to hear that coming from you.” He pinched Haru’s hip as he walked by.

Haru made an indignant noise in his throat, and opened the fridge in hopes to find something a little more fresh to eat. No such luck. They'd have to go to the store after breakfast.

“Do you have my phone?”
Hovering behind Sousuke, Haru reached over his shoulder, and set his phone in front of him on the table. The phone wasn't all, though, it rested on top of a package wrapped in ocean wave patterned paper.

He started to turn back to Haru for an explanation, but Haru placed his hands on either side of his head and forcibly faced him forward.

“Haru?”

He wasn't able to hide the nervousness in his voice, “Happy birthday, Sou.”

*Oh.*

Sousuke honestly hadn't expected anything from him, Haru doted on him enough in their day to day interactions. He was about to insist that this wasn't necessary, but stopped himself, realizing it would probably hurt Haru’s feelings. The gift wasn't born from a sense of obligation; Haru never did anything he didn't want to do.

He moved his phone to the side and picked up the box. Despite usually having the wrapping torn off in seconds, Sousuke took care this time to gently unstick the tape, and keep the paper in one piece. It was his first official gift from Haru, it should be treated with respect. He opened it, pulling out the softest scarf he'd ever felt. It was ash grey, speckled with darker charcoal and slate blue flecks.

It was beautiful.

Sousuke had been quiet too long, and from where he was standing, Haru couldn't see the awestruck look on his face as he ran his fingers over the fine knit. He cleared his throat as his hands shifted from the side of Sousuke’s head to his shoulders.

“I know it's nothing fancy, but-”

“Haru, you made this?” It was more of a statement than a question, and Sousuke was glad his voice didn't come out as choked up as he felt. He already knew it was homemade, he had heard about, and seen Haru working on the other unique gifts he'd create for his friends.

“Yeah… There's an amazing yarn shop in Kyoto I went to a couple years ago while I was there for a meet. I had Rin go and take photos so I could pick out the colors for him to send to me.”

They let silence settle over them again. Feeling a bit daring (thanks Tou-san), Haru leaned forward, wrapping his arms around his shoulders. He pressed his cheek against the crown of Sousuke's head.

“Do you like it?”

Sousuke reached up and rested his hand on the arms crossed under his chin, giving them a squeeze. “I love it. Thank you, Haruka.”

He felt Haru smile against his hair, and couldn't stop his own wide grin.

Chapter End Notes

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR ALL OF YOUR AMAZING COMMENTS ON CHAPTER 14!!!
I hope this was a nice little breather as we build up to the next Big Thing. :)

Much love to all you precious dumplings <3
I've only got myself to blame

Chapter Summary

Heart to hearts all around.

Chapter Notes

enjoy October~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Makoto took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. He was four hours deep into a twenty page research paper and fading fast. After a quick stretch break, he shifted tabs to check his email. His eyes widened in surprise at the newest message in his inbox.

It was from Rei.

He hesitated on opening it, not sure what to expect. Nagisa and Rei didn’t lash out at him like Rin, but the confusion and hurt in their expressions about the whole situation was obvious. He swallowed his nerves and clicked on it.

Makoto-senpai,

It’s been a while and I hope this message finds you well. I should let you know that Nagisa-kun is with me as well so please considering this note as being from both of us. We wanted to let you know that Haruka-senpai did not disclose the details of the end of your relationship to us and frankly, it’s none of our business. You are still our dear friend, Makoto-senpai, nothing will change that. Haruka-senpai would never ask us to choose between you two, so please feel like you can come to us if you want to talk or need a distraction. We are here for you.

LOVE YOU, MAKO-CHAN!!

Rei and Nagisa

Makoto read the message one more time before he had to cover his eyes with his hand to hide the tears running down his face. He hadn’t expected compassion from his old friends - it never crossed his mind that he deserved any. No one was harder on Makoto than himself, and this was especially true since he pulled his head out of his ass and reflected on his behavior toward Haru.

If Rei and Nagisa could still offer him their smiles and understanding, if Haru was willing to tend to his wounds despite Makoto leaving worse ones on his heart, then maybe he could forgive himself.
Eventually. With a lot of help.

“Daichiiiiiiii! We’re out of the Chinese chili oil!” Suga flopped onto Daichi’s back.

“Suga you have at least a dozen other chili sauces. It’ll be fine.”

“It’s not the same and you know it! Go buy some, please?” he added, in a low voice, directly into Daichi’s ear. “Take Sousuke-kun with you.”

Since they all met at the volleyball game, Haru and Sousuke came over for dinner at least once a month. However, during one of their movie nights with Haru only, about a week after they had stopped by for breakfast to meet Haru’s childhood friends, he’d disclosed what happened with Makoto on campus. While Daichi was tampering down his anger about it by a sprint around the block, Haru told Koushi about the fake letter he wrote for therapy and how it ended up in Makoto’s hands. That fact was particularly troubling for Haru because although he never expected this, part of Haru wanted Makoto to know the things he wrote. Why did he want that though? What good could it possibly do? Koushi couldn’t give him an answer.

After that, neither Suga nor Daichi really knew what to say except they were glad Haru had such good friends, and they were there for him whenever he needed a safe space or someone to talk to. Daichi did have more to say, but not to Haru. As protective as he was, and as imposing as he could come across, Daichi was soft hearted. He believed Sousuke’s feelings for Haru were sincere and well intentioned, but he still had to have a talk with him.

Daichi got up, Suga sliding off his back. He went over to where Sousuke was sitting with Haru and clapped him on the shoulder, “Prince Suga has ordered us to bring him every kind of chili sauce they have in stock at the grocery store.”

Chuckling, Sousuke stood. “Can’t refuse a direct order from the prince.”

“Why am I a prince? Shouldn’t I be King?” rang Suga’s voice from the kitchen.

Daichi called back as they headed out the door, “Whatever you like, your worshipfulness!”

Once they exited the apartment building, Daichi led the way toward their local market. Sousuke’s posture was tense, as if he knew this was more than a relaxing stroll to pick up some missing ingredients. Daichi decided to just get it over with.

“When are you going to tell Haru?”

It would have been stupid to ask ‘tell Haru what?’ because there was only one secret Sousuke was keeping from him. He sighed before replying, “It won’t be anytime soon, so you and Suga shouldn’t hold your breaths.”

He caught the stern look Daichi threw his way and explained, “Haru’s acting like he’s fine, more or less, but I can tell he’s still shaken up about talking to Tachibana. He doesn’t need any more pressure to sort out what he’s feeling, especially if he has to figure how I fit into it. I’m not going to rush him.”

Daichi looked at him from the corner of his eye. Was Sousuke naturally extra cautious about relationships or did he truly not understand the special way Haru looked at him? Or talked to him, or
talked about him, or touched him. Although Daichi wasn’t someone who could judge considering his experience.

“I understand where you’re coming from. You don’t want to jeopardize the relationship you have now because you know as soon as you say it, things will change.”

They walked a few more steps in silence before Sousuke asked, “How did you confess to Suga?”

Daichi reached up and rubbed the back of his neck. “Actually Suga went first. He kissed me one time when we were alone in the clubroom after practice. Even though I knew he was special to me, I honestly hadn’t been thinking about romance with anyone. I told him I didn’t know what to say and, Suga being Suga, laughed and brushed it off like it was no big deal. Thankfully things weren’t awkward between us, but his behavior toward me still changed.”

“How so?”

He signaled to Sousuke that they were going to take a slight detour in order to continue to conversation. The grocery was only a few store fronts over and this wasn’t really a topic Daichi wanted to discuss with others crowded around.

“He stopped teasing me so much. He avoided the innocent touches we used to share. He still treated me like his best friend, but there was a barrier between us that wasn’t there before. I knew he was only protecting himself, but it still hurt.

“I realized how much those little things meant to me. It forced me to think about how I really felt about Suga and what I wanted from him. I figured it out, but I was still afraid to tell him. I didn’t want him to think I was only saying it out of pity or guilt.”

Sousuke frowned. It was difficult to imagine confident, self assured Daichi hesitating when it came to Suga. Just looking at them it was so obvious they belonged together. He idly wondered if anyone would ever think that way about him and Haru.

“What finally forced you to do it?”

“I overheard Suga talking to our friend about university choices. They were all far from Miyagi and I panicked. I thought ‘in one year I’m going to lose him completely,’ and I didn’t want that. So I researched all of the schools he mentioned and the next day I pulled him aside and pushed a brochure into his hands and said ‘you should go to this one!’ He asked me why and I said it was because they had the best volleyball team out of all of his choices. He laughed, saying he wasn’t going to continue playing and I explained that it was wasn’t for him - it was the team I wanted to play on. It took him a little bit to figure out what I was trying to say, but when his eyes lit up I told him I loved him and would go with him anywhere, always.”

Sousuke gave Daichi a small smile, “I thought you said you weren’t a romantic.”

Daichi’s cheeks colored, “S-sure, that might be romantic for me or you, but Suga - and I have a feeling Haru - are on an entirely different level when it comes to that stuff.”

He thought about the handmade scarf that was currently hanging in his doorway at home. Yes, Haru was definitely a step above.

“I guess what I’m trying to say is I’m relieved that you are being so considerate of Haru’s emotional state and willing to wait for him to be ready. It shows how much you value him. But don’t wait so long telling him how you feel is an act of desperation.”

Sousuke nodded, glad that he earned the trust of Haru’s most steadfast protectors (besides him, of
They continued to sit there in thought for a couple minutes before Daichi patted Sousuke’s knee. “We should get that chili oil and head back. Suga is a nightmare when he’s kept waiting.”

Sousuke was on his way to the university’s pool. It was one a few places he could navigate to on campus with no problems, provided he started at a certain place every time.

Touya and Ichirou waved at Sousuke as he walked into the lobby. It wasn’t surprising that only those two were waiting, Haru was usually the last one out of the locker room and Yamato tended to lag behind to keep him company (or to make sure he didn’t stand in the shower for an hour).

This time Yamato exited by himself with a small frown on his face. When he spotted Sousuke, a flash of nervousness wiped across his features that immediately put Sousuke on edge, but it was gone in a flash.

“Nice to see you Sousuke-kun,” Yamato offered him a smile.

He seemed sincere enough, but there was still something off.

“Where’s Haru?” Touya asked.

The corners of Yamato’s mouth tightened. “Tomoyuki-san wanted to speak to him.”

Both Ichirou and Touya’s eyes narrowed at the name. Before Sousuke could ask who the hell Tomoyuki was and why they carried an obvious negative connotation, Haru came around the corner and joined the group. He wedged himself between Yamato and Sousuke, giving Sousuke’s forearm a gentle squeeze in greeting.

Ichirou’s voice was uncharacteristically hard, “What did Tomoyuki want?”

Haru rolled his eyes and answered in an annoyed voice, “What he always wants when he corners someone.”

“You didn’t say ‘yes’ did you?”

Haru shot Ichirou a glare, “Does anyone ever say ‘yes’?”

“He can be charming when he wants to be.”

“He’s a sleaze. I only talked to him so he’d stop bothering me.”

Oh. Things clicked in Sousuke’s mind; Haru had been propositioned by some player. His hand instinctively went to the small of Haru’s back.

It was unsettling for him to hear about people being romantically or sexually interested in Haru despite knowing he was popular. He was a star athlete, a talented artist, and good looking. Even his quirks of being quiet, stoic, and weird came off as an alluring air of mystery that made him more attractive. But this was the first time Sousuke was directly confronted with it and now he had to wonder if Haru had ever - and would ever - say yes.
Yamato had been observing Sousuke the entire time and could see the minute changes in his demeanor as he comprehended the situation. Something had obviously happened between them, but not so much that their official status had changed. Yamato wondered if Sousuke had admitted his feelings to himself and was now taking steps toward telling Haru. He certainly hoped so because they were all ready to see these two surprisingly shy men get together.

Haru scooted close to Sousuke, practically pressing into his side. Yamato caught Touya and Ichirou’s eyes and smiled. It seemed like they would get their wish sooner rather than later.

Officer Tanaka led the way through the dark streets. They were already a few drinks in before Sousuke finally agreed to go with him to a friend's Halloween party. Sousuke never really cared for the holiday, but he was tipsy and irritated and it was easier to go along with whatever his partner wanted. Tanaka had brought Buddhist robes to change into while Sousuke stayed in uniform. Plenty of people dressed up as law enforcement and it’s not like any of these strangers would know he was a real cop.

Sousuke barely registered where he was going, but if he was more sober and less lost in thought he would’ve recognized his surroundings as a place he’d been a few times. Tanaka brought him into an apartment building and to a door that was covered in fake cobwebs and plastic spiders. Music and chatter was drifting through the door. It certainly sounded like a good time.

The door swung open after Tanaka pounded on it. A bright voice rang out in surprise, “Sousuke-kun! Haru said you weren’t coming tonight!”

Sousuke blinked, not quite sure who he was looking at. He recognized the metal arm, outfit, and dark eyeliner as Bucky Barnes AKA the Winter Soldier. However, unlike the real one, the person before him had a wide, charming grin and silver hair.

“Suga?”

He flashed a peace sign, “I guess the hair gives it away! I never knew you were the Officer Yamazaki that is Ryuu’s partner!”

Tanaka smacked Sousuke on the arm, “How do you know Suga-san!?!”

Suga answered for him with a wink, “Sousuke-kun is a close friend of Haru’s.”

Tanaka paused, puzzle pieces fitting together. A devilish smirk cut across his face. “So Yamazaki’s Haruka is the same as Suga-san and Daichi-san’s newest adopted child. What a wonderful coincidence!”

Sousuke was flooded with panic as Tanaka pushed past Suga and into the party. “Where is he? I have to hear Yamazaki gush about him all the time. It’s time for me to meet him! Gotta make sure he’s good enough for the best partner on the force.”

He barely heard Sousuke’s roar of “I do NOT gush!” over the music.

Tanaka had no idea what Haru looked like, but he figured shouting his name until the man in question responded was a fine idea. Before he could start yelling, he stopped dead in his tracks when a bare chest with muscles cut from marble caught his attention. “Holy shit.”
“Tanaka!” Sousuke barked as he caught up to him, grabbing his arm to keep him there.

The owner of the most lickable hip bones Tanaka had ever seen turned toward them at the sound of Sousuke’s voice.

Sousuke looked over to where Tanaka was blatantly staring. It was Haru. He was wearing full length black jammers with red stripes running down his long legs. It had been ages since he had a haircut so the overgrown length was easily pulled back in a small ponytail and topped off with a pair of goggles resting on his forehead. His chest was bared, the black jacket he was wearing unzipped. Sousuke recognized it as a Samezuka swim club warm up.

Half of Sousuke wanted to stare at him like Tanaka was, the other half wanted to rip the jacket off of Haru because he knew it wasn’t his.

“Sousuke, Tanaka, you made it!” Daichi was next to Haru, dressed in a remarkably detailed replica of Captain America’s uniform from *The Winter Soldier*.

Tanaka finally picked his jaw up off the floor at the sound of Daichi’s voice. “Daichi-san! You and Suga-san have the most excellent couples costumes, as usual!”

Daichi rubbed the back of his neck, “Thanks, Tanaka. Suga picked them out. Are you matching with Noya again this year?”

“Yes! Asahi-san too. Yuu is the devil and he’s Jesus Christ.”

Daichi chuckled, “Just crass enough without being too offensive, huh?”

Tanaka let out a bellow of laughter in agreement and then turned his attention to Haru. He put on what he thought was his most charming smile. “I’m Tanaka Ryuunosuke. Nice to see a new face around here.”

Haru gave him a little bow and a smile. “I know. I watched a lot of the Karasuno matches with Daichi and Koushi. You were an impressive wing spiker.”

Daichi groaned, “Haru, please do not stroke his ego. This fool doesn’t need it.”

Tanaka’s eyes widened in surprise. “Wait, you’re Haru?!”

He nodded, tilting his head to the side.

“Damn. None of you told me he was smoking hot.”

Haru immediately flushed. With his jacket open everyone could see how far down his neck and chest it went.

“Oi, don’t be a creep.” Sousuke let go of his arm and smacked him on the back of the head. He finally made eye contact with Haru who was no frowning at him. It wasn’t his normal pout or resting expressionless face. Sousuke raised his eyebrows in question.

Haru huffed, grabbing Sousuke’s wrist. “I need to talk to you.”

Sousuke didn’t have a chance to refuse as he was pulled through the crowd, a whistle from Tanaka trailing after them. Haru led them into Daichi and Suga’s master bathroom. Normally this space was off limits, but they weren’t going to make a mess or make out, so it would be okay. Haru turned on his heel to face Sousuke.
“You’re being weird.”

“What?”

“You’re being weird. The past couple of weeks I feel like you’ve been kind of avoiding me.”

Had he? Sousuke tried to think critically about his recent interactions with Haru. Maybe he had been texting him less.

And touching him less.

And inviting him over less.

Shit.

Haru’s voice was impatient, “Did I do something wrong?”

“Of course not,” Sousuke sighed.

“Then what is it?”

Sousuke rubbed a hand over his face, wishing that he hadn’t let Tanaka buy him so many beers.

“Sou, please. If something happened then we should talk about it. I don’t want things hidden between us,” desperation laced his voice. What he had with Makoto was ruined by lack of communication and he’d be damned if he let the same thing happen to him and Sousuke.

Sousuke kept his eyes glued to the floor. When he finally spoke up, it was in a timid voice unsuited to him, “Does it happen to you a lot? People asking you out.”

Surprise washed over Haru’s face, “No. Not really. I guess once a week or something.”

“Once a week is a lot.”

Is it? Haru was used to being around Makoto whom people flirted with constantly every single day. “It doesn’t matter. I’m not interested.”

“In any of them?”

“No. I’m…” he paused, the blush returning to his skin, “I’m happy with who I spend my time with now. I don’t want anyone else.”

Sousuke was sure his face was as equally red as Haru’s. Hearing him say that loosened a knot in his stomach. They stayed quiet for a few heartbeats before Sousuke reached forward to brush the bangs out of Haru’s eyes. “You need to cut your hair. You look too much like Rin, especially in that outfit.”

Haru snorted, “That’s the point, Sou. Nagisa said I should dress as something scary so I’m Rin for Halloween.”

Sousuke couldn’t help but laugh, “Does he know about this?”

Haru smirked, “Whose jacket do you think this is? He thought it was a great idea and said he’d dress up as me.”

He pulled his phone out of his pocket and brought up the photo Rin had texted him earlier. Sousuke
moved so he could look over Haru’s shoulder to see.

Rin was giving his best blank expression, goggles around his neck, the white and blue Iwatobi Swim Club jacket halfway zipped up. He had on a pair of Haru’s signature purple and black knee length jammers.

“It’s Gou’s jacket,” Haru explained, “but I sent him the jammers as a gift.”

Sousuke rested his chin on Haru’s shoulder as he chuckled, “I think you make a better Rin than he does you.”

Haru smiled to himself as he leaned back against Sousuke, “I’m going to tell Rin that.”

They stayed like that for a few minutes, Sousuke watching as Haru and Rin bantered back and forth over text.

Eventually Haru slipped the phone back into his pocket. “Are we good?”

One of Sousuke’s arm wrapped around his waist and gave it a squeeze. “Yeah, we’re good. Sorry for being weird. I didn’t realize what I was doing.”

“You don’t have to overthink everything.”

Haru placed one of his hands over the one Sousuke had on his hip and let them lapse into a comfortable silence again.

“We should probably get back to the party,” Sousuke whispered, his lips only a hair’s width away from Haru’s ear. He boldness was rewarded with a slight shiver from the man in his hold.

Haru sighed because he knew Sousuke was right. He was sure Daichi, Koushi, and now Tanaka were probably wondering what was taking them so long. He stepped forward out of Sousuke’s embrace and instantly missed the warmth.

Chapter End Notes

I really just wanted to write Haru dressed up as Rin and vice versa.

I hope you are enjoying some of the (mostly) fluff, lovelies! Thank you for your continuing support and comments :D It really does make my day!
thinking 'bout everything we could've been

Chapter Summary

Digging down deep for those truths.

Chapter Notes

Heyo~ Have some Haru as Rin! Big thank you to @stormiscoming for the idea that Haru bought vampire fangs to represent Rin's shark teeth!
If you have any doodles from anything in my story (or SouHaru in general), please let me know, I would L O V E to see them!!

Shoutout to my beta reader @princest!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Once again, Sousuke was planted in front of his full length mirror agonizing over his outfit. It was the night of Haru’s first gallery showing, and all day during his shift, Sousuke had to listen to Tanaka nagging him about being presentable for such a crowd. As if Tanaka was ever presentable.

After Sousuke and Haru had returned from their bathroom heart-to-heart during the Halloween party, Tanaka instantly latched onto Haru. For whatever reason, Haru indulged him with rapt attention for every work or volleyball story he told. At one point Haru even called him ‘Ryuu-senpai’ and the man almost fainted.

It was Suga who had to hold Sousuke back when Tanaka slipped his arm around Haru’s shoulders while he introduced him to Asahi and Noya over facetime. They’d heard stories about Haru from Daichi and Suga, and were excited to know more. Noya made a fuss over Haru’s abs while Asahi apologized profusely for Noya and Tanaka’s harassment. Daichi was watching it all with a look that was half amusement, half annoyance, which was typical when it came to those three. Sousuke shot Suga a look of just one punch? and Suga quietly explained this was Haru’s revenge for Sousuke getting jealous over nothing and ignoring him.

Sousuke resigned himself to enduring his punishment with dignity since he’d truly been an ass. Eventually, his usual party habits emerged, and he sat himself on the couch to eat snacks. As the party wound down, Tanaka and Daichi kept each other busy by egging the other on with ridiculous competitions like: ‘how fast can you open every jar in the fridge?’ or ‘how many of Suga’s textbooks can you balance on your head?’. They were both drunk and terrible at every challenge, much to the amusement of the other attendees. Sousuke mostly rolled his eyes at them, but at least Tanaka wasn’t flirting with Haru anymore.

Eventually Haru plopped himself down on the couch next to Sousuke, their sides pressed together, and his head resting on Sousuke’s shoulder. Sousuke resisted the desire to lace his fingers with Haru’s, and instead settled for toying with the sleeve of his borrowed Samezuka jacket.

“Stay over tonight.” The way Sousuke said it made it clear it wasn’t a question.
Haru bit back his smile and stood with a grumbled ‘finally.’ Sousuke watched him go over to Koushi, thanking him for the fun night, and letting him know they were taking off. Turning back to Sousuke, Haru beckoned him with his hand. Even though he glared at him, Sousuke didn’t protest at being summoned like a pup, and quickly followed Haru out the door.

At his next shift, Tanaka made it clear that he considered himself ‘officially involved’ and was going to assist Sousuke in wooing Haru. Despite the threat of bodily harm if he did any such thing, Tanaka had worked with Sousuke long enough to know when he could keep pushing, and push he did. Everyday there’d be a one-sided discussion of tactics to win over Haru’s heart. Sousuke only half listened, but he was mildly impressed that Tanaka’s ideas weren’t half bad for only knowing Haru a few hours.

When Sousuke let it slip he was going to Haru’s gallery show, Tanaka’s eyes shone, and he immediately pulled out his phone to show him suit ideas. Knowing Haru wouldn’t give a shit if he showed up in sweats, Sousuke turned down every single suggestion. Unfortunately, Tanaka had gotten to him, deep down, and now he was glaring at his closet, wondering why everything he owned was garbage.

Reaching his limit, Sousuke grabbed his phone and called Rin, knowing he’d regret it later.

“Aren’t you supposed to be ooh-ing and aah-ing over Haru’s art right now?”

It was only Sousuke’s stubbornness that kept him from hanging up, “Why do you think I’m calling? I need your help.”

“If you can’t find the building, GPS would be more useful than me.”

Sousuke bit back an insult. He needed to play nice right now. “I haven’t left my apartment yet. I… I don’t have anything to wear.”

There was silence over the phone before Rin erupted into a fit of giggles. Sousuke waited it out, face on fire, knowing he had no other option.

When Rin’s laughter had mostly died down, he managed to ask Sousuke to list off the nice pieces of clothing in his possession. It was a disappointingly short list.

“Seriously, Rin, the nicest thing I own is my dress uniform.”

“How does the son of Yamazaki Yasuhiro not own even one damn suit?”

“How many do you own?” Sousuke asked.

Rin answered easily, “Three.”

“Three? Why!?”

“For events, press conferences, and dates. I know those things aren’t in your usual rotation, especially the last one…”

“Oi! If I have to put on a suit for a date, I’m not dating the right person.”

Rin scoffed, “Right. Then what do you call this?”

“It’s not a date,” Sousuke insisted.

“Only because you’re too chicken to tell Haru how you feel.”
Sousuke grunted, letting an edge creep into his voice, “Rin, I’m not in the mood to talk about this with you again.”

Rin clicked his tongue, but let the subject drop. As much as he wanted his two favorite idiots to get together already, he wasn’t willing to invoke Sousuke’s wrath to do it. He cleared his throat, “Wear the black jeans you think are too small and the teal sweater matching your eyes. You can wear a white polo underneath since you don’t have a real dress shirt.”

Sousuke dug the items out and laid them out on his bed. They didn’t look half bad. “Thanks, Rin.”

“Just do me a favor and update your wardrobe,” Rin pleaded.

“Will do.”

“...and touch Haru’s butt already.”

“Goodnight, Rin.”

-

Sousuke was relieved, upon arrival, to see at least half of the other attendees in more casual wear like himself. He wandered through the exhibits, not sure what he was looking at most of the time. Supporting Haru was the real reason he was there so he figured it didn’t matter if he didn’t understand why someone would pay twenty thousand yen for four lines painted on an otherwise blank canvas.

Eventually Sousuke stumbled upon a crowd gathered around a particular display. Tall enough to see over most of their heads, his eyes raked over the paintings there. They were of people but rather than ordinary skin, their bodies melded with nature. One man was depicted with a thunderstorm raging in his chest. Another featured a woman, with long hair cascading over her shoulders full of stars and moonlight.

The largest and most impressive piece was displayed in the center of the exhibit. It featured a man’s broad, muscular back, ocean waves cresting and breaking over his shoulders. The rest of the skin was awash with blue, fading into deeper hues toward the man’s waist. In the water swam a school of hammerhead sharks, surprisingly graceful as they were painted moving across the muscles.

“I hope it’s okay I used your image,” came a voice to Sousuke’s side.

Sousuke looked over to see Haru, a faint blush coloring his pale cheeks. He was wearing a navy blue suit, tailored perfectly to make his shoulders appear wider, and waist more narrow. Underneath was a grey button up the color of rain clouds, and a thin navy tie. The whole outfit made Haru look even longer and leaner than he normally did. He was stunning.

Sousuke swallowed thickly, letting Haru’s words sink in. “If... If it’s me, w-why did you use hammerheads?”

A slight smile played on Haru’s lips, “In Hawaiian culture, hammerheads are one of the most respected sharks, often seen as protectors and warriors of the ocean.”

Someone should’ve probably called an ambulance because Sousuke swore his heart stopped beating
then and there. Not only had Haru made him - him! - into the breathtaking centerpiece of his first official gallery showing, but his reasoning behind the painting showed how Haru viewed him. Sure, it could be that way because of his career as a police officer, but Sousuke knew that wasn’t it. This was how Haru felt - Sousuke protected him, he fought for him, Haru respected him.

In order to distract himself from the overwhelming rush of emotions, Sousuke noted the red ‘sold’ stickers next to the descriptions of the four other paintings. “No one’s bought that one?”

“It’s not for sale. I painted that one for myself,” Haru answered quietly, pressing his elbow against Sousuke’s.

Sousuke tried to give Haru a natural smile, but he knew it was strained like how his heart felt against his ribs. “G-good. I’d feel weird knowing my bare back was hanging in some stranger’s living room.”

Haru granted him a huff of laughter, “Nobody would buy it if they knew the guy it belonged to.”

“Oi.” Sousuke pinched Haru’s bicep.

Finally, Haru lifted his face to look at him. When their eyes met, they exchanged understanding smiles. If Haru was the ocean, Sousuke would absolutely be his steadfast guardian.

By the time mid November rolled around, the bruises on Makoto’s face were gone. Only a strange perpetual fuzzy warmth where Haru’s fingertips brushed his cheek hinted at the confrontation with his old friends. Everyone around him agreed Tachibana Makoto had not been acting like his usual cheerful, lighthearted self. The sympathy and well wishes from his classmates only inflamed the burning in his gut. He didn’t deserve their concern.

Art history was his last class on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and he couldn’t wait for the next 90 minutes to pass. He was roped into the course by a friend in his major because they needed more fine art credits to graduate. He should be paying attention as a midterm was fast approaching, but his thoughts lingered on a gallon of chocolate brownie ice cream at home just begging to be used by Makoto to drown his sorrows.

Reconnecting with Rei and Nagisa had helped a little. Their usual antics provided a good distraction and Nagisa - knowingly or not - gave Makoto hints as to what Haru had been up to and how he had been able to move forward. As much comfort as Makoto drew from these conversations, soon after he would feel the ache of Haru’s absence. It was wasn’t supposed to be like this; it was supposed to be all four of them together.

Even though it was his birthday, whatever gods looking over him decided to make Makoto’s day absolute shit. It took every fiber of will power in Makoto’s body not to run out of the room as the too familiar form of his ex lover walked in. What the fuck was Haru doing here? Makoto knew he had been an assistant in this class before, but his name wasn’t on any of the classes this semester. He thought he was safe when he signed up.

The other students immediately quieted down as the stranger addressed them.

“Hello everyone. Nagoya-sensei was called away for a family emergency and asked me to fill in. I’m Nanase Haruka. I’m on the swim team and my favorite food is mackeral.”
His eyes swept over the class and widened in shock as they met Makoto’s. To his credit, Haru only faltered for a moment, “I-I was the TA for this class several times in the past so I’m sure we’ll have no problem continuing with Nagoya-sensei’s lesson plan.” He smiled hesitantly, “Please take care of me.”

The class enthusiastically responded with their own greeting. As Haru pulled up the lecture on the projector and started explaining the slides, Makoto couldn’t help but tune in to the whispers around him.

“*He has a nice voice, I wouldn’t mind if he did every lecture.*”

“*He’s definitely much better to look at than Nagoya-sensei!*”

“*Sorry girls, I think he’s gay.*”

“*Now that you mention it, I’ve seen him around campus a lot with a silver haired man. They always look like they’re off in their own world, it’s actually really cute!*”

“*Oh! That super pretty guy, right? With the beauty mark under his eye?*”

“*They’re both so dreamy, no wonder they’d be in love.*”

“*No way, I’m pretty sure he’s dating this totally buff dude with dark hair.*”

“*How do you know that?*”

“*That guy lives in my building. I think he’s a policeman? I see Nanase-san come over to his place a lot and he leaves when I’m going for my jog in the morning.*”

That’s when Makoto notices it.

*It* being the Tokyo Police Department sweatshirt Haru’s wearing that’s at least 2 sizes too big for him. The wide opening exposes too much of his collar bones and the sleeves have to be folded up just for his fingertips to peek out.

Makoto immediately remembered every time Haru strutted around in his own clothing (which was more often than Haru wore his own clothes at home). When Makoto had asked him about it, Haru explained they made him feel calm and safe, like he had a piece of Makoto - a piece of his home - wherever he went. They’d made love for hours after that sweet confession.

Snapping back to reality, Makoto felt his veins being clogged with sluggish jealousy. Yamazaki was giving Haru his clothes, his comfort, and his protection. **What other things once belonging to Makoto was Haru replacing with a man who used to hate his existence?**

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Haru opted to walk to Sousuke’s apartment rather than hop on the train. It was only forty minutes away by foot, and he needed the cold air and time to sort out his thoughts. Seeing Makoto today didn’t ignite the same panic it had the last time. Maybe the first time is the hardest, and now he knew what to expect.

He was definitely surprised, but it hadn’t been bad. The tension between them was more awkward
than anything else, like they both didn’t know what to do in this situation.

The big question was whether or not to tell Sousuke. He had the feeling Sousuke would be unhappy with the news, and that was putting it lightly. Haru was Nagoya-sensei’s last resort, and he didn’t want to let him down by having to withdraw due to Sousuke being unable to keep his temper in check. Maybe he could bring up Makoto to gauge his reaction before telling him.

Deep down there was another reason for keeping this to himself for now. Haru couldn’t help but feel like this was an opportunity for him and Makoto to set things straight between them. He wasn’t sure exactly how it would play out, but the feeling in his gut told him that this was the right time to face Makoto.

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Attempting his homework later that night, Makoto couldn’t get his mind off Haru. He groaned and slammed his head down on his textbook. Being hung up on an ex was normal, he assumed, but he didn’t feel right about it considering it was fast approaching a year after he instigated their messy break up. Maybe this was his punishment for betraying his best friend.

That was the core issue. Makoto had only been thinking of Haru as his lover and stopped considering him a friend, as if the two were separate, and one relationship was more important than the other.

Makoto now realized: he had it backwards. The connection he had with Haru was always one of the most important things in his life. It was natural for them to go from spending their school years together, to moving to Tokyo together, to living together. After the initial shock of Haru being bold enough to confess, their transition to boyfriends felt inevitable, too.

But the status change flipped a switch inside Makoto’s head. The idea of what a ‘couple’ was and what ‘dating’ meant was specific, and had been ground into him by friends, books, tv, and movies over his entire life. Even in the stories where best friends turned to lovers, they no longer called themselves friends. They were something different, and that meant he and Haru were something other than friends too.

What Makoto didn’t understand then, what he’s only kind of grasping now, thanks to a few late night skype chats with Nagisa, is Haru would have never loved Makoto like that if the love between them as friends wasn’t there. Haru could only share himself so intimately with someone he trusted one hundred percent. Someone who had proven they weren’t going to leave him, someone who was there for him during his worst times, someone who could read his moods and be patient with him.

Makoto was all of those things. Or at least he had been until he slowly started poking holes in Haru’s faith in him before tearing it down completely.

Makoto’s dishonesty went against their friendship, and that’s what broke Haru so thoroughly.

Makoto had moved on quickly after the breakup, and didn’t give a second thought to the repercussions of his actions. He sincerely wished he had now. Maybe Haru wouldn’t need therapy. Maybe Haru wouldn’t be so friendly with Yamazaki. Maybe they could have tried again. Maybe it could’ve been Makoto’s oversized clothes Haru would wear to class.

The gentleness Haru had shown him after Yamazaki beat him only made him feel worse. Haru still
loved him, not in the same way, and he’ll probably never hear him say it again but it was obvious in
the moment Haru would always love him. Makoto was one of the few people who always
understood how deep Haru’s feelings ran, so he shouldn’t be surprised. Haru would never give up
on his childhood partner, his best friend, his first love.

Makoto couldn’t stop the tears of regret that poured out of his eyes.

They had settled into bed a while ago, but Sousuke could tell Haru was still awake. It wasn’t
unusual, Haru often took a little longer to drift off, saying he had a hard time shutting his brain down.
He had seemed a little more restless tonight, but Sousuke figured it was because he had his first day
of covering a class for his old art history professor that day. Anyone would be stressed out having to
deal with thirty or so college kids who probably didn’t actually care about Renaissance architecture.

“Hey Sou…”

Sousuke always perked up at the sound of the simple nickname. He wanted to cheer every time Haru
used it. He had never heard Haru use a nickname for anyone except the occasional “RinRin” to piss
off their friend. Haru even called Koushi by his first name although everyone else referred to him as
Suga. Sousuke felt especially warmed that Haru felt comfortable enough to use it in their bed.

_Hold on. When had it become ‘their’ bed?_

Haru didn’t live here, not in any official manner, but he stayed with Sousuke more often than not. He
had his own drawers, closet space, toiletries, and dishes. It was closer to the university than Haru’s
own apartment so he often went there over long breaks. They had always shared the bed; and
Sousuke wasn’t complaining. Since the night Haru told him about Makoto’s infidelity, they dispersed
of all pretense, and settled immediately into each other’s arms, rather than pretending it was merely
an accident when they woke up in the morning.

Their touches had been increasing since Halloween. Nothing by itself would be rated higher than
PG, but somehow they all still felt intimate. Haru massaging Sousuke’s larger hands with his thin,
deft fingers. Sousuke drying Haru’s hair after a bath. Haru sitting between Sousuke’s legs while they
watched TV, his back pressed against Sousuke’s broad chest while Sousuke’s chin rested on Haru’s
shoulder. Now that Haru knew Sousuke could easily pick him up, he would whine and pout until
Sousuke carried him to bed if he was too tired (Sousuke pretended to be bothered by it, but was
secretly delighted).

All of this was definitely outside of the ‘just friends’ category, but it wasn’t like they were actually
dating either. So what did that make them? What did he want to be to Haru?

To be honest, he wanted to be most things. He wanted to be Haru’s best friend, his confidant, his
boyfriend. His lover, eventually. Even more if he allowed himself to think that far in the future.

Realizing he’d gone too long without responding, Sousuke faked a yawn to cover up his spacing out,
“What is it, Haruka?”

Haru never told him, but he actually liked to hear his full name come out of Sousuke’s mouth. It was
strong and reassuring, and something he didn’t have a word for, but made his insides feel like jelly.

“You said you promised yourself two things when I told you about the cheating.” Haru began.
“I did.”

“And beating up Makoto was the first one.”

Sousuke nodded, rubbing slow circles into Haru’s back. “Yup. Although, I don’t count a couple measly punches as beating the shit out of someone. I owe him some kicks to the gut. It’s not an ass kicking ‘til ribs are involved.”

Haru knew Sousuke couldn’t see his face from where it was pressed against his chest, but rolled his eyes anyway. “Is that what they taught you in the academy?”

Sousuke hummed a confirmation before Haru spoke again, “So what’s your second promise?”

“To do everything in my power to make sure no one ever hurts you like that again.”

Sousuke thought he should be embarrassed, especially when he heard Haru gasp a shy ‘oh,’ but he didn’t feel it. From the first night Haru had reentered Sousuke’s life, they had been able to make these kinds of dramatic statements without shame.

There was silence for a long time after that. It wasn’t uncomfortable, but it was loaded. Sousuke’s promise could be taken in a couple different ways, but no matter how you looked at it, it showed how much he really cared for Haru.

Their relationship had grown and changed steadily since their first frantic encounter. Haru hadn’t put a name on it since it didn’t fit with his prior experiences. It wasn’t the passionate comrade-slash-rival dynamic he had with Rin, nor the lovers’ companionship he once shared with Makoto. It wasn’t the carefree and gentle friendships he had with Nagisa and Rei, nor the familial comfort he found in Koushi and Daichi.

It was the best things from all of them melded with what was uniquely Sousuke. It had slowly started filling him up and before he knew it, Haru spent more time with him than apart, and he didn’t mind it at all. His desire to be alone had been replaced with a need to be with Sousuke.

Haru hadn’t wanted to need someone again, but he should’ve known it was inevitable. From the first night he cried, holding onto Sousuke’s hand as a lifeline, he should have seen it. There was no way to stop the hold Sousuke had on him. Maybe it would’ve happened two months or two years from now, but he knows now he would have fallen for Sousuke no matter what.

