Game

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Game
by thedrunkenwerewolf

Summary

AU/canon divergent. It was a game, Aizen told himself, to see if could pull Gin into his sphere of influence, and more importantly into his bed. Then cast him aside when he got bored. But the reality was very different, and he was just deluding himself. Gin, however, decides to play along with his game. And it becomes a battle of wits to see who falls first. Even if it's completely unnecessary.

Eventual smut. Some lighthearted silliness fuelled by caffeine and late night writing sessions. AU in which Gin is a lot older than he is in bleach canon. Part of the Heirverse series but can be read independently.

Part 2 to follow if people are interested.

Notes

Business first - Bleach is not mine. Lolita is Vladamir Nabokov’s. Not for profit, all for fun.
AU, canon divergent storyline in which Gin is a lot older than he is in bleach canon (so 17-
ish or the rough shinigami equivalent because I don't even know how it works out with the lifespans. idk. Legal consenting age anyway at least where I'm from)

Set in my Heirverse series that can be found on fanfiction.net under the same name. Not only is this a prequel to another story, but this is just some lighthearted silliness on my part as a break between angstier parts of the series.

Some quick notes – AiGin, cat and mousey-ness, sexual situations, smut later on, swearing, Aizen being an absolute fucking pervert, the author regrets fucking nothing,
His eyes were on the pages of the book in his hands as he sat on the communal garden bench, though Aizen Sousuke wasn't reading. The words had long ago blurred together and his focus drifted off into a higher realm of thought. The book was more of a prop now, really. Part of the show. A disguise. Oh, he'd come to the garden for some peace and quiet, with all the best intentions of reading. But all that halted when he saw the boy with his lady friend. Then the facade
of the studious vice captain came to pieces and suddenly he was that lecherous old man Humbert drooling over his Lolita at play in the book he was pretending to read. The only difference being that the object in his eyes was the young boy, instead of the girl. Thankfully the book, the illusion he was even reading it, kept his secret.

*At least the glasses help, Aizen-sama,* the light voice of his sword giggled in the back of his mind. And the book. *What would they say if they caught you leering at the young ones and weren't even pretending to read?*

*My, dear Kyouka, you wound me. I am merely observing.*

*Liar.*

He did not answer her. They were talking, laughing about something. And Sousuke was too caught up in watching that mouth curl up into a grin, and then a soft smile. Watching those eyes crinkle as he laughed, and listening to the cackles of amusement floating through the air.

Kyouka Suigetsu sighed loudly. Frustrated.

*Why do you not just go up and talk to him instead of leering from afar?*

*I cannot do that.*

*You can. Just put on that big fake smile you do and go get him. It will be easy.*

He held the book higher, ignoring his zanpaktou. He'd seen the boy and his friend before. In some of his lectures, and the boy had made himself memorable to him with his consistent high marks across all areas. He even remembered the day they'd met.

He was due to start covering some lectures and had taken the files home the previous evening. Perhaps it was because he needed to play the act of a good teacher, or just thoroughness on his part, but Sousuke made it his business to know the names of all the students he taught. He sat looking through their files before his first class, taking names and learning what their abilities were. If they could be useful, or were wastes of space. But Gin had intrigued him from the start. High marks across the board. A sharp wit. Although when Sousuke did meet him in class the next day, he didn't think he could ever forget how all the air seemed to leave his lungs and his confidence failed when he introduced himself to the class the moment he locked eyes on that gorgeous silver-haired masterpiece. Or the snickers of his classmates as he had to cough to clear his throat.

And Gin's smile had widened just a touch while his teacher played the bumbling nerd.

*When I am captain,* he remembered thinking, watching his silver haired beauty scribbling away three rows away from him, brows furrowed in concentration and slender, beautiful fingers loosely holding his pen, *I will have him as my second.* And Kyouka Suigetsu had reminded him to take one step at a time. To walk before he could run.

Of course, it hadn't taken very long before Sousuke imagined those beautiful fingers holding *other things.* His hands, for one. And something else much further down. Which was about when the bubble of hot poison moved from his brain to his loins. Transforming him into Humbert Humbert, and Ichimaru Gin into his Lolita.

It hadn't taken long, either, for Sousuke to claim him as a subordinate. Hirako had raised his eyebrows, but didn't comment.
“I don' think he likes me.” Gin said. Perceptive as always.

“No matter.” Sousuke smiled, placing a hand on Gin's shoulder. “I'll deal with him, later.”

“How?”

“Oh, I have my ways.”

The woman's laugh brought him back to the present moment. Shrill and high, not at all like his Gin's laugh. Though it served as a reminder to live in the present and not in the past. Because how could he enjoy watching his Gin now if his mind was elsewhere? He renewed his focus. Pushed those invasive thoughts aside, for now.

“So, come on, Gin.” she cooed. “What do you think of our new teacher?”

“He's alright.” Gin replied. A shrug on his shoulders.

“Alright?!” She screeched. All excitement and loudness. “He's totally hot! I mean, if you like that bookish nerdy look.”

Gin frowned. Brows furrowed, shoulders hunched. Clearly not amused by her schoolgirl antics. “Ran, ya know yer talkin about my new vice captain, right?”

“Oh yeah. He handpicked you for the fifth division, didn't he?”

“Yep.”

Sousuke could not help the quiet smile at Gin's pride in having secured such a position. One that Sousuke had offered himself, no less. Surely this was a good sign of things to come.

“Ah, you're so lucky, Gin. I'd love to get handpicked by one of the vice captains. Especially Mr Hottie.”

Gin laughed. Sweet and gentle. “Maybe ya would if ya worked a bit harder. Yer test marks last week were awful.”

She pouted. “Well, maybe you can help me study?” she pleaded. “I mean, if Mr Hottie doesn't keep you too busy.”

Sousuke rolled his eyes behind his book. Of course, he knew people made eyes at him. He was used to it. But did this girl have to be so crass about it?

“Course I'll help ya study.” Gin said again, all kindness and gentleness. “If ya lay off calling him Mr Hottie. I gotta work with the guy, and I can't do that if I keep hearin' yer lil nickname for him in me brain whenever I see him. What if I blurt it out by accident?”

The mere thought of Gin saying such a thing to him, even by accident, nearly had Sousuke in a puddle on the floor. Although the years of self-enforced acting, playing the role of a wholesome person had given him a superhuman amount of self-control. He kept still and listened.

“Ugh. Fine.” The girl, Rangiku, he remembered her name now, huffed. Her lips in a pout and her arms folded across her large chest. “I'll stop calling him Mr Hottie. But I really don't see why you would blurt something like that out unless...”

A wide, devilish grin spread across her face. “Unless you like him, too!”
Gin only placed his face into one of his hands, in frustration. “Rangiku.” he groaned.

“Oh gosh, you do!” she squealed. “You really do!”

“Scream it a lil louder, Rangiku, I think there's someone in the human world tha' didn' hear ya properly.” Gin scowled. “And I don't like him. He's irritating. And besides, it's not professional.”

She cackled like a witch. “Yeah, you hate him, that's why you sit in the front row in every one of his classes.”

Sousuke peered over the top of his book, abandoning all pretence of reading now as he watched his Gin's face flush the brightest shade of red as he tried to defend himself, and failed.

“Only cuz he writes so...” Gin stammered, all scowls and indignant fury, “So small an' crooked an'... an'... I got problems with me eyes. I can't see fer shit!”

His friend was not taken in by any of it. “Gin, his writing is perfect. And your eyes are fine.”

That earnt her a scowl. And Sousuke even got a little laugh from his sword.

**It's so cute. He has a crush on you. Oh, if only they knew you were watching, Aizen-sama.**

Indeed.

*I say you interrupt them. Just walk on by and say hello. Wouldn't th at make things awkward for them?*

*Oh, Kyouka, where's the fun in that?*

**But you'll get to see him fall all over himself because of you.**

*That is tempting. But I wouldn't want to embarrass him any more than his lady friend already has, would I now?*

*I suppose.*

Kyouka Suigetsu huffed. She always did prefer his direct approaches more, but that was out of the question. At least here and now.

He went back to pretending to read again. Already planning his next move with this new information. Of course, it all made sense now. The looks Gin gave him when he thought nobody was looking. The rapt attention in his lectures from his darling. Making incorrect stances in practical lessons just so he could physically move and correct him. Not incorrect enough to stand out, but enough so the perfectionist in him would notice.

It went without saying that he was used to such looks and things from others. But Gin... Gin ignited something in him. And he'd be lying if he said he hadn't wondered how Gin's skin might feel, or look when heat rushed to his face. How the boy would look and feel bent over his desk, on his back, in his bed and out of it. Against a wall. On the floor. Anywhere and everywhere. Even under the moon and stars.

He was tempted. He had to admit that.

*No, not here. He checked himself. My thoughts cannot wander again here. Perhaps later.*
Rangiku's laughter quieted down, and the redness faded from Gin's cheeks.

“Say, Ran, if ya like 'im so much, why don' you ask him out?”

She tossed her hair. “Because, I'm with Shuuhei, remember?”

Gin scowled at her again.

“Hey, you know if you keep doing that your face will stay like that forever.”

“Don't care.”

“Okay, so,” she began, ignoring Gin's scowls, “What are you going to do about Mr. McDreamy?”

Gin rolled his eyes and groaned. “Nothin'. And what did I tell ya about yer little nicknames?”

“But you just said-”

“I don't care. Can the nicknames. It's bad enough you takin' the piss without em.”

She pouted again. “Fine. But you can't just do nothing.”

“I can.” Gin told her. “I will.”

Kyouka Suigetsu giggled again.

Oh, dear. Oh well, he won't need to do anything. Will he? He'll be yours soon enough.

You are awfully chatty today, my mirror princess.

The bell for the next lot of classes tolled in the distance, and Sousuke regretted this little interlude couldn't last longer. However, he did enjoy Gin's long, tired sigh at the thought of more classes in the afternoon. Although thankfully, for Sousuke at least, the next class Gin would be in was his.

“Lunch over already? Damn.” Gin rubbed his eyes. Sleepy. “I coulda used a nap.”

“Oh, hush up.” Rangiku took his hand and pulled him up to his feet. “Come on, you should be excited for Mcsteam's class next!”

Gin's groan at her comment was audible, and very much enjoyed. *Ah, yes. Sousuke thought. My favourite class of the day.*

He debated following the pair of them, but decided against it. Instead he would take a leisurely stroll to his classroom and enjoy the sunshine. And plan out the opening moves of his next game. He closed his book slowly. The cogs turning in his head. And the question.

*What can I do to make him mine?*
Let the game begin

continued Lolita references, Kyouka Suigetsu and Rangiku totally shipping Aizen/Gin (which I'm currently enjoying. A lot.), continued cat and mouse games, some teacher/student fantasy and general perving on Aizen's part. Not sure how in character this all is, but I'm having too much fun to care.

So what will you do, Aizen-sama?

Kyouka Suigetsu was curious as ever. All excitement and fidgeting in the back of his mind. Sousuke couldn't help but smirk to himself.

Now, now, good things come to those who wait. I'll let it be a surprise.

Oh, you are awful.

Don't I know it.

He kept the pace leisurely. After all, he was in no rush. There was plenty of time. And even if he did happen to be late, who cared? No-one would say anything about it. Not to him, at least. Some others weren't so lucky, or well-liked enough to get away with even slight infractions. From the beginning Sousuke played his cards right and managed to ingratiate himself, sucking up to those who needed to be sucked up to and kind to those who were ants in comparison to him. Truth be told, he simply couldn't wait to get out of this restricting place. It was tiring, putting a mask on all the time. He'd truly relish the day he'd be able to take it off. And then the world would be bowing at his feet. Hopefully Ichimaru Gin, his perfect darling, would be beside him when that day came.

But until that day, he would have to wait, and at least try to enjoy things. Besides, if all went well today, hopefully he'd be soon enjoying a certain someone. But that was the endgame. It was the opening moves he had to put into motion first.

Walking into his classroom with an air of jauntiness, he found his class already waiting for him. One quick glance at the clock on the wall let him know he was exactly on time, right down to the second. As expected, Ichimaru was there, although it disappointed Sousuke that he was in the middle of the fourth row rather that right up front. He hid the frown forming on his lips, and instead put on his brightest smile, however false it felt.

“Good afternoon, class,” he beamed to them as he set down his book on the desk. “Today, we'll be covering kidou spells of levels fifty, sixty, and if we have time, level ninety. Though I doubt you'll have much use for the latter. If you'd please open up your textbooks to page eighty five, we'll make a start. Now, this stuff will be on the exams, so I suggest you pay attention.”

He opened his own textbook and folder of notes on his desk and scanned through his lesson plan. Then picked up his chalk and proceeded to write his notes on the board, while prattling on about mundane kidou spells. Of course, he tried to keep his lessons engaging, inviting discussions and debates and the like, however today would be mostly theoretical knowledge parroted to the class while they made notes. Which, unfortunately, meant he couldn't engage with Gin. But it did allow
for some surreptitious admiration of the boy while he wasn't paying much attention to his teacher.

At some point, he caught Matsumoto throwing Gin a note, which the boy looked at once before scowling and scrunching it up. He pretended to not see, not notice. But whatever happened, Gin was where his eyes always gravitated to. Though he did try to look at every face in the classroom. He'd have loved to know what the note said, though. Then the idea hit him.

“Ichimaru, you know better than to pass notes in my classroom.” he reprimanded. Gin blushed beet red at the remark, at the sternness to Sousuke's voice. Jeers emanated from the rest of the class.

“But, I wasn't, I-”

Sousuke held up his hand to stop him. Everyone fell silent. “Class, please. Show some maturity.” he said, “Ichimaru, see me after class.”

Gin shot a scowl over at Rangiku, sitting nearby. She grinned and gave him a sly thumbs up. Gin groaned and let his face fall onto his desk. The class laughed.

“Ichimaru, what did we say about heads on the desks?” Sousuke asked. Gin only groaned louder. And Sousuke had to silence the class again before continuing his lecture. Looking forward to the end of it. Once again morphing into Humbert Humbert salivating over his darling Dolores Haze.

Let the game begin.

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Once the class had ended, Gin was still packing away his books and pencils while everyone else walked out. Gin scowled at his friend as she walked past him. It was, after all, her fault he was in this predicament.

“Go get him, tiger.”

“Fuck you, Ran.”

She only laughed, ignored his insult and skipped out. Leaving only Gin and Sousuke in the room.

“So, what ya gonna do?” Gin asked. “Lecture me? Make me write 'I will not pass notes in class' a thousand times?”

Sousuke considered telling Gin the truth as he cleared his desk. That he asked Gin to stay behind because he would absolutely love to bend Gin over his desk and fuck him stupid. Or perhaps get his ruler out and discipline him. No, that he had another lesson in mind, to teach Gin the art of love. No, even better, that his punishment for passing notes would be to give him a strip tease and then put his lips and hands to good use.

He was tempted.

But that would get him nowhere, and only earn him strong words and disciplinary procedures from the higher ups. And gossip flying about staining both their images. And potentially a slap from Gin before he stormed out. Which would not do. Not after so much careful planning and scheming. So he went with his rehearsed answer.

“No, actually I have some business I'd like you to accompany me on.” he explained. “Telling you off for passing notes was just a convenient ruse.”
He caught the frown as it spread over his Gin's face. “A ruse?”

“Yes.”

Gin was clearly not impressed by this answer. “And, why couldn't you have, say... just took me aside and said that we had an errand to run?”

Sousuke raised an eyebrow, amused.

You are all sass today, aren't you, my darling?

“To keep up appearances.” Sousuke replied coolly. Putting the rest of his notes and folders into his briefcase. “So, shall we?”

Gin rolled his eyes and pushed off his lecture chair. “Fine. Let's go.”

Sousuke led Gin out of the classroom and out into the spring air. They made their way past students and other gotei thirteen members who greeted Sousuke in passing. It bothered him that Gin was often ignored in these greetings, irked him even. But Sousuke contented himself with the knowledge that when Gin officially became his second in command he would never again be ignored as if he were dust on the pavement. A time that would hopefully come around sooner rather than later. If only he could find a way to get rid of his current captain, Hirako. Then everything else would follow smoothly.

Just as planned.

“So, where are we going?” Gin asked, walking in step beside him. His voice breaking the older man's reverie.

“I have to pick up an order.”

”And you need me for that, because?”

“You'll see.”

Gin fought to suppress a groan. “Did I ever tell ya I hate surprises?”

“You have now.” Sousuke smiled. Gin ignored him, choosing to glance off to the side. Sousuke ignored his scowls, hoping quietly that given time, the scowling would diminish into smiles the longer they were around each other.

“So, no hints?” Gin asked. “Nothin’?”

“We are going to pick up a package.”

“Gonna tell me what's in said package?”

“No.”

Gin rolled his eyes again, as the two of them walked up to the dispatch office. Gin waited quietly and impatiently as Sousuke collected the brown wrapped package and carried it under his arm. Gin trailed in his footsteps as he strode off.

“Come, Gin. We'll go to my house.”

Gin balked. “Eh?”
“What's wrong with going to my house?” Sousuke inquired gently. Watching Gin as he tried to search for words without offending him.

“Nothin'. Just... why your house?”

“I want you to have tea with me.” Sousuke supplied. “You work hard. You deserve a break.”

Gin eyed him, wary. And Sousuke knew then it would take a lot of time and effort to break down Ichimaru Gin's walls to truly know him.

“Don't worry.” Sousuke smiled. “I'm not going to do anything to you.”

He left off the 'yet' at the end of that sentence. Besides, if Sousuke was going to do anything to him, he would ensure Gin would want it first. In fact, it was paramount. Consent was a beautiful thing, and it got you much, much farther than forcing an issue, Sousuke had learned.

“Fine.” Gin relented, though his gaze suggested he'd be keeping a close watch on him throughout his visit. And that if he tried anything, Gin would cut his balls off. “Your house.”

“Of course.” Sousuke gestured, “This way.”

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Sousuke unlocked the front door to his house and told Gin to make himself comfortable while he prepared drinks. He left Gin in the sitting room, looking around at the exquisite furniture and artwork while Sousuke left the package on the coffee table and went into his kitchen.

“Do you want tea, Gin?” he called out. “If you don't, then I can make coffee or...” he smiled, “I even have wine if you prefer.”

“Tea is fine.” Gin answered. Sousuke had to admit he was a little disappointed. Having a drunk Gin in his arms would have been very pleasing. But his darling obviously wanted him to work for his affections. And Sousuke always loved a challenge. The harder it was to make someone fall for him, the more desirable they were. And Gin would no doubt be his biggest challenge.

It was like a game of chess, and this was no different. Gin was a game and he was playing to win.

He made the two cups of tea carefully, and carried them into the main sitting room. Gin sat on one of his armchairs, waiting for him.

You haven't drugged his tea, have you? Kyouka Suigetsu asked, worry coating her voice.

Of course not. He told her. I may be corrupt, but I am not that corrupt. And besides, he has to come to me on his own.

This seemed to satisfy his sword, and she fell silent for the moment, letting him set their mugs on the coffee table onto two leather coasters. The coffee table was mahogany, after all. And very expensive. It would not do to scratch it.

“Thank ya.” Gin said, and Sousuke took a seat on the sofa. He had to smile. Despite all Gin's roughness and snarkiness, the boy possessed excellent manners.

“It's not a problem, Gin.” he answered. “Ah, I can call you Gin, yes?”

Gin shrugged. “Gin's fine.”
“Excellent.” Sousuke beamed at him. “I didn't want to be overly familiar or make you uncomfortable.”

“Don't worry, ya aren't.”

“Good.”

He took a sip of his tea, keeping his eyes fixated on Gin. The boy was all grace and fluidity as he picked up his tea and took a sip of it, leaving him to wonder if all Gin's movements would be as graceful. Or whether it was just because Gin was in his presence. He made a mental note to find out.

“So,” Gin said, breaking his train of thought. “What's in that so very important package ya had to get me to accompany you to collect?” Gin asked. Sousuke just smirked at him.

“Why don't you open it and see?” he answered. “I ordered it for you, after all.”

Gin eyed both him and the package suspiciously. “If this is some trick-”

“No tricks.” Sousuke smiled, setting down his tea and holding his hands up. “I promise.”

Gin looked at him again, but his curiosity won out over his suspicion and he got up to retrieve the brown paper package from the coffee table. He took it back to his chair and sat, untying the string holding the paper closed. Gin very carefully opened the brown paper and the little O shape his mouth slipped into was utterly delightful.

“This...” Gin gasped, examining the contents of the package, his fingers tracing over the black cloth, “This is...”

“Your new uniform as a shinigami.” Sousuke finished for him. Unable to suppress or hide the smile creeping across his face. “I had one made for you. The standard ones only come in one size, and would only swamp you, due to your thin frame. Do you like it?”

“I...” Gin was lost for words, “You had this made for me?”

“Yes.” His smile then was softer, more gentle. “Do you like it? I didn't know your exact measurements, but I am very good at measuring with my eyes. So it should fit you.”

“I dunno what ta say, Aizen-san.” Gin said softly. Incredulous. Fingers gently, delicately running over the black fabric. All too aware of the cost of it. “I can't take this.”

Why? Sousuke could feel his heart sinking. His smile vanishing. This was not the reaction he'd hoped for at all.

“Of course you can.” Sousuke told him, “I want you to have it. If you are going to have a uniform, it should fit properly.”

Gin's eyes flitted up to meet his, and the world stopped. Looking at him now, Gin looked so vulnerable. So unsure what to do. But somewhere in that gaze, he could sense there was gratitude, as well. Fighting to free itself from the feelings of being in debt to him.

“It's too extravagant.” Gin protested. “I can't.”

“If it is the cost that worries you, I assure you I am not out of pocket.” Sousuke tried to explain. “So you needn't worry about accepting it.”
Gin hesitated for a moment. Opening and closing his mouth before finally speaking. Trying to reason with himself. “If... if yer sure.”

Sousuke smiled again. “I'm sure.” he told Gin. “I want you to have it.”

Gin's mouth twitched and tentatively lifted into a small smile, putting a stop to the older man's heart.

“Thank ya, Aizen-san.”

A warm feeling spread through Aizen's chest and through his body, a wide smile spread across his face. And Aizen Sousuke knew then that he was absolutely done for. That that smile would be the end of him. That he would do anything and everything to keep that smile on Gin's face.

“You're very welcome, Gin.” he said, searching for calm while his heart leapt up and down like a lunatic, “Now, why don't you go try it on?”
Your hand fits mine

Chapter Notes

Some general sappiness (at least until Aizen ruins it by going back to pervert land), continued Lolita references. Not at all sure how appropriate this all is but still having too much fun to care.

Why don’t you go try it on?

Gin blinked in surprise.

“Here?” Gin asked, raising his eyebrows. Clearly not expecting this. Or either expecting this and playing innocent. Sousuke suspected the latter. Surely, Gin was not that naïve. Nobody was that naïve.

“Yes. Here. I want to see how you look in it.”

“Right here?” Gin asked again.

Sousuke smiled. Yes. Here. Strip for me. Give me a show.

“There's a bathroom down the hall on the left.” he replied. “You can change in there. If it doesn’t fit, then I can have it altered.”

“Alright.” Gin answered, taking his new clothes and striding off to the bathroom. A big smile on his face. Aizen watched him go, with a feeling of keen anticipation. He hoped the uniform would fit. He hoped Gin would like it. He hoped the dark ebony colour wouldn't make Gin look too pale or ill. He hoped... he hoped a lot of things. But most of all he hoped he wouldn't blow it with Gin. That he wouldn't get himself too excited and push him away.

What is wrong with me? He tried to shake away his worries. Of course he will like it. Of course I won't blow it. This is a game, like any other. I am an excellent chess player. I should not be this nervous.

But he was.

He sat on the sofa, frowning, arms folded across his chest. Brooding quietly. Silently telling himself to get his shit together, that Gin would be impressed whatever he did, that Gin must like him even a little bit otherwise he would not have come here. But still the doubts clawed at his insides, whispering what if?

Only Gin's teasing, lilting voice cut through the din of his thoughts.

“How do I look, Aizen-san?”

Aizen looked up at him, all elegance and beauty in his new black uniform. As expected, the fit was perfect. And Gin's light skin and silver hair stood in stark contrast to the dark colour. It even brought out his crimson eyes, which he was treated to a very quick glance at. The sight took his breath away. It was fairly safe to say, if Sousuke had been holding something, he would have
dropped it by now.


Sousuke closed his gaping mouth and swallowed. You are the most beautiful thing I have seen all day.

“I like it.” he smiled brightly. “It suits you. And the fit is perfect.”

“Ya think so?” Gin asked, turning so Aizen could see his back. “Feels kinda weird, ta be wearing black after so long.”

“Oh, yes, I definitely think so.” Sousuke smiled at him. “I must say you look very dashing.”

Gin laughed then. A nervous, self-deprecating, incredulous laugh. “I dunno. People say I got about as much appeal as a kidou textbook. That's ta say, none.”

Sousuke raised his eyebrows. Are you kidding? He thought, incredulous and outraged. Are you fucking kidding? Please tell me you are fucking kidding. You are a gorgeous creature.

“Oh, I don't know,” Sousuke told him, smirking across at him, “I've never taught anyone who didn't open a high-level kidou textbook and say fuck me. And believe me, I've taught a lot of people.”


Gin's light cheeks flushed a wonderful shade of pink, then red, as he digested Sousuke's latest comment.

“I... ya can't just...” Gin fumbled around for words. Some words, any words, to answer that. Finding none, and unable to take his future vice captain's chuckling at him, he settled for covering his face with his hands. “Ya can't say that, Aizen-san!”

“Why not?” Sousuke asked, “It's the truth.”

Gin groaned audibly out of embarrassment. It was so adorable, Sousuke had to laugh.

“Don't you fuckin' laugh!”

Sousuke's chuckling subsided, albeit slowly. He rested his chin on his hands, elbows on his knees. “I'm sorry, that was terrible. Forgive me.”

He watched as Gin slowly uncovered his face, letting his hands drop. Sousuke kept his eyes on Gin, enjoying the pink tinge to his pale cheeks. The clenched fists.

“Here,” Sousuke patted the space next to him on the couch, “Come, sit and finish your tea.”

Gin fought a scowl, and trudged over to him, sitting down next to him with a huff. Sousuke reached across to the coffee table and passed Gin his mug of tea. Which the boy gratefully sipped, just so he wouldn't have to talk for a moment.

“I'm terribly sorry, Gin.” Sousuke said, after a few moments of quiet in which Gin's eyes roved over every piece of furniture in his living room, rather than at him. “That was rather inappropriate of me.”

“Ya think?” Gin glared at him. Though only to hide his embarrassment at having such a thing said
to him.

“i meant it to be flattering.” Sousuke admitted, eyes cast down to his mug of tea in his hands.


Sousuke's smile tugged the corners of his lips up. “Oh? Am I?”

“Don't play dumb, Aizen-san.” Gin retorted. “It really don't suit you.”

“And what does suit me, then?” Sousuke asked, intrigued now. Here was that sharp wit Gin had.

That fire. That challenge.

“No, now,” Gin grinned at him, “It aint much fun if I just tell ya. I thought ya were smart.”

“I am smart.” Sousuke told Gin. More than a little arrogant.

“So, tell me, then,” Gin pushed, voice teasing and devious, “Tell me, what I think suits you.”

The smirk in that moment that spread it's way very slowly across Sousuke's face was so full of
cunning deviousness. “Oh, that is quite simple, Gin.” he said, with as casual an air as he could
scrape together. Taking a long sip of his tea before continuing, for the effect. “I think you suit me
most perfectly.”

Gin balked again. Blinking with the surprise and fighting the rising blush in his cheeks. “Eh?”

“You heard me.”

Gin's cheeks flared a bright red again, his mind no doubt running rampant with all sorts of images.
And Sousuke wondered just how far he could push it. How much he could get away with.

“Our hands, for example.” he went on, his hand creeping along the space between them like a
spider hunting his prey. His fingers slotting themselves in between Gin's and moving forward so
their hands were connected. He lifted their conjoined hands up, so Gin could see. His fingers closed
around the back of Gin's hand, holding it. Gin's fingers were more hesitant in their embrace. He
noted how soft and smooth Gin's hands were compared to his own rough and calloused ones.
Lolita's fine and delicate fingers linked with Humbert's, sharing a moment together.

“Your hand fits mine, don't you agree?”

“I...”

Gin struggled to find his words again. But then, Sousuke did have that effect on people. To have
them stumbling around for some words, any words, while he charmed and smiled and made them
bend to his will.

“I think they fit together perfectly. Our palms... our fingers...”

“Umm.”

“Your fingers are beautiful, you know, Gin. So slender, so perfect.”

“Aizen-san...”

“Yes, the whole carpus, your strong shapely wrist... so beautiful.”
“I don't...”

He watched Gin try to remember how to breathe, chest heaving from the effort. The light blush colouring his cheeks returning in full force. Heat flooding into his young body at the touch of his superior's hand. Gin had no words for him, no ability to form them. The room was quiet enough for Sousuke to hear his heart beating, thumping like a drum against the confines of his chest. Gin's heart was probably doing the same, so powerful was the spell being cast over him.

“Have any words?” Sousuke asked, a little amused, watching Gin blush more, “No, of course you don't. You've probably never had anyone compliment your hands before, I imagine. But they are, Gin, they are beautiful. Perhaps the most lovely hands I have seen.”

The smile that crossed Sousuke's face in that particular moment was probably one of his most genuine smiles. A soft smile, full of content, stripped of all deviousness and malice. A lover's smile. Soft and warm.


He recalled a line from Lolita. Where the narrator compared their fingers:

*The phalanges, the whole carpus, the strong shapely wrist were far, far finer than mine. French epithets, a Dorset yokel's knuckles, an Austrian tailor's flat fingertips – that's Humbert Humbert.*

It was like it was written about him and Gin.

Gin's voice was little more than a whisper, cutting again into his thoughts. “No.”

The word took Sousuke by surprise. Put an immediate halt to his train of thought. He raised his eyebrows, slightly incredulous. Now, this, was not expected.

“No?”

“I mean,” Gin caught himself. Sousuke was not meant to have heard that. But it had come out louder than he'd intended it to. “Ya got...” Gin flushed a brighter shade of rose, “real nice fingers. They aint ugly at all.”

Sousuke could feel his heart of ice melt and drip down his insides. That warm sensation spread rapidly through his being again. That same soft, warm smile creep over his face again.

“Ah, really?”

Gin hesitated, but only for a moment. “Yeah. Ya do.”

“Well, if you think so, then I'm happy.” Sousuke answered, his smile bright. Real. Nothing like the false one he presented the world. He disengaged their hands, relinquishing Gin's fingers so they could settle back in their place by his side. His eyes drifted over to Gin's face, to his soft and clinging smile. He wondered what Gin was thinking about, to make him smile like that. Unlike many others, Gin's thought processes were still unreachable. The boy liked to keep his cards close to his chest so no-one could see them. Not even Aizen Sousuke.

Though he hoped in time, that would change.
well. Like our lips perhaps.” he smirked over at Gin, “Other parts of our anatomy.”

Gin flushed *beet red* at that lewd comment, and Sousuke laughed, “Ah, but don't listen to me. I'm being highly inappropriate again, I'm sorry.”

He left Gin to his embarrassment, trying not to chuckle at him and how adorable he was, and then diverted their talk to more mundane matters to let his darling calm down. Listening to Kyouka Suigetsu scolding him for ruining such a romantic moment.
It is a date

Chapter Notes

more of Rangiku totally being AiGin shipper trash and some Phantom of the Opera references. Which will continue in the coming chapters.

The next day in his lecture, he noticed Gin's eyes were everywhere, except on him. He also noticed the way Gin pulled his little friend Rangiku by the arm to sit on the back row. As far away from him as physically possible. Sousuke couldn't help but feel a little disappointed and rejected.

*It's your own fault.* Kyouka Suigetsu chided, *if you didn't say such lewd things to him, he might still like you.*

Sousuke frowned at his sword's words. Loathe to admit she was right. She usually was.

*Hm. Perhaps I should apologise for offending him.*

*Yes. You should.* Kyouka huffed. And Sousuke knew he would have a very uncooperative sword on his hands unless he apologised to Gin.

*You were far too lewd and sexual.* His zanpaktou hissed. *Remember how young and shy he is.*

Sousuke thought on this. Yes, perhaps I have been going about this the wrong way.

*You think?*

The lesson he taught went slowly. That is to say, it dragged along at an *incredibly slow* pace. He tried to keep focused, talk with at least some enthusiasm about his favourite topic, level sixty kidou spells, but in reality he wasn't really feeling it. Gin, who normally engaged in discussions and answered questions, kept silent, which only served to make his heart sink further into the floor. He'd clearly upset Gin. It had been exactly the opposite effect he'd been aiming for. This would have to be remedied as soon as possible.

It was a blessed relief when the bell rang, signalling the end of the school day, putting them all out of their misery. Though Sousuke could hear the class muttering quietly among themselves – particularly the girls – about how Aizen-sensei wasn't as chipper today.

“Aizen-sensei seems off today. I wonder if he is alright.”

“Did something happen?”

“Maybe he is just tired. Everyone has bad days, right?”

“Perhaps his girlfriend broke up with him.”

“No way! Who would dump that guy? He's so hot.”

“No, you're both wrong. Aizen fukutaichou never has anyone for more than one night. He doesn't have a girlfriend.”
“I’d sell my soul to have him for just one night.”

He frowned at the group of girls as they walked out of the classroom, truly loathing such gossip. Thinking that the sooner he left this place, the better. Because if there was anything Aizen hated more than anything, it was idle gossip. He quietly made a mental note to kill them first when he returned with his army to decimate them all.

Gin and Rangiku were in the last little group to leave, and Sousuke supposed it would be too much to ask of the universe that Gin would not hear such gossip. He sighed, watching Gin leave. He picked up his book and followed him, deciding there were far more important tasks ahead of him than clearing his messy desk. Like making things up with a certain silver-haired student of his. Because it would not do if his darling hated him.

***

Gin and Rangiku sat down together in the communal garden again, on one of the wooden benches under a peach tree in full bloom.

“Gin,” Rangiku pried gently, “You've been quiet today. Is everything alright?”

Gin gave a non-committal shrug. “I'm fine.” he answered. “Jus' thinkin' is all.”

“Oh,” Rangiku's face broke out into a smile, “Thinking about your hot date with Aizen yesterday?”

Her grin was devilish, and Gin fought the urge to blush.

“it weren't a date, Ran.” Gin told her, with an air of superiority to his voice. A very I-told-you-so tone. “All we did was pick up a package. That's it.”

“Oh.” her smile faded. And Gin hoped that would be the end of it. But Rangiku had known Gin for too long not to be able to tell when her best friend was still hiding something.

“Are you sure that's all that happened?” she pried, hoping for further details. At least a kiss, or even a snog. Exciting, juicy details. Gin averted his eyes for a second – just a second – but it was enough of a giveaway for Rangiku.

“Well-”

“I knew it!” Rangiku was triumphant, her voice raising an octave. Maybe several octaves, if Gin's ears were any judge on the matter. “Tell me everything! Leave nothing out!”

Gin winced at her high pitched voice. “Alrigh', alrigh', jus' stop squealin', jeez.”

“Talk!”

Gin sighed, knowing full well she would not give him any peace until he sang like a canary.

“Well.” “Alright.” he began, “But first,” he pointed his finger at her, “you better promise me ya won't tell anyone. I fuckin’ mean it, Ran.”

She held her hands up, “Okay, okay. I promise. I won't tell another soul. Now talk!”

Gin cleared his throat, ready to tell the story. “Well, we went an' collected his order, like I said. Then we went and had tea at his place.”

Rangiku smirked. “Just tea?”
“Yes.” Gin said, much to Rangiku's disappointment. “Just tea.”

“Oh.” she frowned. “Shame. I was hoping for at least a kiss. Even some snoggage.”

“Ran.” Gin frowned, shooting her a warning look.

“Okay, okay. I'll be quiet. Please, continue.”

Gin huffed quietly, pleased that she'd dropped the subject – at least for now. Gin knew the subject would definitely crop up again, knowing his best friend.

“So we get to his place,” Gin continued, “Ya shoulda seen it, Ran, it were so elegant. Everythin' mahogany. Coffee table, dinin' chairs. He even had a soft plush three piece suite, couple a armchairs an' a sofa... but anyway. He makes us both cups of tea and we talk a bit.” Gin gave another little non-committal shrug. “He seemed real nice.”

Rangiku gave a little dreamy sigh, with her hands in her lap. “Oh, Gin, just admit you like him. Life would be so much easier if you did.”

Gin said nothing to that comment. Choosing not to add any fuel to her shipping fires. It was bad enough she was trying to push them together, to set them up and play matchmaker. Gin didn't need to give her any more motivation to do so. And Gin was certain if he told her he did like Aizen in that way, he would never hear the end of it. Ever.

Besides, Gin wasn't stupid. Even if Rangiku got her way and set him up with Aizen, it would only be a short-term arrangement. Because who hadn't heard the gossip? That Aizen fukutaichou was a notorious playboy, that he made people fall for him only to cast them aside, that all anyone ever got with him was one night. Him and Aizen together as lovers? Forget about that. How could Gin in his right mind pursue a man like that? How could anyone? He was too easy to get, and just too easy to lose. Aizen was a man who liked to break hearts and play with people like toys. It wasn't going to happen with him and Gin. And the sooner Ran accepted this fact, the better it would be for everyone.

“But anyway, carry on.” Rangiku's chirpy voice pulled him back to reality. “I wanna know what happened next. Did you ever find out what was in that package you collected?”

Gin had to press his lips together at the memory of it. But he forced himself to be calm. He had to keep calm. He could not keep on blushing like a schoolboy every time someone mentioned Aizen Sousuke.

“Yeah.” Gin answered slowly, “He'd got me my new shinigami uniform.” The laughter, high and nervous, bubbled out of him as soon as the words left his mouth. “It's weird, right? He had it tailored to fit me an' everythin'. Is that weird, Ran? It's weird, right? He had me model it for him, to check the fit.”

Rangiku allowed a moment to pass, to find her voice again.

“What did he say?” she asked, the excited smile creeping back across her face, “I mean, did he compliment you or anything?”

This time, Gin could not beat down the tinge of pink colouring his cheeks. “He said... he said I looked...”
The embarrassment was too much. Cheeks the shade of red to make all tomatoes envious, he had to bury his face in his hands. “Oh, gods.”

Rangiku's laughter was light and soft, and kind. “Aw, come on, Gin,” she said gently. “You have to tell me. I want to know what that charmer of a man said, to make you go all pink.”

Gin slowly lifted his face from his hands to look at her, willing himself to calm down. He supposed he could tell her. After all, she'd told him all about Shuuhei when he asked, to make sure he would treat her right. It was only fair he told her about Aizen. Besides, who better to confide this sort of thing in than your best friend?

“Well, he said I looked real dashin’.” Gin told her, shyly, “I said no, that I had 'bout as much sex appeal as a kidou textbook. And he just said that he never met anyone who didn't open up a high-level kidou textbook and say...” Gin's cheeks flushed a light shade of pink again as he hesitated, “and say 'fuck me'.”

A moment of silence came and went, and it was so unbearable, Gin had to fill it. So he babbled.

“And... and then he held my hand and said some stuff about how we fit together, like out fingers and stuff, and then he said...”

Gin glanced up at her. She was sitting there, dumbstruck and mute. Which only added to Gin's current anxiety.

“Well, say somethin’!” he spouted.

Rangiku's smile only broadened into a delighted grin. “Aww, Gin!” she clasped her hands together and sat beaming across at him, “I knew it! I knew he liked you!”

Gin looked at her, confused. “How?” he asked, full of scepticism, “How could you possibly know that?”

“Oh, I just have an eye for that sort of thing.” Rangiku said dismissively, waving her hand. “I notice things. Like how his eyes always find you in class. And how he always smiles when you talk to him—”

“Psh. Please.” Gin rolled his eyes. “He smiles at everyone.”

“Oh, I just have an eye for that sort of thing.” Rangiku said dismissively, waving her hand. “I notice things. Like how his eyes always find you in class. And how he always smiles when you talk to him—”

“I don't think so.” Rangiku said calmly. “You don't know, you've never seen someone in love before. I have. Honestly, Gin, you could so much worse that Aizen fukutaichou. He's so sweet, and gentle. He'd be good to you.”

Gin thought again, about the things he'd heard about Aizen. Not just from his classmates, but from other Gotei Thirteen members as well.
“Nah. You've been readin’ too many trashy romance novels.”

“He would.” Rangiku pressed. “I know he would.”

“I doubt it.” Gin frowned. *Because everyone knows you only ever get one night with him. That he don't do relationships. And I will not be his little fucktoy he can throw away when he gets bored. I want everything, or nothing. I want all of him, or none of him. It aint worth it otherwise.*

“Oh, Gin,” Rangiku just sighed again. “If only you could see, just how besotted he is with you. It's just like in that story we saw at the theatre, with the Phantom and Christine. So romantic.”

“Ugh! Ya didn' jus' call me his Christine!” Gin scowled, folding his arms across his chest. But she only laughed, and Gin couldn't keep the smile from his face. Her laugh always made him smile.

“But it's true!” she protested, “You're Christine, and he's the Phantom. I wonder if he plays any music... if he did I bet all of his songs would be inspired by you. I think he's a piano playing sort of guy... he could seduce you with his rendition of Music of the Night.”

“Gimme a break, Ran.” Gin replied.

“Nope! You're his Christine. End of discussion.”

Gin smirked, “Oh, so then, does this make you Raoul?” Gin teased, poking her stomach playfully, making her laugh more.

“*Who's Raoul?*”

The both of them clammed up at the sound of his voice, letting silence permeate the air as they turned their heads upwards, gazing up at Aizen. He'd come over to them unnoticed since they were so deep in their conversation.

What does he do? Gin wondered, *Spy on us?*

Aizen was smiling down at them, genial and polite as always. “Ah. You're talking about that musical, aren't you? The Phantom, right?"

*He must spy on us.* Gin thought.

It was Rangiku who broke their silence. “Aizen fukutachou!” she greeted him, “We were just talking about you!”

He laughed gently, “Oh, all good I hope.”

“He must spy on us.” Gin thought.

"Of course.” Rangiku beamed up at him. Gin just wanted him to get to the point and then leave.

“Why are ya here?” Gin asked him.

Aizen turned his gaze to Gin, who was clearly less than impressed at his sudden appearance. “Ah, about that,” he began, “I came to apologise to you, for my comments the other day. I appear to have offended you and made you uncomfortable. I'm sorry.”

“What?” Gin blinked.

*That* threw Gin off. He hadn't expected Aizen to apologise for embarrassing him. He'd expected more of the same. More lewd remarks, embarrassing him in front of Rangiku perhaps. But not this.
“I...” Gin struggled for words, but no words would come to him.

“Before you say anything, please allow me to make it up to you.” Aizen continued, “How about I take you out for dinner. As an apology?”

“I...” Gin started, “Ya don't hafta do that.”

“But I want to.” Aizen pressed. “Please?”

Gin eyed him warily, trying to figure out his angle, what he wanted. What he could possibly gain from this proposal if he accepted? He was about to respond, but unfortunately, Rangiku answered for him before he could speak. Before he could refuse.

“He'd love to!” she chirped, placing her hand on Gin's shoulder, “Wouldn't you, Gin?”

Gin sighed, defeated. He knew full well she'd never let it drop, never give him a second of peace if he refused Aizen now. She'd make it her mission to force Gin to traipse to his home and apologise, and then sit them down for dinner together. He may as well bite the bullet now, and get it over and done with.

“Yeah, sure.” Gin put on his most winning smile, “why not?”

Aizen smiled at him like a puppy who'd just been told he was going for a walk. All happy and excited. This time Gin could not miss the man's warm smile Rangiku had talked about. Gin had a feeling if he weren't already sitting on the bench, his knees would have gone weak and failed to support him.

“Oh, that's perfect!” Aizen said, still giving Gin that smile. Gin suspected that smile had broken many hearts over the years. “I know the best place we can go. Meet me at my place at seven. You remember where it is, right?”

Gin glanced quickly at Rangiku, who currently had a big shit-eating grin on her face.

What do you want?

Chapter Notes

NSFW near the end. Because it's Aizen and he is a pervert.

Also – Phantom of the Opera and Love Never Dies mentioned are not mine. They belong to Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Once Aizen left them, and was well out of sight and earshot, Rangiku let out the little squeal she'd been suppressing.

"Ahh, Gin, you've got a date tonight!" she sang, gently swinging Gin's hands from side to side. And Gin had to laugh despite himself. At Ran's giddiness. At his own odd feeling of giddy excitement at the scheduled dinner with Aizen. At the ridiculousness of it all, because Aizen would never be serious about him.

*But Ran's normally right about people in love.* The thought occurred to him. *Could he be serious about me? And what about me? What do I feel?*

Gin shook the thoughts out of his head. Those were things to be answered alone in his own room, not here with Rangiku. Besides, the man was a player. He reminded himself. It was pointless to feel anything about him. But then, why the giddiness? Perhaps Rangiku's excitement was infectious. Yes, that was it.

"I do, don' I?" he answered her, a smile plastered on his face, despite his reservations on the man.

"Ouu, you're excited." she teased him, which only earnt her a little scowl as he gently swatted her hand away.

"Oh, shut up. I aint excited. 'sides, I'm only bein' toyed with. I gotta remember that.

"Yeah." she said, a smug smirk on her face now. "And the sky is green."

Gin shot her another scowl, only drawing out another teasing laugh from her.

Sousuke could not believe his luck as he made his way back to division five. Trying hard to keep his mask of calmness in place to hide his giddiness. To keep himself from laughing.

*I can't believe it. He said yes. We are going out tonight. This is perfect. And if he just so happens to have a little too much wine and tries to seduce me, well...*

He could feel Kyouka Suigetsu bristling at his side.

*You keep this up and you will drive him away forever.* She hissed at him.

*Will you relax, Kyouka?* Sousuke told her. Not at all eager to listen to an encore of her lectures on
common decency and what constituted appropriate behaviour. *I won't do anything he doesn't want me to. I will be a perfect gentleman around him. I will be on my best behaviour.*

That answer seemed to mollify his sword, and Sousuke sighed with relief. Things truly were difficult with an uncooperative zanpaktou. Even basic things.

*How about you just be yourself?* She asked gently.

*Myself?*

The question brought him up short.

He thought of the carefully constructed mask he'd created over the years. All the false words he'd spoken to get what he wanted. To work his way into a position of power. All the lies he'd told his countless lovers to get them into his bed – that he loved them, they were beautiful, they were the only one he ever wanted – only to leave them after a night of sating his need because it was far too dangerous to get attached to anyone. No wonder the boy was repulsed by him. He knew exactly who Aizen was.


No wonder Gin didn't like him.

He stopped walking for a moment, listening to the birds in the trees as the realisation hit. Suddenly feeling very small. He'd have to do a lot of convincing and so much work to get Gin to warm to him.

But he never could resist a challenge when one presented itself to him. And he always got what he wanted in the end. Always.

And he wanted Gin. Badly.

But most of all, he wanted Gin to smile at him. To look at him with love.

The thought of it caused that warmth to spread through his chest like wildfire again, and curl its tendrils along his limbs. He imagined seeing that look on Gin's face would feel very different from seeing the looks of adoration his other lovers gave him. They all loved him stupidly, blindly. Not knowing they were a piece in his games. He had a feeling Gin would be different.

*And our hands fit so perfectly together, as if they were crafted to hold each other. And he made no effort to disengage them.*

That last thought made his heart stop. Yes. Of course. When he'd taken Gin's hand in his, Gin had made no effort to pull away, to extricate his fingers from Sousuke's grip. None whatsoever. The knowledge made his breath catch in his throat.

*Yes. He must like me a little bit, to allow such a thing.*

Somewhere in the recesses of his mind, Kyouka Suigetsu sighed softly. All her anger evaporated. *Oh Sousuke, of course he does.*

Sousuke sighed and took a few steps over to a nearby tree, leaning against the rough bark. Trying not to smile and failing dismally. He covered his mouth with his hand to hide it, since smiling so much would only invite prying questions, but thankfully no-one was around to see. No-one to put his mask on for. So he decided to allow himself to indulge such giddiness and even allowed a little
laugh to escape his throat.

Yes. Gin still liked him. The game was still on. He was still a player and Gin a piece to be moved and manipulated. Rolled between his fingertips.

*But is that what I want? Really? Another game?*

That was the important question. What *did* he want?

He wanted... he closed his eyes softly and thought again of Gin. His little Lolita. His darling. He recalled the feel of Gin's hand in his, instantly evoking an absolute replica of him on the underside of his eyelids. A ghost in natural colours. His shyness, the heat in his face, breathless voice, the tinge of pink on Gin's cheeks while he prattled on about Gin's hand and how they fit together perfectly and thinking all the while that yes, they were made to be together.

The image morphed, changing, and he imagined Gin's smile, soft and clinging – the envy of all croissants – under heavily-lidded eyes gazing at him across his bed. Their bed. He imagined gently, quietly, pulling Gin into his arms and kissing those soft lips. Tasting that warm, wet tongue. Coaxing the softest of moans from that lovely throat.

He sighed with content and opened his eyes again. Less sure of what he wanted now than he'd been earlier. He wanted Gin, that much was certain. But in what context? A one night stand? A fling to pass some time? As a toy to play with, to break his heart for amusement like he'd done to so many others before him?

He wanted...

He sighed again. Perhaps there were no words for what he wanted. None that he could form, anyway. But after playing mind games so convincingly and for so long, he supposed he lost the ability to form such a concept even in his thoughts. There was only a vague feeling that all of those scenarios somehow felt... wrong. That he couldn't – try as he might – imagine himself smashing Gin's heart to pieces, or only being with Gin for a night. Even if one night was all Gin was supposed to get, because any more than one night with anyone went against all the rules of the game.

He turned his thoughts to his zanpaktou, hoping for answers, but she remained silent. And he knew then that he'd have to work it out on his own. What he wanted, what he didn't want... he'd have to work those things out with a lot of wine and time. For now, though, he'd just play the game and see what happened.

Sousuke pushed himself off the tree and started walking again, wishing he could skive off work and leave his captain, Shinji, to fend for himself. He was really not in the mood to deal with that asshole today. Especially not after such a perfect encounter with his darling Gin. Captain Hirako would doubtlessly make some jibe or cutting remark that would destroy his good mood. In fact, he'd rather just go home and have a nice, hot cup of tea and play on his new grand piano for a while. Maybe even finish off the aria he was composing.

*Oh, fuck it. They will survive one day without me.*

He quickly turned and changed the direction he was walking in, heading for home instead of division five, where a pot of tea and an unwritten song called out to him. If anyone noticed his absence, then they noticed. He'd just tell them he wasn't feeling well and had to go home. He was sure some of his students in Gin's class could attest to that.
Sousuke set the pot full of still steaming tea on the table and sat on his armchair, utterly content. He held his mug in his hands and relaxed into the comfortable chair. So glad he'd blown off his duties as a vice captain, at least for today. Tomorrow he'd have to return to them, which would no doubt bring about more stress, but at least for the remainder of today he could relax and unwind.

He held his mug in his hands, letting the warmth seep into his skin, and took a sip, allowing the tea to warm his body from the inside out. It had nothing on the warm feeling Gin gave him, of course, but it was still very pleasant. And an excellent way to end a very stressful day.

He drank the tea slowly, savouring the flavours as he worked out the next notes to his song in his head. Picturing the pen moving across the empty score sheet. Perhaps he could play it for Gin when it was finished. Gin did like music. And from what he'd heard from Rangiku earlier today – while pretending to be immersed in a trembling book, waiting for the opportunity to approach – they'd been to see the Phantom of the Opera together at the theatre. Sousuke smiled to himself. His little darling had excellent taste. Phantom had one of the best musical scores and storylines around. He was sure he had some of the songs lying around here somewhere. Perhaps he could play it now to pass some time before Gin came to meet him.

He set his tea down and picked up a worn leather folder he kept on the little shelf under his coffee table, where he kept his musical scores. He opened the folder and thumbed through the songs. Most were his own compositions, though some were songs he'd collected over the years. Beethoven. Bach. Mozart. Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber's works were more recent acquirements, so they were near the back. Love Never dies. Beneath a Moonless Sky. Angel of Music. Point of no Return.

Ah, here we are, Music of the Night. He smiled to himself again. Perhaps I should take Matsumoto-san's advice and seduce my Gin by playing it for him. There's a good idea. I could bewitch him like the Phantom did Christine. Be his angel of music.

The next thought came unbidden, but it caused a wide smile to creep its way across his face.

I could make him mine.

He turned his eyes down to the notes of the song in his hands. It was one of his own arrangements, a re-conceptualisation of the original melody, made to add some spice to it, because the original seemed too simple without a voice to sing the words. So he'd filled the silences with notes and little embellishments to give it depth and breadth and life.

Strangely enough, now he thought about it, Matsumoto's comment had been true; he'd had Gin in the forefront of his mind when he composed this arrangement. And many other songs besides, while drinking tea and smoking cigarettes. For the first time truly understanding the Phantom and how someone could inspire the creation of such beauty.

I wonder if he would sing it for me, he thought idly, While I played the notes.

He slid the score back into the folder and, glancing at the clock on the wall. Four o clock. There was plenty of time to pass until Gin arrived. Enough time to shower and change ready to go out with Gin, and then finish his aria. He might even play a couple of songs if Gin was running late, but he doubted it with the eagerness of Gin's friend to set them up with each other. But it always paid to plan ahead.

He trudged through the hall and up the stairs to the bathroom, shutting the door behind him and opening the glass door to the shower. He turned the water on, to give it time to warm up before he
got in, and slowly peeled off his uniform, throwing it onto the floor. Glad to be out of the dirty thing. His socks and boxers soon followed. Naked, he took a deep relaxed breath, and stepped under the hot water, shutting himself in and letting it relax his tired muscles and soak his body. His mind drifting off as the water dripped down his skin.

Naturally, his mind sought Gin again, and set to imagining all the possible scenarios that could play out following their evening together. One such scenario involved a morning shower together. And made him wonder what Gin looked like, under those new black clothes...

He could imagine it clearly, already aroused at the thought...

*Gin's deft fingers were working to untie the knot holding his black uniform, the garment sliding off his pale shoulders, his smile seductive and full of promises.*

"Shower with me?" Gin asked, dropping his trousers. Sousuke looked at him, smiling. Gin’s words were a question, but the demand was clear: make love to me in your shower.

"Of course."

Sousuke followed his darling into the shower, closing the glass door behind them while Gin turned on the water. Jumping at the temperature.

"S'cold." Gin said, shivering a little. It always did take a while to warm the water up. "Warm me up?"

Aizen smiled down at him, playing the innocent. If just for a reaction. "Oh? How?"

*It was Gin's turn to smile, now. Quietly, lifting his slender arms up and around Sousuke's neck, he pulled the man in for a deep, lingering kiss. Making sure to press his naked body against him so Aizen could feel his erection against his skin.*

"You know how."

Sousuke groaned and leant his forearm against the tiled shower wall, arousal in full effect.

Fuck. Just thinking about him makes me hard. It's a good thing I have extreme levels of self-control around him, otherwise I'd be in trouble.

But there was no need for restraint here in the privacy of his own home. No-one was watching him now, so he gave in to it. He let his hand move to grip his hard and aching cock and started stroking it slowly, biting his lip, building up a pace as the rest of the fantasy unfolded itself...

*He removed his fingers from Gin, having thoroughly prepared his darling for him, enjoying the gasps and groans and soft noises Gin emitted. He lifted Gin's body up by the hips and pinned him with his back against the tiled wall before plunging his arousal into Gin with a grunt. Gin's arms around his neck, clinging to him for support. He leant in and kissed Gin again, pushing his tongue in to taste his darling's warm, wet tongue. Coaxing out more soft moans as the hot water rained down on them, plastering their hair to their heads.*

*When he broke the kiss, Gin's breaths were heavy, his chest heaving as it had the time Aizen took his hand.*

"Sousuke." Gin panted, his voice a breathy whisper. "Fuck m- ahh!"

Sousuke smirked. His thrust had been well timed so Gin's demand had become a strangled cry of
delight. He paused for a moment, savouring the look of ecstasy on Gin's face, knowing that only he would be able to draw such sounds from Gin. That only he would be the one to send Gin to a land of ecstasy like this.

"More." Gin breathed. "Harder."

The sight of Gin's face flushed with heat, coupled with the feeling of Gin's walls tight around him made Sousuke definitely willing to comply. He pulled out almost completely, and then slammed back into Gin. Repeatedly. Setting a relentless pace because he didn't have the time or patience to start slow. Enjoying each and every one of Gin's moans of pleasure – no, ecstasy – and the way Gin's beautiful fingers tangled themselves in his dark, wet hair. Only able to say Aizen's name. And the word fuck.

"Sousuke," Gin cried, delirious with the pleasure, not even caring who heard, "Ah! Sousuke. Fu-fuck. Sousuke! Fuck!"

Hearing his beautiful Gin moaning his name with such passion was enough to drive him wild. He lowered his lips to Gin's neck and started kissing and sucking the soft flesh, seeing what other delicious sounds he could pull out of Gin while fucking him against a wall.

"Mmm, oh, Sou..."

"Yes, Gin?"

"S'good. Do that s'more."

He repeated the action, sucking hard enough to leave large bruises. And Gin made some sort of noise that was a cross between a hum and a moan. Whatever it was, it was music to Aizen's ears.

He thrust into Gin's welcoming body a few more times before Gin clamped down around him, climaxing with a loud, strangled cry. Spraying semen up Aizen's stomach. Gin's whole body shuddered, and his grip on Aizen's hair tightened and pulled while his free hand clung to Aizen's back. Sousuke followed shortly after. A few more groans and thrusts later, he fell into oblivion after Gin, pumping out into his lover, panting and breathless...

Shuddering with his release, Aizen returned to reality with a sigh. He'd have to clean the shower again now, but at least his mind was clear again and his evening with Gin wouldn't be tainted with such bodily reactions. At least he hoped so, anyway. With a contented sigh, he reached for a sponge and some body wash, and set to cleaning his body. Grateful he'd chosen to shower first.
His body clean and dry and dressed in an elegant deep blue formal yukata, Aizen walked back into his study, drying off his damp hair with a towel. His feet padded softly on the wooden floor as he took slow and lazy steps into the room, and he sighed quietly as he set the wet towel onto the radiator to dry. The shower had been cleaned, he'd made his bed up with fresh sheets – just in case he did bring Gin home with him. And there was nothing to do now but wait. So, he walked into the kitchen and made himself a fresh pot of tea, and carried it back into the study along with a clean mug, where he kept his piano.

He carried his drink over to the piano and set it down onto the coasters he kept on top of it, pouring the tea into the empty mug before sitting on the piano bench ready to compose. His pen ready for him beside his half-empty score sheet. He lifted his mug of tea and took a long sip of it, thinking. He then set the mug back onto its coaster, right beside his trademark glasses, and picked up his pen to write the next notes of the song.

He frowned to himself before pushing the hair back off his face, so he could concentrate. Leaving just one strand hanging down over his forehead. Then, he aligned his fingers over the piano keys and played the notes he'd just written.

"Ran, I already have clothes." Gin sighed. But Rangiku was having none of it.

"I know that." she cooed, "But don't you want to look nice for Aizen-san?"

Gin sighed, watching her scan through the different kimono and yukata in the shop.

"Well, I do, but-"

"Excellent!" she beamed at him, "Now, do you know what colours he likes? You can appeal to him by wearing his favourite colour."

"Dark colours." Gin supplied. Rubbing his chin thoughtfully. Thinking of the blue folders the man kept his files in on his desk when he taught their classes. "I hear he likes blue."

He looked up at her again, finding her smirking smugly across at him. Gin frowned.

"What?"

"You." She said, smiling. Her voice turning more mocking and playful as she impersonated her friend, "No, I'm not excited to go out with him. Nah, he don't like me. I got problems with me eyes. He smiles like that at everyone. You're a terrible liar, Gin. You like him. You know his favourite colour. You sit at the front in class just to be close to him." He watched her smile soften, then, along with her voice, "And you always smile that little bit wider and softer whenever you talk to him."
Gin could only stare at her, lips firmly pressed together and trying to fight the pink tinge in his cheeks.

"You think I don't notice, Gin." Rangiku said softly.

Gin opened his mouth to protest, but nothing came out of him. He closed his mouth again. She was right. She knew him too well, and she was very observant of people.

"Yer right." he conceded. Ignoring her smug grin. "I like him, 'kay. But who doesn't? He's smart, he's charmin', he's handsome, an' he always knows jus' what ta say."

Gin sighed softly and opened his eyes to find Rangiku smiling warmly at him.

"Wha' now?" he asked.

"That's the same smile he has when he looks at you." She swooned. "I'd put money on it that he thinks about you smiling at him like that."

Gin laughed. "Then ya'd be very poor." he said derisively, "'Tha' guy don' do love. He jus' plays wit' people. Everyone knows it. All ya ever get with him is one night. An' I don' wanna be jus' another notch on 'is bedpost. I don' think I can do it, Ran."

She frowned, studying him quietly for a moment before she took his hands in hers. "Gin," she said, staring into his eyes intently, "I promise you, if he uses you like a toy, I'll kick his balls so hard he'll be tasting them for weeks. Okay?"

Gin smiled, knowing she would definitely do it. It wouldn't be the first time she'd kicked a man in the bollocks, either. Or the last. And he was suddenly very glad he had someone like her looking out for him.

He nodded. "kay."

She beamed a smile at him and released his hands, brushing his shoulders gently. "Now you just concentrate on having fun." she told him, "Go out, enjoy your dinner, get to know him a little better. And if anything happens, then it happens. And if he hurts you, you come get me and I'll kick his balls. Deal?"

"Deal."

"Good." she smiled. "But you know, I don't think for a second he will. I still think he'll be very good to you. You could ask him for the sun and he'd find a way to give it to you."

Gin's smile brightened a bit at the idea. "Ya think so?"

Rangiku reached over and brushed the hair out of Gin's eyes. "I know so."

Gin smiled tenderly at her, and quietly imagined living in a world with no sunlight or natural warmth. Making an offhanded comment to Aizen Sousuke about missing the sun, and waking up days later to bright sunlight coming in through the windows. And Sousuke lying naked beside him, smiling, and saying "I made a sun for you."

"Now come on," Rangiku said to him, taking his arm, "Let's get you looking nice for your date. I don't want you wearing your usual scruffy clothes. You said he liked blue, right? Let's have a look at the blue ones."
She led him over to the neatly folded collection of blue yukata on one of the tables, all various shades and sizes.

"Hey, Ran." Gin called to her while she perused the stock, "Thanks."

She smiled gently back at him. "No problem. You'd do the same for me."

Gin returned her smile. Very glad she was in his life. "Yeah, definitely."

They were interrupted by the little old lady who ran the shop, who came hobbling over with her walking stick.

"Hello, dears," she cooed gently, "Anything I can help you with?"

"Yes!" Rangiku chirped, a little too loudly for such a quiet little shop. Embarrassed by her mistake, she cleared her throat, speaking at a more appropriate volume. "Yes," she repeated, "My friend Gin here has a date tonight and he wants to look nice for him. What do you have in the colour blue?"

The old woman, tiny and hunched, peered at Gin through her glasses. Looking thoughtful. Rangiku kept talking.

"He's going out with a very important man," she elaborated, "A vice captain. And Gin really likes him so he needs to make a good impression."

"Ran," Gin hissed in her ear, "D'ya gotta embarrass me by tellin' everyone?"

But Rangiku ignored him. Smiling brightly at the shopkeeper. "So can you help us?"

The old woman scrutinised Gin, who was fighting embarrassment again, as if she were trying to place a familiar face.

"This man," she said finally, "What does he look like?"

"Oh," Rangiku grinned, "He's tall, handsome..." Rangiku twirled her thick hair with her fingers, pretending to look thoughtful, reveling in Gin's embarrassment, "Thick brown hair, black glasses... he looks a bit like a librarian. If a librarian were sexy."

Gin flushed a beet red. "Ran!" he hissed, indignant, "Don't say that!"

But Rangiku only smirked, thoroughly enjoying Gin's flustered face. Even the old lady seemed to be enjoying it, because she was smiling at him, too. Gin scowled at them.

"Ohh, I see," the old woman grinned, "You mean Aizen-san, don't you?"

Gin cringed and covered his face as Rangiku nodded excitedly. "Yes! He's taking Gin out for a fancy dinner. And if all goes well, Gin won't be making it back to his room tonight."

Gin dropped his hand from his face and felt more heat flood his face. Quietly dying of embarrassment. "Ran..." he pleaded, "Stop, please..."

The old woman clicked her fingers with a smile. "I knew I recognised you when you walked in, young man." she said, "Aizen-san told me all about you."

Gin groaned inwardly. "Yer kiddin."

"Oh, no," she chuckled, "He talked about you at great length. Said he was going to ask you out."
"Does all a fuckin' Seireitei know?" Gin spouted, "I mean, damn."

Rangiku tried to stifle a giggle, as the old woman continued. "How does the new uniform fit?"

Gin fell silent, and Rangiku took the opportunity to gently elbow Gin in the ribs knowingly. Grinning at him.

"Perfectly." Gin admitted. And the old woman smiled softly, nodding.

"Ah, excellent." she beamed at him. "I did hope I cut the material correctly to fit you. I was a little worried since I didn't have your exact measurements. He did place another order for you, I have it in the back ready. Aizen-san told me he'd come collect it after work tomorrow, but I think it'd be really nice if you wore it today and surprised him. It's already been paid for, so you don't need to worry about the bill."

Rangiku gasped, "Oh yes, that sounds wonderful."

Gin frowned, slightly dubious. _Knowin' him though, he'll prob'ly have me pay fer it in other ways._

"Alrighty, I'll just go and get it." the shop owner told them, "You two wait here."

The pair of them watched the little old lady disappear into the back of the shop behind the counter. Once she was out of earshot, Rangiku quietly squealed with excitement.

"Ohhh, Gin!" she gasped. But Gin had other things on his mind.

"If it turns out ta be a girls kimono, I'mma kill him."

But it turned out that Gin needn't have worried.

When the shop owner returned with the garment in question and opened the brown paper, Gin and Rangiku were greeted with the sight of a dark blue yukata, made of the finest cotton. Formal and elegant. Rangiku gasped and slowly raised her hands to cover her mouth.

"Oh, Gin..."

But Gin just sighed in relief, thanking the gods that it wasn't remotely feminine.

"Gin, it's gorgeous." Rangiku sighed as Gin stood in the doorway to the fitting room wearing his latest and _most expensive_ gift from Aizen Sousuke. Trying hard not to think of just how much it had cost, and what he might have to do to pay for it.

"It's very formal." Gin stated. "I feel kinda overdressed."

"It's perfect. He has excellent taste." Rangiku smiled. "You look so elegant. He's probably taking you to a really fancy place to eat. Somewhere real classy."

Gin snorted and crossed his arms across his chest. "How do you know what his tastes are, Ran?" he asked, "He could be plannin' ta take me ta some back alley and-"

"Gin!" Rangiku gasped, "He won't do that!" She gave him a stern look, offended that he could even suggest Aizen was a sexual deviant. "Besides, I read the Women's Institute Weekly! They have a lot of information on all of the eligible bachelors. Even Aizen-san. He had a good rating, too, so don't you fret. He is most definitely not a sexual deviant according to my information."
Gin thought she meant to be reassuring, but he was just confused. Weren't sexual deviants good at hiding the fact that they were sexual deviants?

But he knew he had to say something, so he went with questioning her information. "Ya have a rating system?"

"Yes." she trilled on, "All the men get given a score based on desirable qualities. Like their cooking abilities, attractiveness, chivalry, if they can protect you in a fight..."

Gin snorted and rolled his eyes. "Ran, I can fight me own battles. I don't need protectin'."

"I know." Rangiku told him, "But say you were fighting an abnormal hollow, that you were badly injured, bleeding everywhere, wouldn't you want Aizen-san to stroll in and save you?" she asked hopefully, "I know I would."

Gin pressed his lips together, thinking. Would Aizen save him if he were in a pinch? Probably. It would depend on how many people were around, and what Aizen could get out of it.

"Well, yeah." Gin answered her. "If I was bleedin' everywhere an' on me last legs maybe. Bu' fer all I know he might jus' lemme die."

"Oh, please." Rangiku countered. "You'd be the first one carried to safety. I told you, he loves you."

It was all Gin could do not to laugh. But he managed a long sigh. "If ya say so, Ran."

"I do say so." She countered, a little smug in her opinion. "Now come on, I will not let you be late to meet Aizen-san!"

Before Gin could even answer, she took his arm and dragged him out of the shop while the old woman waved them off and wished Gin luck.

"I changed my mind, I dunno if I wanna do this." Gin told her. A bouncing ball of nerves as he walked with Rangiku towards Aizen's house. "I feel like I'm gonna throw up. Let's just go back."

Rangiku grabbed his arm again before he could run away. Gripping him tightly.

"Oh, no," she said sternly, "You are not wussing out. You promised Aizen-san. And you'll break his heart if you ditch him now. Besides, you were looking forward to this, too."

Gin groaned, watching their destination come into view in the evening sunlight. And he wished for some way, any way, to get out of this dinner. Because nevermind the fact that Aizen was playing him like a fucking fiddle - if he said something stupid or did something idiotic he'd never be able to look Aizen in the face again.

"You're just nervous." Rangiku continued, "It's normal. Just first date jitters. If you weren't nervous, it would mean you didn't care. And you're really nervous, so it means you care a lot about impressing him."

Gin frowned, loathe to admit she was right. But she just smiled, rummaging in her bag and procuring the small flask of sake she carried with her. She held it up in front of Gin's face.

"Here," she said softly, "To calm your nerves."

Gin took the flask and slowly unscrewed the lid. He drank a few large gulps of the sake, feeling it
warm his insides, before handing it back to Rangiku. Though he was highly tempted to down the whole thing, if only to make his stomach stop twisting in on itself with nervousness.

"Better?" she asked him.

"Much. Thankya."

"Good." she nodded, smiling softly, "Now remember, he already loves you. So just be yourself, okay?"

"'Kay." Gin nodded, taking a deep breath. Though it did little to soothe his nerves.

"But what if-"

"But nothing!" She cut him off, "You go have fun. Oh, and don't worry if you don't make it back to your dorm tonight." she added with a sly smirk of her own. "I'll take your stuff back and feed your fox for you."

"Okay, Ran, I get it." Gin smiled. "Have fun. Be myself. Don't worry about stuff."

"Right." she beamed at him, giving him a big, warm, squeezy hug that he did not hesitate to return. "Good luck."

"Thanks, Ran."

"And tell me everything tomorrow!" she grinned, "And I mean everything. Details Gin, I want details!"

Gin had to laugh at her exuberance. "Can ya turn off yer shippin' goggles?" he asked, "It's jus' dinner."

She swatted him playfully on the arm. "You just go or you'll be late." she chided, pushing him in the direction of Aizen's home.

"Okay, okay!" Gin laughed. "I'm going!"

"Good!" she called out after him, turning to head back to the dorms. "And good luck! Not that you'll need it!"

Gin smiled after her as she set off, shaking his head slowly. He then took another deep breath, calmer now, and trudged towards the house and up the little path to Aizen's front door.

<ll>Well, he thought, here goes nothin'.</ll>
Music of the Night

Chapter Notes

the song played is an original arrangement of Music of the Night by Fabrizio Caligaris. Search it on youtube. Best piano cover I have ever heard.

Also it has long been a personal headcanon that Gin has a thing for musicians, and that Aizen is a pianist. Which is why we have this chapter.

"Okay," Gin told himself, trying to scrape together enough nerve to knock on the door. "You can do this. Remember wha' Ran said. Ya don' hafta do what ya don't wanna do."

Sighing, he reached up and knocked on the door loudly. Then he waited. Gin always hated waiting. Especially waiting for people to answer their front door when he knocked. A minute would feel like a century, and Gin was impatient anyway, which only made it worse. And his anxiety didn't help matters either. He could only hope Aizen would answer the door quickly so his anxiety would be short lived. But one minute turned into two, then three, and Gin began to suspect he'd been stood up. That he'd been left to stand on the front porch like a hoover salesman nobody wanted to see.

Am I late? Or early? Gin wondered, wishing he had a watch. He folded his arms across his chest. Fuckin' Aizen-san, making me stand out here like this.

"Hello! Aizen-san!" Gin knocked the door again. Louder this time. Jeez, is he deaf?

Gin stood awkwardly on the porch, arms folded. Fidgeting and shifting his weight from foot to foot. Growing a little annoyed now.

After lookin' at me like a happy little puppy when I agreed to go to dinner with him, ya think he'd be jumpin' to answer the door.

He waited for what felt like another ten years, but what was really another couple of minutes. Waiting for an answer. Finally, sick of waiting, he stood scowling at the door.

All a this effort an' anxiety fer nothin'.

He uncrossed his arms and let them hang down by his sides. One more minute. One more minute and then I'm going home.

A few seconds of silence passed, and Gin felt his sleepy zanpaktou spirit rouse itself grouchily from his sleep. Woken by Gin's anxiety and frustration.

Oh, for fucks sake, just go in, Shinsou grumbled, I would.

I can't. Gin protested.

What is the worst he can he do to you?

Gin wanted to tell his zanpaktou that there was an awful lot the man could do to him. But that was an argument he didn't want to get into. So he just stood frowning at Shinsou's words. Sometimes Gin swore he had the crankiest zanpaktou in the world. Well, fine then, if Shinsou wanted him to 'grow some balls', then Gin would grow some balls. He reached for the door handle and pulled it down angrily and pushed the door, expecting to find it locked. It was a little surprising to find it open.

"Oh." Gin gaped quietly. To which Shinsou just cackled loudly.

You look so surprised, Gin.

Gin ignored the jibe. Not rising to the bait. Instead, he slowly pushed the door open and cautiously walked inside.

Aizen's house was the same as it was the last time Gin visited. It was quiet, too, and Gin could hear the loud thumping of his heart against his ribcage in the silence. Feeling it thrash against the cage containing his wild heart. He turned slowly and closed the door behind him softly, careful not to disturb the quiet. He could not shake the feeling that he was intruding into Aizen's quiet sanctuary. After all, he hadn't technically been invited in this time.

Gin inhaled deeply through his nose, taking in as much air as he possibly could, holding his breath for a second before exhaling in an attempt to calm himself.

Calm down, Gin commanded himself, He's just a man.

He forced his body to take the first step into Aizen Sousuke's home. He felt a little like a criminal breaking in to steal all the valuables like he did in the Rukongai districts as he moved silently through the house. He was careful not to make a single sound or creak. A skill honed over many years thieving in the Rukongai.

The lights were on, Gin noted, which meant Aizen was definitely home. Though the knowledge did little to subdue his nerves.

He must be in one of the back rooms somewhere. Maybe he fell asleep. Gin reasoned, eyes scanning the empty living room. Eyes resting longer than they should on the sofa where Aizen had held his hand and flattered him to death, and enjoyed his immense embarrassment. He could still hear the man's laughter, deep and smooth, and musical...

Gin shook his head to free himself from the thoughts and continued to move through the house. That's when he heard it. The music. The notes of a piano, soft and dulcet. Floating through the air and into his ears.

I didn't know he played the piano, Gin thought, He kept that quiet.

Gin crept through the house, past the kitchen, and down the hallway, lured by the pull of the music. It was utterly enchanting. Soft and hypnotic, and Gin instantly recognised it as one of his favourite songs, Music of the Night. In which Erik the Phantom utterly seduced Christine and pulled her into his world. It was a song Gin could sing by heart. He knew all the words. If only he knew how far into the song he was. Was it the beginning? It sounded like he wasn't that far in. Maybe he'd timed it just right and walked in just as he started to play the song. That really would be something special.
Gin took another step, then another, following the beautiful music. The words of the song coming to him. Wondering to himself, is this how Christine felt when she heard this?

He crept towards the source of the sound. Slowly, carefully, the music took hold of him. Gently pulling him towards its maker. The calming, soothing notes lulling him into a sense of wonderment. Soon enough he was in another world entirely, where nothing else mattered except that music Gin wished would never end. Someone, anyone, could come creeping up behind him now, ready to kill him, and Gin would not have seen it coming.

It was unlike any version of the song Gin had ever heard. The melody was complex, and there were a lot of additions and embellishments to the original. Did he compose this himself? Gin wondered. If so, the man was very talented. Gin could listen to him play all night. Every note played was soft and lilting, designed to hypnotise and seduce and lull the listener into a sense of warmth and security. Gin couldn't afford to let himself be pulled in by such a dangerous man, but he felt himself being taken by the hand and pulled in anyway. He couldn't help it. Not that he'd resist at this point, anyway, if he could. He was already too far gone into Aizen's wonderful musical world to go back now. Just like Christine, he was done for.

If he fell into Aizen's arms now, Gin doubted he'd be able to resist there, either. All the man would have to do was quietly smile and tell him, "give in." and Gin would surrender.

Rangiku had often joked to him that since musicians really did it for Gin – pianists especially – all anyone would have to do was play Gin a song, and he would drop his trousers. And if said musician looked like Aizen did, and played like that, Gin would be naked in their bed before the song ended. Gin laughed at the time, but now he feared how right she'd been. If Aizen knew that information, that he was there listening, no doubt Gin would definitely end up in his bed, naked and moaning Aizen's name like the end of the world were coming.

And the worst part of it was that Gin wouldn't even care if he did. So complete was the hypnosis. So complete the magic spell cast over him by the man and his piano.

The music was coming from behind a door Gin presumed was a study. It was a room he'd never seen, but perhaps Aizen wanted it that way. Maybe he never let anyone go in there. But with the music and hypnotised by it as he was, the thought never crossed Gin's mind he might not be wanted in there. That he might be walking into a private personal space. There was only him, and the music, and the desire to see the source of such a lovely sound. So carefully, he gently pushed the door, which had been left ajar, open.

He found the composer himself sitting at a wooden piano facing the far wall. Naturally, the instrument was made of mahogany. Like everything else in the house. Gin sighed softly, relieved he would not be seen. He could see Aizen's back though. His dark hair, broad shoulders. He was dressed formally, in a deep blue yukata of a similar shade to Gin's own. And every so often Gin caught a glimpse of those graceful fingers reaching out to press on the piano keys.

Atop the piano, on a coaster beside his trademark pair of glasses, sat a mug of tea Gin suspected had gone cold a while ago. Forgotten about as Aizen had become absorbed in his music.

Gin held his breath. Certain Aizen would notice his presence. Or sense his spiritual energy. But he was too absorbed in playing, and Gin breathed out softly. Gin thought about moving closer, but he didn't dare. He might interrupt the casting of the magic spell, and then the music would cease. And he didn't want this song to end. Not until the last notes had been played and he heard them fade into silence again. So Gin stood still, leaning against the doorframe, listening.

Even the final notes were perfection. The song wound down, and Gin floated back down to earth
again from his dreamworld. The notes grew softer, quieter, and then finally faded away, leaving silence to reign over the room again.

Gin thought he'd better break it, so the man would know he was there and not turn around and have a heart attack upon seeing him. But carefully, carefully. In his current state, trying to remember how to breathe, he might blurt out something he might regret later. Because *take me now* was on the tip of his tongue, and Gin knew after that he'd just be another one of Aizen Sousuke's sexual conquests. So he had to think before he spoke.

In the end he settled with a harmless compliment on the music.

"That was beautiful, Aizen-san."

Gin had made sure to speak softly, but Aizen still jumped when he realised Gin was there. That he'd been watched. He jumped to his feet abruptly, slamming his hands down on the piano keys in his fright, making a loud and ugly sound and shattering the dreamlike atmosphere. Effectively breaking the magic spell he'd cast over Gin. Jarring the both of them back to reality.

Aizen wheeled around, and sighed relieved when he caught sight of Gin standing there.

"Gin!" he exclaimed, "It's you. You startled me." He sighed, then, "I wasn't expecting you until..."

Gin watched Aizen's chocolate coloured eyes cast up to a clock on the wall, and then winced. "Ten minutes ago. Ah... sorry about that." he looked around guiltily, and Gin could not help but notice just how much more attractive he looked with his hair pushed back off his face, with the one strand hanging down over his forehead. And no glasses.

"Ya know..." Gin said quietly, unable to stop the words from leaving him, "You look so much better without yer glasses."

Gin watched the shock register on Aizen's face at the unexpected compliment. It was as if for the first time, he was really seeing Gin. His eyes roamed down Gin's body.

"And you look..."

Gin smiled, a little pleased, watching Aizen scramble to find his words. He suspected not many people could render Aizen Sousuke speechless.

"You look beautiful."

Gin could feel is cheeks flush a little at this, and he rubbed the back of his head, touching his hair shyly. "I'm sorry I broke inta yer house." he told Aizen, "I didn' think ya heard me knockin'. I didn' know ya played."

Gin caught Aizen's soft smile at the comment, and Gin knew he'd landed on one of the few things Aizen took pride in.

"It's a well-kept secret," Aizen admitted, sitting back on the piano bench and facing Gin. "Nobody knows. Well, except you, of course." Gin just stood there smiling and let Aizen continue.

"I'd like it to stay that way, though." Aizen told him. Giving him a serious look. Gin knew a veiled threat when he heard one, and vowed silence.

"I aint gonna tell anyone."
"Thankyou." Aizen said softly, "The Women's Institute have been trying to rope me into one of their talent shows for years. If this ever got out I would never hear the end of it."

Gin suddenly thought of Rangiku, and smiled. No doubt she would be one of the first ones to try and convince him to play for a crowd. And use his affection for Gin as leverage.

"And I'd rather not play for a crowd," Aizen explained.

"Howcome, Aizen-san?" Gin asked, curious now.

He'd have thought the man would love to perform for an audience. You know, big up his ego with the applause. Not that his ego needed to get any bigger, but still.

"Yer really good. Don't ya wanna share yer talent? I would if I were as good as you."

Aizen considered Gin for a moment, as if deciding how much to reveal.

"Music is..." he began, hesitating a moment to collect his thoughts and words. "Music is my way of expressing myself. Every song I play is a piece of my soul given sound. And sharing that with a crowd, and people I don't know, takes a lot of trust I do not have. So I don't play for anyone."

"Oh." Gin said, a little saddened by this answer. Because such great art as this shouldn't be locked away. It was meant to be heard by all, so it could touch people's hearts the way it had his. But it was Aizen's art, and it was his choice what he did with it, and Gin had to respect that.

"Do ya think..." Gin started, unsure whether to ask, but feeling brave enough to try. Because he had to hear that music again. "Do ya think ya could play fer me?"

The look Aizen gave him then seemed to be asking if he were mad. So Gin back-pedalled quickly. "I mean, just for me. Not a big crowd with me at the back."

The silence between them grew awkward, and it made Gin nervous, so he began babbling in a nervous embarrassment just to fill it.

"I mean, that is, if ya wanna." Gin held his hands up, feeling heat rise to his cheeks again, "If- if ya don' wanna it's fine. Ya just said ya don' play fer anyone an' that includes me. I wasn' even s'posed ta hear ya play just now either, so don' feel pressured or anythin'. I did break inta yer house an' all, so feel free ta say no."

Aizen kept his gaze on Gin, considering the request. Only making Gin more nervous with each silent second that passed, knotting up his stomach with anxiety. Keeping his face composed, his expression thoughtful. Gin swallowed the lump forming in his throat as he watched Aizen's hand slowly reach for a worn black leather folder on top of the piano. He lifted it up and held it out to Gin, arm outstretched.

"Here," he said softly. "Pick a song."

Gin's face broke out into the widest grin, incredulous at the fact that Aizen Sousuke, a man who by his own admission played for no-one, would play a song for him.

"Ah, you'll play for me?" Gin asked, excitement building in his stomach as he took the few steps into the study and carefully took the folder of music from Aizen's hand. Cradling it carefully in his arms. Knowing he was holding pieces of the man's soul given sound.

Aizen smiled at him again. That same soft smile he'd given when he held Gin's hand.
"For you." he said. "Only you."

"Just me." Gin breathed. "Just this once."

Aizen shot him an amused glance, suggesting he could see through the lie that just this once would be enough. But he said nothing, and let Gin open the folder to peruse the pieces of music with gentle and delicate hands.
For you, Only you

Chapter Notes

Because I am utter Phantom of the Opera trash - the Song played here is Love Never Dies, written by Andrew Lloyd Webber. On a sidenote it's difficult to describe music but I tried my best.

Gin looked up at Aizen expectantly. "I can pick any one I want?"

Aizen only smiled indulgently at him. "Yes. Any song you want."

Gin smiled softly, carefully opening the folder of music. "Can I sit? I don' wanna drop yer music everywhere."

In answer, Aizen scooted over to one side of the piano bench and patted the empty space beside him. Gin took the invitation and walked over, perching himself on the bench next to him. Their bodies pressing together.

Gin gently set the folder on his lap and started to peruse the selection. Turning the sheets of paper carefully, knowing they meant a great deal to the man next to him. Some were his own compositions, and the result of a lot of hard work. And the rest had no doubt taken a lot of money to add to his collection.

"Ya have so many." Gin said softly. "How'm I supposed ta choose just one?"

Aizen's chuckle was light and musical, reverberating through Gin's body. Full of amusement.

"Who says I'll only play you one?"

Gin looked up at him, flushing pink at the words, his smile, and all the statement insinuated, and quickly looked down at the musical scores again. Hoping to distract Aizen from the fact he was blushing. Again. He flicked through them, eyes studying the notes on the lines. They meant little to Gin. But then, Gin's knowledge of reading music was very basic. But if Aizen could translate the dots and lines on the bars into the beautiful music he'd heard earlier, Gin was determined to treat them with the utmost respect.

Gin let a quiet sigh leave him as his fingertips ran over the dried ink of the notes. "I wanna hear em all."

He glanced up, quick and shy. He hadn't meant to say that. Not out loud. But Aizen's smile was so soft, and warm, that Gin made himself swallow his protests and apologies for being so forward.

"Well, I'd be happy to play them for you, Gin." he answered, "If you like."

Gin looked up at him, surprised. Until a smile of equal warmth and softness crept its way quietly across Gin's face as he turned his eyes to the music again. Though Gin was sure the smile hadn't gone unnoticed.
"That'd be real nice, Aizen-san."

"Yes, it would." Aizen agreed, his voice soft and far away. And Gin thought that perhaps he was imagining some rainy days spent together, Gin listening to him playing his music. And possibly singing along to it...

"Perhaps not all in one day, though."

Gin smiled. "Yeah, there's a lotta songs here. It might take a few days. Plus, if yer gonna write s'more, it might take even longer." Gin looked up at Aizen, smiling sheepishly, "Are ya writin' any more songs, Aizen-san?"

Now it was Aizen's turn to grin sheepishly. "Ah, actually," he began, "I'm working on one right now."

"Oh." Gin gasped, flush with excitement. "Ya are? What kinda song is it? Are ya writin' it fer anyone? Oh, no, yer probably not since nobody knows ya play... right?"

Aizen could only stare back at Gin, shocked. Because oh, if only his darling knew.

If only Gin knew the half composed aria hidden underneath the score resting on the piano now was intended for him...

"That's right." Aizen told him, "Although, when it's done I can play it for you."

Gin's face brightened. "Ya will?" he asked, somewhat incredulous.

"Of course." Aizen reassured him. "But only when it's done. I don't want you to hear it until it's perfect."

Gin nodded, smiling again. "A course. But if Aizen-san composed it, it'll definitely be perfect."

Sousuke returned the smile, though it was a touch sceptical. "You have a strong faith in my abilities."

Gin raised his eyebrows in answer, resisting the urge to lift his eyelids. "And you don't?"

Aizen regarded him for a moment, "I am merely a little dubious of your optimism, since you've never heard any of my compositions before."

Gin took a deep breath and sighed. Were all artists like this? So self critical all the time? "But you play so beautifully," Gin said softly, "How can it be anythin' but perfect?"

Aizen smiled very gently at him. "You're very flattering."

Gin had to fight to stifle a laugh. "Tha's rich, comin' from you." he retorted, "Since ya flattered me ta death yesterday."

Aizen's chuckle at the remark was lighthearted and full of amusement. "I suppose it is," he said gently. Then, more seductively, he added, "Though I don't recall you complaining at the time."

Gin swallowed, flustered both by his words and the sultry tones they were spoken in, and – why not admit it? - the man's close proximity. Gin could feel heat flood his body, rising to his neck and face, and he cursed his traitorous body for having such a reaction to him. The chuckle Aizen gave him told Gin his cheeks were red again, so he turned his face away, hoping the older man hadn't seen him blush. But the touch of gentle fingers on his jaw, the tingling of skin against skin, set his
heart racing. And Gin knew then that Aizen had *seen*.

"You are adorable," he heard Aizen tell him, "When you blush." He smirked, then, and Gin thought he caught the devious glint of amusement in his eyes as he spoke. "I'll have to make you do it more often."

Gin tried to find his voice, to search for words. But his traitor of a body defied him, determined to make him fight for every single syllable. For every breath of air. "Ah, Aizen-san... I don't... don't think that... you... tha' we should..."

But Aizen only smiled. Whether at his confusion or embarrassment Gin couldn't tell. There was just a hot, twisty feeling in his stomach, a lightness in his chest. Heat flooding into his body, spreading from his chest, making his heart threaten to escape his ribcage. Making him desire to both touch and be touched. And it had everything to do with the man beside him gently lifting his face up to look at him. Fingertips gently resting under his chin.

"Oh?" Aizen inquired, "You don't think we should... what?"

Gin swallowed the lump in his throat, trying to ignore the moths fluttering in his stomach, even though the man's voice was gentle. Or were they butterflies? Gin was sure they were moths, but Ran had said something about getting butterflies...

He tried to ignore the doubts, too. Because Gin wasn't too sure is these feelings were things he was supposed to be feeling about another man. And he wasn't at all sure if pursuing anything with Aizen Sousuke was a good idea. But the moths were fluttering, his body was hot all over, and Gin couldn't have moved or resisted if he tried.

"You don't think we should do this?" Aizen asked, softly caressing Gin's cheek with a smirk on his lips, "Or this?"

Gin opened his mouth to speak, but only the first syllable of Aizen's name left his mouth before he felt the older man's lips firmly pressing against his own. Gin's eyes shot open, shocked at the sudden intimate contact. His whole body tensed, too. Because he knew this was definitely a bad idea. That Aizen would only take advantage of him, and then leave when the sun came up. But once the initial shock had worn off, Gin felt a warmth, too. Like the sensation of a hot drink filling his stomach on a cold winter's day. It spread through his body, warm and curious, lighting up all the dark spaces inside him. Like the first spark of a fire. And when Gin tasted that warm, wet tongue, he was in no place to resist it. He could feel himself melting into the kiss, trying to return it. Because it was so soft, and warm, and deep, and very gentle besides.

Gin closed his eyes and lost himself in it. Allowing himself to feel how good Aizen tasted. Giving himself over completely to the kiss and reciprocating as best he could. Because this was his first kiss, and Gin wasn't too sure how good he was at it. Which should make some sort of impression on Sousuke, he supposed.

Aizen broke the kiss not long after, leaving Gin hot and breathless – and definitely wanting more. He gave Gin another smile, soft and clinging, a lover's smile, and Gin wanted to melt into a puddle.

"I've been wanting to do that." Aizen told him, his smile still soft as he gazed at Gin.

"An' was it how you expected?" Gin asked. Trying to remember how to breathe normally.

Aizen's face cracked into a wide, delighted grin. "Oh, Gin, do I have to answer that?"

"Well, if ya could it'd be nice."

"It was one of the most satisfying kisses I've had."

The words brought Gin up short, and he blinked in surprise at him. *He's jokin'.* He's gotta be jokin'.

"Ah... ya mean I weren' clumsy er nothin'?"

Aizen's answering smile was completely disarming, though his eyes studied Gin curiously. "Why would you be clumsy?" he asked, realising the reason quite suddenly. His smile morphing into a wide grin. "Was that your first kiss, Gin?"

Gin said nothing, but his pink cheeks spoke for him.

"Yes." Gin bedgudgingly admitted. Somehow getting the feeling he ought to be a bit more experienced for the man. More adept at the physical intimacy Aizen was used to. More skilled at pleasing him. "Why?" Gin probed, worried now the man might be disappointed. "Wasn' it good?"

Aizen smiled at him, looking like the cat that got the cream. "It was *very* good, I assure you." he smirked again, "So good in fact, I want to do it again."

The laughter burst out of Gin before he could stop it. Part of it was nerves, and the ridiculousness of being complimented on his kissing by the biggest player around who was doubtlessly trying everything in the book to get in his pants. And the other half of it was a genuine relief that he could please a man like Aizen, and elation that the man just might actually want him.

"You're a *wonderful* kisser, Gin." he purred into Gin's ear, and Gin tried to calm himself again, his jaw hurting from smiling so widely and for so long.

"If ya say so, Aizen-san."

Aizen smiled softly, touching Gin's face again, creating more butterflies in Gin's stomach.

"Sousuke." he corrected, "Call me Sousuke."

"Huh?"

"I think if we are going to get familiar with each other, you can use my first name." And again he smirked, morphing quickly back into the seducer, his words drawling and sultry, "Especially if we are going to kiss."

Gin flushed pink at his words, and all they implied, but he agreed all the same.

"Sousuke." he corrected himself. Causing a bright smile to spread across Aizen's face. Leaving Gin to wonder at how this man could so easily change his face, and dance between the drawling seducer and the softer, warmer Aizen who'd play him the loveliest music.

"Perfect." Aizen beamed at him, rewarding Gin with a second kiss, "Now, I do believe I promised you a song. You should hurry and choose one."

Gin breathed in and out slowly, in an attempt to calm himself down. Dragging himself back to the present moment and free of the spell Aizen had cast over him. "Oh. Right. Of course, Aizen-san. uh- I mean- Sousuke-san."

Gin heard the light chuckle and tore his gaze away from the man, trying to ignore the amused expression on his face by looking through the music folder again. But Gin knew he wasn't fooling anyone. And so he sat there quietly kicking himself for stammering about like an idiot. But Aizen –
no, Sousuke now, he had to remember – just seemed to have that effect on him. Gin couldn't help reacting the way he did around him.

Thankfully though, Sousuke didn't seem to mind. Though it did make Gin wonder if it was like this for everyone else who'd been with him. Whether they'd stumbled around for words around Aizen Sousuke, too. Whether they'd felt all hot and bothered when he'd kissed them. Or was that just how it felt when you kissed someone? He'd have to ask Rangiku about it later. Now though, he'd just focus on choosing a song to have Sousuke play for him. A task in itself, since there were so many, and Gin had only just remembered how to breathe again.

He did say he'd play them all for you. Shinsou reminded him. Just pick one already.

Yer right, yer right. Gin took a deep, quiet breath. I'll just pick one I reallly wanna hear righ' now.

Gin leafed through the folder, turning the pages slowly. He could feel Sousuke beside him, looking over his shoulder.

"See anything you like?" Sousuke asked him. And Gin had to fight the urge to answer, you.

"I like this one." Gin told him instead, pointing to his musical selection. He could feel Sousuke peer over his shoulder.

"Ah. Love Never Dies." Sousuke smiled, "Excellent choice."

Gin shrugged. "I never heard it before. Be nice ta hear somethin' new."

Aizen warmed up his fingers by hitting a few notes on the piano lazily. "It's an aria. Supposedly composed by the Phantom for Christine. Highly appropriate, as she was his muse as you are mine."

Gin rolled his eyes. "Don' you start, too. I get enough of being called your Christine by Rangiku."

Aizen smiled, genuinely amused. "Oh? Would you like to be my Christine, Gin?"

Heat flooded to Gin's face again, which only invited more chuckling. "Jus' shut up and play."

Sousuke gave another of his light chuckles as he took the music off Gin and set it on the piano. But nonetheless, his fingers aligned themselves with the ivory keys, and the soft and lilting music began, while Gin's eyes followed the lyrics on the sheet because he couldn't read the notes too well. The melody started slowly, softly, giving Gin his first clue this was a song for one voice. The notes high and soft as they floated through the air.

It was a few bars into the music before the words appeared, and Gin read them, trying to fit them into the melody amid all of Sousuke's beautiful music.

Who knows when love begins
Who knows what makes it start
One day it's simply there
Alive inside your heart

It slips into your thoughts
It infiltrates your soul
It takes you by surprise
Then seizes full control

The music was soft and light, and surprisingly Gin could relate to the words. He hadn't even known
himself when he began liking Sousuke. He couldn't even say why, exactly. There was just
something about him that made his heart start thumping and the moths – no, butterflies – start to
congregate inside his stomach. He hadn't intended to like him, it had just happened.

*Try to deny it*
*And try to protest*
*But love won't let you go*
*Once you've been possessed*

He'd fought it, at first. Outright denied it. But Rangiku had pried it out of him. And if the words of
the song were true, Gin knew it to be hopeless to fight it. Because no matter what he did or what
happened, those feeling would not just cease existing. Especially not the way his music made him
feel. Gin sighed softly as he listened to it, letting it carry him off to somewhere else.

The melody continued at a slow and lilting pace, and Gin knew this was to be a passionate piece.
After all, Christine was a soprano, and the Phantom had written it for her voice alone. There was a
pause, a space for the singer to collect her thoughts and her voice, right before the main chorus.
And then the melody altered its course, the notes full of passion and love, played expertly by
Sousuke's clever fingers.

*Love never dies*
*Love never falters*
*Once it has spoken*
*Love is yours*

*Love never fades*
*Love never alters*
*Hearts may get broken*
*Love endures*

*Hearts may get broken*
*Love endures*

The notes became soft and high and light for the next verse, the notes floating into the air. Gin
tried to imagine what the words might sound like if they were being sung. Imagined singing them
himself. He could do it. The song was simple enough. And it was passionate, and soulful, and
everything Gin liked in a song.

Not that he would. Not for Aizen anyway. There wasn't enough trust there yet for that. But he
hadn't sang in so long... maybe he could sing it for Rangiku. But for that he'd need a copy of the
words. And the song. And Gin didn't think Aizen would part with either. Besides, it was a big
enough ask just to ask the man to play for him. So he let the idea go with a sigh and just listened.
Trying to hear the words in his head.

*And Soon as you submit*
*Surrender flesh and bone*
*That love takes on a life*
*Much bigger than your own*

*It uses you at whim*
*And drives you to despair*
*And forces you to feel*
*More joy than you can bear*
Love gives you pleasure
And love brings you pain
And yet when both are gone
Love will still remain

Gin let his eyes drift over to Sousuke. His fingers, his hands... watching them dance over the keys. Floating almost. The skill it must take, Gin thought, to play like this without even looking at what his hands are doing. All the practice...

Gin felt his breath catch in his throat as his gaze quietly wandered up Sousuke's arms, to his chest, his neck. And finally his face. The strong jaw, the perfect skin, those focused eyes flying over each musical note on the pages in front of him, never once glancing down. It was as if another world blinded him to Gin, and Sousuke was in his own little bubble where nothing existed but him, his piano, and the music. Every so often, Gin noticed, one of his hands would deftly turn the page of the score in front of him, with not one pause or interruption in the song. Gin's eyes followed his hand, turning his attention back to the score again.

Perfect, Gin thought, He's perfect.

Love never dies
Love never alters
Once it has spoken
Love is yours

Hearts may get broken
Love endures
Hearts may get broken

There was a pause in the song, a quick moment to breathe before the tempo picked up and the song built up into something passionate, soulful, beautiful. Gin watched Sousuke concentrating, losing himself in the song. He didn't know what it was, but Gin couldn't take his eyes off him.

Beautiful... Gin sighed, shutting his eyes and allowing a soft smile to cross his face. Losing himself in the song as well. Listening to the final chorus. He's beautiful when he plays.

Love never dies
Love will continue
Love keeps on beating
When you're gone

Love never dies
Once it is in you
Life may be fleeting
Love lives on
Life may be fleeting

A pause. A breath for the voice, for the singer. For Christine, to compose herself before she sang the final line, slower and softer than the others. Gin opened his eyes and read the last verses, and took in the words.

Love lives on

Gin let out his breath as the last notes died, reverberating through the quiet around them. Fading into silence.
There was another pause while the both of them returned to reality and collected their thoughts again. Gin floated back down to earth from the musical dream, and Sousuke slowly returned from his own world.

And this time, instead of a harsh jarring back to the real world, the spell was broken quietly. Gently.

"How was it?" Sousuke asked softly.

"Beautiful." Gin sighed, "Thankya... fer playin' that fer me."

Sousuke smiled at him, full of warmth, and this time Gin returned the smile without hesitation. The moment was broken however, by the sound of Gin's stomach growling loudly. Inviting a laugh from Sousuke.

"I think we better go to dinner." he said, standing up and offering Gin his hand. "Shall we?"

Gin nodded and stood, quietly placing his hand in Sousuke's. He watched as Sousuke mussed his hair into his traditional librarian style and placed his glasses back on before he led Gin out of the house.
As soon as they were outside, Gin let go of Aizen's hand, albeit a little hesitantly. But Sousuke comforted himself with the knowledge that it was just shyness and unfamiliarity with such intimacies. Because really, he'd just stolen his darling's very first kiss from him. A feat he hadn't thought he'd get away with. But he had. Oh, he had... and Gin had tasted so good, better than he'd imagined. And his Lolita was such a good kisser, so talented for one so inexperienced. And under his tutelage, Gin could become very skilled indeed in pleasing him.

And Sousuke had to admit he'd gotten a little twist of excitement in his stomach when Gin admitted that had been his very first kiss. A perverse little thrill at the knowledge of being the first one to explore the warm, wet cave of Gin's mouth. That later, he'd be the first one to explore Gin's slender, pale body, untouched by anyone else. Just the thought of it made a sly smirk creep across his face as he once again morphed into the lecherous Humbert. It was only a mental swat from his zanpaktou that forced his thoughts from the gutter.

Right, right. He told her. Mind in the present.

"So where are we goin' fer dinner?" Gin asked him, walking beside him down the street towards the heart of the city.

"I've booked us a table at one of my favourite restaurants." he told Gin. "I think you'll like it."

"At this point I'm happy if it's jus' edible." Gin replied, which only drew out a light chuckle from Sousuke.

"Well, you're in for a treat. Because the food there is both edible and delicious."

Gin smiled across at him as they walked, his hands loose by his sides. Sousuke thought for a moment about offering Gin his arm, or giving Gin his hand to hold as they walked. But it was an impulsive thought, so he pushed it aside. He'd already pushed Gin enough for one day. Kissing behind closed doors was one thing. Asking him to openly show affection in public might just be a step too far.

There will be plenty of time for that, he reasoned, and so he contented himself with walking beside his Gin in the moonlight.

"It's a beautiful night, isn't it?" he asked, smiling gently down at Gin beside him. Keeping his pace leisurely.

"Yeh, it is." Gin answered, sighing softly as he glanced up at the sky. "Th' moon's pretty."
Sousuke had to smile at him. "Not half as pretty as you, though."

Gin covered his face again in an attempt to hide his blush. "Aizen-san!" he hissed, "D'ya have ta *do* that? An' in public too."

Sousuke's smile was smug. "Yes."

Gin dropped his hand and scowled at him, folding his arms across his chest. It was truly adorable. The tinge of pink colouring Gin's cheeks, the flustered breathy voice. The feigned indignant huff at such shameless flattery. Gin really was beautiful in those moments.

He let a soft laugh leave his throat as he looked down at Gin, his chocolate coloured eyes meeting Gin's.

"Don't worry," he assured Gin, "I'll stop."

"Good. Cuz yer just embarrassin' me."

Sousuke could not help the knowing smile spreading across his lips. *Oh, don't pretend you don't like it, Gin.*

But he knew better than to voice the thought, so in the end, he just held his hands up and set to assuring Gin he'd behave. "Alright. No more embarrassing comments, I promise."

Of course, he left off the *'for now',* he'd have usually tacked onto the end of that sentence.

Gin scowled at him a moment longer, but eventually he let it melt away and slowly uncrossed his arms, letting them hang by his sides again.

"Alright." he said, prompting another soft smile from Sousuke.

"Come on," he said, deciding to grab hold of Gin's hand anyway. If only to lead him through the city streets through the crowds. "Let's go and eat. You must be starving. I hope you like seafood."

Gin's smile widened at that. "I like seafood." he grinned. "Though if I'm honest, I really aint picky when it comes to food. Growin' up where I did... ya learn not ta be picky."

"Ah, yes, you're from the outer Rukongai districts, aren't you?"

Gin nodded, averting his gaze downwards. "I hate admittin' it. Tha' I came from such shameful beginnin's."

Sousuke studied Gin a moment, listening as Gin continued. "I mean, people pick on me an' call me names when they find out. Seems they think I'm dirty somehow. So I try an keep it quiet like. So people don' start treatin' me diff'rent."

"Different?"

"You know," Gin told him, "Like I'm somehow less of a person than 'em."

Sousuke frowned, sighing. Of course, he knew this place was full of small minded, arrogant people who looked down their noses at anyone they thought beneath them. But the idea they considered Gin – his beautiful, brilliant Gin – no more than dirt under their shoes simply because of where he came from infuriated him. It was just one of the many things wrong with this place.

"Gin," he stated calmly, because it would not do to grow angry. Even if his anger was not directed
at Gin. "Believe me when I say you are not dirty."

Gin's eyes flitted up to meet his again, and his heart stopped because Sousuke knew he had Gin's full attention. His smile softened, his gaze grew tender, and his voice carried gentle tones as he spoke. "You are a wonderful young man with a promising talent, good qualities in abundance, and for me you're perfect the way you are. And anyone who calls you such demeaning things is a fool."

*And I will slaughter anyone who dares to call you such.*

He watched as Gin digested his words, and then observed as a soft, shy smile passed Gin's lips. And again that warm feeling started to spread through his chest again. Along with a vague feeling his heart might be turning into a puddle somewhere inside his ribcage.

"Tha's real nice a ya ta say." Gin said softly. Sousuke squeezing his hand reassuringly. His smile turning more knowing as he added, "Though I think ya might be a lil bit biased."

"A little, yes," Sousuke smiled warmly. "But it is true. And I think your dear friend Matsumoto-san would agree with me."

Gin's smile at the mention of Rangiku was soft and warm, lighting up his whole face. And Sousuke could tell from that alone that the boy held a deep affection for her.

"Yeah," Gin said quietly, "She would."

"You see?" Sousuke teased, "That's two people who think you are wonderful. And the both of us can't be wrong."

Gin smiled again, allowing a little laugh to escape him. "Well, ya could... but I appreciate th' sentiment."

Sousuke's smile never once faltered as he eyed Gin. *I could get used to that smile. I really could. The question is, will he give me a chance to?*

"Even if yer biased." Gin added.

Sousuke laughed, then. A good natured laugh. "Oh yes, we're both very biased. I know I am. But that's only because I like you so much."

Gin's cheeks coloured a very delightful shade of pink, and Sousuke would be lying if he said he didn't enjoy it. Although, it was the first time he'd openly admitted to liking Gin aloud, so he supposed that had to count for something. But at the moment he could only hope Gin reciprocated his feelings. The boy kept his cards close to his chest, so it was difficult to read how Gin was feeling. Though that was part of the attraction; the challenge Gin presented to him. The fact Gin laid obstacles in his way and threw wrenches into his plans to make Gin fall for him. Though time would only truly tell how Gin felt about him. If Gin had any feelings for him at all.

*But he kissed you,* Kyouka Suigetsu quietly told him, *Why would he kiss you if he didn't like you?*

Sousuke thought for a moment. *Hormones. Endorphins. The fact this is all new territory for him. He may have just got carried away in the moment.*

Sousuke turned his attention to Gin again, choosing not to draw attention to Gin's flushed face.

*Many reasons.*
He wondered if Gin was thinking about it, too. Analysing it and breaking it down the same way he was. *The first of many kisses,* he hoped. A satisfied grin crept across his face as he thought of the potential for more kissing in the immediate future.

"I hope you're thinking about earlier." Sousuke told him, the smile never leaving his lips.

Gin turned to face him, "Which bit?"

"Our kiss." Sousuke answered.

He watched, with great amusement, as the redness spread from Gin's face all the way down his neck. "Whether you liked it." His smile widened, and he just couldn't resist teasing Gin just a little more, "If I tasted good."

"Sousuke!" Gin hissed, clearly uncomfortable talking about this. "Ya can't ask that!"

"It's a legitimate question, Gin." he said, perhaps a little too matter of factly. "I'm curious about whether or not you enjoyed it." he feigned innocence, looking into Gin's face questioningly, as if he needed reassurance. "Did you like it? Kissing me?"

"It was... it was..." Gin swallowed, clearing his throat. Trying to find his words. "It were real nice. An' I did really enjoy it. Ya made me feel all warm and tingly, like there were moths flutterin' in me belly, and... and and ya tasted..." Gin's voice softened as it died off, "Ya tasted..."

Sousuke watched intently as Gin took a moment to compose himself. Breathing in deeply and sighing softly, happily. "Ya tasted so good."

He watched, quietly satisfied, as Gin's chest heaved with the admission. His pale face flushed with a renewed heat, even as Gin studied his face quizically, as if trying to puzzle something out. "Are all kisses like that, Aizen-san?"

Sousuke raised his fingers to rub his chin, thinking. His mind retracing over all of his previous kisses. The mere manipulation of tongues designed to pry what he wanted from all of his sexual partners. Manipulations that, by design, were enacted to get them to spread their legs for him and swear to fulfill his every desire. Not warm and loving, but cold and mechanical. Illusions of affection and desire. Pretences. Acts. A play at being in love. Sousuke certainly hadn't felt anything remotely like what Gin had just described. Not until kissing Gin...

"No," Sousuke told him, "At least, not for me, anyway."

He paused, smiling tenderly at his darling beside him. Deciding it would be better, in the long run, to go for an honest response. "Not until you."

"Oh." Gin said. Obviously a little stunned by the words. Lips forming a cute little O shape for just a moment before they resumed their trademark grin. "So..." Gin asked hesitantly, "You felt all a that stuff, too?"

Gin's eyes met his, and with a smile hopeful enough to melt even the iciest heart, Gin squeezed his hand. Pale and slender fingers tightening their grip on him. And Sousuke could have sworn Gin had just released a horde of moths inside his stomach. A desire to taste those perfect lips again filling from head to toe. *So much for resisting in public...*

"Yes," he answered his darling softly, "I did."

Gin's relief was palpable, permeating the air around them. Sousuke watched Gin's smile soften,
"Tha's good." Gin murmured. And Sousuke smiled.

"Yes," he agreed, slowing to a stop so he could lean in close and capture Gin's lips with his again. "It is."

He brushed their lips together, gently, kissing his darling softly. It was only a moment later, however, that Gin pulled back, frightened and shy.

"Ah, Wh- what if people see?" He protested, turning his face to the side. Breathing heavily, face flushed as he spoke.

"It doesn't matter." Sousuke's voice was low with affection as he spoke, and laced with desire. He let his fingers move to gently hold Gin's chin, turning his darling's face to him again, once again casting his magic spell over Gin. "Let them see."

"Sousuke," Gin breathed, though he only had time for that one word before Sousuke's lips were on his again. His tongue gently encouraging a response. Gin gave the softest of moans into the kiss, no doubt experiencing the warm tingly sensations he'd described earlier. And when Sousuke broke away again to let him breathe, he smiled.

"I don't care if they see." Sousuke told him, eyes fixed on his beloved like he were the only thing in the world worth looking at. He smiled again before leaning in again and giving his Gin another impassioned kiss. Deep and warm and slow, designed to lull and hypnotise and bewitch his senses.

When he broke the kiss, he took in Gin's flushed face and smiled. There would be a few glorious seconds before Gin remembered where he was, and Sousuke was determined to carve this vision before him into his memory before Gin switched back on to reality again. He made mental notes on the dreamlike expression in his eyes, those O shaped lips, those delicately flushed cheeks, and knew the expression Gin wore would appear in his dreams tonight.

But the moment was short-lived, and Gin returned to the real world again, clearing his throat. "So," Gin said, a little too loudly, in an attempt to change the subject away from kissing. "Where is this place we're goin' to? Is it very far?"

"It's not too far. Just along the next street." Sousuke answered. "There's usually a queue, but I planned ahead and made a reservation."

Gin blinked in surprise. "On such short notice?"

Sousuke allowed himself a small smirk. "Well, being a vice captain does have its perks."

Gin returned the smile, a hint of mischief in his grin. "Aint that called abuse of power?"

"Hm, I suppose," Sousuke conceded, "Though what is the point in having power if you cannot abuse it?"

"Yer devious, ya know." Gin teased him, gently elbowing him, looking up and grinning widely at him. "But I guess ya have a point. It's really th' reason anyone wants ta get power."

Sousuke allowed himself a little laugh, "Oh, Gin," he drawled, "You know that's why you like me."

Gin answered him with a swat on his arm and a prompt command to shut up that was only answered with another of his light laughs.
They reached the restaurant after a short walk through the busy city streets, passing numerous people along the way. As Aizen had said, there was indeed a long line of people waiting to go inside.

Sousuke led Gin to the doorman and gave his name, saying he'd booked a reservation. The man looked at his list and then promptly let them inside. Gin trailed nervously behind him as he was led over to the maitre d' to be shown to their table, eyes taking in the sheer elegance of the place. Especially the crystal chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. Trying not to feel out of place in such a high-class establishment. Though he couldn't help but feel relief when he saw the maitre d' was Rangiku's boyfriend, Shuuhei, wearing the black yukata all the waiting staff wore. Here at least was one familiar face.

"Hello," Sousuke smiled politely, "We have a reservation for a table for two." He paused for a moment before adding, "Preferably a quiet table. We do not wish to be disturbed."

Shuuhei returned the smile. "Ah, yes, Aizen-fukuutaichou. Right this way."

They followed Shuuhei to a table at the far back, in a quieter area of the restaurant. They each took their seats, and took the menus Shuuhei handed to them.

"Do you want to order drinks now, or would you like a moment to look over our selection?"

Gin opened his menu to look at the food, and Sousuke had to smile at him. His darling certainly had his priorities. Shame, really... getting to witness a drunk Gin could be amusing. It may even turn out that Gin was an amorous drunk, who wanted to kiss and fuck the night away. Which might amuse him for a little while, but that would be too easy. This little game was all about the chase. Getting Gin to fall for him. And besides, Sousuke wanted his Gin to remember their night together. One night with him was all any of his lovers got, and he wanted that one night to be unforgettable. Even for Gin.

And somehow, Sousuke didn't think he could accomplish that by getting Gin drunk. Because drunk people never could remember anything after they woke up.

However, that didn't mean they couldn't drink a little.

"We'll have a bottle of your finest red," Sousuke told Shuuhei, "Please. With two glasses. Is that alright, Gin?"

Gin looked up from his menu, confused and clearly distracted by the lure of food. "Huh? Oh, yeah, whatever ya think's good."

Shuuhei smiled and nodded, "Excellent choice. I'll be right back with your drinks."

Shuuhei made his way over to the bar and grabbed a tray, one of the more expensive bottles of wine, and two wine glasses. He set them on the tray, ready to take back to Aizen-fukuutaichou's table. He'd only just turned back around to take it over to them, wheen he caught sight of his girlfriend strolling over to him.

"Shuuhei!" she cooed, sitting on one of the barstools beside him.

"Rangiku," he answered, surprise in his voice, "What're you doing here? Better yet, how did you even get in here?"
Rangiku just smiled at him. "Ah, the doorman owed me one for covering for him the other day."
She told him, "But listen, honey, I need a favour. My friend came in here with his date earlier, and I
just want to keep an eye on them." she did her best to keep her voice sweet and light, "You know,
just in case anything bad happens."

Shuuhei studied her skeptically. "You mean Gin?" he asked, "Yeah, he came in here with Aizen-
san a little while ago."

"Yes, I know." She told him.

"Jeez, what'd ya do, follow them?" he asked, "And no. I will not help you spy on them, before you
even ask."

Rangiku sighed. *Damn him, he knows me too well.* "No, of course not!" she cooed sweetly,"Well,
maybe a little... but mostly I just wanna make sure Gin doesn't get into any trouble."

Shuuhei snorted at the ridiculousness of her logic. "With Aizen-fukutaichou?" he asked,
incredulous, "Please. With that guy around, Gin couldn't get into trouble if he tried. You just want
to eavesdrop."

"I... well, I..." she stammered, "Oh, alright! I wanna see how well they hit it off. Because they both
really like each other and I know Gin won't tell me things."

She folded her arms and huffed. Shuuhei just looked at her with a deadpan expression.

"And what do you want me to do about it?"

She smiled, "Let me borrow your work uniform and pose as a waitress. I can't see or hear anything
from here, and I need to get up close."

Shuuhei shook his head. "No."

"Aww, but Shuu," she cooed, pouting, "Please? For me."

"No. I am not risking my job for you."

But she pouted and gave him her puppydog eyes, tracing the tip of her forefinger in small circles on
the smooth black surface of the bar. A look she knew would melt him. "Not even for me,
Shuuhei?"

He fought it for a while, but eventually, he sighed. "Alright," he told her, "You can borrow my
spare uniform in my locker. Just try and keep out of the way of those of us who actually do work
here."

Her smile brightened immensely, lighting up her whole face, and she leant in to give him a quick
kiss to show her gratitude. "Thanks, Shuu." she purred sweetly, "I mean it. I promise I'll make it up
to you."

"Yeah, yeah." he pretended to grouch, "Just be quick about it."

Rangiku nodded, and grinning like a lunatic, she hopped off her barstool and scurried off through
the door to the staff locker room.

Creeping stealthily into the locker room, Rangiku kept her eyes peeled for any of Shuuhei's
colleagues that might rat her out and get security to escort her off the premises. She poked her head
around the door and, seeing no-one, sighed in relief and walked in.

She made the few steps over to Shuuhei's locker and opened it, knowing the combination already, and spied the spare uniform. It was neatly folded, like all of Shuuhei's clothes, so she took it out carefully so as not to crease it. She took it into the ladies toilets to change into it in one of the cubicles, emerging perfectly disguised as a member of staff. Moving quickly, she replaced her civilian clothes into her boyfriend's locker and strode back into the toilets, to make sure she looked the part.

She examined herself in the mirror, checking she looked presentable. The uniform was simple yet elegant, in keeping with the elegance of the place. It was big enough to cover her ample chest, for which she was grateful, as she couldn't be falling out of her clothes in a place like this. She scrutinised her reflection in the mirror. She would have preferred one of the kimonos the waitresses wore, cut to better fit the female figure - but she couldn't afford to be choosy. At least with this, she could actively spy on Gin and Aizen-san.

"Alright," she told her reflection, "It's time to go undercover."
Mad, mad, mad love to everyone who commented on this and left kudos. It makes me so happy. This is a long one at 5082 words. Silliness. Fluff. Sousuke being protective near the end. There is also some foreshadowing in relation to this monstrosity (https://www.fanfiction.net/s/4917136/1/The-Heir-of-Las-Noches) regarding the creation of the sun as both stories are set in the same universe. But this can be read on its own so it's not important.

When Shuuhei returned to their table with the wine they'd ordered, Sousuke thanked him and the young man left them to peruse the food menus. Gin scanned the different dishes available. *So many choices. All so expensive...*

“Do you know what you're going to order?” Sousuke asked him.

“I dunno.” Gin admitted. “There's so many choices, an' th' prices are so high... I can't afford this...”

Sousuke smiled across at him, “Relax,” he assured, “It's my treat. Order anything you want.”

Gin smiled back at him. “Okay.” he nodded, and held the menu up to read through the dishes.

“Umm, I think I'll have the tempura. Oh, or the salmon. The salmon looks good.” Gin lowered the menu from his face and looked at Sousuke. “D'ya know what yer gonna order?”

“Oh,” Sousuke grinned at him, “I know what *I'm* having.”

Gin held the menu back up to cover his pink cheeks. “Will ya *behave*?” he hissed. Because it was one thing to make such comments in private, but they were in public now. What would people think if they overheard?

“What?” Sousuke smiled politely, innocently, back at him. “I was talking about what I was going to order. *You* were the one thinking dirty things.”

Gin rolled his eyes. Not believing that answer for a second. “Yeh. Of course ya were. So what're ya gonna get?”

“Hm,” Sousuke thought a moment, resting his chin on his hands as he scanned the menu, “I think I'll have the lobster.”

“soun's good.” Gin agreed, “Do ya wanna call the waiter back or...” he set the menu down on the table and scanned the room for a waiter when he saw her. “Oh hell,” he cursed, quickly lifted the menu back up again in an attempt to hide, but it was useless. She'd seen him. Begrudgingly, he lowered it to the table again, and quietly burned with embarrassment as Rangiku swanned over to their table. Posing as a waitress.

“Hi there!” she trilled, “Are you gentlemen ready to order your food yet?”

Sousuke smiled politely at her, “Ah, Matsumoto-san. I didn't know you worked here.”
Gin scowled at his friend. “She doesn't.” Gin told him before leaning over to hiss at her. “What're ya doin' here?”

“I just wanted to see how things were going.” she whispered back, leaning over so she could whisper in his ear.

“Well, things are fine, so ya can leave now.” Gin whispered back, catching sight of Sousuke taking a sip of his wine awkwardly as he tried not to listen to their exchange.

“I can't,” Rangiku protested, the manager's seen me and if I leave now there'll be trouble.”

“Tha's crap an' you know it.” Gin answered back, his voice a loud whisper, “D'ya know how embarrassin' this is?”

“Oh, shush,” she waved her hand dismissively, “At least this way if there's trouble or if it goes very badly I can help you get away.”

Gin just groaned, quietly dying of embarrassment as Rangiku turned to address his date.

“So, what'll ya have?” she asked Sousuke, holding a little notepad she'd produced from the sleeve of her borrowed uniform. Her eyes sparkling, and a mischievous grin on her face, she added slyly, “I recommend the oysters. You know, they're supposed to be an aphrodisiac.”

Sousuke grinned, playing along with her little game. Which Gin was not happy with at all.

“Oh, really?” he asked, feigning innocence, “In that case, we'll have one order of oysters on the half shell.” His eyes darted up to meet Gin's, and his tone grew more seductive again, “To share. Not that we'll need any help in that department.”

“Sousuke, behave!” Gin hissed at him, kicking him under the table as a sign to quit it, because clearly, the man was enjoying this far too much. But if the man felt any pain, he didn't show it.

“I'd also like the lobster, please, and Gin would like the salmon.”

Rangiku scribbled down their order and grinned, “Ohh, good choices. Especially the oysters.” her grin morphed into a devious smirk, “Not that you'll need it, of course.”

Sousuke returned her knowing grin as she took their menus away. “Of course.”

Gin groaned again, sure he was pink as a strawberry in summertime. Why, Ran? He thought, Why?

“I'll be right back with your order, gentlemen.” she told them, and marched off towards the kitchen, menus under her arm. When she was gone, Gin put his head on the table and hid his face in his forearms.

“Your friend is quite nosy, isn't she?”

“You dunno the half of it.” Gin told him. Which only drew out another light laugh from the man.

“You didn't have to kick me, you know.” Sousuke told him.

“Shut up.” Gin's answer was muffled, but he lifted his head up to speak again, “Ya deserved it fer playin' along and embarrassin' me. Did ya have ta say all that stuff? Now she thinks we're gonna... oh gods...”

Sousuke chuckled again, taking another sip of his wine, “I couldn't help it. I wanted to see your
flushed face again. It's cute. I also thought she might leave us alone, if I made it seem like things were going well and leading up to that outcome."

No. Now I'm gonna get the Rangiku Inquisition tommorrow about how it went and how good you were in bed. Gin thought. But instead, he just shook his head, and took a nice long gulp of his wine. Hoping the redness in his neck and face would vanish soon.

“You are one devious man, Aizen Sousuke. Lemme tell ya.”

In answer, Sousuke lifted up his own wine glass, as if toasting him, and smiling smugly he answered, “I know.”

Gin kept his eyes on Sousuke, tried to keep his mouth from smiling. “Ya don't hafta be so smug about it.”

“Oh?” Sousuke's eyebrows lifted questioningly, amusement in his eyes, “But isn't that what you like about me, Gin?”

Gin pressed his lips together, fighting to keep the scowl on his face as he listened to Shinsou snicker inside his head.

*He has you there, Gin.*

“Hm. I s'pose.” he admitted, pretending to begrudge it. Determined not to blush like a girl again. “But I wanna know what ya like 'bout me. I mean, ya could have anyone. Why me?”

Sousuke gave him one of his most charming smiles as he set down his wine glass carefully. “Well,” he began, resting his chin in his hand with his elbow on the table, “Because you're you.”

Gin smiled and shook his head. “That aint an answer.”

“it is.” Sousuke pressed. “Does love need a reason?”

Gin fought down his frustrated sigh. *Ya see. It's when ya say stuff like that, that makes me mistrust everythin' ya say. Cuz love – real love – takes time, and it takes work. Love at first sight don't exist. Right now, yer just infatuated.*

“Then... can ya be more specific?” Gin pressed, genuinely seeking an answer to his question. “What is it about me you like?”

Sousuke's smile softened considerably. “Well, if you want a list,” he said gently, “You're clever, you're beautiful, you're very caring – I can see that from your close relationship with Rangiku-san. You have an appreciation for fine music, you're ambitious. And...” he paused, letting the words register and take effect, “You're passionate. Frankly, I don't see why everyone likes you.”

Gin digested the words for a moment, before he spoke again.

*And then you go an' say things like this... things that make me want ya...* 

“You can tell I'm passionate?” Gin asked him. He was very skeptical of that. Because certainly it wasn't one of the words people would use to describe him. Sly, yes. Cunning, yes. Dangerous, yes. But passionate? No one but Aizen Sousuke had used that word to describe him.

But Gin soon got his answer to the question, with Sousuke's next sentence.

“Well, I'd say the kiss you gave me was very passionate.”
The words were punctuated with a lazy, soft smile, and Gin had to smile back.

“Fair point.” Gin agreed. Feeling that warm feeling again, spreading throughout his chest and limbs. It was a feeling he'd like to get used to. If Sousuke would give him the time to get used to it, that was. Gin wasn't so sure. Though Rangiku was certain the man would give it to him. What was it she said? I could ask him for the sun, and he'd find some way to give it to me...

“What are you thinking about?”

“Huh?”

Sousuke's voice cut through his thoughts, pulling him back to reality again. Jerking him back to the present moment. “Oh, it's nothin' really.”

“I doubt that, if it has you preoccupied.” Sousuke told him in the gentlest tones, “Want to tell me about it?”

Gin sighed, “I dunno...”

“Oh, come on, you can tell me.” Sousuke prodded. And there was just something about that smile, soft and encouraging, that made Gin talk.

“I guess I'm thinkin' about how temporary this arrangement is between us.” Because how long will I last, really? One night? Two?

“Oh.” Sousuke said. And was Gin just imagining things, or did he actually sound disappointed? A moment passed, then two, before Sousuke filled the silence between them.

“Do you want it to be temporary?”

“I...” The question took Gin back. Did he want this to be temporary? Did he? He had to search his heart. But he reasoned, in the end, that there were worse people to spend his life with than Aizen Sousuke. “No.” Gin answered. “I don't.”

Because I'd like at least eight decades.

Gin definitely wasn't imagining the happiness that lit up the man's face at this answer. The smile that reached his deep eyes.

“Good, because neither do I.” Sousuke answered, reaching his hand across the table to let it rest on Gin's. Noticing Gin's widening smile, he was intrigued.

“What are you thinking now?”

“Jus' somethin' Ran said about you.”

“Oh? What did she say about me?”

Gin laughed a little. “That I could ask ya fer the sun, and you'd find a way to get it for me.”

Sousuke's smile then stopped Gin's heart. Because it was the warmest one yet. And was so full of tender affection. Sousuke's gaze seemed far away, even though he was looking right at him, his mind no doubt far away, thinking of a place with no real sunlight to speak of.

“One day,” Sousuke told him, his grip on Gin's hand tightening, fingers curling around his. “One day, I'll make you a sun.”
Gin shyly returned the smile, quietly enjoying the intimate touch until Rangiku returned with their food and they had to separate again. Sousuke smiled and thanked her. Gin just sat awkwardly until she left.

Rangiku sighed happily as she sat at the bar, watching them together. She was currently sipping a margarita, courtesy of Shuuhei, and pretending she'd just got off her shift.

“You know,” Shuuhei said, setting down an order of tempura for her, knowing she hadn't eaten dinner yet. “You can put my uniform back now. You came to find out how they were getting on and you did that. You should go home, get some rest.”

“I know,” she answered, picking up her chopsticks, “But I can't leave now. I don't want to miss anything. I mean, what if they kiss and I miss it because I had to go and change?”

Shuuhei sighed. “Have it your way, Ran. But if the boss comes, just say-”

“Yeah, yeah, that I just got off shift. Shuu, honey, I got this.”

“Alright,” he said, giving her a quick kiss, “I gotta get back to work. Enjoy your Gin watching.”

She smiled brightly back at him. “I will, thanks!”

Rangiku smiled to herself as she picked up a piece of her food with the chopsticks, and took a bite. Trying to suppress a laugh at Aizen-san's attempts to convince Gin to let him feed him an oyster. Gin was trying to refuse the offer, but the man was persistent. Waving the shellfish in front of Gin, Try it, Gin. How will you know you don't like it if you don't try it?

She couldn't help but laugh at them. They seemed to be getting on like a house on fire. It made her more confident that her decision to push Gin into giving him a chance was the right one. She'd never seen Gin look so happy. Quietly, she hoped they would last. That theirs was the kind of love that would last forever. Would withstand any hardship. That he was the one for Gin and Gin the one for him. That she wouldn't have to kick anybody in the balls. That the two of them would have a long and happy life together.

She sighed contentedly at the thought and took another bite of her food. Sure that they would be happy together as she listened to Aizen's continued attempts to convince Gin to let him feed him.

“Oh, come on,” Sousuke cajoled him, “Let me feed you one.”

“No.” Gin protested. “They're all slimy, an' they jus' don't look edible.”

“But how do you know you don't like them if you don't try one?” Sousuke reasoned, holding the oyster and teasing Gin with it. Wiggling it about in front of him. “You should try one, just to be sure.”

“I aint biting into those things,” Gin told him. “sides, I'm full already.”

“You don't chew them, Gin,” Sousuke chuckled at him, “You just swallow them. You take a fork and make sure it's detached from the shell. Then you squirt a bit of lemon juice on it for flavour...”
As he talked, his hands mirrored his words, detaching the oyster from the shell with a fork, squeezing a lemon wedge onto it to flavour it with the juice, and then he held the oyster up to his mouth.

“And then you tip it into your mouth, and you swallow.” Sousuke finished. “Like so.”

And then he demonstrated. He opened his mouth and tipped the shellfish into his open mouth, tipped back his head and slurped the thing down. Swallowing it whole. Gin watched, equal parts fascinated and repulsed.

“They're very healthy for you.” Sousuke smiled.

But Gin wasn't convinced. “And you have a lot of experience swallowin' stuff, do ya?” he asked, completely deadpan. Sousuke, who had just taken a large gulp of wine, nearly coughed and spat it out, so taken aback he was by the dirty nature of Gin's comment.

“Well,” Gin added, taking hold of his own glass. They were well into their second bottle now, and he was feeling a little less inhibited. “Maybe not wine, but other things.”

Sousuke forced himself to swallow his mouthful of wine and quickly covered his mouth with his napkin so he didn't cough spittle all over the table. He could hear Kyouka Suigetsu giggling to herself at both him and at Gin's comment. Oh, no doubt Gin had said it in all innocence, but Sousuke's mind was always quick to run to the gutter. As was his zanpaktou's.