Haru’s even breathing and warmth eventually lulled Sousuke to sleep. Brushing his short fringe back, Haru contemplated Sousuke’s peaceful face. Ever so slowly as to not disturb his slumber, Haru leaned forward and placed a soft kiss on the corner of Sousuke’s mouth, where it always crinkled the most when he smiled.

“Thank you for keeping your promises, Sou,” Haru whispered.

As he wrapped the blankets tighter around his shoulders, Haru made a promise of his own, and drifted off to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you like this chapter!!!
As ALWAYS, thank you so so so so much for the continued love, support, and comments!! I’m still very happy to see when I get new notifications from folks just finding this fic for the first time. Thank you so much for giving me and it a chance!

Next chapter includes the very special totally-not-a-date Christmas outing, so please look forward to it!
a dream I can't seem to shake

Chapter Summary

Christmas wishes, complete with fishes.

Chapter Notes

!?!!!

100 subscriptions and 400 kudos?! ;O; I can't even begin to describe how grateful I am that you are reading and enjoying my story!! Thank you so much and I hope it continues to bring warmth to your heart <3

ALSO, there is art for this chapter, check the end notes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Makoto was finally going to do it. He was going to talk to Haru today. They shared a few exchanges during class, but Makoto wanted to talk to Haru about more than just gargoyles on French churches. He wasn't going to bring up anything too difficult, not wanting to condition Haru into thinking that every time they spoke it would lead to a confrontation. Just a nice, casual conversation.

Makoto knew there was a huge swim competition this weekend that Haru was participating in on behalf of the university. Scouts from the National Team were going to be watching and there were rumors Haru was on their shortlist. It was the perfect topic, something personal, but not too personal. An easy conversation between friends.

As class ended and the students who had a class immediately after this one rushed out the door, Makoto took a deep breath to steady himself. He didn't get any further than that, nearly choking on air when he saw Yamazaki walk through the door. He was in full uniform (as if his obscene amount of muscles weren't enough to be intimidating) with a thick winter coat slung over his arm, and a scarf undone around his neck.

Thankfully, he didn't spend any time examining the students, and went straight over to the teacher’s desk. Haru was busy packing up his belongings, and hadn't noticed the guest until Sousuke bumped shoulders with him before placing his hand on the small of Haru's back. Surprise, happiness, and worry flashed in Haru’s eyes in rapid succession, but he managed to settle on a combination of the first two. “Sou!”

_Dammit, he has a nickname?_ Makoto tried not to be too obvious in his staring as he slowly put away his books, hiding behind his backpack so he wasn’t easily noticed.

Haru knew this could turn into a very bad situation, and he wasn’t going to give Sousuke a chance to look Makoto’s way. He felt _certain_ Sousuke would make good on those kicks to the ribs he promised. Haru reached up and fiddled with one of the buttons on Sousuke’s shirt to keep his focus on him, “What are you doing in uniform? I thought you had today off.”
“And I thought you liked my uniform,” Sousuke teased with a wink, and laughed at Haru’s frown and reddening cheeks, “Masafumi needed someone to cover because, like the idiot he is, he twisted his ankle in a bicycle crash.”

Haru nodded in understanding. From Sousuke’s stories, Masafumi was incredibly clumsy and incompetent. It was a wonder he was still on the force, “So what are you doing here? I’m surprised you found the classroom.”

Sousuke pinched his arm, “I’m not too proud to ask for directions. I still have a couple hours and thought we could grab an early dinner. There’s an omurice place between here and Masafumi’s koban I wanted to try.”

The edges of Haru’s mouth turned down, and his bottom lip puffed out ever so slightly.

Makoto tensed. It was the pout. The I-would-do-absolutely-anything-you-asked-me-to-because-what-you’re-doing-with-your-mouth-is-too-fucking-cute pout. Images of what he had done because of that look flickered through Makoto’s mind, and he felt his soul trying to escape him.

Sousuke laughed and patted Haru’s head, “Don’t worry, they have mackerel. I checked.”

“Why didn’t you say that first?” Haru huffed and slung his bag onto his shoulder, tugging on one of Sousuke’s belt loops to lead him away from the classroom and potential violence, “Come on, I’m hungry.”

“Yes, yes, Haruka,” Sousuke continued to chuckle as he was pulled from the room.

“Haruka?” He called him Haruka and he didn’t correct him. No, I swear I even saw him blushing. Oh god. Makoto’s head dropped onto his desk. He wanted to sit in this classroom and rot away. So much for his casual conversation with Haru.

- 

“Haru-sensei!! Was that policeman your boyfriend?”

Haru sighed, “When I asked if anyone had questions, I meant about the topics from the homework.”

“But I won’t be able to concentrate until I know!”

Rolling his eyes, Haru answered, “He’s not my boyfriend.”

Makoto felt the boulder of fear in his stomach ease slightly.

A groan of disappointment came from several students, “But you two looked so intimate!”

“How can you not be interested in him? He’s so sexy!”

“Everyone likes a man in uniform!”

“Then are you dating that silver haired angel?”

Haru was positively frazzled. He really didn’t want to talk about this, especially not with Makoto in the room, but he knew these students and they weren’t going to let it go until he provided a satisfying answer. It’s not like he had enough of an air of authority to listen to him if he told them to just shut
He held up a hand to cut off the line of questioning. “That ‘silver haired angel,’ is just a friend. He’s engaged and I like them both very much. The police officer and I are close and we don’t have any labels for our relationship. We’re just us and we are happy with that.”

All except one student seemed content with that answer. Makoto’s brain was on overdrive. That was so vague! How ‘close’ was their relationship? Were there one sided feelings? If so, whose? Did they like each other, but Haru didn’t want a physical relationship? He had told Makoto that he was never interested in sex until they had been dating for a while; was that keep them apart? Or was it the other way around - were they just friends with benefits? Would that be better or worse?

He felt like he needed answers, but did he really want to know if Sousuke had found the birthmark on Haru’s inner thigh or if he noticed Haru started hiccuping if he was teased and denied release for too long? Did he want to know if Sousuke had seen the particular brightness of Haru’s eyes when he said ‘I love you?’ For whatever reason Makoto assumed he’d be the sole person with that knowledge forever, but now he wasn’t so sure and he didn’t know how to handle it.

When the students were calm enough to begin the lecture, Haru shot Makoto a look of ‘Sorry’ before giving his full attention to the slides. Makoto couldn’t decide if he wanted to laugh or cry.

Sousuke forced himself out of bed early enough to see Haru out the door for morning practice. The latter half of December had brought a vengeful winter, and he knew Haru had the bad habit of leaving the house without enough layers. For instance, Haru was moving to put his shoes on with only his university track jacket to protect him from the elements. Rolling his eyes, Sousuke grabbed a thick wool cardigan off the back of the couch and threw it at Haru’s face.

Haru let out a muffled ‘oomph!’, and pulled the sweater off his head with an annoyed huff. Sousuke knew he wasn’t really bothered though, because he pulled on the extra garment without protest. As much as he genuinely cared about Haru’s health, the real reason for his insistence was that Sousuke couldn’t help but enjoy see Haru in his clothes. Despite Haru having an absurd amount of his own wardrobe at Sousuke’s apartment, it was still often Sousuke’s shirts and sweaters he went out the door wearing.

Haru straightened, turning to Sousuke with his arms out to his sides in a ‘is this good enough?’ gesture. Frowning in thought, Sousuke ducked back into his room. He returned and shoved a beanie over Haru’s hair.

“You know I hate hats,” Haru whined.

“And you know your ears freeze first.”

Sousuke’s eyes flicked toward Haru’s mouth as his scowl turned into a pout. God, he wanted to kiss it away. Maybe bite his plump bottom lip, making Haru gasp, giving him the opportunity to slide his tongue- *Cut it out, Yamazaki. It’s too early for this.*

He cleared his throat to refocus himself. “You’re still free tomorrow, right?”
“Yes. Are you still not going to tell me what you’re up to?” Haru retorted.

He gave him a smug grin, “It’s a surprise, Haruka. You’ll find out tomorrow.”

Haru tried to look irritated, but he wasn’t fooling anyone. The sparkle of anticipation in his eyes was too bright.

The next morning Sousuke let himself sleep in, knowing that Haru wasn’t leaving before dawn for physical conditioning. It wasn’t surprising to wake up alone, but he was a little disappointed Haru wasn’t still keeping him warm. Thankfully the feeling was quick to disappear as a delicious smell wafted over to him.

Haru had just set their mugs on the table when Sousuke walked in. There was a stack of snowman shaped pancakes at both seats, decorated in cream cheese icing with chocolate chips for eyes and mouths. There was also a bowl of fruit salad, the pieces cut in the shape of stars and hearts. Another plate was filled with octopus sausages, tamagoyaki, and penguin shaped burger patties with cheese arranged on them for beaks and tummies.

“Merry Christmas, Sousuke.”

Sousuke’s eyes moved from the food to Haru. A shy smile and a gaudy green sweater with big gold lettering on it reading ‘I AM A GIFT’ greeted him.

“What the fuck is that?”

Haru frowned. He was expecting a more festive greeting. “It’s from Koushi.”

“It’s awful,” Sousuke couldn’t help the laugh that spilled out with his words.

Haru smirked, “He got one for you, too.”

“No.”

“He demanded a photo asap.”

“Absolutely not.”

Haru raised an eyebrow. “You want to be responsible for upsetting Koushi on Christmas? Because if Koushi is upset then…”

*Daichi’s upset.* “Dammit.” Sousuke sighed and lifted his arms to show his defeat.

Haru reached into his bag and pulled out a red sweater with a giant Santa face knitted in the same style as the as the Milky logo girl. An anguished groan could still be heard even as Haru tugged the shirt over Sousuke’s head. It was too small for him, but Haru kept pulling and fussing until the sleeves and hem were as proper as possible.

Haru stepped back, his face screwed up in effort to maintain his aloof expression. He couldn’t last long, his mouth breaking into a beautiful wide smile as he laughed without reserve. The rare, bright sound flew straight to Sousuke’s heart. Maybe this awful sweater wasn’t so bad.
When Haru managed to calm himself, he grabbed his phone. They took several photos, the best being Sousuke doing his best impression of the Santa on his top (a Santa hat Haru had really completed the look) and one of Haru’s head wrapped up in matching gold ribbon, a giant bow tied at his forehead.

They sent them off and started on the amazing breakfast Haru prepared. Halfway through, Haru’s phone blew up with messages from Koushi. He and Daichi responded in kind, Daichi even letting Suga paint his face face to match the reindeer on his sweater. Suga complimented the chubby cherubs decorating his top with a crown of gold tinsel, overly rouged cheeks, and a pair of white wings strapped to his back.

Sousuke was tempted to ask how and why Suga had a set of angel wings, but he was a little worried about the answer.

They finished eating, Sousuke thoroughly pleased with the peppermint mocha Haru made him. They cleaned the kitchen together before Sousuke instructed Haru to get ready and changed. The added bounce of excitement in his step as he went to shower was too cute.

Soon enough, they were both dressed and ready, Haru’s last layer being the same wool cardigan he borrowed yesterday. Standing in the doorway, Haru reached up and adjusted the scarf around Sousuke’s neck, still feeling a smidge bashful that something he made had become part of Sousuke’s daily outfit. When he pulled his hands away, Sousuke took his turn and held up a pair of earmuffs in front of Haru. They were fuzzy and aquamarine, embroidered with yellow and orange fish.

Haru’s eyes lit up in surprise while Sousuke gave him an apprehensive smile. He beamed back, tilting his head down to give Sousuke the signal that he should put them on him.

Sousuke gently placed them over Haru’s ears, letting his thumbs brush Haru’s pink tinged cheeks before pulling away.

“It suits you.”

Haru bit his lip, flushing deeper, and had to move his gaze to the floor. Sousuke was tempted to call off his plan, and simply spend the rest of the day cuddling on the couch, but he’d been building this up for a week and Haru would not wait one more day for the surprise. There would be time for cuddling later. Hopefully.

Exiting the apartment building, Haru was surprised as they turned in the opposite direction of the train station. Sousuke led him to a car parked around the corner.

Haru hesitated. “We’re driving there?”

“It’s almost three hours to get there by train,” Sousuke explained.

Where the heck were they going? “Do you even have your license?”

Sousuke rolled his eyes as he opened the passenger door for Haru. “No, Haruka. I, an enforcer of the law, am planning on driving us to Yokohama without proper training and documentation.”

“Yokohama?”

Realizing he let too big of a hint slip, Sousuke motioned to Haru to hurry up. “Just get in the car, Nananse.”

Haru acquiesced without another quip. As much as he wanted to prod Sousuke and find out where
they were headed, the effort Sousuke had put into the surprise was obvious. Haru was not going to ruin it because he couldn’t keep his curiosity in check for an hour.

The trip was quiet, both content to let the car be filled with whatever half English Christmas songs were playing on the radio. Haru recognized a few that Ren and Ran would sing every year. Surprisingly, the memories of spending the holiday with the Tachibanas brought Haru more joy than sorrow. He took solace in this, the tiniest bit of proof he was truly healing.

Haru pulled out his phone from the front pocket of the borrowed cardigan he was wearing. “Do you mind if I send out some Christmas emails?”

Sousuke smiled to himself. It was cute Haru wanted him to know he wasn’t just bored. “Of course not. You should probably wait to send Nagisa and Rei anything, they’ll want pictures.”

Haru nodded, secretly pleased at the fondness in Sousuke’s tone. Not like he really had to worry about them getting along, but it was nice to know it wasn’t one sided affection from Nagisa.

By the time they parked, Haru had finished sending messages to the Tachibanas and Gou. When he looked up, his eyes shot open and a small gasp escaped his lips in surprise. They were at the Hakkeijima Sea Paradise. Haru had wanted to come here ever since he moved to Tokyo, but between his and Makoto’s full schedules, there was never enough time. Haru turned his head, and gaped at Sousuke, silently asking for an explanation.

“You have a list, don’t you?”

Haru’s head tilted, not understanding.

“Of aquariums you want to visit,” Sousuke elaborated, “You have one of waterfalls so I figured you had one for aquariums. I thought we could start checking them off.”

“It… It’s a long list,” Haru said quietly. *How did Sou know?*

Sousuke laughed, “Well, let’s start here today. I’m sure we’ll have plenty of time to hit them all.”

Every time Sousuke said ‘we’ it caused a flutter in Haru’s chest. Sousuke was thinking about *their* future. Haru wondered what he did to deserve another shot at being happy with someone.

The swell of emotion also brought along a bit of vulnerability. Haru threw open the door, and clambered out of the car to hide the feelings he assumed were showing on his face plain as day. Sousuke was chuckling as he did the same, and followed Haru to the entrance of the park.

“I only bought tickets for the aquarium portions. I assumed you could easily spend all day just doing that.”

Haru nodded, but didn't look back at Sousuke, still feeling too exposed. Even if they would be mostly happy tears, he still didn’t want to cry out here. Sousuke seemed okay with it, though, and let Haru have the time to collect himself. When they reached the Aqua Museum, Haru had regained his composure, and didn't hesitate to take Sousuke’s wrist and lead him into the first zone.

Sousuke quickly learned that visiting an aquarium with Haru was like having your own personal guide. At every tank and display, Haru would point out what they were seeing without needing the informational signs. He’d share interesting tidbits like mating rituals, eating habits, and migration patterns. A few other couples had overheard Haru’s commentary, and had taken to following them through each of the zones, enjoying the extra information. Sousuke liked it too, but mostly, he
admired the sparkle in Haru’s eyes, and the smile that hadn’t left his face since they arrived.

When they reached the Deep-Seaarium, Haru pulled his sketchbook from his bag. Deep sea creatures were some of his favorites, partially because they were rarely sighted, but also because they had the most unusual adaptations. After every quick doodle, Haru would hold it out for Sousuke’s appraisal. Sousuke usually came up with some comment like “it looks kind of lonely, doesn’t it?” or “needs more teeth.” They weren’t at all helpful, but they made Haru let out huffs of amusement and that was good enough for Sousuke.

After they visited every tank there, they headed over to the whale shark exhibit. Even Sousuke was left speechless by their sheer size, and the way they looked so graceful despite doing nothing more than moving forward. Haru glanced at Sousuke out of the corner of his eye as snuck his phone out and took a couple snapshots of Sousuke’s amazed face, complete with whale sharks passing in the background.

Frowning when he noticed what happened, Sousuke grabbed the phone out of Haru’s hand and turned them both around for a selfie with the sharks. With a light blush on his face, he handed the phone back to a flustered Haru.

Haru smiled at the picture. Before putting his phone away, he quickly sent it with a caption of “Merry Christmas!” to Nagisa, Rei, and Rin.

They stood and watched the giant fish for some time after, hands barely brushing until Haru worked up enough courage to entwine his pinkie with Sousuke’s. He heard Sousuke’s sharp intake of breath before he felt the finger around his squeeze back. Maybe to others it wasn’t a lot, but for them it was enough.

Eventually they left the Aqua Museum, and took a quick break for crepes. Sousuke went the traditional route of nutella and banana while Haru chose a peach crepe with fresh cream.

The sky was clear which meant it was cold. After finishing their snack, they didn’t linger long at the Umiku or the Fureai Lagoon. Their last stop was the Dolphin Fantasy building. Sousuke felt Haru’s grip on his wrist tighten as they walked through the arch-shaped pools, and watched as dolphins swam and played all around them.

They spent over an hour there alone, but Sousuke didn’t mind. This was for Haru, after all, and it wasn’t like he was getting nothing out of it. As Haru looked over at Sousuke with one of the gentlest and most thankful expressions he’d ever seen, Sousuke felt like he was getting an awful lot.

They took their time getting back to the apartment, as they would park and wander through the streets. They made a mission of finding the gaudiest decorated store fronts, and admired the lights strung up in the more fun and hip neighborhoods. Most of the time Haru tucked his hand in the crook of Sousuke’s elbow. He gave the excuse that his hands were cold, but the sleeves of his cardigan were plenty long to shield his fingertips from the weather.

When Haru wasn’t holding onto him, Sousuke reached to him instead. He kept a firm hand around his wrist, on his back, or across his shoulders. It was to lead Haru in the right direction, and help navigate through the crowds, young adults, and couples who were also out celebrating.

Or, at least, that’s what he told himself.

They were both hungry when they arrived back home, and Haru headed straight to the kitchen to cook a large batch of chicken karaage. Sousuke grabbed the side dishes Haru had already prepared, and set them on the coffee table in the living room. They settled on the floor in front of the couch,
eating happily with some pop music special on as background noise to their joking and chatting.

When the plates were cleared, Sousuke asked Haru to put on a movie and get some blankets if he wanted. In the kitchen, Sousuke pulled out his last surprise for Haru, one he had hidden behind a case of beer. He returned to the living room with it to find Haru now sitting on the sofa, bundled in a nest of blankets. His eyes widened in curiosity at the sight of the yellow box in Sousuke’s hands.

Setting it on the table, Sousuke pulled the lid off to reveal a beautiful buche de noel. “I asked them to do a matcha one because I know you’re not big on chocolate. It’s from the same bakery as the cakes from your birthday, so I think you’ll like it.”

Haru felt the tears well up in his eyes. He wasn’t really sure what he had expected from today, but being absolutely spoiled by Sousuke was not it. Everything Sousuke had planned was so thoughtful and so Haru. It made him feel valued and precious in a way he hadn’t experienced before.

Sure, Makoto did make him feel loved in the past, but it was different. Being caring and thoughtful is a fundamental part of Makoto’s character - he naturally made everyone feel important. It wasn’t a bad thing, as much as Haru did feel jealous at times, but it was just something Haru had grown up feeling. It didn’t necessarily set him apart from others in Makoto’s life. The transition from best friends to boyfriends had Haru drastically changing his behavior to consider Makoto’s happiness, while Makoto virtually stayed the same, just with kissing and sex.

But Sousuke wasn’t like Makoto, he was like Haru. He was capable and willing to show affection and adoration, but only to certain select people. For whatever reason, Haru fell into this group for him. Today especially, Sousuke gave and gave, and Haru was overwhelmed in the best way.

“But Merry Christmas, Haruka.”

Haru quickly wiped his eyes while Sousuke was busy cutting them pieces of the cake. It was the best he ever tasted.

Chapter End Notes

Have some art:

I AM A GIFT (∩‘ө‘∩)

XOXOXO
Makoto fidgeted on the familiar porch of the Hazuki residence. As always, Makoto headed home for the New Year’s break, and had found out Nagisa was also visiting home while Rei stayed in America for a project with one of his honors classes. When Nagisa found out they’d be close, he insisted on meeting up because ‘Skype calls just don’t cut it, Mako-chan!’

Now that he was here, Makoto was fighting the urge to throw up and run. Logically, he knew that Nagisa would be as friendly and welcoming as ever, but he was still afraid. Makoto had to fight his fears though; being a coward is what got him in this bind in the first place. Taking a deep breath, he rung the doorbell.

Only a few seconds passed before the door was flung open and Nagisa threw himself into Makoto’s arms. “Mako-chan! I’m so happy to see you!”

He returned the hug and gently smiled down at him, “Me too, Nagisa. You look great!”

Nagisa threw up a peace sign before grabbing him by the wrist and dragging him into his home. Even though nothing much changed, Nagisa still gave Makoto a brief tour before settling down in his room with a pot of tea and a tray of sweets to share. They spent the first little while catching up on simple things: school, family, movies, and music. It was easy for them to share, and Makoto felt more relaxed as minutes passed them by.

Eventually, Nagisa took on a more serious tone, “Okay, Mako-chan. Spill it!”

“Spill what?”

Nagisa lets out an overly dramatic sigh, “You can’t fool me, mister! You obviously want to talk about Haru-chan.”

Biting his lip and looking down at his hands, Makoto quietly responds, “He’s… he’s been teaching one of my classes while the teacher has been out. Seeing him so often… it’s weird, but not. Like it’s weird because we don’t really say anything to each other, but being near him again feels good. Sometimes I catch his eyes and I think he feels the same.”
“Mako-chan,” Nagisa chose his words carefully, “what would you like to happen with Haru-chan?”

Makoto’s fingers twitched nervously in his lap. “I think things would be better now, easier. Haru seems a lot more open and talkative about his feelings and I-I know what I did wrong. It’ll be hard, but we can fix it, Nagisa, fix us.”

Nagisa’s smile was tight across his face. What Makoto was saying was probably true, but Nagisa knew that Haru wasn’t looking to rebuild his failed romantic relationship. Haru had worked so hard to recover and put it behind him. He wouldn’t be eager to relive those fears again.

“If Haru would give me another chance, I could prove to him how much I still love him. And I know his feelings for me couldn’t have disappeared, his have always run deeper than anyone’s.”

Makoto was cut off by the sudden blaring of an American pop song. Nagisa gave an apologetic smile, but was secretly happy to put this conversation on pause, and answered without looking at the caller’s name.

“Hey, Nagisa. Do you have a minute to talk?”

He inhaled a quick breath, “H-Haru-chan! I always have time for you, silly.”

Nagisa watched as Makoto’s eyes widened in surprise and apprehension. It was a look of ‘please don’t tell Haru I’m here,’ which Nagisa definitely did not plan on doing. Haru knew they had been supporting Makoto, but it was not something they openly discussed. Haru didn’t need or want to know.

“I need some advice.”

“You’ve called the right person, Haru-chan! I’m an expert in all things not related to school work.”

For the most part, people thought of Nagisa as being scatterbrained and flippant, but he was one of the most dependable people Haru knew. He never pushed or judged when it mattered, and wasn’t bashful talking about the tough subjects others would shy away from. Haru knew Nagisa could help him work through this new stage, just like he always had.

Haru had come to him for help in high school when Rin gave him a hard time for not being interested in sex. That’s how they learned what ‘asexual’ was and Haru was glad to know it wasn’t just him. When Haru and Makoto started dating, Makoto with the full knowledge of Haru’s limits when it came to physical intimacy, it was Nagisa who was visited by a panicking Haru one random weekend. Haru had taken the six hour train ride back to Iwatobi because he almost had sex with Makoto and worse, he thinks he might really want to do it. They did more research and decided that ‘demisexuality’ fit Haru better. In general, he wasn’t interested in sex, but Makoto was an exception because of their tight emotional bond. Haru returned to Tokyo much more calm and confident in himself and his relationship, ready to try with Makoto, knowing he wasn’t broken.

This wasn’t as mysterious as either of those situations, but Haru still wanted to hear Nagisa’s opinion. “It’s about Sousuke…”

Nagisa’s eyes flickered briefly to Makoto’s worried face. He tried to give Makoto a reassuring smile and excused himself from the room to talk quietly out of earshot, “What about Sou-chan?”

Haru’s forehead creased in concentration, and he was silent over the line for a few moments. The regular proximity to his ex had stirred up an urgency to confront his feelings about Sousuke and do something about them.
Since Christmas, he had spent a lot of his free time deciphering the various ways Sousuke made him feel. The ache when he hadn’t seen him in a couple days. The vulnerability when Sousuke studied him with his astute eyes. The tightness in his chest when they shared quiet and seemingly simple moments together (which Haru felt were quite personal). The warmth when he was pressed against Sousuke’s firm chest, close enough to feel his heartbeat. They were all feelings he kind of recognized from his time with Makoto, but they were definitely born from something different, something fiercer.

“I’m really happy he’s in my life and I want to make him happy too. I feel exposed around him, but at the same time it feels safe and I can trust him. I… I want to ask him to be my boyfriend.”

Nagisa felt torn. He was elated because he had been firmly rooting for Haru and Sousuke to become a couple. He had the inkling from the very beginning they would fall for each other, and it was about dang time one of them took the initiative to make it happen. On the other hand, his precious friend Makoto had told him only a minute ago that he wanted to fix things with Haru, convinced Haru could still love him after everything that happened.

He knew it would be tough maintaining friendships with both of them while it was like this, but Nagisa wasn’t made for this kind of drama. He hated having to choose between them.

“Nagisa…? Do you think it’s a bad idea?” The concern in Haru’s voice made Nagisa’s heart hurt.

“No, Haru-chan, it’s absolutely the right thing to do!”

Makoto was his friend, but Haru deserved to be happy too. Right now, it was obvious that Haru’s happiness was with Sousuke.

Nagisa heard Haru breathe a small sigh of relief, “Do you think he’ll want to? What if he likes things the way they are now?”

Nagisa wanted to laugh at how oblivious Haru was. “Of course he’ll say yes, Haru-chan! I can tell you for a fact that Rei-chan, Rin-chan, Suga-chan, and Dai-chan all think you two should be together. We can’t all be wrong, right? Especially Rei-chan, he always has perfect test scores!”

Haru chuckled, taking heart in Nagisa’s assurances. “Thanks, Nagisa. I’m going to tell him when he comes over for New Year’s.”

“Oh, then you can kiss at midnight! Haru-chan, you’re such a romantic!” he teased.

Haru groaned, but Nagisa knew it was from embarrassment rather than annoyance. “I’ll let you know how it goes, okay? Thanks again. Love you.”

“You’re always very welcome, Haru-chan! Love you too, good luck!” he ended the call and looked back at his bedroom door in apprehension. It wasn’t his place to tell Makoto about Haru’s plans, but he didn’t want to give him false hope either. Right now he missed Rei’s ability to strategize and problem solve more than ever. With a deep breath, Nagisa headed back in.

Makoto was sitting right where Nagisa left him, looking more frustrated and remorseful than before. “He… He wanted to talk about Yamazaki-kun, didn’t he?”

Nagisa bit his lip, “Yeah…”

Makoto’s lips twisted into a sad smile. “He came to pick Haru up from class a couple weeks ago. I’ve never seen Yamazaki-kun look so gentle and Haru…” Makoto willed his voice not to crack,
“Haru looked so comfortable with him.”

“Mako-chan…” Nagisa came over and wrapped his arms around Makoto’s shoulders, “You should still try to be Haru-chan’s friend again. I know for a fact it would make him happy, and you too, Mako-chan. I’ve always been jealous of how strong your friendship was. It’s not gone, please don’t give up on it.”

Makoto barely nodded, trying desperately to catch the hope that was quickly slipping away.

In true Haru fashion, he believed it would completely okay to be out in the rain for hours at the tail end of December. The result was Haru ‘I never get sick’ Nanase out of commission with a cold. So, Sousuke had gone to him on New Year’s Eve, bearing gifts of congee and satsuma.

It was one of the few times Sousuke visited Haru’s place. Nothing was wrong with Haru’s apartment (except Sousuke still couldn’t understand why he wouldn’t invest in a couch), it was just that they always gravitated to spending time at Sousuke’s. Maybe it was because this place was for Haru to escape to, not to live in. Whatever the reason, Sousuke never minded opening his home for him.

“Sousuke!” Haru exclaimed as he flung open the door. He didn’t hesitate to throw his arms around Sousuke’s torso and nuzzle his face against his shoulder.

“Ha-Haru? Are you alright?” he had expected to find him suffering quietly, half buried underneath the kotatsu.

“I’m better now that you’re here,” Haru mumbled into Sousuke’s coat.

Sousuke needed someone to punch him. He was so deep into a dream that a normal pinch would not work. What the fuck was going on?

Noticing that Sousuke was not returning the hug, Haru looked up at him with a pout on his face, “What’s wrong, Sou? Aren’t you happy to see me?”

In that moment, with Haru’s bright eyes staring at him through thick lashes, Sousuke had an epiphany: Nanase Haruka would be the death of him. Seriously, where was this coming from? He’d seen drunk Haru, sleep deprived Haru, and excited Haru, but none of those states caused this kind of reaction. Sousuke had to figure out what was behind this, so he could avoid it or induce it, he hadn’t decided yet.

“Of course I’m happy to see you, Haruka.”

It was good enough of a response for Haru, so he smiled and pulled Sousuke inside, leaving him in the foyer while he wandered straight into his kitchen. Sousuke sighed, locking the front door, and gave the apartment a cursory sweep with his eyes as he removed his shoes.

He spotted an opened bottle of cold medicine in the table. “Haru, how much of this did you take?” Haru’s brow and nose scrunched in an adorable way as he tried to remember, “I think I started off with a normal dose. But it wasn’t doing anything so I took twice the amount. Then I could tell it was kinda working, but not enough so I took another one.”

Mystery solved. It was the cold medicine that turned Haru into a sappy menace. Sousuke decided it
was probably for Haru’s own good that he did not get sick often because this was not a Haru who should be allowed around other people. The thought of Haru clinging to another man set Sousuke’s teeth on edge. He would do anything he could for this to remain a secret.

A crash from the kitchen snapped Sousuke out of his assessment. He hurried over to find Haru sitting on the floor with a hazy look on his face and a spilled tea canister spread out around him. Sousuke knelt beside Haru, placing an arm around his shoulders to steady him. “Are you okay?”

Haru blinked a few times, trying to focus, “I…. I got a little dizzy…”

“Haruka, you need to be resting.” He let the police officer tone creep into his voice. Haru could’ve seriously hurt himself. “Let me take care of this, okay?”

A guilty frown crossed Haru’s face as he whispered, “But Sou, you always take care of me. It-It’s not fair to you.”

The admission caught Sousuke by surprise. They had been together this long and Haru still thought he was a burden? It made Sousuke’s heart ache.

He reached over and held Haru’s face in both of his hands, a trick he realized was the best way to get Haru’s full attention. He looked scared, but there was a bit of hope and something else in Haru’s tired eyes.

“Haruka, listen to me. I don’t, and never have, done anything for you out of some sense of obligation. I like to do things for you and I want to see you happy and taken care of because I lo-” Sousuke swallowed to dislodge his heart which had jumped into his throat, “-because I care about you. You’re not troubling me and I’m not going to be upset because you need some help, okay?”

Haru nodded slowly, blinking back the tears in his eyes. He could blame them on the fever later if he wanted to. He feebly croaked out a request for some tea.

Even though he insisted he could walk fine, Sousuke still carried Haru out of the kitchen and set him down in his nest of blankets at the kotatsu. As a precaution, Sousuke took the cold medicine with him as he went to clean up the spilt tea leaves.

While he waited for new water to boil, a soft knock echoed at the door. Sousuke ordered Haru not to get up as he walked to the front. He knew Suga and Daichi were out of town, spending the holiday and Daichi’s birthday in Hawaii, so Sousuke figured it was probably Yamato. He could always be counted on to keep an eye on Haru when Sousuke couldn’t.

When the door opened, it was a handsome couple that greeted him, both with dark hair and clear blue eyes. Everyone examined each other in surprise. Sousuke had a good idea of who they were, but the thought of actually being in this situation was something he hadn’t prepared for today.

Sousuke felt a tug on the back of his shirt. “Sou, is everything okay?”

Stepping to the side so Haru had a clear view of his visitors, Sousuke watched shock spring up on Haru’s face. It made him feel marginally better that this was a surprise for both of them.

“M-mom? Dad? What are you doing here?” He stepped forward and hugged them both.

His father smiled warmly at him, “There was a break in work and we thought it would be the perfect chance to come home for a few days.”

“This is your first New Year’s in Tokyo, after all, so we thought it might to be nice to spend it
Haru knew what they really meant: it was his first New Year’s he hadn’t spent with Makoto in Iwatobi. When they had broken up right before Christmas, Makoto had returned home alone over their break. It gave Haru the chance to pack and find a place to live in whatever peace the solitude gave him. He hadn’t told his parents what happened until midway through January, long after his possessions had been moved into a small storage space and Haru had grown tired of living in a cheap hotel he rented by the week.

That was Haru’s first New Year’s alone, broken and desolate without anyone to spare him a kind word. This year was much, much different.

“Is everything alright, Haruka?” His father was eyeing Sousuke’s uniform in concern.

“Oh! Yes, um, this is-”

Sousuke cleared his throat, cutting off Haru’s awkward introduction. He gave them a deep bow, and introduced himself in the proud, but polite way his father taught him, “Yamazaki Sousuke. Everything is alright. I start a shift soon, but I stopped by to check on Haru since he’s been feeling under the weather.”

Recognition bloomed in the Nanase’s faces. They gave Sousuke a quick bow in return, and introduced themselves, “It’s wonderful to meet you, Yamazaki-kun! Haruka talks about you all the time,” she gave her son a sly smile.

Haru’s face flushed, “You’re exaggerating, mom.”

“I’m not, though! You went on for almost two hours about how Yamazaki-kun took you to the aquarium on Christmas and how it was absolutely magical and-”

“Mom! Please!” Haru looked like he was ready to jump off his balcony.

Sousuke laughed gently, “It’s very nice to meet you as well, Nanase-san.”

“Oh please, you don’t need to be so formal. Call us Aya and Katsuo. Or mom and dad if you’d like.” She winked at him.

“Mother.”

Katsuo laughed and patted Haru’s head, “Let her be, Haruka. She hardly ever gets to tease you in person.”

Haru sighed and led his parents into the living room to have a seat at the kotatsu. He was about to go and prepare tea, but Sousuke stopped him and did it himself, reminding Haru he’s still sick.

“What a gentleman!” Aya praised, causing a faint blush to rise in Sousuke’s cheeks.

Haru buried his head in his arms on the table. He was happy to see his parents, of course, but he didn’t expect them to randomly show up. He especially didn’t think they would be meeting Sousuke. Haru had hoped when they did, he could proudly introduce him as his boyfriend. At the door, he had almost called Sousuke his friend, which was true, but it still felt like a disservice to their relationship.

Sousuke dropped off the tray of tea with some cookies and crackers he found in the cabinet. As much as he felt like he should stay so Haru didn’t have to face his parents’ no doubt awkward questions alone, it was time for him to head to work. He excused himself and Haru refused to stay
seated and walked Sousuke to the door.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, okay?” Sousuke said as he pulled his jacket on.

Confused, Haru looked up at him, “You’re not coming back after your shift?”

“Oh, well I figured you’d want to rest after visiting with your parents.”

Haru wilted, looking like a scolded puppy, “You said you’d be back for the sunrise. We were going to start our year off right.”

*Our year?* Sousuke cursed the cold medicine again. He was so weak against a pouty, clingy Haru.

“Okay, I promise I’ll come back. But only if you promise to let your parents take care of you and relax.”

“Promise!” Haru threw his arms around Sousuke’s neck for a brief hug before handing him the spare key. “Be safe.”

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It was just past 6:00am when Sousuke let himself into Haru’s apartment. The shrine where he was posted had been a zoo. Too many bodies too excited at too early in the morning. Sousuke just wanted to eat and sleep, but he had a promise to keep.

A dim light was left on in one corner of the room, bright enough so Sousuke wasn’t tripping over anything in the unfamiliar place, but not so much that it would bother Haru who was sleeping under the kotatsu. Still some time left before dawn, Sousuke headed toward the kitchen where he found a large platter of osechi ryori with a note from Haru’s mother telling Sousuke to help himself and thanks for the hard work. He ate his fill in the quiet home and as the sky started to lighten, he gently shook Haru awake.

Haru was groggy, but his eyes looked clearer than before and his face less flushed. “Sou?”

“Yeah, it’s me,” he smiled gently as he brushed the bangs to the side, “How was your talk with your parents?”

“It was good. Mom stopped prying, apparently she only wanted to embarrass me while you were here.”

Sousuke helped Haru to his feet, still firmly wrapped in a blanket. They went onto the balcony where they could hear the soft chatter of Haru’s neighbors who were enjoying the same view. Sousuke draped an arm around Haru’s shoulders, pulling him close (to keep him warm, of course). He tried to tell himself he did not feel Haru relax and move into the touch.

When Sousuke looked down, Haru’s face was awash in the soft colors of the dawn. Without thinking, or perhaps after thinking too much, Sousuke leaned over and pressed a kiss against Haru’s temple.

“Happy New Year, Haruka.”

Haru immediately felt his fever return at the touch of Sousuke’s lips against his skin. He did not have
the chance to confess like he planned, but the show of affection was enough to put Haru at ease. He bit his lip to contain his grin, and leaned harder against Sousuke’s side, resting his head on his shoulder. “Happy New Year, Sou.”

Chapter End Notes

Precious babies! I'll be out of the country next week so you all get the next chapter on FRIDAY and whoooooo it is the chapter you're all going to want to read <3 <3 <3
a warm kiss instead of a cold goodbye

Chapter Summary

Desperation in many forms

Chapter Notes

I really, truly love you, reader. Thank you for staying with me this far and supporting and encouraging me this much. I would never have gotten this far or have ever been brave enough to post it in the first place without you <3

Many thanks and blessings to my beta reader @princest, the Boston man version of me @Rex501st who has been teased about this entire story from the beginning, and the cutie @ohmyanase for putting up with my screaming and nerves over the past month.

Haru was fifteen minutes early to teach the art history lecture. Normally arriving on time for a class would be a good thing; however, for Haru it meant everything was off. Usually he walked through the door a few minutes after class started, but from the moment Haru had woken up, things had gone wrong. He slept through his alarm, did poorly at practice, forgot the painting he was working on needing to be critiqued during class, and hadn’t eaten all day. His only solace found in bitching to Sousuke over text (with Sousuke firing back about the idiots he’s had to deal with at the koban) and knowing mackerel was on a special sale today.

The students filed in, surprised to see their temporary professor already there and sporting a pissed off look on his face. There were whispered mutterings about what it could be: Did we all bomb the last quiz? Did he not do well in his last swim meet? Did he get into a fight with Mr. Sexy Policeman?

Makoto made an effort to tune out his classmates after the topic of Yamazaki was breached. Besides, he knew that particular expression. It wasn’t anything serious, just a bad day, and Haru was hungry and pissed. Still five minutes before class started, Makoto found the courage to get up and offer Haru the croissant stashed in his bag from a cafe they used to frequent together. As he grabbed it and took a step forward, a familiar voice rang out from the doorway to make him freeze.

“Oi, Haru.”

Shit.

“Sou?!” Haru jumped up from his seat in surprise and rushed over, preventing him from entering further into the classroom.

“You said you hadn’t eaten,” with a warm look on his face, Sousuke held up a bento, “Tanaka and I went out for lunch so I figured you could have mine. Least I could do considering you made it.”

A couple students nearby gasped and whispered to each other, “Sensei makes him lunch? I don’t
Haru chose to ignore them. “I would have managed.”

“Yeah, but you’re an asshole when you’re hungry, and it’s not fair to subject your students to that kind of terror-” he went dead silent as he looked over Haru’s shoulder, all traces of gentleness gone. The entire class staring at them with intense interest except for one brown haired, green eyed man who was doing his best to make himself invisible as he awkwardly sat back down in his seat.

It didn’t work.

_Shit._

Sousuke’s eyes flashed dangerously as he growled, “Haruka-”

“Let’s talk outside!” Haru grabbed the bento, placing it on a nearby desk before dragging Sousuke out and slamming the door behind them.

He hadn’t even finished turning around before Sousuke started yelling, “What the fuck, Haru?!?”

Haru winced at the volume, “Sou, listen-”

“Don’t you ‘Sou’ me! What the actual fuck, Haruka? You didn’t think it was important to tell me that Tachibana’s in your class?”

“Please lower your voice, they can all probably hear you.”

“I don’t give a shit!,” Sousuke spat, “Why didn’t you tell me? What happened to ‘I don’t want things hidden between us?’”

“I didn’t tell you because the last time you saw him you wanted to break his ribs! I don’t want you to hurt him again. It’s not a big deal that he’s here.” Haru tried to reach for him, but Sousuke took a step back, keeping himself out of range.

“Like hell it isn’t!”

Haru recoiled and panic threatened to seize his body. He needed to stay calm, he needed to fix this. He couldn’t bear to lose Sousuke. “We haven’t spoken a word to each other outside of classwork. It’s nothing!”

“Then why do the both of you look like you were fucking caught doing something wrong ?” Sousuke was furious. He hadn’t been this angry since the doctors told him he couldn’t swim competitively anymore. But Haru kept a secret from him, a secret about being in regular contact with his ex boyfriend (who Haru had already been too fucking nice to, he might add) and it made him livid. Unspoken worries flashed through his mind as he waited for a response.

Haru looked up at him, eyes pleading, as his entire upper body started to tremble, “Sou, I-I promise, you don’t need to worry.”

Sousuke roared, “Why shouldn’t I worry?! You’re vulnerable , Haruka! What if he still has feelings for you? What if he wants you back? Do you still have feelings for him? Is that why you didn’t tell me?” Sousuke could feel himself breaking. All of the fears he pushed aside, so he could be the anchor Haru needed, were surfacing. His hands were clenched into fists so hard they were turning white.
“You can’t go back to him, Haruka! You can’t just leave me after all this! Don’t you understand, Haru? Don’t you know that I-!”

Before he could finish his all too honest and mortifyingly public confession, Haru reached up and tugged hard on Sousuke’s collar, bringing his lips crashing into his own. It hurt and their teeth clacked awkwardly together, but it still sent shocks throughout Haru’s body. He filled the kiss with as much reassurance and adoration he could muster before loosening his grip, and stepping back to look at him, “That’s why you shouldn’t worry!”

Silence filled the hallway. Haru didn’t release Sousuke from his hold while he stared at him, waiting for some kind of response. As Sousuke finally processed the kiss and Haru’s sincere, watery eyes, his entire face and neck was conquered by a deep red blush. Oh.

“Oh.”

“Yeah, oh.” Haru released him, wiping away his unshed tears, getting some of his composure back. His hands went back to Sousuke’s chest, smoothing out the wrinkles in his uniform.

Sousuke gingerly put his hands on Haru’s hips. He needed to ground himself, make sure it was all real, “…Come over tonight?”

“Where else would I be?” Haru teased with a minute, unsure smile.

“Right. Well, um, I need to get back to the koban.”

“There are probably five grannies there waiting for you to give them directions.”

“Right. Well, um, I need to get back-”

“You said that already.”

“God dammit, Haruka!” He mumbled as he gripped Haru’s waist harder, and pulled him in for another kiss. Haru instinctively wrapped his arms around his neck, pressing as much of his body against him as possible. This time was more passionate, more urgent, screaming I waited so fucking long for this.

Haru pulled away too soon for either of their liking, but one of them had to be responsible. “I have a class to teach.”

Sousuke groaned in disappointment, burying his face in the crook of Haru’s neck, “Can’t you play hooky? You’re not really a professor, you know.”

“The grannies need you,” he poked at the cheek not pressed against him. “Not like you’ll be much help considering how directionally challenged you are.”

Sousuke nipped at the junction of his neck and shoulder in protest.

Haru bit down on his lip to suppress a gasp, and gave Sousuke’s biceps a squeeze, “I’ll make it up to you.”

The breathy promise straightened Sousuke up, “You better.”

“I will.” Haru’s eyes positively sparkled.

Sousuke finally smiled, “See you tonight.”
Haru bounced up to his toes to give Sousuke a peck on the lips before walking back into the classroom.

He didn’t see Sousuke collapse against the wall, clutching his chest, praying to whatever deities that were listening that this wasn’t a dream, or if it was, to never wake him up.

Displaying much more calm than he felt, Haru sat at his desk with the bento and popped a cherry tomato in his mouth as he assessed his students. Except for Makoto, who looked like he was two seconds away from throwing himself out the window, the class was dead silent, all looking fixedly at Haru or their called out classmate.

Haru sighed, “Even if I did the lecture, none of you would be paying any attention, would you?”

A resounding ‘NO!’ echoed.

Haru sought out green. He didn’t feel like he owed the students anything, but it was half Makoto’s business, and he would suffer more of their inquiries than Haru would. Their eyes met and Makoto had a look of complete resignation on his face.

“It’ll be easier than dealing with rumors,” Makoto croaked before he stood at his desk, facing the majority of the class.

Shocked at the response, Haru nodded and let Makoto continue, “Haru and I were a couple. We grew up together in Iwatobi and then started dating when we began college. It ended… poorly, which is why Yamazaki-kun—"

“Officer Yamazaki,” Haru corrected, a hint of pride in his voice.

Another jab hit Makoto’s heart. “Which is why officer Yamazaki reacted so negatively to me being here.”

The room was silent for a few heartbeats while the gears turned in their heads before they all started speaking at once.

“You don’t seem like Tachibana’s type, sensei!”

“Is that how you got hurt before, Makoto-kun? That doesn’t seem legal...”

“Are you two having an affair?”

Haru sat stoically, while Makoto did his best not to groan in agony. Seeing Makoto’s unending distress and feeling his own annoyance rise, Haru informed the class they were done talking about his love life and are dismissed for the day. The crowd only gave a weak protest, hungry for gossip, but happy for the extra free time.

Only Makoto remained where he was, back in his seat with his face now hidden in his arms, his resolve finally broken. Haru didn’t leave his spot at his desk, thoughtfully eating the lunch Sousuke provided. Makoto finally squeaked out Haru’s name.

Without looking up, Haru offered, “I’m sorry. I didn’t think me being here would ever force you to out yourself or our past. I should have told Sousuke about all this, but I was worried he’d act, well, exactly as he did. Or maybe even worse.”
“Is that the only reason you didn’t tell him?” Makoto asked with a mix of hope and curiosity.

“I… I wanted a chance to figure out what I wanted to do on my own. When I first saw you in class I thought it was an opportunity. Maybe we could talk again. Be friends eventually. I don’t know. I just didn’t want our one bad year to ruin all the good ones. Even now I can’t imagine my life without you… You’re still important to me.”

Makoto felt his chest tighten and the tears spring to his eyes. He was right, Haru did still care about him. They could be okay.

“But I haven’t forgiven you.”

The relief Makoto felt a moment ago disappeared.

“I mean, I’m not mad about it anymore, at least not about our fights and stuff, but what you did…” Haru took a deep breath, and looked Makoto in the eye, “You hurt me. You hurt me on purpose. I never, ever thought you’d be so disrespectful and selfish, and even when there was proof of it, I still couldn’t believe it. As the person who’s always been beside you - as your best friend - I deserved to be treated better than that. I know I’m not blameless in what happened, but you broke it beyond repair.”

Makoto looked away, the familiar shame and guilt flooded his being stronger than it ever had before.

Quieter, Haru added, “Kisumi too. He didn’t deserve being used. He really did have a crush on you, you know.”

Makoto hadn’t know, not really, until he was already teeming with resentment and insecurities toward his relationship with Haru. By then it was too late, Kisumi’s not so subtle flirting and cries for his attention eased Makoto’s ego. He hadn’t wanted to give it up.

They sat in silence. While Makoto was drowning in regret, Haru felt lighter than he could ever remember. He had confronted Makoto more or less on his own terms, and Sousuke had been more than fine with kissing him and said he didn’t want Haru to leave him. Haru was sure if he hadn’t surprised him with that kiss, Sousuke would have said what Haru had been dying to hear.

Now when Haru told himself everything would be okay, he could truly believe it.

“Are you and Yamazaki… are you two really…?” Makoto wasn’t sure how to finish the sentence. He didn’t want to hear it, but he needed to know the answer.

“So we’re talking about it tonight.”

“Do you lo-?”

When Makoto finally met Haru’s eyes again, they were ablaze with conviction.

“Yes.”

The weightless feeling of kissing Haru had slowly ebbed throughout the remainder of Sousuke’s shift at work. Sousuke had done exactly what Daichi had warned him about. There were a million opportunities where it could have been easy to tell Haru how he felt about him. They had shared
enough conventionally romantic moments as well as instances that would be special only to them. Hell, even post run when they were sweaty, smelly, and irritated would’ve been better than yelling it in anger and desperation in a hallway of the art building.

Even then, with everything laid out and passions running high, Sousuke had been unable to say it. Haru had cut him off with the most meaningful kiss of his life, and he could only stare dumbly, the confession stolen from him in a breath.

Now he was doubting himself, unsure if what he hoped the kiss meant was what it actually was. What if Haru had only done it to shut him up? To distract him from the issue of Tachibana’s presence? He didn’t believe Haru would stoop so low, but who could think properly with unease and fear filling their chest?

After all, Sousuke didn’t think he could react in such a volatile manner, not anymore. He worked hard since high school to keep his temper in check, no longer prone to outbursts like he suffered growing up. Now his anger simmered quietly, and when it boiled over all that ever happened was silent fuming and beating the shit out of the punching bag at the gym. Even when he went after Tachibana the first time, he hadn’t raised his voice.

This time he shouted - shouted! - at Haru, made accusations he didn’t really believe born from irrational lifelong insecurities. He had bullied him, something Sousuke promised himself he would never repeat. Despite Sousuke so obviously scaring him, Haru stood his ground, tried to explain, tried to make things right. Why would Haru even want Sousuke after his disgusting display?

It was too much to keep in his head, he needed to talk to someone about this. There was only one person to call.

“Rin, I’m in trouble.”

“What did you do now?”

“I kissed Haru.”

“What?!”

“Well, he kissed me first, but I think it was to calm me down because I was ready to murder Tachibana and I was yelling about Haru leaving me and-“

“SOUSUKE. Start from the beginning!!”

He took a deep breath to steady his reeling mind and recounted what happened a few hours ago.

“Damn. Haru should’ve told you about Makoto, but I understand where he’s coming from. You would’ve camped out in his lectures in full tactical gear if you thought he was going to make a move on your man.”

“But not helpful.”

“...but you definitely should not have yelled at him like that, what were you thinking?”

“I wasn’t thinking, I was just reacting.” Sousuke grimaced. He was beating himself up enough without Rin’s help.

“At least tell me you didn’t punch anybody this time.”
“Rin, please, I’m freaking out.”

“What are you worried about, Sou? From where I’m standing, you and Haru kissing is a GOOD thing. It’s about time you stop dancing around each other and get your feelings out in the open.”

Sousuke’s voice dropped to a fragile whisper, “What if he doesn’t want the same things as I do, Rin?”

“You’re joking right? Do you two have no self awareness AT ALL? You’ve been a gross, romantic couple for months, just without all the fun sex stuff.”

“That’s not-”

“Don’t even fucking start with me.” Even over the phone it was obvious Rin’s temper was rising.

“We’ve all been watching and there’s no way to deny it.”

“Wait, who’s ‘we’?”

“Everyone who knows you. Nagisa, Rei, the volleyball dads, Haru’s relay squad, your fucking father, Sou. Everyone. Now quit stalling, go home, and FUCKING FINALLY touch Haru’s butt so I can stop dealing with you two losers being the biggest idiots ever.”

When Sousuke walked into his apartment, he wasn’t expecting to be greeted by the sight of a large platter of tonkatsu and a very nervous looking Haru.

“Sou-”

“Haru-”

They both stopped, hoping to let the other finish. Silence cut through the apartment for a few moments.

“You first,” they said in unison, frowning immediately as they talked over each other.

Why was this happening? They had never been awkward and bumbling around each other before, even when it involved one of them crying like a baby. They had finally let their feelings be known and they couldn’t even maintain eye contact.

Letting out a frustrated groan at the stalemate, Haru grabbed Sousuke’s hand - his actual hand, not just his wrist! - and pulled him over to the couch.

“Sit.”

Sousuke obeyed, settling down in the middle. Haru climbed onto him, straddling his lap, shins sinking down between cushions. The furious blush that spread across the Sousuke’s cheeks boosted Haru’s confidence.

He took a deep breath before speaking, “Yamazaki Sousuke, I’m in love with you. I want to kiss you and have sex with you and be your boyfriend.”
It wasn’t very romantic, Haru knew, but he figured Sousuke would appreciate his direct approach after the drama that unfolded outside of his classroom. He was questioning himself now as Sousuke remained silent and still beneath him.

“Sousuke, say something.” I’m freaking the fuck out.

But Sousuke didn’t. Sousuke couldn’t. He was so ready to proclaim in that damn hallway he loved Haru, he’s been in love with Haru for a while. That Haru coming into his life had changed everything for him. Now Haru had explicitly told him he felt the same way, and he couldn’t choke out a single fucking word.

When Sousuke looked into Haru’s eyes he saw the same doubt and fear he felt earlier, when he thought he lost him to Tachibana. Those emotions didn’t belong there, especially not as a result of his cowardice. He needed to do something before Haru flipped out and ran. He did the one thing he could in this state.

Resting his hands against Haru’s back, Sousuke pulled him forward and pressed their lips together. It wasn’t as desperate as their earlier attempts, but it was still heated and greedy. Sousuke wasted no time in pushing his tongue past Haru’s lips, pulling a soft moan from him. Haru’s hands gripped his shoulders as he returned the kiss with equal fervour, sucking on his tongue before drawing back enough to untangle them so he could graze his teeth over Sousuke’s bottom lip.

The resulting growl in Sousuke’s throat set Haru on fire.

“So this is a ‘yes’ to kissing,” the smirk was obvious in Haru’s voice, “Is there a ‘yes’ to sex?”

Sousuke briefly considered telling Haru, in detail, every single private fantasy he had entertained about him over the past couple months. But he figured Haru sounded like he was completely on board, and Sousuke would prefer to just show him. They would have the time.

“Yes to sex,” he gifted Haru with a taunting smile, as his hands trailed down to give Haru’s firm ass a hard squeeze. The flicker of surprised pleasure that crossed Haru’s face was almost enough to break Sousuke’s resolve.

Haru let his head drop, forehead resting on Sousuke’s better shoulder. He asked, more shyly than the previous questions, “...being boyfriends?”

Sousuke’s hands slid back up to rest around his waist, pulling Haru closer to him, grazing his lips against Haru’s neck. “Yes to boyfriends.”

There was one question left. One Haru needed to ask more than anything, but was terrified to ask. He thought he knew the answer, but if he was wrong… As much as he healed, he knew he wouldn’t be able to handle a rejection from Sousuke.

Sousuke pushed Haru back so he could cup his face in his hands. The action had become a habit of theirs, signifying Sousuke’s strength and Haru’s trust in it, in him. Locking eyes, Sousuke finally said what had been on the tip of his tongue for months.

“I love you, Haruka.”

It was the first time Sousuke watched Haru cry from joy.
I HOPE THIS WAS EMOTIONALLY SATISFYING FOR YOU ALL!!

I seriously stressed out about this chapter forevrrrr even though this was always how I wanted it to happen.

This story isn't ending here, I want to build more on their relationship as well as make sure all of the other characters are happy. Please notice that I updated the chapter numbers!

Thank you again, so, so much for reading and I hope you will continuing to enjoy! Feel free to yell (in a friendly way) at me in the comments!
been waiting all this time

Chapter Summary

Sharing and caring.

Chapter Notes

Hello my precious dumplings!! I really did mean to update last week, but I got super sick while I was abroad and couldn't get the chapter done.

As a token of apology, have this very long Starting Now I'm Starting Over' playlist on 8tracks!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was the first morning in a long time where Sousuke woke up dressed in what he preferred to sleep in: nothing but his underwear. Another bare chest was pressed against his, Haru still asleep and pulled close. He looked completely relaxed, his remaining secrets having been poured out to Sousuke the day before.

They had spent the remainder of the previous night in bed exchanging sweet and sloppy kisses amidst murmurs of conversation. At some point, their shirts had come off, and their hands roamed, fingers mapping out every muscle ridge and detail in the other’s chest and back. It was the most intimate thing Sousuke had ever experienced, completely exposed and pliant under Haru’s tender touches and soft, rich voice.

They hadn’t gone any further, both feeling satisfied with just that. Honestly, Sousuke was relieved. Even if they were happy tears, he still didn’t want the image of Haru crying associated with their first time together.

Sousuke’s stomach rumbled, the plate of tonkatsu Haru prepared forgotten in their excitement to taste each other instead. Judging by how much light poured in through the window, it must have been well past time for them to start their day, but Sousuke couldn’t bring himself to wake Haru. The golden hues filtering in through the window made Haru look like he was radiating sunshine, a celestial being filled with joy.

Or maybe Sousuke had become a sap and saw Haru in the same flowery vision the heroines in romance manga saw their love interests. Either way, it was probably Rin’s fault.

As he decided both observations were true, a kiss was pressed against Sousuke’s chest, Haru stirring and blinking the sleep out of his eyes. “Morning,” Haru murmured in a quiet and content voice.

Such a simple thing hit Sousuke’s core and he wondered if he was the one who would end up crying today. He remembers waking up at his father’s house, the first time he slept with Haru in his arms, and thinking how novel that feeling was and wishing for more mornings like that. Of course, since then they started their day together countless times. The sight before Sousuke wasn’t new, Haru still
resting against Sousuke’s side as he mumbled to himself, making a mental to-do list as he checked his schedule and inbox. By all means, it was ordinary, routine even, but there was a spark to it this morning and not just because Sousuke could now guiltlessly appreciate how soft and blemish free Haru’s pale skin was despite the last four years of constant pool time and rigorous training.

Finally the phone was tossed aside and Haru turned toward him, Sousuke quickly mirroring the motion, their legs easily entangled. Neither of them spoke, just admiring the other, their cheeks faintly coloring and goofy smiles appearing whenever they made eye contact.

This kind of closeness and intimacy wasn’t new to them, Haru knew, but there was more to it today, and not just because Haru could now shamelessly ogle the results of Sousuke’s dedication to his gym regime. There was something else Haru couldn’t place. It felt familiar, but also new. It was unexplored territory, but somehow he also felt like he was coming home.

Haru smiled to himself. That’s how it had always been with Sousuke, half of him as predictable and reliable as the Yamanote line, and the rest dynamic and full of surprises that always caught Haru off guard. Haru loved that about Sousuke. It made growing and changing with him easy, no matter what happened there was enough of Sousuke’s stubborn fundamentals to be comforting. Haru didn’t realize the same could be said of him.

Tired of simply looking, Haru moved in for a kiss. Like this, he didn’t need to stretch up on his toes to reach so he felt the need to take advantage of it while he had the chance. It wasn’t that Sousuke would begrudge him a smooch, but Haru could imagine the smug look on Sousuke’s face every time he had to lean down to give Haru access.

How dare he grow even taller after high school graduation?

Haru’s scorn was short lived, erased by the warmth inside and out Sousuke provided as he eagerly kissed Haru back. It was honestly amazing, every moment with Sousuke had been thawing Haru’s heart and now, finally, it was working again.

Against their wishes, they rolled out of bed, throwing on shirts that both belonged to Sousuke, to eat something light before Haru had to leave for practice. Sousuke stuck close to Haru in the kitchen, grabbing him items from the fridge or rinsing off cutlery as he was done with it. He was just like a puppy, eager to be near and make his owner happy. It was endearing and Haru couldn’t hold back the smile on his face.

They ate slowly, Haru’s usual light meal of mackerel, eggs, and toast. Under the table, Haru’s legs were stretched out, his feet propped up across Sousuke’s knees. The hand of Sousuke’s that wasn’t shoveling food in his mouth rested on Haru’s ankles, fingertips rubbing nonsense patterns into the skin. It felt natural and practiced, even though this was the first time they sat in such a way.

When the last of the dishes were placed in the drying rack, Haru took Sousuke’s hand and led him to the couch, reenacting their position from last night.

“I need a picture.”

Sousuke raised an eyebrow in confusion. “Excuse me?”

“For Rin,” Haru added as if that explained everything.

Somehow, Sousuke did not have a good feeling about this. “What do you need a picture of?”

“You grabbing my ass.”
Heat flooded Sousuke’s face. “No. No way. I’m not sending a picture like that to Rin.”

Haru rolled his eyes. “That’s why I’m doing it. We… we’re going to tell him right? A-About us?”

“Of course we are!” Sousuke’s hands squeezed Haru’s hips to comfort him, “But why can’t we send him something that doesn’t involve your ass?”

Haru’s flat expression should’ve been enough to clue Sousuke in there was no way out of this one. “How many times has Rin told you touch my butt?”

Sousuke remembers the first time, when Rin had been suspicious of them after a late night skype call. He knew Haru had heard, he teased him about it once he had gotten in bed, but how many of the other times did he know about? Honestly, it had become so often that Sousuke usually tuned it out. It was just a part of their normal greetings or partings, ‘hey, I heard about that gang fight you had to break up. You okay? Did you touch Haru’s butt after that?’ or ‘have a good week, don’t forget to tell your dad hi for me and touch Haru’s butt. Night!’

Sousuke held out his hand for Haru’s phone. “Fine. It’ll at least get Rin to shut the fuck up.”

Haru smiled, kissing Sousuke’s forehead and handing over his device. Sousuke rested his chin on Haru’s shoulder and grabbed a satisfying handful of Haru’s perfect rear with his free hand. Sousuke saw Haru’s blush in the front facing camera, but Haru quickly schooled his features into a little smirk and held up a hand to flip the camera off.

Groaning, Sousuke hid his face in Haru’s shirt. “This is so embarrassing.”

“Just take the damn picture, Yamazaki.”

- 

After a hefty fee of kisses for going through with Haru’s idea, it was time for Haru to head to campus for practice. He changed quickly in the bathroom and when he emerged, he was surprised to see Sousuke pulling on his own coat.

“Where are you going?” Haru asked.

Sousuke didn’t look over as he replied, fumbling with the buttons, “I thought I’d take you to practice today since I have time before my shift starts…”

Haru blinked a few times in shock. Sousuke had never taken him to practice before. Sousuke’s police box was near enough to campus to make it an easy detour, but the timing was never right. Makoto used to accompany him when his schedule allowed, when they were still in love.

Oh. That’s right, he and Sousuke are in love. With each other. Mutually.

Haru bit his lip to contain his grin and pulled on one of Sousuke’s sweatshirts. He walked over, squeezing Sousuke’s arm. “I’d like that.”

In return, Sousuke gifted Haru with a smile he would treasure forever.

Opening the door, he let Haru out first before Sousuke locked it behind him and slid his keys into his pocket. Once his hands were free, one immediately reached over and found one of Haru’s, despite it
being mostly covered by the overly long sweatshirt sleeves.

The tiniest of gasps left Haru and he stared down at their joined hands. Their fingers were laced tightly, his thinner ones fitting perfectly in Sousuke’s. Shifting his gaze up, Haru noticed the pink dusting Sousuke’s cheeks, but it was overshadowed by the nervous yet delighted smile that took over the bottom half of Sousuke’s face.

Haru thought his heart was going to explode from his chest and scatter glitter and rainbows everywhere, or whatever it is that happens in children’s movies when the main character is overcome with happiness. How long had he waited for this? To be next to someone proud to be with him, happy to show everyone their relationship. It was such a stupid, small thing, Haru knew, but it still meant the world to him. He gave Sousuke’s hand a squeeze, and walked closer to his side.

When they arrived at the pool, Haru didn’t let go right away. Sousuke had agreed to cover another half a shift before starting his four days of swing shifts. It was bad timing, forcing them on the most incompatible schedule when they were desperate to spend as much time together as possible. It wasn’t the worst situation they’ve had to deal with, but it would still be lonely. Thankfully, this was only their beginning.

Haru stared at his shoes as he spoke, “I… I should get going.”

“Right. Don’t want you to get in trouble for being late.”

Neither of them moved a muscle.

Eventually Sousuke smirked, “I thought you were leaving.”

Haru scoffed in return, “I can’t go anywhere with you holding onto me like this.” He held up their hands as proof.

“You’re the one clinging to me, Haruka.”

That bit of teasing was finally enough to cause Haru to snap his head up to scold Sousuke face to face. Before he could retort, Sousuke’s lips pressed against his, instantly relieving Haru of his irritation and flustered embarrassment.

“No. Fucking. Way.”

They recognized the shocked voice that was coming from behind them. Touya and Ichirou had their mouths hanging open, gaping with utter surprise. Yamato stood beside them, a smug congratulatory smile plastered on his face.

Ichirou gathered his wits first. “Are you two official now? Since when? Why weren’t we notified right away?”

Sousuke rolled his eyes while Haru chuckled. “It only happened last night, and besides Rin, you’re the first to know.”

Touya gave them a lewd grin. “Since last night, huh? You’re not too sore to swim today, are you Haru? Sousuke-kun looks like the type to really-”

The icy tone of Sousuke’s voice cut him off, “You don’t want to finish that sentence.” The smile on Sousuke’s face was anything but friendly.

Yamato smacked both of them upside the head. “What these idiots meant to say was that we’re very
happy for you two, but we really do need to steal Haru away for practice now.”

Sousuke gave Haru one last peck on the cheek before finally untangling their fingers, watching the group disappear into the building.

Practice for Haru was abysmal. His times were as good as ever, but this was the first instance anyone could say that Nanase Haruka was clumsy. He knocked over the rack of kickboards, smacked his head on the wall when he should have been flipping into a turn, and panicked after missing a whistle causing him to belly flop into the pool much like Rei’s first time at Samezuka. After all of those disasters, one of his coaches suggested he spend the rest of the time stretching and doing some bodyweight exercises. No equipment. The last thing they needed was for Haru to drop a loaded barbell on himself.

After the last of their sprints, his friends joined him in the locker room to change.

“That was one magnificent dive, Haru!” Touya teased.

“Yeah, were you too busy daydreaming about smooching Sousuke-kun to pay attention?” Ichirou snickered at his own joke, knowing full well that nothing was enticing enough to distract Haru from swimming.

Haru stared at them and responded with a simple, “yes.”

Ichirou blushed, not expecting that. “W-what?”

“I was trying to figure out if I could make it back to Sou’s apartment in time to see him and say goodnight before he starts his shift,” he answered truthfully.

All of them were bright red caught off guard by this romantic side of Haru. Yamato cleared his throat, “And...?”

A pout formed on Haru’s lips, “I would only make it if he was running late and he never leaves anywhere late.”

“Oh well, you’ll see him a bit tomorrow, right?” Yamato gave his best comforting smile.

After changing they walked out together, Touya and Ichirou headed toward their favorite bar and Yamato back home to check on his dog (‘the only man in my life right now’).

It was movie night at Koushi and Daichi’s, but Haru still had a couple hours before they would be home. He had projects and papers to work on, of course, with graduation less than three months away; however, if his mind was too cloudy with thoughts of Sousuke to swim properly, there was no way he could hope to focus well enough for anything else important. Grading the test from art history would be mindless enough, but that would force Haru to think about Makoto, and the devastated look on his face when Haru had walked out of the room the day before. He wasn’t ready to ponder on that, wanting to stay floating, consumed by happiness of the new layer added to his and Sousuke’s relationship.

As Haru meandered his usual way to the station, he recognized Sousuke down the path, and a pretty
girl Haru didn’t know speaking to him. Haru approached slowly, a chill of unease shooting up his spine. He heard the girl ask Sousuke if she could buy him a drink to combat the cold night. With the way she fluttered her eyelashes and pouted her lips, it was clear she wanted to do a lot more than that to keep the handsome man in front of her hot.

Sousuke answered, his voice tinged with irritation, “I’m waiting for my boyfriend. He keeps me plenty warm.”

The girl gave Sousuke an offended look before walking off with a curt, “I see.”

Sousuke merely rolled his eyes in annoyance, and did the same to his neck to crack the joints. He quickly checked his watch before shoving his hands back in his coat pockets to keep them from freezing.

“What are you doing here?” Haru blurs out after moving closer, immediately cringing at how harsh it sounded.

At the sound of Haru’s voice, Sousuke immediately perks up and turns toward him, but the smile melts into a look of concern, “Haru, what’s wrong?”

For a moment Haru doesn’t understand why he’s asking him that, but then he registers the feeling of tears running down his cheeks. Sousuke is there in only a couple strides, pulling Haru to his chest, fingers carding through Haru’s still damp hair.

Haru starts laughing, the sounds muffled by Sousuke’s bulky wool coat. It utterly confuses Sousuke who was already worried he was doing the wrong thing by showing up here, being too clingy after less than a day of being together as a couple.

“Haru, what’s…?” He didn’t even know what to ask.

Haru pulled back, just enough so he could wipe his tears off with his sleeve and give Sousuke a reassuring smile. “Everything’s great, Sou.”

“You were crying.”

“They were happy tears, I promise.” With the way Sousuke was frowning at him, it was obvious he needed a better explanation. “During practice I kept thinking about how I wanted to see you and I was disappointed knowing it wasn’t going to happen. But then you magically appeared like you knew, and you even called me your boyfriend, and it just made me really happy.”

Blushing a bit at Haru’s candid words, Sousuke bit his lip, reminding himself a hundred times that he had to go to work; he couldn’t just throw Haru over his good shoulder, and head home where they belonged. In some ways, Sousuke felt like he lucked out that such simple things pleased Haru. His previous “relationships” lasted no longer than two months, many of them accusing Sousuke of not making an effort, they never felt special or important to him.

So far so good when it came to Haru. Hopefully it would stay that way.

As for the rest of Sousuke, he was pissed that Tachibana, famous for his kindness and endless doting, hadn’t extended those out in the ways that mattered the most to Haru. How often had Haru seen a similar situation play out in front of him, but instead of a swift and clear rejection, Haru had to watch his boyfriend smile warmly at the intruder and come up with fictional excuses to say no? No wonder Haru was so moved.

“How long do we have?”
Sousuke kissed the crown of Haru’s head. “About twenty minutes.”

“Can we stay like this?” Haru closed his eyes, fingers gripping the back of Sousuke’s coat.

“Oh course, Haruka,” Sousuke’s hold tightened, causing both of them to let out contented signs.

“Whatever you want.”

Lucky for him, all Haru wanted was Sousuke.

- 

Haru was snuggled up on the couch between Daichi and Suga. It had been a while since all three of them could share space. With Haru’s swimming, Daichi’s volleyball, and Koushi’s Master’s program, their schedules didn’t allow for much overlap. Haru could manage grabbing lunch with Koushi here and then an after practice dinner with Daichi there, but rarely did he get to spend time with them together during the last month. Haru jumped at the offer for a quiet movie night at their place, especially with Sousuke doing overnight shifts this rotation.

They were watching some B-movie Koushi picked out. He loved the sincere but poor acting, and the over the top situations. Haru didn’t mind because this one was about mutant sea creatures. The continuous eye rolling and scoffing from Daichi, who declared he was much more sensible in his movie tastes, earned him gentle prodding from his company.

Currently, the no name main characters were supposed to be engaged in a believable romance. Neither Daichi nor Suga gave the scene any thought until a wistful sigh escaped Haru’s lips as the characters shared a heated kiss. Suga gave Daichi a look before they both focused on the man between them. It only took a slight nudge in the ribs for the truth to be revealed.

“Sousuke and I are dating now,” Haru confessed.

Daichi and Suga sat up straight and stared. Haru was gripping one of Suga’s shrimp shaped pillows close to his chest, his mouth curled into a shy smile.

He watched as Daichi and Suga’s surprised expressions turn into ones of elation. Koushi threw his arms around him, “Haru, I’m so happy for you two!”

“See, Suga, I knew they’d figure it out on their own.”

“Yes, yes, Daichi, you’re always right about all matters of the heart. I never should have doubted your superior insight.” Suga teasingly rolled his eyes.

Haru chuckled at their antics, knowing full well how Daichi had been pushing Sousuke in the right direction. Part of their discussion the previous night included having a good laugh over how long they had been pining over each other and how involved their friends and family had been in pushing them closer together.

Suga continued to cling to Haru. “Tell me everything! Spare no idea, I deserve to know.”

Haru recounted the entire story, Daichi smacking himself in the forehead as Haru described Sousuke’s anger induced almost-confession. Thankfully, the rest of it was all sweetness, and everyone was a little choked up by the end.
Suga cleared his throat, wiping away a tear at the corner of his eye. “I have one very important question, Haru. Have you slept with him yet?”

Daichi smacked him lightly in the arm. “Suga, behave!”

“What? I want to know what Sousuke is like. You can’t judge a book by its cover you know.”

Daichi groaned, rubbing his eyes with the base of his hands. “And why do you want to know?”

“So we can give Haru relevant advice! I imagine Sousuke is like you in the sack, and if that’s true then-”

“Suga!” Daichi looked like he was three seconds from throwing Suga out of the apartment.

Haru sat quietly, feeling a little embarrassed, but also interested in anything Suga could tell him. His only experiences were with Makoto and they had only ever been with each other. He knew Sousuke would be quite different.

“We haven’t slept together yet. I told him I do want to have sex, but…”

“But?” Daichi prompted.

“I don’t want to rush things.” Haru bit his lip, trying to think of how to phrase it properly, “It took me some time to get comfortable doing things with Makoto, and I’m not sure how long it will take with Sou.”

“You should tell him that,” Suga insisted. The flash of panic in Haru’s eyes had him quickly adding, “Not because it’ll be a problem! But it’s best to get that sort of thing out sooner so you can set expectations and reduce confusion and miscommunication.”

Nodding, Haru settled back on the couch, letting Suga’s resumed teasing of Daichi give him comfort. He was glad he had this perfect couple to turn to for advice.

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It was still before dawn when Sousuke stumbled through his door after a fourteen hour shift. He was pleased and annoyed to see Haru curled up asleep on the couch, annoyed because he knew Haru would be cranky about his back hurting if he had slept there all night. After grabbing a couple water bottles from the fridge, Sousuke sat down in the free space next to Haru’s head. The jostling of the cushions woke Haru, and with barely opened eyes, he looked up at Sousuke and flopped half into his lap.

Sousuke chuckled, rearranging Haru so his elbow wasn’t digging into his ribs before downing one of the waters.

Haru hummed quietly, “Rough shift?”

“Nothing exciting, just long. The worst part was dealing with my phone and Tanaka blowing up.” Sousuke handed Haru his phone who was now more awake and interested.
From: Sharkbait
SOU I’M SO PROUD OF YOU YOU FINALLY DID IT

From: Sharkbait
Are you two officially dating now or are you skipping straight to getting married?

From: Sharkbait
Who confessed first? I bet it was Haru. It was Haru, wasn’t it?

From: Sharkbait
Why do you look so unhappy in this pic tho? Does Haru not have a nice ass? I imagine he would.

From: Sharkbait
Not that I imagine Haru’s ass, I just mean that we’re in the same physical condition and I have a great ass so I thought he would too.

From: Sharkbait
But seriously, I’m so happy for you. Skype me tomorrow, asshole.

Sousuke sighed. “Those are just the ones from Rin. Daichi and Suga sent their own after that.”

“Did Daichi scold you?”

“Yes, but I deserved it. Then my dad called… Rin apparently texted him. He was crying, Haru, crying! Wanted to know why he had to hear about us from Rin when he helped give birth to me and has been rooting for us the entire time.”

Haru was trying so hard not to laugh at the despair on Sousuke’s face. “I’ll call Tou-san later and give him the details. I have something to ask him, anyway.”

Sousuke raised an eyebrow in question, but didn’t voice it. “Nagisa also sent me an email.” He reached over and brought it up for Haru to read.

To: Yamazaki Sousuke

SOU-CHAN CONGRATULATIONS!!!!!! I knew it, I just knew you and Haru-chan would figure things out! Rei-chan owes me twenty bucks!! I’m sure you are super busy smooching (or more ３ ﾟ )’( ε ﾝ) right now, but I demand to know all the juicy details later!! Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do (good thing I would do most things (_ACL ｆ ｆ ｆ ))!

XOXO Nagisa

Haru pondered what bet Nagisa had made as he felt the rise and fall of Sousuke’s chest slow. If Sousuke fell asleep upright, he would regret it when he woke up.

“Sou, let’s get in bed.” The smirk on Sousuke’s face made Haru blush. “D-don’t be a pervert.”

Sousuke chuckled, and pressed a chaste kiss to his cheek before standing and stretching, his spine letting out several loud pops. Holding his hand out to Haru he said, “You’re the one who asked about
sex during your confession.”

Haru hesitated as he took Sousuke’s hand and allowed himself to be hauled to his feet. “Sou, about that…”

The reluctance made Sousuke pause. He squeezed Haru’s hand and responded in a gentle voice, “Can we talk in bed? I’m not going to last long upright.”

Haru nodded, and went into the bedroom to fix the blankets, while Sousuke went to brush his teeth and wash his face. Haru was already under the covers, facing away from the door, when Sousuke came in. Rolling his eyes, Sousuke flipped off the lights and slid under the blankets. Scooting close to Haru, he pulled him tight to his chest. Sousuke was not going to let him hide.

“Talk to me.”

Haru heard the unspoken please. He rolled himself over so they were facing each other, but still avoided Sousuke’s gaze. “I want to take things slow.”

“Okay.”

Haru frowned, Sousuke accepted too easily. “I do want to have sex with you, but I can’t just jump into it. I need to try out all of the things that lead up to it with you first and-”

“That’s fine, Haru.”

An annoyed sound rumbled in Haru’s throat. “You don’t understand-”

“Haruka, you’re the one who’s not getting it. Look, I’d be lying if I said I hadn’t spent time thinking about us like that. But I didn’t get into this relationship for sex. We can go at your pace, I just need you to do two things for me.”