Gin just sat quietly as he coughed. “Are you okay?” he asked.

“I'm fine, I'm fine,” Sousuke answered, his throat clear again after almost inhaling the wine into his lungs. Strongly resisting the urge to draw attention to the lewdness of Gin's comment. *I just didn't realise you had a dirty mind, that's all.*

It did make him wonder, though, what Gin's voice would sound like when he talked dirty in bed. He'd have to find out. Maybe when Gin was a little more comfortable around him. When Gin was braver about intimacy. Freer with his touches and kisses. The time would come, he'd just have to wait and bide his time until it did.

“So what do you say?” Sousuke asked him, changing the topic, “Will you try an oyster? My offer of feeding it to you still stands.”

Gin just looked at him and reached over to take one of the oysters off the plate between them. He looked at the oyster, decided it wouldn't kill him, and then tipped it into his mouth to swallow it the way Sousuke showed him.

“Well?” Sousuke asked, eyeing him expectantly, “How was it?”

“Kinda bland.” Gin told him, not quite impressed with the taste of it.

“Here,” Sousuke picked up another oyster and squirted a lemon wedge over it to give it some flavour. “Try it with lemon. It improves the taste.” He leant over the table and held the shellfish to Gin's mouth. Gin reached to take it from his hand, but it was quickly pulled away again. Gin scowled. Aizen only smirked.

“Open your mouth for me,” Sousuke drawled, and Gin could only sigh and obey. Letting Sousuke feed him the oyster.

“Better?”
“Better.” Gin nodded. “I like it with the lemon.”

Sousuke smiled across the table at him, watching as his darling took another drink of his wine. He watched as Gin's slender, delicate fingers carefully set the glass back onto the table. Growing more inebriated as the evening drew on. He made a mental note to switch to water after they finished this bottle of wine. Because if there was any chance at all of having Gin tonight, his darling needed to be somewhat coordinated. Sousuke knew he could hold his liquor, but he doubted Gin could hold much alcohol at all without ending up face down and passed out on the floor. It would be best if that outcome was avoided. Thankfully the bottle was nearly empty, so he drank what was left in his glass and refilled it. Filling it more than he should have just so Gin didn't have to drink any more, before he continued to feed Gin the oysters. Enjoying Gin's laughter. Ignoring the stares from some of the waiting staff who were clearly envious of Gin's current position. Although Gin didn't seem to notice it. Which was good, as he didn't want Gin feeling jealous or uncomfortable at all.

Not that he needed to worry, because all of Gin's attention was solely on him. His darling simply wasn't interested in anyone but him. It was a perfect scenario, the sort of thing he dreamed about. Among other things, of course.

“Here,” Gin smiled, clearly giddy, clearly a bit drunk as he grinned. Completely oblivious to the glares and eyerolls of the waitress who came to take their empty plates away. His hands picking up an oyster and squirting another wedge of lemon onto it, “S'my turn to feed you now.”

Sousuke smiled at him. Rangiku was probably having a field day, watching all this.

“Yes,” he replied, giving Gin one of his warmest smiles as he rested his chin in his hand. Hoping to wind the girl up even more. No doubt she was one of his many admirers. “I do believe it is.”

Gin smiled brightly back at him, and held the oyster out for him. His coordination was a little off, because of the wine, but Sousuke didn't mind. He simply held Gin's wrist – slim and beautiful thing it was – and gently guided the oyster to his mouth, and swallowed it.

“Mm. Nice.”

Sousuke could not deny he got a little twinge of satisfaction from seeing Gin's shy little smile, the tinge of pink in his cheeks, hearing his little laugh.

“Sou,” Gin drawled, tipsy with wine, “D'ya wanna 'nother one?”

Gin picked up the last oyster, and Sousuke heard Kyouka Suigetsu sigh contentedly in the back of his mind.

He's so cute, Aizen-sama.

And Sousuke couldn't help but smile softly. Yes. He is, isn't he?

“I always want more when it comes to you.” Sousuke told him, the smile still on his face. Gin truly was adorable, especially when he let his guard down, when he was himself. Sweet. Indulgent. Fun. Sousuke had a sneaking feeling that gin was suspicious of him. Of his motives and intentions towards him. But for the moment, Gin was enjoying his company. Smiling, flirting, feeding him shellfish.

If only every day could be like this, he mused, letting Gin feed him the oyster.

Kyouka Suigetsu's voice echoed again in answer. Who says it can't be?
The plate now empty of oysters, was quickly collected by the waitress who was trying to mask her jealousy with a false smile. Sousuke studied her as she approached. Long dark hair, hazel eyes. Soft, lush curves. He had a vague feeling he'd bedded her before, but who knew? His lovers were all so interchangeable. And there had been so many over the years, it was impossible to be sure. Not that it mattered. He had Gin now. Or at least, he would soon. She didn't matter. Though it did irk him that she had the audacity to show open hostility to his Gin. Even if Gin wasn't aware of it. He smirked, an idea forming in his mind.

“Would you like any desserts today, Aizen-sama?” she asked, a little too flirtatiously for his liking.

“Oh, no thankyou,” Sousuke smiled at her, plastering on the false smile he gave to all his admirers, feigning politeness, “We'll have that later when we go back to mine.”

As he said the words, he punctuated them with a sultry look in Gin's direction and watched the girl's face turn the deepest shade of red. Truly enjoying her indignant embarrassment. Gin cackled, the last of the wine sloshing about in the glass in his hand.

“We'll just have the bill, please.” Sousuke added. She quickly bowed and scrambled to maintain her dignity and professionalism.

“Yes, Aizen-sama, of course.”

And with that, she scurried away with the plates, while he smirked and Gin snickered.

“She thinks yer gonna fuck me.” Gin laughed, slurring only a little. Sousuke just smirked.

“Well, I wanted to make her a bit uncomfortable.” Sousuke admitted, “she's been scowling at you all evening.”

“Oh? Me?” Gin trilled, “Can't see why.”

“Well,” Sousuke explained, “I have many admirers, and you are in a very enviable position.” the smirk spread it's way slowly across his face, “Many of them would kill to be in your place right now. I don't take people out to dinner very often.”

Gin smiled softly across at him then, as he set his glass down on the table again. He let his chin rest on his hand, elbow on the table. “I feel kinda special then, if yer treatin' me to dinner.”

“You are.”

Gin blushed a little, lifting his wine glass up again to have another drink. How did he do that? Make offhanded comments that implied feelings other than lust that made him blush so easily?

Gin glanced down to the side as he drank, thinking again of what Rangiku told him...

“What are you thinking, Gin?”

Gin looked up to see Sousuke's expression change into one of amusement, delight, and curiosity.

“Oh,” Gin lowered his glass, “Just somethin' Ran said to me before... and how yer provin' her point.”

The smile never left Sousuke's face. He was intrigued now. He knew Gin and Rangiku were close, but he had to wonder how he'd come up in their conversations. “Oh. Care to tell me about it?” he asked, “I'd like to know what the point she made was, and how exactly I am proving it.”
Gin laughed nervously, refusing to answer. “Oh, it's nothin', really.”

“Oh, come on,” Sousuke prodded gently, “If she talked about me you have to tell me.”

Gin smiled. It seemed he'd have to give in. “Alrigh','” he began, “Ran said that ya lo-” He stopped himself suddenly, “like me,” he corrected, “So that's why yer treatin' me different. Takin' me out ta dinner and such.”

Sousuke raised his eyebrows, intrigued, “And such?”

“Ya know,” Gin said quietly, “Kissin' me.”

“Ah,” Sousuke smiled, “Yes.”

Gin delighted him again with the shyest of smiles that hinted there was more he wasn't telling. But he let it slide. He was much more interested in tasting those lips again.

The waitress returned to their table again with the bill. Sousuke checked the total amount due and then pulled his wallet out from a pocket sewn in his yukata. He promptly paid for the meals and returned his wallet to where it came from.

“Thankyou,” Sousuke forced a polite smile at the waitress. A smile that melted into a genuine one when he turned his eyes to Gin again. She left in quite a hurry.

“Come, Gin,” he said, offering Gin his arm as he stood from the chair, stepping towards his darling, “Let's go home.”

Gin smiled giddily, no doubt still a bit drunk from the wine, and took his arm. Allowing Sousuke to steady him. He was a little unsteady on his feet, again from the wine, so he was grateful he had someone to lean on for support. They walked past Rangiku, and Gin couldn't resist a cheerful wave to his friend.

“Byebye, Ran.” he called out to her. But she just smiled and shook her head as she watched them go.

Once they were outside the restaurant, Gin broke into laughter. “Ya shoulda seen her face!” he cackled, “She were so offended!”

Sousuke smiled, quietly enjoying Gin's close proximity. “Yes, she was. Although it's her own fault for being rude to you.”

“Aw, she's just jealous I'm with ya an' she aint.” Gin said, words slurring a bit, “It's like ya said, right?”

Sousuke gave another satisfied smile. “Yes, she wants to be the one in my bed instead of you.”

Gin's eyes flitted up to meet his, an amused grin spread across his face. “She's stupid, then,” he drawled on, “If she thinks yer gonna bed me.”

Aizen stopped walking suddenly, causing Gin to nearly trip over. He had to cling to Aizen's arm just to stay upright. His world was spinning now, and he was beginning to regret those last few glasses of wine. In hindsight, the sake he'd drank before that was also a bad idea. Gin waited for the world to stop whirling and then looked up at Sousuke.
“Aizen-sama?”

Gin felt Aizen's fingers gently brush the hair out of his eyes, softly caressing his skin.

“You underestimate yourself,” Sousuke told him, keeping his gaze warm and his voice soft, but Gin could feel the lust coiling about him. Filling those deeply hypnotic chocolate-hued eyes of his. “You are very beautiful and I have every desire to bed you.”

“Oh.” he gasped, processing this new information through his wine-addled brain. “But I thought-” he stammered, “I thought you was just jokin’. To piss off that girl.”

Gin felt the blush spreading over his face, bright and pink as the realisation dawned on him. That Aizen Sousuke wanted him, in his bed, naked. “I thought-”

But all of his protests were cut off by Aizen's lips on his again. Aizen's tongue pushing its way into his mouth and tasting him, and filling his body with heat again as tongue and hands caressed him. Sousuke's fingers and palms slowly, gently, brushing over his jaw and down his neck. Making his skin tingle as if on fire, only without the agony of actually being burnt. That, coupled with the earnest movements of the man's tongue, were enough to pull a soft moan out of him as he tried to return the kiss. Gin lifted his arms up and around Aizen's neck to pull him closer, wanting – no, needing more of that heat. More of the fire that burned inside him at every little touch of Sousuke's skin. Gin could feel his heart race at the touch of his skin, the taste of wine on his tongue, the way he closed his eyes and gave himself over completely to the kiss...

But it was over all too soon. Sousuke broke away to let Gin breathe again, and forced Gin to float back down to reality from the dream, and Gin couldn't help the soft, disappointed sigh from leaving him. But Sousuke only smiled at him, all softness and warmth, and when Gin met his eyes again, he could feel the heat flush his cheeks again. He let out another sigh, softer and more contented this time, as he peered into those eyes. Wondering what secrets they held.

But after a few seconds, Gin's world resumed it's spinning again, making him dizzy and sick and disoriented. The oysters threatened to make a re-appearance, and panicking, Gin very quickly disengaged from Sousuke and half-ran half-walked over to the metal waste bin outside and promptly vomited into it. Re-tasting the wine and the oysters. His fingers gripped the curved edges of the metal as he wretched and emptied his stomach, bitterly regretting having any wine to drink at all.

Somewhere in the distance, he could hear Aizen sigh. Hear his footsteps as the man approached him. The last thought Gin had was that he'd blown it. That he'd blown away his chance at starting anything with Aizen Sousuke because he'd stupidly drunk too much.

Aizen placed his hand gently on Gin's back between his shoulder blades, gently rubbing his back in a comforting gesture.

“Sorry,” Gin gasped, trying not to wretch again at the awful taste, “I drank too much.”

“It's alright,” Aizen answered, voice soft and gentle. “It was my fault. I probably shouldn't have ordered that second bottle.”

Gin only groaned in answer. “I feel awful.”

Aizen sighed softly. Well, so much for a night of passion.

But Gin started wretching again, and his concern for his Gin overrode his disappointment. His darling was sick. He needed to be looked after, not taken advantage of.
“Come on, let's get you home.” Aizen told him, “You can stay with me. I'll look after you.”
I'll never drink again

Gin took another unsteady step into Aizen's house, using all of his energy and concentration to stay upright and not fall again. He'd wobbled a bit – well, a lot – on the walk back and ended up tripping. Thankfully, Sousuke caught him before he hit the floor, but Gin ended up laughing, drunk off his face. Giddy and drunk and excited from his touch.

"Aizen-san, where we goin'?" Gin asked, his words slurring together as he leant on the wall for support. Trying to stop the world lurching wildly around him.

"You," Sousuke told him, putting his arm around Gin's waist to guide him inside, "Are going to bed."

"Am I gonna sleep wif you?" Gin wondered aloud, leaning against him for support. Though really Aizen was the only thing keeping him upright. "Cuz I wanna."

Sousuke smiled to himself. Gin truly was adorable when he was begging for things. It was utterly charming.

"Now, when you say sleep," he asked, his amusement growing, "Do you mean sleep, or are you expressing a desire for sex?"

Gin's grin widened at the word. "Sex." he said, and then immediately burst into a fit of immature cackling at the word, leaving Sousuke to press his lips together.

So. This is it, then. Aizen thought to himself. The first test of my self-control.

He sighed quietly. Of course, he did want to bed Gin. To hear his darling moan and beg for him. To touch Gin's pretty soft skin and kiss those lips again and again. He wanted it. Dreamed of it, even. But with Gin in his current state, mind addled with drink and very much inebriated, he very much doubted Gin would remember any of it when the sun came up. Gin might even regret it when he came to his senses. And he didn't want that. He wanted Gin to remember their first time together. For it to be something Gin would enjoy and not something he'd end up regretting. Call him a hopeless romantic, but he wanted Gin's first night with him to be a bit more than a quick drunk fuck.

"Whilst I think that is a wonderful idea, Gin, you are simply too drunk at the moment. Perhaps another time."

He heard Gin's frustrated, disappointed sigh, and couldn't help the smile that crossed his lips. Well, at least he desires me.

"Okay," Gin huffed. 'I'll jus' sleep."

"Alright." Sousuke said gently, "Now come along, I'll take you to bed."

"Where's th' bed?" Gin asked, letting Sousuke lead him towards the stairs.

"It's just up here," Sousuke answered, holding Gin up so he wouldn't fall. Because Gin was rather unsteady and it wouldn't do if he fell on the stairs. "There's a step just here so be careful."

They got about three stairs up before Gin stumbled again, his co-ordination severely lacking.
"Gin?" Sousuke asked him, "Are you alright?"

"Th' world's spinnin' again..." Gin said, squeezing his eyes shut and on his hands and knees on the stairs. Trying desperately to focus through the dizziness.

"Do you think you can stand up?" Sousuke asked him, to which Gin only shook his head.

"Can't."

Sousuke shook his head. Clearly Gin wasn't going to be able to walk up the stairs on his own. So, moving quickly, he crouched beside Gin and let his hand rest on Gin's back.

"Okay, Gin, I'm going to carry you up." he said softly, "So just put your arm around me, alright?"

Gin nodded, and slowly did as he was told. He knelt up and put his arm around Sousuke's shoulders. Sousuke slowly helped Gin to his feet, and then scooped the boy up into his arms and proceeded to carry him up the stairs. One arm under Gin's legs and the other holding Gin's back, cradling Gin close to him.

"M'sorry I drank too much..." Gin murmured, "n' can't stand up no more..."

"Shh, don't worry about that now." Sousuke soothed him, "Let's just focus on getting you into bed to sleep off the dizziness."

Gin sighed sleepily, his head resting against Sousuke's chest, "Okay, Sousuke."

Sousuke just smiled softly and shook his head as he carried Gin into the bedroom and setting him on the bed, quietly praising his past self for changing the bedsheets as Gin sat with his legs dangling over the edge of the bed.

"Okay," he said to Gin, "Let me take your shoes off and then you can climb in."

"Oh." Gin looked at him, puzzled, "Bu' shouldn' I take me clothes off first?"

Sousuke pressed his lips together again, firmly this time. Good gods, you do plan on testing the control I have over myself, don't you?

"It doesn't matter." Sousuke told him, kneeling to take off both Gin's shoes. Slipping one off first, then the other and setting them by the bed on the floor. "Just climb in. I'll wash them for you tomorrow."

Gin shrugged, but did as he was told, crawling in between the soft, clean cotton bedsheets.

"I feel bad." Gin groaned, laying his head back onto the pillow and covering his eyes with his arm. "Me heads swimmin'."

Sousuke stood over him, watching with concern, hoping Gin wouldn't be sick again. He let his hand carefully stroke Gin's silver hair for a moment. He sighed softly and walked across the room to retrieve his plastic waste bin and place it on the floor by Gin's side. Within easy reach, should he feel sick again.

"Gin," he said quietly, sitting beside him on the bed, "If you feel sick again in the night, there's a bucket you can use, alright."

"Mmkay." Gin murmured, burying himself under the duvet, "G'night Sousuke."
"Goodnight, Gin."

Sousuke smiled tenderly at his Gin, stroking his beautiful silver hair and watching as Gin's eyelids slowly closed and his breathing slowed. When he was certain Gin was fast asleep, he leant over to place a soft kiss on his forehead before changing into a sleeping robe and settling down to sleep in the space beside Gin.

It was the sunlight hitting his eyelids that first stirred Gin from his sleep. The brightness filtered into the room through the blinds, and at first, Gin resisted it. Choosing to roll over and hide under his duvet, in the warm and cozy softness of the bed. Gin sighed softly. He always did like being in bed. Especially on cold days. Even more so on days when he didn't have to wake up early to go to his lectures, which was the case today. He smiled to himself as he buried further under the covers, hiding from the sun because the light hurt his eyes and made his head pound monstrously. His throat was dry, too. He knew he'd have to get up eventually, but for the moment he wanted to stay in his warm and comfortable bed. It certainly was more comfortable than usual today...

The thought brought Gin up short. His bed did indeed feel strange. Unless, the thought dawned on him slowly, unless this aint my bed.

Gin pushed the duvet down and away from his face and looked around him, wincing as his head pounded and the light hit his eyes. He startled when he caught sight of Aizen fast asleep beside him, and quickly remembered the events of the previous night. The dinner, the flirting, the kissing...

Oh gods, Gin thought, terrified, feeling heat rush to his face, I... we didn't... did we?

Gin could feel his heart begin to race, his palms start to sweat, and anxiety start to claw at his insides and squeeze his chest making it difficult to breathe.

We didn' do it, did we? I don' remember. Oh god, what if we did an' I don't remember?

Breathing became harder after that. It was as if there was a vice around his chest, squeezing the air out of him. He sucked in air, trying desperately to fill his lungs again, feeling his hands shake. Fists clenching the thick duvet so tightly his knuckles went white. It was only the voice of his zanpaktou that cut through his anxiety.

Will you relax? Shinsou told him, He never touched you. He never even undressed you. The only thing he did was take your shoes off.

Gin's sigh of relief was audible. He didn' touch me?

No. Shinsou told him. Again. He never even tried to touch you.

Gin could feel his anxiety melting away. The tightness in his chest loosening as he looked at himself and realised he was still dressed in last night's yukata. Oh, he sighed, That's... that's good.

Yes. Shinsou replied, He just looked after your drunk ass after you puked your guts up when you left the restaurant.

Gin had the grace to at least blush at the remark, cringing at the memory of it. He'd thrown up right after kissing the man, too. The worst possible time for his stomach to decide to violently eject its contents. Now the man would get the wrong idea and assume his kisses were terrible enough to make him sick. Gin hoped he wouldn't think that, but the evidence was not really in his favour. Gin groaned inwardly, covering his face, Why? Why'd I have to go and be sick on him? Why?! Now
He's gonna think I hate him.

He lay back down and put his head on the pillow again, watching the man in question sleep beside him. His face, soft and relaxed in sleep, had a charm quite unlike that which he exuded when awake. Sousuke had a certain vulnerable quality about him when he slept, and Gin was highly tempted to reach out over the short distance between them and touch him. To run his fingertips over the soft skin of his forehead, his cheeks, and maybe those lips that kissed him so frequently. He wanted to softly brush the dark mahogany hair out of his eyes so he could get a better look at him.

He's beautiful, Gin thought to himself, I wonder if anyone's ever seen him sleep before, or if he makes them all leave before then.

Gin lifted his hand tentatively, unable to resist the temptation. His fingers reached slowly across the space between them, and slowly, carefully, brushed aside the dark hair off Sousuke's forehead and out of his closed eyes with a soft sigh and a smile on his lips. Aizen truly was a beautiful creature. Why he would even deign to pay notice to someone like Gin was beyond him. After all, the man could have anyone he wanted, man or woman. And he wasn't shy about flaunting that fact, either.

Oh, you big dummy, Shinsou sighed, growing impatient with his master's doubts, I think he's made it very obvious he wants you in his life. Why else would he play his piano for you, when he's played for no-one else. Or kiss you. Why would he kiss you if he didn't like you?

Gin digested Shinsou's words. That was certainly food for thought. Could the notorious perverted playboy finally be ready to settle down? Gin doubted it. But still, it was a possibility. However tiny, it was still a possibility.

Gin continued gazing at Sousuke's face, letting his fingers roam lazily along the man's cheek and brow. His skin is so soft, Gin noted, surprisingly so.

Gin smiled softly as he traced his fingertips along Sousuke's forehead and then over his temple, flowing down over his jaw line. Quietly wondering to himself if anyone else had touched him like this and what exactly were Aizen Sousuke's intentions towards him, and whether or not he'd have to listen to Rangiku saying I told you so.

Sousuke moaned softly and began to stir. Gin pulled his fingers away just as Aizen's eyes flitted open.

"Hey." Sousuke greeted him, still hazy with sleep. "You're awake."

Gin nodded, settling his hands against his own chest, pretending he hadn't just been exploring the contours of Sousuke's face with his fingertips.

"Yeah, I'm awake."

Gin watched Sousuke's lips curl up into a soft and lazy smile full of the same warmth and affection he'd shown earlier. "How are you feeling?"

Gin tried to smile at him through the killer headache thumping away at his skull from the inside.

"Th' truth?" he asked, "Terrible. Me head feels like someone smashed it with a bat. My throat feels like it's made of sandpaper. An' me stomach's all unsettled." He groaned and covered his eyes in an attempt to block out the sunlight that hurt his eyes and only aggravated his monstrous headache. "An' I made a big fool a meself. I'm never gonna drink again."
The light musical sound of Aizen's laughter drifted into his ears.

"That's what they all say." Sousuke told him gently, "I remember my first hangover was terrible, too."

Gin groaned again and rolled over onto his stomach, burying his face into the pillow. "How does Ran do this every week?" he wondered aloud, though his voice was muffled by the pillow he'd buried his face into, "I feel fuckin' awful."

Gin heard the man's light chuckle again and scowled into the pillow. "Great. And now he's laughin' at me."

"Don't worry," Sousuke told him gently, "I'll look after you until you feel better."

Gin pushed himself up onto his forearms and lifted his head up to look at him, confused. "Yer gonna look after me?"

"Of course," Sousuke smiled, "I can't just abandon you after you were ill, that would be cruel."

Gin studied his face, suspicious. But Rangiku's earlier words came back to him.

_He'd be good to you._

Was this what she was talking about?

Gin had to smile. "what er ya gonna do?" he asked jokingly, "Make me breakfast in bed?"

Aizen's smile did not change or falter. "If you like. What do you want to eat?"

Gin was surprised by his answer. He knew he shouldn't be, but he was. But again he could feel that warm feeling spread through his chest and diffuse along his limbs...

_He'd be good to you._

"So what would you like?" Sousuke asked him, "Omelette? Eggs? I can fry you some bacon if you want bacon."

"Oh." Gin gaped at him, searching for words. He'd been so preoccupied with his thoughts he'd forgotten about the question. "Can I have bacon and eggs?" he asked hesitantly, "With... with baked beans and tomatoes?"

Sousuke smiled warmly at him, the smile reaching his eyes and lighting up his face. "You can have whatever you want." he told Gin. "How many pieces of bacon would you like?"

Gin's smile widened at the thought of hot food. "Can I have two, please?"

Sousuke chuckled again, light and amused. "Of course," he said gently, reaching across the small distance between them to softly caress Gin's face. "You wait here, I'll go make your breakfast."

Gin watched him push the duvet off him and get out of the bed, letting his eyes linger on Sousuke's broad shoulders and strong back as he stretched the kinks out of his body, raising his arms above his head. He imagined what Sousuke might look like under his light sleeping robe. He watched as Sousuke stopped stretching and lowered his arms again. Sousuke, feeling Gin's eyes on him, turned around to smirk seductively at him.

"Like what you see?" he asked Gin, who turned the most delightful shade of pink at the question.
"Uh, no, I..."

But Sousuke just gave another lighthearted chuckle. "It's alright if you do, you know."

Gin sat in the bed burning with embarrassment at having been caught admiring the man. But that only drew out another good-humoured laugh from Aizen.

"You know," Aizen drawled, "I can always take this off so you can get a proper look."

Gin's cheeks turned ten shades redder, and he could feel the heat in his whole body. He was certain his face was on fire, and that he probably looked like an angry glowing sun. Gin swallowed.

"Tha- that won't be necessary!" he blurted out. But a large part of him couldn't help imagining Sousuke undressing for him. Imagining how those long, clever fingers would undo the knot tying his robe together. How first, he would bare his shoulders with the garment hanging loosely off them, before letting the thing fall to the floor to pool around his feet. Gin's eyes would drink him in, starting with his face and that smug smile of amusement as Gin's gaze wandered over him. His eyes would then wander down his neck and then over his sculpted chest, the muscles well toned and firm. His waist would be narrow, Gin imagined, and his abs toned and stomach flat – no doubt kept that way through years of hard work. The man would stand tall and proud, showing off his magnificent body, smiling like anyone who was beautiful and knew it. Gin would feel his breaths grow heavy as his eyes roamed down the piece of art in front of him, gaze lingering longer than they should on his square hips and then Gin would gasp in wonder as he looked at the man's-

No. Gin ordered himself firmly. I will not go there. I won't think about seeing his penis.

He could hear Shinsou snickering inside his mind. But Gin, you already are.

Gin cleared his throat nervously and wrenched his thoughts back to reality, where a thankfully clothed Aizen was standing in front of him.

"That aint necessary, Aizen-san." Gin reiterated his earlier statement.

"Are you sure?" Aizen asked, still very much amused, "I can tell you're thinking about it."

Gin opened his mouth to speak, but again he found words a struggle. "I..." he managed, but that was all he could say, "I..."

Oh god, Gin thought, panicking, Don't think about his penis, don't think about his penis, don't think about his penis...

Aizen smiled at him, clearly satisfied with the way Gin was all flustered at the idea of seeing him naked. It seemed his Gin really was as innocent as he looked. Perhaps he could push his darling a little bit more, to make his face flush that lovely pink colour again.

"Because I really don't mind undressing for you, Gin." he added, his voice a soft purr, "If you want to take a good look at me."

As expected, Gin turned that nice pink colour, and he couldn't help the smile that tugged at the corners of his lips at Gin's deep blush.

Aizen-sama, Kyouka Suigetsu chided, Stop teasing the poor thing!

Sousuke softened his smirk into a gentle smile, obeying his zanpaktou. If only because he knew she'd just be difficult if he didn't relent in his teasing of Gin.
"Well, I'll go and make you breakfast," he told Gin, brushing aside his earlier remarks. "You just make yourself comfortable."

And with that, Sousuke turned and walked out of the room, heading down the stairs to the kitchen. Leaving Gin alone in his bed to calm down. Gin watched him until he was out of sight, trying to will the heat and the redness out of his body.
not safe for work at all near the end, and references to the Victorian language of flowers that will be used a lot in this while these idiots are courting each other. It is a language I have studied for several years, and all the meanings are correct to the best of my knowledge. I did type this up pretty quickly so apologies if there are inconsistencies.

Gin groaned and buried his face in both his hands. *Gods, why?* He wondered, *Why does he always do this to me? How can he make me blush like a schoolgirl with just a few words?*

**You'll get used to his flattery,** Shinsou told him levelly, **His advances, his dirty words.**

Gin frowned at his zanpaktou, who had chosen that moment to materialise beside him on the bed in the form of a silver fox.

"Yer assumin' I'll be around him long enough ta get used to it."

Shinsou tilted his head and regarded Gin quizzically for a moment before replying. "You're assuming you won't be?"

Shinsou's answer surprised Gin. Did his zanpaktou know something he didn't?

Gin sighed deeply and lay back on the bed, head hurting too much to puzzle it out. He'd work it out later, at home, where a monster headache wasn't competing for his attention. Or Aizen, either.

"Rangiku has the right of it, you know," Shinsou added. Again using the tone that suggested he knew more than he was letting on. "He may be a complete pervert and a self-serving charmer, but that fool would make the sun rise in the west for you, if he could."

Gin closed his eyes, deciding to rest for a moment. *I doubt it.*

Shinsou made a hum that indicated his disagreement, but he said nothing else on the matter. Thankfully. Gin really wasn't in the mood to argue with his zanpaktou. Especially when he had this terrible hangover and a throat like sandpaper. He was so thirsty, too. He should have asked Aizen for a glass of water before he left. But he'd been too distracted by the possibility of seeing him naked.

"If you're thirsty, he left you a glass of water on the bedside table." Shinsou told him.

"What?" Gin looked around, finding there was indeed a glass of water next to him, with a jug of water beside it. "Has that been there the whole time?"

"Yep."

"How th' hell didn' I notice that?"

"Well," Shinsou began, his voice light and teasing, "You were too busy thinking about seeing his
Gin felt heat rise to his face again, practically hearing the zanpaktou's smirk in his voice. "Seeing his penis."

Gin's face went red, and Shinsou laughed lightly.

"You're thinking about it again now." the spirit teased him.

Gin felt his face and neck turn ten degrees hotter, which only made Shinsou chuckle more.

"Yer just as bad as him, ya know." Gin scowled. But Shinsou only snickered.

"And you call him a pervert."

"Leave me alone will ya?" Gin scowled at him again. Shinsou kept snickering, but he obeyed the command, leaving Gin alone with his thoughts again. Gin sighed with relief. At last he'd have some respite from all the teasing. At least the teasing from his zanpaktou. Aizen was another story entirely. Who knew what dirty things he'd say when he returned?

Gin shook his head, banishing the ideas springing into his mind. He'd worry about that later. First, he'd take care of his dry throat and slake his thirst. He took the glass of water and drank it greedily, emptying it before pouring himself a second glass. Once he'd emptied out the glass a second time, he set the glass back on the table again, hoping the water would help to get rid of the headache as he took in his immediate surroundings.

Aizen's bedroom wasn't overly large, but it was a good size, and like the rest of the house it was elegantly furnished. The bedside table was also mahogany wood, and there was a bookcase, also made of mahogany wood, against the back wall that held an extensive library.

So, he likes to read, Gin noted, his curiosity piqued. I wonder what sorta stuff he reads...

Gin let his eyes wander slowly across the books on the shelf, noting they spanned a great range of topics. Anatomy. Psychology. One called "How to Win Friends and Influence People."

There were novels there, too. Shakespeare, Dickens. Some Gin had never even heard of. Who was this Vladimir Nabokov? But then, Gin had never been one for reading books unless he absolutely had to.

There were some books on the bedside table, too. A copy of Lolita, and on top of that, a copy of The Language and Sentiment of Flowers.

The language of flowers? Gin pondered, a little perplexed.

"It's a language that was once used in the Victorian times," Shinsou elaborated. "Traditionally a language of courtship."

Gin snorted quietly. "Do women actually fall fer that crap?"

"Probably."

Gin picked up the little book, frowning at it. Wondering what possible use Aizen Sousuke could have for it. It must be one of his tactics to seduce people, Gin reasoned, flicking the book open to a random page, eyes scanning down the flowers and their meanings. Whole pages filled by lists. It was more like a dictionary than an actual book. Who knew there were so many flowers? And that each had a unique meaning. Sometimes a flower had two meanings, if the hand-scribbled notes in the margins were to be believed.
Jeez, does he deface all his books like this? Gin wondered, finding an entire section dedicated solely to the different coloured roses. Of course, he'd already known that roses were a way of expressing love, but he hadn't known the different colours meant different things. He hadn't known yellow roses signalled infidelity, or jealousy depending on the context. That white roses meant a heart unacquainted with love, or pink ones meant secret love. Even withered roses had a meaning: transient impressions. And those were just the roses. There were so many other flowers. Tulips, daffodils... and the prickly cactus Gin always thought meant stay away that was actually an expression of ardent love.

Setting the book down on his lap, he examined the pile of books on the bedside table again.

"The fuck is a Kama Sutra?" he wondered aloud, picking up the book and opening it to a random page, not really looking at the cover. Maybe it was just a weirdly titled story, he thought, but he quickly found otherwise when he saw the contents.

"Oh."

Shinsou's mad cackling bounced around the insides of his head, banging against his skull, and reverberated in his eardrums. His face turned red again. The zanpaktou snickered at Gin's embarrassment, "Well, what were you expecting?"

"Shut up!" Gin hissed, but curiosity won out over the initial embarrassment and he slowly flicked through the pages.

"I didn' know there were so many ways ta do it." Gin mused, holding the book up and studying the photos of man and woman united in ecstasy.

"Is this one even physically possible?" Gin asked, squinting at the photo. "It looks pretty uncomfortable to me."

"Well," Shinsou widened his grin, "You could ask Aizen-san. I'm sure he'd be happy to show you. Maybe he could even demonstrate..."

Gin's face turned beet red. "I aint askin' him!" he spouted. But Shinsou just laughed in response. "I'm just saying, Gin. He could."

"Well, don't." Gin told him firmly. "It's bad enough he teases me without you teasin' me, too."

"Oh, please. Like you don't enjoy it."

Gin scowled at his zanpaktou, and Shinsou just laughed in response.

Sousuke hummed happily as he cracked the eggs into the frying pan next to the bacon.

"Someone's happy." Kyouka Suigetsu commented, "I haven't seen you smile so much."

"Well, of course," he told her, "Everything is going so well. My plan is coming together nicely."

He flipped the bacon over with the spatula in his hand. "It is only a matter of time until he succumbs to me."

He pressed the bacon into the frying pan with the spatula and stirred the baked beans in the
saucepan on the hob next to it so they wouldn't start burning and sticking to the pan.

"Oh, I think it'll be the other way around." Kyouka mused, making an appearance in the kitchen beside him. Her form of choice this time was that of a young red-haired woman, green eyes, and freckle-cheeked. Her hair fell in soft ringlets down to her shoulders, and the dress of the day was a white floral print summer dress that was perfectly suited for a high tea garden party. The length of it came down to her knees, and it was paired with some flat white sandals.

"The other way around?" he lifted his head, studying her with more than a little skepticism.

"Yes."

He frowned, trying to work out what she meant. Kyouka was often a tricky and cryptic sword spirit. And while those were often traits he valued, particularly when deceiving his enemies, there were also times he appreciated direct answers. Like now.

"Please elaborate."

"What I mean is," she said, flicking her hair with her fingers, "I think it will be you who falls flat on your face for him before he falls for you."

He managed a snort at this statement as he put the bread into the toaster and pressed the lever. "I highly doubt that. I'm just going to play with him for a little while. I know what I'm doing."

"Those are famous last words, Sousuke."

"What was that?"

"I was just wondering what making him breakfast in bed has to do with 'toying with his feelings', as you put it." She flicked her hair again, "Not that I'm complaining at all. I quite like this soft side of you."

He smiled to himself, quietly pleased with himself. She didn't understand that half the fun was making people fall hard for him before he crushed them. But she would.

"My dear Kyouka," he said, plating up the eggs, bacon and baked beans for Gin's breakfast, "It's all. About. The chase. The breakfast is a part of that."

The toast popped out of the toaster and he put that on the plate, too. His zanpaktou made a noise that indicated she disagreed, but he ignored it. He took the butter out of the fridge and spread it over the warm toast with a knife. He then grabbed a tray from one of the cupboards and set the plate on it, ready to carry it upstairs to Gin. There was just the tea left to make now.

"Of course, Aizen-sama," Kyouka said as he boiled the kettle for the tea, "How silly of me. It's definitely the thrill of the chase before you break his heart that's got you feeling so happy. Not the fact that Gin likes you enough to consider pursuing a serious relationship with you."

"Make all the snarky comments you want." he told her, pouring the hot water into a clean mug and stirring the tea into it. "The game is still afoot."

He heard her sigh tiredly as he walked past her with the tray with the tea and breakfast on it. "If you say so, Aizen-sama. I just hope you won't get bored of him too quickly. He's cute when he's trying not to picture you naked."

"Ah," Sousuke grinned, "Now that's something we can both agree on."
Gin was still flicking through the pages of the book when he heard Sousuke's footsteps and his humming as he came back up the stairs. Panicking, Gin quickly shut the book and hurriedly placed it – and the book on the flower language – back where he'd found them. So hopefully when Sousuke entered the room he'd see that nothing was amiss. Shinsou disappeared as well, and just for good measure Gin lay back down again and buried himself under the warm duvet to make it look like he'd been dozing instead of nosing through Sousuke's things.

Sousuke walked into the bedroom a few moments after, carrying a tray with Gin's breakfast and a mug of hot tea. Gin sat up and watched him walk the few paces over to him and sit beside him. Gin had to admit the smell of the food was a welcome one. Especially since his stomach was empty and crying out for something to fill it and settle it down. Gin couldn't help his mouth watering as the smell of bacon drifted into his nostrils.

"Smells so good." Gin told him, watching eagerly as Aizen set the tray onto his lap. Gin picked up the cutlery the second the tray touched his legs and cut off a piece of bacon. The meat was already in his mouth when he realised Aizen hadn't made himself anything.

"Aint ya eatin' anything?"

Aizen smiled at him, "I'll get something in a bit."

Gin shrugged and stuffed more bacon into his mouth. "Suit yerself."

Gin's interest lay firmly in filling his belly with the delicious food in front of him, so he didn't notice Aizen's gaze drift over to the books on his bedside table. Neither did he notice Aizen's amused smirk. He did, however, hear the drawling amused tones in his voice.

"Were you looking up ideas?"

Gin wrenched his gaze away from the food, a forkful of baked beans halfway to his mouth. "What?"

He followed Aizen's finger as it pointed to the books.

"Sexual positions." Aizen elaborated, and Gin's ears and face turned a red that would have been the envy of any tomato.

"No!" Gin spat, "I thought it was a story, an' I was curious what ya were readin'. I didn't realise what it was."

Aizen smiled at him. "You know, if you are going to snoop, at least leave the things you looked at the same way you found them."

Gin burned with embarrassment as the man chuckled, laughing at him again.

"Ya don't hafta laugh at me." Gin scowled.

"I'm not laughing at you." Aizen's voice became softer, gentler, but Gin was still dubious. "I've just never met anyone so adorably innocent, that's all."

"Sure sounds like yer laughing at me." Gin pouted. "And I aint innocent."

"Alright," Aizen smiled softly, "If it makes you feel better, I'll stop laughing. Deal?"

"Deal."
Gin put the baked beans still on his fork in his mouth and chewed and swallowed them. "Bu’ wait, aint ya mad I looked through yer stuff?"

"And why would I be angry?" Sousuke asked him, still smiling, "It's just a book. And I have nothing to hide from you. You can look at my things if you like. My house is your house."

Yeah right, you've got everythin' to hide from me, Gin thought, polishing off the rest of his breakfast. Though he knew better than to go voicing the thought. It appeared he'd have to figure out what the man was hiding on his own. When his body wasn't betraying him simply by reacting to the man. Especially if just his kisses sent sparks through him, and set the moths fluttering in his stomach.

Gin set down his cutlery on his empty plate and drank some of his tea, setting the mug on the bedside table, smiling back at Sousuke. Because Gin had things to hide, too. His mistrust. His desire to monopolise Aizen's affections. His wish to be the only one the man had eyes for, no matter who he had to throw under the bus.

"Alright, if you say so." Gin smiled sweetly. And then, because two could play at this, he added, "Maybe one day we can read through it t'gether. Ya know, when I'm less hungover. An' you can explain ta me some things..."

Gin grinned as he watched the subtle raising of Sousuke's eyebrows as he took the tray and set it on the floor out of the way.

Wow, I didn' know it would be this easy! Gin thought, excited. Perhaps a little too excited, because the next sentence tripped out of him without any thought at all.

"Maybe we can even try some of the positions in there, too." he added jokingly, but Sousuke's eyes lifted to meet his, the arousal in them hard to miss, and Gin knew instantly those words were a mistake. But he'd said them without thinking, in the spur of the moment. He hadn't thought of the consequences of saying them. Or if he had, he hadn't thought them through carefully enough. Especially since those consequences involved him being pushed down onto the bed, laying on his back, with Sousuke's lips pressed against his. With Sousuke's tongue tasting his again, making him moan helplessly into the kiss just like the last time. His hips were pressed down firmly under the older man's thighs so he couldn't move even if he wanted to. Gin thought of resisting, but he tasted so good, and the sparks were already flying about his body, and his arms – his traitorous arms – were already wrapping themselves around Sousuke's neck, pulling him close. His heart was racing and his mind was keenly aware of just how many layers of fabric lay between their naked bodies. And to top it all, his lust-addled brain was urging him to take those layers away and screw the consequences.

Aizen broke the kiss a moment later, breathing heavily. But Gin's breaths were heavier, his chest heaving.

"I..." Gin breathed, "I want..."

But before Gin could finish the thought, Aizen's warm fingertips were on his lips, silencing him.

"I know what you want," Aizen smirked, letting his fingers trace an invisible line down Gin's neck, "The question is, will I give it to you?"

"Aizen-sama," Gin panted, "Please. Touch me."

Gin couldn't have known what those words would do to him. To the man who craved total control,
power and influence over everything and everyone around him. Especially over the current object of his desires pinned under him being driven crazy with lust, with desire overriding all his reason and sense. Desire newly awakened and fresh. It caused a sly smile to tug at the corners of his mouth as he gazed down at Gin. His Gin, who was both flushed and breathless. No doubt those words had come out of him without any thought, too. In fact, Aizen doubted Gin could form any coherent thoughts. The knowledge pleased him, and he leant down again to capture Gin's lips with his own. Rewarding his darling with a passionate and deep kiss, drawing out another soft moan from Gin.

When Aizen broke away again, Gin's chest heaved with the effort of breathing, and Aizen could hear Gin's heartbeat loud and clear, mirroring his own that thrummed in his ears.

"How can I refuse such a polite request?" he purred softly, enjoying Gin's gasp as his lips kissed the skin of his darling's neck.

Gin's fingers gripped onto Aizen's clothes wherever he could reach, as those lips kissed and sucked his soft skin. Driving his crazy. Filling him with renewed desire. With lust. Gin could feel those lips and tongue gradually move down his neck, and sometimes his teeth gently nipping his skin, pulling the odd moan out of him.

"Sousuke... oh..."

"Mm, hush now," Sousuke ordered, pressing Gin down onto the bed and capturing Gin's lips again with his, "Let me take care of you."

"Aizen-san," Gin gasped, trying to protest, to backpedal, "I-"

But his words were cut off by Sousuke's lips and his tongue, and his traitorous body did not resist them. He wanted to take the words back, because they were a mistake, because he'd said them without thinking. And these were not the consequences he'd intended to happen when he said them.

But Sousuke's body was pressing close to him, legs straddling him, pinning him down. Lips kissing their way down his neck. Sousuke's hands were roaming across his chest, fingertips softly tracing over his collarbones. Every touch, however minute, sending sparks of electricity through his whole body.

"I wonder," he heard Sousuke muse aloud, "Are you silver from head to toe, under your clothes?"

Gin didn't even try to fight the moan that left him as Sousuke shifted to slide between the sheets, his hand moving between them to caress Gin's thigh. Sousuke smirked down at him.

"I'd love to find out." he purred into Gin's ear, breathing slow and steady. A world apart from Gin's erratic and heavy breathing. Sousuke pushed Gin's thigh gently, and his traitor's legs obediently spread apart at Aizen Sousuke's gentle, wordless command.

"Mmm, Sousuke..."

"Yes, that's my name," Sousuke hummed, "Though the way you're saying it now, you can wear it out if you want to."

He moved his hand up Gin's thigh, dangerously close to his manhood, and gazed down at his beloved. His Lolita. His Gin. With a smile spread across his face that rivaled even Gin's trademark grin.

"Hm," he paused for a moment, for thought, though his hands remained busy, continuing to trace
lines up and down Gin's thigh, before sliding into Gin's underpants and moving to take a hold of his firm erection and stroke that too. "I wonder what you taste like."

"Bu' ya have," Gin told him, "Ya have tasted me."

But Sousuke only shook his head slowly, smiling down at Gin indulgently. His voice was low and seductive when he spoke, "I'm not talking about your tongue."

Gin's eyes widened just enough to let him see those gorgeous red irises, and Sousuke covered Gin's body with his to give Gin another deep, languid kiss. All lips and tongue and full of passion and desire. Gin moaned into his mouth again, and at once Sousuke felt Gin's arms move to encircle his neck, pulling him close as his darling returned his kiss with equal passion and fervour. Creating a stirring in his groin, and sending sparks of electricity shooting up his spine, over his skin. And judging from Gin's reaction to his touch, his kiss... Gin was experiencing the same thing.

He let his lips move down to Gin's neck, kissing his way down the soft flesh, enjoying Gin's low moans and gasps. His tongue circling over Gin's pretty, soft skin.

"Oh gods," Gin rasped, gasping for air, pleading for more, "I love- I love-"

Sousuke paused for a moment, reluctantly. Slowly pulling his lips away from his darling's delicious skin as he digested the words that had come so beautifully and breathlessly from Gin's mouth. He lifted himself up, so his face was level with Gin's. His breaths were steady yet laboured, and again a vast contrast to Gin, who was gasping and panting and trying to think through a thick fog of sexual desire.

Sousuke lowered his face to Gin's ear, a soft sigh escaping him and tickling the shell of Gin's ear. His voice was low and husky, belying his amusement.

"You love?" he asked, though he knew the question ran deeper.

Gin sucked in air through his teeth and hissed his answer. "Yes. Gods, yes."

Sousuke smiled. 

Those words came out of him without thought, too.

He brought his lips down onto Gin's neck again, kissing and nibbling the soft skin, listening to Gin's ragged breathing and moaning as he carried out his ministrations. Steadily moving his lips down over Gin's collarbones and chest. His hands moving up to push the yukata off Gin's shoulders so he could suck on Gin's nipples. Kiss down his chest and navel, hands caressing Gin's shoulders before they roamed down Gin's body, creeping down to undo the knot holding the yukata together, so he could push aside the garment, revealing Gin's pale body. He kissed his way down Gin's chest, hands running over his darling's ribs, his waist, his hips, lips kissing a trail down his stomach and navel. With Gin gasping when he felt Sousuke's tongue lick its way back up his navel, before Sousuke shifted his body to cover Gin's again, deftly sliding his hand under the waistband of Gin's underwear to grasp Gin's hard cock.

"Mm, perfect," he said, giving his Gin a most seductive grin, "You're excited for me."

Gin let out a deep, low moan as Sousuke's fingers slowly stroked the length of him, and gave the man another deep, impassioned kiss when he clamped their lips together.

"Gin," Sousuke breathed after he pulled away, his voice soft and seductive, "You're beautiful."

Gin's eyes were fixed on his face, smouldering with hunger and need. Beautiful and red.
"Sou..." Gin whispered, gasping when those skilled fingers moved again, "Oh!"

Sousuke's fingers increased their pace, and Gin's gasps turned into strangled moans, his back arching. Sousuke's lips curled into a very satisfied smile as he lowered his body again, his free hand pushing the duvet off them so he had easier access. It also allowed Gin a better view of what he was doing, should he choose to look.

He brought his lips down onto Gin's chest again and resumed kissing his way down to Gin's navel. Hands moving over his darling's body again – over waist and hips – and pushed down the boxer shorts to expose Gin completely.

*Perfect,* he thought, drinking in the sight of his Gin before him; completely exposed and undone for him, looking at him with lust and desire. *Absolutely fucking perfect. And just as I thought, silver from head to toes.*
NSFW at all in the slightest because the author is a pervert. The author is also a giggling mess but that is irrelevant.

Gin let out a loud moan when Sousuke's mouth engulfed him and those gorgeous lips moved from the tip to the base of his hard cock. That tongue licking all the way down the shaft of him and then back up again.

"Oh gods," Gin rasped again, "Oh gods, oh gods-" his fingers grabbed the sheets under him, fisted in the pillow under his head, "Aizen-sama! Fuck! You- you- oh, shit. Good. That's so-"

Gin groaned again and arched his back, letting Aizen work his magic. *Gods, if he's like this, it's no wonder they all want him!*

Gin leant his head back, moaning, gasping, panting. Trying to form words and failing. Unable to even form a complete sentence, only breathless profanities and Aizen's name. Feeling the man's mouth devour the full length of him over and over, sucking in a breath as heat speared him right through to his core and spread right down to his extremities. It felt good. So good. So damn good.

"Sousuke," Gin moaned, "Sousuke... You- fu-fuck-"

He knew he was babbling, but it didn't matter. All that mattered was Sousuke pleasing him. Sousuke's mouth around him, sucking long and hard. Gin wanted it to continue, wanted more of this new pleasure consuming him, so he lifted his hips up off the bed. Bucking them up so he could meet Aizen's mouth, his throat. He wanted to grab a handful of his dark hair and... but a strong hand pushed him back down again. Those gorgeous lips leaving him with a soft pop.

"No," Sousuke told him. The tone was soft, yet Gin knew the words were an order. "Lie still."

Gin swallowed, catching sight of the hungry, demanding, possessive look in Aizen's deep chocolate eyes, and did as he was told. Aizen smiled at him, and he was immediately rewarded for his obedience with Aizen Sousuke's skilled lips and dexterous tongue resuming their task. Gin shuddered with the pleasure of it. Desire licking its way up his spine. Gin could feel those lips run smoothly up and down the length of him, adjusting to his shape. He could feel that warm, wet tongue licking him up, trailing around in slow circles around the very tip of him. One of Sousuke's hands firmly pressing his hip down into the mattress, keeping him still while the other grasped the base of his hard cock. Each sensation serving only to add fuel to the fire consuming him from the inside out, and tether him to the man currently giving his body pleasure. The man's spiritual energy circling around him, keeping him pressed down even if there weren't any other devious restraints.

Not that Gin wanted any of this to stop, at all.

He moaned again as the man hummed around him, and spewed out yet more profanities.

"Oh, shit." he gasped, "Fu-fuck tha's good. Sousuke... Sousuke... oh. Oh, gods..."

He could hear Aizen's little hum of amusement, keenly aware of the vibrations it sent through him.
He was also keenly aware that was his first complete sentence since the man had started pleasing him, which was probably why Aizen was so amused. But the thought became irrelevant when those lips and tongue became more insistent, increasing the rhythm, sending jolts of pleasure through Gin's body. Pushing him further and further towards the edge of the world.

"Sousuke!" Gin gasped, delirious with lust. The pleasurable sensations making him breathe heavy and hard. His fingers gripping the sheets like his life depended on it. "Oh, oh gods."

Gin could feel the pleasure building up inside him, curling around the base of his spine, filling his stomach, and pooling around his groin. It kept pouring into him, filling him up and sloshing around inside him. He had a vague thought that when it filled him completely it would have to go somewhere – but the idea was dismissed when Sousuke's hand, the one on his hip, moved to rest on his navel. Along with the sensation of being taken deeper into Sousuke's throat, which was enough to push him into oblivion. His vision whitened out, and with a loud moan and one final cry of "Sousuke!", Gin came fiercely into the man's mouth, pumping out what felt like an endless amount of cum before his body went limp. He sank back into the mattress, chest heaving, as he tried to catch his breath. Panting hard.

"Wow," Gin sighed, "That was... an experience."

He was answered with a soft chuckle as Sousuke crawled over the bed to lay down beside him. "I should say so," he smiled lazily, "You only managed one complete sentence."

Gin turned his head to face him, a smile on his lips and a laugh in his throat, "Didn' realise you were keeping track."

Sousuke's smile morphed into a smirk as he gazed across at Gin. Gin had a fleeting question in his mind about what happened to the fluid he'd emptied out into Aizen's delicious and highly skilled mouth earlier – but since the man hadn't even left the bed, the logical conclusion was that he'd swallowed it all.

Gin lay on his back, his breathing slowing down to its normal rate again, and watched the world around him come back into focus. He reached to find the fabric of his yukata and pulled it across his body to cover his nakedness before rolling onto his stomach with a contented sigh.

"Well, that was a nice way ta start my day." he grinned.

Sousuke gave him another light laugh, "Yes, I imagine it is."

"It's certainly an improvement over yesterday." Gin gave his bed companion a lazy, warm smile of his own. "Cooked breakfast, comfy bed..."

"And me."

Gin raised his eyebrows at the smugness in his voice, at the smirk, but he only smiled mischievously in return. Deciding to play along with this little game.

"And you." Gin agreed, watching the older man's smile widen with satisfaction.

"Though as much as I'd like to stay in yer bed," Gin told him, "I do need ta get a shower."

Sousuke gave him another of his soft smiles. "Of course. I'll get you some fresh towels and clean clothes. The bathroom is down the hall on the right."

"Thanks," Gin smiled, quite looking forward to feeling clean again and wearing some clean
clothes. "I guess I'll wait here while ya get th' towels and some clean clothes."

"Alright." Sousuke smiled warmly, gently caressing Gin's cheek before moving to get off the bed. Gin watched him stand and walk over to the wardrobe in the corner of the room and take out a fresh towel, then search through the neatly folded clothes to find something that would fit Gin's small frame.

"Hmm, I should have something in here that will fit you. Let me see if I can find you something..."

"S'alright. Take yer time."

Gin watched him for a few moments, gaze fixed on those broad shoulders and his strong back. And those very skilled lips that not so very long ago had been...

Gin felt heat rush to his face at the thought of it, and tried to push the thought aside. He couldn't let Aizen see him go pink again. It would only invite more teasing, and laughter. And besides that he needed to stop blushing like a teenage girl in front of the man anyway. Better if Aizen didn't see it.

"Aha, here." Aizen's voice brought him back to reality. "This one might fit you."

Gin watched, intrigued, as Sousuke strode back over to him and handed him a large white fluffy towel, and a casual yukata. A dark blue thing with narrow white vertical stripes down it. Sousuke held the clothes out to him, smiling.

"It might be a little bit big on you, but it should suffice until I can wash your own clothes. I'll leave you to wash and dress. You can use my bath products. I'll be downstairs when you're ready."

Gin nodded. "'kay. I'll go shower now."

"Sousuke grinned at him. "Take your time." he drawled, giving Gin a quick kiss before leaving Gin to his own devices.

Gin shivered as he closed the bathroom door, letting his back rest against the polished wood. He closed his eyes and tried to focus through the conflicting emotions inside him, and through the reactions of his traitorous body.

"Oh gods," he whispered, "Okay Gin, ya gotta calm down. This's normal, everythin's fine. Yer jus' still wound up from earlier. Jus' calm yerself down an' get a shower." He took a deep breath, in and out in an attempt to settle himself.

He locked the door behind him, so Aizen wouldn't get any ideas and come creeping after him into the shower, and walked into the bathroom. He let his yukata slip from his shoulders and fall to the floor in a pool at his feet and stood, naked, as he examined the bathroom.

It was every bit as elegant as the rest of the house. Cream tiles under his feet, a white ceramic sink with shining silver taps, and in a corner, a large shower with a glass door and walls. Gin opened the door and stepped inside, noting again it was clean and spotless. Had it been cleaned recently? He wondered. But then he thought that this was Aizen-san, so of course it had been, since the man was always so clean and tidy and organised.

Once he'd closed himself inside the shower, Gin turned on the hot water and let it warm and roll over his skin. He let it relax his muscles and ease his mind. Despite his best efforts, though, Gin's thoughts drifted back over to his earlier activities with Aizen-sama, and the way that gorgeous
mouth of his has sucked and stroked and teased... and that tongue. Oh, that tongue...

It was Shinsou's snickering that interrupted that train of thought.

*Are you quite sure you don't need a cold shower instead, Gin?*

Gin frowned, choosing not to respond. But Shinsou changed his tune.

*Well, that was certainly an enjoyable way to begin your day, wasn't it?*

Gin couldn't fight the grin creeping over his face. *I aint gonna lie, Shin, it really was. Though it wasn' supposed ta happen. It was a miscalculation on my part.*

Psh, *miscalculation*, Shinsou snorted, *Please. You wanted it. You can't lie to me, Gin, I ama part of you after all. You loved having him order you and tell you what to do.*

Gin felt another shudder of desire lick up his spine as he recalled that firm, commanding voice. Those hungry eyes smouldering with lust.

*No. Lie still.*

Gin had to bite his bottom lip as the desire pooled in his groin again. Which only prompted more laughter from Shinsou that he mentally swatted away.

*He's a player. Gin reminded himself. I gotta remember that.*

*Yes, Shinsou agreed. But that doesn't mean you can't play his game and keep his eyes fixed on you and only you.*

Gin digested that. Turning his zanpaktou's words over and over in his mind. *Play his game? How could he do that? And more importantly, how could he do that if just a mere touch and a well timed command made him incapable of even speaking a full sentence and turned him into a babbling mess. And then there were his kisses that had an even worse affect on him...*

Gin sighed. He supposed he'd think of something eventually. Something clever and amazing that would make him the only one Aizen Sousuke would ever look at. The only one sharing his bed. The only one he'd ever kiss and pleasure with that gorgeous mouth of his.

*Yes. Gin thought, I suppose I can play his little game. The question is, how?*

…

Sousuke hummed a happy tune to himself as he cracked an egg into the frying pan on the stove, making his own cooked breakfast now that his Gin's needs had been tended to. A very satisfied grin spread quickly across his face, the images clear in his mind as he lay the bacon slices beside the egg in the pan to cook. Gin's fingers fisting in the sheets, those low moans and cries of his name, the immediate obeying of his command... all of which were turning him on quite fiercely.

*Well, you certainly weren't lying when you said you wanted a taste of him. Kyouka interjected, I assume you got what you wanted, judging from the big grin on your face.*

He smiled. "I always get what I want. Surely you of all beings should know this."

*Of course, Aizen-sama. It is just nice to see you looking so pleased. You don't usually... give your partners pleasure. At least not with your mouth.*
Sousuke thought about it for a moment. Indeed, it was usually the other way around, with his partner of the night pleasing him. He never gave any of them pleasure orally. In bed, he was always a taker, never a giver. And yet, he'd given Gin pleasure that way without a second thought. On a whim, almost. But then – he smiled to himself – the sight of Gin's body exposed for only his eyes, had been breathtaking. And the contrast of Gin's fair skin against the dark blue of his yukata was simply gorgeous.

_Aizen-sama_, Kyouka called to him, _You're burning your bacon._

_What?_

Indeed, the smell of burning things hit his nose, and he looked down at the pan to find the bacon turning black, and his egg more than a little overcooked. He quickly turned the stove off and frowned down at his burnt meal. Sighing in frustration, he walked over to the bin and scraped the burnt black mess into it. Trying not to listen to Kyouka Suigetsu's giggling at his expense, because he was a man who prided himself on never burning food.

_Hehe, it must be love if he made you burn your bacon._

Sousuke only frowned, and put more bacon in the pan to fry, and made himself a bacon sandwich instead of a full breakfast.

He set the plate with his bacon sandwich onto the table and then sat down to enjoy his breakfast. He'd only just lifted the sandwich up to his mouth when he sensed Gin's presence, heard his soft footsteps on the tiled floor of the kitchen, heard Gin's soft voice calling him.

"Sousuke?"

And his eyes darted up from his sandwich to the slender, beautiful figure in the doorway wearing his clothes. He sat, sandwich in his hands, staring across at Gin. The yukata was definitely a bit on the big side. Particularly the sleeves, as they covered Gin's hands totally. But the dark colour suited him, and he'd be lying if he said Gin didn't look adorable wearing it. On him, the garment came down to his knees, and he often wore it when the sticky heat of summer grew too much. But on Gin it fell to his ankles.

_Close your mouth, Aizen-sama_, Kyouka gently prompted him, _You are catching flies._

"Gin," he smiled, "You look nice. I see the clothes fit."

Gin's smile widened at the compliment. "Thanks. It's a lil bit big though. The sleeves are kinda long."

Gin lifted his hand up to show how the sleeve covered his long and delicate fingers.

"It's fine. You can roll the sleever back if they get annoying. Come and sit down."

Gin walked slowly _Thought ya'd have a fry up yerself._

Sousuke shrugged. Not mentioning that his attempt of making a fry up for himself turned into a burnt black mess currently residing in the bin. "A bacon sandwich was easier."

Gin grinned across the table at him, "You didn' strike me as a type ta be a lazy cook."

Sousuke smiled. "Only when I cook for myself. How are you feeling, anyway? Has the headache gone?"
Gin grimaced. Obviously his head was still pounding.

"Ii have some painkillers, if you want."

Gin shook his head. 'Nah, I'll be alrigh'. It's goin' off a bit. I just need ta avoid loud noises."

"Alright. If you're sure."

"I'm sure."

Sousuke smiled across at his Gin and took a bite out of his sandwich. *If only every day could be like this*, he thought, enjoying the feeling of Gin's eyes on him.

*Who says it can't be?* Kyouka asked him. The question bouncing around the insides of his skull. *It's only you who's saying it can't be. There's really no-one standing in your way but you. If I had my way, you'd be together like this every day and be happy.*

Sousuke frowned. Yes, well, you can't, he told her. Knowing full well that sword spirits were forbidden to interfere in such matters. *You know my reasons. I'll have to leave here eventually so it is best if I do not develop any attachments.*

He heard his zanpaktou huff indignantly, but otherwise remain silent. Good. He'd had quite enough of her nagging for one day.

"What're you thinkin' about?" Gin inquired, snapping him out of his thoughts. "Ya looked real serious there."

Sousuke's gaze lifted up to meet Gin's. "Oh. Just a little disagreement with my zanpaktou. Nothing for you to worry about."

But Gin's expression told him that he didn't buy that explanation for a second.

"Ya sure?" Gin probed.

"I'm sure."

"Alright." Gin conceded, deciding to let it go, for the moment, "But ya know, if ya ever wanna talk 'bout anythin', ya can always talk ta me."

Now, that answer surprised him. Though it wasn't an unwelcome surprise. A warm and soft smile passed his lips.

"Thankyou, Gin. I'll keep that in mind."

He glanced up again and caught sight of the brightest grin on his darling's face, and that absolutely made his day. It also told him that gin wanted to be his sole confidant, and Sousuke couldn't help the warmth that spread through his chest at the sentiment.

"Anytime, Sousuke." Gin replied, watching as Sousuke ate his sandwich.

"Your house is lovely, by the way." Gin told him,

Sousuke smiled. "You haven't seen the garden."

Gin looked very pleasantly surprised at this. "There's a garden?"
"Of course there is. Let me finish my sandwich and I'll show you."

...

"Oh, wow." Gin gasped as he stepped out into the garden. "It's beautiful. Did you do this yourself?"

"Most of it." Sousuke told him. "The rose bushes at the back were already here when I bought the house. I'm thinking of getting a koi pond installed."

Gin looked around the lovely green space. It was very spacious, with a patio by the back door with a table and chairs, with a small pair of pruning shears resting on the table. The fence at the far back was unpainted, and a splattering of flowers grew all the way along it, interspersed with bushes that held roses of all colours. Red, yellow, pink, and white. There was a red acer tree, too, by the brick wall at the side, thick with leaves.

"I didn't know you gardened." Gin told him. To which Sousuke just smiled.

"There's a lot you don't know about me."

Gin smiled, "I know you like me."

Sousuke had to chuckle at that. "That is true."

Gin's gaze drifted over the colourful flowers around him, and wondered how long it had taken to get the garden this beautiful.

"What kinda flowers are these?" Gin asked him. "I dunno much about flowers."

He felt Sousuke walk over to stand next to him, and felt the man's hand settle on his shoulder.

"That's okay. I'll teach you."

Gin, being uneducated in the classification of flora, always thought flowers were just flowers. But the gentle gardener began to educate him and correct his ignorance.

"The purple ones there are iris." Sousuke told him, pointing to the purple blooms, "the yellow ones scattered between them are daffodils. There-" his finger moved across the flowerbed, Gin's eyes following it, "-those multicoloured ones by the fence, the ones that look like little spears... those are gladioli. Traditionally the flower of the gladiators."

Gin grinned at him. "So, if ya gave me one of those, would that be you sayin' im yer gladiator er somethin'?"

He watched Sousuke smile knowingly at him. "It might mean that," he said, "But it could also mean something else depending on the context." He paused, waiting for Gin to decipher his words before he continued, "But if we are discussing the language of flowers..."

He let his hand fall from Gin's shoulder and walked over to the metal table on the patio to pick up a pair of small handheld pruning shears. Gin watched him take them over to the small cluster of red flowers growing by the fence and kneel beside them just a few paces away. "Then I think perhaps giving you a red tulip would be more appropriate."

He held the stem of the tulip at the middle, so the flower wouldn't fall into the dirt, and snapped the shears closed around the base of the stem, seperating it from its roots. Rising carefully to his feet, he strode back over to Gin, smiling gently as he held the freshly cut flower out to him.
"For you."

Gin reached out and took the flower hesitantly, their fingers gently touching as the vibrant red flower changed hands.

"Oh... Thankyou," Gin replied softly.