Haru’s shoulders tensed, not sure what to expect, but trusting Sousuke. “W-what are they?”

“First, you don’t force yourself beyond what you’re comfortable with. If you say stop, we’ll stop and I’m completely okay with that, no matter what we’re doing. Second, you need to tell me what you like and don’t like. I can’t read your mind and I refuse to assume I know what you want. I don’t know what you’ve tried in the past, but I want us to have fun and feel satisfied. Our interests won’t line up perfectly, so we both need to be honest if something isn’t working or if there’s something we want more of.”

At first, Sousuke’s frank attitude toward sex left a sour taste in Haru’s mouth. Sousuke knew what he was doing, knew how to navigate someone’s body like a pro, knew what he wanted because he’d had enough partners to figure it out. Thankfully, the more Haru digested Sousuke’s words, the more comfort they brought him. Sousuke would be calm and in control of himself; he was happy to guide them in figuring out their dynamic together. Sousuke was patient and clear headed and not so desperate that he’d put his own desires in front of Haru’s comfort. No, Sousuke’s experience is a good thing. Everything he’s learned in the past could be applied to their relationship now and help make it strong.

“Haruka?”

Haru gave him a small smile and nodded, “I can do that.”

Sousuke smiled back before yawning in Haru’s face.
Haru smacked his arm gently. “Go to sleep, idiot.”

“Goodnight kiss first,” Sousuke mumbled.

It was too bad Sousuke was already half asleep because the loving smile Haru gave him before sliding his lips against his shouldn’t have been missed.

Chapter End Notes

I hope this gave you a lot of feelings?? I sure have them.

Thank you for still reading! Let me know if there's anything you'd like to see as we head toward the finish line :D
the beauty in every inch

Chapter Summary

growing and forgiveness

Chapter Notes

Umm, minor Star Wars: A New Hope (1977) spoilers below?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Haru woke up with a start, his phone trumpeting a custom ring tone he couldn’t ignore. An annoyed groan sounded close to his ear as Sousuke stirred, but thankfully didn’t wake. Haru managed to pull away, Sousuke’s hold around his waist was tight, even in his sleep, and picked up his phone on his way to the living room. He answered as soon as the bedroom door was shut.

The first thing he heard when the call connected was a smoke detector blaring in the background. The next thing was Koushi’s panicked voice, begging him for help.

“Why are you baking at six in the morning?” Haru asked, not fully awake as he curled up on the couch.

“Daichi left already and he’ll be away all day with the team. Today’s the only day I could make him something for Valentine’s Day and have it be a surprise!”

“But why this early?”

The incessant beeping finally stopped and Suga breathed a sigh of relief. “Because I’m lousy at anything involving sweets and I knew it was going to take a few tries. I… I didn’t think I’d set anything on fire, though. I really need your help.”

Haru couldn’t refuse, Koushi had always been there for him in times of need. “Let me take a bath first.”

“Thank you so much, Haru! I’ll clean up and be ready when you get here!” Suga hung up, but not before Haru heard a loud crash on the other end.

Haru really didn’t mind going over and spending time with Koushi, but he wished it could have been later in the day. Over the past month he and Sousuke had spent their shared mornings in bed exploring each other. As promised, Sousuke let Haru set the pace, never rushing him or objecting to Haru’s limitations. At first, Haru struggled with openly discussing his reactions and preferences, but Sousuke quickly learned what kinds of questions were the least embarrassing for Haru to answer. Sousuke never laughed, never made a noise or expression of disapproval, never rolled his eyes to any of Haru’s responses. With each positive interaction, it was easier for Haru to open up without being guided. Haru had trusted Sousuke with so much of himself already, it wasn’t difficult to open this part of himself too. When most of Haru’s insecurities had been quelled, they could engage
without reservation and Haru eagerly spurred this part of their relationship faster than either of them had expected.

Haru had learned many things about himself during these sessions. He learned that where his neck met his shoulder was extremely sensitive to touch and bruised easily (the whispers at swim practice after their first rough make out session were mortifying). He learned that he liked it a lot when Sousuke used his strength and size to his advantage: having his waist held in place as Sousuke teased him endlessly with his tongue, being pressed firmly against the wall as their hips grinded together, Sousuke maneuvering him into various positions as if he weighed nothing at all. He learned he liked it better still when Sousuke let himself be as aggressive as he wanted: teeth biting and nipping all over, the usual calming stroking of his hair turned into not-so-gentle pulls and tugs, Sousuke’s voice dropping even deeper, ordering him around. Sure, Haru liked to be ‘free,’ but he didn’t mind the way Sousuke held him captive.

Haru learned about Sousuke too. He learned why Sousuke didn’t bottom: he’s so sensitive that he couldn’t even last through prepping. He learned that Sousuke liked to be praised, it didn’t matter what it was about - his appearance, his technique, or just an appreciative noise - the positivity motivated him. He learned that Sousuke was an extremely attentive lover, cataloguing every single one of Haru’s reactions to use for or against him later. Haru couldn’t always tell if it was a curse or a blessing.

Haru knew it wasn’t fair to compare, and it wasn’t like sex with Makoto was bad, but it wasn’t like this. Makoto in the bedroom was routine, predictable, more about finding their own release than pleasing their partner. There was nothing wrong with it and Haru liked it enough, but being with Sousuke was different. Even in the smallest, gentlest touches, Haru could feel Sousuke’s passion for him, his devotion. Maybe it wouldn’t last forever, but right now it was what Haru needed and he was so glad Sousuke was more than willing to provide.

He snuck back into the room, using the illumination from his phone screen to make his way around without tripping.

“Where are you going?” Sousuke’s sleep roughened voice called out to Haru.

Pulling a new pair of boxer briefs on, Haru approaches the bed and sits on the edge. He brushes his knuckles gently across Sousuke’s cheek, down his neck, until his hand rested on his chest. “Koushi’s having a baking crisis. I’m going to go over to help.”

“Now? It’s still dark outside.”

Haru chuckled at the disdain in Sousuke’s voice, “I know, but he wants to take care of it sooner rather than later.

Sousuke rolled over on his side so he could see Haru as best he could in the dark room. “When are you going over?”

“I said I was going to take a bath first.”

“Oh, so we have an hour.”

A gasp of surprise left Haru’s lips as Sousuke grabbed his waist and simultaneously pulled and lifted, laying him back on the bed, and moving over him in one fluid motion. Sousuke wasted no time before he started placing feather light kisses along Haru’s jaw and trailed lower, lower, down his neck and his chest. When Sousuke’s lips grazed the waistband of Haru’s underwear, teal eyes flickered up to ask for permission, making sure it was okay to continue. At the tiniest of nods from
Haru, Sousuke bit down on the elastic and tugged, slowly lowering them around his thighs.

Sousuke hovered, his breath hot against Haru’s already flushed, sensitive skin. Haru gave in, knowing the long bath would be good, but not as good as this. “T-thirty minutes. I still want a bath.”

Sousuke shot him a predatory grin before he began in earnest.

In the end, Haru had to settle for a quick shower.

-  

Haru only had to knock once before the door swung open and Koushi pulled him in for a hug. “Thank god you’re here!”

As he moved further into the apartment, a hint of smoke still clung to the air despite the cracked kitchen window. Haru examined the recipe Suga had picked out as well as the ingredients and tools available. He’d done well, purchasing high quality ingredients and even finding the proper pans and tools to create the heart covered and filled cake roll. Haru was seriously confused about how the smoke alarm went off considering Koushi hadn’t even started baking the cake part yet, but he wasn’t about to ask. One look at Suga’s dejected face made Haru decide it was a mystery that could stay unsolved. It was time to work.

Haru threw on an extra apron, of course they owned a stereotypical ‘Kiss the Cook’ one, and looked over the recipe one more time. He guided Suga through each step, letting him do the work himself after a quick demonstration. He could easily whip the cake up on his own and let Koushi use it, but the point was the effort Koushi put in to create something so delightful specifically for Daichi as a token of love. Even if it was slightly burnt or had a funny flavor, Daichi would still love it because it came from Suga.

They pulled the thin baked cakes from the oven and Haru demonstrated how to quickly, but gently roll it up in a tea towel so it would cool in the correct form. Suga gave him a look like what he had just done was black magic. Chuckling, Haru kept his hands on the second cake as Suga rolled it.

“What are you making for Sousuke?” Suga asked, honestly curious as he got out the equipment to make the cream cheese whipped cream filling.

Haru froze. What was he doing for Valentine’s Day? Was that something Sousuke cared about? Was it something he even cared about? In the past he made things for Makoto, lavish chocolate creations that would be almost too good looking to eat, but that wasn’t Sousuke’s style - it wasn’t their style. They had done things for the other holidays, celebrated each other’s birthdays, even went out for a Christmas date (now that they were together, they could admit what it really was).

Suga picked up on Haru’s internal struggle and chimed in, “You said his favorite cake was tiramisu, right? Maybe you could make one of those. It’s not too flashy, so you could do something cute to make it festive like cut it into a heart shape!”

Haru nodded, mentally making a list of ingredients he’d need. It would be easy enough considering nothing had to be made from scratch unless he wanted to do his own sponge cake, but even that wouldn’t be a problem. “Thanks, that’s a good idea.”
Haru floated slowly through the aisles, taking his time to look at everything. Grocery shopping was one of his favorite things and today he wasn’t in any rush. Everything he needed for the tiramisu was in his basket already and he was picking out the last items for a few meals this week. As usual, his last stop was the fish counter. When Haru opened his mouth to ask for his normal order of three whole mackerel, a familiar voice chimed in before him.

“Could I get two of the crabs, please?”

Haru turned his head to confirm his guess. At the same time, the speaker looked at him back, smile dropping from his face as soon as he realized who it was.

“H-Haru…” Kisumi stuttered, panic obvious in his face.

Haru grabbed Kisumi’s wrist before he could bolt. They needed to talk sometime, it might as well be now. Turning back toward the counter, Haru asked, “Could you wrap those crabs with ice? And the same with three mackerel, please.”

The minutes they stood waiting were awkward, the grip on Kisumi’s wrist never lessening in strength. When their packages were ready, Haru shot Kisumi a glare of ‘don’t you dare leave’ and let go, setting the mackerel in his basket and walking to the registers.

They each paid for their groceries, Haru keeping a stern eye on Kisumi in case he tried to rush out of the store afterward. The cashiers kept casting them concerned glances, but Haru ignored them and Kisumi couldn’t bring himself to make eye contact. Once again gripping Kisumi’s wrist, Haru dragged him across the street to a cozy tea cafe, picking out a more private table near the back of the shop. Haru ordered for them both when the waitress came around, Kisumi uncharacteristically quiet. It unnerved Haru to see him this way: silent, uncertain, worried. It wasn’t the Kisumi he knew.

When their order arrived at the table, Haru couldn’t take the silence anymore.

“I don’t blame you.”

Kisumi’s head snapped up to look at Haru, mouth hanging open in surprise. They held gazes for a few moments before it was Haru who looked down, sadness creeping into his features.

“I wanted to, I really did. It should’ve been easy for me to make you the bad guy, tell myself that Makoto was seduced, that he didn’t mean it. But I knew it wasn’t true. We were never on the same page, Kisumi, and you did some things that upset me, but you were never mean or underhanded.”

Haru stirred a little honey into his tea and added in an even softer voice, “It wasn’t because of you that our relationship fell apart. We were having problems long before then. No one was responsible for what happened except us. And I’m sorry you got in the middle of it and were hurt.”

When Haru looked back up, Kisumi’s hands were balled into fists on the table, his eyes screwed shut, his mouth contorted in a grimace. Haru panicked, thinking he said something very wrong, but before he could apologize, Kisumi interrupted with a choked voice, “I loved him, Haru.”

Haru blinked at him in surprise.

“Well… I was on my way to loving him. I always thought he was cute and maybe had a crush on him after seeing him in high school, but meeting up with him had been different. We were actually getting to know each other, connecting. And he gave back as much as I flirted with him.”

Although Kisumi had opened his eyes, they were staring into his tea cup and missed the way Haru flinched.
“So when we finally… I thought it was something special. When I didn’t hear from him afterward, I was disappointed, but it wasn’t like it never happened to me before. That day, I was just thrilled to see him again. But when I found out…”

Guilt. Shame. Humiliation. Anger. It’s not like it was the first time Kisumi had felt taken advantage of, but it was the first time it had been by someone he considered a true friend.

“I swear, Haru, I swear I didn’t know you two were together! I would have never done that if-”

Haru put a hand up to silence him. He really didn’t need to be reminded of it anymore than he already had been. “Kisumi, it’s fine. I’ve moved on.”

Kisumi regarded him carefully as he finished his tea. “…You and Sousuke?”

Heat filled Haru’s cheeks. He knew that most of their friends figured out their mutual feelings long before they did, but Kisumi had seen them for all of a few dramatic minutes. “Y-yeah. But even before then, I came to terms with what happened with Makoto. It’s okay now.”

Finally, Kisumi’s frown turned into a small smile. “I’m happy for you, Haru. A-and thank you, for forgiving me. I’m glad you made us talk.” He let out a laugh. “Now there’s something I never imagined I’d say to Nanase Haruka.”

Haru rolled his eyes, but gave him a small smile back. “I hope you feel better soon. It’s weird when you’re not obnoxiously happy.”

Standing up and pushing in his chair, Kisumi replied, “Maybe when I find my one true love like you and Sousuke.”

If Haru’s face wasn’t red before, it certainly was now. “Just go away already.”

Laughing lightly, Kisumi patted Haru on the shoulder on his way out, “See you around, Haru. Thanks for the tea!”

Haru stayed seated, finishing his tea and wrapping up the shortbread cookies neither of them had touched. Kisumi’s words repeated in his head, and while Haru didn’t believe in things like ‘one true loves’ and ‘soulmates,’ he had to admit that he and Sousuke were building something special.

Sousuke entered his apartment, sweaty and panting after his fifteen kilometer jog. He saw the red and white box on the coffee table before he noticed Haru curled up on the couch, hiding behind his sketch pad. Taking off his shoes and his headphones, Sousuke went and sat down next to Haru.

“You stink,” Haru murmured.

Sousuke scoffed. “It’s nice to see you too.”

“That’s for you.” Haru pointed at the box with his pencil.

“Oh really? You didn’t just leave a gift for someone else here to taunt me?”

Haru rolled his eyes, “I’ll do that next time. Just open it.”

Taking a moment to read the tag with ‘Happy Valentine’s Day’ written in Haru’s flowing scrawl,
Sousuke unwrapped the box and lifted the white top off to reveal a heart shaped cake. The sweet and bitter scent of coffee liquor and the fine dusting of cocoa powder gave it away as Sousuke’s favorite dessert.

“You don’t even like tiramisu,” Sousuke pointed out, smiling at the gift.

The faintest of blushes colored Haru’s cheeks. “I tried it while I was making it and it wasn’t bad.” A smirk graced Haru’s lips as he replied, “Maybe I’m just getting used to the taste of bitter things.”

Sousuke couldn’t find it in himself to be annoyed at the jab and leaned in for a quick kiss instead. Smiling even wider, he said, “I didn’t get you anything sweet, but we are going on a date tomorrow.”

“A date?” Haru tilted his head in question.

“A date. We’re boyfriends, we should go out on dates, especially on holidays. Real ones, not just movie marathons inside my apartment.”

“Did you have something in mind?”

“Yes, I’m going to fix a flaw in your programming. There’s an original Star Wars trilogy marathon in Shibuya; I got us tickets.”

Haru groaned. Sousuke had been trying to get him to watch Star Wars for months, ever since he found out Haru had never seen any of them, didn’t know a thing about them. He had been able to refuse every time; why would he watch a movie about space when there were so many movies about the ocean? “So we’re just doing a movie marathon outside of your apartment?”

“It’s a special activity, it counts as a date,” Sousuke retorted with a frown. At least, he hoped that was enough to make it count as a date. Maybe his exes were right, he was not very good at this.

“I thought when people planned dates, it was to make sure the other person would have fun,” Haru muttered.

Glaring, Sousuke flicked Haru’s forehead. “You’ll have fun if you give it a chance.”

Haru pouted and rubbed the tiny red spot on his head. Looking over at Sousuke, Haru noticed the flicker of uncertainty in his eyes. Haru thought it was odd because this was supposed to be the easier part. They were together now, finally, and Haru knew he wasn’t going anywhere.

When it came to things like this, things that couples did, Sousuke seemed to always second guess himself. Spending casual time with together was second nature, flirting between them was easy, and Sousuke was confident in the bedroom. So why was taking Haru out on a date so hard? Maybe he should’ve accepted Rin’s advice instead of hanging up on him when he introduced his twenty point dating guide. Sousuke made a mental note to email Rin for it later.

“Hey.” Haru took Sousuke’s hand and gave it a squeeze. “Get in the shower.”

Sousuke let out an annoyed huff and stood, pausing when he noticed Haru standing with him. “Where are you going?” Sousuke asked.

Haru walked past Sousuke, tugging him along. “I didn’t say you had to get in the shower alone.” Sousuke grinned. “Then cake?”
Then cake.”

The next day, Sousuke received a phone call from a coworker begging him to cover the last few hours of his shift. In return, the officer would have to take a whole shift of Sousuke’s, but he was desperate enough to agree. He and Haru agreed to meet at the theater later and with a few quick, but loving kisses, Sousuke was out the door.

Haru briefly got up to fetch his laptop and bag from the living room before returning to the warm bed. Alone in the apartment with no one to entertain him, he figured he could get some grading done.

Class had been awkward to say the least. Makoto’s face was always situated somewhere between confused and crestfallen. Haru figured it was the fact he was officially dating Sousuke making Makoto feel so lost. The first chance he had, Sousuke stopped by at the end of class to pick Haru up for dinner while he was on break from the police box. Sousuke made it a point to greet Haru with a kiss before pulling him out of the room while a few remaining students whistled at them. Haru understood it was hard for Makoto to stomach, especially since he was there during his and Sousuke’s feud in high school, but this was their reality now and Makoto could accept it or not.

Still, Haru hated to be the cause of Makoto’s pain.

The one upside was the other students didn’t dwell on Haru and Makoto’s past for more than a week. Haru’s quick dismissal of any of their questions proved that no matter how often they asked, nothing would come from it. Haru hoped that their silence applied out of class as well, for Makoto’s sake.

A couple hours later, Haru had finished his grading and took a long, lazy bath. He kept refreshing the tub with hot water whenever it cooled off too much, something Sousuke hated. He was a firm believer that baths should only last for as long as the water does and what Haru was doing was cheating. Haru was well aware of how Sousuke’s water and electric bill skyrocketed after Haru became a regular guest, but that’s why Haru paid for the groceries.

Haru dug through his clothes for the right ensemble. They were just going to the movies, but it was still a date and Haru felt like he needed to look like he tried at least a little. Tight black jeans with a decorated grey tunic topped with a red and black bomber jacket would have to do. When he looked in the mirror he felt cool, the style much more like what Sousuke or Rin would wear.

The train was crowded, Haru squeezed himself into a corner and used the time to respond to a lengthy email from Nagisa. When he exited the station, he had to double check his phone to make sure he was going in the right direction because they usually only ever went to the theater in their neighborhood. Haru spotted Sousuke quickly, his height making him an easy find. He looked effortlessly stylish, leaning against a lamp post dressed head to toe in Nike gear. It was like Sousuke walked straight out of an ad in some fitness magazine: brightly colored sneakers, fitted basketball pants, a fleece hoodie unzipped to reveal a baggy tank top with the iconic swoosh, and a beanie fit snugly over his head.

When Sousuke noticed Haru approaching, he broke out in a smile. “And here I thought I was going to get stood up.”

“I thought about it, but decided that dealing with you when you’re grumpy is too much effort.”

Sousuke took Haru’s hand and led him inside, handing over the tickets and making their way to the concessions counter. “Gee, I’m glad I rate so high with you.”
They took their seats without spilling too much popcorn, Sousuke filling the wait with complaining about his unreliable coworker and the half shift from hell he was tricked into taking. The lights dimmed and Sousuke threw one last smug grin to Haru before turning his attention forward.

Two hours later, Sousuke knew he won. Haru hadn’t torn his eyes away from the screen since the opening shot of the star destroyer chasing after the blockade runner. The quiet ‘no!’ Haru muttered at Obi-wan’s death and the gasp of surprise when the Millennium Falcon saved the day at the end were further proof that Haru was enjoying himself.

Not that he was about to admit it to Sousuke.

“That was… better than I thought it’d be,” Haru commented from his resting place against Sousuke’s side.

Even though he rolled his eyes, Sousuke was still smiling when he kissed the top of Haru’s head. “The next one’s even better.”

By the time they walked out of the theater, Haru was fully converted. He peppered Sousuke with questions he didn’t really have answers to (“Admiral Ackbar is a squid alien, so does that mean he comes from an ocean world? What’s that like? Do we ever get to see it?”) and asked if they could watch the other movies on their next shared day off.

Sousuke chuckled, squeezing Haru’s hand tight in his, and agreed to his demands. It definitely wasn’t the most exciting Valentine’s Day, but it was the best one Sousuke ever had.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this chapter was kind of about nothing?? I hope you enjoyed it, at least!! I promise there will be more substance in the next one!
we'll take our chances

Chapter Summary

first steps and role-reversal

Chapter Notes

hello, lovelies!

Sorry for the delay in the next chapter. I'm sure everyone knows the terrible things that have been happening in America, which took some wind from my sails. I also had bronchitis for the past couple weeks and a friend in town. I didn't want to throw up a half-assed chapter, so I decided to wait.

I hope everyone is okay and safe. Even if we've never spoken before, feel free to reach out to me, even if you just want to distract yourself with some Sports Anime talk <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nagoya-sensei returned at the beginning of March, looking weary. He thanked Haru profusely for stepping in, saying he hoped the students didn’t cause him too many problems. Forcing out a smile, Haru could only nod and offer a vague response. While it didn’t cause any problems that weren’t resolved, it did force a lot of things in Haru’s life to happen. He and Sousuke finally got together, and Haru had an - albeit mostly one sided - conversation with Makoto. Haru hadn’t felt like he was ready for these things, but when does life ever work out that way?

Haru was grateful for it, knowing sometimes he needed to be pushed into action, yet the situation felt a little incomplete. Yes, Haru had talked to Makoto, let him know what he had done was wrong and he had moved on, but there was more he needed to do. He and Makoto weren’t supposed to end like this, were never supposed to end at all.

The conclusion he came to wasn’t a simple one and he knew it would put a strain on his current romantic relationship. He had to convince Sousuke that this was necessary for him to continue moving forward, that he had least had to try this. If it didn’t work, he’d leave it be, but Haru was no longer a person who allowed himself to give up without a fight.

Straddling Sousuke on the couch had become Haru’s favorite position for discussing important topics. It was an intimate and close set up and it forced them to more or less look at each other while they talked. There was really no way for Sousuke to hide while Haru was in his lap, hovering an inch or so taller than him for a change. This was one of those times that Haru needed Sousuke’s attention, about to raise a topic he knew would not be easy or welcomed. After a deep breath and a lingering kiss to calm himself, Haru revealed his intention.

“Sou, I want to be friends with Makoto.”

Sousuke tensed beneath him, immediately shifting into a protective headspace at the sound of
Tachibana’s name. “Haruka-”

“I know you don’t think it’s a good idea. But it’s Makoto.”

“Who cheated on you and hurt you and broke your heart,” Sousuke protested.

“Who held my hand at my grandmother’s funeral and walked me to school every morning and wouldn’t let me give up on swimming.”

At Haru’s words, Sousuke let out a huff and stayed quiet for a long time, absentmindedly running his hands up and down Haru’s thighs. When he finally spoke, avoiding Haru’s gaze, it was uncharacteristically soft, “What if you fall for him again?”

Haru’s first instinct was to roll his eyes, but he knew this was a serious fear. For whatever reason, when it came to being in a committed relationship, Sousuke sometimes forgot he was worthy.

“I won’t.” Haru promised.

“How can you know?” Sousuke almost whispered.

“Makoto could never be that for me again. Believe me, I spent enough nights thinking over every ‘what if’ of us getting back together and I know that’s not what I want. Besides, the way I love you is… different from how I loved Makoto while we were a couple.”

“That’s not exactly reassuring, Nanase.”

Haru pinched his arm for his sass. “When I think of Makoto and I as lovers, it was like a fire. It was warmth and all encompassing, but it slowly died because we didn’t feed it. In the end, it left us burned.”

“And when you think of us… as lovers?” Sousuke definitely did not blush when he said ‘lovers.’

“The forest. It’s peaceful. Resilient. Lasting.” Haru punctuated each of his points with kisses on Sousuke’s jawline, “Trees grow intertwined and weather storms together. The forest is a sanctuary.”

Pressing a final sweet, chaste kiss on Sousuke’s lips, Haru pulled back to look at him directly in the eyes, trying to convey the truth of how he felt, ‘you’re my sanctuary.’

Sousuke must have understood, his eyes softening as his smile grew. Haru leaned forward for another kiss, thinking Sousuke was absolutely ridiculous for worrying. The smile Haru just saw was so important to him, he would never do anything to jeopardize it. Haru was determined to make Sousuke understand and believe it.

- 

A week passed by with no more discussion of Makoto from either of them. Haru didn’t press the issue and Sousuke didn’t give away if he was thinking about it at all. He knew Sousuke hadn’t forgotten, he was simply taking his time to process the situation and examine it with the care he was trained to use. It wasn’t like they were on a time limit, Haru was fairly certain Makoto was still staying in Tokyo after graduation, the rehabilitation clinic he had interned at the last summer of their relationship had offered Makoto a job if he successfully completed his degree. Haru wasn’t going anywhere either, his life was firmly settled in the city, and even if his current coach hadn’t decided to stay with him, there were plenty that would take him on.

The couple laid in bed spooning, Sousuke wrapped around Haru, providing more warmth and
comfort than any blanket ever could. He placed a kiss behind Haru’s ear, letting out a deep sigh before speaking. “I want to lay some ground rules.”

Haru sucked in a breath and gripped Sousuke’s forearm resting around his waist. “Whatever you want.”

“Public places only and let me know where you are. No late nights. Respond to my texts in a timely fashion. No touching.”

“No touching? Why is that even-” a forceful squeeze from Sousuke cut him off.

“Just humor me, please;” he couldn’t fully remove the insecurity in his voice.

Haru nodded, still surprised by how worried Sousuke sounded. Haru didn’t think he’d ever get use to seeing Sousuke like this and didn’t particularly want that, either. “No touching. What else?”

“Just…” Sousuke trailed off, unsure if he wanted to reveal just how uncertain and needy he really was. “Just come home to me, Haruka.”

Haru covered Sousuke’s hands with his own. After a pause to let the words sink in, Haru responded, “You are my home, Sousuke.”

Sousuke bent and buried his face between Haru’s shoulder blades. Haru could feel him smiling. “You’re so embarrassing, Nanase.”

“You said something sappy first,” Haru laughed.

“Yeah, but you always say something ten times worse.”

“That just makes me the romantic one.”

Even though he knew Haru couldn’t see him, Sousuke still rolled his eyes. “Not something I thought I’d hear coming from you.”

Haru huffed, putting a pretentious lilt in his voice. “I’m an artist, we are naturally romantic.”

Sousuke barked out laughter, shaking them both.

Haru pouted and prodded at Sousuke’s arm. “Rude.”

“Let me make it up to you,” Sousuke whispered in Haru’s ear before his hands snaked down Haru’s body.

A cross between a gasp and a moan was all Sousuke needed to know he was forgiven for his teasing.

“As happy as I am to see you call me for once, I have a proposal to finish before three and-”

“Haru’s out having coffee with his ex,” Sousuke blurted out before his father could give him a time to call back.
There was silence on the other end except for the sound of papers shuffling, the squeaking of a chair, and finally a door closing. Finally, Yasuhiro spoke, “Are you okay, Sousuke?”

Sousuke chewed on the inside of his cheek. *Was he okay?* He trusted Haru, of course, but this wasn’t about rational feelings. This was an acidic bubbling in his gut that would not relent no matter how often he tried to soothe it with reassurances.

Haru came home to him. Haru slept in his bed. Haru *chose him*. Haru *loved him*.

But didn’t he feel the same for Tachibana? Loved him harder and longer than Sousuke had even known Haru.

A deep sigh snapped Sousuke back to reality. “I’m going to take your heavy silence as a ‘no, I’m not okay,’” Yasuhiro decided.

“I’ve been better,” Sousuke admitted.

“Did you know about this before today?”

Sousuke sat back on his couch, rubbing his eyes with his free hand. “Yeah, Haru brought it up to me a couple weeks ago. He wasn’t exactly asking for permission, but he wanted to make sure I was aware of it and would be alright with it.”

“And you said it was fine?” Yasuhiro questioned.

“What else could I say, dad? ‘No, you can’t repair the friendship defining most of your life?’” Sousuke let out a humorless laugh, “No way was I going to say he couldn’t do it. I only make it a habit of telling people who break the law what to do, not my boyfriend.”

The smirk was audible through the phone. “You’ve never had a boyfriend before, Sousuke.”

He immediately flushed, “Not the point, Oyaji.”

Yasuhiro couldn’t resist teasing his too serious son. “What are you thinking, Sousuke? It might help to get it out rather than having it bounce around in circles in your head.”

Sousuke sighed and rolled his neck to crack it before answering. “I know Haru needs to do this for himself, he can’t leave things with Tachibana unfinished. I get that, especially knowing how hard it was for him to reconnect with Rin after so long. But this isn’t just a friendship he’s trying to salvage, Haru truly believed he belonged with him. The end of their relationship *broke him* because he had always believed it would be them together, forever. I… How am I supposed to compete with that?”

Yasuhiro sighed. “Sousuke, listen to me and understand I’m not only saying this because I’m your father. This is not a competition. You are worthy of love and loyalty, especially Haru-kun’s. No, you don’t have almost two decades of history with him, but what you do share is just as important. You said it yourself, he was broken, and you were there to support and comfort him while he repaired himself.

“The only reason why Haru-kun can even love someone again is because of what you’ve done for him. And I think if you ask him, he’ll tell you he could have *only* fallen for you. Only you know Haru-kun so well, only you have stayed by him through his worst moments, only you have cared for him how he wanted and *needed*.

“You don’t have to compete because there’s nothing to compete over. *Haru has given his heart to you*. Have faith in him and in yourself.”
The quivering breaths on the other side of the line revealed how much Yasuhiro’s words affected his son. More than ever, he dearly wished the distance between them was gone and he could be there for Sousuke. Unfortunately, right now, the phone would have to do.

Sousuke’s watery voice finally answered him, “When did you become a relationship expert?”

Yasuhiro laughed, “You don’t stay in a mostly long distance marriage for twenty five years without learning a thing or two.”

Finally smiling, Sousuke let himself relax. “Thanks, Oyaji.”

“Of course, Sousuke. Now go distract yourself. I’m sure you have some studying to do.”

Sousuke groaned, looking over at his pile of textbooks and papers to help him prepare for the sergeant’s exam. “Yeah, I’m behind schedule.”

“Good luck. I love you, Sousuke,” Yasuhiro added.

Smiling softly, getting up to grab one of the books, Sousuke replied, “Love you too.”

- 

Makoto was shocked to see a text from Haru when he checked his phone after exiting from one of his final exams. Honestly, as much as he hoped things between them weren’t done for good, he couldn’t help but think that he’d never see Haru again when Nagoya-sensei walked back into their classroom after his long absence. However, the text asking Makoto if he was free the following day for coffee was enough to send his heart soaring.

Almost dropping his phone in excitement, he replied that he was free all day. It was an agonizing few minutes while he waited for Haru’s response. When it finally came, a simple “13:00 at Cafe Ladro,” Makoto almost couldn’t believe it. He was getting to see Haru again, just them, face to face. It was more than he could’ve hoped for, more than he sometimes thought he deserved.

The next day Makoto walked into their old haunt, searching for the familiar face sitting at their usual table. When he spotted Haru, looking as aloof as ever as he stared out the window, Makoto momentarily lost his breath. It took several seconds for him to process the slightly too large Samezuka warm up Haru was wearing. It was like a slap in the face, a reminder that Haru may be there in front of him, but this wasn’t like old times. Haru wasn’t his anymore.

The truth was Haru wasn’t wearing the old jacket to send a message to Makoto, but to give one to Sousuke. Haru knew how uncomfortable this meeting and potentially rekindled friendship was making Sousuke and wanted to show that Haru was, in fact, still thinking about him. Like this, Sousuke would be there with him the whole time.

Always having the intuition for these sorts of things, Haru turned to look when he felt Makoto’s eyes linger on him. They held each other’s gazes for a moment before Haru beckoned him over with the slight nod of his head. Like a magnet, Makoto instantly moved, a conditioned response to Haru’s call. He took his seat across from Haru and gave him an unsure, but still warm smile, searching Haru’s features for their new secrets. Makoto was surprised he didn’t have to look too hard, Haru was more open, more expressive, than he had ever seen him.

Part of Makoto, the bit that was still clinging to his wounded ego, hated how much good being around - being with - Yamazaki had done Haru. Thankfully, that part was small and most of Makoto just felt happy seeing Haru finally feel comfortable in his own skin.
“You look good,” they said in unison. Both recoiled in a bout of embarrassment.  

Makoto covered his face with his hands. *This was a mistake!* He was not ready for this. He thought it would be okay; Haru had been lecturing in front of him twice a week for almost two months. An awkward goof shouldn’t have been enough to make Makoto want to flee, but it did. He was ready to run far away from here. He’d eventually accept the fact he and Haru couldn’t be around each other by themselves anymore. It might take ten or twenty years, but it was bound to happen someday.  

The soft chuckle escaping Haru was enough to encourage Makoto to remove his hands and stop hiding. Haru had a small and easy smile on his face. Once again Makoto’s heart was torn, memories of every time Haru smiled at him - *for him* - fluttering by too quick for Makoto to fully grasp. Only the smile in front of him was in focus, an understanding and acceptance behind it never before present. How could something so beautiful be so painful for him to see?  

Haru must have sensed Makoto’s discomfort and schooled his features back into their neutral state. His eyes searched Makoto’s face like he had done moments before. Up close and without distraction, Haru could clearly see the faint bags under Makoto’s eyes and the new creases at their corners, matching the ones on his brow and at the corners of his mouth. Did Makoto always look this worn out or was it because of Haru’s sudden reappearance and disappearance in his life? Was his presence making Makoto more stressed? Was he being selfish by asking for Makoto’s time? Haru bit his lip with uncertainty.  

This may have been a mistake…  

Thankfully their server chose that time to step in, forcing them to order and commit to their meeting. After she walked away, Makoto smiled at Haru again, his earlier adrenaline spike dying down.  

“It’s nice to know some things never change.”  

Haru blinked and tilted his head in question, making Makoto’s smile wider at the familiar action. “A matcha latte. You’ve never ordered anything else here.”  

His cheeks faintly coloring, Haru retorted, “And you still order a cafe mocha with extra chocolate. Is it the sugar or the caffeine that keeps you awake?”  

Makoto chuckled, “I like to think it’s the perfect blend of both things.”  

They shared another smile and each let themselves relax a bit They could do this, it was just lighthearted talking, what people did when getting to know each other. Sure, Makoto and Haru might’ve met in kindergarten, but the men sitting across from each other now needed to begin again.  

The conversation flowed easily enough after that. They mostly talked about their classes and their impending graduation. Unsurprisingly, there were some lapses in talking, but none as awkward as either of them feared. Makoto didn’t rely on reading Haru’s expressions or body language when listening to him speak. Haru was clear, plain, and more open with his words than ever before. For his part, Haru didn’t let himself assume where Makoto was going with a story or a thought. He let Makoto speak for himself and Haru asked follow up questions if he wanted more information.  

It was an honest-to-God discussion, something neither of them could really remember having. Even if it was only about school, Haru knowing better than to bring up anything regarding their love lives, it left Haru feeling hopeful and reassured. It was a step in the right direction, a step toward repairing their friendship. It may have been a baby step, but a step nonetheless.  

An alarm sounded on Haru’s phone, letting him know it was time to make his way to practice. Out of habit, Makoto offered to walk him there, but Haru declined, insisting Makoto stay and enjoy the pastry he ordered when the server checked in on them. Haru stood, making sure he had everything
he brought with him.

“This… This was nice, Haru,” Makoto said softly.

Haru paused to lay a hand on Makoto’s shoulder before he walked out. “I’ll talk to you soon, Makoto.”

The simple touch and even simpler promise made Makoto’s heart swell. Even if he failed his exams, Makoto didn’t think anything could wipe the smile off his face. The chocolate croissant tasted sweeter than usual.

- 

To: Whale Shark <3

Heading home now. See you soon.

Sousuke stared at the text, not sure what to feel first. He was relieved that Haru was at last coming home (Sousuke didn’t dwell on the fact at some point his apartment became ‘home’ despite Haru keeping his own place). The conversation with his father had eased his heart, but now the worries and doubts sprinted back.

Looking at the time stamp, Sousuke figured he had about fifteen minutes to clear his head. He dropped to the clear space behind the couch and started doing sit-ups.

When Haru quietly walked into the apartment, slipping off his shoes in the entryway, he was greeted by the impressive sight of Sousuke doing one armed pushups. Haru leaned against the entrance to the kitchen and appreciated the show: the sweat sliding down Sousuke’s tan face, the way the flexing of his back muscles was still obvious underneath his t-shirt, how his arms bulged as he pushed his chest away from the floor. It wasn’t exactly a rare sight for Haru anymore, but now he could shamelessly enjoy it.

As Sousuke transitioned to clapping pushups, Haru decided to make himself known. “Want me to sit on your back while you do that?”

Startled, Sousuke’s timing was off and landed on his face. Haru put in no effort to hide his giggling.

Sousuke rolled onto his back, panting and rubbing his face. “I was looking forward to seeing you, but now I’m not so sure.”

Haru rolled his eyes and walked over, squatting down next to him. “It’s nice to see you mess up. Reminds me that you don’t have a perfect, robot body.”

“It is perfect, isn’t it?” Sousuke smirked and looked over at Haru for the first time since he entered. Immediately a blush spread over his face when he realized Haru was wearing his Samezuka jacket. Sousuke hadn’t even seen it in years, losing it in the closet at some point after moving in. He wondered how long Haru had it, if he had taken it home, if Haru had worn it when he was by himself because he missed him.

A thought struck him. He wore his jacket to see Tachibana. Makoto had to sit across from Haru, with the constant reminder that Haru was taken. It put a smile on Sousuke’s face.

Haru smirked a bit, glad at how pleased Sousuke looked when he figured it out. “I’m not complaining, but why were you doing pushups?”
“Um, I was studying and I had trouble focusing. Working out always helps clear my mind.”

Haru saw through his excuse in a heartbeat. “Your trouble focusing wouldn’t have anything to do with how I spent my afternoon, would it?”

“Why would your swim practice have anything to do with it?” Sousuke asked innocently as he stood and went to the kitchen to grab a bottle of water.

Haru clicked his tongue and followed him. “Sousuke, that’s not what I meant.”

Sousuke set down the unopened water on the counter harder than he meant to. “I know. I know exactly what you meant and yes, it has been on my mind today. I can’t help that it makes me feel uneasy, but I trust you, so I’ll learn how to deal with it.”

Haru looked at Sousuke a little sadly and said softly, “You don’t have to do it alone, you know.”

“What?” Sousuke asked, turning to look at Haru.

For once, Haru reached up and held Sousuke’s cheeks in his hands. “You don’t have to ‘deal with it’ alone. Whatever I can do to help, whatever I can do to reassure you, just name it.” Sousuke had given him so much, done so much to make Haru feel valued and important. It was his turn to do the same for him.

Sousuke’s neutral expression broke, his adam’s apple bobbing as he tried to swallow the emotion that choked him. He was used to giving, to serving, to sacrificing. Being on the receiving end was something he’d have to get used to. At a loss for words, he leaned down, pressing his forehead against Haru’s, wrapping his arms around him and holding him close. They stayed like that for a while, until a rumble of Sousuke’s stomach caused Haru to break out in a fit of laughter.

Chapter End Notes

I hope that was worth the wait!! <3 <3

I don't care if he's an OC, I would do anything for Yamazaki Yasuhiro.
Convocation was just as boring as Haru thought it would be. He only went to the ceremony at Yamato’s behest; it’s not like he wouldn’t get his diploma if he didn’t attend. Yamato was in the same boat as Haru, he didn’t have anyone else to celebrate his accomplishment with; for him it was because his family couldn’t afford the tickets from Matsuyama. Touya and Ichirou had left to Osaka immediately after final exams where they had jobs waiting for them. Like Haru, Yamato was staying put because he was also a strong contender for the national team and would be training along side him.

They were able to sit next to each other through the ceremony itself, but as soon it was over, the area was flooded with family members and well wishers and they had lost each other in the crowd. Of course this would happen on a day where Haru left his phone charging on Sousuke’s nightstand. Haru wasn’t sure if he should stay put, try to find Yamato, or just leave. He wanted to leave, but the thought of Yamato still here, expecting him, stayed his feet. After thirty minutes passed, though, Haru decided it was enough and started making his way out of the crowd, hoping Yamato was on his way home to his dog.

Haru didn’t particularly care he was on his own today. Unable to trade shifts, Sousuke was at work, but had promised a celebration when he came home. His parents were in the final stages of their Italy project and couldn’t return to Japan. Nagisa and Rei would be in America until early June when their quarter was over. Maybe the Tachibanas were here somewhere, Haru had forgotten to ask in his last email. They probably were, never a family to miss a chance to support and lavish praise on their children. The thought of them brought a soft smile to Haru’s lips. Despite his and Makoto’s coffee and study dates going well, he wasn’t ready to see them all together, the family he used to be a part of. He knew he still had his own place with them, but not like before. Being with them all would be too close to the past and Haru couldn’t let himself slip back into those times.

“Haru-kun!”

Haru turned, looking around, unsure of what woman could be yelling his name. When a dark haired teen threw her arms around Haru’s neck, he gaped in shock. “Mi-Michiru?”

Yamazaki Michiru looked up at Haru, still hugging him. “Surprise!”
Haru’s shock melted into happiness and he gave her a smile and a squeeze back. “What in the world are you doing here?”

“I’m in town for a kyudou tournament. Onii-san may have let it slip it was your graduation and since I haven’t actually seen you since you visited, I had to drop by and congratulate you in person!”

“You didn’t have to, but I am happy to see you.” Haru kissed her forehead, feeling warm. Seeing Michiru was a reminder of exactly why it wasn’t important for him to be surrounded by others today. There were plenty of people thinking of him, would put in the effort to see him, make him happy. Haru was important to them, even if they couldn’t physically be there every moment.

Michiru pulled out her phone and checked her hair in the camera before pulling Haru into the frame for a photo. “I promised Otou-san I’d send him a picture,” she smiled as she explained.

Haru decided it wasn’t just Sousuke, but the entire Yamazaki family he loved, or at least, the ones he had met.

“Okaa-san wanted to see too.” Michiru deepened her tone of voice and adopted a more formal speech pattern to imitate her mother, “‘I require to know more about this mysterious boy who has my head strong, hopeless son absolutely smitten. I haven’t even seen a photograph, it’s a travesty to keep these things from your own mother.’”

Despite Michiru’s relaxed and jovial attitude as she said this, Haru couldn’t help feel nervous. It wasn’t like he was afraid of her or thought she wasn’t a good person, in fact, he’s only heard people praise her. The only thing that could even be seen as a negative was her career keeping her abroad. However, that was something Haru understood considering his own parents, and could never hold against her. The rest of her family didn’t mind, so why should he? Still, the feeling of wanting someone to like him was unfamiliar and unsettling, especially since it would be who knows how long before they actually met.

Haru’s prolonged silence caused Michiru to look over. The concern held in his brow and mouth weren’t hard to decode. “Don’t worry, Haru-kun. Otou-san and I have given you glowing, gushing reviews! All Onii-san has said is that he loves you and you’re an amazing swimmer, artist, and chef. I think more than anything Okaa-san is just sad she’s missing this. Outside of Rin-kun, Onii-san was never close to anyone. But now he has you and you’ve become so central to his life, she just wants to get to know you and maybe find out what kind of magic you used to get through Onii-san’s defenses.”

It was a surprise to hear Sousuke’s feeling about him second hand. Haru knew Sousuke had confided solely in Rin through their mutual yet unknowing courting period, but Rin kept the secrets to himself like a good friend or, at least, Rin didn’t share with Haru. It was fine, Haru didn’t particularly want to know, but hearing Sousuke unabashedly told his impressive mother he loved him was enough to make him blush.

Before Michiru could tease him about it, another voice shouted Haru’s name. He turned again and his eyes went wide at the second surprise guest in such a short period.

“Rin!”

All confident swagger and smirk, Rin clapped Haru on the back before giving him a tight hug. Michiru demanded her turn to which Rin replied with a firm squeeze, kiss on the cheek, and a “it’s been a long time, cutie!”

Ever the gentleman, Rin asked all about Michiru, how school was, if she’d been traveling, how her
parents were doing. As Haru watched their easy banter, he was filled with calm and comfort. This is what family was supposed to feel like, a familiar warmth like a favorite sweater. Of course, all of Haru’s favorite sweaters actually belonged to Sousuke. He assumed that was part of the feeling.

“Rin, what are you doing here?” The question came out before Haru could find a more delicate way to phrase it. Thankfully, Rin had known Haru long enough to know he didn’t mean any harm.

“I was hoping to surprise you and Sousuke at the same time, but I might as well tell you now,” he paused for dramatic effect, “I’m moving to Tokyo!”

Haru was smiling before his brain finished processing the announcement. Yes, this is definitely what family felt like. It wasn’t Iwatobi, but he felt like his family was coming home.

Makoto had been feeling good, his life lining back up like he had hoped it would, but didn’t let himself expect. The job at the rehabilitation clinic was exactly what he was looking for, his focus on assisting children improve their mobility whether it was because of an injury or if they were born with the difficulty. It had only been a month, but already he had proven himself an indispensable part of the team. The natural and sincere way he handled and connected with the children helped even the most stubborn cases show progress.

Things with Haru had been improving, too. Since their first coffee date, they had met a few more times. Most recently they had an impromptu lunch, when Haru was fed up with his diet and needed someone else to eat with to assuage his guilt. Another time, before they graduated, they met up for a study session the weekend before exams where they camped out in their favorite campus library and took over an entire table with imperfect sketches and dozens of anatomy diagrams.

That was Makoto’s favorite exchange, despite the stress of the situation. It was the most natural they had been together for a couple years. Haru quizzed Makoto while the gave his cramped hand breaks and Makoto was familiar enough with Haru’s art he could point at problem areas and suggest alternatives Haru was better at. It felt like old times, but better - lighter - nothing hanging over them, no expectations.

The only downside was Haru always wore some sweater or jacket that obviously belonged to Yamazaki. Makoto wasn’t sure if it was intentional, like he knew the Samezuka jacket was, or if Haru simply always borrowed the garments. Either could be true considering how often he had worn some of the same items when he was teaching their class. Still, it served as a reminder for Makoto not to get too comfortable just yet, it wasn’t just Haru he had to make peace with.

Makoto was actually on his way to do just that with another important friend from his past. He was only mildly surprised when Haru told him Rin moved back to Tokyo. Makoto followed Rin’s very active Instagram account where Rin had been dropping some not-so-subtle hints about the relocation. Obviously, Haru wouldn’t have known that, still not having any interested in an online presence. Haru would be shocked to see the pockets of fans he had rooting for him, professing their love for the enigmatic yet alluring upcoming swimming star. The thought of Haru’s flabbergasted face made Makoto decide to show him the next time they got together.

With Rin, Makoto didn’t wait for him to make the first move in patching their relationship. He asked Haru for Rin’s new number and messaged him, asking if he’d be willing to meet for a meal, his treat. Only a couple minutes passed before Makoto received a short response, just the name of a restaurant.
with a date and time. No greeting, nothing except that. It wasn’t Rin’s usual text style, but Makoto was relieved he earned any response at all.

Now he was only a couple blocks away from the ramen joint Rin picked, and the nerves were starting to kick in high gear. The last time they interacted was when his infidelity was revealed to all of them and Rin followed in Yamazaki’s stead and landed his own punches. Would Rin still be mad? Did Rin know that he and Haru were becoming friends again? It’s not like Makoto had cheated on Rin, but he understood, on some weird level, hurting Haru meant he hurt Rin too. They were linked in an unknowable way; it’s what made them such good rivals.

Rin was already waiting outside when Makoto arrived, effortlessly stylish despite his simple taste in clothing. He was engrossed with whatever was on his phone, a gym bag slung over his shoulder. He probably had practice or had just come from it. All he knew about professional athlete schedules were that they varied from person to person. Makoto approached, trying to appear casual, but any resemblance of calm disappeared when Rin’s sharp eyes locked on him. They were cold and merciless and Makoto knew he had made a mistake.

“R-Rin-” Makoto started, but he was immediately cut off.

“Listen careful, Makoto, because I’m only going to say this once.” Rin crossed his arms against his chest and waited for the slightest nod of understanding from him before continuing. “Haru told me the whole story, and while I agree with him both of you handled your relationship carelessly and poorly, what you did was inexcusable. When I came back, really came back after all my dumb drama, the first thing I knew for sure was how much Haru loved you. I ignored it, making up other explanations for why he would look at you like he did, trying to tell myself I might have a chance. But every time I saw him, every time I saw you two together, I knew it was only you.

“I pushed my feelings aside to help you, to help Haru be brave enough to go after what he wanted. I believed you would cherish him like you always did, better than I would have. How fucking dare you betray him. How dare you stay with him after you did. He didn’t deserve that pain and you didn’t deserve him.”

Makoto couldn’t tear his gaze away from Rin. He had known about Rin’s feelings toward Haru, he had known everyone who ever noticed Haru for more than just his talent. Nobody watched and observed Haru as much as he did. A small part of him had always wondered why Rin never pursued Haru, thinking that out of anyone, Rin would have a chance, and now he knew. It was for them, for him, and Makoto repaid that sacrifice by throwing what they had away like trash.

He knew he didn’t deserve Rin’s kindness. He knew he hadn’t deserved Haru’s unconditional love and loyalty either. He knew and he regretted it, all of it, every moment he had been selfish and intentionally uncaring, so unlike himself.

His thoughts must have been showing on his face because Rin’s deep scowl softened, transforming into an empathetic smile. It dawned on Makoto then if anyone could forgive him for what he did, it was Rin. Rin had once taken his pain out on Haru too, had blamed him for his own struggles and cowardice. His selfish words once cruel enough to make Haru quit swimming, sucking the happiness out of Haru’s already troubled life.

Rin had been forgiven. Rin had redeemed himself. It was clear in the now kind way Rin looked at Makoto he sincerely hoped Makoto and Haru could make it through.

“Come on,” Rin said in a gentler voice than his usual tone, “the house specialty is a five pepper super spicy pork ramen.”
Makoto groaned, already feeling his stomach curdle at the thought. “Rin, you know I can’t handle spicy food!”

“Don’t worry, you big baby, their black garlic pork ramen is supposed to be great too. But you have to at least try a bite of mine. As payment.” Rin winked and entered the small noodle joint.

Makoto knew he wouldn’t be able to control his watering eyes and burning tongue when Rin forced the spicy ramen upon him. However, embarrassing himself in front of a handful of strangers was a small price to pay to have his friend back.

To nobody’s surprise, Haru was not a dance club person. The only bars he went to were izakaya and one local pub near campus that was the favorite location for swim team bonding events. The flashing lights, pounding music, and sickly sweet cocktails didn’t suit Haru at all, but that wasn’t the cause of his irritation. No, what was bothering Haru is how the opposite held true for Sousuke.

From the moment they arrived, Sousuke had been relaxed and confident. He easily navigated the crowds from the bar to their group, knew exactly how to get the bartender’s attention and what to order, didn’t mind how others had to lean into his personal space for their conversations to be heard. The realization of Sousuke frequenting places like this before they were together - maybe still even when Haru had been too reluctant to confess - churned in Haru’s gut. He knew it wasn’t any of his damn business where sousuke had gone in the past or who he spent time with (Haru steadfastly refused to even think about the type of person Sousuke would have left the club with), but it didn’t help. Haru was stuck there, in the private upstairs party space, burning with jealousy when he was supposed to be celebrating Daichi and Koushi’s last week as unmarried men.

They settled on a joint bachelor party because they kept fighting over who got to have who if they had separate ones. Not exactly opposed to playing favorites, but unable to split up their friends, one big shindig at the couple’s favorite cheap, trashy club was the best solution. Right now, though, Haru wish they would’ve stayed traditional, knowing he’d be invited by Koushi and Sousuke by Daichi. That way, Haru wouldn’t have to watch some tall, lanky man with an infuriatingly smug grin and ridiculously tall hair, lay his hand on Sousuke’s shoulder and laugh at a joke Haru knew wasn’t fucking funny.

He needed another drink.

Pushing his way to the bar, he slipped between a couple of Daichi’s teammates and a tall blonde Haru recognized from the videos of the old Karasuno matches. By the time he got the bartender’s attention, Suga had noticed his gloomy aura and squeezed in next to him after hip checking his friend over to give him some space.

“I know this isn’t really your thing, Haru, but I didn’t think you’d be downright miserable here.”

Haru managed to give Suga an apologetic smile and a half hearted shrug before his eyes flickered over to Sousuke. Ever observant, Suga followed the motion and spotted the thorn in Haru’s side. He wasn’t surprised to see it was Kuroo.

A mischievous grin spread across Suga’s face as he addressed Haru. “You know, this happens to every couple, even me and Daichi. I mean, his biceps are god-like, I get it, but still, hands off!”

Haru nodded in agreement, quickly finishing his new drink thanks to the tiny straws it came with.
Suga ordered them two shots each, hoping Haru would start loosening up. “I mean, even if they didn’t know he was with someone, why are they even touching him? Haven’t they heard of personal boundaries? It’s plain rude.”

Haru downed the first shot, some apple flavored concoction that burned his throat, and shuddered. This was the first time he’d had more than one drink of hard alcohol and he was already at what? Four? They had only been there for an hour and a half.

“What do you do, Koushi?” Haru’s entire body was tingling and warm as he sipped at the second shot. “What do you do to get Daichi’s attention?”

Suga’s eyes sparkled as if he had been waiting for Haru to ask that exact question. “I give him a taste of his own medicine.” At the confused raised eyebrow on Haru’s face, Suga clarified, “I find someone, the person Daichi would be the most pissed about, and flirt with them.”

Haru gave him an unimpressed look. “Isn’t that worse? Then you’re the one initiating.”

Sugar waved off his concern. “No, it’s fine! I’m in control so I know exactly when I need to reel it in. It works every time, Haru. Macho dudes like Daichi and Sousuke have a sixth sense for when their date has someone else’s attention. He’ll stomp over, tell the other guy to back off, and not leave your side for the rest of the night.”

The explanation gave Haru pause. It still seemed kind of mean, but Haru really liked Sousuke’s possessive side when they were in private. The thought of Sousuke grabbing his wrist, tugging him away to some dark corner to kiss him hard enough to ensure Haru only looked at him…

“One problem, Koushi, I’m terrible at flirting.”

Suga’s grin grew wider. “That’s a-okay. We just need someone who is and likes the dark, brooding type. Good thing I know the perfect guy!” Suga spun around in his stool, eyes searching for his target, spotting him not too far away. Waving his arm to get the man’s attention, Haru looked behind him out of curiosity.

As the man and his companion came closer, Haru had to admit they were both attractive. One was taller, with soft looking chestnut hair. He was slim, but Haru could tell it was all perfectly lean muscle. Just the way he drifted over to them, a small half smile plastered under playful eyes, he oozed confidence and sex appeal.

The other man was shorter, but built like a house; his arms and chest were ready to tear his button up apart at the seams. His face was all sharp, serious features and intense eyes. He reminded Haru of a more compact version of high school Sousuke and if their personalities were anything alike, maybe he would be able to flirt with this guy semi successfully.

“Suga-chan! You still owe me a dance,” he slipped an arm around Suga’s shoulders, almost nuzzling into his hair. Just watching him made Haru blush.

Koushi gave him a patient smile. “In a minute, but first I wanted you to meet my friend Haru, he’s the-”

“The star of the Todai swim team, winning every collegiate competition in the past year and a half, dominating in the 200 and 100 meter freestyle races as well as the medley relays. He’s projected to medal in the his first world championship and, if he continues his training, is the favorite to win gold in those events at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic games.” Haru’s stunned face caused him to smirk. “I’m Oikawa Tooru. It’s nice to finally meet Suga-chan’s little mermaid.”
Just from the way Oikawa looked at him, Haru knew he was a dangerous man.

His companion was apparently immune to all of his charms because his only reaction was to smack him upside the head. “Don’t be a creep.” He fixed his dark eyes on Haru as he reached out to shake his hand. “I’m Iwaizumi Hajime. I’ve seen a couple of your competitions for work, you really are impressive in the water.”

“He’s impressive outside the water too, Iwa-chan.”

Oikawa’s eyes trailed over Haru’s body, and Haru regretted letting Rin pick his outfit. While Haru preferred covering himself with baggy and oversized tops, tonight he was in tight, ripped black jeans and an even tighter black and a grey top. Haru seriously wondered how Rin, who has always been broader than Haru, could possibly wear this shirt and still breathe. Haru was three seconds away from changing, but the appreciative look Sousuke gave him when he popped his head in was enough to change his mind.

And now Sousuke hadn’t even looked at him for half an hour. Haru glanced at Suga who simply winked at him.

Here goes nothing, Haru thought.

“Thank you, it’s a pleasure to meet you, Tooru,” Haru purred, reaching forward to ‘casually’ pick at the medallion around Oikawa’s neck and examine it. The use of Oikawa’s first name and the teasing touches got the response he wanted. Widened eyes, a predatory smile, a green light for him to tease back.

Iwaizumi was about to butt in, but a quick shake of the head from Suga stopped him. He frowned in question, but quickly understood when Suga held up his hand in a familiar gesture. He and Oikawa were the usual social partners for Daichi and Suga. Being volleyball players, they came up with hand signals for specific situations: there’s a guy bothering me, I want to go home, Oikawa has had too much to drink please deal with him. The one Suga flashed him now was a special one between them, ‘Daichi/Tooru is pissing me off and I want to get back at them.’ Iwaizumi glanced in the direction Suga was gesturing, it always pointed to the root of the problem, and instantly picked out the tall, muscular man in an outfit that complimented Haru’s. The former Nekoma captain was hanging off of him, and Iwaizumi didn’t blame Suga for his plan.

When he looked back at Oikawa, he had moved even closer to Haru, almost standing between his knees, as he leaned his elbow on the bar, practically looming over him. Iwaizumi could tell Haru was not a person who was accustomed to this treatment, but he was holding his own, laughing softly at Oikawa’s jokes, running his fingers along the fabric of Oikawa’s shirt at his wrist and along his arm, looking at him through thick lashes and half lidded eyes. Damn, this guy was a natural.

“You know,” Suga started in a tone of voice that signaled caution to those who knew him, “I thought of something I’d like to try once before I’m married,” a devilish smirk cut across his face. “Body shots.”

Haru stiffened. He didn’t really know what those were, but he knew it couldn’t be good.

“Excellent idea, Suga-chan!” Oikawa agreed. “Do you know what a body shot is, Haru-chan?”

Haru’s eyes widened at the nickname, only Nagisa and Makoto ever used it and he hadn’t heard Makoto say it in years. “N-no. I don’t go out drinking much.”

“It’s where a guy gets up on the counter and the bartender pours a shot over his lower abs and
someone drinks it off of him,” Suga explained as plainly as if he was giving directions to the nearest gas station.

Haru paled, this was not good at all. What was Koushi thinking? He could never, ever do something like that.

“Ah, Suga-chan, if you wanted me to take my shirt off, you could’ve just asked,” Oikawa teased.

“Actually, I was going to ask Hajime,” Suga commented with a tinkling in his voice, “He’s much more my type. I would ask Daichi, but one, he thinks food and drink should only be consumed out of their ‘proper’ containers, and two, we’re not supposed to be all romantic and gross with each other tonight.”

Iwaizumi shrugged, knowing that Oikawa had no problem with him and Suga flirting and hopped up onto the counter. Suga beckoned the bartender over and explained what they were doing and the bartender just smiled, this happened all the time. Laying back on the bar and lifting up his shirt to show off a sharply cut six-pack, he signaled to Suga he was ready when he was.

The bartender poured, a syrupy pink drink pooled around Iwaizumi’s navel and anyone looking could see how his core flexed in reaction to the cold liquid. Suga only waited long enough for the bartender to pull his arm out of the way before he bent down, sucking up the drink with a loud slurp. Iwaizumi’s breath hitched and Oikawa whistled when Suga slowly glided his tongue along to ensure he got it all.

*That’s what Koushi wanted him to do?* Haru was glad he was already red from the alcohol because he watching that display set his face on fire.

Iwaizumi moved off the countertop, pulling his shirt down after wiping off with a damp napkin, finally smiling and laughing with Suga. Both were blushing, but neither seemed uncomfortable or embarrassed.

“You’re turn, Haru-chan.”

Haru snapped his head toward Oikawa, his eyes wide. “I-I don’t need another drink.”

Oikawa chuckled, a sound that shouldn’t have been as sinister as it was. “No, Haru-chan, the drink’s for me, you’re going to be the glass. I’ve never seen a swimmer’s body up close before.” Oikawa grabbed Haru’s waist and lifted him onto the counter with surprise ease.

The sirens were flashing in Haru’s head, screaming *ABORT ABORT ABORT!* Before Suga had to step in, before Iwaizumi grabbed the back of Oikawa’s collar, the sound of Haru’s name cut through the chatter and made them freeze.

“*Haruka.*”

Despite the low volume Sousuke growled his name, it still boomed and echoed in his chest. Haru was so relieved to see him that for a moment he forgot this whole thing started because Sousuke was letting other guys touch him. Now that the situation had been defused, the momentary panic gone, and Haru felt like he was in enough control to press his luck.

“Yes, Sousuke?” he responded in a cool, uninterested voice. It made Sousuke’s eye twitch.

Thankfully, Oikawa had enough of a sense of self preservation and let go of Haru’s hips and stepped aside when Sousuke came toward them. Without any warning, Sousuke picked Haru up off the bar
and unceremoniously threw him over his shoulder, carrying him off with a final chilling glare at Oikawa.

Too shocked at first, Haru didn’t have a chance to protest, but now he didn’t want to, feeling smug knowing he had successfully pushed Sousuke’s buttons. The next thing he knew, he was tossed onto a couch in a quiet corner of the party room, landing harder on his ass than he would’ve liked. Sousuke continued standing over him, arms crossed, his face set with a deep frown and furrowed brows. “What the fuck was that?”

“Body shots,” Haru answered as he stretched out on the couch in what he hoped was a relaxed pose.

“Let me rephrase that. Who the fuck was that?”

Haru shrugged. “A friend of Koushi’s. I think he’s on the national volleyball team. He’s a lot stronger than he looks.”

“Why are you being such a brat?” Sousuke spat.

“Why are you letting those guys flirt with you?” Haru threw back in his face.

Sousuke was about to retort with something unthinking and probably hurtful he would never say sober and unprovoked. It must have been a guardian deity looking out for him who forced him to look in Haru’s eyes and see the fear and sadness there.

It had slipped Sousuke’s mind Haru wouldn’t understand nightclub culture. People were more touchy, their nerves soothed by the booze, limited space, and relative anonymity. Sousuke had known none of the interactions he experienced tonight were an actual advance on him, but he realized now Haru had no idea. The last time Haru had dismissed what he thought was harmless flirting… well, his boyfriend came home with love bites from another man.

Sousuke sighed, running a hand down his face and sat down next to Haru, pulling him into his lap like they were back in their apartment. Haru felt more than heard the ‘I’m sorry’s’ that were being mumbled into his neck accompanied by kisses.

“I wasn’t going to let him do it… We were all about to stop him.” Haru said quietly.

The only response he got was the feel of Sousuke’s teeth scraping at his neck. He switched to sucking hard at Haru’s pulse point, determined to leave a dark bruise that would be visible even in this terrible lighting. They usually agreed Sousuke wouldn’t leave any marks on Haru, considering he was clad only in jammers most of the day, but Haru let it slide this time. He wants this, the proof of Sousuke’s fierce protectiveness.

When Sousuke finally pulls away, Haru doesn’t give him a chance to catch his breath before he’s kissing him, long and lewd. Groans escaped from both as Haru pressed his body harder against Sousuke, barely resisting grinding his hips down. When Sousuke grabs Haru’s ass with both hands and squeezes just right, Haru gasps and pulls away. His surprise is replaced by a smirk, one he must have learned from Koushi in the last ten minutes. Leaning over, Haru whispered into Sousuke’s ear, “Later, but only if you’re good,” before he stood and sauntered back to the bar.

Only a few heartbeats later, Sousuke was at his heels, stretching an arm around Haru’s waist and holding tight to his hip. Koushi was right, Haru reflected, he would have Sousuke’s undivided attention for the rest of the night.
I just really, really wanted to write a scene featuring body shots. \(_{(ורתשיה)}_/\

oh my love, you're all I need

Chapter Summary

A wedding.

Chapter Notes

!!Important notes!!

Updates from here on out will still be on Tuesdays, but every other week. I want to take care in wrapping the story up and a weekly update schedule doesn't work for me that way. (Also Rogue One is coming out soon and STAR WARS!!).

Even though the main story will end with 31 chapters, I will be doing an infinitely long long-shot series that take place in this universe! Most of them will be dealing with their futures, but maybe all of you who have been looking for something saucy will have your requests granted *winky face*

Shoutout to my awesome beta @princest and to @ohmynananse for letting me borrow her super cute dog’s name.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Haru took the precious few seconds he had while Sousuke put on his shoes to send a brief, but sincere, note of thanks to Yasuhiro. He knew that the gorgeous, charcoal grey pinstripe suit was his doing, urging his son to start dressing like a grown up. Underneath the suit was a crisp, white button up, and every other piece of the outfit - shoes, tie, pocket square - were a rich chocolate brown. A set of gold stud earrings and gold, large faced watch completed Sousuke’s look.

Overall, no one who didn’t already know him would ever guess that Sousuke was naturally an overgrown puppy who hogged the bed, and managed to spill food no matter what he was eating. Haru truly loved those things about him, but he loved seeing Sousuke like this, too. It was unfair, really, how easily it was for Sousuke to change from lighthearted goof, to respectable police officer, to men’s fashion model, to the human embodiment of lust (Sousuke had a specific smirk which set Haru on fire no matter where or what he was doing).

Haru knew he didn’t look half bad himself, in a burgundy suit with black shoes, shirt, and tie. It had immediately caught his eye while out shopping with Rin, who lamented that it would clash with his hair. Sousuke had appreciatively ran his hands over every seam after Haru was dressed. That combined with how Sousuke looked now with his stupid slicked back hair, and stupid shoulder to waist ratio, made Haru wish they still had another hour before they had to leave for Daichi and Suga’s wedding.

“Ready to go?” Sousuke asked, turning to face Haru and having the foyer light shine on him just right.
Hell, Haru would gladly take fifteen minutes. They didn’t need to undress all the way.

Recognizing Haru’s thinly veiled frustration, Sousuke stepped forward, held onto his waist, and kissed him. It was long and slow, and despite the way Sousuke’s tongue wound around his, and how Sousuke’s teeth nipped and grazed, it was still a tender one. Yes, it was possessive and lusty and filled with promises for later, maybe even in an empty room at the venue after too many glasses of champagne, but it was done in every way Sousuke knew Haru liked. It wasn’t sloppy or rushed; instead, it was a surprisingly well planned and thoughtful kiss.

When Sousuke pulled away after what seemed like the hour Haru had begged for, Haru sighed and rested his forehead against Sousuke’s shoulder. The sense of urgency had evaporated, stolen away like his breath, and now they just enjoyed being close, feeling each other’s chests rise and fall. The fingers Sousuke was carding through Haru’s hair were probably messing up the ten minutes of effort he had put in. It may not seem like much when it was put like that, but it was nine minutes more than he usually spent, even on date nights.

“We need to go.”

“I know.”

Neither of them moved, not even an inch. They couldn’t even pretend like they were going to be responsible. After a few more content minutes, Sousuke heaved a sigh and stepped back. He took Haru’s hands into his own. “Daichi will blame me if we’re late.”

Haru shrugged, and Sousuke responded by pinching the skin on the back of his hands. With a yelp and a pout, Haru agreed and walked out the front door, his fingers intertwined with Sousuke’s, resting where they belonged.

The venue was a small, privately owned gallery, doubling as an event space. Haru had actually been there before to see a classmate’s exhibit. Since then, he had been contacted by the gallery coordinators with the possibility of displaying his own work.

Just like it had been during his last visit, the space was teeming with life and light. The ceiling was blanketed in fairy lights, illuminating the current featured artist’s work, which were incredibly detailed and delicate looking lace-cut acrylic flowers. The guests were all exuberant, everyone there filled with love and support for the couple of the night, and just so, so happy for them.

Haru recognized most of the guests from the bachelor party or from events and dinners at Koushi and Daichi’s place. He’s amazed at how many of them are actually couples. He remembers Sousuke mentioning Tanaka’s desire to find his soulmate stemming from being surrounded by happy pairs in high school. Honestly, Haru couldn’t blame him, it would probably drive him up the wall too, being with just Nagisa and Rei back then was bad enough.

“Oh, Haru, Sousuke-kun! There you are, I’m glad I found you.”

They turned and Haru was surprised to see Yamato in front of them, smiling and dressed in a lovely light grey suit.

“Hey, I was just about to text you; we ran a little late.” Sousuke was definitely not feeling the surprise Haru was and Haru needed to know why.

Yamato smiled his understanding. “That’s alright. We had to get here a early because he’s in the wedding party, but I felt like I couldn’t intrude on their group. The good news is my Rowlet is only
one level away from evolving.”

Haru couldn’t help but ask, “What’s the bad news?”

The smile on Yamato’s face shifted to a sickeningly sweet and fake one he used when talking to his swimming rivals. “Apparently, Ryuu’s first love is Daichi-san’s other groomsman.”

Ryuu? Isn’t that…? “Wait, you’re Tanaka’s date?” Haru asked in confusion.

Yamato looked at him apologetically. “Yes, we’ve actually been dating for about a month.”

What?!

“What?” Haru really hoped he didn’t sound as rude as he thought he did.

Thankfully, Yamato laughed. “I’m sorry for not telling you, I just didn’t want to jinx it. You know my luck with romance has been abysmal the past couple years.”

Haru nodded, remembering how often Yamato showed up to practice with a heavy heart. Eventually he became so discouraged he stopped trying altogether and adopted a dog named Chopper. Haru thought it was a perfectly acceptable life choice, but even back then his friends pointed out Haru was in a different situation.

“How’d you end up meeting?”

“One day after practice I came home to find a giant hole in my screen door and Chopper missing. I searched all around the neighborhood for him and called the local shelters, but no one had seen him. I was absolutely hysterical, thinking all of my relationships were doomed from the start.” Yamato blushed a bit, reflecting on his hopelessness.

“Then I remembered Sousuke-kun could probably help, like don’t cops deal with lost pets all the time? When I went to his police box, I heard what sounded like Chopper barking, ran toward it, and saw him playing with Ryuu. They were so cute together, you know Chopper doesn’t usually like strangers, so I was really surprised! At first I thought maybe Sousuke-kun had found him, but it turned out Chopper went there on his own.”

Yamato’s face softened. “Ryuu was so sweet. He said he was going to call the number on the tag soon, but Chopper looked like he really wanted to play and he couldn’t say no. He was so flustered and blushed whenever I looked at him. He didn’t even remember to get my name or ask for proof of ownership.”

Sousuke rolled his eyes. “Not his finest moment as a police officer.”

“If he didn’t know your name, then how’d you two…?”

“Oh, I asked Sousuke-kun for Officer Tanaka’s information and asked him out myself. He looked like he was going to faint when I did! It’s been great, Haru, he’s a really good guy and I’m having a lot of fun with him.” It wasn’t something Yamato could say about most of his romantic encounters.

Haru beamed at him, truly happy for Yamato, but then frowned at Sousuke and smacked him in the stomach. “I can’t believe you knew about this and didn’t tell me.”

“It wasn’t my secret to tell!”

Scoffing at him, Haru retorted, “You told me about Rin’s secret obsession with Lady Gaga and
showed me the pictures of when he dressed up like her for a concert.”

“Okay, one, it was too great to keep to myself, and two, Rin doesn’t count, he knows anything he tells me is fair game to use against him later.”

Haru rolled his eyes, but before he could snap back, Yamato stepped in. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you, Haru. I just wanted to be sure about it first, especially since you knew him. I wanted to make my own opinion.”

Haru understood, he really did. There were too many times Yamato would come in, absolutely glowing after a second or third date, only to be crushed just as fast. Haru always thought Yamato didn’t protected his heart enough and he couldn’t blame him for starting now.

“If he hurts you, Sousuke gets to punch him,” Haru decided as a way of showing his approval.

Sousuke grinned, probably too happy to hear the offer. “Deal.”

-

Daichi was nervous.

No, nervous was how someone felt before an important exam or a championship game. Daichi was, shaking and sweating from every pour, *freaking the fuck out*. He was getting married to Suga, Koushi. The *love of his life*. His favorite reason for waking up in the morning. Daichi had always planned on staying by Suga’s side, but now it was going to be on paper, a binding contract saying they were going to love and cherish each other until they died easily in their sleep, holding each other like they always do.

Okay, maybe the marriage certificate didn’t say that exactly, but it was still what Daichi was promising. Now the time had come when Daichi could officially make Suga his, he felt like he was going to suffer a heart attack and they’d have to move the ceremony to a hospital room.

He was not used to this; Daichi was always the one who stayed calm in the face of unbeatable odds and intimidating opponents. Always had advice for anyone in a panic. He knew exactly want to do or say to encourage and refocus every member of his team. That was his *job*, that’s who Daichi *is*. He was never the one who needed calming.

There’s a first time for everything, apparently.

He had dismissed Tanaka and Ennoshita, claiming he needed a few minutes alone to collect himself and practice his vows. He didn’t need those goofs listening and getting weepy, not before it even started. Maybe he needs them, though, they could distract him from how tight his chest was getting and how light his head felt. As he reached for his phone, he heard the all too familiar sounds of a crash, Noya yelling in triumph, and Asahi letting out an exasperated groan next door. The sound following it was what saved Daichi, stilling his hand and settling his heart.

It was Suga’s laugh.

In that moment he realized it wasn’t true he never felt nervous before, but he always had Suga next to him to ensure everything would be alright. Nationals, college entrance exams, team tryouts, *job interviews, everything*. Suga knew Daichi inside and out, could decipher when he needed a cheerleader, a partner in crime, or just a swift punch to the gut to get him thinking clearly.

Suga did it again, without even knowing he needed to, or maybe he did because Suga always had a knack for knowing when Daichi was too far in his own head. Either way, he had done it. Daichi was
once again the composed, collected man Suga helped him to be.

When it came to the wedding details, Suga was flexible on most things. He didn’t care on which side people sat. He wasn’t concerned with table centerpieces. He certainly didn’t give two shits what color the table cloths and napkins were.

Suga only had two rules when it came to the wedding. The first being only people who would really celebrate with them and wholeheartedly love them were invited. The second stipulation was no one being labeled as the bride. Suga knew that he, being the more stereotypical ‘feminine’ one, would be shoehorned into the traditional bridal roles. Screw that, they were both grooms and would be treated equally.

It was because of those two rules Suga and Daichi walked down their aisle one after another, accompanied by their former coach, Ukai Keishin, and their former teacher and advisor, Takeda Ittetsu. They stayed in close contact throughout the years, and whenever Daichi or Suga were visiting home, and the not-so-subtle insults and disapproving looks were too much for them, Ukai and Takeda were always there with open arms and a beer.

The ceremony was short and sweet. Daichi started crying as soon as he started his vows, which only made Suga burst into joyful giggles. Suga was scolded by Daichi, of course, when he leaned forward to kiss away the tears on his cheeks, ‘it’s not time for kissing yet, Koushi!’, which only made Suga laugh more. They managed to get through it, despite the continuous whoops and hollers from select guests. Everyone was on their feet cheering when they shared their first kiss as husbands.

During it all, Haru’s fingers never came apart form Sousuke’s, their grip only tightening at every display of their friends’ beautiful love.

After a too expensive, but delicious dinner, multiple toasts making everyone cry and laugh so hard their sides ached simultaneously, and Suga and Daichi smashing cake into each other’s faces, the tables were pushed aside to clear space for a dance floor. The lights were dimmed and the bartenders hustled to keep up with the demands from the guests. Everyone wanted to dance, but they required a little liquid courage first, grateful for the open bar the grooms provided.

Daichi and Suga bought everyone some time while they shared their first dance. They floated over the floor as if they forgot there was a crowd around them, never looking away from each other, exchanging soft whispers and sweet smiles. When the song was over, they were shocked out of their revelry by the burst of applause around them, sending the couple into a fit of slightly embarrassed laughter.

While the bravest among them moved onto the dance floor, Haru slipped away to the restroom, leaving Sousuke open for a familiar man to approach.

“Mr. Muscles.”

Sousuke turned with a frown and a raised eyebrow. It was the man from the party who put his hands on Haru. Great. “What do you want?”

Oikawa clicked his tongue. “So rude. Iwa-chan said I should apologize for crossing a line, but honestly, it was your fault for leaving such a cutie alone. Even if you have been together for a long time, you should know better than to neglect your boyfriend like that.”
Sousuke could feel the heat creep into his cheeks. “We’ve only been dating for five months.”

Oikawa’s eyes scrutinized every inch of Sousuke’s face. “Five months? And you already look at him like that…”

“Like what?”

He smirked and Sousuke immediately hated it. “Like you want to put a ring on it.”

Oikawa walked away laughing at the how red in the face Sousuke had become, gripping his beer bottle so tight, Oikawa was surprised he didn’t break the glass with his bare hand. He spotted Suga and walked over, still with the infuriating smug look on his face. “Your little mermaid and Mr. Muscles are a cute couple.”