He hadn't known it then, in that moment, but Gin was holding onto a declaration of love in the language of flowers.
Love to all who enjoy this and leave nice comments. I am not sure what happened but ch13 got posted twice. Oops. Sorry about that. More of the flower language this time, which will be a running concept in the story. All the meanings are correct to the best of my knowledge. Enjoy.

“Are you sure you can't stay?”

Gin laughed at his comment, light and full of amusement. “It's nearly dinnertime. I've been here all day!” Gin told him, “I gotta go. Else Ran'll be worried about me.”

gin took great satisfaction from Sousuke's sigh of grudging resignation.

“I suppose you're right.” Sousuke conceded, “From what you've told me about her, I'd hate to get on her bad side.”

Gin smiled, thinking of all the lectures she'd given him over the years. “Me, too.”

Sousuke smiled knowingly at him, a smile that suggested they were sharing an inside joke. “So, when will I see you again?”

Gin's smile crept steadily wider as he looked at the man leaning against the doorframe with a lazy, seductive smile on his lips. Reluctant to let Gin leave his porch and venture back to the flat he shared with Rangiku. Gin felt a small surge of triumph at Aizen's reluctance to let him go after their night together. Even though nothing physical happened between them.

“When d'ya wanna see me again?” he asked, trying to sound seductive.

“How about next saturday?” Sousuke supplied.

Gin nodded, “Alright. Next saturday.”

“I'm looking forward to it.”

Gin felt his cheeks turn pink again as he grinned. “Well,” he exclaimed, in an attempt to shift the man's focus away from his red face. “I better get goin', er else Ran's gonna lecture me forever if I'm late fer dinner again.”

Sousuke's answer was a lighthearted chuckle, reverberating through his chest, and Gin couldn't help turning a shade pinker in the face. Which Gin knew would only amuse the man further.

“Well if that's the case I have to let you go, then.” Sousuke answered, the amused tone never once leaving his voice, “But you might want to take this with you.”

“This?” Gin asked.

“This.”
Gin's eyes were drawn immediately to the red bloom in Sousuke's hand – the tulip he'd given Gin earlier – seemingly produced from nowhere. Gin's eyes then took in the rather satisfied smirk on his face.

“Oh,” Gin said softly, “This.”

He reached out to take the tulip from Sousuke, and held the flower close to him.

“Thankyou.”

“It was my pleasure,” Sousuke told him, in that low, drawling voice of his, that made Gin feel like like the words were crafted solely for his ears.

“Now,” Sousuke added, using those same low husky tones, looking at Gin through heavily lidded bedroom eyes, “Can I at least get a kiss before you go?”

Gin grinned at him, deciding to oblige him. Just this once. “Alright. Just one, though. I know what yer like, once ya start ya can't stop, and 'fore ya know it I'll be here all night, too.”

Sousuke smiled seductively at him, “Well then, if I only get one, I guess I better make it good.”

“Yes,” Gin agreed, “You should.”

Sousuke's smile widened and he leant in to capture Gin's lips with his own. His fingertips, followed by his palm, gently caressing the soft skin of Gin's cheek, slowly moving down to his neck.

Automatically, Gin's arms lifted up and wrapped themselves around Aizen's neck, his tongue slowly caressing the older man's tongue. Engaging in an intensely passionate and deep kiss, one that despite Gin's best efforts, drew a soft little moan out of him. It wasn't long after that when Sousuke pulled away from him, smiling tenderly.

“Okay,” Gin said, a little breathless from the kiss, and keenly aware they were standing in Sousuke's front doorway, in view of all his neighbours should they be looking through their windows. “I really gotta go now.”

Gin turned to leave, and took a step forward, only to find his wrist trapped in the man's grip.

“Oh, just one more kiss,” Sousuke grinned, “Just one more, before you go.”

Gin sighed in mock frustration. “Ya see, ya can't just have one.”

“What if I said please?”

“Yer hopeless.”

“Only when it comes to you.” Sousuke beamed at him, “So what do you say? Just one more?”

Gin studied him, sceptical. “Just one.” he conceded, and was immediately yanked in close for another passionate and hungry kiss.

This time, it was Gin who pulled away. “Alright. I really, really gotta go now.”

Sousuke sighed softly, clearly disappointed by this. And gin's smile widened just a touch.

“If you must.” Sousuke said, recovering his easy smile again. Resigning himself to giving his Gin just one last quick peck on the lips. Clearly still not having gotten enough of him. “I'll see you in
“class on Monday.”

“Yes,” Gin breathed, fighting the urge to blush again with the realisation that despite everything between them, Aizen Sousuke was still, in fact, his teacher. And that their relationship was entirely inappropriate. “Monday.”

“If I don't see you before then, of course.”

“Yes,” Gin nodded, “Of course.”

“Alright,” Sousuke smiled, “You better go. I’ll call you later.”

“Okay,” Gin answered, “I’ll see you later.”

Sousuke held his hand up to shoulder height and waved to Gin, watching his darling as he jogged up the path away from his house and disappeared down the road back home. When Gin was out of his sight, he leant against the doorframe with a lazy, yet very satisfied smile on his face. He sighed, perfectly content for the first time in what had been a very long time. After a moment, he turned and retreated back into the house.

What was that you were saying about him falling for you first? Kyouka Suigetsu asked, the smugness permeating her tone. She was determined to get a rise out of him. To get a reaction. He could tell she was itching to say I told you so. But he ignored her, choosing instead to boil the kettle for another cup of tea, and adding a little more water to the lovely pink hyacinths in the crystal vase on his dining table in the kitchen. Freshly cut today because Gin had said he liked them. He could still hear his darling’s light, musical voice in his head.

Oh, I think those are my favourite.

Sousuke smiled to himself as he set the vase back down after filling it from the tap. Pink hyacinth.

In the language of flowers, meaning, game, or play.

How very appropriate, Sousuke thought, sipping his tea as he sat at the table with his drink.

Yes. Sousuke had answered at the time, I think those are my favourites, too.

His grin widened. Of course, he, unlike Gin, knew the meaning of the pink hyacinth. He knew the meaning of the red tulip, too. And he knew it would only be a matter of time before Gin did too. Because his Gin was clever. And if he were honest, that was part of what attracted him to Gin.

You really think he’ll work it out? Kyouka asked.

Yes. If he's half as clever as I give him credit for, he'll work it out. And then he'll come back with a flower of his own in response.

Sousuke took another sip of his tea and, feeling it warm up his insides. Of course, it couldn't even compare to the warm feeling he got when he kissed Gin, but it was very pleasant nonetheless. And if he gets stuck, I'm sure his little friend Matsumoto will help him out.

And what if he sees right through you? She asked, what if he sees your act for what it is?

Well, he smiled, Then that makes things a bit more interesting, don't you agree?

Hm. She snorted her disagreement. I agree you're deluding yourself with this little game of yours.
Gin walked down the street, staring at his bright red tulip and twirling the stem around in his fingers. Trying to work out what it meant. Cursing the fact that when he'd had Sousuke's flower dictionary in his hands that morning, he hadn't looked up the meaning of red tulips. But he soothed his frustrations by reminding himself that he couldn't see the future. That he couldn't have known Sousuke would give him a red tulip. He could, however, analyse Aizen's actions and try to work out Aizen's true intentions towards him. Calculate whether Sousuke was serious about pursuing a relationship with him. And if it turned out he wasn't, well... the man knew where the exit was.

But if Gin could make him serious about being with him, being together, he might just stand a chance against all Aizen's previous affairs. To do that, Gin knew he'd have to plan his next moves very carefully. Like in a chess game. And that involved working out what a red tulip meant in the language of flowers. Perhaps there were some books on it in the library he could borrow. Though a part of him did wish Aizen had told him what the flower meant so he knew how to react. How to feel. So he didn't have to do all this running around and looking things up. So he knew whether or not he could trust the man.

Gin sighed. He could always ask Ran for advice, but her view of their relationship would be very rose tinted. Especially if she knew what happened that morning between them in his bed. She'd only see what lay on the surface, not the full extent of the game Aizen was playing with him. The tip of the iceberg as it were.

What was that about, anyway? Giving him the flower and talking about context and the flower language. Was it so hard to just come out and say what he wanted? It was all so confusing and unnecessary.

But if it was a game Aizen wanted, Gin would just have to grit his teeth and will himself to be a player if he wanted the man's full, undivided attention. It was the only way to make Sousuke look at him, and only him. The only way to make the man love him.

But, to do that, he needed a bit of help. And since Shinsou was the best part of useless with these situations, Rangiku was his best bet. Even if she did have a very rose tinted view of things. But she'd know the flower language, and she could navigate these waters easier than he could. So she'd point him in the right direction.

If she didn't tear him a new one for being gone so long. She did worry about him.

By the time he walked into their apartment, she pounced.

“There you are!” she beamed at him, laying sprawled out on the sofa, “I was beginning to think you'd never come back.”

“Oh, yeah, about that...” Gin rubbed the back of his head as he moved into the front room, looking rather sheepish. “Things happened and I kinda got distracted.”

*That* piqued her attention.

“Ohhh, *things,*” she smirked, her tone mischievous as she sat up on the sofa, “What *kind of* things?”

Gin did his best to fight the redness rushing to his cheeks at the memory of that morning. The kissing. That gorgeous mouth pleasuring him...

“Aha, well... ya see...”

He watched her grin widen exponentially. So much so that he feared it might split her cheeks open.
“Oh, I knew it would go well!” she was bubbling over with excitement now, her voice loud and excitable. “Come! Sit down! Tell me everything!”

“Everything?” Gin asked, dreading telling her the events of earlier that morning.

“Everything!” She trilled. Dragging him by the arm to sit on the sofa beside her. She made his behind sit on the cushion, and Gin knew he'd get no rest until she got at least some information.

“Alright,” he sighed. But I'm not telling you everything. Especially not about this morning.

“Oh, but first,” Gin said, holding up his tulip, “do you have a vase I can put this in?”

She paused and stared at the flower, with a surprised and curious look on her face. “Where'd you get that?”

“He gave it to me. Said somethin' about the flower language and context and it bein' appropriate. I dunno what he meant.”

She thought for a moment before getting to her feet, “There's a small vase in the cupboard with the mugs and glasses.” she told him, “You wait here, I'll just go get my flower dictionary.”

And with that, she jogged out of the room and disappeared, leaving Gin alone. He could hear her rummaging about upstairs. It surprised him how she could ever find anything in that mess of a room. It always looked like a tornado had passed through it. But she did. He supposed when it came to her bedroom, she liked chaos.

He sighed softly, moving into the kitchen to get a vase out of the cupboard. He found a small one, made of transparent crystal, just large enough for two or three flowers to sit comfortably. It was tall and narrow, so it didn't take up much space either. Gin decided it would serve.

He set his tulip on the work surface and filled the vase with water, after which he put in his tulip. Smiling with satisfaction, he took a moment to take a closer look at the bloom. It was still unopened, though the petals were a brilliant red already. Bold against the light coloured surface the vase sat on. A stand-out flower if ever Gin saw one.

What will it look like when it opens? He wondered, but he supposed he'd find out in a few days when nature took its course. Gin held the vase in his hands and carried it carefully back into the living room. Gently, he set it down on the coffee table, right in the centre, and sat on the sofa to wait for his best friend to return with the information he sought.

She came back into the room with the book in her hands, scanning the flowers and their meanings on the pages as she walked.

“Oh, tulip, tulip... where is the tulip?”

She sat down on the sofa beside him and studied the page, brows furrowed in concentration. Gin peered over her shoulder, hoping to see the meaning of his tulip before she did, but Rangiku was quicker. He knew she'd found it when he heard her little squeal of excitement and caught sight of her grin widening exponentially.

“What?” Gin prodded her, “what's it mean?”

“Here, read it,” she urged, shoving the book into his hands, “I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.”
Gin sighed. “Fine. But I don't see why ya couldn' jus' tell me.”

Gin's eyes turned down to look at the book and began scanning for the entry for red tulips.

“Just there,” Rangiku pointed to the bottom of the page, “Third one from the bottom.”

“Thanks.” Gin answered, resisting the urge to roll his eyes at her over-eagerness. Seriously, you'd think she were the one with a new love interest instead of him. But he found the entry anyway, and holding the book up to his face, began to read.

“Tulip, red. A declaration or confession of love.”

Gin lowered the book to his lap again, torn between being flattered and very displeased. “What?” He asked. “Tha' fool's known me fer all of a day! How can he possibly love me?!”

“You see!” Rangiku gently nudged him with her elbow, completely ignoring his comment “I told you he loved you! Ohhh, and he told you with the language of flowers... now that's romantic. He's showing you his sweet side, Gin, that he cares about you.”

Gin rolled his eyes. “Jeez, no wonder yer all excited.” he said sarcastically.

“Aren't you?” she countered, “I would be if I were you. He's giving you his heart. I'm telling you, it's love.”

“And I'm telling you yer seeing things through rose coloured glasses.” Gin answered back. “He's known me fer only a day! How can he love me in so short a time? It aint possible.”

“It is.” she told him, smiling and shaking her head slowly, “Gin, you're amazing. The real question is how can he not love you.”

Gin couldn't help the smile that crossed his face at her words. At the memory of his words from last night.

You're clever, you're beautiful, you're passionate.


“Because it's true!” she grinned, “Is that what he told you?”

“Well,” Gin began, “I asked him why me? Which, ya know, is a legitimate question since he could have anyone he wanted. And he just-” Gin paused, smiled softly, and recounted what Sousuke told him. “He rattled off a list of things. He said I was clever, caring, beautiful, an'...”

“Go on,” she prompted when his sentence died off. Wanting more details. “What else did he say?”

Gin took a moment to breathe. Trying not to think of those lips and those kisses and thinking of nothing else.

You can tell I'm passionate?

Well, I'd say the kiss you gave me was very passionate.

“He said I were passionate. That he liked that about me.”

Rangiku's face brightened upon hearing the word 'passionate'. Her eyes lit up and she had the biggest grin on her face – one that could give even Gin's a run for its money.
“And?” she prodded.

“And what?”

“How did he know you were passionate?” she pressed, her elbow nudges growing more insistent.

“Ummm...”

Rangiku gasped, her hands flying up to cover her mouth in her surprise, “Did you kiss?”

Gin opened his mouth in search of words. “I...”

Oh my god, you **did!**” she squealed, simply beside herself with joy. “You **did!** You really did! You kissed him!”

Gin cringed. “Jeez, Ran, say it a bit louder I think there's someone in the Rukongai Districts who didn' hear ya properly.”

“Oh, I'm so happy for you!” she sang, clasping her hands together under her chin, “I knew it. I knew he liked you.”

Gin shook his head at her obliviousness to his sarcasm and smiled softly, sitting back on the sofa. “I know, ya said.” his grin widened, “Ya said it a lot.”

She smiled brightly back at him, overjoyed things between them were going so well. That they liked each other. That they were kissing. The man was clearly smitten with Gin. Hell, you could see the signs from *space.* And she was glad that Gin was beginning to see that. If he could see that, then there was a lot of room for him and Sousuke to fall in love, maybe get married, have a baby maybe...

She imagined their son would look like Aizen-san.

“Well, duh.” she said, flicking her short hair back over her shoulder. “I said it because it's true. I really don't know why it took you so long to figure it out. But I'm still really happy for you.”

Gin had to smile at her. “Thanks, Ran.”

“So...” Rangiku grinned slyly, “How was it?”

Gin looked across at her, a little confused. “How was what?”

“His kiss of course!” She was bubbling over with excitement, eager for more details. “you have to tell me!”

“Ran!” Gin hissed, blushing the colour of the tulip on the coffee table, “Ya can't ask that!”

“Yes I can,” she purred softly, “Come on, tell me? Please? I told you about Shuuhiei.”

Gin breathed in deeply and gave a soft sigh, knowing she wouldn't let it drop until he told her. But he knew her curiosity came from a place of caring. Just like his own had been when she first began dating Shuuhei. He'd just wanted to look out for her, share in her newfound joy. She just wanted to do the same for him.

“It was...” Gin's smile morphed into a soft and tender one, “It was nice. And slow. And gentle an'...” Gin sighed softly and closed his eyes gently, recalling those soft lips, that warm wet tongue caressing his own. The moths fluttering around in his belly... “Passionate.”
He heard her sigh beside him, soft and slow. “Oh, Gin. That sounds perfect.”

“Gin smiled, “It was.” he admitted. “He didn' even make me feel bad about me not bein' very good at it.”

Gin remembered laughing nervously after exchanging another kiss with the man. They were sitting on the grass together in his garden.

“I aint very good at this, am I?” Gin asked him, laughter high and nervous bubbling out of him.

“It's alright,” Sousuke told him, “You'll get better at it. Personally I think you're perfect the way you are, kisses and all. But if it makes you feel better I can always help you practice.”

“What did he say?” Rangiku asked gently, voice hushed, waiting for Gin to open up to her. Quietly enjoying seeing his smile being so tender as he talked about the person he loved.

“He said... I'm perfect the way I am.”

“Oh,” Rangiku swooned, raising a hand to gently rest on her chest, just underneath her collarbones. “Oh, that's so sweet. He's been a perfect gentleman with you.” She sighed again and lowered her hand to her lap again. “I mean, I was a bit worried at the start what with his reputation and all, but when I saw the way he looked at you, I knew he was a total goner.”

“That perked Gin's interest. “Hm? You worried about his reputation too?”

“Of course I did!” she answered, “You're my best friend. I want him to treat you well! And I was prepared to beat him into the dirt if he hurt you.” That made Gin's chest grow warm and his smile soften considerably.

“But I knew when I saw the way he looked at you, that he would treat you right. That you wouldn't be another one of his floozies.”

Gin failed to stifle his incredulous laugh at the last word. “Floozies?”

“You know, meaningless flings. One night stands.” she explained, waving her hand dismissively, “But don't worry, you'll be different. He loves you.” Gin siled. No, not right now, he thought, But he will. I just hafta get his attention and keep it. I hafta beat him at his own game.

“Yeah,” Gin said softly, “I guess he does.”

He caught sight of Rangiku's bright, wide grin, and he couldn't help the widening of his own grin in answer to hers.

“So, what are you going to answer his tulip with?” she asked.

“Answer?” Gin echoed, “Answer how? With what?”

“With another flower,” she told him, “You have to give him an answer!” she urged him, “Something encouraging, like... ambrosia, for love returned. That's the best answer. I guess you could also go with a red rose for love, or maybe myrtle, but those are too conventional. You need to keep his interest with something different. Hmm, let me see what's in here...” She took the book from him and he watched her flick through the pages of her flower dictionary,
the tip of her tongue poking out over her top lip in concentration. Gin waiting curiously to hear her next suggestions.

“You can choose garden daisy,” she continued, “To say, I share your sentiments. That's a sweet response.”

She turned a few more pages of the dictionary, looking thoughtful as she scanned through each of the different flowers and their meanings. Assessing the suitability of the meanings as replies Gin could use for Aizen's tulip. After a few quiet moments passed, her face cracked into a huge grin again.

“Ohhh, ohh, this is the best one!” she sang, her excitement evident. “Coreopsis arkansa: love at first sight. Because really, anyone paying attention could see the spark between you two when you first laid eyes on each other. I mean,” she laughed a little, “The guy even dropped his chalk the moment he clapped eyes on you, for goodness sake. And you haven't been as ignorant of him as you've made out. You love him, too.”

Gin had to stop and think about that. Did he love Sousuke? Gin wasn't even sure if what he felt even was love. How could he respond to the tulip the way Ran wanted him to if he wasn't even sure himself about his feelings? It certainly was a lot to think about.

Idly he wondered if there was a flower for Doubt, too. He'd have to look it up.

He must have looked awfully confused and overwhelmed, because the next thing he knew, she was holding the flower dictionary in front of his face.

“Here,” she said, “I know it's a lot to think about, so I'll let you borrow my flower dictionary, so you can see all your options.”

“Oh,” Gin said softly, gently taking the little book out of her hands, “Thanks.”

“Now remember,” she told him, “Your flower must be chosen with care and thought, and be an expression of your real emotions. So have a think, read the book, and just be honest about how you feel.”

Gin smiled across at her, thankful he had some information now on this new language he'd been introduced to. “Thankyou, Ran. I'll give it some thought and come up with a good answer for him. I promise.”

“Good to hear,” she beamed at him, pleased that he'd taken her suggestion to heart. “I look forward to seeing what your reply is.”

Gin grinned at her as she smiled.

“Oh, yeah,” she said, “I meant to say when you came in, nice yukata.” she smiled, “Is it new?”

“No,” Gin told her. “Not exactly.”

“Where'd you get it?”

“I...” Gin began, debating with himself how much to reveal. “I borrowed it.”

“From who?” she prompted, but gin just gave her a look that said she knew who from.

“Sousuke,” she said.
Gin nodded. “I was sick cuz I drank too much last night, and he let me borrow this while he washes my clothes.”

“You know, you've landed a real gentleman,” Rangiku cooed, “He spared you the walk of shame.”

“And that's such a big deal, because?” Gin prodded her, hoping for an explanation. Because he had no idea what she was talking about.

“Because,” she explained, “Usually he just lets his partners go home in the morning still wearing last nights clothes and looking all dishevelled.”

Gin grimaced at the thought of walking home early in the morning still wearing the clothes he wore last night. With people whispering and gossiping about him, pointing their fingers. Feeling their eyes glued onto him the entire way home. And the knowledge that the gossip about him wouldn't stop there, that it would continue for days if not weeks on end, eating away at him with every step he took.... Gin didn't think he could survive that.

“Jeez. People really do that? It sounds so mortifyin’.”

“Oh, it is.” she agreed, “Some of the stories my girlfriends told me are so embarrassing. But it's sweet how he didn't want that for you and let you wear his clothes.”

Gin thought about it for a moment. “He really makes em walk home like that?”

“Yes.” Rangiku told him. “Usually he doesn't even make them breakfast.”

“Oh,” Gin said, a sheepish smile spreading across his face. “I guess now's a good time to mention he made me breakfast in bed?”

“Yes!” Rangiku could barely contain her excitement. “You didn't tell me that!”

“Sorry,” Gin smiled, “I completely forgot until you mentioned breakfast.”

“Gin, I want you to marry that man.”

“I think it's a bit early fer that don't ya think?”

“I don't.” Rangiku smiled. “But I suppose you're right, there's still time yet.”

Gin shook his head slowly and let her scheme up his wedding to Aizen-san. It was best to let her scheme and not interfere with it. A lesson he learnt the hard way.

“Man,” she sighed, leaning her head back on the sofa, “I can't believe he made you breakfast. You see, I told you he'd be good to you and this is proof.”

Gin couldn't find any argument against that. Couldn't say anything to dispute it.

“Hm, I guess you're right.” Gin admitted, however much he begrudged it.

But that doesn't mean I trust him, or that I can trust anthin' that fool says.

But the thought was tugging at him that maybe, just maybe there was some truth in what Rangiku said about him, too.
Thinking up an answer

Chapter Notes

Featuring more of the flower language, that seems to have permeated through all my AiGin in the Game/Heir-verse. Things are gonna start getting really chessboardy now :)
liking, "I'll pass you over now."

She held the receiver out to him, and slowly, he took it from her. Gin took a deep breath in through his nose and sighed softly before speaking.

"Hello, Sousuke."

He was rewarded by Sousuke's voice, purring and seductive in his ear, and a shiver of pleasure ran through him. It was as if the man were right there, leaning over his shoulder.

"Gin," Sousuke greeted him, right before lowering his voice and asking, "What are you wearing?"

Gin's face turned about ten shades of red, which only prompted a lot of quiet giggling from Rangiku in the background. And Gin swore he could hear the smug smirk on Aizen's face when the man added, "Because I'm not wearing anything!"

Gin was too embarrassed for words. Though Shinsou was already snickering inside his mind again, whispering teasingly. You're thinking about his penis again...

Gin's face flushed even redder. It was true. He could just imagine Sousuke lying on his couch, completely naked, smirking as he held the phone receiver to his ear.

"Ya don't hafta sound so proud of yerself!" Gin blurted out. But the man just laughed.

"There's no need to be embarrassed, Gin. I know you're thinking about me. Wondering what I look like without any clothes on."

Gin could feel his face burning. What is he? A mind reader?

"Ya don't hafta sound so smug about it, either."

That only earned Gin another laugh.

"You know, Gin, there's nothing wrong with having confidence and feeling good about your body."

Gin sighed at the remark and resisted the urge to roll his eyes. The man knew exactly what he was doing. He was only pretending to pass it off as a harmless comment about body confidence. But Gin could hardly call him out on it while Rangiku was watching and listening to every word he said.

"I suppose," Gin said, begrudgingly, "But a more important question is how did you get this number?"

Aizen's chuckle then was softer, "It was in the phone directory. It was easy enough to find you."

"So why are ya calling?" Gin asked him, "Or did ya just phone me up to embarrass me?"

"Well," Sousuke answered him, "I called to check if you got home safely. But you know me, I love to make you turn pink at every possible opportunity. Especially if it leads to situations like this morning."

Gin remembered that morning. That gorgeous mouth kissing and tasting him, pleasing him with what seemed like very little effort. Sousuke's eyes looking at him like he were the only being in the world. The only one worth looking at. Gin couldn't help the smile that crept across his face as he thought of it.
"Well," Gin grinned, "I hope it was as good for you as it was for me."

Rangiku was mouthing questions at him. What? What happened? What are you talking about? Tell me! But Gin ignored her, shushing her so he could focus on Sousuke.

"Oh, Gin," Sousuke sighed contentedly, "It was."

Gin's smile widened and softened at the remark, and he took a moment to feel the moths fluttering about inside his stomach. Feel the surge of power the words gave him. It was a step in the right direction. If only there was a way he could keep Sousuke's attention, so that they could stay together for longer than the one night all of Aizen's other sexual partners got.

"By the way," Sousuke said, interrupting Gin's train of thought, "How is your tulip? It hasn't wilted yet, has it?"

Gin took a quick glance at the red tulip, still in its vase on the coffee table.

"It's fine," Gin told him, "Still alive at any rate."

"Did you put it anywhere nice?"

"Yeah, it's on my coffee table... in a little vase."

"So you can see it when you walk in every day?" Sousuke asked him. If Gin didn't know any better he'd say the man sounded hopeful.

"Yeah, something like that." Gin admitted. "I know what it means, though. In the flower language you mentioned."

"Oh," Sousuke said, amusement and intrigue saturating his voice, "You do?"

"Yeah. Ran told me. She looked it up. She has her own little flower dictionary."

"And what does it mean?" Sousuke asked, "A red tulip?"

Gin inhaled deeply in through his nose and out again quietly out of his mouth in a soft sigh. "A declaration of love."

"I knew you'd work it out." Sousuke told him, a touch of pride in his voice. "In that case, I shall eagerly await your response."

"Yeah, yeah," Gin answered him, "I'm- I'm working on it. I just... I gotta pick the right one, ya know?"

"Ah, of course." Sousuke said gently, "When communicating with the language of flowers, one must choose their flowers carefully and with thought. You take your time. Don't rush."

"It's okay." Gin answered, "I won't. Rush, I mean."

"Perfect." Sousuke said gently, "Well, I'll let you get on and enjoy the rest of your evening. I look forward to your response to my tulip. Goodnight, Gin."

Gin smiled, though Sousuke wasn't there to see it. "Goodnight, Sousuke."

Gin slowly and gently put the phone down after that, softly smiling to himself as he placed the receiver down in its cradle, thankful that Rangiku was giving him a moment before she barraged
him with questions and comments. After a few moments, she grinned at him and began her questioning.

"So?" she cooed.

Gin eyes her suspiciously, "So what?"

"So, what happened?" she asked teasingly, "What did he say?"

Gin smiled at her, which only made her even more curious. So much so that she playfully swatted him on the arm. "Don't just smile, tell me!"

But Gin just kept smiling. "He called to check in on me. See if I made it home okay. Oh, and to embarrass me."

Rangiku covered her mouth as she giggled. "Yes. I saw. What did he say to you?"

"Well..."

"And what did you mean when you said you hoped it was as good for him as it was for you, hm? What were you talking about?"

"Ah, um. Ya see... ya see..." Gin stammered, flailing to find an explanation that wasn't the truth. A plausible explanation. One that Rangiku would buy. Because he really didn't want to have to say, out loud, 'Sousuke sucked me off this morning'. That was his private business and not a topic for the gossips to gossip about. And that aside, Ran would never let him hear the end of it if she knew. Never.

"Umm..."

"It's okay," she told him sweetly, "You can tell me."

No, I can't. Gin thought. Not that! There's no way in hell I'm telling anybody that! Not for all the money in the world.

"I was talking about the kiss." Gin said. Only half a lie, because he did really hope Sousuke enjoyed their kiss as much as he did. Particularly the first one, after the magical moment with the piano and the music. His very first kiss, deep and passionate...

"I wanted to know if he liked it as much as I did."

That part was the truth.

He smiled as he remembered it, watching her face crack into a really wide grin. "Aww, that's so cute. What happened afterwards?"

"Nothing!" Gin blurted out, just a little bit too loudly. "We just kissed. That's all that happened."

"Hmm," Rangiku rubbed her chin, her smile morphing into a more devious version of itself. "Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"You don't look like you're sure."

"I'm sure." Gin repeated. "And even if anythin' else did happen, I sure wouldn't tell you."
She pouted and folded her arms across her body. "Aw Gin, you're mean. I told you everything about me and Shuuhei. You have to reciprocate!"

Gin sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Ran, there is such a thing as too much information, ya know."

She frowned. "Psh. Killjoy." She muttered. "Well, I suppose it's okay you just kissed for now. You don't want to rush into anything. You'll only regret it later if you did."

"Exactly." Gin agreed. "I don' wanna throw meself at him like a whore. I wanna be sure I love him and he loves me before I do that."

He glanced up at her, only to see a really wide, really sappy smile on her face. Much like the one she wore when she watched her telenovellas and something utterly romantic was happening. Gin studied her, more than a little worried.

"What?" he asked.

"I just think that's really sweet."

"What is?"

"That you wanna wait til you love him. Til you're sure."

Gin had to laugh a little at that. "Why?" he asked, a little incredulous, "Don't people do that anymore?"

"I'm not sure," Ran answered, "But still, I think it's really good you want to wait."

"Says the girl who wanted us to rip each other's clothes off not five minutes ago." Gin smirked.

"I never said that." she smiled playfully.

"No," Gin conceded, "But you were thinkin' it."

"You know me too well, you do." she smiled.

"Mm." Gin continued to grin at her, "Unfortunately."

She swatted his arm, pretending to be offended, and the both of them burst out laughing.

"Alright, come on, let's have some dinner." she smiled, "you can tell me more about last night and this morning."

"Well you were eavesdropping for most of last night, but if you insist." Gin grinned.

* * *

After dinner, Gin retired to his bedroom for the rest of the night. He'd already told Rangiku as much as possible without going into too much detail – particularly about the events of the morning – and now he was exhausted. Sometimes it was hard to keep up with that woman. Especially her enthusiasm for his newly found love life. But still, he was glad she was happy for him, because he was sure there would be more than a few disapproving looks from other people when they looked at the age gap between him and Sousuke.

He sighed slowly, changed into his sleeping robes and crawled into his bed. Grateful he could
finally have time to think. About Sousuke, his feelings, and what sort of answer he was going to give to that tulip.

Gin thought about the flower and sighed. That tulip. That damn ridiculous tulip, complicating everything with its meaning in a dead language. Gin frowned. He supposed it was too much to hope for that a flower would be just a flower and the gift was just a nice gesture of affection. But then, this was Aizen Sousuke, who never did anything without purpose. And Gin should have known better. This tulip was just another move in the game. That's all it was.

And yet, Gin could still feel the way his heart had thumped in his chest when that fool gave him the red flower. Still feel his throat go dry and his knees go weak at the man's smile. For you, he'd said, and Gin had taken the flower off him and felt the fluttering of a thousand moths taking flight all at once inside his stomach when their fingers brushed against each other.

He could feel those moths now just thinking about it.

Good god, what was happening to him?

He sat up, pulling the duvet close around him and fluffing his pillows up behind him so he could sit comfortably. He had a feeling it would be a long night. He reached for the little flower dictionary and began looking for the perfect answer to the tulip sitting on the coffee table in the living room. Bracing himself for an onslaught of information, Gin took a deep breath and opened the book, letting his eyes scan down over the alphabetical list of flowers and their meanings. He spied the suggestions Ran gave him in the list. They jumped out at him as he turned the pages.

Ambrosia: love returned.

Coreopsis Arkansa: love at first sight.

Garden daisy: I share your sentiments.

All of them feelings he wasn't ready for. That he wasn't feeling yet. And as for love at first sight, well... that didn't even exist. At least, that's what Gin believed. Because love took time, and love took work. Nobody could fall in love with anyone just from looking at them. There was infatuation, sure. Lust at first sight, yes. But not love. Not the sort of love Gin wanted that led to a lasting relationship.

His eyes landed on the entry for cedar tree. Constancy, everlasting love. Yes. That was what he wanted. But he wasn't sure if Sousuke could give him that. In fact, Gin was sure the a was simply toying with him.

He flipped a few more pages and found another section of the book where the flowers were categorised by the emotions and feelings they conveyed. That's when he saw it.

Pink hyacinth. Game, play.

"You toy with me."

Yes. How highly appropriate, Gin thought. I could send that and say he's toying with me. Playing with me. Because he is.

He sighed again, turning more pages. He'd outright refuse the man now. Send a striped carnation and be done with it. With him. Because striped carnation meant extreme refusal. "I cannot be with you."
If it weren't for those damn moths, and those lips, and that tongue, and the way the idiot made him feel. Those things alone were enough to make Gin think twice about casting him off.

His eyes moved over the entries, finding apricot blossom. *Doubt.*

Gin frowned. *Huh. So there is a flower for that. That one's appropriate, too.*

Garden marigold his eyes landed on next. *Uneasiness.*

*And that one. Ugh, think, Gin. What can you reply with?*

He scanned the pages, frowning, trying to decide how he felt about it. Doubt, unease and mistrust all swirling about inside him. Shinsou stirred and groaned loudly.

*Ugh, you know you're overthinking this far too much.* The zanpaktou groused. *You know your first instinct is usually the right one.*

Gin blew the air out of his mouth, trying to think. It certainly didn't help that there was a flower for every possible emotion one could feel. Love, doubt, anger, hatred, indecisiveness, infidelity and betrayal, joy, kindness, confusion, desire for intimacy both physical and emotional... Gin was overwhelmed by choice. And he didn't want to give Sousuke the wrong idea either, so that was an added pressure. He didn't want the man to think he was easy, or another one of his 'floozies', as Ran put it. But if things carried on the way they had that morning, that was the idea Aizen was going to get.

Gin sighed again. He was doing that a lot today. *What'm I goin' to do?*

*Listen,* Shinsou said, growing frustrated with his master,* Men want what they've never had. So far, he's never met with any resistance. Resist and you'll pique his interest.*

Gin thought about it for a moment. *Hm, that might work... I guess I could try it.*

*Great.* Shinsou answered, though Gin couldn't miss his sarcasm.* You're welcome. Now can I get some sleep?*

*Yeah, sure.* Gin told him. Grateful when Shinsou settled down and went to sleep. After which, Gin could mull over the idea in peace.

*Resistance, huh? Maybe Shinsou has a point. Because it is a game, isn't it? A battle of wits and intrigue to see who will fall first.*

Yes, he reasoned. It was a chess game, and the flowers in Rangiku's little book were the pieces. Gin just needed to find and move the right one to get things moving in his favour.

Because if Gin had learned anything today, it was that Aizen-sama liked games.

He returned to looking through the flower dictionary for an appropriate response. Now he knew what to look for, it would be easier to narrow it down to a few choices.

That was when he saw it, and the smile spread slowly across his face, full of deviousness and cunning.

*Yes,* he thought, studying the flower, making a mental note of the name of it. *Yes, this's perfect.*

He had to fight the urge to laugh maniacally, grinning like a Cheshire cat. *If ya wanna play with
me, Aizen Sousuke, he thought, Then let the game begin. Let it begin for real.

* * *

When Monday morning rolled around, Gin woke up early and headed off to the communal garden the people in his apartment block shared in search of his chosen reply. He'd done some more research on sunday and found out what the flower looked like, where to find it, and what time of year it bloomed. Now he just had to locate, cut, and deliver it.

He found it without too much trouble. And since the flowers were small and had thin green stems, he grabbed a handful of them. Severing them from their roots with Shinsou. Satisfied with his find, he smiled and made his way towards the school with a spring in his step. His next stop; Aizen-sama's classroom. But first, a visit to the cafeteria to get a glass of water for the flowers to sit in.

* * *

Gin opened the door to the classroom, relieved to find it both unlocked and empty. He didn't know what he would do if Aizen were already here sitting at his desk. Gin liked to think he'd march straight over to him, plonk his impromptu vase of flowers in front of the man, and say "My reply". And then walk right back out again with confidence and purpose. But in reality, Gin knew he'd be a babbling, nervous mess and most likely make a fool of himself. Mostly because he felt a bit silly giving another much older man flowers. Because tradition dictated that women got flowers. But he also knew he'd probably make a fool out of himself because of those damn moths inside his belly that took flight whenever the man so much as looked at him. It was getting ridiculous.

Thankfully there was no-one here yet, and Gin was saved from embarrassing himself. Again. Because it was bad enough Gin puked on their date after they'd kissed without anything else on top of that.

Gin walked through the room to the teacher's desk and set down the flowers in their glass down on the coaster Aizen used for his mugs of tea, and examined the purple blooms, hoping they'd get the message across. He then thought idly how strange it was to be in an empty classroom – a room usually full of people and chatter – and how oddly peaceful it was, when he heard the whistling. And not long after, the footsteps of the person doing the whistling outside in the corridor.

Quietly, Gin cursed under his breath, grabbed his bag, and slipped out the door. Just in time to see Sousuke in passing. Gin greeted him with a quick "hello", and flashed a very forced smile before walking off very quickly down the corridor and out of the building.

* * *

Sousuke watched Gin go, slightly perplexed. What was that all about?

Maybe he's come up with an answer to your tulip, Kyouka Suigetsu ventured. Maybe he came in early and left it for you because he didn't want anybody seeing. Maybe he's nervous about your reaction.

He shrugged. Well, only one way to find out.

Aizen opened the door to his classroom and walked over to his desk, setting his bag underneath the wooden piece of furniture. He had to smile when he saw his darling's reply to him, sitting in a glass of water, right on top of his coaster where he put his morning mugs of tea.

His face broke out into a huge grin as he eyed the handful of small purple flowers, no doubt cut by Gin's zanpaktou because he could feel Gin's spiritual energy all over the flowers in front of him. A
personal touch, he mused as he pulled out his chair and sat down. Taking one of the flowers out of the glass and inhaling its calming scent. Keenly aware Gin's beautiful fingers had handled it not that long ago.

Lavender. He thought, quietly mulling over the meaning of the flower. Mistrust.

He smirked to himself, highly amused.

Ah, so, my darling. That's how you want to play.
Gin had to admit it was a lot of fun to see the little wheels and gears whir and click inside Aizen's head throughout the morning lectures on kidou theory and logistics as the man weighed up his potential replies to the little glass of lavender sitting on his desk. It was clear the man was distracted by it, although he did his best to remain focused on the lesson he was teaching. He was like that old man in that book by Nabokov, obsessing over the little girl. It brought Gin no end of amusement to watch it. He couldn't help but grin as he watched Aizen fight to keep his gaze away from the little purple flowers.

*Go on, Aizen-san,* he thought, *Think about it. You know ya wanna.*

Shinsou cackled. *Yes, Sousuke-san, think about Gin's penis!*

Gin bit back a groan, although the tiniest of sounds did leave him.

Rangiku, in the seat next to him, glanced across at Gin, eyes full of suspicion and questioning. But if she'd connected the dots and made the connection between Gin and the lavender, she said nothing of it. Probably not wanting to get in trouble for talking in class. Again. She'd already been read the riot act by Sousuke, albeit in a very polite manner, for her "disruptive behaviour". So Gin knew she wanted to keep her nose clean. Gin knew, though, if she *had* connected up the dots, he'd undoubtedly hear about it later when class ended. Gin suspected she'd made the connection already because she kept sneaking suspicious sideways glances at him with an increasing frequency. He felt her eyes on him when his face cracked into a face-splitting, devilish grin when Sousuke had to wrench his eyes back to what he was writing on the chalkboard, open textbook in his free hand. And Gin, suddenly feeling very self-conscious, avoided her gaze by lifting his own textbook to hide his face and what she'd only construe as a guilty grin, and what he was sure was a pink flush in his cheeks.

Gin spent the rest of those lessons pretending to be very, very interested in kidou logistics, not looking up at her once. He kept his eyes fixed on his teacher, watching him write on the chalkboard with his back to the class, explaining how incantations could be bypassed if one had skill enough. Gin let his gaze bore into the back of the man's writing hand, trying not to think about where said teacher's hands and mouth had been on his body. Thinking of nothing else. Thankfully he had his book to hide behind.

Eventually, Aizen turned around to face the class again, chalk in his right hand and open textbook in his left, smiling genially at them all. Although nobody could miss the way his gaze lingered on Ichimaru Gin a little longer than necessary.

"Alright everyone, that concludes today's lessons. Before I dismiss you all, *please* note that today's subject matter will be in your final exam, so I hope you were all paying attention."
Aizen's eyes swept across the faces in front of him, a smile plastered on his face. A mere mockup of the gardener's smile he'd given when he'd handed Gin that tulip earlier. "As always, if anyone has any questions, my door is always open to you."

Just then, the bell signalling the end of class rang out and Aizen's eyebrows raised. "Ah, my timing is impeccable. Class, you are dismissed. Remember your assignment is due for marking next week, enjoy the rest of your day."

Taking their cue, everyone in the class began packing up their notebooks and pens and started to make their way out. Gin quietly gathered his things and shoved them into his bag, slinging it over his shoulder as he followed the stream of students heading out to lunch. Slowing a little when he walked past Aizen, he snuck a quick glance at the man, who was smiling knowingly at him.

"And I'll be seeing you later." Gin heard him mutter, quietly enough to only Gin's ears would hear him. Words that sent a thrill through him and a pleasant shiver up his spine. Gin walked quickly out after that, not wanting Aizen to see his reaction. Because he had to keep up his charade of coldness and mistrust. No matter how much his traitorous body desired and loved the man.

Gin could feel those eyes on him, following him as he moved out. And even without looking, Gin could swear Aizen Sousuke was wearing a smug, satisfied smirk on his face. No doubt thinking about how very interesting things were about to get.

... 

Out in the hallway, and out of Aizen's line of sight, Gin let out a sigh and leant his back against the wall as he waited for Rangiku to catch up to him. He stood with his arms folded across his chest, watching his classmates funnel out past him, chattering and laughing. He caught the odd snatches of gossip too, about the flowers on the teachers desk, and Gin knew they were talking about him. Even though they didn't know he was the giver of said flowers.

Even so, it took all of Gin's effort to appear disinterested. To keep the neutral expression on his face as he listened to a little group who'd stopped to talk.

"Hey, did you see the flowers on Aizen-sensei's desk?"

"I know. Who knew he liked flowers?"

"I wonder who gave them to him."

"Probably a secret admirer..."

"Do you think our Aizen-sama knows who it is?"

"He must! He's a highly intelligent man, after all."

"Poor girl. She has to know she'll never hold onto his heart for long. Nobody ever does."

"I wonder who it is..."

"Who cares? It's not like Aizen-sama loves her. He'll just use her and then she'll go the way of all the others..."

Gin fought to keep his gaze away from them, quietly seething inside. Firstly because they assumed he was a girl. And secondly, because they'd insinuated Aizen-sama was theirs. Bitches, he wanted to snarl, If Aizen-sama belongs to anyone, he belongs to me. Ya'll better step off.
Shinsou snickered in the recesses of his mind. *My, someone's jealousies are showing.*

Gin scowled. _Shut up. I jus' don't like it when people talk 'bout me._

*Yes, and the sky is green.* Shinsou answered him, voice dripping with sarcasm. *No. You just don't like sharing your toys. You want Aizen-sama all to yourself. Better be careful, Gin,* the spirit teased him, curling around his master's shoulders, invisible to all but Gin, his fox tail tickling Gin's ear as he whispered into the boy's ear, _If Aizen-sama knew how possessive you were over him, you'd never let you hear the end of it! I doubt he'd even let you leave his bed._

Gin fought back against the pink colouring his cheeks, somewhat successfully, at Shinsou's last statement as he folded his arms. _Don't ya think I know that?_ Gin snapped back, fighting a deeper blush at the images his zanpaktou was conjuring up in his brain. _But you an' I both know if he knew that I'd jus' go the way of all his others, like tha' girl said. Why'd ya think I'm playin' his stupid game for?_

Shinsou sighed loudly. Though Gin thought it might have been exaggerated. *Yes, yes._ Shinsou replied, sounding tired with him already, _You want him to love you. You want him to look at you and only you._ We've been through this already, when you kept me awake half the bloody night, depriving me of my much needed sleep. Though I still think you're trying too hard.

_That_ remark made Gin's eyebrows rise, and his agitation bubble to the surface. *An' what's that s'posed ta mean?_

*Well,* Shinsou started, but Gin never got the rest of the answer, because it was then that Rangiku came out of the classroom and made a beeline for him. Gin sighed, resolving to prise the answer out of Shinsou later. By force if necessary. For now, though, he turned his attention to Rangiku and allowed a genuine smile to pass his lips. The kind that only Ran could draw out of him.

"Hey," he called out to her, "Ya sure took yer time."

She returned his smile, "Yeah, I just had a couple of _questions_ for Aizen-san."

Gin studied her expression, a touch apprehensive. Something about the way she'd said the word _questions_ told Gin she wasn't talking about the lesson's subject matter.

"Uh-oh," he grinned, "Tha' don't sound good."

She swatted his shoulder playfully. _Shut up. I just wanted to know how your date went. If he wants to see you again... you know, since I set you two up._

"Ran," Gin grinned, "You were _there_ for half of our dinner date spying on us. What more can ya possibly find out?"

She smiled back at him; a devious, wide grin that let Gin know she was up to trouble again. "Oh, you'd be surprised at the things I can find out." she told him, and Gin was suddenly terrified Sousuke had blabbed about everything that occurred between them. Unable to fight the redness flushing into his face as he imagined a very smug Aizen-san admitting everything.

*Yes, it went very well. I kissed him and sucked his dick. Yes I will see him again._

And Gin quickly found himself praying to every deity under the sun that Aizen had tact enough to keep that bit about sucking dick quiet.

"An' what did ya find out?" Gin probed, anything to divert the attention off him, "Anythin' good?"
It seemed to work. At least for the moment. Because her grin spread further across her face, "Well," she began, "I know he's very sexually attracted to you."

Gin's face turned ten shades redder, wondering just what Aizen had told her. How much she knew about where his hands – his mouth – had been on Gin's body.

"Oh dear," Rangiku smiled softly, fighting a fit of giggles as she covered her mouth with her hand, "you've gone very pink."

And whose fault is that?

Gin said nothing, quietly dying of embarrassment beside her. Thankfully all their classmates had already gone to lunch, so it was just the two of them in the corridor, so there was no fear of any gossip spreading. But just knowing how much Sousuke would be enjoying this right now played on his mind.

"Is there something you haven't told me, Gin?" She asked, and Gin was certain that not that far away, Aizen Sousuke was laughing at him again.

He's prob'ly in there smirkin' right now.

"N-no!" Gin blurted out. A little too late.

"Ohhh, there is, isn't there?"

"No!"

"I knew it! You have to tell me!"

"Ran, no."

He watched her face morph into a joyful expression, her cheeks flushing from her excitement, "Did he touch you?"

Gin only went redder. "Ran!" he spouted. Indignant. Embarrassed. "Ya don't ask people that!"

"Why not?" she pouted.

"Cuz it's my personal business, an-"

"Aha! So he did touch you!"

Gin could only bury his face in his hands. Nothing, absolutely nothing he could say would deter her or convince her otherwise. He'd just opened up his mouth to speak again when Aizen's voice called out to him.

"Ah, Gin, there you are."

The both of them turned to find their teacher approaching them, a pleasant smile on his face. Gin could only stare at him, trying to fight the unbelievable urge to worship the man like a god in thanks for the rescue from the Rangiku Inquisition. Only Rangiku's gentle elbowing brought him out of his daze.

"Sousuke," Gin greeted him, arms folded across his chest. Trying to ignore his friend's smug little grin as she watched him interact with his new love interest. Aizen merely smiled down at him, a hint of amusement on his face.
"Oh my. You've gone very pink." Sousuke stated.

"Please," Gin answered, face red as anything, "Don act like ya aint enjoyin' it."

Sousuke smirked, "True. I do like it when you go all pink for me."

Gin only blushed harder, and scowled at him. Both Sousuke and Rangiku clearly enjoying his predicament, judging from the smiles on their faces. They're in cahoots, both of 'em.

"So, did ya come just to look at me, or..."

Aizen's smirk melted back into his smooth, polite smile again as he remembered why he'd approached them. "Ah, yes," he said, holding out a copy of a kidou textbook, "You left this behind."

Gin studied the book for a moment, certain that he'd left nothing behind. That this was a ploy just to talk to him again. But it was an escape route from Rangiku's teasing and nosing, so he reached out and took it.

"Thanks," Gin said softly, and smiled sweetly. "Wouldn't get very far without this."

Aizen's smile softened into something almost tender, then, as he looked at Gin. "Indeed. Oh, and I also have that book we talked about the other day, if you still want to borrow it."

Gin knew they'd had no such discussion, but he understood he had to keep up the pretence if he wanted to be rescued.

"Which one?" Gin asked him, "The flower dictionary, or the other one?"

"Both." Aizen told him. "Though I'd say you need the flower dictionary more." Gin watched his smile transform into a smug grin. "You do know lavender means mistrust, yes?"

Rangiku shot him a look that expressed her incredulity and let him know her suspicions were confirmed that Gin did indeed give Sousuke the lavender on his desk. Gin crossed his arms tighter across his chest and stood taller, in defiance of her silent reproaches.

"An' who says I didn' know that?" Gin asked, glad that it was his turn to look smug. "Who says it wasn't intentional?"

"Oh, I'm wounded." Aizen said, doing an excellent impression of someone upset by this. "After everything I've done for you, you still don't trust me," He placed a hand on his chest and let the smile return to his face as Gin watched him. "I guess I must not be trying hard enough to win you over."

Gin couldn't help but smile at this little game. This little back and forth of playful banter between them.

"Yeah, Sousuke, ya better step yer game up if ya really wanna impress me."

It was clear he was joking. And Sousuke's smile said that he was in on the joke. And for a moment, Gin marvelled at this new, strange level of understanding they'd reached. It was oddly satisfying. And Gin had to admit it, it did send the moths that had set up permanent residence in his belly into a mad splurt of fluttering.

They always seemed to do that, whenever Sousuke was around.
Sousuke smiled gently, shaking his head slowly. "Then I suppose I better rise to the challenge, before somebody else comes along and snatches you up." he said, teasingly, "Come on, I've got the other book in my bag. Come on through to the classroom, I'll give them to you."

Gin nodded. "Kay. Ran, why don't you go on ahead. I'll catch you up later."

She smiled. A smile that said she had a thousand and one things to say to him later. A thousand and one questions to ask. "Alright. Meet you at the usual place?"

"Yep. The usual spot." Gin grinned.

"Alright. But you'll tell me everything when you get there, alright."

Gin smiled at her, chuckling. She really was as stubborn as he was. Just about different things.

"Fine." he relented. "I promise. Now go get lunch. Give us a few minutes alone."

She smirked back at him. "Alright, I'll leave you lovebirds to it. Don't do anything I wouldn't do."

That made Gin laugh. Because if she were him, there wasn't a lot Ran wouldn't do.

... 

Sousuke led him back into the empty classroom again, and Gin let himself breathe a sigh of relief as Aizen clicked the door shut.

"Thanks fer fer the rescue back there." Gin said softly. "I know she means well but sometimes she's a bit much."

Sousuke smiled, "Not at all. Besides, if word got out that things between us had gotten... physical," he put a sly emphasis on the word, a grin passing his lips, if only to see his darling's reaction to it. "It wouldn't end very well."

Gin huffed, unwittingly rewarding him with a slight pink tinge to his cheeks. Oh, no doubt Gin wanted to tell him that none of this could possibly end well, not if they had to keep it quiet. To which he could argue that what everyone else thought just doesn't matter, Gin. But he did concede that given his position as a teacher and Gin's position as one of his students, the scandal their relationship would cause would spell catastrophe. Utter ruin for both of them. That was, if whatever was between them could even be classified as a relationship. He would have to test that and find out whether they were in a relationship. Whether his pretty young Gin wanted a relationship with him.

"Yes." Gin answered, setting the textbook down on one of the empty desks, "if word got out we were together, the gossips would have a field day. And then I s'pose yer teachin' career would get flushed down the toilet... ah, that is, if we're t'gether."

Gin paused, and looked at him thoughtfully, tilting his head slightly to the side. "Are we together?"

Sousuke gave his darling an amused smirk, Ah, Gin, you've read my mind. And Gin's face gave it away that the boy absolutely delighted in seeing his amusement.

"I don't know, Gin." he said, shrugging his shoulders for effect. "Are we together?"

He didn't know what he expected. But Gin's grin widened. "I asked you first."

Touche, my darling, Sousuke thought. Wonderful. You're learning. I might be able to make a chess
"That you did." Aizen answered, his smile morphing into something softer. Sweeter. It wasn't entirely forced. He was indeed proud that his lovely little fox was learning to play the game so well. That he was stepping up to the challenge of facing him on the mental chessboard.

"Would you like to be together?" he asked innocently, though Gin would need to work on his poker face. Gin's expression told Aizen he knew full well the words were anything but innocent. Because he was still the same old Aizen Sousuke, playing his tricks and his games to get what he wanted. But Gin's expression told him he thought he was already a step ahead of him, that he was ready for whatever charms Aizen decided to use on him.

Sousuke decided to let Gin think that was the case.

"Yes." Gin answered him, a touch shy. Hesitant. He liked Gin like this. Adorable. Innocent. "I... I want..."

He couldn't wait to destroy that innocence. Make his darling moan and scream his name.

Maybe break his heart afterwards.

He was toying with the thought of it, but Gin's next words caught him off guard.

"I wanna be t'gther. I wanna be in a relationship with ya."

And he could not help it. The warmth began from the pit of his stomach and spread through him again. And Gin watched the smile light up his entire face, a soft, genuine, ridiculous thing promising love and tenderness. And for just a moment he felt like the cat who got the mouse. It was only when Gin's smile mirrored the expression, that Aizen checked himself and morphed his facial expression back into it's default devilish smirk.

"Oh, that's excellent," he told Gin, grasping onto Gin's wrist, and making Gin's pale face burn red again, before yanking him in for an intensely passionate kiss. "Would you like to start right now?"

"I..." Gin gaped at him, so adorably flustered. Having been ready for all of his charms... except that one.

"Because we can." Aizen continued, leaning in and whispering into Gin's ear, lips just brushing against the shell of Gin's ear. "I can do you on my desk right now, which I can tell you I would very much like to do."

He heard Gin swallow hard, and he smiled. *Perfect. You know I like it when you're excited for me.*

...  

Gin swallowed, feeling his fucking traitor of a body begin to react to the man's dark, seductive voice and words as he closed the distance between them.

In the time it took him to comprehend it, Sousuke's lips crushed against his again, and he was flat on his back on his desk, trying to remember how to breathe and kiss at the same time. He could feel one of Sousuke's hands move down his neck, gently caressing his soft skin, roaming slowly downwards, over his collarbones. Down further, to his chest under his clothes. Warm and calloused fingertips weaving lazy patterns over him, eventually circling over his nipples. Wandering down even further, to his stomach and navel, tracing lazily up and down over his skin. Gin moaned softly, quietly, into the kiss. His brain so badly wanting the word *yes* to leave him. Arousal curling
itself around him like a large, heavy boa constrictor as those lips descended on his neck. Kissing. Sucking. Biting.

Gin had to bite his lip to keep from making any noise. To fight down the moan in his throat. He could feel heat pool in his stomach, feel his heart start to race, thumping wildly against his ribcage in hope of escape. His brain short-circuited, feeling a want - need - to make the word yes come out of his mouth. Because everything this man was doing, everything, made him feel electric all over. Set his blood on fire and made electricity surge through his system.

"Sou..." he whimpered, but that was all he could manage to say. So much for resistance. He should have known from the last time the man had him on his back, resistance was futile.

"Just say yes," Sousuke whispered to him. Breaking off kissing his now very red and heated neck just long enough to speak. Warm breath tickling his skin and giving Gin a pleasant shudder of excitement all the way down to his stomach and groin.

"I..."

"Say yes, and I can give your body what it craves, right now."

Gin pressed his lips together and groaned. He wanted to. He wanted so, so badly to say yes. To agree. To let this continue and give his traitor body what it craved in the hope that it wouldn't eep reacting this way.

But he clamped his mouth shut. He couldn't give in now. If he did, he'd go the way of all Aizen's other lovers, used and forgotten by the time the sun rose the next day. Used and discarded. And Gin refused to join that cast. Absolutely refused. Thankfully Aizen noticed his hesitance, paused in his ministrations, pulled back to look at him gently, and smiled tenderly.

"But, if you prefer to wait a while, that's fine too."

Gin sighed in relief, forcing his lungs to take deep calming breaths, still on his back under him. It took all of his effort. It seemed he'd forgotten how to breathe normally. Let alone speak. So he lay there panting heavily for a while, until his voice returned to him. But even then it took all of his effort and willpower to even reply to the man, and his voice came out weak and laboured.

"If it's fine... Gin breathed, air heaving in and out of his chest, "I'd like... to wait..."

...  

Sousuke smiled warmly down at his darling, letting him catch his breath. Yes... it was best not to rush these things, after all.

"Alright." he said tenderly, retracting his hands from his Gin's delectable body and moving them to Gin's face as he leant in for a gentler, more affectionate kiss. "We'll wait until you're ready."

Gin smiled back at him, equal parts relieved and affectionate.

Ah, of course, he expected me to be a little more resistant, to push more for physical intimacy. He's surprised to find me so patient. Very pleasantly surprised, in fact.

"Thankyou."
Sousuke let him up and watched, smiling, as Gin readjusted his clothes again. Cleared his throat.

"Well, I should prob'ly go an' meet Ran for lunch. Or what's left of it."

"Yes," Sousuke agreed, "she's probably wondering why we're taking so long."

Gin nodded, the blush in his cheeks unmistakable. "So, I'll see ya later?"

"If you want." Sousuke smiled softly. "My door's always open for you. I just hope you don't take too long to come and knock."

Gin graced him with a shy smile. "Don't worry." he said, "I won't."

Gin turned to leave, only taking a few steps before Sousuke stopped him.

"Oh, Gin" he called out, stopping Gin in mid-step and turn to look at him again.

"Yes?"

"You better take these," he said, holding out the textbook and his flower dictionary. The one Gin had snuck a look at the other day in his bed. And Gin thought he hadn't noticed. "Keep Rangiku-san off your case a little bit. And also a chance to expand your knowledge on our little secret language, yes?"

Gin's face grew the colour of an angry red sun at those words. Our language. And not just his face, his ears and neck reddened as well. It was absolutely adorable.

"Yes," Gin said shyly, retracting his steps and taking the books from him. Soft, slender fingers brushing against his own as Gin touched them. "Thankyou, Sousuke."

"Oh, and you can keep the dictionary." Sousuke added. The words left his mouth without thought. "Another gift from me."

Gin nodded, and quickly scarpered out of the classroom, obviously hoping the man wouldn't see the giddy idiotic grin on his face, or the bright pink flush colouring his cheeks again.

But it hadn't gone unnoticed. And Sousuke stood smiling after his darling Gin long after the boy left.

He was just packing up the last of his things when he heard her.

"Aizen-sama, that was mean." came the voice, calling to him from the open window. It was Kyouka Suigetsu, this time taking the appearance of a little robin, perched on the window ledge, the breeze ruffling her feathers a little.

Sousuke smirked, "Wasn't it just?" he said. He was very pleased with himself. Certain that nobody else could make his little darling go pink like that except him.

"Must you tease the poor thing like that? His face is all red now. And he's going to develop a hickey on his neck, too! What will people say?"

"Ah, I was just marking my territory, Kyouka. And I doubt people will say anything."

She huffed and flew up to land on his shoulder as he left the classroom, too. Fluffing up her chest in her huff. "Hmph. They will if you keep on the way you are."
He chuckled softly, reaching up to stroke her chest with his forefinger. "Ah, you worry too much." he said gently.

"And you don't worry half as much as you should." she retorted, clearly annoyed with him. He only chuckled again in answer to her.
Out of Sousuke's line of sight, and several long corridors away, Gin leant against a wall, trying to calm down enough to get the redness out of his cheeks. He wasn't succeeding.

He took several deep breaths to try and remedy the situation, because he couldn't walk around with a face the colour of an angry sun. People would think he had a problem. Well, he did have a problem. A man called Aizen Sousuke kept making his face turn fifty shades of red. Gin's fingers gripped the books in his hands tighter. It wasn't fair! Sousuke held the power to make him smile like a giddy fool and pinken his light skin so easily. With a few well timed words and foolish gestures of affection. Why couldn't he have an iota of that power over Sousuke? Why was it all so one sided?

Gin groaned and leant the back of his head against the wall, letting it leech some of the heat out of him.

This's gonna be a lot harder than I thought.

You're telling me. Shinsou teased. The rate you're going, I'm surprised you aren't hard all the ti-

Is that all you think about? Gin asked him, rolling his eyes. Shinsou only snickered. His zanpaktou was doing that a lot lately. And frankly it was beginning to get irritating.

I only think about it because you do. The spirit teased.

Gin blew the air out of his nose. Says you.

Says a part of you. Shinsou countered. Did you forget? I am you and you are me. I think and feel everything you do.

Shinsou paused, taking note of his master's scowl. For example, right now, aside from your frustration with me, I know you're very happy because the only thing on your beloved's mind just now was you.

The scowl did not leave Gin's face. Who says he's my beloved? He retorted.

Everyone. Shinsou smirked his foxy grin. And though Gin couldn't see it, he could feel it.

Everyone? Gin echoed, his embrace of the books tightening further. Because no-one, no-one could know of this. He'd been careful, so careful in how he acted when they were around others.


The last person on Shinsou's list brought his mind to a screeching halt. Him. And it made Gin wonder, was he so transparent? Could Aizen Sousuke see straight through his facade of coldness and indifference? The man was highly intelligent... it stood to reason he'd at least notice something was up with him. That something was amiss. That Gin's body was a constant traitor of him was certain. But were his emotions so see-through? He did wonder. Aizen Sousuke was an enigma, a puzzle. So it was difficult, if not impossible, to discern how much he knew, how much he observed.

Shinsou's voice cut through his thoughts. You're frowning again.
Immediately Gin's frown vanished.

_You're thinking way too much over this, you know._

Gin sighed. _I know, _He answered. _It's just... it's complicated is all. I'd walk away just based on his reputation alone. But then he goes an' does stuff like this- _Gin gestured to the books in his hands, _An' it makes it so much harder ta think about leavin' 'im._

Shinsou listened to his master patiently as Gin sighed.

_I dunno, _Gin huffed, _maybe I'm jus' makin' somethin' outta nothin'. But I just don't wanna end up like his others._

Shinsou sighed softly. _Is this about what those girls were talking about earlier?_

Gin paused, wincing. _Kinda._

_You shouldn't pay them any attention, _Shinsou told him firmly, materialising on Gin's shoulders.

_I know. But- _

_Yeah, yeah, I know. Shinsou cut him off. It's hard not to listen. I get that. But listen to me – the only opinions that matter on this are yours and his. And maybe Ran's. Nothing else matters. Besides, you didn't see his face when you were grinning like a loony despite trying not to when he said you could keep the dictionary._

Shinsou's eyes squinted as he curled around Gin's shoulders and neck, pressing his cool nose into Gin's neck, with his front paws nestled just above his collarbones. _I thought it was cute, the way he mirrored your expression._

"What?!" Gin blurted out, checking himself when he realised he'd shouted aloud instead of mentally. He quickly lowered his voice to an indignant whisper. "How can that pervert be cute?"

"Ah," Shinsou mused dreamily, "He looked like a happy, dorky librarian."

"I bet it was just an act." Gin continued, "Like everythin' else he does."

"Hm," Shinsou paused, thinking for a moment. "I didn't think it was an act. I think he genuinely wants to make you happy. And I think, despite what you say, he's succeeding."

Gin thought about that for a moment, considering the statement.

"It's something to think about, anyway," Shinsou added.

"You sound like Ran," Gin told his zanpaktou as he stood and slowly made his way to the spot he usually met Rangiku for lunch. Shinsou only chuckled.

_You say that like it's a bad thing._

Gin only rolled his eyes as he walked, pushing open the doors, enjoying the spring air outside. He wasn't in the mood to argue. Not now. Not today. Not after Sousuke had given him his very own flower dictionary – something he'd needed ever since that red tulip had been handed to him. After the man had given him what he'd craved since the beginning – his full, rapt attention.

He broke into a run as soon as he entered the courtyard, trying not to think of the possibility that Shinsou was right.
"There you are!" Ran called out to him when he came jogging up to her. She was sitting in the shade of a blossom tree – their usual spot on sunny days like today. "I was beginning to think you weren't coming."

Gin sat down beside her, catching his breath. "Sorry I'm... late..." he panted, "Got a bit distracted."

She smiled softly, "It's fine. I figured you'd get into talking together. What did he say, anyway?"

"Well..." Gin began, thinking of how best to phrase it in the best possible way. While still keeping the details of their more... physical activities to himself.

"Tell me!" Ran whined, "Gin, you promised!"