Within an hour, everyone was feeling loose enough to dance and mingle, spreading out from their usual cliques. Suga and Daichi were making their rounds, ensuring they spent a little time with everyone, letting them know how much it meant they were here.

By the time they got to Sousuke and Haru, they were chatting with Kiyoko and Yachi. At first glance, it was an odd group, but with more thought, the dynamic was a peaceful one, composed of Daichi and Suga’s calmest friends. The group turned and greeted them with tight hugs and giant smiles. After a bit of chatter together, Suga took Sousuke’s arm and insisted on a dance. Haru tried to cover up his laugh at Sousuke’s surprised face, but failed, causing Daichi to snort in amusement. Throwing a glare their way, Sousuke led Suga to the floor for a pleasant slow dance.

“Sorry to put you on the spot, but I’m jealous Daichi gets to talk and hang out with you one-on-one all the time.”

Sousuke laughed and spun Suga around. “Well, feel free to call me out in the future then, especially if that’ll save Daichi some hardships.”


“It’s great. Everything looks like it’s going perfectly and it’s all very… you and Daichi, if that makes any sense.”

It was Suga’s turn to laugh. “That’s what everyone’s been saying!”

“Then it must be true,” Sousuke reasoned. “It’s a good thing.”

In the dim lighting, Sousuke missed the mischievous glint in Suga’s eyes. “Has it given you any ideas for what you want for your and Haru’s wedding?”

It was probably an accident when Sousuke stomped on Suga’s foot after he asked the question, or maybe it was karma for his teasing. “Not you too, Suga.”

Knowing Sousuke was referring to Oikawa, Suga grinned. “I know you haven’t been official for very long, but come on! I’m pretty sure you can tack at least six more months on there. You two were already in deep by the time Daichi and I met you.”

Thinking back on the timeline, Sousuke blushed. The first volleyball game was before he took Haru home to meet his family, before he realized himself he was falling for Haru. Yet, Daichi and Suga had already known. “Even if I count it, it’s still way too early to think about m-marriage.”
Suga let out a noise of disappointment. “Just don’t wait too long.”

The remainder of the dance was pleasant on the outside, but Sousuke’s thoughts were racing in a million different directions. Had Haru already thought about marriage? Did he expect Sousuke to propose soon? How long was ‘too long?’ What kind of ring would Haru actually wear? Shouldn’t they actually move in together before getting engaged? Would Haru want a private proposal or some grand gesture including his friends? Does he need to talk to Haru’s parents first?

While Sousuke’s mind continued reeling, Suga moved on to the next dance partner. Sousuke headed back toward where he left Haru, hoping his face did not betray the panic he felt inside. When he returned to their table, there was no sign of Haru.

“Daichi took him for a bit,” Tanaka’s voice called as he came to sit opposite of Sousuke, Yamato mirroring his actions.

Sousuke recognized the self-satisfied look on Yamato’s face to be similar to the one he wore when he absolutely crushed his opponents in a race. “Having a good time, Yamato?”

He took a sip of his wine before answering. “Oh yes, I just met Ryuu’s closest friends. They’re both very sweet, Noya-san took one look at me and started yelling before giving Ryuu practically a hundred high-fives.”

Approval from the best friends. No wonder Yamato looked so pleased, especially with Tanaka’s old flame around. Tanaka was beaming, looking endlessly proud of Yamato just being next to him. Sousuke was honestly relieved. As brash as he was, Tanaka was a good man and deserved whatever made him happy.

“So when are you gonna pop the question to Haru-san?” Tanaka asked with an idiotic smirk on his face.

Sousuke took back his earlier thought, Tanaka was only decent sometimes.

“Good question, Ryuu! Too bad there wasn’t a bocquet toss, Haru or Sousuke-kun would have definitely caught it.”

Scratch that, both of these men were awful.

Before Sousuke could shoot them down, they excitedly began discussing proposal strategies. Maybe Sousuke could take him to the beach and hide the ring in a shell for Haru to find. Maybe he could do something more traditional like propose at the top of a ferris wheel on Christmas. Maybe Sousuke could make dinner and set the ring on top of Haru’s piece of mackerel.

Eventually Sousuke couldn’t take it anymore, raising his voice as if he was addressing misbehaving high schoolers. “Will you stop talking about how to propose to Haru?”

Tanaka and Yamato silenced immediately, gauging Sousuke’s state. After several seconds, Tanaka turned to look at Yamato. “He’s right, enough about the proposal. What about the wedding itself?”

They quickly decided a destination wedding would suit Haru and Sousuke best. Someplace like Hawaii where they were surrounded by sun and ocean, and could spend an entire week or more celebrating with a smaller group of friends. Sousuke had to admit it wasn’t a bad idea, especially with the Yamazaki’s business connections he knew they had, but he still was not okay with this discussion. Tanaka didn’t even notice when Sousuke grabbed his beer and drained the bottle, feeling like it was useless to try and stop all these nosy troublemakers from butting into his and Haru’s relationship.
In the middle of a heated debate on if they should still wear suits if the ceremony is on the beach, Sousuke felt a pair of arms wrap around his shoulders and a chin dig into the top of his head.

“If you two keep talking like that, neither of you will be invited,” Haru chastised.

They stopped talking instantly, looking over with guilty, but only slightly remorseful expressions. Haru rolled his eyes in response to their half hearted non-apology.

“Dance with me, Sou.” It was phrased like a command, but Sousuke heard the request in his voice.

“Of course, cutie.” Sousuke stood, letting Haru’s arms fall from around him, and took his hand. They moved deep into the throng of people still dancing, pressing close together, grateful for another slow, lovely song.

They didn’t speak, Sousuke’s heart still booming with the ideas people kept feeding him. He knew they were teasing him, especially because he took the bait so easily, but there was still an ounce or more of truth to their words. If things continued like this, happy and wonderful, wouldn’t the next step be marriage?

Sousuke never thought himself the type, but maybe that was his failed attempts at relationships talking. Maybe he just hadn’t been with anyone he cared about enough to take their future into consideration. Haru was different. It’s not like Sousuke couldn’t imagine living his life without Haru in it, he just did not want to. He refused to even think about it. Sousuke wanted Haru by his side and would put in as much work as it took to keep him there indefinitely.


Fucking smooth, Yamazaki.

He felt Haru’s hand squeeze his as his shoulders gave a small shrug. Haru’s face was mostly hidden, pressed against Sousuke’s shoulder, so it was difficult to make out Haru’s soft response. “I-I wouldn’t mind it someday. If it was the right person.”

The way Haru pressed even closer to Sousuke when he said ‘right person’ made Sousuke’s heart leap in his chest. He held Haru even closer to him as they gently swayed, enjoying each other here and now, content in knowing that ‘someday’ would come eventually.

Chapter End Notes

I was emotionally compromised writing this entire chapter <3
being closer to where I want to be

Chapter Summary

growing and changing

Chapter Notes

WOW I'm so sorry this took three weeks to update! Things have been not so shiny in my personal life so I struggled for a while with writing these happy things. But I'm back and I hope you enjoy this chapter and that you are having a joyous holiday season! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sousuke was nervous.

Sousuke hated being nervous. He had spent months studying for the sergeant exam and now he was sitting in the testing room, his legs bouncing in restlessness. He had used most of his precious free time preparing, pouring over a huge stack of books, getting a kiss from Haru in reward for every chapter reviewed. The four practice exams he had taken had been successful and he was able to answer every question Haru quizzed him with. He knew the material and his understanding of its application was spot on.

Despite all his effort, Sousuke was still afraid of failing. Memories of lost races and ineffective surgeries filled his head as phantom pains shot through his shoulder. He thought he was ready to be a professional swimmer too, and look at where that dream ended up.

Now he was trying to make his new dream a reality. He had worked just as hard, pushed himself to be better, held himself to the highest standard. Was it enough? Would he crash and burn just like before? Sousuke wasn’t sure he could go through that again.

With only a couple minutes left before the exam started, Sousuke pulled out his phone to turn it off, not needing a dumb text from Rin to interrupt his concentration. As he held the device in his hand, it vibrated with a new message from Haru. It was simple, as every text from Haru was, but it was enough to give Sousuke the strength to push away his fears and smile, finally feeling ready.

FROM: Mackerel Merman <3
I’d wish you luck, but you don’t need it. See you tonight, Sergeant Yamazaki.

Haru reached up, allowing Yamato to pull him out of the pool. They could do nothing more than exchange weary smiles, both panting from the last set of sprints assigned by their coaches. It had
been another grueling practice. They knew it was good for them, the only way for them to compete with the best swimmers around the world, but it didn’t make it any easier.

A few months passed since he and Yamato transitioned from student to professional athletes. Each of their training regimes almost doubled in hours and cracked own on their discipline. Stricter diets, targeted exercises in and out of the pool, and assessments every week. There was no room for slacking off or taking it easy, except for the couple times per week a rest period was built into their schedule.

They had to balance all this with the rest of their lives. Yamato was forced to switch shifts at his part time job in order to comply with the schedule his coach gave him. Although he hated his coworkers on the evening shift, it was easier than finding another job. The rest of his life was mainly Chopper and Tanaka, who thankfully understood the necessity of his crammed schedule and spoiled him with affection when they could.

Haru made his spending money by selling his art, excellent quality prints available through the gallery where he had his debut the previous November. After having to say goodbye to what he sold in that show, Haru decided he wanted to keep the originals from now on, all of them packed neatly and securely in his spare bedroom. Every so often when he had a new piece, he’d lend it to the gallery for them to display for a few months and let them make prints, taking a fair share for their own profit. The low maintenance and lack of pressure suited him just fine, he had enough to stress about when it came to swimming.

What Haru actually hated about his pro-swimmer lifestyle was being instructed to ‘get serious’ about his muscle development. He’d always been naturally skinny, which made it easy for him to look like he had a decent amount of muscle when he was in high school, but going up against other top competitors, his coaches felt like he was painfully underdeveloped. “Think of what you could do if you had as strong of shoulders as this guy!” “Your triceps are good, but you ignore your lats!”

If they had told that to eighteen year old Haru, he would’ve just rolled his eyes and told him he swam free. Twenty three year old Haru had to do what his coaches told him, including too many (in Haru’s opinion) gym sessions and overhauling his meal plans to be noticeably less enjoyable.

Sousuke tried to help, he really did. In a show of solidarity Sousuke agreed to eat the same foods as Haru, partially not to burden him with cooking separate meals. While Haru appreciated the sentiment, he knew Sousuke still ate whatever he wanted when he was out with Tanaka or Rin. Haru couldn’t help but sulk when Sousuke came home smelling like pizza or the yakitori place on the corner that started carrying fish when he became a regular. During the second week of the diet, there was one time when Haru refused to kiss Sousuke until he brushed his teeth, having obviously stopped for a burger on his way home.

Considering the diet was really the worst of Haru’s problems, he made sure to limit his complaining and be grateful for how unbelievably well his life was going.

- Rin, unlike Haru, was thriving with the rigorous training schedule and lifestyle of a professional swimmer. He loved the structure to his days and how easy all of the rules and limitations made every day decisions. He knew exactly what workout he had to do at the gym, had an outstanding grocery list with a rotating meal plan, could easily use training as an excuse to turn down unwanted offers for parties or drinks.

Overall, Rin loved his life, even the bad days when his times didn’t improve or when he lost a race. The disappointments spurred him on to work harder, or sometimes, forget about swimming for a
while and take comfort in his friends. With Sousuke and Haru so close, it was easy for him to find
solace and support, whether he wanted to complain all night or needed to be distracted and taken
care of. It was the best he could have hoped for and yet…

Rin wouldn’t fool anyone if he said seeing Sousuke and Haru’s perfect relationship didn’t bother him
sometimes. He wasn’t jealous of them, he had never thought of Sousuke as anything more than a
friend and brother, and he had moved past his feelings for Haru a long time ago. He did envy what
they had, their easy companionship, the gentle and innocent touches, the hazy and satisfied looks on
their faces Rin sometimes saw when he came over to Sousuke’s apartment without calling ahead.

Rin wanted all of that and more. His own relationship history wasn’t bad, but also nothing
spectacular, mostly six month long relationships ending in amicable break ups. Every person he had
dated had been so different, and he had genuinely cared about all of them. They just weren’t right
together, there was always a distance they couldn’t shorten, a barrier between their communication.
He just wanted someone who he could know as well as Sousuke knew Haru, someone who he could
trust as much as Haru trusted Sousuke.

Someday he would find them, Rin knew, but for now it was time for the gym.

- Rin was almost done with his workout, only one more set of squats stood between him and the door.
He couldn’t really afford to take his sweet time, but a flash of pink in the corner of his eye caught his
attention. Turning, Rin spotted Kisumi, clad in a tight tank top and basketball shorts. Even like this,
sweat soaked with his hair mussed, bangs clipped back to keep them out of his eyes, Kisumi looked
good.

Haru told Rin about running into each other in the grocery store and how Haru forced him to come
with him so they could patch things up between them. Haru said they left on good terms and this was
the first time he felt like he could be friends with Kisumi since his first year in middle school. Of
course, Haru wasn’t about to actually become friends with him, but he did wish Kisumi happiness,
which was basically the same with Haru.

If Kisumi was all good in Haru’s book, it meant it was okay for Rin to spend some time with him,
right? Rin really hoped so; he had always thought Kisumi was cool and fun to hang out with, and he
definitely wouldn’t mind reconnecting with the Kisumi in front of him. If anyone asked, Rin would
say it was today’s lower body workout making him feel weak in the knees.

Maybe Kisumi also saw a familiar head of hair or maybe he felt the eyes glued to his form, because
he looked over and immediately locked eyes with Rin, grinning once he recognized him. Kisumi
hoped Rin didn’t have a poor opinion of him after all the Makoto drama. If he and Haru pushed past
it, there was no reason for Rin to hold onto any ill will either. That’s what Kisumi hoped as he
walked over to the rack Rin was occupying.

“It’s nice to see you, Rin! Still working as hard as ever, I see.”

Rin would be lying if the way Kisumi’s eyes swept over his body didn’t make his heart pound. He
forced a smirk on his face. “Of course! The work of a pro athlete is never done.”

Leaning against the side of the squat rack, Kisumi wiped his face with a towel. “Sounds exhausting.
I’m glad being a hair stylist isn’t that much work.”

“A hair stylist, huh?” Rin took a moment to mull the idea over in his head. “It suits you.”
Kisumi’s smile widened, the kind-of-praise making his heart bubble. Had talking to Rin ever made him feel like that before? Had Rin’s toothy grin ever made him flustered before? He couldn’t say, but it was certainly happening now.

“I’ve never seen you here before, are you usually here around this time?” Rin asked, wondering if he could match up their gym schedules a bit better in the future.

“I’ve only been coming for a couple weeks when I’ve had time. I hate exercising,” Kisumi grumbled with a pout. “I mean, I still like playing basketball a couple times a week, but working out at the gym is awful.”

Rin laughed, “Then why are you here?”

A faint blush ran across Kisumi’s face, painting his cheeks close to the color of his hair. “W-well, a guy I was dating said I was kinda soft… and not in a good way.”

The amusement on Rin’s face melted away, his eyebrows furrowed as his mouth turned into a deep frown. “Are you fucking serious? Kisumi, you’re gorgeous! Your body is perfect the way it is; don’t let some asshole convince you otherwise.”

As Kisumi stared at him with a face mixed with surprise and embarrassment, Rin realized exactly what had come out of his mouth. His face burned, but he wasn’t going to back down. “I-I know I’m just another asshole telling you what to think, but really Kisumi, if you feel good with how you look, then you don’t need to change it for some guy who obviously doesn’t appreciate you in the first place.”

A wide smile slowly spread on Kisumi’s face. “Thank you, Rin. I… I really needed to hear that.”

Rin’s expression softened, relieved he could help Kisumi in some small way.

Kisumi looked away, biting his lip and building up his courage. “If you’re free after this, would you like to grab a coffee? Or a protein smoothie or whatever it is you pro athletes need after a workout.”

“I can’t,” Rin said, quickly amending his statement when he saw the brightness of Kisumi’s eyes fade a little, “I can’t right now, I mean. I have to meet up with a sponsor in an hour. But I’m free tonight, if you wanna grab a drink.”

Kisumi smirked, his eyes sparkling again. “Oh? I thought people couldn’t imbibe while they’re training.”

“Breaking the rules is half the fun,” Rin responded, flashing his signature shark grin.

“Eight o’clock at Hula Hula. Don’t be late.”

Rin laughed, feeling his chest start to fizz with excitement. “I wouldn’t keep you waiting.”

“Good. I like my men punctual.”

With a wink and another smirk, Kisumi turned and headed toward the locker room, already thinking about what to wear tonight. As he opened his locker, tearing off his sweaty shirt, Kisumi wasn’t sure what he was happier about - the date or the fact he didn’t have to force himself to go to the gym anymore.
Haru was alone in Sousuke’s apartment, sitting cross legged on the couch with his sketch pad in his lap. After attending Daichi and Suga’s wedding, Haru had taken the initiative to reach out to the gallery and inquire if they were still interested in him doing a showing there. They gave him an overwhelmingly enthusiastic response and already had ideas about displays and configurations based on his portfolio. Of course, they would love if he displayed a few new pieces and Haru promised them four. He had eight months to make them, all he needed was a little inspiration.

Sitting on Sousuke’s couch, staring at a blank page and a blank TV was not inspiring. He had thought about grabbing Sousuke on his next day off and trekking out to another waterfall or aquarium, but that’s what he always did. For whatever reason, he wanted to do something different this time, something to challenge himself.

What in the world could that possibly be, though?

A knock at the door snapped Haru out of his frustrated thoughts. Haru had never heard anyone knock on Sousuke’s door before; any packages were left by the mailboxes and Rin had his own key. Setting his sketchbook aside, he stood and went over to the door, opening it without checking through the peephole. Haru felt his breath knocked out of him as he was forcefully squeezed into a tight hug. The blond hair pressed against his chin gave away his attacker’s identity.

“Na-Nagisa?!”

“Haru-chan I’ve missed you!” Nagisa didn’t ease his hold, only nuzzled his face against Haru’s chest like he used to do during high school.

“I’ve missed you too, Nagisa.” Haru gently pried him away, needing to look at his face. “What are you doing here? I thought you and Rei weren’t going to be back until the end of the next month.”

Nagisa’s expression faltered for a split second. “We had to cancel our road trip across America, so I decided to come home early.”
Haru frowned. “Why? You planned that trip for months.”

“Rei-chan was accepted into a fifth year masters program at the university,” Nagisa said with a proud smile on his face. “He had to start right away and I wanted him to focus on his studies.”

Oh. Nagisa came back alone.

“So… you two… you’re…?” Haru wasn’t sure how to ask it. He wasn’t sure he could bear to hear the answer or force Nagisa say it.

“We’re still together,” Nagisa confirmed, but there was a weakness in his voice that hadn’t been there before. “Rei-chan wanted to take a break… didn’t think it was fair to keep me tied to him when we couldn’t even be in the same room together. I told him he was an idiot and that it would take more than an ocean to make me not want to be with him.”

Haru drew Nagisa back into the hug, gentler this time, knowing nothing he could say would ease Nagisa’s heart. “For as smart as Rei is, he sure can be stupid sometimes.” Haru felt Nagisa laugh lightly. “Make yourself at home, I’ll make some tea.”

Nagisa wandered over to the couch, plopping down in the middle, taking in Sousuke’s apartment. There was so much of Haru in there too, sea creature knick knacks, commemorative photos of the two of them from aquariums, cookbooks with colorful tabs marking recipes to try, even a pair of Haru’s jammers thrown across the back of a chair.
Nagisa smiled to himself. He had always like Sousuke, even before the conflict between Iwatobi and Samezuka had been settled. He could just tell Sousuke had a good heart. When he and Haru started getting close, he was all for it, figuring they were compatible, at the very least, to be good friends.

As months passed and Nagisa was in daily correspondence with Haru, hearing stories of their domestic life and blooming friendship, he felt sure that something more than friends, with or without benefits, was happening. Seeing them together when they visited during Sousuke’s birthday, the way they looked at each other, the way their bodies reacted to each other, how they spoke to each other, Nagisa knew he was right. Looking around the apartment now, he couldn’t imagine Haru this happy with anyone else, not even Makoto.

While he waited for the hot water to boil, Haru grabbed his phone to give Sousuke a heads up. Haru knew Sousuke wouldn’t mind Nagisa’s visit at all, would probably even give up his spot in bed and sleep on the couch if Nagisa wanted to spend the night. However, Sousuke did not really enjoy surprises that involved other people besides Haru.

Sousuke always wanted to be able to show the proper reaction, the appropriate behavior in whatever situation he was involved in. Of course, Haru had seen him step outside of those bounds in the past, but was also around to see how much he regretted those moments and was too hard on himself for losing control. Part of it was from being the oldest son of a diplomat and a powerful businessman; his parents had stressed showing the proper face to others. Haru respected this about Sousuke, and knew that with this information, Sousuke could probably make the evening better for Nagisa.

Haru and Nagisa were curled up on the couch together watching Big Hero 6 when Sousuke walked in a couple hours later, he was holding a couple large yellow cake boxes. They were familiar to Haru’s eyes, Sousuke always went to the same bakery when picking out treats for them, even if it was far out of his way. Haru had the feeling the larger of the two boxes contained a strawberry shortcake and the thought of that endeared Sousuke even more to him.

“I’m home,” Sousuke called out into the apartment.

Nagisa hopped up from the sofa over to the foyer where Sousuke stood. “Sou-chan!” Nagisa’s smile turned into a pout when there wasn’t a look of shock on Sousuke’s face. “Aw man, Haru-chan, you weren’t supposed to tell him I’m here!”

Sousuke chuckled and held out the boxes. “If he wouldn’t have told me, then I couldn’t have picked these up.”

Nagisa’s eyes brightened at what must be cake boxes and happily took them into his arms and into the kitchen. He turned just in time to see Haru greet Sousuke at the door. Sousuke leaned forward, a gentle hand tilting Haru’s chin up, and barely ghosted his lips across Haru’s as if asking for permission. Closing his eyes, Haru moved the millimeters forward to press his lips against Sousuke’s. The whole act was painfully intimate, making Nagisa’s heart ache.

They were perfect, so perfect, but Nagisa couldn’t find it in himself to be jealous. They deserved this happiness; Nagisa only wished Rei was here too.
Thank you and I love you <3
my tears turn into butterflies

Chapter Summary

Worries and reassurances

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As the head of a high profile corporation, there were many things Yamazaki Yasuhiro could not do. He couldn’t refuse to do business with someone if he thought their personal values were garbage. He couldn’t freely speak his mind and tell the whole truth when it came to explaining the ‘why’ or ‘why not’ behind his actions. Like having to fight to give the employees who deserved it the most promotions. Or coming up with some bogus political sounding answer to justify hiring someone rather than being able to simply say this person is the best for the job regardless of being a not a man, not straight, or not Japanese.

He has a board of directors to answer to, seven old men who still clung to outdated fantasies about how glorious Japan should have been. They had to power to replace him, and that was something Yasuhiro would not let happen. Not for him, he could easily find a job somewhere else paying just as well, but he couldn’t leave his employees and their mission. Yasuhiro valued their loyalty and he’d be damned if he didn’t give it back. Although it was exhausting work to manipulate as much as he could until those geezers finally left, he would not falter.

It was cruel, but sometimes Yasuhiro cursed the famous Japanese longevity.

In the face of all of the ways he felt stifled, Yasuhiro never, ever, hid how proud he was of his family. He showed everyone the interview clip of his wife when the trade agreement she worked so hard on between Japan and France had been accepted, even though there were whispers behind his back about how a man shouldn’t have a more powerful wife. He left meetings to take phone calls from Sousuke to hear the results after every one of his swim meets and quickly cut off anyone who said trying to become a pro athlete was a waste of time for someone like Sousuke who should be preparing to inherit his father’s work. He bragged about every single one of Michiru’s accomplishments, from archery to tea ceremony to grades to learning how to ride a motorcycle while overseas or starting to learn a new language. People told him he needed to reel her in; young women shouldn’t be allowed so much freedom. To that, Yasuhiro could only smile with a sharp glint in his eye and remark it was a father’s duty to ensure his children thrive and find happiness in life.

Yasuhiro’s unapologetic and unabashed love for his family was why he was now making a scene waving and calling out for Sousuke and Haru in Kanda, a three Michelin Star rated restaurant since 2008. Sousuke was embarrassed enough for both of them, Haru too engrossed in anticipation for the meal ahead of them. This was not Sousuke’s first trip to Kanda, having come here with his father when he finished police academy. Yasuhiro was a little confused as to why they didn’t go somewhere new, but smiled softly when Sousuke explained Haru would really like it and he owed his success to him as much as his own effort.

They sat the counter and toasted to Sousuke’s promotion and Haru’s first victory in a pro competition. Chef Kanda came out to introduce himself and their meal, Haru shouldn’t have been surprised that he and Yasuhiro were on quite friendly terms. With every plate set before them, Haru
practically bounced in excitement, thoroughly enjoying the meal, throwing his meal plan out the window. Although Sousuke couldn’t deny the food was outstanding, the highlight for him was certainly watching Haru.

“So what’s next, Sergeant Yamazaki?” Yasuhiro asked as he finished their last plate, sipping delicately at his sake.

Sousuke hesitated, an instant tell they were passing into sensitive territory. “Ah, well… I’m not really sure.”

Yasuhiro was too classy to retort ‘bullshit,’ but gave Sousuke a look saying just as much.

“I’ve been talking with the Organized Crime Control Section,” he admitted.

“Organized crime, huh?” Yasuhiro’s eyes quickly assessed Haru’s face. He didn’t see any surprise, but there was definitely a hint of concern. “Isn’t that dangerous?”

Sousuke snorted. “Unless I wanted to waste away in a police box for the rest of my life, anything I do with the force could be dangerous, Oyaji. But that’s what I’ve been training for and it’s not like they’re going to dump me in the middle of a Yakuza controlled underground fighting ring with no preparation.”

Yasuhiro watched Haru’s knuckles turn white as the grip on his chopsticks tightened. “I think the point is you going into the middle of a Yakuza controlled underground fighting ring at all, Sousuke.”

“That was an exaggerated example.” Sousuke looked over, momentarily taken aback by the sharpness in his father’s face.

Yasuhiro’s eyes flickered briefly to Haru before boring back into Sousuke’s. “I see why you’re drawn to organized crime and I’m certain you would excel there. You’re young, driven, and tough, but you’re also too eager to prove yourself. It makes you reckless, too impatient to take a step back and assess if what you’re doing is the right thing. You push yourself, taking unnecessary risks, and can’t cope when you fail because it was a bad idea in the first place.”

Yasuhiro sighed at the hurt look on his son’s face. He knew it was kind of a low blow, but it had to be said. “I don’t think it’s a bad idea, Sousuke, but it’s not a decision you should make lightly. You have to not only consider what the strain would be on you, but also on those around you. What price they might have to pay that they didn’t realize would be part of supporting you.”

Sousuke looked down at his empty plate, a feeling of guilt rising in his throat. His father was right. Like always, he had more to consider than his own ambition.

Underneath the table, soft, slightly cold fingers forced one of Sousuke’s balled fists open, fitting perfectly between his. Haru squeezed his hand, forcing Sousuke to look up and into the eyes of the person who mattered to him more than anything. If they were in private, Sousuke knew he would’ve sobbed at the expression on Haru’s face.

*Whatever it is, I’ll pay it. Haru’s eyes were fierce, unwavering. I’ll be there for you.*
Rin really should have learned his lesson about entering Sousuke’s apartment unannounced. However, this time he figured it wouldn’t be a problem since he knew that Haru had swim practice on Friday afternoons. He still had his earbuds in as he unlocked the door, slipping in quietly in case Sousuke was napping. Rin had learned the hard way that trying to scare a policeman in his home was a bad idea. Everyone teased him about the black eye he had for almost two weeks. If he had to wait for Sousuke, Rin would either turn the TV volume up or do something in the kitchen, both activities Sousuke was used to hearing with Haru coming and going whenever he wanted.

After taking his shoes off in the foyer, Rin checked the couch for Sousuke and didn’t see him there. He dropped his bag off and went to check the rest of the apartment, peeking into Sousuke’s room where the door was wide open.

In an instant Rin discovered Haru was decisively not at practice. Haru was currently handcuffed to the headboard, naked except for a navy blue tie, probably from Sousuke’s uniform, acting as a blindfold. His legs wrapped around Sousuke’s waist and his back lifted and supported by muscular arms.

Spotting the movement of color out of the corner of his eye, Sousuke turned his head to investigate and immediately froze.

Beneath him, Haru writhed and whined at the stillness, “Sousuke, please, please move!”

But Sousuke didn’t register the plea. Too busy being mortified they were caught in an exceptionally compromising position, he only managed to choke out one word: “R-Rin?”

Rin turned and bolted. As he wrenched open the front door he caught Haru shouting angrier than he’s ever heard him before.

“What the fuck did you just say?!”

“R-Rin?”

Haru’s heart stopped. “What the fuck did you just say?!” He pulled away as much as he could, painfully extracting his boyfriend from himself.

Sousuke snapped back to reality, understanding the implication of what just happened. “Haru, no, it’s not like that!”

“Uncuff me right now.”

Sousuke didn’t hesitate, grabbing the key off the nightstand and releasing him from his bonds. Haru immediately tore off the blindfold and moved to escape to the bathroom.

This time Sousuke was paying attention and grabbed Haru around the waist, pulling him into his lap, “Haru, listen, it’s not what you think! Rin-”

“Don’t fucking say his name!” Haru continued to try to get away, but he couldn’t overpower Sousuke and his stupid muscles. He couldn’t be here right now; Haru needed some place safe. Let him get to the bathtub so he could think and calm down.

“Haruka, please, let me explain!”

“You said his name while you were fucking me, what else is there to talk about?!” Haru spat. He couldn’t fight the hot tears that flooded down his face. This was one of his worst fears after Makoto
had cheated. He couldn’t believe it had come to fruition with Sousuke.

Sousuke’s voice came out hoarse and desperate, “No, Haruka, he was here!”

Haru stopped struggling, but his body was still tense, ready to spring away, “What?”

“He just walked in on us! He was just standing there in the doorway, that’s why I said his name! Because I was fucking surprised!” Sousuke kept one arm firmly wrapped around Haru’s waist while his other hand was occupied running fingers through Haru’s sweaty hair.

“Please, Haru, I would never… I love you, only you.” Sousuke held him tight against his body; their ragged breathing and the last of Haru’s sniffles the only sounds in the room.

They sat that way for awhile, long enough for Haru to feel Sousuke’s heart stop frantically pounding. Haru’s brain was still on overdrive. Sousuke had never lied to him before, and Haru really didn’t want to think he’d start now. It was reasonable, believable; Rin had his own key to the apartment and was notorious for dropping by whenever he felt like it. It made sense.

Still, Haru needed to be sure.

“Phone.”

Without loosening his grip on Haru’s waist, Sousuke reached over to the nightstand for Haru’s device. Haru immediately pulled up Rin’s number and dialed.

In a panicky voice much higher than normal, Rin answered, “Haru, I’m so sorry! I thought you were at practice! I never would have just walked in if I had known—”

“What the fuck were you doing here?”

The icy rage in Haru’s voice sent a shock up Rin’s spine. He really messed up this time. “I… I wanted Sousuke’s advice about something.”

“What?”

“Ah… it’s…”

Haru huffed impatiently. “About what, Rin?”

“Some relationship advice.”

“What?”

“I’ve been hanging out with someone and I really like him, but I don’t know what to do about it and believe it or not, you and Sousuke have the best relationship out of all of our dumb friends so I wanted his opinion.”

Haru’s eyes widened in surprise. “Oh.”

They left an awkward silence hanging between them for a while.

“I’ll… I’ll give Sousuke a call later. “

“Much later.”
“Haru, I’m really sorry.”

“I’m taking your key at dinner tonight,” was all Haru said before he hung up and tossed his phone on the floor in front of him.

He sat quietly for a while, still in Sousuke’s lap, but he felt his body finally relaxing. Rin was here. Rin walked in on them having sex (thankfully not one of their more outlandish sessions, but still not quite vanilla). Rin was sorry; Sousuke was sorry. It was all an accident, a misunderstanding.

“Rin’s an idiot.” Haru grumbled.

“So am I. I’m sorry for scaring you, Haruka.” Sousuke sounded ashamed, like he knew had done something to shatter the trust between them.

Haru shifted so he could finally look at Sousuke’s face. Looking into Sousuke’s eyes, Haru could only think of how stupid he was, actually thinking Sousuke would do something like that. It was absurd. Sousuke couldn’t, wouldn’t, ever betray him, not even in his head.

“It’s okay, Sou… it was an accident.” Haru meant it. It really was, surprisingly, okay.

“So, uh…” Sousuke’s voice was unsure, still worried about Haru’s mental state. “What do you want to do now?”

Haru tilted his head so he could press teasing kisses along Sousuke’s neck. In a husky whisper, Haru answered, “I going to finish what you started.”

Sousuke shuddered in anticipation at the suggestion. The rest of the afternoon Haru made sure his name slipped uncontrollably from Sousuke’s throat loud and often.

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Rin knocked loudly on another apartment door, hoping its owner would be home. When it opened, he was greeted by a warm smile.

“Rin! What are you doing here?” Makoto’s eyes widened after hearing the accusation in his voice, “N-not that it’s not nice to see you…”

“Actually, I had something to discuss with Sousuke, but when I went over there I saw that he was, uh… occupied.”

Makoto gave him a tense smile and he opened the door for Rin to step inside, “You walked in on him and Haru having sex, didn’t you?”

Rin’s face flushed scarlet, “H-how did you know?”

“I got a text a few minutes ago from Haru saying that if I saw you I should hit you in the gut for him,” Makoto explained.

“Ugh, Sousuke’s temper is rubbing off on him,” Rin looked at Makoto out of the corner of his eye as they sat down on the couch. “Are you still doing okay with this?”

Makoto let his smile falter, “Yes, mostly. When it’s just us or with Nagisa, there’s never really an issue. Maybe a little guilt or awkwardness, but nothing I can’t deal with. It can be rough seeing them together, though. Seeing them do what we used to do… or even worse when they do what Haru had always wanted, but I denied him.
“Like a couple weeks ago when we were all meeting up to celebrate Nagisa’s new job and they walked in holding hands. It looked so natural and easy for them to walk around in public like that and I could see how happy it made Haru. Something so simple I was never brave enough to do.” Makoto’s voice was thick and heavy with remorse.

He caught Rin looking at him in a mix of annoyance and sympathy.

“B-but I’m happy for them. For Haru. He deserves all the things he wants and Yamazaki-kun can provide those for him. It’s just…” He trailed off, not really sure how to explain his feelings. He really was glad, but there was still a thorn in his gut that ached whenever he was reminded Haru was with someone else.

Rin finished the thought for him, “It just fucking sucks to see someone else in the place where you want to be.”

Makoto nodded, once again embarrassed he forgot that Rin had basically gone through the same situation.

Rin sighed and picked up the bowl of chips Makoto had been enjoying before he arrived at his doorstep. “You have to remember being a friend isn’t a second tier position for Haru. How he shows his affection for each of us is different, and yeah, Sousuke gets more, but it’s all unconditional. Haru would drop whatever he was doing and come to our aid and Sousuke knows and accepts it.”

Makoto was still silent, his lips pressed into a hard line.

Rin felt his eye twitch in irritation. “You should be thanking your lucky stars you have that again, Makoto. Or is Haru’s friendship not good enough for you?”

Makoto’s entire body seemed to jolt and he stared at Rin in shock. “That’s not…! I didn’t mean-!” He bit his lip, thinking of all the happiness of simply knowing Haru had brought him. “It’s enough. It’s more than enough.”

This seemed to satisfy Rin, who leaned back and started flipping through the channels on Makoto’s TV. “Good.”

Makoto shook his head, amused at how easily Rin could shift gears. “So what did you want to talk to Sousuke about? Maybe I could help.”

“Oh, uh…” A light blush started creeping up Rin’s cheeks. “I’ve been hanging out with someone recently, I guess you could call them dates, and I wanted to talk to Sou about it. Make sure it would be okay if I asked him to officially be my boyfriend.

“Why wouldn’t it be okay? Whoever this guy is, he’d be crazy to turn you down.” Makoto smiled reassuringly.

“It’s not that, it’s just…” Rin glanced over at Makoto, knowing this would be a sore subject for him as well. “It’s Kisumi.”

Makoto’s eyes almost popped out of his head. “K-Kisumi?!?”

“Yeah, Kisumi. We met at the gym a few weeks ago and have been going out a couple times a week. I know it’s theoretically okay; he and Haru patched things up between them so there’s no bad blood there, but still… I don’t want to make things weird in the group, but I really like him. More than I’ve liked anyone in a long time.”
Mouth still hanging open, Makoto stared at Rin. The possibility of Rin and Kisumi becoming an item was something that never crossed his mind. For a moment, Makoto felt like he should be upset about this development, but seeing the soft look on Rin’s face cleared his head. Kisumi, like Haru, deserved someone to care for them like he never could. Someone to wash out the bitter taste of heartbreak out of their mouths.

“I’m happy for you, Rin. And I’m sure Haru and Sousuke will be too.”

Rin turned his head to catch Makoto’s eyes. They were filled with sincerity and Rin suddenly felt like he had been worried over nothing. “Thanks, Makoto.”

Sousuke was ready for his shift to be over. He had spent the last twelve hours shadowing an Inspector and Assistant Inspector who were hot on the trail of a new organized crime syndicate, one that didn’t operate on traditional Japanese principals. It had been thrilling to the point of overwhelming, and Sousuke loved it, even the mundane parts. This was definitely the department he was going to make his career, but it was the end of his week and he was ready to leave work behind for a couple blissful days with Haru.

Daichi had been watching the door like a hawk, knowing Sousuke would have to come back sometime soon. When he saw him finally walk in, Daichi said his goodbye to Suga over the phone, “I gotta go, Koushi, Sousuke just came in. I’ll call you back soon. I love you.”

The moment Sousuke looked around the foyer and saw Daichi, panic started bubbling in his stomach. He crossed the room in two strides. “Daichi, is everything alright?”

“Haru-” was enough for Sousuke to hear before he rushed past him into the bullpen.

“Haruka!”

Haru jumped in his seat at the sound of his name. He was sitting next to another officer’s desk with a blanket wrapped around his shoulders. Haru made to get up, but flinched in pain as he dropped back down on his bottom, his hand coming up to his ribs.

Sousuke was there in a flash, kneeling in front of Haru. He tenderly cradled Haru’s face in his hands as he surveyed him. Pale, sweaty skin, a bruise forming under his left eye, clothes disheveled and torn, scrapes on his arms and hands. He wanted to tear out of the station and track down the bastard who dared to do this to his Haru. No one is allowed to even fucking look at Haruka in the wrong way, much less lay a finger on him.

But Sousuke stayed there. As grateful as Sousuke was Daichi had been there to watch over him, he knew he couldn’t leave Haru’s side. He might be holding it together now, but Sousuke knew him better than anyone. Haru had too much pride to show any more vulnerability in public, waiting until they were in private to let out his fear and distress in Sousuke’s safe, warm arms.

“What happened?” Sousuke’s voice came out as a tender whisper.

Haru had to swallow the emotion that choked him a couple times before he was able to answer. “I-I was mugged.”

The officer who had been assisting Haru cleared his throat, “Yamazaki, you know him?”
“Yes, he’s my boyfriend.” Sousuke shot the other man a look - *great, it was goddamn Masafumi* - daring him to say something judgemental.

Haru was so surprised by the admittance that he forgot for a minute he’s in pain. He expected Sousuke to say that they were good friends or roommates, not to so easily tell his coworker, tell anyone close enough to hear, that they were *together*.

Sousuke kept his attention on the police officer and grabbed a form off his desk, reading it. “Is this his statement? Do you need him anymore?”

“Yes, that’s his statement. He should-”

Sousuke cut him off, ready to get out of there. “Give the case over to Tanaka when he comes in.”

A vein throbbed in Masafumi’s forehead “But-”

“No one knows that area and the punks in it better than Tanaka. I don’t care if you work it with him, but make sure he’s on it.” The commanding bite to Sousuke’s words left no room for argument.

With a quiet “yes sir” from Masafumi, Sousuke turned his attention back to Haru. “We’re going to the hospital.”

“Sousuke, I just want to go home,” Haru practically pleaded.

“No, Haruka. You’re going to get checked out by a doctor. Think of what your coaches would say if you showed up to practice like this without getting examined.” Sousuke knew Haru didn’t really give a shit about what his coaches would say, but it was an easy out. Something to hide Sousuke’s concern and Haru’s fear behind.

Haru nodded, grateful Sousuke wiped away the tears collecting in his eyes before they could spill down his cheeks.

Daichi volunteered to drive them to the hospital, even offered to wait for them while Haru was with the doctor. Sousuke insisted they would be fine, but Daichi refused to leave until he got a promise that Sousuke would call when they were ready to be taken home.

Thankfully it was a slower night in the emergency room and Haru was done within a couple hours, now wearing a borrowed pair of Tokyo Metropolitan Police sweats because his clothes were collected for evidence. Not like he could wear those torn up pieces again anyway.

Daichi was back, just like he said, this time Suga was with him. Teary eyed and fussing over Haru, he kept muttering all the violent and awful things whoever did this to him deserved. During the drive back to his apartment, Sousuke never let go of Haru’s hand, silent promises being squeezed into Haru’s palm that he would take care of him. Sousuke would make sure Haru was safe, that he would heal just like before.

As shaken as Haru was, as much as he was wounded, he believed Sousuke. Haru always would.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this chapter!! Still a lot of fluff, but a little more drama than the last few. We’re creeping up on the end of the story (but remember I will be doing long shots
in universe to continue sharing their lives) and I'm glad you are still with me for it!
believin' you'll always be here for me

Chapter Summary

A list of successes

Chapter Notes

Haru's mugging in chapter 27 was a shout-out to the MakoHaru fic "Desperate Measures." It's the reason I started shipping SouHaru in the first place (they have a really lovely friendship in it).

That, and @bratinella mentioned a cute Sou teaching Haru how to fight scene months back I really wanted to incorporate. Dedicated to you, my dear!

With assistance from Masafumi, Tanaka relentlessly worked Haru’s mugging case, wanting to bring closure and justice to his friends as soon as possible. Tanaka had never been a victim of a crime, his sharp face and boisterous attitude often led him to be mistaken as a criminal, but he had seen enough to know how important this was for Haru to move on from what happened to him. He had made the arrest within two days, and was able to get everything stolen from Haru back except the cash in his wallet.

Haru almost cried when he got the items back. He didn’t care about the phone or wallet in particular. He could easily buy new ones of those and order new bank cards, but inside his wallet were three photos that couldn't be replaced. One was frayed at the edges and a little faded, a picture of him and his grandma after Haru’s first time at the Iwatobi swim club. The second was from high school, a picture of him, Makoto, Rei, Nagisa, and Gou when they were recruiting for new members and decorated the club room with flowers and fake palm trees. The third one was an instax from Suga and Daichi’s wedding. It was of him and Sousuke, staring into each others eyes with the most loving expressions on their faces as they danced. Suga had slipped it into his jacket pocket with the words ‘you’re next!’ and a tiny heart written on the back.

On his phone were photos of everything else. Daichi’s volleyball games, silly selfies of them when Nagisa grabbed his phone, Makoto being swarmed by cats at each cat cafe they went to for coffee, shots of Sousuke at home looking peaceful and gentle. He knew it wasn’t the end of the world if he lost these things, he’d simply make more memories, but that didn’t mean he wanted to let them go.

That night Sousuke showed him how to set his phone to automatically sync with his computer so he’d always have them saved. Sousuke didn’t even try to delete the many photos Haru had of him making unflattering faces in his sleep. Haru didn’t know it was because Sousuke had a collection of his own.

“You actually have to try to hurt me, Haru.”
Frowning, Haru looked up over his balled fists at his boyfriend who had been asking him to punch him for real for the last fifteen minutes. “But I don’t want to fight you.”

“It’s not fighting, it’s sparring, and I do this all the time with other guys on the force.” Sousuke smiled, his confidence in his hand to hand combat skills obvious. “Trust me, you’re not going to hurt me.”

The self assured smirk on Sousuke’s face kind of pissed Haru off. Maybe he would be able to put some real force into the hit. Haru shifted his weight, pulled back like Sousuke had showed him, and moved forward swinging. He could see Sousuke brace himself, shifting his arm up to block Haru’s punch. At the last moment, Haru slowed and opened his hand, delivering a not-too-soft slap to Sousuke’s cheek. Haru knew the smack, at best, stung like Tanaka’s overly enthusiastic high-fives, but the sound was satisfying.

Sousuke’s stunned face was enough to send Haru into a fit of soundless giggles.

Sousuke tried to be irritated at Haru’s inability to take this seriously, but honestly, seeing Haru’s smile and was better than anything he could think of. He really should have known Haru couldn’t be kept down for long, not with the support system he has now. He had been scared Haru wouldn’t recover well and had put most of his effort into making Haru feel secure, strong, and normal.

After Haru’s aches and bruises were mostly gone, Sousuke had taken it upon himself to teach Haru some simple self defense strategies. The lessons mostly centered on how to get away from common holds, the easiest ways to incapacitate an attacker, and where to and how to ask for help.

It took a couple weeks for Haru to agree. Haru didn’t want Sousuke to think he was weak, which is why he called Daichi in the first place after he was mugged. He knew he’d have to tell Sousuke what happened, but Haru didn’t want him to see him like that, bleeding and humiliated, the most fragile he had felt since their first run in when he had a panic attack on the sidewalk. Ultimately, it was Suga who convinced him the training would help in more ways than one. Sure, it could prevent him from getting hurt again, but the peace of mind a prepared Haru would give himself and Sousuke was more valuable. Sousuke was a worrier, and he couldn’t go everywhere with Haru nor could he eradicate all criminals and potential criminals from his path. This way, he was doing what he could do to feel like he was protecting Haru.

Most of all, Haru didn’t want to be scared; he didn’t want to have to feel anxious about leaving the apartment and continuing with his life. The first couple weeks after it happened, Haru was never left alone. Yamato would take him to and from practice, Rin would go with him to the gym, and Nagisa and Makoto ran errands with him (which was better for them anyway because Makoto and Nagisa procrastinated when it came to things like groceries or cleaning). When Sousuke wasn’t home, Daichi or Suga would be with him. They gave him plenty of space most of the time, content to work on their own projects while Haru painted or prepped meals. Hovering over Haru, acting like he was fragile, wasn’t necessary, but they wanted to be available just in case he got scared.

However, Haru didn’t want that forever. He liked his alone time and spending his free hours on whatever whim he felt. Feeling too troubled and anxious to do something as simple as heading to a cafe to work didn’t sound like living to Haru. He refused to be ruled by fear. If there was one thing Haru had enough of in his life, it was feeling scared.

When it came to Sousuke, Haru’s attitude changed a bit. It’s not like he ever took Sousuke for granted before, but now Haru made sure to be present during their time together as much as possible. The length of their meals together stretched out, savoring the food as well as their light conversations over the table. They went out more, taking turns picking the destination and activity, laughing when they inevitably picked something the other had been planning. Haru memorized the feeling of
Sousuke’s hands everywhere on his body and mapped out Sousuke’s with his own.

It wasn’t that he felt like he owed Sousuke something or like he needed Sousuke to protect him. Haru simply had another rude awakening of how fast things can change, how quickly some things come and go. Every second with Sousuke was something Haru wanted to hold onto and protect. He wouldn’t let anyone take that away from him.

The sleepovers at Haru’s apartment had easily become part of their routine. It started with Nagisa and Rin unexpectedly showing up one night when they knew Sousuke was working a week of swing shifts. Haru had been painting for almost ten hours straight, smudges of color on his face, hands, and clothes as proof. His friends decided he needed a break after he didn’t answer their bombardment of messages in their group chat.

When Haru told the story to Yamato at their next practice, he insisted they do it again with him included this time. He desperately needed some friend time, his life feeling too much like work, work, work. Suga had blessed them with his presence a couple times, but those nights were usually his and Daichi’s date nights so he only came when an away game or an extra practice interrupted them.

At first Haru felt a little guilty excluding Sousuke from the weekly sleepovers, but Sousuke assured him he was fine with it. He was glad Haru had his space, his own life. Of course Sousuke loved spending his time with Haru, but their time apart with their friends was important too. It was usually those nights he and Tanaka would go out, or stay in if they were feeling lazy, and blow off steam from their work weeks. Now that they didn’t share a police box, they had to schedule a time to bitch about incompetent coworkers, brag about their accomplishments, and congratulate each other on keeping the city safe.

It wasn’t that Haru or Yamato didn’t want to hear about their work, but Sousuke and Tanaka knew they would get concerned. It was better to stick to highlights rather than go into detail about the possibilities of what could’ve happened when Sousuke and the inspectors he was paired with actually ran into gang members with guns, or when Tanaka didn’t have time to call for backup to stop a mugging in progress. It was safe to talk about these things with each other, with other members of the force who understood the particulars of their work. They saved the fluffy heartwarming stories for their partners, even though Yamato had said more than once he was glad Ryuu no longer worked at a police box and be at risk at finding a lost dog with a cuter owner (and every time Tanaka would shout ‘impossible!’).

Each of them had a specific task for their get togethers. Nagisa was in charge of providing drinks after they found out he had taken a mixology class for fun while he was overseas. They never drank to get drunk, but it was fun to get giggly off of whatever colorful and fruity concoction Nagisa whipped up each time.

The only one they trusted to pick a movie or tv series for them to watch was Yamato, mostly because the group as a whole could never agree when Nagisa, Rin, or Haru got to choose. Yamato also had enough awareness of the others to know when he should put on something to cater to one of them when they had a bad week. Cheesy horror movies when Rei was too busy to talk to Nagisa much during the week, a magical girl anime when Rin wasn’t making as much progress with his times as he wanted to, an animated movie when Haru had art block.
When he was having a tough time, because his co-workers were as awful as ever, or because his and Ryuu’s schedules didn’t line up at all, it was an action movie. Something mindless with lots of explosion and hilarious one liners. He’d imagine Ryuu as the main character and it made him miss him less. When Yamato got to see him next, he’d have Ryuu say the lines to see how accurate his imagination was. Every time Tanaka vowed to himself to never let Yamato go.

Rin was in charge of the snacks. He had the uncanny ability to find rare and thought to be extinct flavors and specialities from other countries. When asked how he got his hands on a pringles flavor only available in specific areas of the United States, Rin only replied with a mysterious ‘I have my sources.’ No one asked about his methods again.

In addition to hosting, Haru made dinner and breakfast for everyone. It’s not like the others couldn’t cook, it was just better when Haru did. He always made something everyone liked or could tailor to their particular tastes. Nagisa made his food sweeter, Rin wanted everything spicier, and Yamato was liberal with the salt. There were never any complaints when Haru cooked not just because the food was perfect, but because they all knew they’d get kicked out if they dared to complain.

These nights would usually progress in the same way. Haru would have dinner ready by the time everyone arrived and they watched a movie while they ate. When a second, unimportant movie was put on, it was time for drinks and discussions. This was their safe space, to unload their fears and anxieties to each other and be supported and validated. Anything was fair game. Nagisa’s worries about his and Rei’s long distance relationship, Yamato’s fears that he doesn’t compare with the other professional swimmers in the backstroke, Rin’s struggles with balancing his packed schedule, Haru’s frustration with his latest paintings, convinced he peaked during college and had nothing new to show. Nothing mentioned during these talks would ever leave the apartment, each of them taking the trust in one other to heart.

They’d stretch late into the night; no one could ever remember who fell asleep first. One moment they’d be talking and suddenly it’d be sometime the next morning, all of them falling asleep in the pile of blankets and pillows arranged on Haru’s floor.

Surprisingly, Rin didn’t toss and turn in his sleep these nights. Haru had a brief pang of bitterness as he thought maybe Rin only kicked him, but then he remembered Gou and Sousuke had the same complaints.

One night, unable to stop himself before the question tumbled out of his mouth, Haru asked, “Do you kick Kisumi in your sleep?”

Choking on his orange juice, Rin blushed before answering. “No, I don’t. Or if I do, he’s never told me.”

Haru hummed and smirked. “I guess I’ll have to ask him, then.”

“Maybe he likes it,” Yamato added. “One guy I was dating didn’t make any noise or movement in his sleep. Every time I stayed the night I thought he was dead. It makes me thankful for Ryuu’s snoring.”

“Rei-chan talks in his sleep. I’ve woken up to muttered math problems and bits and pieces of papers he was writing” Nagisa smiled, his eyes focusing on something far away.

To borrow Rin’s words, Nagisa was a ‘fucking champ’ in regards to his long distance relationship with Rei. Alarms were set to text Rei good morning and goodnight, with a few in between like reminding him to leave the lab and eat something. He sent care packages at least once a month of Rei’s favorite notebooks and pens and any other useful trinkets he could find. A handwritten letter
with photos was mailed at the end of every week. His work schedule was arranged to keep his Mondays free because it was Sunday in America and Rei could skype or call for hours. Nagisa did everything he could to ensure they felt as close as possible to make up for being so far away.

To Rei’s credit, he responded with gusto. At first, he was too embarrassed to trade sappy handwritten letters, or push their phone calls and skype dates past the PG-13 range. Soon enough, thanks to generous heapings of Nagisa’s encouragement and support, Rei reciprocated, more than Nagisa had really expected.

It wasn’t that Nagisa thought Rei wouldn’t care, but he knew how caught up Rei became with his work. Tunnel vision was always a problem, but usually Nagisa was physically there to pull him out of it. The first package Nagisa received from Rei, filled to the brim with Nagisa’s favorite American snacks and sundries, made him cry for a solid hour. He knew Rei loved him, he believed it, but in that moment he understood why ‘proof’ was so important to scientists.

Haru smiled and shoved a cookie in Nagisa’s mouth. Nagisa pulled back in surprised, but smiled around the chocolate chips when he looked up.

Haru loved these sleepovers.

It had been a little over four months working peripherally with the Organized Crime Control Section when Sousuke was called into the chief superintendent’s office. He was sure, so sure, their talk would be about officially adding him to the section, giving him his first assignment. It would probably be something in the same capacity as now, assisting the inspectors who were doing the real investigating, but Sousuke was still amped, willing and happy to do the grunt work. He would crawl his way up from the bottom, put in the time, grind harder than anyone else. Sousuke knew he lacked many things, but effort was not one of them.

He sat down across from Chief Superintendent Saito. The chair was not comfortable, but Sousuke knew it wasn’t supposed to be. Saito was a no nonsense man with harsh features. Stern, unforgiving, and ruthless, was how most of the inspectors described him, but he still had their respect because he was a damn good cop. Nothing was more important to him than serving his country and upholding the law. Everyone knew he had a good heart, it was just surrounded by his iron outside.

Saito looked at Sousuke over the top of his glasses. He wasn’t one of those chiefs who tried to intimidate their subordinates by acting like you weren’t worth their time. Sousuke had his full attention. “Yoshioka and Fukui have been thoroughly impressed with your work. They’ve been able to concentrate on the bigger picture because they’ve been able to rely on you for support. Your English skills especially have been indispensable during their investigation.”

Sousuke nodded at the praise, keeping his features neutral despite the pride swelling inside his chest. He knew he wouldn’t get called in just for a compliment, so he waited quietly for Saito to continue, enjoying the direction this was going for now.

Saito cleared his throat and spoke in a controlled tone and tempo. “I’m sure you know, the biggest thorn in the Syndicate’s side has been their inability to get more than one step ahead of the police.”

When Sousuke first learned the crime group they were attempting to bust was simply known as ‘The Syndicate,’ he wanted to roll his eyes. The group itself was composed entirely of expatriates, mostly
from Europe and North America. They had no idea if there were branches in other countries or where they originated. One day they more or less sprang up, much to the chagrin of the Tokyo police.

“They’ve been looking for someone with intimate knowledge of how we operate, how we’ve been able to keep up with them as well as we have. Someone to help their organization grow and compete better against the Yakuza.”

Sousuke sat straighter. He was the one who had picked up on the whispers and rumors. “They want a mole.”

“Yes. To our department’s credit, no one has taken any of their offers.”

That certainly was a relief. Even at the inspector level, police officers did not have the most handsome of paychecks, especially considering how much the job could wear on them. Sousuke knew of several people just in this precinct who had gambling debts or too many mouths to feed at home who could really use the money the Syndicate was promising.

Saito carefully watched Sousuke’s face. “You’re in a unique position, Yamazaki. Anyone who has seen you work since your promotion to sergeant can see you belong in this unit. You have more than earned your place and I can’t think of another person in the last five years who has shown the drive and initiative you have.”

Stiffening, Sousuke waited for the bomb to drop. He knew that Saito wasn’t just talking, he had a point - an order - he was leading to. Sousuke had an idea of what his chief was about to ask him, and it scared him.

“I want you to go undercover,” Saito said plainly, as if he was talking about a television program or the weather. “Give them enough of a lead they get overly confident and less careful. Become indispensable to them, get close to their leaders. You’ll let us know when the timing is right, and we can trap all of them and bring their entire organization down.”

The conversation with his father at Kanda sprang to his mind. Sousuke swore they wouldn’t throw him in the middle of an underground Yakuza ran fighting ring, a dangerous, but absurd assignment Sousuke was was sure would never be handed out. He should’ve knocked on wood, thrown salt over his shoulder, done something not to press his luck because this was much, much worse.

Sousuke swallowed, making sure his voice wouldn’t betray the clamp that was tightening around his heart. “I’ve had enough contact with them, they won’t believe I want to work for them.”

“They would if you were busted back to box cop because of a mistake that wasn’t even yours. Maybe something Masafumi - don't think I haven't noticed the animosity between you two - did, but he’ll blame it on you. Add to that a falling out with your best friend because he takes his talent for granted, and a messy breakup with your boyfriend. They’ll believe it.”

Wait, what?!

“What do you mean ‘messy breakup?’” There was no way to hide the panic exploding in him at the word *breakup*.

Saito’s eyes narrowed. He knew this was going to be the hardest part for Yamazaki to do. He was there when Yamazaki’s boyfriend had been brought in to report his mugging and saw the level of tenderness and devotion in the way Yamazaki handled him. “You can’t stay with him. He’s your biggest weakness. If they get even one inkling that you’re still loyal to the police, they’ll go after him.
What would you do if they break him?"

Sousuke’s father had warned him about the cost of his ambition, but he never expected this, even when he let himself dream about the future. He assumed there would be fights with Haru about working too much, bringing his cases home, missing too many of their children’s swim meets. Maybe a gunshot wound if he was really, really unlucky. The thought of losing Haru never crossed Sousuke’s mind because he would never willingly leave Haru and trusted Haru would fight for him as well.

Saito’s voice lowered, filled with understanding and tenderness at the sight of how glassy Sousuke’s eyes had become. “We need you to do this, Yamazaki. We have to stop them and you are, by far, the best suited officer for this assignment.”

It no longer mattered to him if he looked weak in front of his commanding officer. Shoulders slumped and head hidden in his hands, Sousuke let himself cry because he knew what he going home to do.

Chapter End Notes

:(')
somewhere far from your shade

Chapter Summary

"Doing the right thing isn't something special. It's the minimum. It's where we start each morning, not where we try to end up one day in the future."

Chapter Notes

This chapter is very sad, but not as sad as it was originally going to be because everyone's comments on the last chapter really concerned me!

TW: the BRIEFEST mention of human trafficking. Literally just saying the phrase "human trafficking." If you want to skip it, it's the part with Tanaka doing research.

If you want to save yourself some tears, skip to the last line break for set up for chapter 30.

When Sousuke walked into his apartment and smelled his favorite foods, his resolve instantly crumbled. He spent the last three hours talking himself into doing exactly what Chief Superintendent Saito wanted, cutting ties to everything that mattered to him and joining in with the Syndicate. There was no one else who could do it, he reasoned, every other candidate was weaker in some respect. Some had families they couldn’t leave, some weren’t as skilled in combat, some had nothing to lose, but less motivation to not become an actual member of the Syndicate and ruin the operation.

Reason ruled Sousuke ever since he started the academy, but how could reason stand up against the sight of the man he loved smiling at him. How could reason compete with the soft ‘welcome home’ and the following kiss softly pressed against his lips. It couldn’t, but it had to.

Sousuke forced a smile on his face, but Haru could tell it didn’t meet his eyes. He was instantly concerned, but knew Sousuke would tell him when he was ready. Maybe after Haru got some food in him.

Their dinner was quiet; for once it was Haru doing most of the talking, filling Sousuke in on how everyone was doing. Sousuke knew most of it, of course, because he made his own effort to be a part of his friends’ lives, but he reveled in Haru’s tender voice. They washed up together, like they always do, arms brushing and hips not-so-accidentally bumping into each other. Every smile Sousuke gave Haru was tainted with sadness, causing Haru’s insides to twist with worry. This was not going to be the relaxing night Haru had planned.

When they finished with chores, Sousuke pulled Haru into his lap, pressing as much of their bodies together as possible. It would be a long time before Sousuke would feel this warmth again ( if he ever did, the voice in the back of his mind taunted), and he needed to savor it now. He tried to memorize the heat and weight of Haru’s body against his, the scent of chlorine and citrus Sousuke had come to love. He’d have to remember it, use it to remind himself of who he was when he was far away from
Firmly cupping Haru’s face, Sousuke desperately kissed him. He was going against orders, but this was the only way he’d be able to do what he needed. When he finally broke the kiss, he looked into Haru’s eyes.

“Do you remember what my old man told me when we went to Kanda…?”

The next day, Sousuke woke late, but Haru was still safely asleep and curled in his arms. He watched Haru for as long as he could stand it, eventually the sorrow of what they were about to do forced him out of bed. After dressing, he picked up Haru’s phone, sending a text to Makoto, asking him to come and get him from Sousuke’s place. Makoto’s response was instantaneous and panicked, but Sousuke didn’t reply, knowing it would work out for the better.

They only had about fifteen minutes before Makoto would be here, pounding on Sousuke’s door, so he roused Haru with a gentle kiss. Haru’s eyes glistened with tears almost as soon as they opened. Endless declarations of love and promises passed silently between them, but nothing could really comfort either of them.

After packing up the things Haru wanted to take with him, they settled back on the couch. Neither of them could stomach any food; they just wanted to be as close as possible for as long as possible.

They heard the squeaky breaks of Makoto’s used car park out front and shared a kiss with whispered “I love you’s” before they stood, getting in position.

Haru didn’t need to fake his tears as he yelled, “You have to pick, Sousuke!”

Sousuke shouted back, “You knew it’d be like this, Haruka! You said you were fine with it; you’ve never said anything was wrong!”

Makoto ran up the steps two at a time and rushed toward Sousuke’s door. He hesitated, hearing raised voices through the wood.

“I’m saying it now. I’m not asking you to stop being a cop-”

“No, you’re telling me I have to choose between you and what I want to do with my life.”

Haru forced himself to groan in frustration, “There are other units, Sousuke. With better hours that aren’t so damn dangerous!”

“But I’m good at this. I’m making a difference! We’re so close to catching-” Sousuke was glad Haru cut him off, his voice was starting to crack.

“I don’t wanna hear it! It’s all you talk about, all you think about! It’s like I don’t even exist. You haven’t even touched me in weeks!”

“Haru, I-”

“I need to be more important to you than your job.” Haru knew it wasn’t true, but the way Sousuke’s expression fell even more at his words made Haru want to call the whole thing off. But he couldn’t, he agreed to this. “You have to choose.”

The following silence gave Makoto his chance to knock. Haru stole one more rushed kiss before he
stomped toward the door. He turned back to Sousuke and spat, “Sounds like you already made your
decision.”

When the door opened, Sousuke did his best to glare at Makoto and hoped he wouldn’t realize there
was no heat in it. “What the fuck is he doing here, Haru?”

“I asked him to come and get me,” Haru had to swallow a few times before he could continue. “At
least I can rely on Makoto being here when I need him to be.”

“Is that what this is about?” Sousuke felt like throwing up, forcing the lie out of his mouth. “You
don’t give a shit about my job, you just wanted an excuse to go back to Tachibana!”

In a flash, Makoto had pushed himself inside and across the foyer. Sousuke didn’t register what had
happened until he was already reeling, stumbling back against the bookshelf behind him.

Makoto had punched him. It was a good one too, Sousuke felt the blood from a cut high on his
cheek and knew he’d have a black eye in only a few hours. Makoto’s usually gentle eyes were hard
and narrowed, looking at Sousuke like he was trash. “Haru would never… he’d never do something
like that!”

The horror in Haru’s eyes was real as he wrapped his hands around Makoto’s bicep and tugged.
“Makoto…. Come on. Come on, we’re done. I don’t want to even look at him anymore.”

Makoto nodded, finally taking his gaze off Sousuke and grabbed the bags Haru pointed to on their
way out the door. Haru didn’t look back, he couldn’t.

Once the door shut and the sound of a car could be heard driving off, Sousuke slid down onto the
floor and screamed.

-

Makoto had spent the night on a futon in Haru’s living room. Filling in the silence, he had been
fuming the entire time he had been there. Haru hadn’t said much more than ‘thank you,’ not
revealing anything more than what Makoto had overheard. Haru hoped the scowl forced onto his
face and his unwillingness to talk gave more of a pissed off appearance than heartbroken.

*Our breakup is mutual*, Haru reminded himself the entire way back to his apartment, *I don’t want to
see Sousuke anymore*. The lie, even though it was spoken only in his head, tasted sour and made him
gag. He’d have to get used to it, he thought as he stared out the window. He’d have to get used to
Sousuke missing from his place beside him.

The next morning, after only a couple hours of sleep and a long bath, Haru reset the studio in his
second bedroom. He put away the unfinished pieces, threw out the bottles and tubes he was scraping
the last paint from. New tarps and canvases were set up and Haru washed the windows to let as
much natural light shine in as possible.

In the hours he spent laying in bed trying to sleep, unable to close his eyes without seeing Sousuke’s
pained face, Haru had finally decided what his new pieces would be for the gallery showing at the
end of the year. Well, he didn’t know exactly what each one would be, but he had a theme and
motivation, and that was enough for him to start.

With his rearranged space and a quick look at the photo of him and Sousuke he still kept in his
wallet, Haru began to paint.

Exiting the shower, Makoto looked in to check on Haru, confused yet relieved that he was up and
Haru seemed to be doing better than after their own breakup, but Makoto had the feeling the shock hadn’t set in yet. He had felt the same thing when he came back to an apartment cleared of Haru’s belongings, a memory from so long ago. The feeling of empowerment and freedom was sweet, but short lived, and Makoto soon had to force himself to do anything over than sit and wallow in his sadness. He hoped Haru wouldn’t come to that, but Makoto would be here if it did. He’d do it right this time, support Haru when he needed him.

Sousuke had gotten even less sleep. He spent all night pacing his apartment, anxious and angry energy flooding his body. After his initial outburst, Sousuke didn’t allow himself to feel the sadness he wanted to, couldn’t let himself sit and sob until he convinced himself to call the whole thing off and run over to Haru’s place.

When his alarm chimed, Sousuke went through the motions of getting ready for work. He showered and shaved, put on his crisp uniform. His eye had bruised spectacularly overnight, overshadowing the dark bags from lack of sleep. He started to comb his fingers through his hair to get rid of any loose tangles, but the action reminded him too much of Haru. Gripping the sink as he tried to compose himself, he was glad he was fake quitting that morning and didn’t have to pretend like everything was okay for very long.

Sousuke forced himself to down a protein shake on the train ride to work. He needed something in his system, but he doubted he could stomach any food. Pausing outside of the police station, Sousuke wondered for the millionth time if he was doing the right thing, but it didn’t matter now. What was done was done and he had to continue moving forward.

Before he could even reach his desk, Sousuke was called into Saito’s office. Shutting the door behind him, he took a seat and filled Saito in a mostly truthful version of the break up. Saito nodded in approval and gave Sousuke final instructions on how to contact him when he needed assistance or when he was ready for the police to move. No one else in the precinct knew about this assignment, Saito was his only contact and he would inform others only when absolutely necessary. Sousuke was virtually on his own, trusted to make the best decisions. It was a lot, but Sousuke was confident he could do this. He had to succeed, otherwise, what was the damn point of putting himself and Haru through this shit?

When they were done with the details, Sousuke had to put on another performance. He threw the door open, shouting about how it was bullshit, how he clearly would never make a mistake like that. Saito played his part, telling Sousuke if this is how he behaves, he didn’t deserve his promotion and promptly demoted him back to box cop. In response, Sousuke quit; he could never respect a man who wouldn’t even listen to his subordinates, and punish them for mistakes that weren’t theirs.

He stormed from the office. Punching Masafumi on his way out helped a little bit, both with his cover and his rage, but it wasn’t enough. Only bringing down these bastards and being allowed to run back to Haru would make it okay.

When he got back to his apartment, he tore off his uniform and pulled on whatever he grabbed out of his drawers. Sousuke looked like a fucking wreck, bloodshot eyes, bruised face, anger laced in every feature. Perfect. He grabbed a leather jacket and headed far across town, to a bar he knew the Syndicate would be.
Haru knew how everyone was looking at him, like he was a time bomb, ready to crumble into a mess of sobs at any moment when he finally realized his loss. It had already been a couple months since the breakup, but they still eyed him sympathetically and warily when they thought Haru wasn’t looking.

He wouldn’t break down, not like he had in the past. They didn’t have to worry like before. Haru wasn’t overworking himself or eating so little to make himself pass out at the end of the day. He was surviving, getting his work done and not locking himself away.

Still, Haru was only half there sometimes, his expressions and emotions dulled down like never before, even the painful ones were hidden by a plain face. They didn’t know how he was really feeling and he couldn’t tell them. For now, he had to keep his thoughts to himself.

There was one person he could feel more relaxed with; Tanaka had become an unlikely companion through this ordeal. Haru always liked Ryuu; he made Yamato outstandingly happy and was always there for Sousuke, but that was the problem. He had always been Sousuke’s friend before Haru’s.

After Sousuke forcibly removed himself from all of their lives, Tanaka was the only one who didn’t blame him and kept his faith in his friend. He was shocked when he learned Sousuke had quit in a rage, but Tanaka was never mad, even when he learned about his and Haru’s split. No one on the force knew Sousuke better than Tanaka did. Over the years they spent working together, he found there were two undeniable truths about Sousuke: he always wanted to do the right thing, and he would never willingly hurt Haru. Others might not think highly of Tanaka’s intelligence based on his wild looks, but it took him no time at all to realize what Sousuke had done.

After his shift, Tanaka researched what Sousuke had been working on before he quit. Where Sousuke had hoped to join the Organized Crime Control Section, Tanaka moved into the Criminal investigation Section. He had heard whispers of the Syndicate while working his own cases, and looking over the files, he understood why Sousuke couldn’t turn his back on these orders.

The Syndicate was brutal. Unlike the Yakuza who operated on Japanese principles, the group of expatriates did whatever they pleased. Sadistic, cruel, and ruthless, all of it for fun. They were less businessmen than they were profitable murderers and torturers. Their most successful enterprise was human trafficking, and most of their victims could still be considered children.

Tanaka couldn’t help but remember one night he and Sousuke had almost finished the bottle of Yamazaki sherry cask whiskey Yasuhiro had sent Sousuke. Yasuhiro included a note in it, “I didn’t know our family was in the whiskey business! Must be the secret project your mother was talking about.” Sousuke groaned at the bad joke, but opened the bottle without prompting. In their stupor, Sousuke had spilled out what shouldn’t have been his deepest secret - he wanted a family. Although it was far off in the future, he had thought through his options, deciding on adoption, hoping to make a little family with older children who were less likely to be adopted.

Tanaka knew the thought of those precious kids, the ones Sousuke wanted to love, in the hands of the Syndicate, was enough for him to sacrifice everything he had. It broke Tanaka’s heart, and Yamato found him wrapped in a blanket crying while watching Disney movies when he came over for dinner.

Any contact with Sousuke would put his assignment in danger, so Tanaka supported him in whatever way he could from afar. Mostly it meant being Haru’s temporary anchor, someone who would smile at the thought of Sousuke with him. He was happy to do it, knowing Sousuke would need Haru more than ever if he made it out of this assignment alive.
Sousuke never considered himself a skilled actor. There were several times growing up he had tried to lie, try to hide things from his parents or others around him. They were mostly innocuous things all children do. He had no idea who ate the entire gift basket of cookies that arrived for his mother; he didn’t sneak out to go stargazing in the middle of the night during a meteor shower when he had the flu; he definitely finished that history essay, but it got mixed up with his father’s papers and it was accidentally taken it to work with him. He was honestly amazed Rin hadn’t caught onto his lie about his shoulder sooner than he had.

It had taken time to get used to, but after a few months, Sousuke felt it had become easier for him to play his role in the Syndicate. He didn’t know if this was a good or a bad thing. It wasn’t because he had actually been corrupted, but because his anger and bitterness grew with every passing day. It was clawing at his chest, gouging holes in his heart, tearing away the softness in his soul. However, it kept his secret safe, allowed him to continue working against them from the inside. The traps and pitfalls he was carefully planting would be useful soon. They had to be.

Still, Sousuke let himself have a few comforts of his life from before, mostly in regards to Haru. He switched his laundry detergent to the brand Haru used, and grilled mackerel for breakfast most mornings. When he was alone at home, he even wore the stupid pink panda shirt Haru liked so much. It wasn’t like he didn’t desperately miss Rin, Tanaka, and Daichi, the closest friends he had, but Haru was different. Sousuke knew it sounded ridiculous, like something Rin would say, but Haru had become essential to Sousuke’s life and his happiness.

The space left by Haru’s absence was filled with all of their happy memories, but everyday it dimmed a little. With every lie he had to tell, every horrendous action he had to turn a blind eye to, Sousuke felt himself letting go of those happy thoughts. In his worst nights, he wondered if he deserved the shreds of happiness he kept for himself, if he was even worthy of Haru coming back to him. There was an answer in his heart that scared him, and he lamented the fact he couldn’t actually get drunk enough to push it away, lest he accidentally reveal too much of the truth.

One of the few positives was that the particular group he worked with in the Syndicate operated far away from his apartment, far away from where he had made a life. He didn’t want to be around folks who knew him, who would ask why he didn’t come around with Haru anymore. All of his little free time was spent at the gym or locked away at home. He spent every night with other members, putting on an act with drink, handsome men, and beautiful women. Many of them favored Sousuke, his good looks made it easy, and he had to make a show of leaving with one or two of them some nights while his “friends” whistled and hollered after him. Thankfully, the other Syndicate members assumed Sousuke chose the most intoxicated ones because they were the most pliant. In reality, it was because they never remembered the fact that as soon as they were far enough away, Sousuke put them in a taxi and sent them home. There were still some rules he wouldn’t allow himself to break.

Sometimes Sousuke wouldn’t be up for playing this game. He’d sit there with his whiskey, silent and brooding. Everyone around had come to know better than to bother him when he was in one of these moods. No one thought any less of him, no one was suspicious when Sousuke would make up something about a deal going south or the cops getting too close. He couldn’t tell them it was because he had missed Haru’s birthday or couldn’t be there to help Rin move to a new apartment.

It was one of those moody nights when a familiar bark of laughter rang in his ears. He looked over, spotting a profile he’d seen a thousand times sitting at the bar with a few others, enjoying their drinks with tired but pleased looks on their faces. Sousuke cursed his luck; Daichi must’ve had a game near
here and now he was out celebrating with his teammates.

Sousuke considered his options, weighing if it was safer for him to stay where he was or literally sneak out behind Daichi’s back. They were tucked away in a corner, but it was on the way to the men’s restroom. There’s no way Daichi wouldn’t throw a glance in his group’s direction, their boisterous ruckus caught everyone’s attention. It was only the regulars who know better than to look over, knew to leave the Syndicate alone.

Deciding it would be best to try to leave unnoticed, Sousuke drained his glass and nodded to his companions, offering an excuse about meeting up with someone from last night’s bar. They whistled and clapped him on the back, wishing him a fun night and returned to their own drinks and exaggerated stories. Sousuke pulled on his jacket, hoping he looked different enough that even if Daichi saw him, Sousuke would get the benefit of the doubt of being a lookalike. His hair was longer now, his slick clothing completely different from his old comfortable style. His once perfect posture was now slumped, tired shoulders. Sousuke had put on weight, too. He was as just as strong and muscular as before, but there was more mass to him, particularly a soft stomach growing from all of the booze he had to consume.

*It will be fine, I won't get caught.* Sousuke repeated it to himself as he strode toward the exit steps.

“Yamazaki!”

So much for his plan of getting out without a confrontation.

Sousuke had never heard his name said with such virulence, such disgust. Even when people have tried to break his arm or spat in his face for arresting them, he’s never heard as pure of an anger as he does right now. He knows he deserves it, knows it’s supposed to be this way, but it breaks his heart still.

Pushing the hurt down and schooling his features to be aloof, Sousuke turned around and faced him. Daichi was standing now, his hand clutching his glass so hard Sousuke knows it’ll break soon. As Sousuke watches him shake with anger, he understands what Suga and Tanaka meant when they said the last thing you wanted to do was get on Daichi’s bad side. When Daichi’s truly mad, he’s *scary.*

Sousuke took a breath to compose himself, not allowing any weaknesses to show. “Sawamura.”

Even in the dim and forgiving lighting, Sousuke could see Daichi’s eyes burning, his teeth grinding in his clenched jaw, the vein throbbing on his forehead. Daichi had let go of his drink and now both of his hands were balled into fists so tight, even his short nails would leave marks in his palms.

“You goddamn… you fucking…” Between labored breaths, Daichi couldn’t even find vile enough names for what Sousuke was to him now. Daichi listened to Haru’s explanation about their breakup, how it was Haru who ended it, but he hadn’t believed it for a second. There was no way Haru didn’t want to be with Sousuke.

Daichi thought he knew Sousuke. Daichi thought they were friends, good friends. Haru wasn’t the only one feeling betrayed.