"I will!" Gin told her, "Jus' lemme gather me thoughts a bit."

Rangiku hushed immediately and waited expectantly, like a cute puppy awaiting a promised treat. Gin had a thought that if she had a tail, it would be wagging rapidly.

"A'ight." Gin began, "So, he gave me the textbook, as you know. And he also gave me his flower dictionary."

"What? To borrow?" she asked, highly curious.

"No. he said I could keep it." Gin told her, flushing a little despite himself. He noticed Ran's happy smile broaden at this, and he continued. "an' well, we had the what are we? talk. Are we together? Ya know?"

Gin thought of Sousuke's face then, the playful smirk as he said the words. *I don't know Gin, are we together?*

He must have been smirking himself, because the next thing he knew, Ran was pressing him rather insistently for more information. More details.

"And then what?" she prodded him, "Then what? Gin! Tell me!"

Gin thought, too, of his own reply in answer to those words. *I asked you first.*

"Well, long story short, I think we're together now." Gin added, raising his fingers to his chin in thought, his cheeks reddening. "I think he wanted to grab me an'... do things to me right then, but I got him to wait for me."

Silence reigned for what felt like an age as Gin watched Rangku process all of these new developments. Her mouth was hanging open, catching flies as Shinsou might say, and the seconds continued to tick by. Gin growing more and more uneasy with each silent second that passed them by.

"Well say somethin'!" he blurted out, when it became too much.

She didn't say anything. She only screamed with joy and pounced on him, squeezing him to her in a tight embrace.

"Oh, Gin, I'm so happy!"

But Gin's face was buried in her chest, his protests begging to get her to let him go muffled by her
large breasts. *Yer crushing my lungs!* He wanted to shout at her. But the air was being squeezed out of him, and the words died before they left him. He could only try to push her off him, while she babbled on about how happy she was for them.

"I knew you two were a match! See, it pays to listen to me." she told him, more than a little smug, "I wonder when you'll get married. Oh, you'll be so happy together, I just know it!"

Gin wanted to scream at her, *I can't breathe!* But she wasn't paying attention.

"Oh, it's perfect. Just perfect!"

Losing his patience, and his oxygen, Gin began thumping her shoulder with his fist to get her attention. Which thankfully, he did get, because he really thought he might faint from lack of oxygen. Or suffocate and die. And if he went that way, they'd talk about him forever as the guy who got smothered to death by Rangiku-san's great breasts. Every teenage boy's dream... but not Gin's. Gin would rather die in battle. That was far more brave and dignified. Though more likely he'd probably die being fucked to death by Aizen-sama. Especially at the rate things were going. It seemed that man just could not get enough of him.

She stopped gushing very suddenly, realising she was suffocating Gin. Quickly releasing him so he fell backwards.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "Oops! I'm so sorry! Are you alright?!"

Gin was dropped to the ground, and promptly began sucking in large lungfuls of air. Chest heaving with the effort, he crawled onto his hands and knees.

"It's... okay..." he panted, collapsing onto his back, exhausted just from the effort of breathing again after nearly suffocating. "Jus'... don't do that again. I wanna live, please."

"Sorry," she said again, her fingers covering her lips, "I just got a bit excited."

Gin had to smile up at her. "I think that were a little more than a lil bit." he teased, making her blush. *Good, Gin thought, revenge fer flusterin' me before.*

She smiled warmly down at him, her cheeks still a little flushed from her earlier excitement.

"I suppose it was." she said, "Sorry if I got carried away."

Gin turned his eyes to her, opening them for her, "Ran," he said gently, "Don' ever apologise for expressin' yerself. Not to me. If ya wanna be excited, be excited." Then he grinned, lightening the conversation considerably, and her mood, too. "Maybe just try not to crush me lungs so much next time."

She beamed a smile at him. "I'll try not to."

Gin laughed, an action that hurt his ribs. He groaned and clutched his body, willing the pain to vanish.

"Damn, when did ya get so strong?" he asked.

That drew another smile from her. "Well, I have been training this whole time." she told him, a little smugly, "You were the one not paying attention. Although," she smirked, "you were preoccupied with staring longingly at Aizen-san, so I'll let it slide."
"How generous of ya." Gin replied, managing a sly smirk of his own before he sighed, his body exhausted.

"Damn, this's the second time I've had ta catch me breath lyin' on me back."

*Third, actually.* Shinsou corrected him. *If you count the time he had your-

**Okay, I get it!** Gin snapped at his zanpaktou, but Shinsou ignored him.

*-Sucked you like a lollipop-*

**You can stop talking about it now!**

*-and he tasted you.*

Shinsou was definitely smirking now. But Gin didn't even dignify that with an answer. Instead, he focused on Rangiku, who had a rather curious expression on her face.

"It is?" she asked, "The second time?"

"Yeah." Gin admitted. "First him, now you. I swear yer in cahoots."

She leant over him and grinned devilishly. A smirk akin to one of Sousuke's. "Who says we aren't?" she asked him teasingly, and he just gave her an exasperated groan and covered his face with his arm. She laughed lightly.

"Don't worry, we aren't." she assured him, "It's just fun to tease you."

Gin groaned again as he recalled another voice saying the same words. Another set of lips smirking as their owner said them, white teeth showing.

**It's fun to tease you.**

"Funny," Gin told her, "that's what he said. Ya sure you don' wanna date him 'stead a me?"

she smiled broadly and held up her hands, "Oh no, he's all yours. I'll let you have the pleasure of having him and making all his fangirls envious."

"Damn. I were hoping to save meself some trouble there."

She giggled at him. "You know, I'd believe you if you sounded more sincere. And if you didn't smile so much whenever he's around."

His smile at her last comment was lazy. "You know too much, you do."

"Well, as your best friend, it's my job to know everything about you." she told him, her expression smug as she lay a hand on her chest, "Anyway, let's have a look at that flower dictionary he gave you."

He reached beside him and handed it to her. "Here. Prob'ly nothin' excitin' in it though, if that's what yer hopin'."

she took the little book from his outstretched hand and began flicking through the pages.

"Wow, he's really *studied* this language," she gasped softly, "There's meanings and even different contexts for some of the flowers in here he's written. I may have to ask him to teach *me* some of
what he knows."

She turned another page and Gin closed his eyes, resting them for a moment as she scanned over this new book.

"Oh, Gin, he has the loveliest handwriting. You should see it."

Gin smiled to himself as he listened to her, letting his attention drift. *I know. I saw it.*

"He really is gorgeous, Gin, even his handwriting..."

*Yeah... I got me a real catch.* He sighed, content as his body relaxed. He might have even had a quick nap, if it weren't for Rangiku's next words.

"Hey, what's this?"

"Dunno." Gin said, "don' care." He was so sleepy. Couldn't this wait a while?

"Well, you should care," she countered, "Because it looks like a note from Aizen-san."

*That* brought Gin out of his tranquility quite sharpish. *"What?!"

"Addressed to you. Shall I read it out?"

"No!" Gin scrambled to sit up and snatched the thing out of her hand. Because who knew what sort of dirty things were in that note she could tease him about forever. "Lemme see it!"

"Okay, okay," she sighed, "Though it's nice to see you're eager."

Gin waved his hand and shushed her, "Quiet. Lemme read."

He unfolded the piece of paper in his hands. It had been folded twice. And each fold was crisp and precise. The edges perfectly aligned and folded the way Gin could never accomplish regardless of how much he tried. He could feel Ran's eyes peering over his shoulder as his eyes scanned across each word, searing them into his brain. But that didn't matter. He trusted her not to gossip about the contents of the note. And at any rate, at least she wasn't reading it out loud for anyone who walked by to hear. Which was a good thing, given the suggestive nature of its content.

Gin's breath caught, though, as he read the words a second time.

*See me tonight. It seems I have to educate you in the language of flowers... among other things. Perhaps we can continue from where we left off the other morning? I want to taste you again. Sousuke.*

*P.S. - Lavender? Really? You wound me. Expect my reply to that very soon.*

Gin could feel his face grow hotter than the sun as he registered the words. His cheeks turning about fifty different shades of red. Thankfully, Rangiku couldn't see because she was behind him. At least he hoped she couldn't see, anyway.

Thankfully though, her attention was drawn to something else.

"Lavender!" she shrieked, swatting him hard, "You. Sent him. *Lavender?!* What were you *thinking?!* Do you know what it *means?"* she shook her head and Gin winced. Clearly she was upset by this. "$Did you even *read* the book I gave you?"
Gin frowned. *I read it cover to cover.* But he couldn't tell her that. It'd kill her if she knew about the game he was playing with Sousuke.

Rangiku sighed, running a hand through her hair in her exasperation. *"It's okay,"* she breathed, in and out through her nose. *"We can fix this."*

Gin's eyes found her face again as he stared at her. *"We?"*

"Yes." she said firmly. *"We."*

She leafed through the flower dictionary in search of a remedy for this situation. *"I am going to help you fix this."*

Gin said nothing. It was best to keep his mouth shut, because once Ran made up her mind about something it was impossible to talk her out of it. And it wasn't like he didn't know sending the man lavender was cold. Calculating, even. *But it got his attention.* And now Gin was thinking of his next move, anticipating the possible replies Sousuke could come up with, and trying to pre-empt his answers to them. Thinking of the possible ways he could stick his claws into Aizen Sousuke. *His* Sousuke. Because every time the man looked at anyone else, Gin had to fight an urge to climb him like a tree and screech at anyone who came too close to *piss off."

Of course, Ran had said he was the only one Aizen saw suiting him. But Gin knew better. At the moment, he was disposable. He needed to change this. The wheels and gears whirred and clicked in his head. *If only there were a way... a way besides the flowers...* But Gin supposed there would be plenty of time for a solution to present itself. And when it did, Gin was sure there'd be a lot of room for them to fall in love, too.

That was, if Rangiku didn't throw a wrench in the works. Although with her track record, it was quite likely she would. But then again, she did tend to be right about this sort of thing. She'd been right about Aizen so far... maybe he should hear her out.

"How?" he asked, "How're you gonna 'fix this'?"

"Give me a minute, I'm thinking."

Gin sat back and watched her study his flower dictionary, scouring the pages furiously for a solution. Until a thought occurred to him.

*Please,* he pleaded to all the deities he could think of. *Please dear gods on high, if there's a flower that means 'I want sex' don't let her send him that one pretendin' ta be me.*

...  

At the end of the school day, Rangiku practically frog-marched him all the way to Aizen's classroom, the flowers of her choice forced into his hand. Well, not entirely forced, because Gin felt her choices were a pretty accurate summary of his feelings. *It has to be convincing,* she said, when he'd asked why she wasn't going with one of her earlier suggestions declaring Gin's ardent love for him. *And fit with the lavender you sent. Otherwise you'll send mixed messages and turn him off."

It made sense. She'd chosen a branch of white poplar, for *time*. And peppermint for *warmth of feeling."

Both together they meant: *"in time my feelings will warm to you."*
"Right," she said, holding his shoulders so she could look directly at him as they stood by the door to the classroom. "Now you go in there, give him those, and you pay attention when he teaches you about the flower language."

She had an air of seriousness about her, that suggested arguments would be shot down, so Gin just nodded. "A'ight. I got it."

She smiled brightly at him. "Good. Oh, and if he asks to kiss you again, you say yes. Got it?" her smile morphed into her usual sly smirk she wore whenever the topic of Gin kissing Aizen-san came up. "Because the note said he wanted to taste you again."

Gin could feel his cheeks burn. Because he knew that line of the note wasn't about kissing. "Yes. I get it, Ran."

She grinned and clapped her hands together. Gin tried to keep the scowl on his face. Misliking the fact she was making him go red before meeting Aizen again. Because she knew it only invited more teasing from the man.

*They're definitely in cahoots,* he thought again. Because it wasn't just his face that flushed when they embarrassed him. No. Because his skin was so pale, his whole face and neck grew hot and red, making him look like an angry, glowing sun. He could only pray the redness calmed down before Aizen showed up. Thankfully they'd waited until the building was completely empty before venturing in to find their teacher. So nobody could make any comments or ask any questions.

He took a few deep breaths and fanned his face with his hand while Rangiku peered around the doorframe into the classroom.

"Okay, he's just packing up now." She whispered to him, "Let's go."

"Wait, Ran, I need ta calm down a bit before I-"

"Nope, you don't!" she chimed, grabbing his upper arm and dragging him into the classroom.

"Wait, Ran," Gin hissed, resisting her, "Ran!"

But she wasn't listening. And resisting was useless. And before he knew it they were standing in the middle of the empty classroom, awkwardly staring at Aizen Sousuke again. Like so many others before him. Incapable of even saying hello.

Thankfully, it was Aizen who broke the silence, glancing up at him and smiling like seeing Gin was the best part of his day.

"Ah, Gin," he smiled slyly, "I see you got my note."

Gin flushed pink again. Though he tried to fight turning red. He cleared his throat in an attempt to distract from it.

"Yes. Well. It was in a rather obvious place. A bit hard to miss."

Gin couldn't read the man's smile at that, but he saw its softness and took it as a good sign.

"Yes," Rangiku added, "And I must say he really needs you to teach him about the flower language because he's hopeless."

"Oh," Sousuke smiled at them both, "I wouldn't say hopeless. Just in need of a little tutoring."
Wouldn't you agree, Gin?"

"Yes," Gin answered, and with Aizen's smile, Gin knew that was the right answer. He didn't want to admit it, though, that the smile on his own face and the blush on his cheeks were because he'd made the man happy.

"Excellent," Sousuke smiled softly, warmly, again. "I'd be more than happy to tutor you in this elegant language. Shall we retire to my place? It's a bit more private than here."

Gin watched as he closed up his briefcase and stood, holding out his hand. "Shall we?"

Gin felt the smile coming long before it spread and lit up his face. His body moved of its own accord and closed the distance between them, and his hand slipped itself into Sousuke's. Somewhere behind him, he heard Rangiku sigh happily at the sight of the two of them together, holding hands. Outwardly showing the world – or at the very least, Rangiku – they were together. Despite the chessboard spaces between them.

Aizen smiled at Rangiku, then. "I'm afraid I'm going to steal your friend away, Matsumoto-san. Do forgive me. I'll be sure to return him in one piece."

Rangiku smirked at the man. "Oh, believe me, Aizen-san, there's nothing to forgive. Steal away. You two go have fun."

Sousuke smiled, and the two of them turned to face her. Gin shy and awkward. Aizen easy and confident.

"Oh, we shall." Sousuke told her, "I plan on teaching him many things."

Gin's face flushed a light pink at that. At the suggestiveness of it.

"I hope love is one of those things." Rangiku sighed softly.

"Who knows?" Aizen answered her, "Perhaps it might be." he grinned at her, and she had to suppress a giggle at the comment.

"Well, I'll leave you two lovebirds to it." she announced, "Try and get him back to me at a reasonable time, Aizen-san. Or at least let me know if he's staying the night again."

Sousuke laughed lightly at that. "Well, I'll try, but I can't make any promises. I might not be able to keep my hands off him long enough to telephone you."

Gin reddened severely at this. "Sousuke!" he hissed. Chiding, scolding. But the man only chuckled at him.

"Ah, we best go," Aizen said, "We'll see you later, Matsumoto-san."

"Okay," she cooed, "Just try to make sure he can still sit down when he comes back."

"Ran!" Gin hissed at her, very much embarrassed. Face once again the colour of strawberries.

Rangiku didn't answer him. She just turned and skipped happily out and away, leaving Sousuke to chuckle at Gin's red face.

Again.

Gin scowled, trying not to look at him. He let go of the man's hand.
"Let's jus' go." he grumbled, sticking his flowers into a side pocket of his bag before stalking out. Leaving Aizen to follow him, still chuckling to himself.

_Cahoots_, Gin thought again. _They're definitely in cahoots._
You Pierce My Heart

Chapter Notes

NSFW. But then this whole thing is not worksafe, so this isn't news to anyone. Just enjoy the story :)

It was hard not to laugh at his little fox.

Gin's face was still hot and red even as the two of them walked down the street. Gin was quietly furious that his face was still the colour of an angry red sun, and Sousuke still found the sight most pleasing to his eyes. He couldn't help but chuckle to himself at his Gin muttering obscenities under his breath at his friend for embarrassing him again. He was cute, all angry and scowling and with cheeks a very nice shade of red. He did think about chastising the boy for spouting such vulgarity, but he decided this would be more fun.

*And there will be plenty of time for that later,* he rationalised, smiling at the thought of it. He would indeed teach Gin many things. Things preferably involving ropes and a bed...

*Aizen-sama!* Kyouka Suigetsu chided him, *You behave!*

He frowned as he felt her settle on his shoulder again, still taking the form of a robin. *You never let me have any fun.*

She pecked him on the shoulder in response. Hard.

*So? He's clearly not ready for any of that yet!*

*He is,* Sousuke told her, *he just doesn't want to admit it yet.*

She pecked him harder, on the neck this time. His frown deepened.

*You do things at his pace.* She ordered. *Not yours.*

He sighed at her. Resisting the urge to roll his eyes. *Yes. Fine. You don't have to peck me. I shall take things at a glacial pace, if that's what he wants. If that's what this game requires.*

He felt her fluff up her feathers, satisfied with his reply. Happy it was a genuine one. Well, as genuine as it could be, anyway. *Hm. Good.* She said. *Because I know what you're like. Ripping the petals off flowers before they're ready...*

Sousuke kept his frown firmly in place. *Somehow, I don't think you are talking about my plants here.*

*I'm not.*

*Because I'm an excellent gardener, you know.*

*I know.*
And as such, do you really think I'd not look after him? He let his gaze focus on the object of their discussion, his face softening into a smile, Take care of him?

Kyouka studied him a moment, considering. Searching his soul, his intentions. She was a part of him, and she could see these things. Feel these things.

No, she said finally, her voice soft. But it doesn't hurt to make sure.

Sousuke smiled at that. Of course.

It was then that he felt his darling’s attention shift onto him again. A change he was always instantly aware of, and always in tune with.

“Sousuke?” Gin called out to him. Making his smile broaden.

“Yes, darling?”

His little Gin's blush returned at the endearment, and he felt his smile widen considerably.

“Ha- have ya been watchin' me grouchin' this whole time?”

Sousuke was amused by the question, by the fact that Gin felt the need to ask it, and he smiled happily down at his Gin. Feigning innocence.

“why, yes, I have.” he replied, and he got to watch his darling redden further.

“Aizen-san!” Gin exclaimed, chiding him almost. It was cute though, how Gin thought he could tell him off. The student scolding the teacher. It did make him wonder, though, how else Gin might reverse their roles in the future. Who knew? Maybe many years from now Gin might even switch their roles in bed.

Hm, I guess only time will tell me that. But back to the matter at hand...

“What?” Sousuke laughed, pretending innocence again. He was good at that. He had spent decades pretending innocence. “What's wrong with me looking at you?” He caught sight of Gin's frown, and let his grin soften a little. “You're very pleasing to look at.”

He watched a variety of expressions and emotions play across Gin's face, from pleasure to awkwardness to embarrassment to joy. It made him smile. Oh, my darling, you really do need to work on your pokerface. As you are now, I can read you like a book.

Gin opened and closed his mouth, fumbling around for words, blushing furiously. “Ah, yeah... well... do-don't ya think ya better watch where yer goin’ instead? Ya might walk inta a lamp post er somethin' if ya aint careful.”

“Oh, you needn't worry about me,” Sousuke replied, waving away Gin's concerns. “I'm always careful.”

Gin frowned at him, no doubt sceptical of that statement. “Uh-huh. Well then, be even more careful.”

Sousuke only grinned broadly in answer. “Aw, this is cute. You're worried about me.”

His Gin’s cheeks flushed that delicate shade of pink he liked again, as the boy folded his arms across his chest in defiance of the assumption. Even though it was true. Gin was obviously worried about him getting hurt.
“No!” Gin spluttered, “I jus' don' want ya walkin' inta stuff and havin' people blame me.”

But Sousuke just kept on grinning. Oh Gin. I'd believe you if you weren't blushing so hard.

“Oh, I think you're worried about me.” he teased, thoroughly enjoying this. Gin only folded his arms tighter and looked away defiantly. Scowling.


“Oh,” he said, feigning hurt now, “Well, now I'm disappointed. And here I thought you actually cared about me.”

Gin's facial expression at that statement was a mixture of horror and satisfaction, with some panic thrown in there, too. Though Sousuke suspected the panic won out, because Gin's invariably closed eyes opened, just for a second, and gave him a glimpse of his gorgeous red eyes. He suspected Gin wasn't aware of this. It was all he could do not to laugh. It was so much fun to push Gin's buttons. So easy to manipulate Gin's emotions.

“Because I care about you,” he added, laying on the pretence of dejected disappointment thickly. “I care quite deeply for you, actually.”

He placed his hand flat on his chest with that last statement, and then sighed heavily. It was difficult to not burst into a fit of maniacal laughter at the look of guilt on Gin's face. Because his darling was no doubt thinking of the lavender and feeling awful about it.

Just admit you like me, Gin. It'll be so much easier.

Though when Gin's expression morphed into one of dejection, his stomach did twist in on itself. That was when his zanpaktou pecked him again. Hard. A warning to cease and desist if he ever wanted to build anything with the boy.

Enough. She hissed. Fix this. Now.

He sighed. He supposed he'd had enough fun at Gin's expense. It was time to remedy the situation, the only way he knew how.

“If I had a gladiolus, I'd...” he began, having intending to say, I'd give you one and show you’. But the sight of the cluster of the red flowers he was speaking of stopped him mid-stride and mid-sentence. They were at the side of the pavement, right by the entrance to the park, long stemmed and vibrant. Gin stopped beside him, confused.

“Wait here.” Sousuke told him, and walked over to cut one of the gladioli with Kyouka Suigetsu.

He chose a smaller one of the spear-like blooms, so it would fit comfortably in Gin's hand. Gladioli could grow to be quite long and tall, and he wanted one that wouldn't look ridiculously large when Gin held it. So he cut a younger gladiolus, with six bright red flowers. Each one perfect, unblemished. He unsheathed his zanpaktou and carefully cut the stem reasonably short, leaving enough length so it could sit in a vase. When he was done, he re-sheathed Kyouka Suigetsu and smiled at his choice, satisfied.

Yes, perfect, he thought. And then walked back over to where Gin waited for him. Each of his strides long and confident.

...
Gin watched him walk off, amazed at how easily distracted the man was. But when he saw Aizen cut off one of the bright, spear-like flowers, he understood. *Oh, it must mean something in our new language.*

Shinsou snickered quietly in his mind. *I like how you're claiming the language already,* he teased. Clearly approving of this.

Gin only rolled his eyes. *Well, duh. I do wanna share more than spit an'*... Gin couldn't help his blush, *body fluids with him.*

Shinsou started laughing, but Gin ignored him. Deciding to watch Aizen instead.

The man returned, stopping in front of him, beaming the brightest smile, proudly presenting Gin with his latest offering.

“For you.” he said.

Gin reached out and took it, slowly. The moths in his belly taking flight again, his heart bashing against the cage of his ribs as their fingers brushed together again.

“A gladiolus.” Aizen told him, answering his question of what the flower was before Gin even had a chance to ask it. Gin couldn't help but notice how Aizen's voice and general mood was so much more animated than before. “Remember, I showed you them in my garden the other day?”

*How can his moods change so quickly?* Gin wondered, a little shocked. *Jus' minutes ago he were all sad an' disappointed. What happened?*

*He thought of a way to make you happy.* Shinsou supplied.

Gin smiled at both Shinsou and Aizen, holding the flower carefully. “Yes, I remember. The flower of the gladiators.”

“Yes.” Aizen grinned at him. Clearly pleased Gin had remembered the information. Remembered that day.

“An' what's it mean?” Gin asked, “In the flower language?”

Gin watched as the man's grin grew considerably wider, but whether it was with joy or amusement, Gin couldn't tell.

“You have your own flower dictionary now,” Aizen told him, “Why don't you look it up?”

Gin grinned back in answer. *Oh, yes. That's right. I can.* “Good idea. I will.”

... Even before Aizen opened the front door to his home, Gin already had the dictionary open, searching for the G section. The second the door was open, he made a beeline for the sofa, set his bag down beside him and sat down heavily. Fingers holding the little hardback book close to his face. Somewhere in the doorway he could hear Aizen chuckling at his eagerness, but he ignored it.

“Hmm, lessee,” he pondered, grinning to himself because now finally, *finally,* he had something to translate the offerings of this whimsical, capricious magician without any help. Not that he didn't appreciate help at all, but it was just nice to be self sufficient.

“Gladiolus... gladiolus...” Gin ran his finger down the page, searching for it. Going down the list in
alphabetical order. The book sitting on his lap. “Garden sage, gardenia, gathered flowers... jeez, how many geranium varieties? Gillyflower... aha! Gladiolus!”

“Ah,” Sousuke said, materialising behind him, sounding pleased, “You found it.”

“Uh-huh,” Gin nodded, holding the book up to his face, reading the meaning of the flower.

“And?” Sousuke prompted, sitting down beside him and setting two mugs of tea on the coffee table. Gin had to do a double-take at his speed. *When did he have time to make me tea?* He wondered. But Aizen's arm around the back of his shoulders pushed the thought from his head.

“What does it mean?” Aizen asked him, his voice that of a teacher about to ease his student into a lesson. Albeit with very sensual undertones. “The gladiolus?”

Gin swallowed, skin tingling at his touch, trying to force his body not to tremble too visibly. “Ready armed,” he answered, reading the printed words. Trying to keep his voice steady. “You pierce my heart. But you've scribbled some other stuff here, too.”

“Ah,” Aizen said, letting his fingers lazily roam first down, then up, the length of Gin's spine. Sending little jolts of excitement through his body, even through his clothes. “Then this will be a lesson in context for you. Can you read what I've written?”

The large hand came to rest on his hip, and Gin had to take a deep, shaky breath to let himself think. Because the man was just so close and whenever they were in close proximity his brain tended to shut down all rational thought processes in favour of other desires.

“Ye-yes...” he said, clearing his throat in an attempt to remain composed. But even that was difficult with his traitorous body reacting the way it did whenever the man so much as looked at him. *I'll read whatever ya want me to.*

“You wound me.” Gin read. “Or, you pierce my heart with passion.” He frowned at the words, “I'm confused. Which is it?”

Aizen smiled at him, “Well, that depends on the situation. Remember what I told you about context being important?”

“Yes,” Gin said, thankful that hand on him was still and not distracting him by drawing lazy seductive patterns on his body. “I remember.”

“Good,” Sousuke praised, “Now, because the meaning of the gladiolus is subjective, there are two ways you can interpret this,” he began, “Depending on whether you look at it from the perspective of your latest offering to me, or...” Aizen let his hand move again, slowly, up along Gin’s waist, curling around his chest. “From looking at our earlier conversation, before I gave the flower to you.”

Gin gasped at the gentle touches, heart crashing around inside his chest, the touches were so damn arousing and distracting. Sexual and yet not sexual. Making his heart race. The worst part was that Sousuke could feel it, and Gin knew he could feel it, his hand now resting flat over his heart as it beat away like a mad thing. Gin had a fleeting thought that this was why ribs were cages, because hearts were wild animals that would escape at any opportunity presented.

“Your heart is racing.” Sousuke told him. Waiting for Gin to puzzle out the answer. Not that the man was making it easy, what with his hands on him. “Don't tell me I'm distracting you.”

Gin took a deep breath in and out. *Settle,* he willed his thumping heart. *I can't think if you don't*
settle.

It took a moment, but amazingly, Gin's heart obeyed him. It calmed and slowed, stopping its thrashing and resuming beating at a steady pace again. Allowing Gin the space he needed to think. Because he knew this was going to be an important lesson.

“Hmm, I think I got it.” Gin said, his sharp mind quick to put it together. “If I take it from wha' ya told me earlier about how ya cared fer me, it means you pierce my heart with passion. As in, you have pierced my heart and made me love you. Cuz yer in love wit' me. But ya also said ya were disappointed I wasn' worried about ya, so if I look at it that way... then it means you wound me.”

“Good.” Sousuke nodded, “And if you take into consideration the lavender you left me...” he prompted gently, waiting for Gin to make the connection.

“Then it means the same thing.” Gin finished, “But given that yer tryin' ta convince me you love me, it could be both.”

He risked a glance up at Sousuke, and saw the man nodding and smiling. “Yes, go on.”

Gin pointed his finger to Aizen's handwriting in the book. Rangiku was right. He really did have lovely handwriting. “Cuz ya put here, You stab/pierce my heart. So what ya really wanna say ta me is, You wound me, I care deeply for you. You have pierced my heart with passion and made me love you.”

Gin cocked his head to the side, turning it a little towards Sousuke, smiling at his explanation. “Isn't that right, Aizen-sama?

"Aizen-sama."

A small smile tugged at the corners of Aizen's lips.

"Aizen-sama."

The words sent a spear of heat through him. Mm. Yes. I like that. Call me that again.

“Yes,” he said, letting his hand roam slowly down Gin's chest. His thumb brushing gently against his darling's soft skin as it moved down the centre line of his body. Eliciting a quiet gasp from Gin as it travelled slowly downwards.

“That's right,” he smiled, moving his hand back up again. Thumb, palm and fingers ghosting steadily over pale skin. Enjoying the gasps Gin made. “That is precisely what gladiolus means in the flower language... exactly what I wanted to say.”

He let his hand caress dangerously southward down Gin's oh so delectable body. Gin's facial expressions and slight moans only adding fuel to the desire sparking in him to touch and taste every inch of Gin's body. Arousal curling its way slowly around him, pooling in his stomach, his groin, as he thought of all the ways he could make his Gin moan and scream his name.

"Aizen-sama. Or better yet, Sousuke."

He wanted to completely dominate Gin's thoughts and be the only thing he thought of. To be the sole object of his darling's focus and attention. He'd had a taste of what that felt like the last time he'd had Gin on his back, in his bed, moaning loud and breathless and calling out his name in the
throes of pleasure.

*Sousuke! Oh, oh gods-

He smirked. *Yes, that was certainly an experience I'd like to repeat. Let's see if we can...*

He moved in closer and shifted so he had better access Gin's neck with his lips, so he could murmur in Gin's ear.

“I can see I was right about your sharp mind,” he breathed, voice low and sensual, hands working their magic on Gin's lithe body. His lips connecting with the skin on Gin's neck for a mind melting kiss. “You've picked this language up quickly. I'm very pleased.”

He felt Gin moan, then, quiet and soft as he punctuated his sentences with more hungry kisses on the delicate skin of Gin's neck. Each one long, lingering, ravenous. “I think,” he said, kissing him again, “I should reward my student for showing such proficiency.”

“Aizen-” Gin gasped, closing his eyes and trying to suppress another moan, “Oh...”

Sousuke answered him with a deep, throaty chuckle. It was obvious that his darling was beginning to lose all rational thought now. Beginning to fall under the magical spell he was casting with his hands roaming over his body. With his lips kissing his skin. Another smile passed his lips as he savoured the moment. *Yes. It won't be long now before I get another taste of you.*

“Now, now Gin,” he chided gently, shifting his weight again so he was straddling Gin. Feeling Gin's slim, bony hips under his thighs as he gently pressed Gin down. “We've talked about this. You should be addressing me properly.”

He heard Gin moan again, half aroused, half frustrated as Sousuke picked up the book from his hand and set it on the table. Because it wouldn't do to get cum all over it now, would it?

Gin's breaths were harsh and laboured, his chest heaving with each intake of air. The dazed expression on Gin's face told him his darling was trying so, so hard to turn the gears in his brain, even through the thick fog of lust he'd been thrown into. A strangled moan escaped Gin's throat at being pinned down like this, at being touched and kissed and desired. Pressured ever so slightly by the energy Aizen himself exuded.

“Ai...” Gin began, though his thought died when Sousuke let his hands roam upwards, pushing the blue and white fabric of his uniform off his shoulders, palms and fingers running freely over naked skin. His hands continued their journey over Gin's body, down over his chest, his waist, his ribs... exposing more and more pretty soft skin as they went. Soft, pale skin that was untainted, unmarked.

Sousuke figured it was time to change that.

Gin gasped, fighting a moan and failing as Sousuke's fingers ghosted over his ribs, and it drew another chuckle out of him.

“Oh, you have sensitive ribs.” he said, moving his hands across them, laying his palms flat and sliding them down either side of Gin's slim waist and over his ribs, enjoying the little shivers of pleasure the caresses enticed out of Gin. “And a sensitive waist.”

Aizen smiled, quietly enjoying his Gin's reactions to such subtle touches and presses. “I wonder where else you like to be touched. Perhaps we can find out... if you address me properly as we discussed.”
Sousuke let his hands come to rest on either side of Gin's waist, pausing for effect. To give time for the boy to miss his touches and kisses. Although that didn't take very long.

A heavy sigh left his darling, thick with disappointment. No doubt he was trying to string together a coherent thought through the mist of desire coursing through his body, clouding his thoughts. His mind. Pale hands reached up to touch him, but those slim wrists were gently captured and held down. Gin whined softly in frustration, and Aizen couldn't suppress his devious smile as he looked down at his darling Gin lying pinned under him. Slim wrists in his grip, panting, pale skin flush with the heat of desire. Eyes propped half open to reveal a set of gorgeous red irises... beautiful. In all aspects, beautiful.

So much so that it was taking a large amount of self control for Sousuke to keep himself restrained. To look but not touch. Not devour. Not consume.

*Do you know how beautiful you look to me right now, Gin? Pinned under me, looking at me the way you are? At my mercy, completely trusting me?*

*At this rate it will take all of my self control to wait for you.*

Gin moaned softly, ad Sousuke couldn't tell if his darling was aroused or frustrated at being restrained, however gently. He suspected it was a little of both.

“Aizen-sama,” Gin sighed breathlessly, like a needy lover, “Please... touch me.”

The words sent another spear of heat through him. As did Gin's expression. His vibrant red eyes... his dazed, lustful smile...

*Aizen-sama. Touch me...*

Sousuke's breath caught in his throat, but only for a moment. The smile, however... that tugged the corners of his lips into a wild grin... *that* stayed there. Again the gladiolus came to his mind, as did it's meaning. *You pierce my heart with passion.*

Appropriate. So very appropriate. Because he was certainly feeling a lot of passion right now.

He'd struck the match and watched it burn, and set their world ablaze with passion. With fire. Him, the pyromaniac, with Gin's veins all full of gas, burning high and hot for him. Desire spreading like a wildfire, ready to scorch them both to ash.

But then, he always did like to play with fire.

“Mmm, very good,” he purred, relinquishing Gin's wrists and leaning himself down to continue kissing his darling's bare neck, trapping him with his body, his arms. “But I think you can do better than that.”

Gin let out another soft, breathy moan as his neck was attacked again by lips and teeth and tongue.

“Aizen! Fu-fuck!”

Aizen paused in his ministrations and smirked into his Gin's neck. “Now, now,” he chided, “There's no need for any profanity. I believe it was a very simple request. Not all that difficult.”

Gin let out another strangled moan of frustration and arousal both as Sousuke let his fingers resume working their magic again. Trailing lazy lines up and down and around Gin's body. Oh, he was enjoying this. Having Gin at his complete mercy. So naïve, so beautiful, so trusting... no, not quite
trusting yet. There was still the lavender, sitting unassumingly on his desk. That was an issue he'd have to overcome to gain Gin's trust. Indeed, it would be difficult. A challenge. But he always did enjoy the game of pursuit and capture. And when in the end, Gin finally did cave in and spread his legs for him, he'd enjoy it all the more after having to work so hard for it.

Until then, he'd savour every moment of this cat and mouse game they were playing. Take the time to truly enjoy moments like this.

And there would definitely be many more moments like these. He was certain.

“No,” Gin whispered, just about capable of words, “Not that difficult”

“No,” Aizen smiled down at him.

Ah, Gin, I'd believe you if you weren't concentrating so hard just to string together a coherent thought. I can see the little wheels and gears in your mind whirring and clicking, working overtime just to keep you focused on my words and not my touches. My kisses...

“So,” Aizen began again, “Do you want to try again?”

Gin smiled up at him, once again snatching his breath away; his cheeks were still flushed with the heat of desire he'd ignited, and his eyes were heavily lidded, open just enough to let him see those gorgeous red eyes of his.

Beautiful. Truly.

There was a little extra something in Gin's smile this time, though. Something sly. Devious. Cunning. Something no-one else but Aizen Sousuke would notice. And it made him pause for a second. But only for a second. Because he was Aizen Sousuke, and he could not let his mask of control slip for even a moment. Instead, he just smirked back.

He's enjoying this. Is he playing me at my own game?

Somewhere in the recesses of his mind, he felt his zanpaktou give a little smirk of amusement. I don't know, Aizen-sama. You tell me.

Gin's pause and feigned thoughtfulness was his answer.

*Oh, you sly little fox.*

“Yes,” Gin panted, finally breaking the silence. That same devilish smile playing on his lips. “Sousuke.”
very, very NSFW for Aizen's general perviness (and by proxy my general perviness), Aizen's dirty talking, manipulating, wanting to throw caution out the window, being possessive as all hell, his continued chessboarding, touching an underage-ish Gin and finding any excuse possible to touch Gin, and other stuff. And also some very very sly Heir references if you look hard enough (Particularly the “You will be what I make you” lines). There's also some mentions of Aizen's glasses that I really enjoy here, too. Happy reading, folks.

Yes, Sousuke.

Aizen smiled. Gin knew, or at least he must have had some idea, of the effect those words would have on him. Because the smile playing across his darling little fox's face suggested he knew something. A part of him was impressed; his Gin was finally learning how to play the game. The other, greater part of him was very aroused, and wanted nothing else but to pin Gin down, rip off his clothes, and completely control, dominate and roughly take young Gin's virginity right now. Consequences be damned. To make Gin scream his name to the high heavens until his voice went hoarse. Give him so much pleasure and fuck him so hard he wouldn't be able to walk straight for weeks. Preferably on his hands and knees so Aizen could take him from behind.

He wanted to. He really, really wanted to.

But he didn't. He resisted the impulse. Because he'd promised. Because these things couldn't be rushed. Because quick, hard fucks on his couch had long ago lost all his interest and were, quite frankly, boring for him now. No, he had to wait until Gin was ready. Because Gin deserved more than just a quick fuck. He wanted Gin to remember their night together, brand himself into Gin's brain and into his skin for all of eternity, so Gin would remember him even centuries after he left and broke his heart.

And if he were honest, Sousuke wanted more than that, too. But then, he wasn't the honest type.

But nevermind that, it would make the endgame all the sweeter if Gin's night with him was an unforgettable one. When the time came to take a hold of his metaphorical revolver and shoot it into Gin's heart.

Yes... it was a sweet thought. But for now, right now, he had to focus on his next move in the game. Gin had moved his piece, it was time to move his own. Sousuke took in a deep, if somewhat shaky breath to steady himself. To calm some of the desire burning through him from the inside out. Because he wanted Gin's experience with him to be unforgettable, a memory that would never die. Not even after twenty, forty... eighty years. And it wouldn't be if he couldn't control himself now. Although, the way they were now, Gin was making that very difficult for him. He took in another breath, trying to maintain his iron grip of self control.

“Yes,” he breathed, “That's perfect.”

He planted another kiss onto the skin of Gin's neck, and the action drew out the softest of moans
from Gin's throat. He pulled away for just long enough to smile – no, smirk – and whisper again. The warmth of his breath sending a little shiver through his Gin's little body, still pinned underneath him.

“That's perfect, Gin,” he said, taking another slow, soft breath, arousal coiling around him. Gin sighed underneath him. “Perfect.”

Gin gave out a soft cry as Sousuke clamped his lips down onto his neck again, sinking his teeth into the warm, yielding flesh. Gin's cry morphing into a rather loud, pleasured moan as Sousuke laid siege to his bare neck. Kissing, sucking, biting. Leaving his marks. Claiming every inch of skin he could reach. Marking what was his, and what would only be his. Oh, others could look. But he'd never in a million years let them touch. Never let them fuck what was his. Gin belonged to him. Had done since he'd laid eyes on the boy, and each of Gin's gasps, pants and moans at his touches only reinforced this. As did each of the bruises slowly flowering under his darling's pale skin. On his neck, collarbones, chest. Each one dark and purple.

Sousuke pulled his lips away to look down at Gin beneath him, taking in that look of wild abandon, heaving chest, heavily lidded eyes, skin flushed with the heat of desire and arousal. He couldn't help but smile and admire his work.

Yes, you know, don't you? You are mine and mine alone.

You will be what I make of you.

“For good or ill, you will be what I make you.”

“Sousuke...” Gin sighed, breathless and lustful. Sousuke smiled down at him, dark eyes smouldering with lust and hunger.

“Yes, Gin?” he asked, letting his hand move lazily down Gin's lithe body, slowly tracing from between his collarbones and pausing just as his fingertips reached Gin's stomach and navel. He took a moment to truly savour the moment the unarticulated lust and desire in Gin's expression, in his eyes, before Gin found the words to answer him.

“Don't stop.”

Aizen let his hand glide down his Gin's body further, enjoying the little gasp his darling emitted when his fingers pushed down the trousers in the way and curled around his erection. Gin doubtlessly trying to work out exactly when his nether regions sprung to attention. Doubtlessly a little bit embarrassed too, of just how easily aroused he was. How easy it was for Sousuke to wind him into such a state.

“Oh,” Aizen answered him, fingers beginning to move slowly up and down the length of Gin's penis. His glasses sliding down his nose as he smirked down at Gin. Tongue licking his upper lip. Glasses, like his self control, his mask, sliding off him. “Don't worry, I wasn't planning to stop.”

He jerked his hand, making Gin cry out again, small hands searching for purchase on his shoulders, squeezing him tightly. The glasses slid even further down his face, then, briefly lifting his focus off Gin. An infuriated scowl crossed his features as he lifted his hand away from Gin, sitting up just enough so that he could remove the offending things from his face. He threw the glasses over his shoulder, and then returned his attention to pleasing Gin. Yes, this was much better now he didn't have those distracting spectacles sliding down his damn face every time he moved. He softened his expression again, and resumed pleasing his Gin again. One hand working its magic down south, while his lips laid siege once again to Gin's neck. The sound of the spectacles
clattering to the floor lost in a sea of moans and hungry kisses.

“Sousuke! Oh!”

Aizen couldn't help but grin into Gin's neck. “Yes, that's my name. Although, the way you say it, you can wear it out if you want to. In fact,” he paused his hand in its steady rhythmic motions and let his thumb swirl around the tip of Gin's achingly hard cock. Only drawing out more moans from Gin, each one growing louder and louder in their volume and intensity. “Feel free to scream it out for me.”

“Ah!” Gin's breaths heaved in and out of him, “So-Sousuke... I'm... gonna...”

Aizen jerked his hand again, then moved it slowly from the tip to base of Gin's arousal. Gin moaned again, loudly, a sound Sousuke didn't think he'd ever tire of. A sound that only served to make the fire inside his body to spread, to make arousal pool in his loins, and to make him hard, too. Particularly when Gin's hands ran up either side of his neck, when his slender, beautiful fingers tangled themselves in his hair, pulling with each movement of his hand. Sometimes tugging gently, sometimes pulling hard.

A moan slipped out of Sousuke's throat at one such tug of his hair. His grip of control held over himself slipping. If he wasn't careful, patience would go flying out of the window and then there would be no endgame to speak of. He knew he had to tread carefully, to keep it from slipping further. And the best way to do this was to keep talking.

“Do you know how much your moans are doing it for me, Gin?” he asked, “How much I want to hear you say and scream my name so breathlessly, like my lover?”

Gin's only answer was a breathless sigh of his name that only quickened his pulse.

“Sousuke...”

“Hm. Yes. Like that.” Sousuke smiled down at him, “Because you belong to me, don't you?” he asked, enjoying having Gin at his mercy like this. At Gin's attempts to formulate an answer to the question through his lustful delirium.

“Sou... I...”

Sousuke smirked down at his Gin again. Oh, my darling, “yes” is the word you're looking for. You'd be absurd to say anything else, so don't even try. Because I'll get under your skin, if I haven't already. Penetrate your mind. Permeate your thoughts. You'll never be able to get me out of your mind, never forget my touch. My kiss. And don't even think of saying “I can't go on anymore”, because we both know you can. We both know you want me as much as I want you. Loathe though you are to admit it... try as you might to deny it...

I'll show you what brilliant ecstasy is like.

You won't be able to forget me.

You will want more of me.

Gin groaned again, delirious with pleasure now. It was clear to Sousuke the boy was close to the edge of oblivion now. That he would do anything, say anything, to get that sweet release Sousuke was dangling in front of him.

Agree to absolutely anything.
And yet Gin thinks he has me pinned so securely under your thumb... how amusing.

It was Kyouka Suigetsu's voice, quiet in the back of his mind, that answered him. Her tone mischievous, as if she knew something he didn't.

And who says he doesn't, Aizen-sama?

Sousuke ignored her, choosing instead to focus on far more pleasurable and important matters, like the beautiful creature moaning in ecstasy underneath him, trying to just get out a simple word through a thick fog of pleasure and lust.

“Because,” Aizen continued, “I can make it very pleasurable, belonging to me...”

He punctuated his sentences, his words, with slow, lazy stroked of Gin's arousal. Listening to the series of erotic moans that left Gin's lips. The little cries of pleasure.

“Do you wish to belong to me, Ichimaru?”

The shift in tone and back into formality was slight, as he slipped into the version of himself he liked to keep hidden. The Aizen Sousuke who liked to control, to dominate, to stake his claim to whatever his heart desired. And right now, what his heart desired most was ichimaru Gin's body, mind and heart.

“Yes!” Gin cried out, fingers gripping Aizen's thick brown hair. Pleasure filling him entirely, so much so that Gin was about to explode with it. “Yes! Gods, yes!”

Sousuke smiled, very pleased with himself. Feeling Gin's young body tremble underneath him.

“Perfect,” he said again, leaning down to claim Gin's lips with his own, truly savouring Gin's soft pleased moan into his mouth, his fingers deep in his hair. Trying his best to return the kiss with equal passion and fervour. He broke the kiss slowly, giving Gin just enough time to miss it before he sank his lips down onto Gin's bruise-littered neck again. “Absolutely perfect.”

Gin moaned softly, music to his ears, as he laid kiss after kiss on the delicate pale skin of his darling. His hand resuming pleasuring his Gin at a more rapid pace designed to bring his little fox to completion to a background symphony of Gin's soft moans and cries and pleasured noises. Noises that brought thoughts of the last time he'd given Gin physical pleasure like this to the forefront of his mind.

Sousuke! Oh, og gods-

I love- I love-

Aizen-sama. Please, touch me.

That was... an experience.

He pictured Gin's soft, lazy smile, full of mischief as he pictured it. And then, oddly, he thought of what his zanpaktou had said.

You don't normally... give your partners pleasure.

He thought for a moment. She's right. I don't. But rules can have exceptions, can't they?

He was pulled out of his thoughts by a loud cry of his name saturated with pure ecstasy from his young Gin. “Sousuke!” and he could feel in his hand the warm, sticky cum emptying out of Gin.
He pushed himself up so he could see Gin's face, meet those gorgeous red eyes and see the euphoria in them that came after orgasm. He smiled at the happy, satiated play on his Gin's face, even though Gin was still trying to catch his breath. Sousuke released his hold on Gin's now flaccid penis and sat back to admire his handiwork.

Hm. he looks completely debauched like that. Half naked, sweaty, covered in cum, trying to get his breathing under control. And this is just the beginning. I have much more planned for you, my dear Gin. But first, I must win you over. And isn’t that the real challenge, really? Getting you to fall in love with me. Gaining your trust.

He listened to Gin, his Gin, sigh softly. Slowly and steadily coming down from his orgasm. Gradedly returning to reality. Sousuke let out a quiet sigh himself, willing his body to cool down and his arousal to once again return to its dormant state. Only Gin, it seemed, could get him this worked up. This riled. This aroused so damn quickly. And this without even being on the receiving end of any physical pleasure himself. It was truly an odd sensation for him, although it was not unpleasant. In fact, it made a nice change compared to his usual forays into sexual pleasure with nameless faces and throwaway passions never again spoken of after the morning came. When he said goodbye to his partner of the night and never spoke to them again.

It was different, yes, this feeling Gin brought him. Although it wasn't unwelcome. It was much like all of the other feelings and sensations Gin brought to life inside him. This strange and logically implausible desire to protect Gin, for one. He'd had a taste of that on the night Gin had thrown up his food and all those expensive oysters, and he'd had to carry Gin up to bed.

Watching Gin sleep next to him in bed, he'd felt it again. Stronger this time. And he'd felt quietly glad that Gin was with him, because certainly there were quite a few perverts out there who would be only too glad to take advantage of the situation, and Gin's inability to consent to anything in his drunken state. Not to mention Gin's impaired ability to fight off any unwanted advances from such predators.

Where is all this coming from? He wondered, This mess of feelings?

But that was a question he could only answer later, alone, and with much thought and reflection. And alcohol. For the moment though, he returned to the present moment, focusing on his current situation. And Gin.

 Plenty of time to solve that problem later.

“Damn,” Gin panted, smiling up at him. He returned the smile, only to hear Kyouka Suigetsu giggling in his head.

Do you need a cold shower, Aizen-sama? She teased, Or perhaps a bucket of ice? A large one?

Sousuke's smirk only indicated she was right. I might, he answered her.

“Yer good at this,” Gin told him, and Sousuke's grin only widened.

“Well,” he said, keeping his tone playful and seductive. “I've had a lot of practice to perfect my skills.”

The frown that quickly replaced Gin's lazy, satisfied smile told him immediately that this was the wrong thing to say. Absolutely the wrong thing. And Sousuke remembered all too suddenly that Gin absolutely loathed the fact that there had been others before him. That there might be others after him.
A small wave of panic washed through him at this, and his mind scrambled around for the words to say to negate this. To banish the frown from Gin's face and have it replaced with that smile he loved again.

Quick, he commanded himself. Say something.

“Although,” Sousuke added, “This was the first time I've been quite so... aroused... giving someone pleasure like this.”

He let Gin digest this, the frown on his darling's delicate features replaced with a look of both confusion and concentration. Sousuke watched him puzzling his words out with anticipation. It seemed to take a little while for the words to sink in, so Sousuke decided to help speed things along a little. He took one of Gin's hands - small, fine fingers in his rough and calloused ones - and guided it, palm first, onto the bulge between his legs.

“As you can see.” he smiled. And finally, finally, things in his darling's mind clicked firmly into place. He could tell because those cheeks flamed red again, those gorgeous red eyed widened, and those lips fell into a little 'O' shape as the realisation dawned on him.

“Oh,” Gin gasped quietly, “Oh, is... is it really the...” Gin paused between fragments of his sentence. Fighting to get words out through the heat of embarrassment. “Firs' time?”

Sousuke just smiled, very much enjoying this. “Yes,” he aid, quite matter of factly, as if he were merely confirming common knowledge. Like the sky is blue and gravity makes things fall downwards. “It is.”

He released Gin's hand and let Gin settle it down by his side again. Watching very closely as the little smile of satisfaction tugged at the corners of Gin's lips, pulling them upwards. Feeling a smile mirroring the exact same sentiment play across his own lips.

“I've told you,” Sousuke added, “You're very desirable. I know you don't really believe me, but it's true.”

Gin looked up at him, taking all this in, as if this were news to him. He would have laughed, if Gin hadn't looked so endearingly innocent.

“It is?” Gin blinked up at him, and Sousuke couldn't tell if his expression and tone were genuine or a fabrication of innocence designed to toy with him. He decided to believe it was genuine. His Gin wasn't that cunning yet.

“Yes,” he said, tenderly caressing Gin's face with a hand that wasn't covered in sticky fluid. Smiling gently, warmly, tenderly down at his darling Gin.

He'd have reasoned with himself that he was acting, but even he couldn't tell at the moment, the line was becoming so blurred. It was hard to keep up with what was real and what was false.

“It is.”

And then he leant down again, claiming Gin's lips with his, gently pushing his tongue into Gin's mouth for a passionate and soul-stealing kiss. Feeling the delightful sensation of Gin's slender fingers tangling themselves in his thick hair again, feeling Gin softly moaning into the kiss. Feeling that stirring of heat inside him again, and storms rising up under his skin when his Gin kissed him, returning his passion. As if he were the ocean and Gin the moon. The passion, the spark between them raging inside him, like a stormy sea, spreading like a wildfire, reducing all other thoughts and feelings to ash and dust.
Only Kyouka Suigetsu's words rang out as the only coherent thought not drowned in passion. Her voice thickly saturated with amusement and mischief, and just a hint of sarcasm, as if she knew something he didn't as she watched events between the two of them unfold.

Who says he doesn't have you secured so firmly under his thumb, Aizen-sama?
Light and Playful Teasing

Gin's descent back to reality when the kiss broke was a slow one. He lay there panting underneath Sousuke for several moments, steadily regaining a normal breathing rate and feeling very satisfied with the most recent turn of events. A sly grin spread slowly across his face as he ran a hand through his hair to push his bangs off his sweat slicked forehead.

Damn, Aizen was good with his hands. "I could get used ta this." he said softly, with an equally soft smile. The man was still sitting straddling his hips, eyes fixed on his face. Gin lifted his eyelids for a few moments, treating the man to a good, long look at his usually squinted eyes. A reward of sorts for wrapping himself so willingly around Gin's slender fingers. For moving into the position on the mental chessboard Gin wanted him in. For gazing at him like he were the only source of water in a vast desert wasteland. He caught Sousuke smiling at him in that moment and saw something akin to tenderness in the man's gaze.

Yes, Gin thought. Look at me and only me.

"You know," Sousuke said gently, "I could too."

Gin widened his smile at that, and feeling brave after his small victory, reached out to Sousuke again. His hands quietly finding the older man's cheeks and neck and pulling him in for another deep lingering kiss. His hands gentle but firm in their actions. Letting Aizen know there would be no argument, no resistance. Not that he needed to do such a thing, because Sousuke would be a willing participant in whatever he initiated. The man was already putty in his hands. Of course, catching the man by surprise helped too. Made it so he opened his mouth up in a silent gasp and made it easy for Gin to push his awkward tongue inside and attempted to lead the kiss.

He tried to mimic the movements, the gentle yet demanding, hungry way Aizen's tongue had so often claimed his own. He couldn't say for sure if he was very skilled at it – or just any good at all. But after the initial shock had worn off, Sousuke came alive at his touch, his kiss. His stillness quickly replaced by passion as he returned the kiss, equally hungry. Graciously letting him lead this time. Letting him experiment a little. Gin still wasn't sure just how well he was doing, but when the man moaned softly into his mouth, into the kiss, it was all the encouragement he needed.

Yes, think of me and only me.

When he had to break away for air, he found himself staring up into the warmest chocolate coloured eyes he'd ever seen, and the softest smile that answered any questions he had about being a good enough kisser.

"You're getting good at this." Aizen told him, his low and sensual voice sending jolts of excitement up Gin's spine. And lust, that too. But Gin pushed that aside for now so he could focus on the compliment.

He couldn't help his bright happy grin at that compliment.

"Ah, I am?" he asked, somewhat incredulous but pleased nonetheless.

"Oh yes," Aizen purred down at him, "very good."

Gin felt heat flush into his cheeks again and his grin threatened to split his face open at the thought of Aizen enjoying his kisses. Ah, but then, he realised he needed to weigh up the truth in such a statement before he got too excited.
"Ah yer sure ya aint sayin' that ta be nice?" he asked, unable to keep the shyness from his voice. Because a part of him did hope Aizen wasn't just saying that to make him feel better about his lack of experience. Wasn't just letting him save face and sparing him the embarrassment of being told he wasn't very good at it. But he did have hope he was at the very least improving.

"Of course not," Aizen answered him, tone light and playful. "I mean what I say. I do very much enjoy it when you kiss me."

Gin flushed again and his smile widened considerably. "Ah, I'm glad," he answered, "Cuz I do worry bout no bein' up to yer expectations."

_Cuz I wanna tame yer heart that jumps from here to there. I can't do that if I aint good at pleasin' ya._

Aizen chuckled at him, then. But it wasn't mocking. It was more like indulgent laughter, light and amused – but not cruel.

"Oh Gin," he drawled, "you always exceed my expectations."

And then he leant down and captured Gin's lips again for another slow and passion filled kiss, one Gin felt himself simply melt into.

. . .

Aizen felt Gin moan softly into their kiss and suppressed a smile. It was so adorable. His darling, his beautiful, brilliant Gin – highly skilled at strategy, kidou and absolutely lethal with his Shinsou – was insecure about something so simple as his skill at _kissing_. Oh, if only Gin knew just how ridiculously turned on he got just from kissing him. Alright, admittedly Gin's tongue was still a little clumsy, his lips somewhat awkward, and Gin still wasn't exactly sure what to do with his hands when they kissed. But the boy _more_ than made up for it with passion and enthusiasm.

But Gin would learn. With himself as a teacher, Gin would surely become proficient at kissing. Perhaps in time, he could make Gin into a very adept lover too, who knew just how to please him.

He moaned into the kiss himself at the thought of it. Multiple scenarios and sexual positions running through his quick and dangerous mind. Gin's expression at varying stages of ecstasy... those hands on him... those lips... that tongue...

Yes, by the end of this, Gin would be very adept at pleasing him indeed. And right now, with such a willing and eager student, Aizen found himself more than happy to teach Gin the art of love. About physical pleasure. The passion of sex. When the time came, of course. One couldn't rush these things. He'd wait until Gin was ready. Like he'd promised.

Another one of Gin's soft moans brought him out of his thoughts and back to reality again. As did the sensation of Gin's fine lovely fingers sliding into his thick hair again. _Ah yes, _he wanted to grin, _you're definitely learning._

When he broke away from those lips, he couldn't help but grin. Unable to hide his pride in his lovely Gin for picking things up so quickly, just as he'd come to expect. It was just another affirmation that he'd made the right choice in both a sexual partner and a second in command.

_Yes, Gin, you'll definitely flourish under me._

He gazed down at his darling, drinking in his flushed cheeks and those absolutely gorgeous red
eyes, heavily lidded with desire and satisfaction. That soft, lazy smile.

_In more ways than you know, you'll definitely bloom for me._

"So," he drawled, still keeping his gaze fixed on Gin's face. His smirk melting into a soft, lazy smile of his own, mirroring Gin's. "What shall we do with the rest of our day?"

He caught Gin's sly little grin, his darling laying beneath him, still delightfully flushed and catching his breath.

"Oh, I dunno," Gin sighed, still in that blissful state after his orgasm. "But I can think of a few things..."

Aizen could not miss the subtle seductive tease in his Gin's voice, and pride tugged at him again. He might need to reward his student again, at this rate. _You're definitely learning quickly, Gin._

"I'm certain you can," Aizen answered, shooting back a seductive grin of his own, letting his fingers slide slowly down Gin's exposed chest. "But I was looking for suggestions that lay outside of my bedroom."

"Oh." Gin gasped. Blushing at his mistake, his pale cheeks tinged that wonderful shade of deep pink that he'd grown to love seeing. It was just so endearingly innocent. He'd have believed it if Gin hadn't just given him a glimpse of the passionate, hungry lover he'd become with that last sentence. One who'd love nothing better than to sit astride him and fuck him hard into his mattress all night, every night. Aizen had to chuckle at the deliciousness of it all.

"Unless," he added, "that's where you wanted to spend the day... the night?"

He watched Gin blush an even deeper red, and listened intently as Gin stammered about for words.

"Um, ye-yes. No- I mean... um..."

Sousuke chuckled again. Oh, his young Gin was adorable when he got all shy. Stumbling over his words in that way he did, only endearing himself more to him.

_Oh, will you stop teasing the poor thing?_ Kyouka huffed at him. _Honestly, he's trying so hard to keep up with you and all you do is push his buttons._

He watched Gin try to glare up at him, red-cheeked, attempting to keep a scowl on his face at being teased in this way. He could feel Kyouka muttering her clear disapproval in his mind at all of it, but Aizen ignored her, choosing not to rise to the bait and instead focus on Gin, letting his hand gently caress the delicately soft skin of Gin's cheek. Smiling gently, tenderly as he did so.

"Ahh, forgive me." he said, "It's so much fun to tease you, I just couldn't help myself."

"Yeh ya said tha' already." Gin huffed. "That it's fun teasin' me."

He wanted to laugh at his darling's frown, his indignant outrage. His frustration at having his buttons so easily pushed. "I know." he said gently, "Do forgive me. We don't have to do any more than we already have today."

He watched Gin try to maintain his frown, try to weigh up the sincerity of his words. He interrupted Gin's train of thought with a soft kiss on the forehead.

"Let me make it up to you." he told Gin, "Let me take you out again."
Kyouka huffed again in the back of his mind, her irritation easing off a little at his last request of Gin. *That's a bit better,* she told him.

Again he ignored her. Fighting the strong impulse to tell her to shut up. Silently cursing the fact that he had to have the most nagging, sarcastic, meddling sword spirit in existence. But thankfully Gin was a good distraction from that fact.

... 

Gin looked up at the man, his frustration giving way to curiosity at how Aizen was planning to spoil him to make up for his earlier teasing. He had to suppress a grin at this; Aizen really was wrapped around his fingers.

"What'd ya have in mind?" Gin asked. Trying not to sound too eager. Because it wouldn't do if he sounded too eager.

"Oh, maybe dinner, some dancing..." Aizen mused aloud, "with perhaps a little less wine this time."

Gin smirked up at him, fighting the urge to wince. Yes, he remembered that wine and oyster fiasco. But he wanted Aizen to try a bit harder. The man was trying to make it up to him after all. He had to work for it. Put the effort in. So Gin thought he'd push the man's buttons a little bit to get him to aim a little higher.

"Oh?" he asked, pretending innocence, "That all? I thought ya said ya were gonna make it up ta me? Not to mention ya made me clothes unwearable jus' now..." he added, "I can't go out'n public in dirty clothes! What'll people say?"

He heard Sousuke laugh somewhat nervously at that remark, undoubtedly remembering just why Gin was lying here all sticky and flushed and dishevelled. "Ahaa, well, if you put it that way..." Aizen drawled on, "I'll take you for dinner and then we'll go somewhere a little different, a place you can relax. I'm sure you've been quite tense with these upcoming final exams, yes?"

Gin smiled up at him, his curiosity well and truly piqued now. "Ohh someplace different. Gonna tell me?"

"Hmm, no. I think I'll surprise you."

Gin pouted. "Oh, yer no fun."

Aizen chuckled down at him indulgently again. "Oh, my dear Gin," he crooned, "I beg to differ. I do believe a few moments ago you thought I was very fun."

Gin tried, in vain, to fight the heat and redness that rushed to his cheeks at that comment. *Damn him! Why does he always do this to me?!!*

"I- I... I just..." he began, but the argument died in his throat. Try as he might, he could not refute the words. And to further add to his embarrassment, Sousuke just chuckled again. Gin scowled at him, unable to do or say much else.

"Don't worry," Sousuke told him, grinning knowingly, like they were sharing a secret, "I won't tell anyone."

"Ya best not. Cuz it'll be bad for ya if ya do." Gin retorted, catching Sousuke smile that smile again, like he were proud of Gin for his remark. Sousuke just laughed and captured his
"Yer enjoyin' this." Gin accused. "Embarrassin' me."

"Oh, I am." Sousuke smirked.

"Uh-huh. Bu' don' think ya can kiss yer way outta repayin' me fer it."

"Oh, I wouldn't dream of it." Sousuke smirked down at him, eyes smouldering with an odd mixture of mischief and desire. "Now go and shower. I'll find you some clean clothes."

"Yeah, yeah," Gin said, Sousuke letting him up so he could put his clothes back on properly, and go and wash himself. "Though a th' rate yer goin' lendin me clothes, ya won' have much left ta wear yerself."

Aizen shot him another mischievous, troublemaking grin. "Oh, Gin," he called, making Gin pause in the middle of the living room and look back at him, "Who says that wasn't my intent? You do flush such a lovely pink colour whenever you think of me naked, after all."

This, of course, made Gin's face hot and red again. Made images of what Aizen might look like without a stitch of clothing on spring to mind. Aizen smiled knowingly, oh so infuriatingly knowingly at him, as if he could see what he was thinking.

Shinsou cackled loudly in his mind. Oh Gin, just admit it, you wanna see him naked. See his penis. Everyone in this room knows ya do!

Gin turned away from him, scowling, embarrassed again. And as he stomped off to the bathroom to use the shower, he could hear Sousuke laughing at him and Shinsou making comments about wanting to see Sousuke's penis that he tried to ignore but couldn't.

Aizen kept chuckling even after Gin had left the room. Oh gods, it really was such fun to tease him! And Gin did always turn that lovely shade of pink whenever he teased the boy. It was all in play, of course, moves in a game designed to push Gin where he wanted him on the board. Not intended to be malicious. Although his zanpaktou disapproved. Though she tended to disapprove of a lot of what he did of late. It was beginning to irritate him.

He could hear her sighing even as he finished that thought.

What now? He asked. Knowing she'd been sitting on this little comment for a while now, but hadn't wanted to interrupt his moment with Gin.

You. She said. I'd say you need to go to the fourth division, but I doubt even they can cure foot in mouth disease. He could feel her shake her head. Don't worry Gin, I've had a lot of practice giving others pleasure', she mocked. Such a stupid thing to say. And stop teasing the poor thing, for goodness sakes! Or you'll put him right off you.

He frowned at her. Sarcastic little witch.

Just because you know I'm right, she teased him, her tone haughty. He really wished she'd quit it with that high and mighty attitude of hers. Particularly where Gin was concerned. He was a master of chessplay, he knew what he was doing.

Yes, well, keep your opinions to yourself. He shot back. And I don't have foot in mouth disease.
She snickered a bit more at him.

*Oh, you do,* she answered, *you do.* But nonetheless, she obeyed, fading into sweet blissful silence. Though he knew there'd be no keeping her from truly expressing her opinions. With a frustrated sigh, he wondered fleetingly if Gin had an equally snarky sword spirit, but immediately dismissed the notion. No, his darling was perfect. No doubt he'd also have a perfectly obedient zanpaktou.