Words had never failed Daichi before, but for once he had nothing to say. He bridged the gap between them and punched Sousuke in the face as hard as he could, almost falling from the follow through. It made a satisfying sound, and Daichi knew he had, at the very least, split Sousuke’s lip. This was only the second time in his life Daichi had ever hit someone. The first time was a creep at a bar who was getting too handsy with Suga and wouldn’t take no for an answer. He had felt a little
guilty for acting like a brute himself, but it solved the problem. One punch didn’t solve the problem of Haru’s broken heart, but it felt damn good.

What Daichi didn’t consider, and should have expected, was Sousuke retaliating. Sousuke barely stumbled back from the punch. He immediately reached forward and grabbed Daichi’s shoulder, bending him over and delivering a swift punch of his own to Daichi’s stomach. Daichi gasped, letting out a grunt and falling to his knees.

Sousuke pulled back and took stock of the other bar patrons. Daichi’s companions were frozen in shock, but only half of the people around them had paid any attention at all. The bartender was the most concerned and came forward, asking Sousuke if he needed these guys thrown out. Of course he would favor the criminals in here over upstanding men like Daichi.

“It’s fine.” Sousuke waved off the bartender as he pulled out a handkerchief and spat blood into it. The Syndicate members he was with had watched, but didn’t bat an eyelash. Run-ins like this were commonplace when it came to thugs and criminals like them. They would probably assume Sousuke messed around with Daichi’s significant other or scammed him out of some amount of cash. This was the first time Sousuke had been punched in a bar and he knew it would only make him more accepted, convince them even more that he was like them.

Daichi looked at Sousuke from where his friends were fussing over him and making sure he was okay. His rage had subsided, uncertainty taking its place. Sousuke could’ve broken his nose, could’ve punched out more teeth than the one he lost in high school. Instead he went for a punch to the gut, avoiding the kidneys and liver, or any other major internal organ.

Before he left, it had become a habit for them to go to the gym together, and Sousuke introduced Daichi to boxing. He’d seen Sousuke abuse a heavy bag, felt the impact and wondered if he’d get bruises just from keeping the target steady. The fact he could actually breathe, that the punch wouldn’t do much more than leave a purple spot, was what confused Daichi. At the last moment, Sousuke had pulled back, held back his strength. Why would he do that after all this?

Daichi managed to catch Sousuke’s concerned gaze before he looked away, shame and sorrow washing over his face as he headed upstairs and out of the bar. Daichi suddenly regretted the pain in his fist.

Sousuke’s birthday had come and gone. Haru had tried not to get his hopes up, but the thought of spending Sousuke’s birthday together was too comforting of a fantasy to be denied. In the end, he bookmarked the cake recipes he found and stored Sousuke’s gift in a safe place. Maybe he could pull it out and wrap it for Christmas when it came in a month. Maybe that would be enough time.

Haru looked out at his guests from the pass through in the kitchen. They gathered for a small celebration in honor of Haru finishing his new pieces for his gallery exhibit. He even had two weeks to spare, which Haru assured them was a miracle when it came to artists and deadlines. No one had seen them yet, they still weren’t allowed to be viewed until opening night. They all complained, begging for even a hint of what Haru painted, but he would not relent.

In a squishy armchair his parents sent him from America, Kisumi was sitting in Rin’s lap, playing pokemon on his Nintendo 3DS. Rin kept offering suggestions during battles Kisumi was obviously not taking. Haru wasn’t sure if it was because it was bad advice or if he just liked seeing Rin get riled
Nagisa and Makoto had been sent out to grab desserts. It may have been a mistake sending the two with the biggest sweet tooths, they would no doubt end up with much more than they needed, but they knew the best bakeries and confectioners around Haru’s apartment.

Tanaka would be joining them in a couple hours when he got off his shift, but in the meantime, Yamato and Daichi were on his new couch, locked in what looked to be some serious conversation. Suga passed by Haru to grab a couple of the dishes Haru finished cooking and whispered in his ear, “They’re discussing the finer points of the anime Ore Monogatari.”

Haru struggled to keep his laughter in. He had watched the show with Rin and could understand why it appealed to them. He asked Suga, “Is Daichi thinking about working at a bara cafe after he retires from volleyball?”

Suga didn’t bother holding back his howl of laughter. “If he does, I’ll come by every day to get my coffee there.” He grabbed the dishes and set them out on top of the kotatsu before turning on the TV. There was supposed to be a movie on, but it was preempted by a breaking news story.

“...The Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department emerged victorious today as they apprehended the leaders of the foreign organized crime operation known only as the Syndicate. Sources say this take-down has been in the work for several months, and was made possible largely due to an undercover operative. We were unable to reach anyone for comment, but the police have stated they happy to see this case come to a decisive end. The Syndicate-”

The announcer was drowned out by the sound of ceramic breaking, the stack of plates Haru was holding shattered on the floor. Everyone whipped their heads in his direction to check if he was alright. Haru was frozen in his spot, completely unmoving except for the shaking of his hands.

Suddenly Haru’s body hitched, as if his heart had been jump started. He rushed to the foyer, only pausing to slide on shoes before he threw the door open and ran.

Chapter End Notes

I love you, thanks for sticking with me through this <3
would you please come back home

Chapter Summary

seeing your face, sharing a story

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Haru had made it to the stairwell before anyone else could snap out of their surprise. Out of everyone, it was Daichi and Kisumi who reacted first. Kisumi nudged Rin in the chest before moving off of his lap and nodding toward the door.

Daichi was already there, forcing his shoes on. He had been waiting for this, waiting for some sort of a sign. The confrontation with Sousuke at the bar had set his mind spinning. He couldn’t figure out what was going on exactly, but he realized there had to be more to Sousuke and Haru’s breakup. There was an answer out there somewhere to explain why Haru had walked away and didn’t look back, why Tanaka and Haru had started spending time together by themselves, why Sousuke had looked so pained about punching him. Daichi knew if he followed Haru, he’d get the answer that had been eluding him.

Daichi and Rin ran out the building and were lucky enough to catch a glimpse of Haru as he sprinted toward the train station. As fit as they were, Haru was still quicker and had enough of a head start to make sure they couldn’t stop him. Knowing it was useless, they focused on maintaining the distance between them, keeping an eye on his trail.

As they rushed through town, passing familiar shops and buildings, Rin realized where they were headed. He smacked Daichi’s arm to get his attention. “Oi, you know where we are?”

Daichi shook his head, needing all of his oxygen to keep him going. A creature of habit, Daichi really only knew the area around his home and from the train station to his regular destinations.

“So’s police station is this way.,” Rin huffed between breaths. “That news report...”

They let it hang between them. There was no way for them to figure it out now, not with worry about Haru taking up most of their minds, but they knew this was something important.

Rin felt reinvigorated at the prospect of seeing Sousuke. When he had found out about the breakup, he immediately went to Sousuke’s apartment and banged on the door, demanding to know what was going on. He was there everyday, sometimes multiple times, but even after a month of knocking, there was no sign of Sousuke. He eventually gave up, mostly at Haru’s request, feeling defeated and angry.

Sousuke had been there, though. He had heard Rin’s furious shouts and desperate pleas through the door. If it had been anyone else, Sousuke would’ve been able to handle it, been able to bluff his way out. But not with Rin. Sousuke wasn’t sure which would be worse - seeing Rin pissed off or seeing him cry in sympathy. He had to deal with both when the truth about his shoulder came out, and he promised himself he wouldn’t be the cause of those faces on Rin ever again. It was better for Rin to stay away, but it would only happen if he thought Sousuke was lost to him.
Now with the possibility of seeing Sousuke, of getting answers to all his questions, Rin had no problem keeping pace.

For the first time, Haru was sincerely grateful for all of the on land conditioning he had been forced to do over the last few years. Although the fastest way to Sousuke’s police station was by train, Haru knew he couldn’t stand still even for that. The ten minute ride would allow his mind fill with worry and doubt. Why didn’t they mention any names of the officers on TV? What if Sousuke still wasn’t done on his assignment? Would he even want to see him?

It was better this way, better to be in control of his movements. There was no room to focus on anything besides going the right direction, not crashing into anyone, and running as fast as he could. No fear, no second guessing himself, just the singular thought of getting to Sousuke.

Haru pushed past the handful of reporters that were still waiting outside for some comment from the police about the bust. He didn’t hear the officers who shouted for his attention, telling him to slow down and watch himself. He rushed through the lobby and up the stairs to where he knew the inspectors gathered and desperately looked around for a familiar face.

Sousuke was sitting beside a desk, his knee bouncing restlessly as he answered questions and filled an inspector in on finer details of the operation. Struggling to catch his breath, Haru took in all the ways Sousuke’s appearance had changed. His hair was longer, tied back in a small ponytail just like Rin used to. Haru had never seen more than twenty four hour’s worth of stubble on Sousuke’s face, but now it looked like it had been a few days since his last shave. Sousuke had gotten bigger, no doubt working out as a stress relief, but having no need to be as mobile or trim as he kept himself before, he was heavier too. There was a soft stomach Haru would love in any other situation, especially if it was from the combination of eating too much of Haru’s cooking while spending more time cuddling and less time at the gym.

Sousuke was beat up, of course. That was the one thing Haru had expected. The bruises and cuts typical of what Haru had seen in the action movies Sousuke made him watch. What worried Haru the most was seeing Sousuke’s right arm was in a sling. That was his bad shoulder, and he hoped there wouldn’t be permanent damage after how hard Sousuke worked to have it fully functioning again. Still, Sousuke looked more annoyed than in pain. That was enough of a good sign for Haru.

By the time Rin and Daichi finally caught up to him, Haru couldn’t just watch anymore. A desperate cry of Sousuke’s name left his lips.

Sousuke’s body went rigid and he immediately found Haru through the crowd of officers. He stood, ignoring the questions from the inspector, stumbling toward Haru with pain and determination etched on his face. Haru hadn’t even realized he was moving until he was already in Sousuke’s arms, a tight lipped kiss between them. It was short lived, the need to be close and bury their faces in each other’s necks more important than anything else.

Haru could feel Sousuke’s chest heaving, hear the strangled breaths he’s taking. He knew the way they both gripped and clung to each other would leave bruises by the morning. Sousuke smelled like booze, cigarettes, and blood, strong enough to turn anyone’s stomach. Surely by now, everyone was staring at them. But it didn’t matter; none of it did.

All that mattered now was that he was here and with him.

It was impossible to tell how long they stood like that, keeping each other upright because their individual strength had left them. It might have been minutes or seconds, but how could anyone tell when they felt like they had been waiting for an eternity to touch each other again.
Eventually, inspector Yoshioka laid a hand on Sousuke’s uninjured shoulder. “Yamazaki, Saito wants to see you.”

Sousuke reluctantly ended their embrace, but held fast to Haru’s hand as he walked to the chief superintendent’s office. Feeling like this was supposed to be a private talk, Haru shot a concerned look at Sousuke who only squeezed his hand tighter. If he walked into that office alone, Sousuke was afraid he’d come out only to find Haru missing. He wasn’t going to let go, not when he finally had Haru again.

To their surprise, Haru was not asked to leave when they entered the private office, nor did Saito even question Haru’s presence. Sousuke realized Saito must have figured out Haru knew more than he should; how else could he have arrived when he did, exactly when Sousuke was free from his burden?

When they were offered a seat, Sousuke declined. He felt like he had to stand in order to defend himself and his decisions. Saito sighed and started with the easiest topic. “About that display in the bullpen…”

Sousuke couldn’t officially be reprimanded for being in a relationship with a man, but there were still many people on the force who had old fashioned values. As long as Sousuke wasn’t rubbing his sexuality in their faces, they could easily pretend that ‘Haruka’ was a woman or he was too busy with the job to meet a nice girl and settle down.

“If someone has a problem with it, they can take it up with me. I think it’s been made obvious it does not affect my work.”

Saito waved it off. “I agree, and anyone who brings complaints to me will be told as much. Just don’t let it happen again.”

Sousuke nodded. Of course it wouldn’t happen again; he’d quit before taking another undercover assignment that forced him away from Haru. They wouldn’t need a flashy public display of affection if he got to see Haru everyday like he normally did. Thankfully, he was fairly certain it wouldn’t come to that because his face was now known. Nobody would ever believe him turning to a life of crime for a second time.

A smirk tugged at Saito’s lips. “Yamazaki, don’t you find it curious Nanase-san appeared right as the news broke the story about the dissolution of the Syndicate?”

Haru sharply inhaled a breath. He hadn’t thought about how obvious it would be, his only concern was seeing Sousuke as soon as possible.

Sousuke stood his ground, his expression still neutral. “It was the best move for the assignment, sir. It the only way Haru would not be a target for the Syndicate. Because he understood the true nature of the situation, he was able to keep other concerned parties from trying to seek me out and lead to my cover being compromised.”

Saito studied them for an uncomfortable minute before sitting back in his chair. “I agree with your assessment. Nanase-san seems like a man who would put up a fight, even if you did your best to estrange yourself from him.”

“Y-yes, sir, that was my conclusion as well.”

“However, it would have been better if you had informed me when you went against a direct order,” Saito finally let the smirk grace his face. “I would have made it a point to have someone check on
Nanase-san more frequently, but I believe officer Tanaka was keeping a close watch without any prompting."

Sousuke’s heart warmed at the mention of Tanaka. Sousuke hoped he wasn’t too mad at him, he had always been the type to forgive and forget. He would need Tanaka’s unrelenting spirit to get him back on track.

“Nanase-san, I’d like to talk with you privately.”

The request took them by surprise. Sousuke was about to argue, but Haru squeezed his hand and let go of it to show it was alright. The loss of warmth and comfort put a frown on Sousuke’s face, but he nodded and left the office.

Haru knew Sousuke was just outside the door, straining his hearing to keep check on what transpired inside. No doubt Sousuke would charge in at the first sign of Haru being mistreated. The familiar thought of Sousuke’s protectiveness put a small smile on Haru’s face.

Saito watched Haru’s expression soften, there was no doubting what they meant to each other. He cleared his throat to bring Haru’s attention back to him. “What Yamazaki has done is no small thing. Assignments like this can break the best police officers. I was once in Yamazaki’s shoes; I was given the opportunity to go undercover when I was fairly young. At the time, my career was the only thing that mattered to me, so obviously I dove in without hesitation. I spent over a year trying to dismantle a fairly large drug operation. In the end I was successful, but the price for that… Well, I’ve spent most of my life since then wondering if it was worth it.”

Saito’s voice had started to drift. He was getting lost in memories from what seemed like a lifetime ago. “When I returned to normal duty, I was even more obsessed than I was before. I was trying to erase my misdeeds by solving every case, fixing every problem that came across my desk. But no matter what I did, no matter how many criminals I put away, it was never enough. The nightmares wouldn’t stop and I kept falling deeper into despair. After a couple years of suffering, I had decided to end my life.”

A hard rock of worry settled itself in Haru’s stomach. “You look like you’re doing well enough now, sir.”

Saito gave a small smile. “Do you know what saved me?”

Haru shook his head.

“One night I was on a bridge, trying to talk myself into falling off of it. I thought I had finally built up the nerve when I felt someone grab me around the waist. A woman started begging me not to do it, promising me that things would be alright. I didn’t believe it, of course, how many times had I told myself things could go back to normal only to have it all fall away from me? But there was something about this woman’s voice that stopped me, brought me back over the edge.

It took a moment for us to recognize each other, she worked in one of the clubs ‘my’ gang frequented. When I had last seen her, she was a mess, had absolutely nothing to live for. Now she was lively, well fed and well dressed with a spark in her eyes. I must have looked horrible to her as I was living on coffee, instant noodles, and beer.

“She brought me back to her small apartment, not taking no for an answer, and made me tea. She told me about what she had been doing since her bosses were all thrown in prison; she had just graduated from a local women’s college and was one month into her new job at a daycare. It was what she always wanted, ever since she found out as a teen she wasn’t able to have children as her
“She was so bright, thriving, and happy. And I thought… I thought if she could turn her life around from when she had absolutely nothing, what the hell was I doing wasting mine when I had everything? That night was the first time I had cried since I was a boy. She held me and promised she would help me, promised things would be okay. She was the first person I believed.” Saito’s eyes came back into focus and he gestured at a framed photograph on his desk. “We’ve been married for thirteen years now. It would’ve been longer, but she said no the first two times I asked.”

“I’m telling you this because Yamazaki is going to need you more than he realizes. When I read his file, I could see myself in him, even more so when I met him in person. I assume you know him best, so tell me if this sounds like him. He’s stubborn, but it makes him an unbreakable pillar of support. He looks harsh, but he’s one of the most caring people you know. He always knows when something is off with his friends and he knows what he needs to do in those cases whether it’s helping to resolve the issue or simply listen and be present.”

Haru nodded along the entire time, wondering where this was going.

Saito’s eyes narrowed, trying to impress the seriousness of the situation onto Haru. “Yamazaki is going to pretend that he’s okay, but he won’t be. He’s done things that will haunt him for a long time, some for forever, and he will doubt his worth and his strength. He will blame himself for every person he couldn’t save, for every time he had to turn away. He won’t easily forgive himself for hurting you, for lying to your friends. He’ll think he deserves whatever pain he’s feeling, whatever punishment he can think of.”

Haru’s chin and hands trembled as he listened to Saito speak. He needed to go to Sousuke now, needed to touch him and hold him.

“He has a long, promising career, and a happy life in front of him, but only if he can avoid self destructing.” Saito’s eyes never left Haru’s. “He’s going to need someone to pull him back from the edge. To remind him that he is a good man and he’s allowed to forgive himself and move on.”

They sat in silence after that. Running through Haru’s mind were all the times Sousuke has cared for him, helped him piece together his heart when he thought it would be shattered forever. Even at the tentative start of their friendship, Sousuke was an anchor Haru could rely on, a solid space where he could rest and figure things out. Sousuke had been so willing to open his home and his heart to Haru, do anything he could to help him. Haru worked hard on his own to heal, but there was no doubt in his mind it would have been a much, much more difficult road without Sousuke at his side.

Now it was Haru’s turn to help Sousuke bandage his wounds and fix up the tears in himself. There weren’t strong enough words to describe Haru’s devotion and how determined he was to take care of Sousuke, so he settled for a strong nod and a fire in his eyes.

At Haru’s show of commitment, Saito smiled - a reassuring and handsome grin Haru is sure very few people have seen. Haru wondered if he could meet his wife someday, she might have some good strategies for dealing with stubborn men like Saito and Sousuke.

“I’ll leave him in your care, Nanase-san. Don’t let him come back too soon.” Saito motioned toward the door, giving Haru permission to go find Sousuke.

When Haru exited Saito’s office, he panicked when he didn’t see Sousuke waiting for him by the door. Raised voices brought his attention and he looked over to see Rin and Daichi talking with another man - Fukui, maybe? - who was obviously embarrassing Sousuke. Haru moved closer, but didn’t try to get their attention.
It was cute, really, the way Fukui was raving about Sousuke’s ingenuity, dedication, and flawless police work. There was no way the Syndicate was going to get off on any technicalities. Sousuke had been thorough and careful, he documented everything, gathered all of the proof necessary and even had back ups in case something happened. Sousuke had promised himself that everything he had put his loved ones through wasn’t going to be for nothing.

Daichi and Rin weren’t responding much, shock and confusion slapped on their features as they stared at the inspector. For his part, Sousuke looked like a guilty puppy who had torn up the house while his owners were out. He kept sneaking looks at Daichi and Rin from beneath his overgrown bangs, hoping he would be able to spot some forgiveness or kindness in their expressions.

It caused a bittersweet pang in Haru’s heart. He knew all his friends had only been protecting and supporting him, but Haru would kick all of their asses if they held Sousuke’s actions against him. The circumstances were painful and unfair, yes, but no one suffered more than Sousuke did.

And he had to suffer alone.

Just as Haru started marching over to make it abundantly clear Sousuke was not to be treated poorly, Rin stepped forward and threw his arms around Sousuke’s waist. It was clear he was crying, face pressed against Sousuke’s good shoulder. Haru could make out faint mumbles of ‘I knew it,’ ‘you’re an asshole, but not a bad guy,’ and other phrases of vindication. Rin hadn’t let go of his hopes Sousuke would return to them. He knew sometimes people lost their way, but learning it was all an illusion brought him more relief than he thought possible.

Daichi was standing still, a hand covering his mouth and tears in his eyes that he hadn’t let fall. No doubt he was kicking himself for the punch he gave Sousuke, for the times he spent boiling in anger for his own and Haru’s sake. He was probably itching to hug Sousuke as well, but let Rin have his moment. Best friends were entitled to those kinds of perks.

Fukui left the group to themselves, but stopped at Haru’s side, squeezing his shoulder and giving him a wink. “He needs to recover, but we’ll need him back eventually.”

Haru gave him a small smile and nod back. He hoped Sousuke understood how much he mattered to everyone. Looking at Sousuke, flushed and overwhelmed, finally hugging Rin back with his free arm, Haru knew he didn’t, but hopefully he’d learn in time.

Chapter End Notes

One more chapter and an epilogue, friends! <3 Thank you for sticking with me and your wonderful support. Even if you haven't left a comment or any kudos, thank you for reading.
Healing was a slow and painful process.

It wasn’t that any of them thought it would be simple, but the warm welcome everyone offered Sousuke once the situation was explained lulled them into a false sense of security. Sousuke did well in group settings, happily letting everyone fill him in on their lives while he was gone. After finding out Haru was in on it the whole time, there wasn’t much ill will thrown at Sousuke. There were some hurt feelings, but they understood he did what he had to and weren’t going to hold it against him.

It was a good start, but that’s all it was. A few days showed activities with friends were easy; it was the quiet times that caused problems. It gave Sousuke too much time to think in circles, reflect on all the things he could’ve done differently, and degrade himself for not doing better. He knew it wasn’t healthy or productive, but he couldn’t stop himself.

The good news was the injury to Sousuke’s shoulder wasn’t too severe. It was a smooth dislocation and while it would take a reinvigorated physical therapy regimens, there was little chance of it turning into a more serious problem. Haru considered it a small victory, but a win nonetheless. It didn’t make Sousuke feel any better, though, still frustrated by his lack of mobility. Everything outside of cycling and exclusively lower body workouts made him ache. He was smart enough not to push his shoulder too hard, but there were still some days he went out for a two hour run anyway and was thoroughly scolded for it at his next appointment.

After checking in with them, Saito helped arrange a therapist for Sousuke, someone who had experience counseling law enforcement professionals and had helped people in similar situations before. Sousuke only mildly resisted, more out of habitual stubbornness than anything else. It only took one session for Sousuke to see the value in talking to someone who didn’t know him or know Haru.

Having his own confidant helped relieve some the weight on Sousuke’s shoulders. There were things he refused to tell Haru, partially out of fear of giving him the same nightmares and mostly because he was scared Haru would look at him different after he found out. Someday he knew he’d have to tell Haru, but not yet, not when things were already precariously balanced. Instead he got to work through these issues with someone who wasn’t judging him, someone whose personal opinions of him didn’t matter.

Tanaka did his part too. He was someone who could get mad with Sousuke, bitch and commiserate
about being expected to do the impossible with nothing. Despite Sousuke’s negative outbursts, Tanaka remained relentlessly optimistic. Rather than being annoying, it was in a helpful way, reminding Sousuke of what he had accomplished and how the challenges he faced were behind him. He snuck in comments about how Fukui and Yoshioka were counting down the days until he returned to their team, or how other inspectors were going to try to poach him away to join theirs. Tanaka wouldn’t stop until he saw the small smile on Sousuke’s face or a glimmer of pride in his eyes. Each day he hoped the next time would be easier, not for his sake but for Sousuke’s.

As much help as Sousuke was getting, Haru was still overwhelmed with guilt every time he left Sousuke’s side, whether it was going to practice or carrying on with his usual solo activities that were never an issue before. Haru knew he shouldn’t be there all the time, Sousuke needed to be able to do his own things too, but whenever Haru came over and heard Sousuke throwing up or saw him passed out on the couch after punishing himself at the gym, Haru felt like he had done something wrong.

The worst part were the nightmares. Haru could feel Sousuke’s muscles flex and tense in his sleep, heard his breathing get ragged, knew Sousuke was reliving some real or imagined painful situation. At first he would try to wake Sousuke up. When Haru did, Sousuke’s mind took too long to realize he was safe. One time, Sousuke was so startled he had pushed Haru away, forcing him into the nightstand and knocking the lamp onto the floor. Only the sound of it smashing into pieces brought Sousuke out of his stupor. The frightened look on Haru’s face burned itself into Sousuke’s mind and he didn’t let Haru stay over for a week, afraid of hurting him again.

Haru was constantly at a loss of what to do to help. How had Sousuke been so capable, so sure in his actions when he was dealing with a broken Haru? It all made Haru feel weak. He hated that feeling; he worked so hard to be strong and now it felt like all of it was being undone.

Haru had a thrown a fit at Suga’s one night, after his patience broke and he yelled at Sousuke for skipping physical therapy. It turned into a fight, but Haru couldn’t even remember what they had shouted about by the time he knocked on Suga’s door. When Haru revealed at the end he had just walked out on Sousuke, Suga grabbed him and dragged him back to the apartment, lecturing him the entire way about how unless he felt like he was in danger, that’s precisely the time Haru needed to be by Sousuke’s side.

Haru was already overcome with shame by the time he reentered Sousuke’s apartment. He found Sousuke balled up in the corner of his bedroom, face buried in Haru’s pillow and silently crying. In that moment, Haru realized that maybe Sousuke didn’t have any idea what he was doing before. Maybe he had been scared and worried and doubted he was doing any good, too. But Sousuke stayed, he continued trying. He refused to give up on Haru, even when he had been petulant and difficult.

Haru had expected it to be easier because they had already gone through so much together, but he was wrong. It wasn’t just Sousuke’s heart that was broken, it was his whole sense of self. Scolding himself for being so impatient, Haru walked over, making enough noise so he wouldn’t spook him. He knelt down, pulling the pillow away from Sousuke and settling himself between his legs. Haru lifted his chin, cradling his face in his hands, wiping away the tears with his thumbs. Sousuke’s eyelids fluttered, his breath hitching in his throat, trying to think of something to say.

But there was nothing. They already knew what they had done wrong, and Haru already figured out what to do from now on. Sousuke didn’t need Haru to give him answers, find him solutions. He just needed him to stay by his side while they figured it out together.

That, Haru could do.
Yasuhiro stayed for two months. Under the guise of several business deals and face-to-face meetings he put off for far too long, he temporarily moved into a penthouse apartment owned by one of his close friends who was currently overseas. No one was fooled, though; Haru knew he wanted to be close to help Sousuke in any way he could. Yasuhiro hadn’t been there for Sousuke when he lost his way in high school, so he’d be damned if he didn’t make time to be there now.

Sousuke hadn’t given him the full disclosure of what happened, but he didn’t need to. Once he said he was going undercover, Yasuhiro was able to assume the painful consequences. Every Sunday he’d get a brief phone call from Sousuke, letting him know he was alive and alright, but nothing else was passed between them.

When he showed up on Sousuke’s door one evening with more takeout than two men should be able to finish (they did), a wave of genuine relief washed over Sousuke. They embraced for longer than usual and Sousuke led him to the couch and covered the coffee table with the food. Haru was gone for the next four days, away at a competition Sousuke wouldn’t let him skip. Sousuke wouldn’t admit it out loud, but he was grateful he didn’t have to spend this time alone. Yasuhiro didn’t ask Sousuke to retell his story. He’d probably been doing enough of that, and Yasuhiro only wanted to provide comfort, something familiar Sousuke could hold onto.

That night, Sousuke fell asleep to the familiar sounds of one of his favorite movies, his head resting on his father’s shoulder.

When he arrived back in Tokyo, Haru couldn’t help but feel a little jealous at how much of an effect Yasuhiro’s arrival had on Sousuke. While the rest of them had been handling Sousuke with caution, Yasuhiro had no qualms about being confrontational with him, dishing out hard truths when he needed to. He seemed to know whenever Sousuke had pushed himself too far or had been degrading himself, and put a quick end to it. Yasuhiro wasn’t going to let anyone hurt his son, even if it was Sousuke himself.

Even if Haru couldn’t do the same kind of tough love treatment, Sousuke had become more receptive to Haru’s gentleness. It made Haru feel better, helping Sousuke rebuild the parts of himself the therapy and Yasuhiro were breaking down. Sousuke wouldn’t be the same man as before, but he could be whole and happy again.

It had seemed like ages since they were last like this, Haru in Sousuke’s lap on the couch. The last time was when Sousuke revealed his new assignment. Haru hoped it would be better news this time.

“Move in with me,” Sousuke blurted out before, for the hundredth time, he could talk himself out of asking. At Haru’s taken aback expression, Sousuke forced himself to continue. “I mean, it doesn’t have to be here, we can go someplace else, some place we both decide on so it’s really ours, but I just…”

Sousuke trailed off. There weren’t meaningful enough ways to describe to Haru why this was so important to him, why he needed to be even closer despite all the ways they were already
inseparable.

“I… I want to be able to come home to you. Even when you’re not home, just seeing your things, our things … that you belong there with me… I want that.” Sousuke finished, disappointed in how lame his words were before he even finished saying them.

He stared at Haru’s hands in his, memorized the way they fit perfectly just in case he crossed the line and they would be yanked away. It was only when tears dropped onto the back of Haru’s palms that Sousuke looked up to see him crying.

An apology was already forming on Sousuke’s tongue when he was shushed by the sound of Haru’s watery voice. “It needs to have two bedrooms.”

Sousuke sucked in a breath, not sure if he was hearing correctly. “What?”

“Two bedrooms. I still need a room as a workspace. And obviously we’d need a big bathtub. One that can actually fit us both.”

Some of the tension left Sousuke’s shoulders. “That’s going to be hard to find.”

“Then an apartment where we can remodel the bathroom ourselves. That would work too.” Haru wiped his eyes, grabbing his phone and pulling up an apartment locator app. “I was thinking we could start looking at the area next to my pool. It’s only one train to your station and then my schedule wouldn’t be so tight if I didn’t have to factor in thirty minute commutes between everything.”

Wait, what did he say? Haru had been thinking about this?

Haru had been thinking about this. About where he and Sousuke would live, what kind of place they would build a fully intertwined home in.

“How long?”

Haru looked at him and tilted his head in question.

Sousuke locked gazes with him. “How long have you been thinking about this?”

Shrugging, Haru looked back at his phone. “A while. Before you went undercover. It didn’t really make sense to live separately anymore and besides… I want to come home to you everyday too.”

Haru’s cheeks were dusted with pink, and although he had seen it plenty of times before, it was still one of the loveliest sights Sousuke had ever seen.

“There’s a condo for sale in this building.” Sousuke pointed to a spot on the map Haru held in his hands. The area was highlighted, Haru had already marked it as a good possibility. When Haru looked up from his phone, his lips instantly met Sousuke’s.

The real estate agent looked at them in confusion as Haru pulled Sousuke into the tub with him. They had already seen three other places, all of them disappointments. The last one was especially bitter because it was perfect - a huge apartment featuring a gorgeous kitchen and a balcony with a spectacular view. Haru couldn’t wait to see how great the bathroom would be after seeing everything else, but he froze in the doorway as he spotted only a shower. It was a nice one, sure, but there was still no tub, and they had to turn it down. Sousuke regretfully walked out after one last glance to the
At this place, Haru walked immediately to the bathroom, not wanting to get tricked again. Thankfully there was a tub and it looked like it was larger than normal. He got into it by himself first to test it out, knowing that most of the time it’d be his sanctuary. It was only when he deemed it acceptable he grabbed Sousuke’s hand, who rolled his eyes but humored Haru anyway, getting in behind him and leaning back against the side.

They sat for a few minutes, silently imagining what it’d be like after they moved in. Sousuke needing to soak his shoulder, and Haru never passing up an opportunity for a bath, especially a shared one. It wasn’t the most spacious, but it would work for them.

“We’ll take it.” Haru wasn’t even looking at her, his eyes closed, leaning back again Sousuke’s chest.

The agent was even more shocked. “D-don’t you want to see the rest of the apartment first?”

“No, this is the one.”

Sousuke gave her a sympathetic look. “This was actually the first place we picked out when we started looking. We watched the virtual tour, it should be fine.”

She stood there gaping for a few more seconds, but a sale was a sale. She smiled and said, “Welcome to your new home.”

Sousuke was not happy with how little he could help with the move. All of their parents told them to hire movers, but when it came to things like this, Haru and Sousuke were stubborn and frugal. It was only because all of their friends were saints that they finished in a day.

Their friends were split into two groups; Makoto, Daichi, Tanaka, and Nagisa going over to Sousuke’s place. They had the unenviable job of moving the furniture because Haru’s apartment came furnished and would stay that way for the next tenant. Nagisa volunteered to babysit Sousuke, making sure he didn’t try to do anything that would aggravate his healing injuries. Everyone else thought it was sweet, but there was almost too much joy on Nagisa’s face as he handed Sousuke pillows and blankets to carry to the car.

Even though they had mostly patched things up, it still irked Sousuke to see Makoto doing the heavy lifting he should be doing. When Makoto had first seen him and Haru back together, he was ready to fight again. After hearing the full story and learning Sousuke had singled him out on purpose to witness their breakup, Makoto couldn’t stop himself from pulling Sousuke into a hug, apologizing for hitting him and for thinking poorly of him; that Sousuke was so brave and he was glad everything worked out. Sousuke was stunned, but he returned Makoto’s hug, unable to say anything except to thank him for being a good friend to Haru.

Haru and Rin teased them about the tender moment for days.

Haru’s gallery showing was postponed. He explained that he had a family emergency and although the pieces were completed, he would be unable to be there at the date assigned. It was a late notice,
but they worked it out after Haru contacted a couple of his former art professors and suggested a last minute show for their students.

It was finally the night of the rescheduled show and Sousuke and Haru decided to take a train rather than a taxi. Unable to completely break out of his old habits, Sousuke kept scanning faces for anyone he might’ve crossed and who might want to hurt him. Haru was used to it by now, keeping his hand firmly tucked in Sousuke’s, letting Sousuke keep his back to the wall so he’d feel safer.

When they had arrived at the gallery, Haru was immediately whisked away by the staff. When he looked over his shoulder, he was relieved to see Rin already there, a hand on Sousuke’s shoulder, pointing out something to distract him. Rin was already dependable, but it had been highlighted even more so recently, seemingly reading Haru’s mind when it came to keeping Sousuke in a good space.

Their friends trickled in, most of them finding Sousuke first to say hi, but Rin never left his side, even when Kisumi arrived. Sousuke was grateful for it, Rin’s energy was enough to keep to keep him going despite how crowds now made him feel exhausted. They gathered around when it was time for Haru to debut his new works. Haru did not have his usual embarrassed and annoyed look at having to make a speech about his art, but instead an excited gleam shined in his eyes.

“I noticed that every time I’ve painted someone, they’ve been alone. But that’s not how we really are. Even if you’re by yourself and are feeling lonely, someone is thinking about you, hoping you’re doing well or wishing they could see you. I painted these because I wanted to give people a reminder that when you need someone, they’ll be there for you, even if you don’t think anyone will.”

The curtain was pulled back to the sound of applause, but Sousuke and Haru only looked at each other.

Chapter End Notes

Epilogue coming soon!

I honestly haven't even started collecting my thoughts as this story comes to a close. Please know how much it has meant to me to share this with you. Thank you so, so much for reading.
you swore 'together forever'

Chapter Summary

2020

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Haru didn’t need to look up at the scoreboard. He knew by the jolt throughout his entire body and the screams of the crowd he won.

Nothing would’ve been wrong with silver, but this was the first race where Haru could undeniably say his goal was to win. It wasn’t just to feel the water, or do his best, or support his team. This was a race and a victory all for himself, and he did it.

His coach came toward him with a flag to drape around his shoulders, but Haru moved past him, over to the wall of the stands. Sousuke was leaning over the railing, the smile on his face radiant. Haru reached out, his fingers skimmed Sousuke’s and then clutched his hand out of shock when a pair of arms wrapped around his legs. Looking down, Haru saw Rin boosting him up, giving him enough extra height for Sousuke to pull him up the rest of the way.

Sousuke leaned forward to peck Haru on the lips and gave Haru’s hands a squeeze before letting go. Haru took a step forward to hug him, needing some sort of outlet for the excitement and jubilation bubbling throughout his body, but froze as he watched Sousuke drop down to one knee in front of him.

Haru got to kiss Sousuke first, say ‘I love you’ first, had been planning on moving in together before he had even thought about it. Sousuke’s pride wouldn’t allow him to hesitate on this one.

“Marry me.”

Sousuke already had the ring out, positioned at the tip of Haru’s finger. It must have looked like a show of confidence, but really it was because Sousuke’s hands were trembling and he knew he would drop it down the bleachers if it wasn’t anchored to something.

Enough time had passed for the cameras to be trained on them, broadcasting the proposal on the screen next to the scores. No doubt it was being picked up by as many networks as possible on live Olympic coverage. The crowd had stopped cheering, everyone now waiting for Haru’s response, hoping to see him get one more piece of gold today.

Haru didn’t hear the murmuring or the shouts of ‘say yes!’ sporadically thrown their way. His heart was pounding so loud in his ears it was all he could hear, all he could feel except for Sousuke’s calloused fingertips and the foreign smoothness of the ring.

“Haruka…” Sousuke breathed, almost pleading, “Say something.”

But Haru didn’t. Haru couldn’t. Nothing Haru could think of would be able to express how much Sousuke meant to him, how Haru already planned to stay by his side as long as possible. There weren’t words, so Haru did the one thing he could in this state.
With his free hand, Haru grabbed Sousuke by the back of the neck to keep himself steady and leaned forward. His lips landed hard, teeth clacking together before they relaxed into a gentle, but passionate kiss. When Haru pulled back, both of them were flushed, tears gathered in their eyes.

“So is this a ‘yes’ to marriage?” Sousuke tried to smirk, but he was too happy to even pretend to have any attitude. Haru rolled his tear filled eyes and spread his fingers to making it easier for Sousuke to slide the ring on.

Sousuke let out a laugh in relief, pushed the gold band on and stood, gathering Haru in his arms. They just held each other amidst the whoops and shouts of the crowd. There was nothing Haru could say that Sousuke didn’t already know. Just this once, he’d let Sousuke have the last word.

Chapter End Notes

I honestly cannot believe it's over. I started writing this almost a year ago and it was a first for me in many ways. I didn't know it at the time, but I was putting a lot of my own situation into this. I'm in the process of getting a divorce now, and one comment said this story made them believe they could heal after a devastating breakup, and I want to believe that.

I wasn't sure how this story would be received, but you've been so lovely and wonderful. There have been so many comments that have really touched me and I'm so happy to see this story has meant something to you too.

I'm not done writing these two dummies. As I mentioned before, I'll be doing a series of long shots about their future domestic/family life. I know that's not everyone's thing, especially in the SouHaru ship, but if it is, I hope you give that a chance in a couple months.

Again, I can't thank you enough for reading this and sticking it through with me to the end. It has meant the world to me. This will not be the last you hear from me, so I hope it's not the last I hear from you. <3 <3

End Notes

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR READING!!

Follow me/shout at/hit me up on Twitter or Tumblr @tspofnutmeg!

Comments and kudos would fill my soul with happiness

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