Much unlike his old *nag* of a sword spirit.

*I heard that,* she snapped.

*I don't care.* He sassed back at her, reaching for his pack of cigarettes on the coffee table, and his lighter. Taking one out of the pack, sticking it in his mouth and lighting it up. Inhaling the smoke deeply before breathing it out in a long, satisfied sigh, letting his frustrations with Kyouka Suigetsu melt away so he could focus on more pleasant matters. Like Gin. Because good gods, he'd needed a smoke after that experience of pleasing his Gin. It got him excited just thinking about it. Gin's quick wit at picking up the meaning of the gladiolus, the flush of heat and desire on those pale cheeks, those sensual moans... calling him 'Sousuke'...

He took another drag from his cigarette just so he could calm down and made his way into the garden. He tried to smoke outside these days because the smoke made everything in the house stink, and he didn't want his home to stink of cigarettes. A lesson learnt the hard way in his academy dorm that he didn't care to repeat.

He moved slowly through the house, though there was more than a little swagger in his walk as he went through to the kitchen and outside into the fresh air.

*Where are you taking him this evening, anyway?* Kyouka asked him, her curiosity roused too, now that she'd gotten her digs at him in.

*Ah,* he smiled, leaning against the wall by the back door with his cigarette in hand. *Now that's a surprise.*

... Gin closed the door of the bathroom behind him and locked it, and then let out a deep, satisfied sigh, his legs turning to jelly. He sank against the wood of the door, heart fluttering and giddy with excitement. An idiotic grin threatening to split his face apart even as he covered his face with his hands. He sighed happily again.

*Damn,* Gin grinned between his fingers, heat flooding his cheeks again at the thought of it *he's good with his hands.* Gin tried to suppress a giddy laugh. *An' he only had eyes for me.*

Shinsou snickered, feeling and joining in with his excitement. *Oh, he got you so turned on... best be careful else you really will end up in his bed before too long!*

Gin grinned, despite himself. Though he knew Shinsou was right. He had to be careful. One false step and his traitor of a body might just surrender itself a bit too willingly. Not that that was necessarily a bad thing, especially if it would feel like *that...* but he had to be rational. If he did that, he'd get nowhere and just go the way of all the others that man bedded.

*Yer right, yer right.* He breathed, *I gotta start bein' careful. Careful as I can anyway.*

He took several long, deep breaths to refocus and calm himself before he stripped off his dirty uniform. Risking a glance at his reflection in the mirror after he did so.
He was more than a little horrified at the sight.

Hickeys. Hickeys everywhere.

On his collarbones, on both sides of his neck... dark and purple and stark against his moon-pale skin. His eyes widened in horror. Oh gods... what would people say if they saw these, right after he left Sousuke's house?! His classmates... his teachers...

No, worse, what would Ran say about them? Good lord, he'd never hear the end of it!

More importantly, how was he going to hide them? It was the middle of spring, he couldn't exactly go about wearing a scarf... unless Cherry counted, which he was pretty sure she didn't. Not that anyone else but Aizen would let the fox into class with him. Well, Ukitake might, he had a soft spot for cute little critters... but the vast majority wouldn't.

He sucked in a breath through clenched teeth. "Sousuke you moron!" he hissed.

Immediately Shinsou commenced cackling. Oh, he marked you nicely, don't ya think Gin? 'property of Aizen Sousuke'.

Shut up! Gin snapped. This aint funny! What'm I gon' do 'bout these?!

Shinsou snickered some more, but offered no help. As expected. Gin decided there was nothing to it. A scarf it would have to be, unless he could borrow some of Ran's makeup to cover the more visible ones, because he sure as hell couldn't chalk them up to sparring bruises.

But there was nothing he could do about it now, so he just sighed, defeated for now, and used his time in the shower to wash off and try to think of a plausible story for his new hicckeys. Maybe he just might have to bring Cherry into class after all...

... When Gin emerged from the bathroom in his towel, he found a clean yukata waiting for him on the floor outside the bathroom. Another of Sousuke's. Gin took it into the bathroom, locked the door again, and changed into it. This one was smaller than the last one he'd borrowed, either a leftover from Sousuke's younger days or shrunk from washing. Gin suspected the former. It was a soft navy blue thing, clean and warm, and as Gin stared at himself in the mirror wearing it, he tried to imagine what the man might've looked like wearing it. A slightly younger Sousuke, a student like him perhaps, young and fresh and full of ideas. Dashingingly handsome, even back then. It struck Gin that people probably would have killed for a chance at him, even then.

Gin's thoughts returned to the present again, refocusing on his own reflection and his bruise littered neck. He pulled the garment around him; at least this borrowed yukata hid most of them. He had to suppose Aizen was thoughtful in his choice, knew the bruises were there and made his wardrobe choice accordingly in an attempt to cover the marks.

He sighed again and turned to leave the bathroom, feeling refreshed despite his latest predicament. And he was feeling more relaxed than he had in a while. Though he did wonder where Sousuke would take him after dinner this evening.

He returned to the living room, where he found Sousuke waiting for him. He was sitting and reading a book, with the hair pushed off his face, wearing a casual black yukata. He wasn't wearing his glasses, though, which surprised Gin. Didn't he need those to read? But then again, he hadn't worn them when he read his music sheets before, so maybe he was just short sighted and didn't need them for reading.
Gin marvelled at how at ease he looked. How calm. Serene almost. How approachable. Until he sensed he was being watched and his mask slid firmly back into place again.

Gin couldn't help feeling a bit disappointed when it did.

"Ah, Gin," he smiled, still looking at his book, "I've been waiting for..."

And then the man looked up at him, and Gin heard Aizen's voice die off and saw the man try and gather his thoughts together again. As if his mere presence made them scatter and fall apart in his head.

"You look..." Aizen smiled broadly at him. A giddy, stupid and very out of place thing on his face. But Gin thought it endearing. The fool was like a schoolboy with the biggest crush. "You look amazing."

Gin couldn't help but flush at the compliment and give a shy little smile. "Thanks." he answered, "So ah... ya ready ta go?"

He watched Sousuke quietly gather his thoughts up and bundle them together, the intelligence once again returning to those expressive chocolate eyes. "Of course," the man answered him, closing his book and setting it on the coffee table before standing. He reached his hand out to Gin and gave a soft smile. Offering Gin his hand again.

"Shall we?"

Gin didn't hesitate in stepping forward and taking hold of that hand, the shy smile still on his face, and the both of them set out into the evening air.
Chapter 21: Your Roots are Showing

They held hands as they walked down the street, and it filled Gin with an odd mixture of giddiness, excitement, and pride at this outward show of unity. Of affection. Okay, there wasn't anyone else around to see it – at least not anyone who mattered, or even cared – but still. Just the fact that Gin was saying, without any words, Aizen Sousuke belonged to him, made him feel electric. Powerful. And for the first time since it all began, Gin felt as if he actually deserved all the compliments the man had given him. He felt Aizen's attention shift onto him, and risked a glance up at the older man, catching sight of one of the most tender, heartwarming smiles he'd ever seen. Even Ran's beautiful motherly smiles when she watched his pet fox Cherry sleep in his arms couldn't compare.

He wondered then what Sousuke would make of his baby Cherry, whom everyone couldn't help but love, and had to smile at the possibilities. If Sousuke would try to act indifferent towards her, and cuddle the fox in his arms like a teddy bear when he thought nobody was watching. Gin
smiled at the thought. Yes, it definitely seemed like something he'd do.

"What are you thinking about?" Aizen's calm voice interrupted his thinking, gently pulling Gin's mind back to the present moment.

"Huh?" Gin blinked.

"You had the dreamiest smile on your face just now." Aizen smirked at him, and heat rushed up into Gin's face again. "What were you thinking about?"

"Oh." Gin began, certain his cheeks were still a bright pink. "I was just thinkin' 'bout wha' one a me friends migh' make a ya." he explained, "Ya know, if ya'd get on or not. If... ya know, this goes anywhere..."

Gin glanced away in a vain attempt to hide his pink cheeks, but he wasn't able to disguise the hesitancy or shyness in his voice. But if Aizen picked up on it, he gave it no mention.

"It seems you want me to meet this friend of yours." Sousuke smiled at him, and Gin caught the warmth of it in his chocolate eyes. Caught the hints of excitement there. Was it possible Sousuke wanted to meet his Che-Che?

"Well, she's more like me fam'ly really." Gin admitted, still somewhat shy. A part of him wasn't really sure if he should be talking about this; it might be used against him later down the line. But a bigger part of him, the one that wanted everyone important to him to get along, the part that loved Cherry, wanted to gush about her to Sousuke forever. Yet he still couldn't forget the game they were playing, either. It was a tough thing to try and balance the need for his little pack to be harmonious and the need for subtlety in this game of chess he was playing with Aizen. Both had to be kept in check. And then there was his love for Cherry, whom he'd raised from a pup himself. That might be the toughest thing of all to keep in check.

Gin studied Aizen's face for answers. Reasoning with himself that the older man did seem genuinely excited at the prospect of meeting one of his friends.

Gin shrugged. What the hell? Why not? There was really no harm in at least mentioning Cherry to him and gauging his reaction to her.

"Ah," Sousuke smiled, "So like Rangiku-san."

"Yeah, like Ran." Gin agreed. "So it's important ta me you two get along. "An' like Ran, she can be a bit..." Gin paused, thinking of all the mischievous things his Cherry-chan could get up to if left to her own devices. Destroying things, chewing things to pieces, rifling through bins, stealing things... Kuchiki's koi, mostly. "Troublesome."

Sousuke laughed then, light and amused. "Gin, I think if I can handle Rangiku and her antics, I'll be able to handle whatever trouble your friend throws at me."

Gin averted his gaze again, just to avoid the intensity of Sousuke's eyes. It was true, he realised, unable to help the smile spreading across his face. Sousuke had dealt with Rangiku and her gatecrashing their first date remarkably well. Maybe he'd be just as open to Cherry.

"Yeah, I'm sure ya can." Gin agreed softly, keenly aware that Aizen's eyes were on him, watching quietly. Studying him and all his little reactions. Storing them for future reference.

"You really care about her, don't you?" Sousuke asked, voice quiet and curious. "This friend."
Gin blinked at the question, surprised. Almost brought to a stop mid-stride because of it. *Almost.*

"O’ course!" he blurted out. "*Wasn’t that obvious? She’s me family." *She’s me family an’ I love her a lot.*

He winced at the sound of his own voice. How argumentative and indignant he sounded. But Aizen's soft gaze never faltered. Not for a second.

"If that's the case," Aizen ventured gently, "Then I'd love to meet her."

Heat rushed up into Gin's entire face at that declaration. Something else so important that the man said so casually. Gin couldn't quite believe it. Had Sousuke just outright said he wanted to meet Cherry? Did he hear that right?

"You would?" he asked. A stupid, giddy, face-splitting grin *plastered* on his face.

"Yes," Sousuke answered. "I would. She seems very important to you, and I want to meet all the important people in your life."

Gin could hear Shinsou snickering quietly at his childish levels of excitement over such a little thing, but he was far too happy to care.

"Really?" he asked again. Still incredulous. Still not quite believing his ears.

"Of course." Sousuke smiled softly, warmly, at him, and he felt himself melting. And finally, before his knees could go weak at the sight of that smile, Gin let himself believe it. His thoughts immediately filling with visions of Sousuke meeting his Cherry, both getting along famously. 'Like a house on fire', as Ran would say.

Sousuke watched, with equal parts fascination and giddiness, as Gin's smile widened. He'd never seen a smile so wide! Whoever this friend of his was, she clearly meant an awful lot to his Gin. He had to give a smile of his own, too, when his darling's cheeks flushed that lovely shade of pink he liked again. He was certainly curious now as to who on earth could make his Gin turn that delightful colour apart from him.

"What's her name?" he asked.

Gin's smile softened. "Cherry."

He nodded. And Gin blushed again. Indeed, this Cherry must be someone special. Though a small part of him did hope very fervently she wouldn't become a rival for his Gin's heart and replace him.

"Oh, now I *really* want to meet her," he teased, "if she makes you turn that lovely shade of pink I like and makes you smile so much."

Gin's gorgeous red eyes glanced up at him, as if he were realising Sousuke was still there, still watching him, and he got to see that lovely blush deepen and creep further down Gin's neck. He smirked, deciding to turn on the charm offensive and initiate a little teasing. Because his Gin was *most* bewitching when he was stumbling all over himself for words with his face flushed pink like that.

"I hope I won't have her as a rival for your affections," Sousuke teased, smirking. Although after a beat of silence passed, instead of the reaction he'd anticipated – Gin stumbling over himself to
reassure him that wouldn't be the case – his darling Gin just burst into a fit of laughter.

He frowned. This was... not what he'd been hoping for.

"What are you laughing at?"

"Oh, gods," He raised a hand to his forehead brushing his silver hair out of his eyes. "Oh gods, yer... yer too much... ya..." Gin broke into another peal of laughter. Sounding like someone were tickling him.

"What?" Okay. Now he was irritated. This wasn't funny.

"I's just..." Gin tried to stifle his laughter, without much success. It actually took him quite a few attempts before he even remotely calmed down. "It aint nothin' like that." he said, gasping for breath as his laughter quieted. "Ya migh' 'ave her as a rival, bu' no' th' way yer expectin'." Gin explained.

"So... explain."

He waited as Gin took another breath and recomposed himself. "Cherry..." he began, searching for the right words. Probably trying to think of the least offensive way he could phrase it. "Ya see, Cherry-chan's me pet fox."

That gave Aizen pause. He hadn't been expecting that answer.

"Oh." he said. Only able to stare stupidly at Gin and listen to Kyouka giggling at him inside his mind.

Boy. Don't you feel silly? She teased him, snickering quietly through her fingers as if she'd already known this information the whole time.

Shut up. He snapped back. True, he hadn't been expecting Gin to say that, of all things. But what was he supposed to expect?

How was I supposed to know he had a pet?

She sighed. You should really start paying more attention, Sousuke. Kyouka chimed. Most times, that fox is all he talks about.

Sousuke shrugged her comment off. Because of course he'd been paying attention. When hadn't he been paying attention? He wanted to counter her, say something to argue his case – but his curiosity won out and he turned his attention back to Gin again.

"What kind of fox is she?" he asked, making Gin's expression morph from one of amusement at his expense into a more thoughtful one.

"Ya know, I dun really know." Gin admitted. "I've never really thought 'bout it. All's I know is, she's white, she's got bright blue eyes, an' er fur's real soft. An' she likes cuddles."

Gin's cheeks coloured a light pink again at the addition of that last one on his list. And Sousuke couldn't help but smile at the image of his Gin snuggling a cute, white, fluffy fox that sprang to his mind. He closed his eyes for just a moment, to try and hold onto the image.

"What're ya doin'?" Gin's voice asked. He opened his eyes, back in reality once again, and allowed himself a gentler smile.
"Just trying to get a picture." he told Gin, who just smiled shyly back at him.

"Ya can meet 'er later, if ya want." Gin offered softly. "After we have dinner an'... go wherever we're goin'. If she aint already 'sleep. She gets real grouchy if I wake 'er up."

Sousuke fought the urge to laugh at this. *Hm, I wonder where she might have got that from...* he wanted to tease. But something told him now wasn't the time. That he'd already teased Gin enough for now, so he simply looked at Gin and smiled again.

"I'd like that." he answered softly. "I'd like that very much."

Gin didn't say anything to that, choosing only to gently squeeze his hand a little tighter and run a soft thumb over the back of his hand affectionately. Aizen was so happy at this new progress, he didn't *once* make any mention of the pink colour of Gin's face. Much to his zanpaktou's approval. He heard her sigh dreamily, asking him softly, happily, *why can't you be like this all the time, Sousuke?*

A question which, of course, he ignored. Because there were much more interesting things he could focus on. And he didn't have nearly *enough* alcohol in his system for that level of introspection. And because Kyouka of all beings knew his answer already.

"Come on," he said, shaking the question from his mind, gently pulling Gin alone. "The place we're going closes soon, and we need to get dinner before we get there."

Gin smirked up at him. "What? Still no hints?"

"No, still no hints." he smirked back. "But you're clever," he added, a hint of mischief in his voice. "I'm sure you'll work it out. Now, where do you want to eat?"

Gin looked thoughtful again, but shrugged. "Dunno. Can we jus' troll around til we find somewhere we like?"

Sousuke had to smile at the hopefulness in the question. Suspecting Gin just wanted to keep walking about holding his hand. Not that he was complaining. "I don't see why not." he answered, looking down at his Gin again. "Shall we?"

Gin nodded and dutifully followed his lead into town. A ridiculous grin on his face.

... By the time they'd arrived in town, it was well into the early evening, and as usual the town centre was bustling with people.

"Uhm... Sou..." Gin's uncertain voice drifted into his ears, sounding shaky and anxious. It was then that Aizen noticed Gin looking nervous and generally uncomfortable, with one hand on his neck as if he were rubbing it. He was confused for a moment, until he realised.

"Ah, yes. The hickeys.* My marks of possession.*

Gin nodded. Sousuke just smiled. *You don't want anyone to see them, do you? You want it to be our little secret.*

*Interesting you aren't like any of the others, who like to broadcast that I've pleasured their bodies.*

Thankfully he knew just the solution.
"Come with me." he said, and led Gin by the hand through the street to a shop he knew well. "I know a place."

The shop door opened with the tinkling of a little bell, and Gin followed Sousuke inside.

"Alright," Sousuke asked him, now in the silence of the shop. "First of all, what's your favourite colour."

"Blue." Gin answered shyly. And certain now that everyone was staring at him. Staring at the marks on his neck and collarbones and judging him. Stop looking at me! I know I'm an eyesore! I know!

"Oh," Sousuke smiled at him. "Blue's my favourite, too."

Gin smiled. Grateful Sousuke was continuing as normal, so he didn't feel so self conscious. Yeah, I know it is.

"Alright, you wait here," Sousuke told him, "I'll be right back."

Gin wanted to grab onto his sleeve and plead with him. No, no don't leave. If you go they'll just stare at me! But instead he just nodded. Whatever Aizen wanted to do he supposed it was to help him. And with that Aizen left to venture further into the shop and left Gin to wait for him.

Aizen walked along the rack in search of what he sought. "Hm, let's see... blue... blue..."

You're going through an awful amount of effort for him. Kyouka said simply. Are you quite sure you're still playing, now?

Aizen snorted as he stood and searched the rack for a suitable choice. Of course I am. I want him to trust me. How can he trust me if I leave him feeling self-conscious? Besides, I want him to feel comfortable.

Liar, she hissed. You want to look after him and love the boy forever.

Sousuke sighed. She was stubborn as ever. If you say so. But saying such a thing on only the second date is a bit creepy, yes?

He took a great amount of satisfaction at her answering pout and sigh. I suppose, she said, begrudgingly admitting he was right. He intended to savour this moment. She did not often cede defeat to him in these petty arguments.

Ah, this one looks perfect. He mused, holding up the fabric to the light. What do you think?

He felt her study it, assessing it with her critical eye. He considered letting her feel it in her fingers, knowing she was a fine seamstress and had a feel for quality. But it wasn't necessary.

It's perfect. She told him. And the moons and stars on it are quite apt as a gift for the moon of your lif-

Ah, let's not get too far ahead of ourselves, shall we? He cut her off, taking much joy out of her indignant silence as he smiled and took his intended purchase to the counter, where his Gin was
waiting for him. It's not like I love him or anything.

He heard her bark out a harsh laugh. You know you're not fooling anyone, right? Kyouka asked him. Again, he ignored her. Not wanting to rise to her bait.

He had better things to do.

. . .

Gin watched curiously as the man paid for the item. Being careful to keep it out of his view as much as possible. Which only inflamed his curiosity. Once the thing was paid for and they exited the shop, Aizen stood with him outside in a quieter street without any people. Aizen turned to face him.

"Close your eyes."

Gin sighed and obeyed him, and soon after felt the weight of a light, soft cotton being gently wrapped around his neck. And for just a moment he was rendered wordless by the man's thoughtfulness.

The scarf itself was Midnight blue, with a moon and stars on it, with lines depicting the various constellations. And Gin lifted up a hand to touch it, stunned. Grateful. Touched. The man had such wonderful taste, though he couldn't have known Gin enjoyed looking up at the stars and studying the constellations.

It was beautiful.

It was from him.

And couldn't have been more perfect.

I am wearing a nighttime sky, he thought.

"Is this better?" Sousuke asked him, and Gin had to swallow to find his voice. A wondrous gasp escaping him. You have given me the stars. "Yes." he breathed. He knew he was blushing furiously now, but he didn't care. For once, he didn't care. "Th-tha-thankya."

Sousuke smiled and took his hand, slowly lifting it up and pressing a soft kiss to the back of his hand. Gin was grateful Aizen ignored his stammer, the heat in his face, just... everything really.

"It's my pleasure, I want you to be comfortable." Aizen told him. And then, after a second, asked somewhat nervous and hopeful, "Do you like it?"

Gin paused, smiling, eventually finding his voice. "I love it."

I'll treasure it forever.

And then Sousuke smiled at him and Gin thought he might truly melt into a puddle on the floor.

. . .

After leaving the street and heading back into the crowds again, with Gin feeling a hell of a lot more comfortable now his marks were well covered, the two of them ventured further into town in search of food. Apparently a sort of food market had sprung up overnight, with people selling all sorts of cooked foods. For a moment, Aizen wasn't sure what was going on. But thankfully Gin was
quicker on the uptake and knew instantly what this all was.

"Oh," Gin gasped, surprised. "This must be tha' food festival thing Ran was tellin' me 'bout. I didn' know this was today." he paused only to deeply inhale the smells of various foods being cooked. Sniffing the air like a dog... or a fox.

*Oh my dear,* he smirked. *Your roots are showing so adorably now.*

"Oh, this takes me back..." Gin sighed, overcome with a wave of nostalgia. "'course I couldn' 'ford anythin' then, but..."

Aizen watched Gin as his voice trailed off, watched him grow aware he was being observed and try to cover his embarrassment at his Rukongai roots showing themselves. Watched his Gin's face flame pink again as he cleared his throat and tried to force his cute blush away.

"I mean," Gin corrected himself, "We can get somethin' from here. It's cheap, it's good food and we can eat it fast or on the move."

Gin smiled, seemingly pleased with both his suggestion and how he'd covered his embarrassment. "What do you think, Sou?"

Aizen stood, taking him in for a moment. Pretending to think the suggestion over. Though really he was just using it as a cover so he could enjoy looking at Gin some more. Smiling all happy like that, Rukon through and through, though he tried not to show it. It was a sight he wanted to savour. Though he was trying to ignore Kyouka snickering at Gin's use of 'Sou' to address him and going on about how cute it was.

*He's cute when he's trying to impress you, Sousuke.* She sighed softly, once her snickering had died down. Aizen only smiled indulgently.

*He is, isn't he?*

"I think that's a marvellous idea," he agreed finally. "Let's start walking and see if anything catches our eyes." he paused for a moment, before playfully adding, "Or more realistically, our noses."

Gin blushed prettily again for him, no doubt remembering the way he's sniffed the air and all that delicious food cooking. But Sousuke decided he wouldn't make any mention of it. Not this time, anyway. Plenty of time for that later. Instead, he just chuckled at Gin's hesitance to move.

"Come on," he said, gently coaxing Gin onwards and into the crowded marketplace. "Let me know if you see anything you want to try."

With that encouragement, Gin grinned and walked with him, full of excitement at the prospect of so much food. And, Aizen assumed, finally being able to afford some of it instead of having it dangled in front of him, always just out of reach unless he stole it. Gin turned to him and grabbed his wrist.

"I wanna taste everythin'." he said eagerly. Looking so much like an excited child in a sweet shop.

"Everything?" Aizen asked, smiling down at him, amused.

"Everythin'." Gin echoed. And Aizen had to chuckle at him.

"You best pace yourself then. There's a lot of food here," he said teasingly. Though Gin paid him no notice, far too captivated by the sight and smell of cooking food around them.
"C'mon, Sousuke," Gin called out, dragging him by the wrist into the market, lured in by all the wonderful smells and foods. Pulling his wrist when he didn't move as fast as he would like. "Let's go! C'mon!"

Sousuke chuckled again and let himself be led among the stalls, keeping a keen eye on Gin, who was drooling as he stared at all that food.

"Alright, alright, I'm coming, Gin." he answered, a smile still on his lips at Gin's eagerness to taste all the food the market had to offer. "You don't have to drag me."

... 

Gin pulled Sousuke on through the stalls, sniffing the air. Oh, there was so much food! He didn't know where to start. Should he have the stir fry first, or the stew? What about the dumplings? Or the fried chicken? or- or-

Gin was just aimlessly wandering through the stalls, trying to decide what to eat first when he heard his stomach growl. Loudly. A sound immediately followed by Aizen's chuckling.

Again, heat rushed to his face and his cheeks coloured.

"I guess you really must be hungry." Aizen teased, and Gin could feel his face grow even hotter.

"A bit..." Gin answered, turning his face away so he didn't look at the older man directly. "Jus' dunno what kinda food ta start with."

Aizen chuckled again, a little more kindly this time. "Ah, I guess the choice is a little overwhelming." he said gently.

Gin nodded his agreement. "Just a bit."

He looked up then to see Aizen smiling gently at him, and for just a moment Gin thought his traitorous body would make its knees go weak at the sight of that smile.

"I think I can help," Aizen said, softly, gently prising Gins hand off his wrist and holding it in his own. Making Gin's face dangerously hot and red and in true fear of his knees giving out under him. The moths in his belly going absolutely crazy at the simple action.

"Come with me, I come to this thing every year. Let me show you my favourite food."

"Oh," Gin replied quietly. Not trusting himself to say much else. "Okay."

He curled his fingers around Aizen's and saw the man's smile reach his chocolate eyes. And Gin was struck with an intense desire to follow that smile to the ends of the earth. Wherever the man led him, if only he could see that smile one more time.

Gin smiled gratefully and let himself be led, thankful he'd be spared the difficult choice of what to taste first. Suddenly curious about what Sousuke's favourite food was.

"Lead the way."

...

Sousuke had to keep glancing over at Gin, just to see the look of fascinated curiosity he wore. "You're not going to ask about it?" he asked Gin teasingly.
Gin just shook his head. "Nah. Wanna be surprised."

He had to smile at that. *Ah, so you like surprises*, he mused to himself. *That's good to know.*

"Well," he grinned over at Gin again as they waded through the crows of people. "I hope you'll like it. It's one of my favourite things in the world. And they only make it here."

Now it was Gin's turn to grin over at him. "That why ya keep comin' back every year?" he asked, a little mischief creeping into his smile, and his voice. He was certainly pleased; Gin was definitely learning ways to intrigue him.

"It's one of the reasons," Sousuke admitted. Eyes leaving Gin's momentarily to scan the stalls around them for the one he was looking for. It didn't help that they all changed locations in the market every year. He suspected it was a ploy to make people walk around more in search of their favourites, and thus tempt them into buying other things.

"Ya found it yet?" Gin asked him, when they'd been searching a while.

"I'm looking for it." he answered, still walking and scanning the stalls, ignoring the people around them. Until, at last, his eyes landed on his target.

"Aha!" he grinned, unable to hide his excitement. "Found it!"

He heard Kyouka snort at his childish excitement. But he ignored her, too entranced by the lure of his favourite food.

"Ya have?" Gin blinked up at him. Aizen's smile just beamed brighter. He knew he should probably be a little more reserved, particularly in front of Gin – he didn't want to come across as too eager, after all. And such a simple little thing like food should not cause these levels of excitement. But tasting this particular dish was something he looked forward to all year. Particularly as it was a dish he couldn't replicate, even with all his intelligence. He just couldn't get the right balance of flavour no matter how hard he tried. He'd even tried to pry the recipe out of the woman who owned the stall, had used all his tricks and methods of flattery and seduction, and been rebuffed at every turn. So in the end he had to concede to the fact that the recipe was a secret she'd take to her grave. Telling himself a bowl of stew just wasn't worth the effort.

It was a shame, too. It was one of the things about his past he quite enjoyed.

"Yes, it's here." Sousuke answered, "Come on, it's good. I think you'll like it."

And with that he practically dragged Gin towards the stall, practically bouncing with enthusiasm while Gin ran just to keep up with his long legs.

Kyouka just giggled at him. *Now whose roots are showing so adorably?* she teased playfully.

*Shut up.* He answered back.

... 

Gin was nearly pulled off his feet when the man moved again, making a beeline for one of the stalls nearby. *Wow, he's certainly excited! Must be some damn good food to get him this excited.*

But Gin was even more surprised when the familiar smell hit his nostrils. *Oh*, he grinned, just as excited as Sousuke now. *Oh, is that what I think I smell?*
Shinsou snickered at their shared excitement. *I don't know,* he teased. *Best go and find out.*

So that's exactly what Gin did. He trotted obediently after Aizen and towards that very delightful, nostalgic smell. His grin widening enough it might split his face apart as Aizen led him straight to the source of the smell.

*Oh my gods, it is! It really is!* Gin wanted so badly to squeal out his excitement, he was so happy. But he restrained himself. He didn't want Aizen to think him weird, getting too ridiculously excited over it. For crying out loud, it was only *food.* Food shouldn't warrant this much excitement. Even *if* he were Rukon.

Aizen manoeuvred them through the people to the front of the stall, and much to Gin's sheer delight, he saw a big batch of stew and dumplings sitting in a giant cooking pot on top of a portable stove.

"Well, here we are." Aizen's voice broke through his giddiness, and he looked up to see the man smiling brightly. "This is my favourite food in all the world. They sold it on the streets where I grew up."

Gin took note of his face and his words, and quickly returned his attention to the thick stew and dumplings. Eyes trained on the thick gravy all the meat and vegetables were mixed up in, the dumplings floating on the top. And though he knew they were playing a game still, Gin didn't lie when he spoke next after a breathless sigh, grinning from ear to ear.

"Oh, it's mine, too."

... Aizen's interest piqued. Well, *this* was certainly news. "Oh. It is?" he asked stupidly.

Kyouka just snorted in his mind again. *Oh, don't act so surprised. It's really not news at all. You know where he grew up with his friend. It's not that much of a coincidence you two came from the same place. Albeit some decades apart...* He caught Gin's dreamlike smile as he deeply inhaled the scent of the wonderful stew.

"Oh, yes... it is." Gin sighed. "Oh, I aint 'ad this in years! I didn' think anyone here made it. Did' think you'd be familiar with it though."

"I told you, there's a lot you don't know about me." he said. Gin grinned up at him.

"Guess we got somethin' in common."

Aizen had to smile at his Gin, getting so excited over such little things like this. "I guess we do."

*Oh please,* Kyouka snarked again. *Like you were any better when you found the Rukongai stew again.*

Aizen tried not to cringe at her comment and refocused his attention onto Gin, who was still ridiculously giddy about the stew, and the fact they now shared something in common. He'd let Gin enjoy it. After all, he had been the same, and he didn't want to detract from his darling's joy. He did so love to see that smile.

"Oh, I haven't had this since me Rukon days," Gin sighed. "It were one a the better things about that place. If ya could get it, that was. Though I always made sure Ran got some first."
He had to smile at his darling Gin, being all cute and excited like that, and with a smile so large it spread ear to ear as he asked with a small, hopeful voice, "Can I really have some, Sousuke?"

His own smile softened, melted into something gentler at the disbelief of the once-chronically-hungry he understood all too well. "You can have as much as you like."

Gin laughed, then. Light and amused and musical to his ears. "I dun think ya got enough dough on ya ta pay fer the whole damn cookin' pot!" he grinned. "But thanks."

He smirked at that and leant down, speaking quietly into Gin's ear. Two conspirators sharing a secret. "Or we could steal it."

Gin gave him an impish smile that promised mischief. Sharing the feeling. Because oh, what fun it would be to get back to their shared roots, if just for an evening...

"We could..." he said, "Best not, though."

"Yes," Sousuke agreed, "Best not. Not today anyway. "Come on," he laughed, "Let's get a bowl before everyone else eats it all."

He grinned again and manoeuvred them to the front of the queue, where they could see the stall owner was a woman around his age, with dark hair and bright eyes.

"Yuki!" he called out. Immediately she frowned.

"For the last time, Sousuke, you aint getting the recipe for the stew so stop trying already."

He laughed again, a little louder. "Actually I'm here with someone, so I don't have time to try and wheedle it out of you today."

"Oh, good." she retorted, "I get a break, then."

He smiled at her. "Just this once." he told her. "I'll just get two bowls today, please."

Yuki nodded and started filling bowls for both him and Gin. "So, you with someone special today?" she asked. And despite himself, his smile softened again.

"You could say that." he said, smiling down at Gin, who was flushing that wonderful shade of pink at his comment.

Yuki nodded in agreement, looking at Gin standing beside him. "He must be special." she said, "You don't bring just anyone here for your favourite stew. Actually you don't bring anyone here for your favourite stew. Here you go."

She handed him the bowls of stew, which he then passed to Gin. "Go find us a table while I pay for these." he ordered Gin. Watching as his future lover and second in command nodded.

"'Kay." Gin said, and weaved his way through the cluster of wooden benches nearby to find a vacant one for them to sit and eat together.

"He's cute." Yuki smiled at him, once Gin had disappeared.

He had to smile. He just couldn't help himself. "He is, isn't he?"

"You better not mess him up, Sousuke." his smile just widened into a half-smirk, despite the warning in her tone.
"My dear," he drawled, handing her the money for the stew. "I wouldn't dream of it."

. . .

Gin sat at one of the benches, waiting for Sousuke to come and join him. Impatient to dig into the stew. But he knew he should wait so they could eat together, so he fought his urge. It was difficult, though. The stew smelled so good. Where was Sousuke anyway?

He best hurry up, it'll get cold. And eaten.

He kept scanning the crowd, keeping a careful watch over their bowls of stew, that had not once left his hands even when he set them down on the bench. It was silly; he knew nobody here would try and take it from him, but habits developed in the Rukongai districts were hard to break. And besides, one couldn't be too careful. Even here, there were miscreants. Himself and Sousuke not included, of course. Though they were miscreants. Well, former miscreants... supposedly.

Thankfully he didn't have to wait long for Sousuke to show up and sit opposite him. Gin smiled and gently pushed one of the bowls of stew across the table to him.

"Here. I guarded it for you." he said. Trying not to wince at his roots showing again. But Sousuke made no mention of it. He understood what it was like. How long it took for old habits to die. Instead, Sousuke just smiled at him like he were the best thing that'd come into his long, dull life.

"Thankyou, Gin." he said softly. At which Gin gave him a shy smile and slid a spoon across the table to him, too.

"Yer welcome. Now eat it 'fore it gets cold."

Sousuke laughed, and the both of them dug in.
First emotions of love

Chapter Notes

a/n: So I had a lazy saturday in to rest, and decided to get this one typed up before I return to the crazy detective evidence board that is the [revised] Heir story plan and resume the pacing and making plot calculations and fleshing the skellies that are older chs – instead of putting my feet up. I think I reheated my cup of tea into oblivion before I drank it typing this, which took all day. Note to self: learn how to relax and drink tea while it is hot.

notes: Happyfluffy, sappyshippy. Kissing. Fun. Nakedness. Sensuality near the end [alluded to in Heir 81 that should escape the revision unaltered]. Icebergs of Realness in the Falsehood Sea. First emotions of love. Sly happy “I Love” echoes if you know what to look for. Written while listening to YusukeKira's songs 'magical night', 'piece of art', 'games', and remix of Kim Pertas 'heart to break'.

When you're done with this, please go read my packmates and series collaborators Timewaster123456789, GanymedeLullaby99, SesshomaruFreak. And check out my illustrator moon--shield.deviantart.com.

Chapter 22: First emotions of love

"So how'd ya meet Yuki?" Gin asked, his voice soft and full of curiosity, and without a hint of jealousy. Which took Sousuke by surprise.

He had sat down to enjoy both his stew and present company, expecting Gin to be feeling some level of jealousy over his closeness to Yuki. It wouldn't have been abnormal, or the first time one of his lovers expressed displeasure when he showed interest – even purely platonic interest – in someone else. Probably because to all of them, he was easy to get, and therefore too easy to lose. He'd expected Gin to be the same; fighting tooth and nail to cling to what tenuous connection they had. So when Gin only smiled and slid his bowl of stew across the table to him, needless to say he was a little surprised. Pleasantly so. And then when Gin had guarded his stew and kept it safe for him, that warmth had spread through his body again, originating from his chest, filling up his heartspace. Because he knew what it meant to have someone guard your food for you. He understood the trust and loyalty of such an action. Ever since he'd met Yuki, growing up in the outer Rukongai districts, he'd come to appreciate having trust in someone and having them trust you in return.

To have Gin give such a deep level of trust and loyalty so freely... well, he hadn't any words for that, apart from 'thankyou'. But even that felt like too inadequate a word. Particularly since he of all people knew how rare it was to find genuine trust and affection, being surrounded his whole life by liars and self serving rats masquerading as people. Present company and Yuki excluded, of course.

So instead he just took his spoon and ate his stew, quietly working out some way he could repay this. After all, Gin hardly knew him. They were just starting to get to know each other. They were still working on establishing trust – or at least he was, he couldn't speak for Gin. And what did they
really know about each other anyway? He reasoned. Gin would've been excused from guarding his stew, for those reasons alone. Gin didn't have to guard his food... 

But just the fact that Gin had, as if he were always an integral part of his life... well, that was something to hold onto. Gin was someone to hold onto. He smiled to himself as he dug into his stew.

"Rukongai," he answered, smiling at the thought of his friend and because Gin just seemed to keep on surprising him. "It's a funny story, actually."

"Tell me?" Gin smiled.

"We were both kids at the time. Hiding, waiting to steal some stew from a stall owner. Anyway, we both hid in the same spot and as Rukon kids do, we squabbled over who had first rights to the hiding spot."

He paused to let Gin snicker a bit, no doubt imagining him as a younger, much more mouthy version of himself. "Can we steal some stew sometime?" Gin asked sweetly.

"It can be arranged," he smiled indulgently. "But let me finish the story. So, we squabbled, and after a bit of arguing, we decided we'd work better together. Of course, we reached that decision after we'd been spotted, and nearly arrested by a couple of passing shinigami. So we made a quick dash, grabbed what stew we could before the irate stall owner chased us away."

He had to laugh at the memory, and was pleased Gin laughed along with him.

"And well," he continued, "We've been close ever since. Of course we didn't have much time together when I became a shinigami, but... we spoke when we could."

He paused, looked up, waited for the inevitable question of 'were you two ever together?'. For the implication that more happened between him and Yuki than it did – but it never came. Instead, Gin's smile was soft and gentle.

"Ya care 'bout 'er a lot, don'tcha?" Gin asked. And he nodded in answer.

"The way you do about Rangiku."

Gin nodded at that and Sousuke hoped inwardly it would negate any doubts Gin had nagging at him about his friendship with Yuki being more than just a friendship. Because he still had to gain Gin's trust and he couldn't do that if there were any doubts inside Gin's mind. But Gin seemed to take the hint when he'd made the comparison of himself and Yuki to Gin and Rangiku, so it seemed he was safe there. It was also a weight off his shoulders. This game would be difficult enough as it was, without all these issues complicating matters.

It was a relief when Gin's smile brightened again, his darling eager to hear more.

"Tell me about her." Gin said to him. To which he just grinned somewhat boyishly and obliged. Launching into a series of anecdotes about him and Yuki surviving the perils of living in the Rukongai. Stealing, eating, living together. Looking out for each other. Guarding each other from the night. Telling the stories he thought would make Gin laugh, which they did. With Gin interjecting every so often with a similar story involving himself and Rangiku. The two of them enjoying a steady stream of easy conversation. Punctuated by smiles and laughter that came easily to both of them.

...
Gin watched him eat the stew with equal parts affection and fascination as they conversed. He had to smile at his companion in between spoonfuls. He'd never seen the man so happy. And a part of him began wondering how he could keep that smile on Sousuke's face, because it was just so genuinely charming when the light and warmth of feeling actually reached his eyes and for a few brief moments Aizen Sousuke shone brighter than the sun and all the stars in the galaxy combined as he chatted and laughed. It truly warmed his heart to see it. More so because it really felt like catching sight of a brilliantly white iceberg floating on what Gin could only describe as a sea of falsehood he'd been swimming in so far.

*Yeh, tha's what I want.* Gin thought. *Keep smilin' like that, cuz it warms me heart right up.*

His gaze flitted up to meet those gorgeous eyes again, and he felt that familiar warmth spread through his chest again, steadily working its way outwards until it reached his extremities. And when Sousuke smiled at him, all warmth and softness, and something akin to love, Gin thought his heart might just burst. His face hurt from all his smiling, too. This, he decided. *This* was what he wanted. To just spend eternity inside moments like this. Talking, laughing, smiling together over mundane things like the stew. Telling jokes, sharing stories. Gin wanted every day to be like this. Wanted to share every day with this man. Even though it was a bit of a pipe dream at this point.

He was so happy, so caught up in the moment, the lighthearted conversation, in hearing about Sousuke's past escapades with Yuki growing up on the Rukongai streets the way he had grown up with Ran – that when he reached across the table and settled his hand on Sousuke's, he was struck by just how natural and right the gesture felt.

He felt Sousuke's gaze shift away and land on their connected hands before returning to his face again. As if he were surprised by the gentle contact. Gin smiled at him again, softly. Warmly. Curling his fingers around the older man's hand and watching his smile return at the gentle squeeze.

*Yeh, Gin thought again. Keep smilin' like that. You're like the sun when ya smile like that.*

"So?" Gin prompted, when he'd lapsed into silence. "What happened next?"

...  

He hadn't seen it coming.

He'd just launched into a new story, about the time he and Yuki foolishly challenged a bear over the rights to the honey in a beehive in the woods at the edge of their district. He'd laughed, giddy with the memory of it. Yuki shouting at the great lump of a bear, him having to drag her away running from the charging, snarling beast when she decided to throw rocks at it. He was so involved in the story and the stew and the moment and Gin's rapt attention being focused solely on him and not who he pretended to be for the whole damn world, he'd quite forgotten he was a lieutenant, a shinigami, and that left unchecked, his thoughts tended to wander to dark places. He was simply Aizen Sousuke, enjoying some quality time with his new interest. His new partner. He let his mind taste the word. Partner, yes, partner, that seemed to fit Gin best. He was just listening to Kyouka softly agreeing with this line of thinking – *ah so, now you're getting it, Sousuke* – when he felt the warmth of Gin's hand on his. And the whole world seemed to stop spinning.

*He hadn't seen it coming.*

The shock and suddenness of Gin's hand on his. The rush of warmth filling his heartspace and headspace and every other space in between.
It took a moment for his brain to register it, but after that, he was grinning like an idiot.

"So?" Gin said, and he realised then that he must have been quiet for some time. "What happened next?"

And slowly the world resumed spinning at its usual pace.

Sousuke shook his head and forced his mind back into the present moment again, trying to ignore his zanpaktou's snickering.

"Ah, right," he said, and finished telling the rest of the story. All the while being keenly aware of Gin's eyes on him, and having his full attention. And almost hyperaware that Gin's beautiful, soft hand was holding his. Gin's thumb stroking the back of his hand as they continued chatting away, completely forgetting the rest of the world existed.

. . .

The two of them talked long after their stew bowls were empty. Both so involved in spending time together they didn't realise just how late it was until Yuki gave them a shout.

"Hey, you lovebirds!" she called over to them. "I'm gonna close up soon so I'mma need those bowls back!"

Aizen looked up and looked around. Indeed, everyone else that had been sitting at the tables around them was gone. But that couldn't be right, surely?

"What are you talking about?" he said, reaching into his yukata to retrieve an elegant silver pocketwatch, flicking it open carelessly as Gin watched, fascinated. "It's only been five min..." he looked down at the watch face and his voice died off. "Ah."

Gin leaned over and peered at the watch, curious as to what the time was. He couldn't help but laugh. "Five hours." Gin supplied.

Aizen frowned. "That long?"

"Yep. Cuz we arrived at six, remember?"

"I remember."

"Guess time flies when ya have fun." Gin smiled brightly. "Let's go," he said, standing and picking up the empty bowls and the spoons. "I'll take these back, you wait here."

Aizen nodded and watched him move, and Gin could feel the older man's gaze on him all the way to the stall where Yuki stood waiting for her last two stew bowls.

. . .

Gin walked steadily as he took the bowls over to Yuki, with a smile still plastered on his face. And not just because he'd had good stew, but because it seemed like Sousuke was finally opening up to him. Even going so far as to share some of his past with him. Trading both stories and confidences with him. Just the thought that Sousuke trusted him enough to share that part of his life – a part of his life Gin was certain nobody else knew about – made him lightheaded and flushed with excitement. Because like Yuki had said earlier, Sousuke didn't bring anyone to share his stew. So Gin had to rationally conclude that this fact alone meant so much. And hell, if he were honest, it made him feel pretty damn special. He still couldn't believe Aizen had shared such an important
part of his life with him. Though he understood it was something he shouldn't go blabbing to people about. Sousuke might not want people to know. And besides that, he didn't want people to start looking down on or start belittling Sousuke just because of where he came from the way people did to him.

And if they did... well, he'd put Shinsou to good use and anyone who talked shit about the man would never speak again. Gin smiled at the thought of it.

"What're you smilin' about?" Yuki drawled, a smug grin spread across her face. And Gin was reminded of Aizen's own smug 'I know everything' grin.

Gin shot her a smirk of his own. "Whaddya think I'm smilin' 'bout?"

She laughed. "Ya know kid, I like you." she beamed, and Gin handed her the bowls.

"Then ya got excellent taste." Gin shot back, and she chuckled.

"It's Gin, right?" she asked, "I heard him call you Gin."

He nodded, and she smiled again. "I can see you'll be good for him." she said, and Gin couldn't help but flush a light pink at the compliment. He could see why Sousuke liked her.

"Ya think so?" he asked, quietly reaching a hand up into his hair in his nervousness. Feeling both flattered and sheepish at once, and unsure what to make of the praise. "I mean, Ran says he's good fer me, but, I dunno 'bout the reverse..."

Gin wanted to go on, to say more. To ask if she really thought he'd be good for Sousuke. But all of his questions, worries and doubts died when she smiled and nodded at him.

"Yeah," she said softly. "I know so." And Gin blushed at the words and felt a smile as bright as the full moon above them tug at his lips.

"You'll balance him out." Yuki continued, taking the bowls to stack them with the others for washing. "Keep him on his toes." She winked at him and Gin had to chuckle. "But most of all you'll make him smile."

Gin smiled softly at the comment, and Yuki sighed wistfully. "I've never seen him smile so much." she said, gazing warmly across at Sousuke, sitting waiting for Gin to return. "I think you make him really happy."

Gin was genuinely touched by the comment. Completely at a loss for words, though he could feel the warmth spread through him again, and the moths inside his stomach all take wing at once. Unconsciously, he raised a hand to his chest, letting his fingertips press hard into the space below his collarbones through the fabric of his scarf. Feeling his heartspace well up with the warmth of this new feeling. Love, maybe? Were these the first emotions of love?

He closed his eyes for a moment, thinking of Sousuke and what Yuki had said. And a soft, tender smile spread slowly across his face as he sighed at the thoughts. His next words coming from somewhere real and true inside him.

"He makes me happy, too."

He opened his eyes and caught Yuki beaming at him, and he suddenly checked himself. "What?" he asked defensively.
She just smiled knowingly and shook her head. "You're just like him," she muttered under her breath. "But if he makes you happy, then you hold onto him, kiddo," she told him, a wise old sage passing on advice. "You hold onto him, and you never let him go. No matter what he does to push you away."

Gin was a little surprised by her words, how adamant she was about this, though he shouldn't have been. She knew Sousuke well, and Gin knew she just wanted Sousuke to be happy the way Ran wanted him to be happy.

"Because I know him." she continued, "I know he'll think he won't deserve you, won't deserve to be happy. But he'll be wrong. He's an idiot. So you hang on tight to him, kid, and don't let go for anything or anyone."

Gin digested her words and then nodded firmly. "I know." he said. "I will."

Because he had absolutely no intention of letting Aizen Sousuke go. Not without a fight.

"I just..." Gin began again, a little hesitant. "I want him to smile like that every day."

Yuki just nodded. "Yes, I can see that," she said warmly, and then cast a quick glance around to see if anyone was listening to them. "Tell ya what, I'll share a secret with you."

Gin blinked in surprise. "Oh. A secret?"

"Yeah," Yuki smiled conspiratorially, reaching inside her kimono and pulling out a folded sheet of paper. "C'mere," she said, and Gin leant over the counter and felt her press the paper into his hand.

"What is it?" he asked quietly, and she leant closer.

"My stew recipe," she whispered. "Sou's been trying to pry it outta me for decades, but I always refused. It was my grandmother's recipe, and when she died she made me promise to keep it secret, even from Sou. But Sousuke's my closest friend, and I want him to be as happy as you've made him tonight. And if I can help you do that with something so small as a stew recipe, I feel like I should. So here, take a copy of it."

She smiled then, bright and hopeful, and so much like Ran it warmed his heart. He was glad Sousuke had someone like her in his life.

"Now you go make him happy." Yuki finished. "Just don't tell him where ya got the recipe from."

Gin stood there, feeling young and small and so very, very touched by all of this. This woman barely knew him, and yet she'd given him something that meant so much...

He struggled to find the right words.

"I... I dunno what ta say," Gin started, all the words he wanted to say, could say, dying in his throat. "Thankyou, Yuki."

Yuki smiled back at him. "You're welcome, Gin."

The two of them stood smiling at each other, and Gin was so caught up in marvelling at their new understanding and mutual affection for Sousuke – albeit in two vastly different contexts – that he didn't notice Sousuke approach them until Yuki panicked.

"Hide it, quickly! He's coming over!" she hissed, and Gin promptly shoved the paper with the
young woman's scribbled writing on it into his yukata into a hidden pocket sewn into it out of Sousuke's both of them quickly acting nonchalant when the man himself strolled over and wrapped his arm around Gin's waist.

"I hope you're not talking about me," Sousuke drawled.

Yuki smirked. "What if we were?" she sassed. Then, softer, "Don't worry Sousuke, we were just talking about how wonderful you are. Right, Gin?"

Gin nodded and smiled brightly. Playing along. "Right."

Sousuke just laughed and kissed Gin on the temple. "That's good to know."

Gin kept on smiling and caught another flash of Yuki's knowing grin and turned his gaze up to Sousuke's face.

"I guess we should get going now, Sou?" he prompted, though he had a feeling the place Sousuke wanted to take him would be closed now.

"Yes, we should." Sousuke nodded, and turned his attention to Yuki again. "It was nice to see you again, Yuki."

Yuki crossed her arms and nodded, grinning. "Likewise, she said. "Just don't leave it so long next time!"

Sousuke laughed softly. "I won't. I promise."

"Maybe your new loverboy can remind you to pay me a visit," she teased, and Gin grinned because Sousuke cleared his throat uncomfortably, finally getting a taste of his own medicine. But he recovered all too quickly and the man turned his head to look down at him again he just gave him that smile again, and Gin felt heat rush into his face. Again. If Gin had any doubts left about how Sousuke could be friends with this woman, they'd just been wiped off the map.

"Perhaps he can," Sousuke said, and Gin felt his face grow hotter. "Another time though. We really should get going. Goodnight, Yuki."

She smiled at the two of them and nodded. "Goodnight, Sousuke. Gin."

Gin returned her smile, some of the heat leaving his face for the moment. "It was nice to meet ya, Yuki." he said warmly. "G'night."

Aizen couldn't help but grin stupidly as Gin took his hand again while they walked off. Happy Yuki approved of his choice.

They walked slowly, keeping a leisurely pace as the two of them quietly enjoyed the beautiful star filled night together. He knew he should probably walk Gin home about now, simply because it was late and his friend was probably wondering where he’d got to. But the night was just so peaceful and calm, and Gin's beautiful hand was in his, and he didn't really want the night to end just yet. And okay, he had to admit it to himself if nobody else, he really couldn't remember a time when he'd had this much fun. Or a time where he'd been legitimately happy before tonight. No, he didn't want this to end just yet. In fact he felt so giddy, didn't even mind if it didn't end with Gin in his bed. It was enough just spending time together.
No, he didn't want this to end. Even if this wasn't love, he didn't want it to end.

Is this what it's like for other people? He wondered. I've seen things in black and white for so long, it's hard to remember what seeing in colour feels like. But I guess it feels something like this.

I remember reading a story about people living in a black and white world, and then upon meeting their soulmates, they suddenly see the world in vivid colour.

This feels like that.

I'll have to tell him the story someday.

He smiled to himself again, and then again at Gin walking beside him. He had a vague feeling that if he were to die, he'd like it to be in his sleep tonight, because things couldn't possibly get any more perfect. Not even Kyouka had anything snarky to say the whole evening.

"So where to now, Aizen-sama?" Gin asked him. "I don' think the place ya wanted ta take me's open no more.. it probably closed a while ago. 'Less ya jus' wanted ta walk 'round some more?"

Aizen smiled softly. "I'd like that," he said gently. "But I think I have a better idea."

He watched Gin raise his eyebrows, clearly amused and intrigued. "Oh?" Gin grinned. "And wha's yer big idea?"

Aizen just smirked and pulled Gin along. "Come with me," he said, mischief in his tone and excitement in his smile. "I'll show you."

...

Some time later, they were both standing outside the entrance to the building that housed the hot springs, with Gin standing watching Sousuke pick the lock with a set of tools he carried.

"Aint this breakin' an' enterin'?" Gin asked, frowning.

"You just keep watch in case somebody comes," Sousuke told him, fiddling with the lock until it clicked open. "Ha. There we go, we're in."

He looked up at Gin, who was wearing a smirk of satisfaction, despite his earlier protests. "Criminal." Gin teased.

"Accomplice." he shot back, smirking. "Come on, Gin, live a little. Walk on the wild side for a change."

Gin frowned at that. "Hey, I'm wild. Wilder than you anyway."

Aizen's smirk widened. He didn't know where this boldness, this defiance had come from – and apparently neither did Gin judging by his expression – but he liked it.

Yes, you're a wild fox, aren't you? A wild untameable creature. But I'm good at handling dangerous, wild things. "I think you'll have to prove that."

Gin's face flushed that lovely shade of pink again, and Aizen half expected Gin to fall back into a shy, stammering mess again. But to his credit, Ichimaru Gin, his lovely Gin, his darling Lolita, rose to his challenge. "Fine, I will!" Gin said. And Aizen watched as Gin stood up straight, pushed his shoulders back, and walked straight inside. And he felt a swell of pride because he knew he'd chosen the right person.
"Well, are ya comin' in or are ya jus' gonna stand ou' there all nigh' grinnin' like a loony?!" Gin called out to him. Sousuke couldn't help but chuckle.

"Keep your pants on," he called back, "I'm coming."

And then he marched inside after Gin, unable to resist calling after his silver fox again. "Oh, and you better keep those clothes on! I want to undress you myself!"

His only answer was Gin's laughter, as he ran away inside. "Best hurry then!"

He smiled and quickened his pace.

. . .

Gin was waiting for him at the edge of the outside bath, still dressed, standing against a backdrop of a grove of bamboo and smiling beautifully for him. The scarf was already off, and lay neatly folded on one of the benches nearby.

"Took ya long 'nough." Gin admonished. "Did ya get lost?"

Sousuke huffed out a breath and stepped closer to him, so close their bodies were almost touching. And Gin felt heat rush into his face at their close proximity, felt the moths inside his stomach go frantic as he caught the look of unbridled desire in the man's chocolate eyes. Caught sight of that confident smile.

"If I'm lost anywhere, it's in your eyes." Sousuke drawled, all sensuality and seduction. And Gin felt his knees go weak at the words. The next thing he knew, fingers were tilting his chin up and those lips, that gorgeous mouth was claiming his again. And Gin couldn't help but moan into the kiss. Couldn't help but be carried away by the sheer passion and sensuality of it. So much so that when Sousuke's strong arms encircled his waist to pull him close, he didn't fight it. Instead, he just let his body press against the older man. Let his arms wrap themselves around his body, holding him close.

It was Sousuke who broke the kiss first, and Gin who sighed in disappointment. He could have kissed the man all night.

"Come on," Sousuke prompted, "We can continue this in the water."

. . .

Gin watched as Sousuke let go of his hand and stepped towards the hot water, watched as Sousuke glanced back over his shoulder at him with a smirk. Gin watched him completely disrobe and let his yukata slide off his bare shoulders and onto the floor. Giving Gin a good view of his sculpted naked body from behind, illuminated by the moonlight. Gin just swallowed and let his eyes devour the sight before him. Aizen stood tall and confident, like anyone who was beautiful and knew it, and Gin couldn't help but stare in awe.

*He looks amazing. He's so captivating.*

Gin watched as Sousuke turned to face him, smirk still on his face as he gazed back at his newest admirer. Shinsou snickered and made his usual comments as Gin's gaze flowed southwards.

"Like what you see?" Aizen asked teasingly, just as Gin's eyes were wandering down his body, coming to a natural stop between his legs.
"Well? Marks out of ten?" Aizen prompted when he didn't answer. Shinsou just fell to cackling.

_Yeah Gin, does his penis live up to your expectations?_

Gin ignored his zanpaktou and just sucked in a breath. Keeping his focus on the god before him. "Every single incha you's a ten." he said softly. Sousuke just chuckled.

"So not a disappointment, then?"

"No," Gin breathed. "You're a piece of art."

_I've never seen a person so hypnotic. I've never wanted anything so badly._

Gin watched his smirk soften into an affectionate smile as he strode back over to stand before him. And Gin’s eyes looked up into his again, and he swallowed again at the desire he saw there.

And then Gin felt a gentle hand caress his cheek and Sousuke leant in to kiss him deeply again. Gin moaned softly into his mouth again, and felt those same skilled hands slowly undoing the tie at his waist, felt those calloused, hardworking fingertips brush his skin as they pushed the fabric of his yukata off his shoulders, and onto the floor so that he too, stood naked before him. He felt a sudden urge to cover himself again, but quickly realised he was being silly. Aizen had already seen all of him. Tasted him, even. So he scolded himself. His body was no secret to the man and now Sousuke's body was no secret to him. And he was surprisingly comfortable with that.

When Sousuke broke the kiss gently, Gin just stared up into those eyes, feeling his heart trying to beat its way out of his chest. Feeling his lungs try to remember how to make his body breathe.

"Perfection." Sousuke murmured softly, and Gin flushed with heat all over at the word. Still somewhat incredulous it was being used to describe _him._

"Come on," Sousuke said softly. "Let's get in the water."

Gin nodded and let himself be led by the hand into the hot water of the spring. He let Sousuke go in first, and then followed, albeit more slowly. Quietly grateful there was no-one else here to look at him as he slid into the hot water. Feeling its heat lap at his waist and his ribs, easing out some of his tension. He let out a soft sigh at the welcome heat, and opened his eyes to see Sousuke smiling at him.

"It's nice, isn't it?"

"Yeah," Gin agreed. "Real nice."

Sousuke's smile never faltered, and Gin felt a jolt of excitement run through him. A part of him still couldn't believe he was here, alone and naked with Aizen Sousuke. That the man had said he was _perfection_. He wondered idly how many people would _kill_ to be where he stood now. How many people would be out for his blood if they knew. He shifted in place._Best not to think about that now_, Shinsou murmured. _Just enjoy the night._

He felt those eyes watching him intently, and he refocused on reality. On _Sousuke_ again.

"What?" Gin asked. Sousuke's smile remained in place, but it took on a sort of amused, indulgent quality.

"You know," Sousuke told him, his voice gaining the tone of a teacher again, the way it had when he'd taught Gin about the meaning of the gladiolus and the importance of context in the flower
language. "You need to grow more comfortable with being naked... with your body..."

Gin gasped softly as he moved closer, and even under the hot water, his skin tingled with anticipation. He wasn't disappointed, because those hands were on him again, slowly caressing his wet skin as the hot spring water lapped at his waist as he stood, with Sousuke standing behind him and touching him. Letting Gin feel his water softened fingertips gliding over his pale skin that people only ridiculed for being unusual, and feel the burning heat in their trails over him. Feel those fingers igniting fires inside him. Gin gasped again. Feeling desire coiling inside him at their closeness, at Aizen-sama's touch, at the way that man made him feel. How his traitor body reacted.

And yet... and yet it felt... right. Because it was his Aizen-sama, his Sousuke, his wonderful capricious magician casting yet another magic spell over him. Making his body burn and his breath catch as those fingers, those hands, caressed his neck... his shoulders... his waist... moving slowly. Ever so slowly Gin thought he might go mad. He was used to the man being hard and fast and eager to please him, so this display of sensuality, this slowness was... odd. Not unpleasant. Definitely not unpleasant. Definitely not unwelcome. Actually it was quite pleasurable indeed. It was just something he wasn't used to yet.

"Because you really are beautiful," Sousuke murmured softly. Hands still working their magic. They were soft touches Sousuke gave him. Intimate yet non-sexual touches. At least not yet. Though the desire in them was evident. So very obvious. And Gin stood there, in the water, Sousuke behind him, letting the man work his magic. Letting the man touch and explore him openly. And when Gin was gently turned around to face him, he could see it was in those smouldering eyes, too.

It was in that voice...

That smile...

 Everywhere.

"You're strong." Sousuke said. And Gin gasped softly, still under his spell, trapped like a fly in a spider's web, still thinking of nothing but those slow caresses. Steadily going insane until those hands came to rest on his hips, gripping him lightly.

"You're perfect." Sousuke told him, voice hypnotic and sensual, drawing him completely in. One hand raising from the water to caress Gin's cheek and neck again. With the other hand, still resting on Gin's slim hip, pulling him closer. And Gin felt as if Sousuke were a magnet and he a piece of metal, helpless against the magnetic force dragging him in.

"You're a piece of fucking art." Sousuke murmured softly. "I just wish you could see that."

Gin studied him for a moment, unsure what to make of this. Was he really serious, or was this just another ploy? Another move in the game? But on closer inspection, Sousuke's gaze only seemed to be full of genuine tenderness, and, if Gin didn't know any better, something akin to love.

But still under the spell of his magician, and still entranced by the magic of the evening together, still enamoured by the man and the moon and stars and constellations above them, and the fact they were completely alone, Gin decided not to read too much into it. Instead, he bravely draw closer, pressed their naked bodies together, and pulled his Sousuke in for another deep, if clumsy kiss.
Chapter Notes

For the absolutely lovely timewaster123456789. For her birthday :) [June 26th]. For an endless list of reasons she knows about already. Love you, Time! keep being amazing and infected! Happy birthday you wonderful packmate you *hugs*

Everyone who isn't time: go and throw this amazing lady some love by way of reviews [ahem-CF/Sanc, Underbelly]. Lovely person. Awesome Co. Talented writer.

You'll see us working together again soon. So get ready for feelings and shots fired. [because my idiots have been a bit too happy]


Chapter 23: Sweet like Cherry pie

They spent the rest of that night in the hot spring together, kissing languorously, enjoying being in each other's arms, and talking.

After that first kiss, Gin pulled away for breath, laughing softly. Sousuke smiled back at him, and in that moment, Gin felt like he could do anything. So he smiled and leant up to kiss Sousuke again, slowly and deeply, completely melting into the older man and his kiss. His touch. Quietly enjoying the feel of those hands on his skin as they slid down his back and playfully squeezed his buttocks, pulling a soft moan out of him. Sousuke started laughing gently, and had to break the kiss because of his chuckling.

“What?” Gin asked. “Wha'so funny?”

Sousuke just smiled at him. “You make the cutest noises.”

“Eh?” Gin gaped, heat rushing not just through his face but through his entire body. “What?! No! I do not!”


“I don' make noises.” Gin protested.

“Oh, you do.” Sousuke repeated, a teasing smirk on his lips. “Shall I show you?”

“You dun need ta do that.” Gin told him. “I told ya I don-”

His words were cut short however when Sousuke's hands grabbed his ass and pulled him closer – quite abruptly – at which Gin gave a little involuntary squeal at the unexpectedness of it. Sousuke just grinned because his point had been proved and kissed him passionately again. Making Gin
moan and lean into his body again, closing his eyes slowly. Letting his hands rest against Sousuke's firm, muscular chest. He could feel the man's heart beating directly under his palms. As if it were within touching distance, if not for the thin wall of skin, muscle, and bone between his hands and that heart. If only he could pry apart the cage of bone and reach in and grab it... so at least he could say he held Aizen Sousuke's heart. Even for just a moment.

He enjoyed the kiss for a few moments more thoroughly lost in it, until Sousuke pulled away again. Leaving him flushed and breathless. And without speech. It really was a talent of Sousuke's, leaving him speechless.

“See?” he said, when he broke the kiss. Smirking in that way he did when he knew he was right. Gin tried to look indignant. “You do.” Sousuke murmured softly. “You really, really do.”

Gin opened his mouth to protest this, but those lips gently captured his again, that tongue pushing into his welcoming mouth, and nothing else seemed to matter anymore.

... When they emerged into the night again, pink skinned and fully dressed with towel dried hair, all the tension eased out of their muscles by the hot water, Sousuke walked Gin home.

They walked as they had all evening; hand in hand, grinning and laughing together like giddy loved-up idiots. The conversation still flowing easily between then. Effortlessly, even. Sousuke listened with quiet fascination, as Gin pointed out all the different constellations above them. Which only delayed their arrival at Gin's place, but he reasoned it would be worth suffering tomorrow if it meant seeing Gin smile tonight. Gin stopped them and pointed out another constellation, and he smiled indulgently and listened, interested in hearing Gin talk about the stars.

Most of the things Gin told him he already knew, of course. But it was still refreshing to see it all through Gin's lens, and listen to Gin describing and explaining it all with great enthusiasm. He'd even go so far as to say it was infectious. And okay, it was really cute to see his Gin all excited about his stars. Sirius, the 'dog star' was his favourite, he said. For its name. And it warmed that cold dark space in his heart that Gin wanted to share that with him. He made mental notes and smiled warmly at Gin as he pointed out another star in the sky, another constellation, and happily began pointing out the focal points of it. With Sousuke again pretending ignorance on the subject just so he could enjoy Gin's enthusiasm. After all, who knew how long this would last? He needed to make the most of seeing that smile and Gin's bubbly, infectious enthusiasm now, while he still could. Before he found some way to fuck this up.

Which, as the hellish voice inside his skull loved to remind him, he would eventually.

He shoved the thought away with great effort, before his mind ventured into darker places, and refocused on the lovely creature standing with, talking about the stars.

A smile passed his lips as he looked at Gin looking so beautiful illuminated by the moonlight.

Gin must have sensed him staring because he turned to look at him nervously.

“What?” Gin asked. “Do I still got stew on me face?”

Sousuke smiled softly at him. “No,” he said. “I was just thinking of how beautiful you look in the moonlight.”

Gin flushed pink again. “Oh.” he gasped quietly. His shy smile brightening considerably. “Really?”
“Yes, really.”

Gin’s broad, happy smile at that lit up all the dark spaces inside him, and it made him want to spend every single day of his life making his lovely Gin smile like that.

“You’re beautiful,” he added. “I think you’re really beautiful.”

Gin’s smile turned shy again as he tried to meet his intense gaze, and Sousuke couldn’t help but think how adorable he was. But he knew better than to tease him about it. At least right now.

“Come on,” he smiled at Gin again. “Let’s get moving. I’m sure Rangiku-san will be waiting up for you to return and tell her all about tonight.”

Gin bit his lip and glanced away, no doubt remembering just how nosy his friend could be when it came to their relationship.

“Yeah... I guess we better go home.” Gin said slowly, apparently not wanting this magical night to end either. If his reluctance to go back was anything to go by. He hoped it was.

“Can we walk the scenic route though?” Gin asked quickly, and Sousuke, appropriately heartwarmed, smiled affectionately at Gin. His Gin. His for however long they had together. Though a part of him hoped that would be forever. But that was the hopeless, stupid part of him. Because such a hope was futile and foolish.

“For you,” he said gently, “anything.”

Gin smiled brightly, no, affectionately at him and took the arm that was offered. And together they walked back.

. . .

When they arrived at the little apartment he shared with Rangiku, Gin stood, nervous and anxious, in front of the door with Sousuke.

“Well, here tis,” he said. “Home sweet home.”

Sousuke smiled gently at him and Gin took a deep breath to try and calm his nerves. He was being ridiculous. He knew he was being ridiculous. Sousuke wasn’t going to judge him on where he lived or how small his flat was. But damn it, he wanted to make a good impression on the man.

“I know s’not much compared to yer nice house, but it’s home.”

“I’m sure it’s lovely,” Sousuke smiled, and Gin felt a rush of warmth surge through him at the older man’s reassurance.

“Anyway, are we going inside?” Sousuke asked, a teasing smile on his face. “I’d love to meet this Cherry you’ve been telling me about.”

Gin’s whole face lit up, and his smile was so bright at just the mention of his beloved pet. “Ah, yeah!” he beamed, fumbling for his keys, quietly praying that Rangiku had at least tidied the place up a bit like he’d asked. The hell butterfly he’d sent while waiting for Sousuke to finish his business in the toilets, telling her quite frantically that Sousuke was coming over later and to make the place presentable should have arrived in plenty of time... but you never knew with Rangiku.

Gin found his key and unlocked the door. Pushing it open. “After you,” he said to Sousuke, who
just seemed to be ridiculously over excited to be walking into his home and meeting his pet as he stepped over the threshold.

Gin followed him in and breathed a quiet sigh of relief as he caught the smell of pine. Ran had cleaned the place from top to bottom.

...  

Rangiku sat with Cherry on the sofa. Both of whom, unknown to Gin and Sousuke, had been waiting all evening for Gin to return so he could tell them what happened on his date. Cherry just waited up so she could get in some snuggles before bedtime. Well, Ran did clean the place while she waited too, upon getting her message. With Cherry ‘assisting’.

As soon as they'd heard the soft chatter outside and the key turning in the door, Cherry's fluffy white ears perked up and she sat poised on the sofa cushions ready to rush and greet Gin. Rangiku was similarly on high alert, keeping her eyes and ears open for any new developments on the Aizen-Gin relationship. Particularly things Gin might be hesitant to tell her. He was still so damn shy, bless him. But she reasoned Aizen must like that about him, or else why agree to go out with Gin in the first place? Then again, Aizen might secretly be just as awkward as Gin when it came to love and feelings... now that was a thought that made her smile.

_Honestly, you and your shipping..._ Haineko shook her head. Rangiku shushed her.

Cherry whined softly in anticipation of her master coming home, but Rangiku shushed her too, just in case she missed something. But Cherry just licked her lips and wagged her tail as the voices grew louder. Closer. She was almost unable to keep herself from leaping off the sofa and rushing to greet them.


Cherry whined again with excitement as the pair of them heard Gin's voice as the pair of them approached. Oh, she hoped this would go well. Cherry could be... a bit much sometimes.

“Ran!” Gin called out to her. “We're back!”

_Showtime_, she smiled to herself. Picking up a magazine and sitting more comfortably.

...  

Sousuke strode happily into Gin's apartment, followed by Gin, who directed him into the living room where immediately the white fox rushed over to Gin and began jumping up his leg, all excitement, happy yips and tail wags. Gin grinned down at her and lifted her into his arms, giving her a big cuddle.

“Hey, didya miss me?”

The fox nuzzled close to Gin, tail thumping him in her excitement. Sousuke could have watched the two of them all night.

Rangiku grinned at the three of them.

“Well this is a nice surprise,” she said cheerily, smiling and setting down the gossip magazine in her hands. “I wasn't expecting you! You're such a gentleman, walking Gin home like that. Though you did have me thinking he wouldn't be coming home tonight.”
She smirked at the pair of them, Sousuke in particular, and Gin flushed a light pink at her words and what they implied. A fact he didn't miss.

“Ran!” Gin hissed, embarrassed. But Sousuke just chuckled good naturedly.

“I admit it is quite late,” he said, slyly glancing at the clock on the wall. *One in the morning already! How did it get so late?!* “But we got talking and just completely lost track of the time. Didn't we Gin? How long were we talking for? Five hours was it?”

When he didn't get an immediate answer, he turned his head to look at Gin standing beside him, “Gin?”

He had to laugh a little at what he saw.

Cherry was in Gin's arms still, licking his face in joyous exuberance at his return – no doubt she envisioned him never coming home, as pets often did when their owners left the house – her tail bashing against him as it wagged violently. Gin was laughing and trying to calm her down enough to get her to stop licking him five seconds so he could speak without getting a mouthful of fox tongue.

“And this must be the lovely Cherry I've heard so much about.” Sousuke said, smiling affectionately at the happy pair.

“Sh-shuhhhmmh-” Gin began, deciding in the end to clamp a hand down on Cherry's muzzle to keep her still and stop her licking. “Kay, *enough* ya crazy thing. Lemme breathe fer five minutes.” he chided her, then turning his attention to Sousuke again. “She sure is.” he beamed.

Rangiku just giggled. “Hey, you can't blame her, she was waiting all night for you to come home and play.” she teased. “Maybe next time you should take her with you. Go for a nice romantic walk in the park, just the three of you.”

Sousuke smiled again, softly this time. “I think it's a great idea. Shall we say next saturday in the park? Or a walk in the woods perhaps?”

He watched Gin's smile soften and turn affectionate as his darling looked down at his pet first and then him again. That smile... damn that adorable, heart-thawing smile. If his defences hadn't been melted down already, they certainly were now. Just looking at that smile, and knowing it was there because of him, his body felt warm for the first time in... a long time. It was a nice change from the bonechilling cold thrust upon him by... outside forces.

“Th' park soun's perfect.” Gin answered softly. “Here, hold Cherry fer a bit.” he said, handing his fox over to him, which Sousuke received somewhat awkwardly. But he supposed it was to be expected. He'd never held onto such a small, fragile creature before. Particularly one so beloved.

Gin smiled at him, seemingly satisfied that his pet was in safe hands. “I gotta go wash me face cuz somebody-” he said pointedly, looking at his pet, “licked it.”

Cherry just licked her lips again, looking smug as Gin gave her a quick scratch on the chin.

“I'll be right back,” he said to Sousuke. “You sit down an' make yerself at home.”

Sousuke nodded and did as instructed, with Rangiku scooting across the sofa so he had space to sit. Gin meanwhile went to quickly wash his face from all the fox slobber.

He sat on the sofa next to Rangiku, limbs stiff and wooden, and more than a little awkward as
Cherry sniffed him curiously, as if sussing out his intentions towards her master. He sat for a moment, perfectly still as she sniffed, and as she looked up at him with her bright blue eyes, he wondered if she could see through him. Because it certainly felt like she could.

“Don't worry,” Rangiku called, catching his attention. She sat smiling as she watched him. “She won't bite. She knows you're Gin's friend.”

Sousuke looked back down at the little fox on his lap, still thoroughly sniffing him with great curiosity, and reassured by Rangiku's words, he hesitantly reached to stroke Cherry's head as she set to sniffing his chest. Smiling to himself when she didn't immediately growl or move away from his touch. In fact she seemed to relish it, closing her eyes in a squint and flattening her ears against her head. Tail wagging ten to the dozen.

His smile brightened. Her fur was so soft under his hand, and she was just so warm and friendly, even to one such as him... it was simply astounding.

“Hello, Cherry,” he said softly, losing some of his awkwardness as his body relaxed, knowing she was no threat to him. Was accepting him, even. He supposed it was true, then. That pets were indeed like their owners.

He'd not been sure what to expect with the little fox. Even though Gin had already told him so much about her, and assured him she'd love him. Gin shared little stories with him about her antics and their adventures together. And he had to admit – to himself if not aloud – he'd been a little apprehensive. Though he'd hidden it well from Gin. But now he'd met her, he understood why Gin loved her so much.

He was so lost in the moment, quietly enjoying his few moments with the fox, that he didn't even realise Gin had been watching until he heard that lovely voice calling to him.

“She's cute, huh?”

He fought the urge to jump out of his skin and turned in the direction of the voice, catching sight of his lovely Gin watching them from the doorway, bringing him back into the real world again. Popping the little bubble he'd been inside with Cherry. He also remembered Rangiku had been watching them, too, and tried to recompose himself by clearing his throat.

He addressed Gin first.

“How long were you standing there?” he asked. *How long were you looking? How much did you see?*

Gin shrugged, innocent and nonchalant. Or at least pretending to be. “Long enough.”

Translation: *I saw everything.*

Sousuke gave gin a somewhat exasperated look and Gin moved to sit on the sofa between him and Rangiku, smiling tenderly at Sousuke and Cherry. Who had realised Sousuke had stopped fussing her and began climbing up him, nudging him with her nose and standing up on her hind legs to lick his face.

Gin snickered at her and Rangiku giggled quietly.

“I think she likes you,” Gin said, voice light and teasing, though the undercurrent of tenderness in it was obvious to all present.
“Yes,” Sousuke answered, resuming stroking the fox’s head and quieting her down again. “It would appear so.”

“And do you like her?” Gin pried sweetly, watching the two of them together. Full of anticipation like a single parent hoping his baby would get along well with his new partner and all would be well with them.

He debated drawing out the moment, just to keep Gin on his toes a bit longer. But decided that would be cruel.

“Yes,” Sousuke said finally. And Gin gave a little sigh of relief. “I like her very much.”

Gin smiled tenderly at the both of them, and he was sure Rangiku was melting beside him.

“I’m glad,” Gin said softly, just as Cherry rolled over onto her back so Sousuke could rub her fluffy belly, making them all laugh.

“I see what you mean,” Sousuke said gently, giving the fox’s belly a good rub as she bashed his legs with her bushy tail as it wagged. “It’s hard not to love her.”

Gin smirked at him, a little smug. “Well duh. Course it is. Everybody loves Cherry. I mean who doesn’t love that face? Gotta be made a stone not to. Aint that right, Che-Che?”

Cherry yipped in answer and wagged her tail harder in agreement.

“See? Even Cherry agrees,” Rangiku smiled. Sousuke supposed smugness was contagious.

“Smug lil thing,” Gin said, “She knows she’s real pretty an’ everyone loves ’er so she uses it to ’er advantage.” He smiled down at Cherry again and gently poked her, grinning playfully. “Dontcha, Che-che?”

Cherry made several soft, happy, squeaky noises as Gin tickled her belly.

“Che-Che?” Sousuke asked, eyebrow raised in amusement.

“S’er nickname.”

Sousuke just smiled. “That’s very cute.”

Gin’s smile was shy at that. And it made him feel lightheaded. Giddy almost. Honestly, how could one person be this endearing? He wondered.

Giddy fool, get a grip.

“Tis isn’t it?” Gin asked.

Sousuke nodded. “Indeed.”

Rangiku beamed in agreement, having sat silently, clearly not wanting to interrupt their shared moment. A thing for which Sousuke found himself feeling grateful for. He had to hand it to her, she knew when to keep her trap shut. A trait he highly valued. Most of the women around him never seemed to be able to shut up, desperate to impress him. Make him see them.

Little did they know someone else had already done that, and he was sitting right beside him now.

“Gin came up with it while they were playing one day,” Rangiku explained softly. “And it just
stuck. We've been calling her that ever since.”

“Well, I think it's a very cute nickname.” Sousuke reiterated softly. “Very endearing.”

...  

Gin smiled, and caught Rangiku beaming across at him and Sousuke. Oh no. No, no, no. He knew that look. She'd seen an opportunity to fish for more information about the two of them.

“So have you two lovebirds got any endearing nicknames for each other yet?” she asked, and Gin blushed scarlet. Even though he'd known it was coming.

But thankfully, Sousuke laughed and gently deflected the probing question. Once again saving him from the Rangiku Inquisition. “No, not yet I'm afraid.” Sousuke said lightly. “It is still early days, after all.”

Rangiku sighed, but relented. “You're right. I guess it's still too early for things like that...”

“Though I'm sure you'll be the first one Gin tells when we do come up with something.” Sousuke added gently. “Right, Gin?”

“Yeah.” Gin nodded, smiling. “Right.”

The smile returned to Ran's face again, and Gin felt relief crash over him. Followed swiftly by tenderness. Sousuke had shielded him from the probing question and smoothed things over with her in a way that spared both their feelings. Now, if only he could think of some way to repay that, they'd be square.

Rukongai rats tended to despise owing people debts, after all.

And old habits died hard, slow deaths.

“Well,” Sousuke said, “It's getting quite late, and I don't want to keep you both up, so I should probably head home...”

“Oh,” Gin said, unable to help feeling disappointed. But then, he'd known Sousuke would have to go back home at some point. He just... he sighed. Swallowing the bitter taste in his mouth. He just didn't want him to. “Are ya sure ya don' wanna stay?” he asked. “I mean, it's real late, an' we have room...”

“Yeah, you're more than welcome to stay if you want. You wouldn't be in the way or anything. And I'm sure Gin wants you to stay.” Rangiku added, and he felt a rush of love for her, too. For echoing his desires and expressing them far more eloquently than he ever could.

“You can sleep in Gin's bed,” she suggested. Without a hint of teasing. And though the comment was tease-free, Gin couldn't help but flush pink again. Feeling far too awkward to say anything.

Sousuke however, seemed to think about this. And for one terrifying moment, Gin was certain he would say no, that he didn't want to stay.

“If you're sure I wouldn't be intruding,” Sousuke said softly, “I'd like to stay.”

...  

Rangiku clapped her hands together and squealed quietly in excitement. But Sousuke's eyes were fixed solely on Gin, whose smile was brighter than the moon in the sky outside. Happy with the
knowledge that this lovely night didn't have to end after all.

His own smile felt tired and halfhearted in comparison, though it was one of his rarer genuine ones, and expressed the same sentiments. But then, who could compete with his moon's brightness?

“Well, c'mon then,” Gin said, springing to his feet, full of bounce. “I'll show ya where me bedroom is.”

Sousuke just smiled warmly at him and followed. Cherry trotting at his heels.

. . .

Gin led Sousuke into his room and waited as he inspected the space and Cherry leapt up and walked in a circle, sniffing the cotton duvet before curling up ready for sleep, covering her nose with her tail.

“Well, this is cozy,” Sousuke said, watching Gin noticeably relax when he saw the smile on his face, satisfied that it was indeed a genuine compliment of his sleeping space.

“Glad ya like it.” Gin smiled.

Sousuke walked further into the room, taking in the soft pastel hues of the room. The blue of the walls... the oak wardrobe and bedside cabinet on which the red tulip sat in its vase... the bookshelf, filled with textbooks and light novels...

And his flower dictionary. Sitting beside the tulip on the bedside cabinet.

The very one he'd given Gin not too long ago.

He couldn't help but smile at the sight of it right there, within easy reach, possibly being thumbed through late at night or first thing in the morning by his lovely, darling Gin. And that now familiar warmth rushed through his chest again and spread through his body, warming even his toes and fingertips.

“Well, get comfy,” Gin told him, changing into a clean sleeping robe and then opening the wardrobe. Turning back around to him holding one of the yukata he'd lent Gin before. “Here,” he said, offering the garment to him, “Though' ya might want somethin' clean ta sleep in. or fer tmorrow.”

Sousuke had to struggle to find his voice to answer that. It seemed to have gotten lost somewhere, probably in the horde of moths inside his stomach or in the melting ice sloshing about in his chest cavity and heartsapce. He swallowed and dug deep, and managed an answer.

“Thankyou.”

It was satisfactory, if not as self assured as he would have liked. But Gin didn't seemed to mind, so it was fine. In fact, Gin hadn't stopped smiling. Which gave the impression that it didn't really matter if it did sound weak.

He undressed and changed into the clean garment and climbed into bed beside Gin. Trying not to think too much on or feel too giddy about being in Gin's flat. Being in Gin's room. Being in Gin's bed. And instead tried to focus on Gin. Which was made so much easier when Gin snuggled up to him and lay his head on his chest like it was the most natural thing in the world. Like he belonged there. As if they'd slept together like this for decades. With Cherry curled at the foot of the bed.
He felt Gin sigh, perfectly content, and found himself wrapping his arms around Gin's body. Letting his mind and body completely relax. Letting his guard drop.

“This's nice,” Gin murmured softly. Somewhat sleepily.

“Yes. It is.”

He felt Gin shift to lie more comfortably, and heard the smile in Gin's voice as he spoke. “T'night was lovely. Thankyou.”

Sousuke couldn't help but return the smile, though Gin couldn't see it from his current position. “It was my pleasure,” he said, pausing for thought. Eventually deciding it was safe to admit the truth, or at least a small part of it.

“You know, tonight was the most fun I've had in... a very long time.” he said quietly. Afraid that speaking too loud would shatter the fragile peace they'd found with each other.

“Ya know,” Gin said softly, and Sousuke could swear he heard the smile in his voice again. “Me too.”

“Mmm. We should get some sleep, though. It is quite late. Or very early, depending on how you look at it.”

“Dependin' on context?” Gin asked mischievously, and Sousuke chuckled softly. Gin was definitely learning.

“You could say that, yes.” he said, lazily stroking Gin's hair, finding it soothing. It really was a beautiful colour, too. The colour of moonlight.

“Mmm, tha's nice,” Gin murmured, half drowsy with sleep now. “Keep doin' tha' til I fall 'sleep.”

Sousuke smiled again, all warmth and softness. “Alright.”

Gin sighed again, sounding about as content as he felt. And Sousuke let his eyes rest for just a moment as he continued playing with his Gin's beautiful hair.

“G'night Sou,” Gin murmured sleepily, closing his eyes and getting ready to drift off. Sousuke would join him soon, though he intended to stay awake for a few moments more. Just a few moments more so he could enjoy watching Gin sleep in his arms, still not wanting the night to end just yet.

“Goodnight, Gin.” he said. Letting his own eyes slowly close and his hands still. The last thing he was aware of before he followed Gin into sleep was that Cherry had got up and snuggled in between them. Nudging his hand with her cold nose until he settled it down on her back.
Chapter Notes

a/n: Sesh's bedtime story chapter :) for real. She got the handwritten draft of this before bedtime. Which was like 4am her time when I was just starting my day.

Oh guys, also you can find me on ko-fi now! So if you like what I do you can go buy me a coffee! I'm real easy to find and under the same username there. Coffees are much appreciated. So go go, I need coffee! :D seriously though, funds will be used to keep me in caffeine, pens, paper, and supporting my illustrator [so I can stop freeloading off her fanart as lovely as it is] and also support my series Contributors.


Enjoy.

Chapter 24: Could it be Love?

Sousuke woke slowly, blinking his eyes open gradually as the natural light from outside gently tugged him into wakefulness. He shifted and stretched in the bed, bare feet brushing against the soft cotton bedsheets. There was a vague feeling of being in a bed that wasn't his own that he couldn't quite put his finger on... but that feeling passed as he recollected the events of last night. And took note of Gin sound asleep in dreamland next to him, mumbling in his sleep. Limbs wrapped around him like an octopus. *As if I were going to even try to escape...*

And Cherry too, squished between them.

He smiled softly. He could get used to this.

Beside him, Gin sighed contentedly, and Sousuke was struck with an urge to reach out and touch him. To let his hands and fingertips memorise every detail of his darling's face. But that might wake Gin up and shatter the fragile peace that had settled over him, so he closed his eyes again and quietly drifted off to sleep again. It was still quite early. He had a few more hours yet.

... When he woke again, several hours later, he found that Cherry had squished herself *right up* against him. Face and paws pressed against his chest, snoring loudly. It was all he could do to not burst out laughing. Although a little snicker did escape him.

*You are a funny thing,* he thought. Gently stroking her fur, watching her ears flatten against her head at his touch. Clearly enjoying it. He smiled at her.

Gin moaned quietly in his sleep and slung an arm possessively over the both of them, and Sousuke couldn't help but feel happy. He could really get used to this.
He smiled at the two lovely creatures sharing the bed with him and watched Gin's eyes blink open and his face soften into an affectionate smile.

"Hey," Gin greeted him, voice softened with sleep. He returned the smile easily. *Funny how I smile for you like never before...*

"Hey."

Gin's smile grew more tender, and he knew that Gin could get used to waking up next to him, too.

"Sleep well?" Gin asked warmly, and Sousuke knew he *really* could get used to this, if this was what it was going to feel like.

*I want you to be with me.*

*And I want to be yours. Every day like this.*

"Perfectly." Sousuke answered. "You?"

"Same 'ere." Gin smiled. "'m still kinda tired, though."

"That's alright," Sousuke said softly, returning the smile. "We don't have to get up just yet. If you really wanted we could stay in bed all day."

He watched his lovely Gin blush at the suggestion, doubtlessly imagining all sorts of dirty things. He laughed softly.

"Get your mind out of the gutter, Gin," he teased softly. "It wasn't meant like that. It was a perfectly innocent suggestion." *For once. "I meant we could stay in bed and we could cuddle all day."

Gin frowned, not believing it for a minute. No doubt furious with himself for being so easily flustered around him.

"Ha, like you could be innocent." Gin sassed.

Sousuke's smile gentled. "When I want to be. The offer of staying in bed all day still stands. Though I may want to wrap my arms around you... and kiss you."

Gin's expression melted into a softer, surprised little smile. Poor Gin, still so adorably shy when it came to affection despite his earlier sass. So different from his usual type. Of course, he knew his Gin still had venomous fangs hidden underneath it all – he had to if he was going to grow into the role of a strong, confident shinigami, and his second in command – but for the moment, his darling Gin was all warmth and softness.

"Oh..." Gin gasped, as if he still couldn't believe it. "Y-you wanna kiss me?"

Sousuke smiled indulgently at him. *Who wouldn't want to kiss you?* "I've wanted to kiss you since you woke up.

Gin's smile widened, brightening up his whole face. *No wonder you're my only light.* "You can kiss me."

"Well come here then," Sousuke said playfully, "You're too far away."

Gin scooted closer to him and quietly pressed their lips together, moaning softly. Tongue pushing
into his mouth for a deep, slow kiss.

"Ya know," Gin said, when he had to break away for breath. "I could get used ta this."

Gin's smile was so soft and dreamlike, and mirroring his own, he was sure.

"You know," he said gently, "I could, too."

Gin just widened his smile and kissed him again.

... 

"You know," Sousuke said, after they'd curled up together again, Gin resting his head on his chest.
"I think we should just stay in bed all day."

"Psh, you jus' don' wanna leave my comfy bed." Gin answered, his smile softening and tone playful.

"Well, Sousuke said, gently stroking Gin's hair. "There's a pretty good reason for that."

Gin tried to stifle a laugh. "Oh? An' wha's that?" he asked, playing adorably dumb.

Sousuke's smile morphed into a Cheshire cat like grin. "How about I show you?"

And with that he rolled over, pushed Gin onto his back and kissed him deeply. Carefully avoiding squishing Cherry.

"Let's just stay in bed," he purred. "Besides, I like cuddling you."

And of course at that, Gin turned the loveliest shade of pink.

Beautiful, he thought.

If we could stay together... I'll be happy.

... 

Some time and much snuggling later, the pair of them ventured into the kitchen in search of food. Only to find Rangiku was frying up some breakfast for the three of them. The table was already set, and Gin gestured for Sousuke to sit down as he trudged over to the cupboard for the mugs. Cherry pranced in after them, digging into her own bowl of food hungrily.

"Mornin' Ran,"

"Good morning," she chirped. "Breakfast will be ready soon. I didn't think you two were ever going to leave that bed."

Gin couldn't help but flush pink at that comment and all it suggested, though he was grateful he had his back to Sousuke. But the smug grin Sousuke gave him when he turned around after calming down told him he knew.

"I... I don't know how you take your tea," Gin said. Something, anything to distract him from the colour of his cheeks.

"Milk with two sugars."
"Jeez, anyone'd think ya weren't sweet 'nough." Gin said.

Sousuke just laughed. "Well, no-one's ever said that to me before."

Gin turned back around, cheeks burning. Why did he say that? Was his brain not functioning today or something? Had this morning, last night and all those kisses eroded away his brain to mouth filter so much that he'd just start blurtling things out without thinking? Damn it, even Ran was giggling at him. He poured the kettle and made their mugs of tea, just for something to focus on.

"'Kay, you can stop laughin' a' me now, I'm 'barrassed enough now." he said, setting the mugs on the table, leaving Sousuke's for last. He set it down carefully in front of him and took a seat beside him. Feeling very stupid. Why did they all have to laugh at him? It was bad enough everyone else mocked him... for his looks, how he acted, how he spoke... he didn't need Sousuke joining in.

He was interrupted in his brooding by the gentle touch of Sousuke's hand on his, the warmth of it thawing him through.

"Okay, I'll stop laughing." Sousuke said. "I'm sorry."

Gin glanced at him quietly. The man was smiling warmly at him again, but Gin didn't want to relent just yet. Sousuke sighed, as if searching for the right words to say to him.

"It's just..." Sousuke began, "You make me laugh with some of the things you say."

"Cuz they're stupid and I'mma fool?"

"No," Sousuke smiled reassuringly. "Because you make me laugh with some of the things you say."

Oh. Gin thought. He's laughing at my joke. Not at me.

"But if it makes you feel better, I won't laugh."

Gin at once felt small and terrible. Well damn. He hadn't meant it like that. He didn't want the man to stop laughing entirely. That smile and laugh was what he loved most about him. He'd only wanted Sousuke to stop laughing in what he thought was a mocking fashion. He didn't want this. And now the man felt bad for laughing... something he wanted Sousuke to be able to do freely. To express himself freely. Because Gin got the feeling Sousuke hadn't genuinely laughed in a very long time.

"Uh, no, I didn't want... I didn' mean it like... I don't..." Gin groaned in frustration at his ineptitude. "I don' wan' ya ta not laugh. I just..." he sighed, "Don't want ya laughin' at *me*. Like ever'body else does."

Gin glanced up from the table and found Sousuke looking at him softly. Like he understood what he was saying. Where he was coming from.

"I would never laugh at you," Sousuke said softly, gently. "I'll laugh at your jokes, but never at you."

Gin gasped quietly. "Oh."

"Why would you think I'd laugh at you?" Sousuke asked. And Gin struggled to find an answer for him.
"I dunno." he said. Because he really didn't know why he was like this. *Jus' too used to it maybe? "Dunno why I'm like this."

But Sousuke just squeezed his hand, and he felt a little better. He even managed a small smile.

"I guess because you're just... you." Sousuke smiled.

Gin shrugged, still smiling despite himself. "I wish I were better, though." *Wish I weren't me.*

"Don't," Sousuke said, whispering into his ear almost. "You're perfect the way you are."

Gin had to smile then – *really* smile – heart filling up with fresh affection for the man. Though he had to wonder if Aizen Sousuke possessed some psychic mind reading ability. Because it certainly felt like he did. In answer to the man, he returned the hand squeeze and whispered, "Thankyou."

Shortly after that, Ran appeared and set a plate of pancakes before each of them.

"Well dig in boys, get em while they're hot."

In response they disengaged their hands on the table and picked up their cutlery, with Ran gently elbowing Gin as she walked past him to take her seat. "He's right you know," she whispered.

Gin just frowned and shoved the piece of pancake on his fork into his mouth. He was not going to give her the satisfaction of agreeing and admitting it. Even though she was always so infuriatingly *right* when it came to this sort of thing.

At least Sousuke was pretending not to notice though.

...  

After they'd finished breakfast and the dishes had been cleared away, the three of them sat in the living room chatting away. Mostly it was Sousuke telling Rangiku what they'd gotten up to last night, tastefully leaving out certain parts that would doubtlessly embarrass his Gin too much. After which, the conversation turned to Cherry.

At the sound of her name, the little fox trotted into the room, tail in the air like the Lady of the Manor, and made a beeline straight for the sofa Sousuke and Gin were sitting on.

Gin smiled brightly at her. "Hey Che-Che, come sit!" he called to her, patting the empty seat beside him. But Cherry just looked at him and then at Sousuke, and then leapt up and settled herself by Sousuke instead.

Rangiku giggled. "I think you've got a new best friend," she teased him playfully as he sat looking and feeling awkward and amused as Cherry curled up on his lap again.

Gin just eyed the pair of them up and down in a way Sousuke hoped was approving.

"I think I've been dissed." Gin said, playfulness in his tone. Sousuke had to smile at that grin.

"It would seem so," he replied, softly stroking the fox's head.

Gin's gaze softened. "S'good, though."

"Indeed."

"Never seen 'er take ta someone so fast," Gin mused softly, as he was stroking the fox's soft fur.
Sousuke pondered this for a moment as Cherry let out a heavy, contented sigh. Feeling a small smile tug the corners of his lips upwards. He didn't know what it was about her that made him feel so at ease, or Gin even. But he wasn't about to question it. Not when he really felt like he could sit with them forever.

The peace of the moment, however, was broken by Gin.

"Ran, what're you doing with that?"

Silence. Now this had him intrigued. Gin had said he couldn't get Rangiku to shut up. So the reason for this quiet was something he had to see. He lifted his gaze to see her, standing frozen like a deer caught in headlights, holding a large mechanical contraption. A camera, he recognised, having spent more than enough time in the world of the humans to be familiar with their technology.

"I wanted to take a picture..." she answered, somewhat sheepish as she lowered the thing. Her smile shy.

"Coulda jus' asked." Gin told her warmly. To which she smiled even more sheepishly.

"Oh, but I wanted to get the perfect snapshot of you two gazing lovingly at Cherry," she whined, "but you spotted me."

Gin shook his head at her, still smiling, and Cherry blinked her eyes open, alerted by the commotion. Wondering, Sousuke knew, why all their attention wasn't focused on her anymore. Sousuke smiled and settled his hand on her fluffy head.

"No reason you can't take another one," Sousuke told her, smile still stuck on his face. Because here was a perfect opportunity to have his time with Gin captured forever on film. "Come here Gin, get closer, you need to be in the photo."

Obediently, and with a light pink tinge to his cheeks, Gin scooted closer so they were sitting right next to each other. Thigh pressed against thigh.

"This good?" Gin asked.

"Perfect!" Rangiku smiled.

"Wonderful," Sousuke grinned, turning his attention to Cherry, still sitting – well, laying – in his lap. "Do you want to be in the photograph, Cherry-chan?" he asked. At which the little fox perked up her ears and sat up ready to be a part of what was happening.

Gin laughed. 'I'mma take that as a 'yes'."

"Alright," Sousuke said, lifting the little white fox up so her face would be in the frame with them. "As long as you sit still and be good." he told her, doing his best to sound stern.

Cherry just answered him with a nice big lick on the cheek. Which Gin openly snickered at. He tried to hide his own answering smile at the both of them and focused on just getting a good photo taken. He didn't pose for photographs very often, after all. Not willingly at least. So he needed to make this a good one.

"Alright," he said, putting an arm around Gin and pulling him close. "I think we're ready."

Rangiku grinned at him and readied her camera, pointing it at them and peering through the
viewfinder to frame the perfect shot. Making sure to get Cherry's face in as requested. The little fox sitting on Sousuke's lap nicely.

"Okay boys, ready and... smile!"

They grinned at the camera, and she pressed the shutter, capturing them forever on polaroid film. She let the first photo print out of the camera and set it on the coffee table to dry before insisting on taking another one. Needless to say, several shots later, they were finally allowed to go. Not that Sousuke was complaining. He could have sat with Gin all day like this. But Gin was beginning to grow irritable, so it was probably best they stop.

"So did we get any good ones?" Sousuke asked, in an effort to distract Rangiku from taking enough photos to fill up a scrapbook. Which from what Gin had told him, she probably would do. Actually he wouldn't be at all surprised if she had one already just to document their 'romance'. Good god, he hoped not.

"Oh, I think we got a few good ones!" Rangiku grinned. Meanwhile Gin rolled eyes and muttered.

"More'n a few lookin' a that pile."

But Sousuke quietly shushed him. "Now Gin, be nice."

Gin frowned, still grouchy. But Sousuke turned his attention to Rangiku again. "May I see them?"

"Oh, sure!" Rangiku smiled, handing him the small pile of polaroids to look through. Sousuke smiled as he took them. Though he couldn't help but grin a little as Gin shifted closer so he could take a look, too.

"I like that one." Gin said softly as they looked through them. Stopping him as he was looking at a particularly lovely shot of him, Gin and Cherry-chan.

"That one?"

"That one." Gin echoed.

Sousuke smiled at the photograph. It really was nice. Not his favourite – his favourite was the one where Cherry licked his face and Gin had started laughing – but still, it was a lovely photo of the three of them. They looked almost like a family in it.

"Rangiku-san," Sousuke began, "May we have these?"

Rangiku smiled proudly. "Of course," she told them. "I took them for you, after all."

Sousuke smiled and nodded, selected his favourites from the pile to keep, and then handed Gin the photo he'd just said he liked. "Here, you can have this one."

... Gin took the photograph off him, blinking in surprise.

"I... are you sure?" he asked, a little unsure. Why was Sousuke giving him this? Surely he'd want to keep the perfect photo of them for himself. Put it on his desk maybe. Gin could tell he wanted to do that. So it was a surprise to hear Sousuke offer it to him instead. A pleasant surprise, but still a surprise nonetheless. *Ya think ya know a person...*

"Of course I'm sure." Sousuke told him. "You did say you liked it, so you should have it."
Gin felt a gentle heat rush to his cheeks. "Oh." he said, finding it a little absurd that such a small gesture should touch him so much and send the moths that had taken up residence in his belly into a frenzy. "Thankyou."

He looked up to see the man's soft smile again and quickly glanced back down at the photograph in his hand. Unable to meet the intensity of his gaze. It was too much like staring into the sun.

"Don't mention it," Sousuke said softly, kissing him on the temple. "I just like seeing you smile like that."

This, of course, prompted a wider smile and more heat to rush to Gin's face. But for once, he didn't mind. In fact, he was already thinking of what kind of frame to put his new photograph in, so he could keep it beside his red tulip.

"So what do you want to do today?" Sousuke's voice interrupted his thoughts. Bringing him back to reality again.

"Oh," Gin gasped, forcing his mind to focus. Feeling suddenly awkward and shy again. Honestly, this was ridiculous. He'd already seen the man naked, there was no reason to be feeling this awkward. "Um, I guess we could take Che-Che for a walk," he said. "Be nice t'walk you home fer a change."

He heard Rangiku snicker quietly and felt like his whole face was on fire. God, this was not how he imagined things would go at all. But if Sousuke noticed his awkwardness, he didn't mention it.

"That sounds perfect," he smiled. "What do you think, Che-Che? Should we go for a walk?"

Cherry just answered by leaping off Sousuke's lap and running in a circle making happy little yips at them. And Gin felt all warm inside because the man had used her little nickname.

"I think we're going for a walk," Sousuke said, shooting Gin a happy grin. Gin just smiled, grateful the attention wasn't on him anymore.

"I'll get our shoes," he said.

....

They were walking through the park together, taking the long and scenic route to Sousuke's house when Gin broke the quiet between them. By laughing when Cherry kept running around Sousuke's legs with a big stick in her mouth.

"Yeah Che-Che, we see ya wit' yer big stick!" he called after her. Even though she paid him no notice. She never did when sticks were involved.

"Think she's tryin' ta impress ya," he nudged Sousuke, who just chuckled in answer.

"She might be," he answered, a soft smirk on his lips, "Though she must know I already love her."

Gin laughed at that. "I don' doubt it, she's clever like that," he said, with more than a touch of pride. "An' well... she knows I like ya so she prob'ly wan'ed t'make a good impress'n on ya." Gin shrugged. "So 'guess she's jus' real happy ya like her. Like I am."

Sousuke had to smile at that. In fact, he was smiling so broadly his cheeks were beginning to ache. "You like me?"
Kyouka snorted in the back of his mind. *No shit, Sherlock!*

Gin's response was kinder. His darling just laughed softly. "Course I like ya," he said. "How can I not after yesterday? Ya gave me the stars fer fucks sake!"

Sousuke took a quiet moment to digest this.

*Yes, Kyouka added. And because you were being yourself.*

Sousuke smiled despite himself. Quite forgetting where they were when the warmth of Gin's lovely fingers in his shrank the world down to the space just around them. He returned the squeeze Gin's hand gave his.

"You were bein'... you." Gin added softly. "It was... nice."

That brought him up short.

He glanced across at Gin, who was carefully avoiding his gaze with the lightest shade of pink in his cheeks. Still so very shy around him – even after last night. Even though they'd already seen each other naked. But then, he supposed laying one's feelings bare and exposed was an altogether different kind of naked. One that Gin was still uncomfortable with. And one that he himself intended to avoid forever. After all, the name of the game was to get Gin to completely fall for him. Not get attached himself. Though Gin was doing his damn best to make it very difficult not to...

Although, if Gin was being like this with him, it meant he was making progress. If only the damn moths in his belly would settle down long enough to let him savour this little victory of getting Gin to show some warmth and affection towards him. That was, if it was genuine. It felt genuine, but with the lavender still sitting on his desk, he couldn't be sure. Did Gin have feelings for him? Did he have feelings for Gin, even?

The only way to be sure was to play the long game and hope for the best. And hope that his instincts were right.

"Yeah," he said softly. Recalling the night they'd shared together and unable to help smiling. *Because it had been a nice little break from reality. And chessgame aside, he had felt happy then.* He felt happy now, too.

"It was nice. I really enjoy spending time with you."

*Just such a shame it has to end.*

The dark whisper in his mind laughed, teasing him. But he made himself look at Gin, whose smile made it melt away.

"I'm glad ya think so," Gin said happily, beaming up at him and holding onto his hand tightly. And when Gin boldly leant up onto his tiptoes and kissed him, the whole world just stopped rotating. And Sousuke couldn't help but wonder what in the three worlds he was going to do without him. Because right now Gin was the only thing that seemed to keep the darkness away.

*Yes, the voice whispered. What on earth are you going to do?*

He shoved the question aside and silenced the mocking laughter by pulling Gin into his arms and kissing him deeply. Not even caring who saw. And Gin responded eagerly, wrapping his arms around him, kissing him with more passion than Sousuke thought existed.
They were brought back to reality by the sound of Cherry's barks. They broke apart to find her
sitting there – giant stick chewed to pieces around her – expectantly waiting to continue their walk.
Gin just laughed, undoubtedly feeling a little awkward he'd just essentially been cockblocked by
his own pet.

"Alright, alright Che-Che, we're comin'." he said, sighing in exasperation. Then turned his attention
to Sousuke again. "Guess we better get movin' before she drags us."

Sousuke laughed. "Has she been known to do that?"

Gin cracked a somewhat sheepish smile. "She's certainly tried." And Sousuke suddenly had an
image of the little fox holding Gin's clothes with her teeth and trying to drag him along while Gin
laughed and humoured her.

What's that Che-Che? Lil Johnny fell down the well?

Arf, arf, arf!

"I can just imagine that," he said, amused to no end by the mental image.

"Well ya won't have to if we stay here." Gin told him. "But we can't spend all day in the park.
C'mon, let's walk."

Sousuke let Gin lead him on, while Cherry yipped excitedly and sped around them as they walked.
Laughing together at her as she chased several squirrels up trees. The voice still whispering quietly
inside his skull.

Whatever will you do? Because you know he'll leave you eventually. They all do.

Though he ignored it in favour of his pleasantly distracting companions. Because then he could
pretend he was 'normal'.

..."Well, this is me." Sousuke said, when they were standing outside his front door. "Do I get a kiss
goodbye or would you like to come inside?" he asked, with a mischievous smirk. The meaning of
which was not lost on Gin, who laughed, a little embarrassed at the unspoken suggestion.

"Well I would but, I don' think Cherry-chan will give us any 'lone time." he smiled, doing his best
to stop laughing. "Maybe another time?"

Sousuke smirked again. "Well, you can come inside anytime."

Gin flushed pink and swatted him. "You behave!"

"Never." Sousuke smiled. Gin just shook his head at him.

"Well then, in that case," Sousuke said, "Do I at least get a kiss goodbye?"

Can I pretend I'm normal just a bit longer?

Gin's smile softened, although his cheeks were still very pink. He looked positively lovely. "If ya
ask real nice."
Sousuke smiled back at him. "Then, may I please have a kiss?" \textit{Will you let me pretend I'm happy just a little bit longer?}

Gin smiled gently at him. "Well, since ya asked so nicely, I suppose ya can have a kiss. Just one though. We now once ya start ya can't seem ta stop."

Sousuke chuckled. "I'll have you know I have excellent impulse control." he said smugly. "Though I will admit it is difficult to keep my hands off you."

The fading blush on Gin's cheeks returned with full force, and Sousuke wished he could take a photograph. But he'd settle for another kiss of those lovely soft lips and his sharp memory.

"Jus' shut up an' kiss me." Gin told him, all pink and lovely and trying not to be so embarrassed by scowling. Sousuke couldn't help but chuckle.

"Ah, now that I can most certainly do," he smirked, quietly snaking his arms around Gin and pulling him in for a mind melting kiss. Thoroughly enjoying the way his darling's lips parted for him, and the way his tongue tried to fight for dominance before giving in, and the way he moaned so softly and the way he tasted and... well, just everything about him, really. But most especially he enjoyed the way his lovely darling's arms bravely snuck around him to hold him close, too. So much so that when Gin finally had to pull away to breathe again, he felt a keen sense of disappointment. But Gin's giddy smile was worth it, though.

"Wow," Gin breathed, huffing a breathless laugh. "I'mma be thinkin' 'bout that fer a while."

Sousuke shot him a mischievous grin. "Want to try for 'all day' as opposed to 'a while'?"

Gin laughed breathlessly. "Yer hopeless."

"And whose fault is that?"

"Yours." Gin retorted. Though his face was steadily turning that lovely shade of pink again at the comment. He was just thinking about how cute Gin looked like that when Cherry started whining and barking at them.

"Ah, apparently we've been standin' still too long on walkie time." Gin elaborated, answering his question before he could even ask it.

"No' been payin' ya 'nough attention, ne?" he asked the fox, who just sat at his feet wagging her tail like butter wouldn't melt. Sousuke smiled down at her, but Gin just sighed and shook his head.

"So bossy," he said. Lifting his gaze up to Sousuke again. "Guess we better get movin' er she'll never let us hear the end of it." he sighed. "I did have a lovely time, though."

Aizen returned the smile, almost giddy at the tenderness in his darling's face. And the fact it was quite impossible to miss.

"Me too," he said. "I had the best time."

\textit{Best I've had in a long while.}

Gin beamed at him, clearly pleased by this. "I'm glad," he said softly. "We should do it again sometime."

The smile absolutely refused to leave Sousuke's face. "Same time next week?" he asked. Trying not
to sound too eager. And probably failing. Ah who cared? Gin was smiling at him. It didn't matter how he sounded.

"It's a date." Gin answered. And Sousuke could have burst with happiness. Not that he'd actually admit that to anyone. But still.

"Perfect!" he said. "I'll come pick you up then."

"Great!" Gin grinned. "See you then."

And with that, Gin surprised him by leaning up on his tiptoes again and kissing him softly on the lips. He was so surprised in fact, that it took him several seconds to recollect himself. Much to Kyouka's amusement.

Cherry yipped at them again, telling them to hurry up. And Sousuke couldn't help but feel a bit ridiculous at being told off by a little fluffy white fox.

"Yeah alright, we're goin." Gin told her, sternly. "Now shush."

Sousuke fought a snicker at the two of them and Gin turned to look at him again. "Byebye, Sou," he called out after he took a few steps down the path. "See ya next week!"

"Yes," Sousuke smiled. "See you then."
Chapter Notes

A/n: *deep breaths and posts* Introducing 'Hellish voice'. Apologies in advance for getting dark with this lighter story.

Warnings: some darker themes, thoughts, concepts and references to mental issues/disorders. If you are proceeding, please proceed with caution, and an open mind. This is 'hellish voice', named such for good reasons.

Note: next time i will return to lighter topics including Cherry cuteness and mutual pining.

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_In pictures I see all that we were and could be_
I'll hold onto the breakthroughs
I'm a fool for you
In the mirrors I see demons set out to haunt me
With familiar faces starting to talk like I do

'I cant stand you, I don't get you
I don't want to, never want to, get to know you.'

_In the mirrors I see demons set out to haunt me_
With familiar faces starting to talk like I do

I can't stand myself

- Circus-P _[I Can't Stand You]_

**Chapter 25: I Can't Stand You**

Sousuke watched Gin walk away with a lovely spring in his step, Cherry running off ahead of him. He watched the little fox stop and wait for him to follow, yipping until Gin shooed her on, which made him laugh a little.

He waited until the boy and his fox were out of sight before he went back inside and slipped into the house quietly. Smile still tugging the corners of his lips upwards even as he went into the kitchen and boiled the kettle, ready to settle down with a nice cup of tea to end his perfect days with Gin.

Once the kettle was boiled, he poured himself a pot of tea and grabbed a mug from the cupboard and took them into the living room. He sat on the sofa, feet up on the coffee table and sighed happily. The heat of the mug radiating into his hands. Yes. This was a perfect way to end a perfect morning and the end of a wonderful time with his lovely Gin.

He was just taking the first sip of his tea, wondering if his next date with Gin would be as magical as this one had been, when the dark thoughts returned.
I don't know what you're so happy about. You know he's just trying to play you.

He tried to ignore the thoughts, the doubts plaguing him because of it but it wouldn't stop. Gin wasn't here anymore and there was nothing to take his mind off it.

What did you think? That he was falling for you? HA! He couldn't get away from you fast enough!

Sousuke sat and gripped his mug of tea, trying hard to blot out the voice, by remembering the wonderful night. This morning. The passion. The love. Being happy. All of his pleasant interactions with Gin thus far in the past few weeks. Trying to keep his thoughts buoyant and upbeat.

But it was useless.

It was always useless.

The darkness would always come, always out of nowhere, and blindside him.

He sucked in a breath. His mood was crashing, and it was crashing hard.

He tightened his grip on his mug. Why? Why was it always like this? Why was he feeling so low now when only ten minutes ago he was feeling on top of the world?

Why?

He was happy before. So happy. So incredibly happy.

Why now?

Gods he hated this.

It was like only black and white existed in his world, and he was constantly switching between them. Sometimes he swore his brain hated him, being wired this way. Although he knew the real reason was much more than that. But still. Gods, no wonder Gin couldn't turn away fast enough earlier. He was a fucking mess. A fuckup. And who on earth in their right mind could love a fuckup?

Yes, now you're getting it. You're a fuckup. That's all you do, just fuck things up. Gin's definitely better off without you. You deserve to be alone.

Aizen sat up and carefully set his mug down on the coffee table with shaky hands, as if it might detonate at any moment - or as if he might detonate at any moment, he didn't know which – and held his hands over his ears. Wiling his brain to shut the fuck up. Because Gin liked him. Gin had said so. Gin had said he'd had a lovely time with him and made plans to see him again. And why would he do that if he didn't like him?

But the hellish voice in his head didn't care.

You idiot. He's playing the long game. Just waiting to get what he wants out of you. And when he does he'll stab you in the back. He'll be just like all the others. Selfish and out for himself. He doesn't want you. He wants what you can give him.

Gin doesn't want you. He doesn't love you.

It laughed, and he pressed his hands over his ears harder. Trying to tell himself Gin could love
him. That it was possible.

_Of course he doesn't love you, you complete waste._ The voice said. _I don't know why you even try._

He sank further into his chair, trying to fight the darkness within. But it was useless. He'd have better luck trying to stop the tide coming in with his bare hands. Once the darkness infected, there was no stopping it from blotting out every single bit of light and hope in his world.

No stopping it from wrapping itself around his ankles and dragging him down into the abyss to drown.

Alone.

_How could anyone love you?_

_You're pathetic. A waste._

_If you think anyone could love you then you're crazy. Stupid. Deluded. Mad. Insane, insane, insane._

_You're insane. A failure as a human being._

His breathing was shallow now. Harsher. His whole body shaking with the sheer effort it took to hold himself together. Because from experience he knew it took ten thousand times longer to put yourself back together than it did not to fall apart in the first place. And it was easier to keep it together rather than go through it again. But he was failing at even that. Just like he failed at everything else.

Pathetic. Useless.

Weak.

_Who would love you?_

He could feel his heart racing. Trying to escape the cage of his ribs with force. Bashing against what felt like the fragile walls of his chest cavity. It was pointless to fight the darkness. It was right. He was everything it said he was. Useless. Pathetic. A complete fucking waste.

No wonder he didn't have any friends. No wonder Gin didn't want to be with him.

The thoughts grew softer, comforting almost. And he could feel the darkness curl around him. Feel it smile and murmur softly in his ear. _What you need to do is self destruct..._

He wished Gin were here with him now. Just so he wouldn't feel so alone. Just so he could go back to being happy. But gin wasn't here, he was already on his way home. So the closest he could get was looking at the photographs of them together. Actual, physical proof Gin liked him. Evidence he had been happy.

_Ladies and gentlemen, exhibit A._

They were sitting on the coffee table and he picked them up. Looking at them carefully. Seeing all the things they were and could be. Happy. Together. Smiling. He would have smiled now if not for the all consuming emptiness inside him.

_All the things you aren't and weren't._
He knew somewhere in his mind that he should be happy – why wasn't he happy? He should be ecstatic – but he just didn't know. Was this what Gin did to him? If so, gods only knew how something so enticing could have such awful side effects. And if this was withdrawal then this itching and scratching was its own kind of hell.

Maybe the voice was right. Maybe self destructing was better. After all, he was crazy. And who would love a crazy person?

Yes. Do it. Everyone will be fine without you. Better without you. Especially Gin. In fact, him most of all.

He stood up slowly and made his way into the kitchen again.

I don't know why you even bother. He can't stand you. None of them can. They all just put up with you because they're being nice. They're just too polite to tell you to fuck off. They just feel sorry for you.

They just pretend to care.

He stopped when he caught sight of his reflection in the glass of the cupboard where he kept the wine glasses and other breakables. Saw himself as he was. Empty. Unsmiling. Unsure of whether he'd ever smile again.

Not liking at all who he saw in the mirror.

You should just disappear.

He stared blankly at his reflection for a moment. Just breathing. Though even that was hard now. Feeling himself sinking further and further. Deeper and deeper.

You'll be out of everyone's way then.

He inhaled deeply and sighed. Yes. He was just in the way. A hindrance. After all, who'd want to put up with him? Not even he wanted to and he was the one who inhabited his body. Uncomfortable in his own skin.

A part of him knew he needed help. That he should get help. Because this wasn't normal. Nothing about this was normal. Nobody was either insanely happy or at rock bottom...

But getting help meant psych evaluations. Pills. Crazy candies. Talking. Talking about just how insane he was. Other people talking about how he'd lost the plot and was too weak to handle the pressure of being a person. People questioning his fitness and ability to work.

No, thankyou. He felt crazy enough on his own without that circus. He didn't need any help feeling crazy.

He didn't want to be put in a box and labelled.

And he certainly didn't want pills numbing out the highs, because those were what he lived for. Because those were the days he was on top of his game. Invincible. No-one could run his mood. And he just got so much done. He lived for those days.

Even though it meant he'd be constantly feeling like he were walking on ice, unsure of whether or not his next step would result in him crashing through it into freezing cold, dark water for days, sometimes weeks, until he could drag himself onto the ice again. Ready to do it all again. And
again. And again. Living a constant cycle of walking, plunging into icy water, nearly drowning, pulling himself up, walking, shivering, defrosting, running, falling through the ice.

If that didn't make him crazy, he didn't know what did.

He wondered if Gin knew he was messed up. Crazy. If Gin could sense it somehow. If Gin knew he was fucked up and was just too nice to say what he really thought.

*I can't stand you. I don't want to ever get to know you. I'd never love you in a million years.*

He wouldn't blame Gin for it at all. In fact, he wouldn't want to love him either.

He sighed, shoulders sagging, moving slowly to the cupboard to take a bottle of whiskey he'd been saving. A bottle meant to be savoured, enjoyed. He planned to do neither of those.

Instead, he shuffled back into the living room and sat back down on the sofa. Body hunched forward and forearms resting on his thighs. Hands hanging limply between his knees.

He unscrewed the bottle lid.

The darkness curling around him like a familiar friend. *But we all have our hellish voices, don't we?* He thought as it consumed him.


*Stop.*

*Disappear.*

*Because nobody here cares.*

*Nobody would miss you if you were gone.*

It laughed, mocking and cold, like the icy water he'd fallen into, and he covered his face with his hand. He tried once more, futilely, to block it out. But it was no good.

The poison was inside, not out.

And it was right.

Nobody cared.

Nobody.

*You should end it all now.*

*Oh. But you won't, will you? Because you're a coward. Because you still hope. You still cling to a foolish dream that someone will love you. That Gin will love you. That things will get better, which obviously isn't going to happen.*

It laughed again. Cynical. Dark. Icy cold. *You really have a stubborn streak, don't you? An iron will,* it sneered. *But I guess that's a good thing, because you have a job to do.*

*And when you do it, it continued, when you do it, everyone will despise you more. Which, let's face it, won't be much of a stretch, as they all loathe you already.*
He closed his eyes and the voice laughed again. His own inner saboteur. And the darkness coiling around him quickly drowned out every single last bit of light. Even the light of his Moon.

_You're a fool to think anyone would ever love you_, it said.

And Sousuke, desperate to blot it out, or diving headfirst into the abyss – who knew? Who cared? It didn't matter anyway - picked up the bottle and drank.

He didn't even taste it. And meanwhile his tea slowly went cold.
Peppermint and White Poplar

Chapter Notes

Last update til after October (2018) – because I have many pieces to have written for various deadlines then. Blame TheFoxPack ;) Go check them all out! They're all lovely! - Timewaster123456789, SesshomaruFreak, Spunky0ne, Ganymede Lullaby, Catsafari, HitsugayaKuchiki, Salazar Marvolo, Henka-chan, Tropicallight, Twisted Virtue.

a/n: Because Foxes Fix Everything :) – for Lull&Spunky. Feel better soon!

Notes: Che-Che. Foxes Fix Everything. Crossreferences to stories 'Chessboards' (Game prequel) and 'Say it' because this series is reaching mothy's 'Evillious' levels of crossreferencing. Alludes to Demisexual!Gin. Some ace/demi-ace problems and feeling out of place [love to Cat for being HERE for that]. Mutual pining! Flower language. foreshadowing that probably only Time will get. Setup setup setup.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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\[I'm \text{ tired of mess} \text{ing around}\]
\[I'm \text{ tired of playing games}\]
\[I'm \text{ tired of hide and seek yeah}\]
\[I \text{ want you, I want you}\]

\[I \text{ know it's breaking me down}\]
\[It's \text{ driving me insane}\]
\[So, baby, tell me if I\]
\[just \text{ had a minute with you}\]
\[Would our wildest dreams come true?\]

\[Tell me would you feel it too?\]
\[All I \text{ want to hear is that you}\]
\[Love me, love me, baby\]

- Yusuke Kira [Games]

Chapter 26: Peppermint and White Poplar

Gin was still feeling giddy and light headed as he walked back home. Unable to keep from smiling like a loon. He felt like he were still dreaming, because real life couldn't possibly be this good. As he whistled for Cherry to come to heel to walk down the paved streets of Aizen's neighbourhood, he kept replaying their evening and morning together. Wondering if this was what people meant when they talked about this falling in love business. If this is what it felt like. But from overheard conversations at school, Gin had gathered that falling in love was all fiery passion, intense heat, and butterflies in your stomach. This was... different. Of course, there were elements of those things, particularly the moths in his belly, but... in general Gin just felt a soft warmth. Like a
hearthfire on a cold winter day when he was around Sousuke. He felt calm. Safe. Happy.

His smile softened as he thought about it. Realising he'd felt like this for all of last night and this morning.

*Could this be love?* He wondered. *Is this what they all talk about? This feeling? And more importantly, does he feel the same about me? Does he feel this way around me? It's... so hard to tell.*

*But,* he thought, his mind drifting back to that magical night they'd spent together. His fingers unconsciously playing with the ends of the deep blue scarf wrapped loosely around his neck, still hiding his hickeys. *He gave me the stars and made me feel beautiful. He makes me feel wanted. And I feel like I can be myself around him.*

*And for just a little while, all his walls came down, too.*

When he got to the park again, he let Cherry run free through the fields and around the trees, though she always kept within sight of him. That didn't stop her from getting up to mischief, though.

She spent most of her time eating blackberries off bushes, digging holes in the dirt, and kicking up little pebbles onto the paths. She even picked up sticks to chew, and Gin had to stop her from trying to drag a branch three times her size home with her. And when she ran out of sticks, she tried to eat the long grass that grew at the edges of the fields that got missed by the lawnmowers. Gin told her off several times for her naughtiness, but she didn't seem to care. Her response was to stand looking at him with her big pink tongue lolling out of her mouth with a face that said, 'Yes. And? Your point is?'

So understandably, when Gin returned home with her, he was a little big exasperated and very much exhausted. But he supposed she kept him from brooding too much, so that was something. Well, he guessed so, anyway.

"Oh, Gin," Rangiku called to him. Another excitable puppy in his life. "You're back!"

"Yeh, I'm back." he answered. Collapsing onto the sofa while Cherry pranced into the living room and nosed in her box of toys. She retrieved an antler bone Gin had treated her to the other week, and settled down to gnaw on it. Gin just sighed, long and tired as he rested his eyes. Only opening them when he heard Ran shuffle into the room with a hot mug of tea in each hand.

"Here," she said, offering him a mug. "Thought you might need this."

Gin smiled warmly at her. She really knew him so well. She also knew just how much of a handful his little Cherry-chan could be, too. Though he wouldn't trade his baby fox in for anything.

"Thanks, Ran."

She smiled softly in return and took a seat beside him. "You're welcome. I figured between loverboy McDreamy and Cherry-chan both wearing you out, you might need a bit of time to rest and recharge your batteries."

Gin's face flushed just a little at the comment.

"Yeah, 'm pretty worn out," he said, sipping his tea and trying not to rise to the bait. Much to the amusement of his zanpaktou. "But d'ya have to call 'im that?"
Rangiku giggled. "Ah yes, you're right. I suppose McSteamy might be more accurate since I'm sure things got heated between you two last night..." she smirked. "Maybe this morning, too."

Gin nearly choked on his tea, coughing and spluttering. Face the colour of an angry red sun. Again.

"Ran!"

"What?" she asked, feigning innocence. "It's true! You look me in the eye and tell me it's not true."

"I..." Gin stammered, fumbling around for words. Cursing his own inability to lie to her with a straight face with for all he was worth. "Well, I... ya see... well..."

Rangiku smirked, triumphant. "I knew it," she said smugly. "Why else would you be wearing a scarf in springtime?"

Gin's fingertips instinctively reached up for the soft, thin cotton around his neck patterned with the constellations, and fought the blush aggressively rushing to his cheeks. "Be-" he began, pausing to scrape together some composure. "Because I thought it was nice and he bought it for me."

Shinsou cackled. Nice try, kiddo.

"Aw, come on Gin, tell me the real story," she whined. "I promise I won't tell anyone."

Gin pressed his lips together, not wanting to give in. but Shinsou kept on snickering. You know she won't let you rest til you give her something. And besides, she is your best friend. You should tell her.

Gin frowned, because the worst bit was Shinsou was right. He did owe Ran this. If he were her, he'd want to know, too.

"Okay, alright." Gin relented, much to Rangiku's delight. "I'll tell ya. But this goes nowhere, a'ight? I aint 'avin it goin' round th' whole damn school I'm 'avin it off with the teacher."

"Agreed." Rangiku said eagerly.

"You promise?"

Rangiku nodded seriously. "Pinky promise," she said, offering him her little finger. "This stays between us."

Gin nodded, satisfied, and linked his pinky finger with hers. A sacred pact that had survived their childhood in the Rukongai.

"So... Tell me, tell me, tell me!" Rangiku pressed.

"Alright then, alright," Gin said, separating their fingers again and proceeding to tell her what happened. He cleared his throat.

"Well, yer right," he began, cheeks still flushed bright pink. "Things between us did get a bit..." he paused, cleared his throat again. "Passionate."

He risked a glance at her, trying to ignore her huge grin and continued. "So as you probably guessed, there's some, erm, marks on me skin."

Rangiku nodded. "So you brought the scarf to hide them."
"Actually, no." Gin told her. Much to her surprise.

"No?"

"No." Gin echoed. "Actually what happened was, we went out ventured into the food market. Y'know, that one they have every year?"

"Oh, that one we always say we'll go to but never do?"

Gin smiled. "Yeah, that one. But anyway, we were walkin' 'round and fer well, obvious reasons, I felt self-conscious. An' ya know how anxious I get, feelin' like everyone's starin' at me. So he stops an' goes into a shop an' comes back ta me and wraps this around me," he said, gesturing to the scarf. "So I didn' feel so uncomfortable no more."

Rangiku smiled. "Oh Gin, that's so romantic," she sighed, "I'm so, so happy for you."

Gin smiled softly at the memory. "Yeah," he said quietly, "I'm pretty lucky, huh?"

"No duh!" Rangiku squealed happily. "Do you know how many people would kill to be in your shoes and have that gorgeous man dote on them the way he does you? Gin, you're the luckiest guy in the world! Because he loves you, and out of all the people in the world, he picked you."

"I guess so." Gin said. Smiling despite himself.

"Sooo," Rangiku cooed. "What else happened on your date?"

Gin laughed softly, a little embarrassed still. "Well, we had some Rukon stew at the food festival thing, he introduced me to his childhood friend Yuki, and after that we broke into the hot spring baths and spent some time in there."

He paused, drinking his tea again. But it was too much to hope for that she wouldn't take too much notice of that last part.

"Old habits die hard I see," she said, smirking. "Your idea to break in?" she asked, with a raised eyebrow.

"His, actually." Gin told her, keeping his tone casual. Waiting for her inevitable surprise.

"No way!" she gaped. "I don't believe it. Not the perfect, buttoned up lecturer Aizen Sousuke!"

"Believe it," Gin told her. "He grew up on the same streets we did. Th' man knows how to find trouble... knows how to pick a lock, too."

Rangiku whistled. "Damn, I never would've guessed."

Gin smiled knowingly. "S'always the ones ya least expect, aint it?"

"I'll say," she agreed.

"So as you can imagine, we bonded over a bowl of hot Rukon stew." Gin smiled. "His friend runs the stall and she made it for us. Real nice girl. Seemed to approve of me."

"Well, she'd be crazy not to!" Rangiku told him. "But oh, Gin, this is perfect. He's letting you meet people he cares about. This can only mean he's really serious about you! Oh, I'm so happy for you!"
Gin laughed. "Yeah, you said that already Ran."

"I mean, I didn't expect you'd ever find anyone," she added, "because you just weren't interested in a relationship. And most people only see outer beauty, you know?"


"Ugh, no, I didn't mean it like that!" She said. "Gosh that came out all wrong! I'm sorry. I mean I'm just... really, really glad you've found someone you really connect with, who loves you the way you are. Who likes you for you and thinks you're goddamn beautiful."

Gin's smile returned at that softening his expression considerably. "Thanks Ran," he said gently. "Me too."

"And from the looks of things," she added, "I think you're starting to feel the same way about him, too."

Gin had to think about that for a moment. Was he feeling that way about Sousuke? The way he was feeling earlier... could it be love? Were the icy walls defending his heart starting to melt? Was he beginning to thaw around him? He might be. He might definitely be. If only he could be sure those feelings were reciprocated...

"I think I might be," Gin admitted. "I'm thawing a bit towards him. I just... dunno what he's thinkin'. And then I aint sure. But then he gives me that look, an' I feel like I'm drownin' in those deep eyes. An' then he smiles a me like 'm th' best person in the world – and I just feel so gone."

Gin sighed softly, trying to work it out. Could this be love?

"Oh, that sounds like love to me," Rangiku said softly. "Or at least the beginnings of t."

"Ya think?"

"From what I've seen, I think so," she answered, smiling warmly at him. "Even if you don't quite know it yourself yet. But I'll let you figure that out on your own."

Gin smiled to himself as he mulled that over. Thankful that Ran was going to give him the space he needed to work his feelings out himself. Because feelings were complicated enough. And if he factored in the little game he was playing with Sousuke, well that took things to a whole new level of complicated for something that should really be very simple.

But he just couldn't ignore the way he felt, that spark between them, or that wonderful evening they'd shared where they'd connected in a very real way that made him smile whenever he thought about it. It could very well be love, for all he knew. And that made him stop and wonder if maybe Ran was onto something there.

"Thanks Ran," Gin said, still smiling. "I 'preciate it."

"No problem," she smiled. "Just don't take too long though, you don't want him to get away."

"You shutup," he said, smiling as she giggled at her own little joke.

"Oh Gin, you know I'm just messing with you."

"Yeh, I know," he said, drinking the rest of his tea, "Ya mess wit' me every chance ya get."

Oh you know you love it," she teased. To which Gin could only make a half hearted "Hmm," of
"So tell me, Gin, did you give him a kiss goodbye when you left him today?" Rangiku asked, hoping for more information from him.

"Course," Gin said. "What d'ya take me for, some cold floppy fish?"

"I just wanted to know," she smiled. "Oh, and did you give him the peppermint and white poplar, too?"

The hopefulness in her voice made Gin cringe. "Ah, uhm... no..." he admitted. More than a little ashamed. Cursing himself. *Shit. I knew I forgot somethin'...*

He covered his face with his hand, groaning. How could he have been so stupid?

"Aw, Gin!" Rangiku groaned, sharing his disappointment. "You missed a perfect opportunity!"

"I know, I know!" Gin groaned again. "We were just having so much fun- and the stew and- and I got distracted..."

*And I completely forgot we're supposed t'be playing a game.*

Both he and Rangiku sighed in unison.

"It's okay," she said gently. "I mean, the important thing is that you had fun and grew closer together, right? I mean he couldn't take his eyes off you today, so you're definitely doing something right."

Gin sighed softly and smiled. *Way to go Ran, remindin' me a the important stuff.* "Yer right, yer right. There'll be other opportunities t'give it to him, right?* And plenty of time to regroup.*

"Exactly," she nodded. "Plenty of opportunities. And maybe even time to come up with a more appropriate answer, even."

Gin smirked at her. "Such as?"

"Hmm, well, you know," she said suggestively. "Maybe something like jonquil... for desire. If things are getting passionate between you two."

She giggled as heat rushed to his face again.

"Ran," he sighed, shaking his head slowly at her antics. "No."

"Oh suit yourself," she said. "Just don't let the moment pass this time, okay?"

Gin nodded. "Okay."

"Good," she said. "Now are you finished with your tea?"

"Yeah." Gin handed her his empty mug and she stood, ready to take the dirty mugs into the kitchen to wash them. As she walked towards the kitchen, Gin took out the Polaroid photo Sousuke had given him, and sat examining it. Utterly fixated on just how happy they looked together. Him, Sousuke, and Cherry-chan. *Jus' like a little family,* he thought, smiling tenderly. Feeling that warmth spreading through his chest again, filling him up inside.

"Hey, Ran!" he called out to her, waiting until she poked her head out of the kitchen to answer him.
"Yeah?"

"Have ya got a frame fer this I can use?" he asked, holding up the photograph.

He watched her smile brighten up enough to rival the sun as she grinned at him. "Of course! I have loads! Come on, we can find one you like."

Gin smiled at her and followed her through to her room, fingers still clutching his photograph.

... Later that evening, Gin set his newly framed photograph on his table, right beside the tulip in its vase and his flower dictionary. He'd chosen an elegantly simple oak frame for it. He smiled at it, satisfied, and then flopped onto his bed, sighing heavily. He was still digesting the events of the last two days, and though he was exhausted, he also felt happy. The past couple of days had been... for the lack of any better words, so wonderfully amazing. Really, he didn't see how things could get any better.

*If only it could be like this every day,* he thought, rolling over and burying his face into the duvet and inhaling deeply. *Mmm, god, it still smells like him...*

Gin lay on the bed, quietly enjoying the lingering scent of Sousuke on his pillows and bedsheets, and wondered how many other people could claim to have had this pleasure of their bed smelling like Sousuke. Nobody, if Ran could be believed. Because rumour was he always took his partners back to his place, he never stayed the night at anyone's house. If so, did that mean Sousuke cared about him? Could he be in love? It was possible. Okay, the possibility was very slim, but still, it was possible.

Wasn't it?

It was possible, right?

*Right?*

Gin sighed heavily. He hoped it was possible, anyway. Life would be so much easier if it was.

He was interrupted from his musing by the sound of paws thundering across the floor as Cherry pushed the lightly closed door open and ran into the room, launching herself onto the bed beside him. Laying down in a huff on what had been Sousuke's side of the bed, looking rather glum.

"You miss him too, huh?" Gin asked, gently stroking her fluffy white fur. Cherry just sighed softly in answer. Shooting him a disappointed glance, violet eyes asking *'why isn't he back yet?'*

"C'mere," he said, rolling back over onto his back and gently patting his chest; his way of inviting her for a cuddle. One that she gladly accepted. She climbed onto him and settled down on his body. "We'll see him soon," Gin told her, holding her gently in his arms. She was his baby, after all.

*And in the meantime, I can work out how I feel.*

He let his fingers run through Cherry's soft, fluffy white fur, his mind wandering. Drifting through different possibilities of the two of them building a life together. Waking up next to each other every day like they had this morning. *Could that happen?* Gin wondered. *Could we have a life like that?*
He sighed again. *Does he even want a life like that with me? Or is it really just a game?*

He hugged Cherry close and tried to ignore the knot in his stomach as he thought about it. *Why can't it be easy? He wondered. Why can't you just make it easy, Sousuke?*

*Everyone else finds this easy. So why'm I questionin' everythin'?*

Cherry-chan whined softly and snuggled into him, and he gave her a gentle squeeze. *But then when you're around, I just feel, I dunno... happy. But how can I know if you feel the same?*

*Do I make you happy like you make me happy?*

*I mean, he sighed again, snuggling Cherry, who was very much enjoying the snuggling. I've never felt like this about anyone before. At least, not romantically. No-one's ever made me feel... attraction - or desire before.***

He lazily stroked Cherry-chan's fur. It really was so soft. And it helped him to think. She sighed deeply, eyes closing slowly as she drifted into sleep.

*There's been no-one before you. No-one. I just never felt attracted to anyone like that. Sure found people good-looking, but tha' were different. I didn' feel that spark, so I jus' weren't interested. And I couldn' even imagine climbing into bed with someone I didn't even know, much less love. Which s why I jus' can't have a one night stand like everyone else.***

*If I could, it wouldn' matter or not if I trusted ya. I'd just enjoy ya while I had ya.*

*But I can't.*

*I just aint wired that way.***

*So come on, Sou, just make it easy. Tell me you love me, so I can love you.*

*Cuz I'm tired of messin' around, 'm tired a playin' games...***

*All I wanna hear is that ya love me...***

*What do I gotta do? Hold you down and force you to say it?***

*Tell you to lie to me?***

*Don't ya know that I want you?***

Gin closed his eyes, lulled almost into sleep and he stroked and held a very comfortable Cherry in his arms as she lay on his chest, snoring away. Gin looked at her and smiled. She was so cute, even if she was a bit of a pain in the ass sometimes. As he watched her, he thought of the last few weeks with Sousuke. And last night. And this morning. And he couldn't help but smile at that, too.

That was when it hit him. Maybe that was why Ran was making such a huge deal out of their romance. Why she'd made a massive deal out of Gin *liking* him, even. Was finding him sexually attractive. He knew she was so excited about it simply *because* there'd been nobody else on his radar before him.

Because Gin had never been attracted to anyone at all.

He still remembered the time she'd been so shocked to hear it. They were in their first year at the academy, and somehow they'd got onto the topic of crushes, because Rangiku had been chatting to
some of her girl friends about 'the cute boys in class' and 'the sexy teachers'.

"So who do you think is sexy?" Rangku asked him.

"Eh me? N-nobody..."

"Whaaaat? No, come on, really... who do you find sexy?"

"Nobody. Sorry I jus'... don't find anyone attractive like that."

"For real? Hm well, that's alright I guess. If you don't feel it you don't feel it, right?"

Of course, she'd been quite accepting of it, but Gin remembered thinking at the time how out of his depth he felt talking about it. Though that had paled in comparison to sitting with Ran and her guy and girl friends, drinking and listening to them talk about their love lives. Their sex lives. That had made him desire to be swallowed whole by the ground beneath him. Because he had nothing to add to the conversation, no real experience to share, and couldn't relate to anything they were talking about at all. And he'd never felt so out of place in his life.

It had been awful.

But then, he'd always felt out of place. Ran pointed it out to him.

Until he'd met Sousuke Aizen.

Then his entire world shifted.

It didn't happen right away. The change was so gradual, he didn't even notice it until Ran pointed it out to him in her rather unsubtle way. 'So, come on, Gin. What do you think of our new teacher?'

But it happened. And things were never the same again.

It was a normal day, just like any other. He went to his class and handed in his assignments that were due. Had his lunch outside with Ran in the sunshine. It was a normal bog-standard day, at least, right up until the last lecture of the day. Hirako Shinji, Captain of the fifth was scheduled to teach the class, but the man who came in was not Hirako Shinji. There was a lot of confusion – who was this guy and where was their lecturer? - but the man calmly called for quiet, introduced himself, and explained there's been a switch out and that he'd be teaching the class instead. There was a bit of murmuring, but everyone accepted it and he began teaching them all the basics of kidou.

Gin watched him pick up a stick of chalk, wishing he could be half as calm and collected and composed at this man – right up until their eyes met and Aizen-sensei seemed to go still, staring at him for a moment, and dropped his chalk onto the floor with a clatter.

And the whole class bar Gin giggled. 'Ah, oops, how clumsy of me.' He smiled, playing it off, clearing his throat and turning to write on the blackboard. 'Right, now we'll begin, shall we?'. And Gin instantly smiled and felt a lot better, feeling a lot of respect. Even fukutaichou's were human and made fools of themselves. And if this guy could goof up and have it be okay, anybody could. Even him.

And for the whole hour, Gin couldn't take his eyes off him.

His knowledge was fascinating, and his voice was very easy on the ears. There was something about him, too. Like he was a puzzle waiting to be solved. A Rubik's Cube in human form. He
even raised a couple of points Gin wanted to ask him about, which he made a note to speak to him about after class was over. Which he did.

Aizen was all the right things. Polite, warm, courteous. Interested in the questions Gin asked. He seemed genuinely intrigued, too.

Time moved on, and the two of them often talked shop after class. Regularly getting into deep discussions until Ran had to come drag him out because it was getting too close to dinnertime. Something the man just smiled and shook his head at. Even as she was literally pushing him out of the classroom.

When the practical kidou lessons started, Gin quickly realised he needed a *lot* of correcting. Theory was one thing, but practicals... well, they were a whole other story. His posture and stance were awful. Aizen had to gently move his hand, his arm, his feet, nudge his thighs further apart. Sometimes standing a little too close for comfort. But oddly enough, he didn't really mind. And if he was going to learn, he needed to learn the *correct* way of casting kidou spells.

And eventually, Gin found he improved. And Aizen's obvious approval of this made him smile for the rest of the day. And every time Rangiku would point this out, happy he was in a good mood, and questioning why this was.

Gin supposed this must have been when things began changing, though at the time he'd been quite oblivious to it. Even thinking nobody would notice if he sat just a little bit closer to the front of the class just so he could be a little closer to the walking enigma teaching him. Although lately, the man was becoming less and less of an enigma and more of a real person to him, and he wondered how that had happened in such a short span of time.

Maybe he *was* thawing. Maybe his feelings really *were* warming up towards Sousuke. Maybe he *was* in love.

Ran sure seemed to think so, which was probably why she was pushing so hard for him to pursue the man. Why she was so adamant about responding positively to his floral offerings. Hell, it was probably why she'd even set them up on a date in the first place.

*I think you're starting to feel the same way about him*, she'd said. *Could she be right?* He wondered. *Do I love him? And more importantly, does he love me?*

"What do you think, Cherry-chan?" he asked softly, "Do you think I love him?"

The little fox opened one of her lovely violet-blue eyes, flicking her ear as if to say, 'Duh. Don't ask such silly questions.'

Gin smiled softly. "Thought you'd say that. So Miss *I know everythin*, what does he think about *me* then?"

Cherry opened both of her eyes and stood up on his chest and barked, clambering off him and onto his bedside table, where she sniffed the red tulip with her tail high in the air, wagging it slowly. She nosed the bright red flower delicately and then turned and barked at him thrice. Looking at him expectantly and tilting her head.

"Ugh, yer as bad as Ran," Gin groaned, only to have Cherry-chan pounce on him and land on his stomach, nearly winding him. Then she promptly began licking his face repeatedly and whining.

"Ah, Che-Che, stop! No!" he cried, thrashing and laughing until he had to lift her off him to get her to stop. She just wagged her tail happily.
"'Kay, 'nough now. Ya made yer point. But whaddya think I should do 'bout it, if he does love me?"

Cherry wriggled in his hands until he let her go. She immediately started pawing the flower dictionary on the bedside table, trying to drag it closer. Gin sat up and picked it up, thumbing through the pages, thinking.

"Well, I already know I gotta answer him with a flower, but which one?" he asked her. "There's so many choices..."

Cherry looked from his face to the tulip again, but Gin shook his head. "I don' wanna say that if I aint even sure how I feel meself, Che-Che," he said gently. "I can't lie."

Cherry lay down and huffed a sigh, obviously quite disappointed by this. Gin appeased her by stroking her head tenderly. "Maybe there's a better option ya can help me find, ne?"

Cherry snuffled closer, combat-crawling across the bed to settle herself beside him. Her rump in his armpit and her head on his stomach so she could read the book, too as Gin slowly read through the list of meanings.

"Hm, rose maybe?" he mused, turning to the list of roses. Finding about a page of just the different coloured roses. "Yikes, that's a lotta roses. Maybe not then."

He noticed then that there was something scribbled in the margin of the book.

"Ohh, Sou's handwritin'," he gasped, grinning, and Cherry leaned closer to the book to see.

"Jeez, does he deface all his books like this?" Gin wondered aloud, but was intrigued nonetheless. What could Sousuke want to note down? What would he deem important enough to write down on a page in his dictionary?

Cherry yipped, sensing the excitement, urging him to read it.

"Blue rose. 'Impossible' or 'impossibility'. Gin read, even more curious now. He may not have known much about flowers, but even he knew blue roses didn't exist naturally. But he read on. "Only created artificially, blue roses symbolise the impossible or unobtainable and in the flower language refers to unrealisable or unobtainable dreams or fantasies. With red roses 'impossible love'."

Gin opened his eyes, truly intrigued now. Until something twigged in his brain. "Is this what he thinks about me?!" he exclaimed, shocked and, slightly offended. Almost growling at the book in his hands. Making Cherry yelp in surprise with his ferocity.

"I hope not," Gin grumbled, scowling at the page. Cherry just whuffed softly and looked at the tulip again, nudging his hand with her nose.

Gin lay his hand on her head gently. "Yer right, yer right, I gotta focus," he told her, and the pair of them resumed browsing the flower meanings together peacefully.

Gin turned more pages, gears turning in his head, until he came across the entry for spearmint: *warmth of sentiment*. And peppermint: *warmth of feeling*.

And something instantly clicked in his mind.

"Peppermint!" he exclaimed, grinning. "It's **perfect**!"
Cherry-chan jumped up and wagged her tail, yipping joyfully.

"D'ya wanna help me find some peppermint t'give 'im Che-Che?" Gin grinned at his beloved pet, excited. Cherry jumped off the bed and ran around the room, no more than a white streaky blur as Gin laughed at her antics. She only stopped to sniff about when she caught the scent of something.

"Hm? What s it, Cherry-chan?" Gin asked, watching her with curiosity as she followed the scent to his bag that he'd just dumped carelessly in the corner of his room. He laughed when she stuck her head inside it.

"What're you doin' in there?" he asked, snickering. "C'mon, get outta that bag. Aint nothin' fer you in there."

Cherry did so, but when she pulled her head out of the bag, she was gently holding a twig in her mouth. No, not a twig, Gin realised. A small branch of a tree... is that...? The white poplar branch Ran gave me to give him? It is! An' she tied a big of peppermint to it, too! 'In time my feelings will warm to you', she said it meant. It's... it's perfect!

"Oh, good girl, Cherry-chan!" Gin smiled as she pranced over to him with her find. "Tha's perfect!"

Cherry sat down at his feet and she wagged her tail, looking quite pleased with herself at helping solve the problem. Gin gently took the poplar and the peppermint and smiled as he put them in the vase with his tulip, so they would keep until tomorrow. Unknowingly altering the flowers' meaning to 'in time my feelings will warm into love for you'.

"There we go," he smiled at Cherry-chan, "We can give it to him after school tomorrow."

Cherry yipped happily in response and Gin laughed, scooping her up into his arms. Giving her a big cuddle and lots of fuss for a job well done. "Alright, c'mon, time fer bed."

Cherry yipped once more and curled up with Gin after he climbed under the duvet, both of them settling down to sleep for the night. Cherry wiggled and pressed herself close to him, and Gin ran his fingers through her soft, fluffy fur, quietly drifting off to dreamland.

"Huh. I guess Ran's right," he mumbled sleepily, "Foxes really do fix everythin'."

Chapter End Notes

Hope everyone is enjoying so far :)  

Next chapter will be a joint effort with myself and Timewaster123456789 – who I worked on Cold Feet and Sanctuary with. Rembrandt [me] meets Picasso [her]. Get excited! I am! [please go and leave her pretty reviews/comments, she's amazing]

If October doesn't kill us, you'll see us working together again soon!
Chapter 27: Just the tequila talking

The next morning hit him like a ton of bricks. Someone had a jackhammer against his skull cranked to the max, and his throat resembled the Sahara desert. Or maybe that was just his alarm clock going off, amplified by one huge hangover.

He groaned, dragged kicking and screaming into wakefulness by the incessant beeping and he had just about enough coherency to reach over and turn the alarm off. Gods, he'd forgotten what this felt like.

He rolled over and slipped out of the bed. Head pounding. Joints screaming. But at least the mocking voice had been drowned out. Small mercies, he guessed.

He trudged through the house and into the kitchen, the light from the window painful and blinding. He squinted through it and tried to ignore the throbbing of his head as he boiled the kettle.

It was going to be a very long day. Even for him. And that was saying something.

X

As expected, the day dragged. No, he should say it *crawled* along, at an *unbearably slow* pace. So by the time the last lecture of the day finished, he was just about done with the whole world and every fucker in it.

Aizen winced burying his face in his hands now that the students had filed out. His eyes catching, unintentionally, the lavender still on his desk. He scowled at it. The floral answer sitting on the table in front of him stung…far more than he'd ever willingly admit. The voice echoed in his head,
mocking him, *Ha! You really think he gives a damn? Even after this? How cute*, the voice said it like 'cute' was a disease.

*He's just a kid. I've got him wrapped around my finger,* he replied.

The voice laughed. *If you think that then you're stupid... deluded... mad...*

*Insane.*

Insane... that sounded about right. He felt insane. Trapped under the ice that he was certain that he wouldn't climb out from this time. He was always certain he wouldn't, but he always did manage to crawl out. Although right now he wasn't sure he wanted to, it was a fucking exhausting cycle.

The student whispers of what a player he was, that normally he took a sort of concealed pride in stung.

He had to 'conceal' a smirk when it just made him feel more unworthy of Gin, when he wanted the ground to swallow him. Everything just fucking hurt. The amount of whisky he'd used to drown out the voice the night before probably didn't help.

*You're being pathetic*, Kyouka whispered in his head. *Fuck off,* was his succinct response.

He unlocked a drawer of his desk, pulling out a bottle of tequila. *Really?* Kyouka whispered, disapproving. *Shut up,* he replied pouring a second glass. Trying to drown out the wretched, hellish voice. *Again.*

An hour slid by with him drinking somewhat faster than he normally would. The hellish voice had died away some time ago and he should back off. *Should...* but he relished the silence and just, well... not feeling quite so alone. The blissful numbness... and then his eye caught the cynical mocking vase and that goddamn fucking lavender again and he threw down another glass, returning his gaze to the floor. He had enough problems without getting emotional over damn plant. He slammed the glass down harder than necessary and refilled it. Pathetic.

*That's right. Worthless, deluded...* the voice answered distantly through the haze of alcohol. And now he was giving it ammunition, splendid, well played. He downed his glass.

"Oh!"

His head snapped up at unexpected sound so fast it should have hurt.

"Gin?" he asked.

"I-I wasn't expecting...I fergot my book," he explained blushing in that way he did. All pink and lovely and...

*Cute'? The voice supplied. Smugly. He wanted to punch that voice.

"Oh, of course," Aizen said. He winced at the disappointment that'd slipped into his voice and swallowed as Kyouka hissed in disapproval.

"Are you drunk Aizen-sama?" Gin asked trying to cover his nervousness. He wasn't skilled yet but, he was learning. And a sense of pride filled him, though he concealed it. Difficult in his current state but, he managed.

"Nah yet. Care ta join meh?" he responded cockily, offering the glass he'd just poured.
"You are lying right? You do realize you're plastered?" Kyouka asked.

"Psh. Ye of little faith I've got this," he replied.

"You are. So. Fucked." She hissed.

"Shut up," he said. Gods, he spent way too much time telling her that.

"Ye in a good mood," Gin said, still obviously trying to hide his nervousness. And Aizen realized he was smiling idiotically. Well so much for hiding his pride. Ah fuck it, he was drunk. He'd put it down to that if anyone asked.

"Cus I gaht the chance ta get yadrunk an' alone," Aizen smiled then, another giddy and idiotic thing, "'An' you're here. M' dayss allllways betta when yer 'ere." They're hell when you're not.

He watched Gin's cheeks pinken to that lovely shade he liked so much again and saw the shy smile creep across his darling's face. Though he could see Gin was fighting it.

"Ahh..." Gin nervously turned the book in his arms, "Re-really?"

"Yeah," he smirked. "But s'even betta whenya smile a me too. Like tha' one yer givin' me now. So 'dorable. Goin all pink fer me. S'cute."

Gin blushed redder and cleared his throat, in a vain attempt to retain some control. "Yeah, well..." he said, seemingly unsure of how to continue. "We established that already. So I think now we better get ya home before ya embarrass yerself or get in trouble fer drinkin' at work."

Aizen frowned. He'd wanted to sit and look at Gin's lovely pink face a bit longer, but he did suppose Gin was right. He'd probably get a written warning for drinking at the school.

"S'pose yer right." he said, sighing softly. Sounding disappointed to even his own ears. "C'mon, lessgo."

Gin eyes him dubiously as he made to stand. "Ya sure ya can walk?"

Aizen gave him a smirk. "Ah aint so pished I carn' walk by myself." He said, only to nearly go tripping over the chair.

"Liar." Kyouka told him. You are so fucking wasted.

"Ah..." Aizen smiled, trying to cover up the fact he might just need some help getting home. "But I'd like to take yer arm 'nyway. Be nice to stroll t'gether. S'posedta be romantic, walkin home togehter."

He moved slowly, using the desk to remain upright. Trying to blow it off with a laugh he was good at that. Shit, I hadn't meant to get quite so plastered... he thought. Trying to stop the world spinning around him quite so fast. He closed his eyes and held onto the chair, hoping it would help. Somewhere close by he heard Gin sigh, and opened his eyes to see the boy shake his head. He half expected Gin to make some remark about just how plastered he was, how fucking wasted. Gods, yer so fuckin pissed, Aizen-san. Go sober up, yer gross, pathetic.

But Gin just quietly took his arm. And he was grateful for the warmth, for the contact, for Gin propping him up, for being the one light in this otherwise dim world. The bright moon in a sunless sky. He was absurdly grateful, too, for the escort. He might end up in a ditch somewhere if left to his own devices. Or worse. At least if Gin was here, he'd get home safely. Gin wouldn't let
anything happen to him. Gin would keep him safe. The thought brought a soft smile to his face.

"C'mon, Sousuke let's get ya home."

He grinned then. He hadn't meant to smile quite as softly as that. Best play this one off, and quick.

"Oh good." he drawled. "Will ya stay wi' me nigh too? Cuz I wanna take ya home and make ya scream loud..." He then leant into Gin's ear and whispered, "I'mma make ya cum so 'ard."

"Sousuke!" Gin chided him as they made their way out. "Will ya behave!"

"Oh ya knowya wan' it. Want me inside yer..."

"Sousuke!" Gin gasped, scandalised. Mortified. "This's a public space! Ya shouldn't be sayin' tha' stuff!"

"Bed." Sousuke finished. "Lemme finish, Gin. Lemme finish 'fore ya get all scandal lik at."

But Gin just groaned, as they strolled out of the school building and into the outside air. Sousuke stumbled against Gin as he leaned close to Gin's ear and said quietly, deviously,

"Imma even leya be o'top."

At which his lovely Gin went bright pink and nearly leapt off him. "WHAT?!" Gin exclaimed. Sousuke just grinned. Oh, it was adorable. So adorable. Gin stammering for words and all pink like that. And then it all got too much and he descended into a fit of snickering at his own words. Imagining dirty things while Gin stared at him, shocked.

Because it felt good to laugh. Gin was here, so fuck everything else. Fuck his hangover tomorrow, fuck his bad day, fuck the lavender, fuck the voice. Fuck everything. All that mattered was right next to him.

"Jokin 'side," Sousuke carried on, ignoring Gin's embarrassment. "'m sayin I anna ave love wi'ya." and then he flashed what he hoped was his most seductive smile, and purred out, "Wanya ta make sex t'me Gin."

Gin was silent for a moment as he digested the request, and then burst out laughing. Aizen frowned. "Whadid I say? M' bein serius. Don' laugh a me."

"Ya... ya said it all wrong!" Gin said, trying not to laugh and failing horribly. But he let it slide because it wasn't a malicious sounding laugh.

"Its' 'have sex' and 'make love'" Gin said, correcting him as gently as he could. Still laughing softly. He had to smile again. He loved that laugh, oh how he loved that laugh.

"See?" he drawled, "Thiss why yer mazin'. So smart'n shit. S'why I likeya."

Gin smiled at him, warmth at the compliment flooding his cheeks as he gently steered them out of the way of a lamp post. Good. Because that would've ended badly. Concussed and drunk were a bad combination. And just drunk was bad enough.

Kyouka sighed wistfully. See? I like this honesty. Why can't you be like this all the time?

He tried to reason with himself, come up with a reason why. He came up blank.

He wasn't that into Gin. Not really. There really wasn't anything special about him. He was just a
distraction. A way to pass the time before he left this wretched hole for better – if darker, more sunless – pastures. Well, it was what he tried to tell himself. But with the drink and the world spinning slowly around him, no reasons were forthcoming. And through the haze of the alcohol, it was difficult, nearly impossible. And he was just so tired. And his brain was too addled with drink for any type of chessplay, even just basic moves. Simple witty remarks.

And with the hellish voice in his head, the sting of the lavender on his desk, the things people whispered about him, nobody wanting to be with him for more than power advancement or bragging rights that they'd bedded lieutenant Aizen, and the crushing loneliness he felt even surrounded by people – sometimes he did wonder, what it might be like just to not wake up alone anymore. To have someone to fall asleep next to every night. Someone to fill the void inside him so he wouldn't keep feeling like a puzzle with a missing piece. A piece that might just be Gin.

His other half.

Not that he'd admit that to anyone.

He paused mid-stride, dragging both Gin and his dark train of thought to a halt. No, best not let his mind go there. Not to that dark place, where the hellish voice lived. Better to keep things light, fun.

"Can I kiss you?" Aizen asked.

"Ah.. in public? Aint we s'posed ta be a secret?" Gin asked in a hushed voice.

"Ah dun care, wanna kiss ya. Wan' makya happy."

Gin looked around, spying no-one that he could see. Deciding it was safe, he smiled. "Aight. Bu' just one, cuz I know what yer like."

Aizen leant down to kiss Gin, but he moved too quickly, and the world swam, so they ended up bashing their noses together.

"Ow, Sousuke!" Gin groaned, holding his face. "Said ya could kiss me not bash me!"

Aizen laughed, then. Somewhat nervous yet amused laughter.

"Sorry, Gin." he said, and reached a hand out to touch Gin's face again. "Hopya don bruise."

"Should be fine." Gin told him. "Jeez. Yer co-ordinations fucked fer someone who 'aint pissed'."

Aizen laughed again. And Gin could see his laughter was true laughter. Laughter of the soul. An iceberg of realness in a sea of falsehood and chessplay. It shouldn't have made him as happy as it did. This was supposed to be normal behaviour for couples. How many times had he caught Kyoraku and Ukitake playfully flirting and laughing with each other like this? Holding hands in public? Gin decided then that he'd ride the iceberg for as long as he could, and climbed on top of it to enjoy the view before it melted again and life went on as before. Though he couldn't help but feel a twinge of disappointment at the realisation that life would go on as before.

When the laughter faded away Aizen just smiled warmly down at him. Affection in his eyes. "less try that 'gen." he said. And this time he leant in slowly.

It's odd kissing a drunk person, Gin realised. Oh god, is this how I kiss?! He wondered. So clumsy and uncoordinated?! Was I like this? Good god I hope not! If I am I know he's just saying I'm good
at kissing to be nice!

Though I do wonder... Was he like this, when he had his first kiss?

He had a wild thought he might be taking advantage of the situation, until he remembered they were officially together now. That even if they were drunk as a skunk, you were allowed to kiss your partner. Though he tried to ignore his stomach flipping at the word he'd just used.

X

When Gin finally did reach up to kiss him, Aizen melted into the kiss and moaned softly. Feeling that warmth suffusing his body again, beginning in his chest and flowing outward to his extremities. This was nice... the fun, the playful flirting, the kissing that his Gin was certainly improving at... he couldn't quite put his finger on it, but he felt... more alive, with Gin around. Less... less alone in the world.

Like the world was full of colour instead of black and white.

But he quickly caught himself before his thoughts went somewhere they weren't supposed to. Before he started imagining things that couldn't be, shouldn't be.

Nonsense. I only feel this way because I desire his body. This is just arousal. It is. It is...

Kyouka just snorted. Yes, she said sarcastically, of course it is. Just like it was in that fantasy, when you wanted more than just that physical connection while he rode you. If you wanted to slake a need, you'd have picked anyone off the street and you know it. When will you stop pretending?

He was about to come back with a snappy remark to his zanpaktou, when he heard captain Ukitake calling out to them. "Hey, lovebirds! Save it for home you two!"

And immediately Aizen was laughing and had to break the kiss. Because here he was, at his age, being treated like a frisky teenager caught getting it on with his partner by the headteacher when all they'd done was kiss. It was ludicrous.

"Ah'm sorry," Sousuke smiled at the captain. "I cannae 'elp meself!" Laughing. In front of him, Gin was flushed beet red, quietly dying of embarrassment. Even in his drunken state, he picked up on this and decided it was best to go home now. For privacy. So Gin didn't feel so awkward.

"I'mma take im 'ome now an make im so he cannae sidown!" Aizen declared, loudly, and then fell into a fit of what he knew Gin would only describe as a fit of perverted laughter.

"Sousuke please!" Gin groaned, covering his face with his hands.

"Ah. Oops. Perhaps I should've said more polite..."

But Ukitake just chuckled at them. Gin was just groaning. Wanting the world to swallow him whole.

Foot, Kyouka said, meet mouth.

Gin suddenly laughed, high and nervous, trying to play it off. "'M' so sorry, Taichou, 'e's drunk! C'mon Aizen-san," Gin called loudly, possibly too loudly as he started pushing Aizen towards their destination. "Less get ya home so ya can sleep this off."

"Aw but I wan'ed ta kiss ya more." Aizen whined. But Gin just pushed him harder. Trying to
ignore the goddamn snickering and Aizen's loud disappointment.

"Do we 'afta?"

"Yes!"

"But-"

"Move it Sousuke!" Gin ordered, pushing him along. "We can kiss later."


X

Once they were out of Ukitake's sight, Gin winced as Aizen staggered against him. This was such a weird situation but, he figured he owed the older man for the fiasco that was their first date.

Oh how the tables have turned... Shinsou mused. Gin shushed him.

"Ya know," Aizen said slowly slinging his arm clumsily about him. "Ya….make lif…bearable…like fuck Gin… Ya hav nah idea," Gin was stunned into silence as the player straightened once again walking under his own power. He couldn't tell quite if the man was feigning or not so he tried not to be too flattered by the act just in case. You never knew with Aizen.

"Sesrily," he continued. "Yehv no idea," he repeated. Gin was about to tune him out when the next thing he said snapped his eyes open and turned his heads to the playboy. "I'm sa' fucking loneley yeh mik I' bareable" he hissed under his breath. The world suddenly went very still after that, and Gin felt warmth spread though his body before catching himself, there was no point in getting emotionally invested it was quite clear his pursuer only cared about one thing. Aizen clumsily hugged him and Gin pushed him off.

"Fuck off yeh drunk," he said wishing with all his heart that wasn't the reason for the unexpected affection.

"Im naht, an' ah…ah luvya" he slurred rather proving Gin's point.

X

Aizen winced as the words left his mouth. He may not have had the capacity to lie to himself, but he'd meant to continue his game with Gin. And he'd very much not meant to admit…uh claim that. Ah fuck it all, he'd just say it was the liquor talking. Just the tequila talking. Yes.

Silence filled the empty space between them.

"I..." Gin began, only to have his voice die off. "Ya really mean that?"

"Wouldna' said it othawize," he replied. The truth. And the exact opposite of what he'd intended to respond. Foot meet mouth indeed. But it was just the alcohol, he told himself. Because of course he didn't give a damn about another one night stand. Why would he? It was a fun chase, nothing more. He could feel Gin's suspicion as he looked at him even through the haze of alcohol. "I'm paint thfuckin sky ferya tprove it. Makeya see. Make a go-dam sun fer yous."

Oh, so you finally get it. Kyouka said. Finally. Took you long enough. Five years of pining after him until you could screw up the courage to go and talk to him, and then getting plastered and declaring you'll paint the skies for him. Such a shame you'll start lying again when you sober up.
He told her to fuck off again.

"Uh well then..." Gin said again trying to seem confident and failing so adorably.

He heard Kyoraku whistle as they walked by, the dick.

"Oy Aizen-taichou, you're not settling down are ya?" he called in a perish-the-thought tone. Oh shit, Aizen thought muzzily. Told you so, Kyouka broke into his thoughts sounding way too smug. He ignored her.

"Set 'em up an' knock em down," he sneered back.

"Ugh give it a rest will ya?" Kyoraku called. "An' leave the boy alone,"

"I'm here w-willingly," Gin piped up shakily. Blushing furiously.

"That's what they all think," Kyoraku said darkly.

"ahd neva urt Im," he snapped. That was no here near as suave as what he'd meant to say… whatever that had been. Ah fuck it, in for a penny... "Go fuck yerself with a goddamn cactus!" he railed at the man. A snarl on his lips and a pair of possessive arms around Gin.

Kyoraku laughed though what he said was lost as the world spun wildly. All he could gather was Kyoraku's tone and laughter somewhat resembled the cackling voice in his head just before the world lurched around him. Bringing nausea and dizziness. Shit.

X

Somehow Gin got him home. After waiting for him to come to and lumber onto his feet again, Gin got him home. Trying not to spew vitriol at Kyoraku for the things he'd said. The things he'd insinuated. As if he didn't have his own mind saying those things.

But Gin managed to ignore it. And they arrived at Aizen-sama's place without further incident. Gin waited while he fumbled for a key and handed it to him, clearly not trusting his own co-ordination. Gin took it without comment, opened the door and watched as Aizen stumbled to the couch, sat down, and let head loll back on the corner. Gin walked in after, feeling incredibly awkward, and handed him back the keys. Aizen cracked his eyes open.

"eh? Keep em," he said, closing them again. Gin tried not to get too happy, knowing he'd ask for them back later but still it felt he'd won a round. He turned to leave.

"Ya can stay ya know,"

"er thanks but I think I'll be going," Gin said.

"I…I'd likeit if ya stayed," he slurred softly.

"I'm sure," Gin replied not trying to hide his bitterness. At aizen for using him, at what Kyoraku said, what he'd implied, as if Gin didn't know all of that shit already. He wondered if there was a flower for hatred, so he could give to Kyoraku, for stirring up all this in his mind again when he thought they'd been making progress. For reminding him that his relationship with Sousuke would be forevermarred by chessplay.

A long pause then Aizen laughed harshly,"ya kiddin righ? Ya rem'ber thiss feelslike?" Gin did indeed, wincing as he remembered his own experience. He hesitated. Guilt clawed at him, too as
he remembered how Aizen had looked after him when he was in this state. Fed him, let him shower, clothed him, let him sleep in his bed. How he'd stayed. And suddenly he felt awful and ill.

Gin shook the guilt away. No. He would not let Aizen guilt trip him into staying. Drunk or not, chessplay between them or not, that was an underhanded move.

"Jus' donwanna be 'lone." Aizen whispered.

Gin could feel his heart break inside him at that. And he swallowed thickly. Guilt like bile in his throat. But he made himself put the key in the door to go. He had to. He couldn't let Aizen manipulate him like this. Not into his life, not into his bed... certainly not into his bed.

And Kyoraku had warned him...

"Wan ya t'stay." Aizen slurred again.

Gin made himself place his hand on the doorknob. "I don' think is a good idea." he said. Kyoraku's voice bouncing in his skull. Never hurt him... please. I've seen enough of your other victims to know otherwise... you'll get bored of fucking him sooner or later and go onto the next one.

He remembered Aizen's response of 'Go fuck yerself with a cactus'. After which he had hit the floor.

Gin took a deep breath. Maybe this was all a big mistake, coming here, doing this, being with him... maybe Kyoraku was right. Maybe he should just save himself heartache and pain later down the line and walk away NOW, while he still could. While he still had his heart intact. Spare himself the 'I told you so's and gossip and rumours and the shame when it all ended badly.

Which, he knew, it would eventually.

Somewhere behind him, he heard Aizen sigh tiredly and softly.

"Ahshit. Didn' meanta upset you." he slurred. "I done gone put me foot innit again."

That made Gin pause, turn around. Aizen sounded genuinely upset. He'd never heard that before. He always seemed so controlled... Gin hadn't even been sure the older man could get upset.

Was this just another ruse? A move in their game?

"issit wha' Kyorakuuu said?" he asked curiously. "Look I didnwanna give tha impress'n. I know said some lewd stuff before but tha's no'wha I wanout ya. I's tryinna be smooth an'... I'm jus' idiot. Footin mouth disease, me. If ya wanna stay I won' touch you if ya don'wannit. Promise. Doneven care if ya never fuckme honnesly, jus wanna make ya happy the wayya make me happy..."

Gin could only stand and stare at the man. Completely thrown back by this. Was this genuine? It seemed genuine.

They did say that 'a drunk mind speaks a sober heart.'

it could very well be genuine. Could easily be genuine. Felt genuine.

The warmth in his chest said it was genuine. The damn moths in his belly said it was genuine.

Did he trust his gut?
He turned to the door again, needing privacy to digest all of this. Not trusting his face to not give him away.


Can't help ya on this one, kiddo. Shinsou said to him. Some things ya gotta figure out on yer own.

Aizen sighed again. Gave up. "S'up t'you. Go if ya want. Won't stopya. Jus..." and Gin watched as Aizen let his shoulders sink. "Wanna makya happy either way."

Gin hesitated at the door again. Thinking. Weighing the words. Aizen's. Kyoraku's. Whose had more worth? More weight? He closed his eyes and thought backwards... how they'd laughed and kissed earlier. Their first date, until the Ran and oyster fiasco. The music. Their first kiss. He hadn't imagined that, the spark between them. The feelings of desire and warmth suffusing his body at just being near him. The red tulip. The scarf covered in constellations, still around his neck. Aizen looking after him, letting him borrow his clothes. Cherry. The Stew. The joy of just seeing the older man smile – really smile – the way his laughter seemed to come from someplace deep within him. The real place. The true place.

Ya make life bearable. I'd make ya a goddamn sun. Paint the skies.

The icebergs on the Falseood Sea.

He definitely hadn't imagined any of that.

And now this declaration.

Gin opened his eyes again, clarity dawning on him. How could he leave now? After hearing that? Even if life did return to normal after this. Even if the iceberg melted, it had still been an iceberg of realness in the Falsehood Sea. A genuine moment, a break from the chessplay, hadn't he just been wishing for exactly that, knowing Aizen would never – could never – give it. And with this realisation, Gin felt his heart thawing from the frost Kyoraku had put there, took the keys out of the door and turned back to face him. Maybe he was thawing, after all.

Excellent choice, Shinsou murmured approvingly.

Gin allowed himself a soft tender smile. As if there were any other choice, he replied.

"Kay." Gin smiled. "I'll stay," he walked back to the couch "Whaddya need? Water? Painkillers?"

"Jus' you," Sousuke replied. Gin tried not to smile as he sat down next to his 'partner'. Sousuke tried to rise and sat back down closing his eyes.

"Tha fuck are you tryin' ta do?" Gin asked teasing.

"Er...Shum water'd be good 'n sekin thought," Aizen answered. He sounded so sheepish and embarrassed that Gin immediately dropped the playfulness and retrieved a glass of water without saying anything else. Aizen accepted It gratefully and drank.

Gin lapsed into thought. A voice at the back of his head was whispering 'something's wrong with this picture'. And he couldn't ignore it. Aizen was a control freak even on their first date had only drank socially, had barely shown the effects of the wine, screwing with that dumb waitress skillfully. Not that Gin had been in a great position to judge but still...And today he'd been about a drink away from face-planting on the desk. The hell was going on?
Gin mulled it over, quietly, though his mulling was interrupted by the weight of Sousuke's arm around him. So he gave up and settled himself against the older man. Plenty of time for thinking later.

Aizen raised his head meeting Gin's with the earnestness of the terminally wasted, he'd seen it on Rangiku's face often enough.

"Y'eva feel lik ya'drow'in un'er ice?" he asked.

"What?" Gin replied leaning in unable to understand the slurred words. Aizen blinked and stared at him for a moment then shook his head.

"Nev mind. I'm wayshted," he said finally raising his glass for more water.

"No shit," Gin agreed leaving to refill the glass. What the hell had he been trying to say? It sounded important and the fact that he wouldn't repeat it just made Gin more curious. Either way, Gin vowed after this to be a bit more open and caring when the drunk fool woke up the . Runs him a bath. Makes food. Be freer with his affection. That was what partners were supposed to do, right?

"Gin?" Aizen said quietly, interrupting Gin's thoughts again.

"Hm?"

"Will you stay with me?"

Huh. What kind of question was that? It made Gin wonder. Maybe it had something to do with what he was trying to say before, something about... drowning? But Gin couldn't make out much more than that and suddenly felt like he'd missed out on something important.

But there was nothing he could do about that now. The moment had gone. So Gin just sighed softly, settled himself against Aizen's body, arms around him, and laid his head against his chest, listening instead to his heartbeat. And he focused on the question he could understand. "Always," he replied.
A Love Like You

Chapter Notes

A/n: why does this ch feel like the end of part 1 of this?

Notes: 4740 words. Waffles&fluff featuring flower language and some Demi-ace feels. Enjoy a thing I wrote as a pick-me-up a couple months back. Song is Rebecca Sugar's.

As an artist I am tempted to recreate what Aizen's notebook might look like... but first I rest and recharge.

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Chapter 28: A Love Like You

Aizen groaned as the sunlight hit his eyelids. Gods, getting wasted yesterday was a stupid idea. Quite possibly one of his stupidest ideas to date. If his pounding head and killer headache were anything to go by. He'd rank himself quite high on the idiocy scale, if such a thing existed. This was the last straw. After this, he'd never touch another drop of alcohol. And if he did he most certainly wouldn't down the stuff like tea. He wouldn't make that mistake again in a hurry. No, sir.

He buried his face in the pillow to hide away from the sun and its infernal blindingness. Hating the natural light source. Feeling certain that this must be how vampires feel.

"Fucking sun," he muttered, his words muffled by the pillow. He huffed a long, aggravated sigh, willing the pain in his head to go away. Even though the only way to actually make it disappear was to brave the blinding sun and venture out of the comfort of his bed in search of water and painkillers.

Well, that's what you get for drinking yourself into a stupor like that. Kyouka chided. He wasn't in the mood for a lecture, though.

Fuck off, will you? I learnt my lesson already.

Hm, I suppose. She answered, though very begrudgingly. He knew he'd hear about it later though. No doubt she had a whole lecture planned for him. Good god he hoped not.

He closed his eyes and tried to bury further under the duvet. Partly wishing he could fall back to sleep again. But it just wasn't on the cards. So he resorted to just trying to tune the rest of the world out. An old standby mechanism for when he wasn't feeling up to facing the outside world. He'd almost succeeded in tuning it completely out when a soft voice quickly brought it back into sharp focus. Though not painfully so.

"Oh. Yer awake."

Aizen still had his face hidden in his pillow, but he felt the smile even in his bones. I know that voice.
He slowly shifted his body and lifted his head up to see Gin standing by the side of the bed, already washed and dressed, holding a mug of tea. Smiling softly down at him.

*I know that smile, too.*

"I brought you tea," Gin said softly. Still smiling. Filling him up with warmth. Looking for all the world like an angel, the way his body blocked out most of the sun.

"Thanks," Sousuke smiled, then winced at the soreness of his throat and the gravelliness of his voice. It made him wonder if he looked a wreck too. He certainly felt and sounded like one.

Thankfully Gin was kind, and didn't bring it up.

"S'alright," he answered as he set the tea on the bedside table. "I won't ask ya how yer feelin'." he added, with a little sheepish smile. "I know right now yer prob'ly feelin' like ya been hit by a truck."

Sousuke managed a chuckle. "Yes, that sums it up very accurately," he smiled through the pain. "A very big truck. Or perhaps a train."

"Ouch, a train. Ya must need painkillers then."

"If you wouldn't mind," Sousuke answered, somewhat sheepishly. Gin didn't have to babysit him, after all.

"Course I don't mind." Gin smiled brightly. "Where are they?"

"Bathroom cupboard. Top shelf."

Gin nodded and left to fetch them, only stopping for a moment in the doorway to turn back and tell him, "Don't you go anywhere."

Sousuke laughed then. "As if I could," he joked. Because really, he couldn't even move. Gin seemed to appreciate the joke though, because he snickered a little before he set off on his mission to find and retrieve his pain relief.

...  

Gin managed to find the bathroom without too much trouble and found the cupboard hiding the painkillers. Actually getting them though was a bit difficult, because he had to stand right on his tippy toes just to be able to reach. And gin refused to go and drag a chair in here to stand on. He might be a bit vertically challenged (for the moment, at least) but he still had his pride, dammit.

Anyway, after some effort, he'd retrieved what he sought and filled a glass of water to take back with him. You can't take pills with tea, after all. And the best thing Aizen-sama could do for himself right now was stay hydrated. So he carried both water and medicine back to his intrepid patient who'd placed himself in Gin's hands. Maybe when Aizen was feeling up to it, Gin could draw him a bath.

But first, he had to give the patient his medicine.

...  

"Are these em?" Gin asked as he walked back into the bedroom, trying to make it look like he was reading the dose information on the box instead of giddily oggling Aizen's big smile that appeared
the moment he set foot through the door. He didn't know how successful he was though.

"That's them. Thankyou, Gin."

Gin nodded and handed him the box so he could take them. Knowing that, like him, Aizen would be suspicious of pills not in their packages. Not that he'd ever drug Aizen against his will, but growing up Rukon made you suspicious of a lot of things.

Gin watched Aizen swallow two of the pills with the glass of water.

"You need anythin' else while I'm up?" Gin asked.

"No, no I-" Aizen began, but the loud grumbling of his stomach interrupted him. Gin tried his best not to snicker at his embarrassment.

"Some food maybe?" Gin offered.

"Some food sounds good, yes." Aizen answered.

"Kay. What ya want?"

"Surprise me," Aizen smiled. Gin just nodded.

"A'ight." he said. "Be right back."

. . .

Aizen lay back in his bed again, quite pleased with his current situation. Well, not the hangover, that was awful. But the rest of it – Gin staying the night, helping to look after him, even making him breakfast – the rest of it was lovely. Another goofy smile spread across his face as he looked up at the ceiling.

*Well, I'd say you've done very well for yourself,* Kyouka Suigetsu teased. Aizen opened an eye.

*What are you talking about now?*

*You know what I mean,* she said. *Your new boy-toy looking after you.*

He sighed. *If you're planning a lecture-*

*No lectures,* she said gently. *I was just going to say it's nice. That you've got him to look after you.*

She let that sink into his mind, not saying anything else.

"Yeah," he said, after a few moments of silence. A soft smile tugging the corners of his lips upwards. "It is."

. . .

Gin was looking through the cupboards and the fridge, taking a mental inventory of the food Aizen had in, when Shinsou's voice hummed in his mind.

*Ohhh, check you being a little housewife for the day and looking after loverboy,* he teased, snickering.

Gin groaned internally. Apparently one day without any sarcastic remarks from his zanpaktou was
just too much to ask for.

*Shut up,* he answered. Hm, there was bacon in the fridge. Perfect. He could make them both bacon sandwiches.

*What?* Shinsou feigned innocence. *I think it's cute.*

*S'not cute. S'bein' a decent person,* Gin answered. Taking the bacon out of the fridge.

*Ha! Yeah, I believe that for like, two seconds.* Shinsou snorted. *You care about him.*

Gin rifled through more cupboards until he found a frying pan. *Shut up.*

*Pfft. You only say that because you know I'm right.* The fox said smugly.

*Shut up.*

*Case in point.* Shinsou grinned. Gin just sighed and turned on the stove to fry the bacon. Wishing he could trade in his snarky little shit of a zanpaktou.

. . .

Aizen was dozing quietly when Gin returned, plated sandwiches in hand. He was probably awake, or at least half awake, but Gin thought he'd better announce himself. Couldn't have his patient having a heart attack now, could he?

"Hey, I'm back," he called gently, in as light and sing-song a voice as he could. He surprised even himself with how soft and... *affectionate* his voice sounded. He didn't dwell on it though. "I brought food," he added, holding the plates up as Sousuke dragged himself to a sitting position.

"Hope you don't mind, I used the last of your bacon," Gin said, handing over one of the sandwiches; the one without the black edges on the bacon.

"It needed using anyway," Sousuke smiled at him. "Thankyou."

"S'alright." Gin shrugged, though he could feel the heat in his face already. At least thankfully Aizen didn't comment on it. But then, he was probably feeling too rough after his day of being the town drunkard to comment on his skin colour.

"You've gone very pink." Sousuke smirked at him. Which of course made Gin blush even more. Well, maybe not too ill to embarrass him after all. Sousuke just chuckled.

"Jus' shu'up an' eat yer sandwich." Gin told him.

Aizen tried to suppress a little snicker. "Yes dear," he smirked. Gin shot him a glare, and after that Aizen went quiet and did as he was told.

*Good,* Gin thought. *Maybe now I'll get a break from the teasing.*

Shinsou snorted. *Ha! Not likely.*

Gin groaned inwardly and bit into his own sandwich.

. . .

When the sandwiches had been devoured, Gin carried the dirty plates downstairs – much to Aizen's
disappointment, because he'd been very obvious about wanting to cuddle. But too many years of living in the squalor of the Rukongai and the fact this wasn't his house compelled Gin to clean up the mess. In his defence, he'd never washed up so fast in his life before going back up the stairs.

Sousuke's face was a picture (if a picture could look very pleasantly surprised).

"That was fast," he smiled.

Gin shot back a smug smirk of his own, crossing his arms for effect; a trick he'd learnt from the master himself sitting in the bed. "Told ya I'd be quick. "Ya look so surprised."

Sousuke's smile broadened. "Very pleasantly surprise, I assure you," he said. Patting the empty side of the bed next to him. "Care to join me?"

Gin walked across the room and climbed onto the bed, settling himself under Sousuke's arm. Resting his head on the man's chest. Doubting that anyone else had been allowed this close. Gin was so close in fact, he could hear Sousuke's heart beating, the small center of a universe separated from him by a fragile layer of skin, muscle, and a cage made of bones. If only he could reach in and touch it... take a hold of the beating organ and keep it somewhere safe. Maybe even hold it hostage until it developed Stockholm Syndrome and grew to love him.

"Comfortable?" Sousuke asked, gently pulling him out of his thoughts.

"Mmm-hmm." Gin nodded. "So comfy could fall 'sleep."

He heard Sousuke laugh softly, feeling the sound reverberate through the man's chest. "You can fall asleep if you want. I don't mind."

Gin smiled to himself. He could swear he'd heard the smile in Sousuke's voice as he spoke.

"'kay," Gin nodded, closing his eyes slowly. "Bu' don' lemme sleep too long." "I won't." Sousuke answered. Gently sighing and stroking Gin's hair. And pretty soon Gin was lulled into sleep by the heaviness of his body, Sousuke's warmth, and the gentleness of the hand on his head.

... .

Gin woke up what felt like several hours later.

He slowly hefted his body up, ready to grouch at Sousuke for letting him sleep so long, but he stopped when he saw the man, too, was fast asleep. Gin sighed. He couldn't berate him when he looked so peaceful like that. So instead, Gin just very carefully extricated himself and crept out of the room. He made his way back down the stairs to make himself another cup of tea. Thinking this might be a perfect opportunity to do some exploring. See who Aizen Sousuke was as a person when the world wasn't watching. And what better way to do that than snooping around his house?

He made himself a mug of tea and took it with him on his journey through Sousuke's house and his life.

He started in the living room and worked his way through the house, looking for the good stuff. The personal stuff. The things that told him who Sousuke was.

*You know, you could just ask him*, Shinsou said, and Gin could feel his zanpaktou roll his eyes. *Instead of sneaking around.*
Ha, yeah, an' have him give me the varnished version? Gin asked, skeptical. No thanks.

Have it your way, Shinsou sighed. Just don't whine to me if he catches you and gets mad.

He won't get mad, Gin told him. But Shinsou had stopped listening. So he turned his attention back to his snooping.

He decided the piano room would be as good a pace to start as any. Particularly since by his own admission Sousuke hadn't shared his music with anyone else but him. And there were bound to be things in there Sousuke was determined to keep secret. So he went in there. But carefully; he didn't want to make any loud noises and wake the man up. He needed his sleep. And besides, Gin didn't really fancy having to explain himself if he got caught.

So he was careful, and quiet. And was very cautious about leaving everything just as he found it.

It was a small-ish room, sparsely furnished. The main features being of course, the piano, and the bookcases holding various novels, folders, papers, and surprisingly even a few notebooks. Duh, of course he has notebooks, Gin chided himself. He's gotta write his own songs down somewhere.

He reached up to take one off the higher shelves, only to send three more tumbling to the floor. Gin heard the series of loud thuds and winced at the noise, quietly praying Aizen was a heavy sleeper.

He bent down and picked them up, hoping to put them back in the right order on the shelf. He was about to do so when he caught a glance at the covers of the notebooks. The covers were plain, but in the top left corners they were numbered, 'Book 10', 'Book 11', 'Book 12'. Accompanied by a set of dates. The date the book was started and when it was finished and filled. Gin looked at the dates and picked book 11, because it was the most recent, and also because it had no end date. Sousuke was still in the process of filling up this one. It totally didn't have anything to do with the fact the dates on the cover overlapped with when Gin first met him. Not at all...

Psh, liar, Shinsou smirked, calling him out. Gin felt heat creep up into his face at that, but said nothing. He had more important things to do than get into stupid arguments with his zanpaktou about stupid things. Like reading the contents of the notebook he had in his hands. He put the others back on the shelf and sat on the empty piano bench to read the as yet unfinished book.

Gin hadn't really known what to expect when he opened the book, but nonetheless he was pleasantly surprised. A good chunk of the pages were filled with Sousuke's beautiful handwriting. Page after page covered in words written in ink – Sousuke seemed to favour the colour black, he noticed. On some pages there were poems. On others, notes on lyric structure. Story ideas filled others. And songs. Every other page had a song. Sometimes single verses, with sketched in music bars holding notes. On other pages, there were fully written pieces.

Gin was amazed. It was so much like looking through one of Rangiku's sketchbooks, only this time the beautiful art was made up of words. And music that evoked a story. Okay, fair enough, Gin couldn't actually read the music... yet. But even so. He had fun imagining what the background music to some of the verses might be. If they would be light and fast or slow and melancholic. The possibilities were endless. Gin just wished he had a talent like that. Well, he used to tell Ran bedtime stories when they were younger, made up tales of adventure to escape the hell on earth that was the Rukongai, even if just for a little while. But it was one thing telling stories and quite another recording them all somewhere. And each time he tried, he worried the words would come out of the pen wrong, and get all jumbled, so in the end he gave up trying. Rangiku hadn't been very happy about that. And he doubted Sousuke would be, either. But what could he do?

He chose to be in this moment instead, looking through Sousuke's notebook, getting a sense of who
he was. He didn't know how long he'd been sitting there just reading through, turning the unlined pages – which only made Sousuke's neat and straight handwriting look more impressive – but time seemed to stand still. It was quiet in the room, too. *Soundproof?* Gin wondered.

*Probably,* Shinsou answered.

Gin just shrugged and turned the next page, blinking when he looked at the title of the song. Firstly because of the sudden genre change; most of the songs before this had been darker, melancholic almost. The one about the circles especially... well at least the notes about that one, obviously a piece still in its inception, ready for fleshing out. But this... this was different. And it had been written after they'd met and started dating.

*Well, lookie what we got here,* Gin grinned, casting his eyes over the title, and all the beautifully written words underneath it. Unable to help his smile broadening and warmth suffusing him as he read.

*If I could begin to be,*
Half of what you think of me,
I could do about anything,
I could even learn how to love.

*When I see the way you act,*
wondering when I'm coming back,
I could do about anything,
I could even learn how to love like you.

*Love, like you...*

Gin felt the warmth the song carried, the hopefulness. The desire to be a better person. It was a song he related to, because how often had he walked next to Sousuke, held his hand, and wanted to be all those things Sousuke said he was. He knew right now, he wasn't, but... he would be. In time, with Sousuke by his side, he would be. And if not, then, well, he'd certainly try to be.

He read on, utterly enthralled by the song. Even though he could only imagine the sound of it.

*I always thought I might be bad,*
Now I'm sure that it's true,
'Cause I think you're so good,
And I'm nothing like you.

*Look at you go,*
I just adore you,
I wish that I knew,
What makes you think I'm so special.

Gin read those last verses carefully again. This... was this how Sousuke really felt about him? Truly? Because if so, it was eerily like looking into a mirror. Looking at himself. Because hadn't he been concerned since the day they met about being 'enough' for Sousuke?

It struck a chord with him, and somehow, in some twisted way, it warmed his heart a little. Because Aizen was battling the same insecurities as him. It made Aizen seem more reachable, more... human. And that was the part of him Gin liked. He'd seen that part of Aizen before, on the night they'd eaten the Rukon stew together. But here it was in writing. In black and white. Documented, irrefutable proof it existed. And that was all Gin needed to see.
He read on.

*If I could begin to do,*
Something that does right by you,
I would do about anything,
I would even learn how to love, like you.

*Love, like you.*

Gin sat silently with the notebook on his lap and then gently closed it. Handling the book like it were a sacred object, he rose to his feet and placed it carefully back where it came from on the bookshelf.

He left the room with an altered perspective. His heart quietly digesting his newest discovery. Feeling his heart thaw a little with the warmth flowing through him. Instantly he thought of peppermint. *Warmth of feeling.* And the thought occurred to him that perhaps he wasn't being fair. Perhaps he wasn't giving Aizen enough credit. That maybe he was being too frigid towards the man. Especially with that lavender. *Mistrust.*

Flowers that would follow them forever now, because of him. Gin winced. He wasn't too sure how he felt about that.

But perhaps it wasn't too late to fix it.

He moved quietly back through the house again and found himself back in the living room, opening his bag – still where he'd left it yesterday – searching.

He knew what he was looking for. He just hoped they wouldn't be too damaged or dehydrated from spending the night in his bag. If they were he'd have to go and get fresh ones, and to do so he'd have to find a way to excuse himself without looking like he was making an escape, and he didn't think he could do that.

Thankfully the flowers weren't in too bad shape, and Gin sighed with not a small amount of relief at that. Now all he had to do was find a vase or a glass or something and let them rehydrate before he gave them to Sousuke.

Gin carried the flora into the kitchen, feet padding softly on the floor as he walked. The floor cool on his bare feet, which was an undeniably pleasant sensation. Especially now the day was warming up.

He set the peppermint and white poplar branch on the counter and opened up the cupboards in search of a glass to put them in. Finding a tall drinking glass that would suit his needs, he filled it at the tap and put his flowers in it. Then he set the makeshift vase on the counter near the window and waited. Wondering how long it generally took for slightly wilted flowers to come back to life again after being given water. Although may as well ask 'how long is a piece of strong?' because he supposed it would depend on the plant and the amount of water.

He studied the flowers with a soft gaze and let his mind wander. Trying to guess how Sousuke would react to his latest floral offering. Gin imagined he'd be thrilled. But he'd take pleasantly surprised if thrilled was too much of a stretch. If nothing else, he'd be amused by the attempt to win him over. But he reasoned with himself. This was what Sousuke wanted. And for the past however many weeks, Aizen had been doing his best to get him to warm up to him. To thaw out, if only just a little bit. Any progress on this front would *doubtlessly* be well received. Gin would be a fool to think otherwise.
That's exactly what I've been trying to tell you! Shinsou sighed, exasperated. But you never listen.

Gin snorted. Well I aint gonna listen if all ya do's nag me, he huffed. Now shu'up an' lemme daydream.

Fine. Shinsou huffed, and lapsed into silence. Leaving Gin to his thoughts.

He stood in the kitchen for a little while longer, lost in his musings of Sousuke and flowers. Leaning over the counter on his elbow and holding his chin in his hand. Eyes fixed on the flowers in the glass.

He didn't know how long he'd been standing there for, because time seemed to stand still again. Or at least it felt like it did, standing in the sunlight. Basking in its warmth like the cold blooded thing he was. Thawing out his frigid heart as the peppermint rejuvenated.

Daydreaming about Aizen Sousuke, like he used to do.

He had to smile at himself. Apparently some things never changed.

It was kind of funny, that.

He smiled at the flowers on the counter and laughed very softly. Perhaps he really was thawing. Perhaps he really was warming up to Sousuke.

Maybe he really was opening up, finally, to the idea of a relationship with the older man.

His smile softened. Yeah, he definitely was.

"Oh, that's interesting."

Gin jolted, started. Of course it could only be one person. He turned his head sharply to see the man himself standing in the kitchen doorway, looking very pleased with himself.

Gin swallowed, feeling completely wrong footed. Very much caught off guard.

*Oh no.*

*Ooh dear god, no.*

*This was not how it was supposed to go down, no.*

Gin swallowed again. He was supposed to just quietly leave the flowers for him to find somewhere. Not this.

Sousuke pointed to the flowers in the glass and smiled. Looking for all the goddamn world like a happy little adorable puppy. If he had a tail Gin knew it'd be wagging furiously. Heat rushed headlong into his face, and he heard Shinsou snicker.

*Busted!*

Sousuke's smile broadened. "Those are for me, aren't they?"

Gin's face – no, his whole body – was on fire.

"Yes," Gin answered. "Who else would they be for?" he added, with as much confidence as he could muster. His voice was a little unsteady, but he thought he managed it. "The tooth fairy?"
"Touche," Sousuke smirked. "Can I see?"

Gin reached out and grabbed the flower glass, trying not to die of embarrassment in the process. Though he couldn't tell how successful he was. He held it out to Sousuke and watched his face carefully. "Here."

Sousuke took the glass carefully. Almost as if it would detonate if he moved too quickly or held it with too tight a grip.

Gin watched his face change, almost seeing the gears turn inside the man's mind as he decoded the message. Flicking through his mental cipher.

Gin watched too, as the message registered in his brain. Saw his amused smile fade into something a lot softer.

"Oh."

It wasn't the thrilled reaction of pure unadulterated joy Gin had been thinking of. But he knew Sousuke did things very subtly.

Well, that and, the man was probably in shock. It would probably take a bit of time for it to properly sink in.

Once it did, Gin was sure the man would be appropriately thrilled by this.

The softness of that smile told him so.

And the fact that the light of it actually reached his brown eyes, lighting him up like the sun certainly did help.

Gin smiled, saying nothing. Choosing instead to let the moments pass as Sousuke digested this new move. Alright, it wasn't the declaration of undying love Aizen might have wanted, but it was a start.

It was a small step in the right direction. All Gin could realistically give at this moment in time. He wasn't one to fall in love at first sight. Neither was he lured by physical beauty. Gin was someone who had to really know a person before he could say he desired them. He had to have a deep, meaningful connection with them. And there was no way in hell he could climb into bed with someone he didn't know. Didn't love. Didn't trust. It was just the way his brain was wired.

But if Sousuke could give him time, and patience, maybe Gin could get to that place with him.

Peppermint and white poplar.

In time my feelings will warm to you.

And the gentle, somewhat awed expression on Sousuke's face told him his message had been understood.

"Thankyou, Gin," Sousuke said softly. As if speaking too loud would shatter both the glass in his hand and the moment.

Gin just smiled in answer. For the first time in a long while, happy.

"Yer welcome, Sousuke."
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